

harmony

JULY 2016 ₹ 40

celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens



**SILVER INTERNS
DISH OUT
DIET WISDOM**

**TALES FROM
ITALY**

**CHAPLIN LIVES
IN ADIPUR**

HEALTH

**A bone to pick
WITH OSTEOPOROSIS**

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**P SUSHEELA'S
MUSICAL
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LEGAL EAGLE

**RTI REVOLUTIONARY
SHAILESH GANDHI**

**RATNA
PATHAK
SHAH**

**ONE-WOMAN
ACT**

“After retirement, I’ve taken up socializing as my new job.”

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HEALTH & HOPE

When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied.

These ancient words by Greek physician Herophilus (335 BC-280 BC), who was considered the first anatomist, remain relevant even centuries later. From family abuse to ineffective government policy, ageism to social apathy, dwindling savings to compromised security... silvers in India battle a host of challenges every day. But the most acute is access to healthcare. As we reported last month, life expectancy in India is on the upswing, having increased from 63.2 years between 2001 and 2005 to 67.5 years between 2009 and 2015. But living longer doesn't mean living better. Physical wellbeing is the key ingredient in any recipe for active ageing. Without health on one's side, longevity is more bane than boon; a life sentence, if you will, plagued with crippling medical costs and diminished quality of life.

Far too many of our silvers, especially in rural India, remain outside the ambit of even the most basic medical care. The urban scenario is certainly better, with most towns and cities in the country offering modern medical care—public and private. It is also heartening to see that many hospitals are beginning to offer special schemes and services for elders, incentivising them to become proactive about their health. That said, India still lags far behind the developed world when it comes to viewing silver healthcare in a comprehensive, holistic manner. That, in fact, was the genesis of geriatrics as a separate discipline—the understanding that the problems of silvers are unique and best handled by a multidisciplinary team of specialists acting in concert, with sensitivity.

While hospitals across India cater to the disparate components of silver requirements—from physical medicine



Dabboo Ratnani

and surgery to rehabilitation, physiotherapy and counselling—there is a crying need to bring them together under a single roof. That's what we are endeavouring to do at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital and Medical Research Institute. A truly global healthcare facility that provides the best quaternary care services, the hospital's 'full-time specialist system' ensures availability and access to dedicated specialists. And going forward, it seeks to channel its expertise encompassing 11 'Centres of Excellence' and 160 multi-speciality clinics to establish a dedicated umbrella for geriatric services.

It's the logical next step for the hospital, which has been defined by the credo, 'Every Life Matters', since inception over seven years ago. And it is a natural progression in my own commitment to touch the lives of silvers in India. We look forward to sharing more on this exciting new chapter as it unfurls—watch this space!

Tina Ambani

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Special Correspondent **Srirekha Pillai** Sub-Editor **Natasha Rego** Correspondent (Mumbai) **Aakanksha Bajpai** Design Consultant **Jit Ray**
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TRASH TALK

Sudha Pai leads a quiet revolution with the message, 'your garbage is your responsibility'

TOON TALES

Cartoonist V G Narendra on the art of spreading smiles

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

Toll-free: 1800 1800 100 Phones: New Delhi: (0120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India

Fax: (0120) 4078080; **Kolkata:** 033-22827695 Fax: 22828949; **Bengaluru:** 080-2212448, 22213037, Fax: 2218335;

Mumbai: 022-66063355 Fax: 24444358; **Chennai:** 044-28478525 Fax: 24361942; Email: harmonycare@intoday.com

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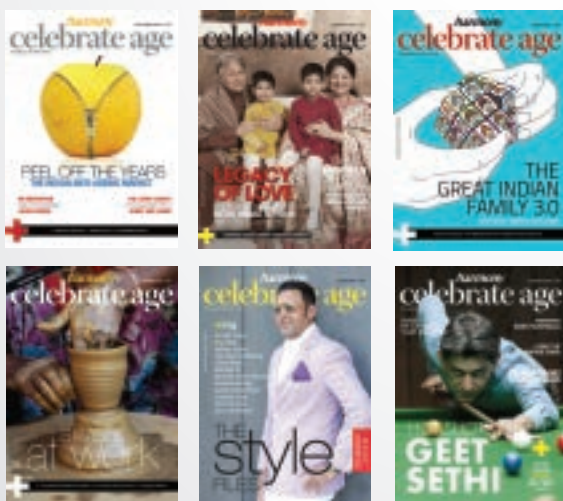


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Harmony-Celebrate Age

www.magzter.com

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column one

"You say your world revolves around your parents, but you are willing to put your mother out on the streets if she is too old and gets too hard to live with. This dichotomy and hypocrisy is what we need to get past. But we are more focused on being vegetarians who won't let non-vegetarians live in the same apartment." Ratna Pathak Shah's words hit the mark every time—much like her carefully chosen roles. In an interview with our former copy editor Rajashree Balaram, she shows us how her wit is backed by wisdom born of an enlightened worldview.

Another remarkable woman graces our pages this month: singer P Susheela, the darling of the Southern Indian film industry. Recently recognised by *Guinness World Records* for rendering the most number of songs in Indian languages, her career, spanning over six decades, is the stuff of legend. The 80 year-old has no desire to live in the past, though. "The moment a new device finds its way to me, I do not look up until I have a handle on it."

One woman who is most certainly looking back is well-known nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar. With the objective to 'revive lost wisdom', she recently conducted a six-week 'internship programme' with silvers to absorb their dietary wisdom. Our report tells you how it went.

Elsewhere, we introduce you to citizen activist and RTI crusader Shailesh Gandhi; help you bone up on your knowledge of osteoporosis; and fly you to Italy to experience the delights of Matera, Florence and Siena. And for fans of The Tramp, there's a special treat... read on and find out!

—Arati Rajan Menon

This is with reference to your story, "The Groovy Side of Gulshan Grover", which was published in the 12th anniversary issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. Grover is right in saying that instead of giving into an old-fashioned dress code after crossing 50, he is countering it with bold looks and physical fitness. Indeed, a person though old at age must keep young at heart! Grover once said, "I'll never do a fashion show to promote my movies. But if it involves a social cause or some charity, I'll definitely do it." It shows that he is a high-thinking individual. (Grover is a BCom graduate from Shri Ram College of Commerce.) As for his calibre as an actor, despite the presence of the leading men and women, one never fails to notice him in a film.

Mahesh Kapasi
New Delhi

The Senior Citizens' Run that has been supported by the Harmony for Silvers Foundation for many years now has always been a fun event for us at the Sri Raghohthaman Laughter Club. This year was no different. We assembled at the marquee in our yellow T-shirts and bibs at the Sri Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore. We were like schoolchildren taking part in an interschool athletics meet! After a small snack, we started our race at exactly 7.40 am. We ran through the stadium and exited onto Kasturba Road, passed the GPO, Vidhan Soudha and Central Library before heading back to the finish line in the stadium. On the way we spotted the Harmony volunteers in white T-shirts, the ambulance and a medical team keeping a close eye on us. They supplied water, biscuits, chocolates and fruits to energise us. Back at the stadium, radio jockeys and music bands entertained the participants of the run while photographers trained their lenses on us. At the marquee, a fitting



breakfast awaited us. Events like this show that Harmony seeks to promote the interest of senior citizens and help them sustain their sense of pride and self-esteem. Kudos to these efforts! We seek more such support, always.

Poonam P Shenoy
President, Sri Raghohthaman
Laughter Club, Bengaluru

My wife was always persistent about keeping up with new technology and her health. Her motto in life was to learn something new every day. After she passed away, I have been feeling a little low and was not sure about how to keep going. In one such random moment, while on my daily walk, I saw a group of people my age trying to work an iPad and getting frustrated with it. I offered my help and soon became great pals with them. Now, I not only have great company but have become a mentor when it comes to technology. I have realised that even though I miss my wife, her zeal to learn was infectious and it will keep me going.

Naval Kishore
Hyderabad

inside

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P22: Dating deserts

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



📺 MEDIA WATCH

Always in **VOGUE**

We've fallen in love with **Birmingham lass Bo Gilbert, style bible Vogue's first ever 100 year-old model**, who graces the magazine's special June centenary issue as the face of luxury store Harvey Nichols's Spring Summer 2016 campaign. As London newspaper *Daily Mail* tells us, Harvey Nichols, who wished to make a powerful statement against ageism, chose Gilbert because she still wears heels every day and never leaves the house without makeup! For the high-fashion shoot, by fashion photographer Phil Poynter, Gilbert wore a coat from Dries Van Noten, a top by Victoria Beckham and tailored trousers from The Row, accessorised with shoes from Céline, glasses by Valentino and a Lanvin necklace. "I do things that I think a lot of people wouldn't do at my age," she says in a two-minute video that captures the shoot. "I dress to suit myself; I certainly don't dress up for boys." Her expression when she's shown her finished picture: Priceless. See for yourself at [📺 youtube.com/watch?v=RkJhpv671RA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkJhpv671RA)



Courtesy: Harvey Nichols/Adam and Eve DDB



Courtesy: MIT

SECOND SKIN

A team of American scientists from Harvard Medical School, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Massachusetts General Hospital, Living Proof and Olivo Labs have invented an **anti-ageing fix that, quite literally, works as a second skin**. The product itself is a polymer made of silicone and oxygen molecules that can be stretched over 250 per cent its original size while still keeping a transparent

appearance and being comfortable to wear. You apply it in the morning like a gel/cream, activate it with a catalyst gel that tightens the skin— instantly smoothing out wrinkles and lines, reshaping eye bags, and locking in moisture—and peel it off at night. The best part: it causes no irritation and can withstand sweat and rain. The scientists, whose work is published in journal *Nature Materials*, will soon market the patented formula, which they believe

can also be used for sun protection and to deliver drugs to help treat skin conditions such as eczema. "It's an invisible layer that can provide a barrier, provide cosmetic improvement, and potentially deliver a drug locally to the area that's being treated," Daniel Anderson, associate professor at MIT, tells media. "Those three things together could really make it ideal for use in humans." See how the second skin works at [youtube/AkpT5BihMio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkpT5BihMio)

Ocean's bounty



On the heels of Esthechoc, the anti-ageing chocolate developed by researchers at Cambridge University, scientists in Russia's Far East have developed **Sea Masterpiece**, a **chocolate bar made with starfish and sea urchin extracts that claims to slow down the ageing process** by upping endurance, normalising metabolism, fighting fatigue and rejuvenating the body. "We extract the necessary substances—naphtho-quinones, a class of vitamins—from sea urchin shells grown at our experimental marine station

200 km off the coast of Vladivostok," Mikhail Kusaikin, deputy director of the Pacific Institute of Bio-Organic Chemistry, tells Russian news site www.rbth.com. "We use pigments from sea urchin shells for the production of medications, and add the extract remnants of their shells to chocolate. The extract can be added not only to chocolate but to cookies or any other product." Available in dark and white varieties (with no fishy smell), the chocolate is expected to sell for about \$ 4.50 (about ₹ 300) for a 100-gm bar when it hits the market.



Sun OR SHADE?

We're not sure about this one. A **new study** by Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston commissioned by cosmetics giant Olay **urges women to avoid the sun**, contending that it can make them look up to two decades younger. According to the researchers, the usual recommendations like drinking lots of water, sleeping well and exercising don't hold a candle to keeping out of the sun. Sunscreen? Only when you absolutely must step out, they say. How do you get your Vitamin D, then? No answer there.

iStock



Skin-sation

British drugstore chain Boots has unveiled the latest addition to its 'Protect & Perfect' anti-ageing range: **No7 Lift & Luminate Triple Action Serum**. It contains Indian gooseberry that fades dark spots, hyaluronic acid that firms the skin and an ingredient called Matrixyl that promotes elasticity by increasing the skin's collagen content. The company claims that in clinical trials of 100 women between the ages of 45 and 65, 90 per cent of them reported a reduction in their wrinkles. Boots has hired 52 year-old Italian ballerina Alessandra Ferri to be the global brand ambassador for the serum, which is priced at £ 27 (about ₹ 2,600) for a 30-ml tube. To order online, go to

www.international.boots.com/en/No-7/Skincare/Lift-Luminate-TRIPLE-ACTION-Serum/

I spy... It would appear that espionage and the beauty industry make for strange bedfellows. But there's a very good reason why the CIA's venture capital arm In-Q-Tel has invested in an American cosmetics company. According to website *newbeauty.com*, the company, Skinciential Sciences, offers a resurfacing product called Clarista that 'retexturises' (essentially, removes) the outer layer of the skin to remove blemishes and smoothen it. Now here's the reveal: the process also reveals valuable biomarkers that can be used for diagnostic and forensic tests, including DNA collection. Aha.

THE SON STILL SHINES

While daughters are valued, a majority of Indian parents still want to live with their sons when they grow old. That's the conclusion of the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), conducted jointly by researchers from University of Maryland and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi. The team interviewed a representative sample of 41,554 households across 33 states and union territories in both rural and urban areas. Here are some highlights of the survey, according to media reports:

77% 16%



About 77 per cent of Indian parents expect to live with their sons when they grow old; only 16 per cent consider living with their daughters

834:1000

IN HARYANA

the state with India's lowest child sex ratio (834 females per 1,000 males), this figure was 90 per cent; next was Maharashtra, with 85 per cent

60%

26%



While about 60 per cent of respondents said they ideally wanted one son, 26 per cent said they wanted two

73%

11%

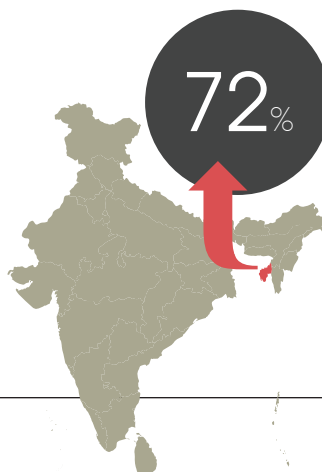


About 73 per cent of respondents said they should ideally have one daughter; 11 per cent said they should have two

73%

Indians expect sons to support them financially in their old age, while just 18 per cent said they would consider taking money from their daughters

72%



TRIPURA

has the highest percentage of parents (72 per cent) preferring to live with daughters in their old age



Miracle molecule?

The search for an anti-ageing pill continues. Hongbo Zhang, a scientist at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne working with colleagues from ETH Zurich, University of Zurich and universities in Canada and Brazil, has pinpointed the **rare vitamin nicotinamide riboside (NR) as a 'miracle molecule' that can rejuvenate stem cells, boost weakened tissue and restore the regenerative capacity of organs.** In their study, elderly mice injected with NR displayed renewed energy, pronounced muscular regeneration and increased longevity compared to their peers. The flipside: NR appears to be indiscriminate while boosting cell function. This means that it could boost 'bad' or pathological cells as well as good ones. The study is published in the online edition of journal *Science*.

Circuit breaker It's not just resistance to change that makes you inflexible. According to researchers at University of Queensland in Australia, **the deterioration of a brain circuit makes it difficult for silvers to adjust to new surroundings and circumstances.** As news agency IANS reports, the team found that ability to make choices between distinct courses of action depends on a brain region called the striatum, which is located in the forebrain and associated with planning and decision-making. Their study of mice revealed that faulty activation of this brain circuit mixes both new and old learning, thus causing impairment in their ability to select the most appropriate action in response to a changing environment that leads to confusion. "Flexibility issues in ageing have long been described in other navigation and spatial memory tasks," team leader J Bertran-Gonzalez tells media. "Here we describe a similar flexibility problem but applied to goal-directed action, which of course has more detrimental consequences for everyday life and potentially compromises survival." The study is published in journal *Neuron*.

GENE GENIE

More proof that your genes have a lot to do with how well you age. Researchers from multinational giant Unilever in collaboration with the Erasmus MC University Medical Centre Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, have established that **a variant of the MCR1 gene could increase 'perceived age' by up to two years.** Interestingly, the gene, known for its role in the development of pale skin and red hair, is proven to play a part in DNA repair and inflammation. The team came to this conclusion after a study of 2,600 Dutch silvers. "If we can identify more genes that link with perceived age, we would expect them to also be involved in ageing within the body with consequences for health and disease," lead author David Gunn tells website *ibtimes.co.uk*. "We believe this as we have previously demonstrated that those who look young for their age are also more likely to live longer." The study is published in journal *Current Biology*.

Photography by iStock



Courtesy: Walk With Path

ON FIRM FOOTING

At the Wearable Technology Show held in London in March, this company walked its talk: British start-up Walk With Path unveiled its range of **Path Feel insoles** and **Path Finder shoes** to help silvers and the physically challenged combat their fear of falling. As website www.newsweek.com reports, the range is designed to assist people who suffer from peripheral neuropathy, which can

occur owing to diseases like diabetes, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's. The insoles are imbedded with sensors that vibrate the feet of wearers, informing them when they touch the ground, while a companion app gathers data. And the shoes help Parkinson's patients suffering from 'freezing of gait'—lasers project outwards from the shoes in a green line, offering the user a visual guide to put one foot in front of the other. "If you walk

and you don't have a good feeling of the ground, you've got to be very careful," Iddo Wald, a design engineer at Walk With Path, tells the website. "Path gives the confidence needed to walk without falling. We had a patient who suffers from a spinal cord injury and actually had no feeling of the ground at all but he could feel the vibration." Both products are undergoing trials at present. To learn more, go to www.walkwithpath.com



Courtesy: grandPad

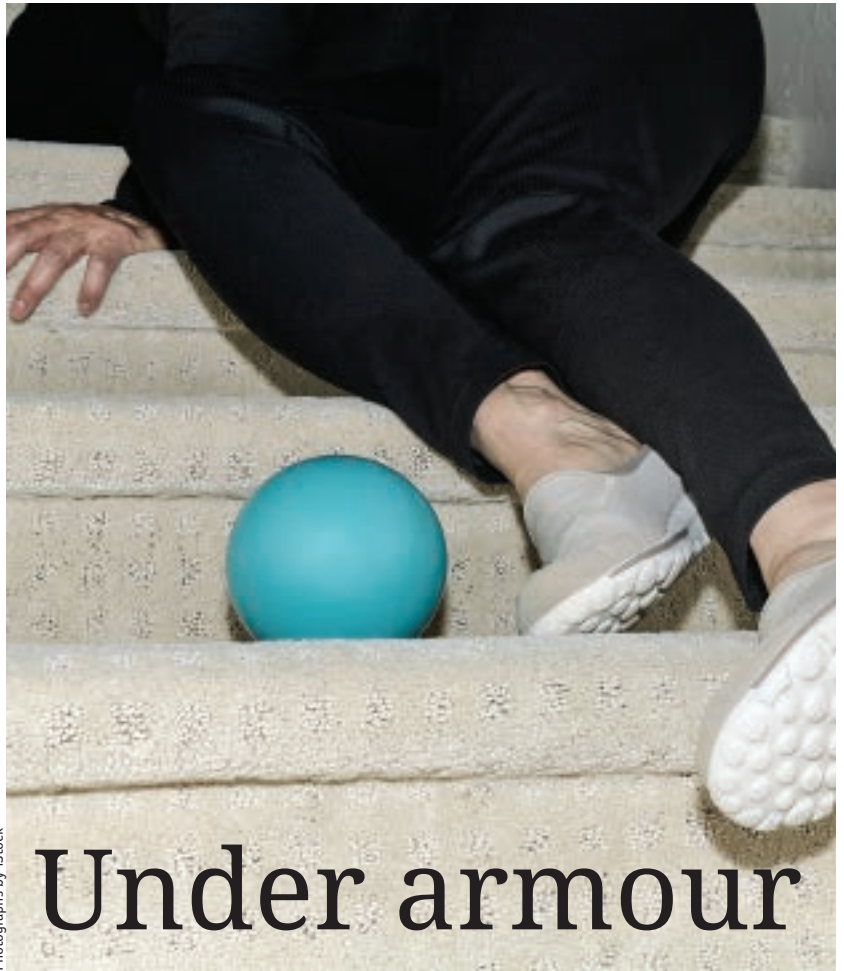
FAB TAB: At a recent event in New York City, tech giant Acer announced its partnership with grandPad, which has developed a tablet for silvers with a simple interface, featuring large circular icons for phone, text, games, music, and more. The tablet is not available for sale individually; users pay a monthly subscription to connect to the service, which includes the device. Go to www.grandpad.net/acer to learn more.

Dial an app

When 24-year-old Southern Californian Justin Boogard realised his 85 year-old grandmother Betty Lou Luce, who still uses an old-fashioned flip phone, was being deprived of the benefits of the digital age, he came up with a seriously smart idea: GoGoGrandparent. As newspaper *The San Diego Union-Tribune* reports, this free phone service enables silvers to access a host of app-based services, from Uber rides and meal orders to grocery deliveries, with



the utmost ease. You just dial the hotline from any phone and select from a simple menu of automated choices: Press 1 for an Uber ride, 2 for a return trip, 3 to order a meal, 4 to get groceries delivered, and 5 for all other delivery options. The service takes care of the rest. The best part: there are no user charges; the company makes its money from the service providers it affiliates with. To learn more, check out gogograndparent.com



Photographs by iStock

Under armour

Cheers to home-grown innovation! Students from IIT - Delhi's mechanical engineering department have designed an undergarment that protects silvers from injuries sustained during falls, especially in the hip and pelvic regions. Unveiled at the Institute's Open House in late April, the 'device' is made of cotton and contains plastic foam with micro-cellular injection, reports Press Trust of India. Worn as an undergarment, it is fitted with plastic on the sides to shield the femur that juts out from either side of the hip area. Small and lightweight, it does not impair mobility. "The protection is porous and of high tensile strength," project head Prof Naresh Bhatnagar tells

media. "In case of a fall, it protects the femur bone by dispersing the load to surrounding tissues. So, there are no injuries or bruises." During tests, conducted at the geriatric ward at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences and a senior citizens' society in Ghaziabad, among other places, the researchers found that no fractures were recorded for those who tried it; but the real challenge was to get silvers to use it. "While compliance among the elderly is 70-80 per cent, 92 per cent of those who gave it a shot said that they could leave it on while walking," adds Bhatnagar. "It will soon be available on Flipkart at a price less than ₹ 1,000. A similar device is available in the US for \$ 100, but this is the first in India."



A serving of wisdom

The corporate world depends heavily on interns, whether it admits it or not. From fetching coffee and filing reports to making multiple trips to the photocopying machine, the life of an intern is both hectic and thankless.

Not so in Rujuta Diwekar's office.

Diwekar is a Mumbai-based nutritionist and fitness consultant who recently conducted a six-week internship programme for silvers. Unlike the typical office intern, whose brief it is to absorb new facets of the job without so much as a murmur, here it was the interns who brought wisdom to the table. The objective of Diwekar's internship programme was to 'revive lost wisdom.' "A large part of

my work is about learning from traditional wisdom, tying it in with modern terminology and making it more accessible to the public in a language that they understand; otherwise we lose all this wonderful wisdom. I felt we had a generation that is more than capable of contributing to society but we do not have any network to learn from them or any method to share their information," reveals Diwekar, explaining why she put together this unique programme.

A paid internship, the preconditions were to be above the age of 65, and interested in food and fitness. Four interns were selected and the internship started on 15 April. The interns came in five times a week for four hours, each time.

"The idea first came to me when I watched the Hollywood movie *The Intern* while on a flight, where a senior comes in for an internship and enriches the company with his experiences," recalls Diwekar. "It struck me that I could document the vast experience that we have freely available in the form of our seniors."

The internship was divided into three projects. The first one focused on reviving pulses in our cuisine, where the interns discussed pulses, documented different types of pulses and even prepared some of their ancestral recipes.

"We are trying to revive our ancestral, *khandani* food habits and lifestyle," says 65 year-old Renuka



Photographs by Sanjhi Shah

Renuka Rohra, Dr Shaila Nimbekar and Rekha Diwekar; below: Rujuta Diwekar
Opposite page: the silver interns at work with Diwekar's team

Rohra, a senior intern. "We have come up with the idea of reintroducing *kulthi* [horse gram] and have named it a 'super pulse' for this project. It is found all over India but today's generation is not aware of it and hence it is becoming extinct. It's a very economical pulse that is easily available and tasty as well."

The second project focused on working on basic lifestyle changes for police officers of the Khar police station in Mumbai. The interns visited the police station and drew up a questionnaire to understand the lifestyle and food habits of the officers. Dr Shaila Nimbekar, 66, says, "We realised that they needed to take some small steps that would make a big difference to their health. We noticed that they drank a lot of tea and did not eat breakfast. We advised them to drink *chaas*, *nimbu paani*, *kokum sharbat* or sugarcane juice and to avoid *vada paav* and rather bring something from home. We made our recommendations in the form of posters and have put them up at the Khar police station for everyone's access."

The third project of the internship was to come up with recipes for every trimester of pregnancy. Rekha Diwekar, 65, says, "We have the

knowledge our grandmothers gave us when we were pregnant and recipes that are not followed nowadays. It was a very different lifestyle then. So we discussed how that lifestyle could be incorporated into today's lives. We covered all three trimesters, keeping in mind the development of a child in any particular month



and the nutrients that are required during each period. We even asked our seniors for suggestions and made them into charts."

A session was also held where an 89 year-old woman from Goa, popularly known as '*ajji*', offered her recommendations for a healthy lifestyle. She told the team all about spices, how she consumed them, where they are grown, how they should be stored, and how versatile they are. During another session, the interns visited a farm, picked up fresh vegetables and cooked them.

The fourth intern was Sanjay Bhide, a 70 year-old farmer from Sangli, Maharashtra, who was recommended by his daughters. They had spotted Diwekar's Facebook post announcing the internship and encouraged their father to apply. One of Bhide's main contributions to the programme was introducing *mandga*, a roast *kulthi* and rice, a nutritious breakfast beverage made of roast *kulthi* and rice.

Summing up the internship, Diwekar says, "The idea was to start this type of programme and see where it went. I think this one was very successful and I found some great people to work with."

—Aakanksha Bajpai

Colour your life. Start an intergenerational art project in your community centre to promote communication and break down barriers. Take a cue from Paint Pals, an intergenerational art project developed by British non-profit Alive! which brings silvers and the youth together to share interests and memories through painted postcards. There's a double payoff here. First, the proven health benefits of art: it improves hand-eye coordination, boosts memory and cognitive skills, lowers blood pressure, busts stress, and battles depression. Second, the artwork created can later be sold to raise funds for community projects.



iStock



Then: Plastic bottle
Now: Flower vase



RECYCLING FACTS

- Recycling plastic can save twice as much energy as burning it in an incinerator.
- PET plastic (polyethylene terephthalate), a plastic resin and a form of polyester, can be recycled into clothing, fibrefill for sleeping bags, toys, stuffed animals, rulers and many other things.

Here's a way to cut your eco-guilt—repurpose an old plastic bottle into a vase. You just need a marker and a pair of scissors. Make a circle at the upper half of the plastic bottle and cut it out; jab the scissors in (carefully) to begin. Ensure it is evenly cut; else, the jagged cut could hurt you. Take the lower half of the bottle and cut strips all around the bottle vertically. Ensure these are of the same size and length and are evenly cut. Once these 'petals' are cut, press and fold all the strips in the outward direction;

press the bottle upside down on a flat surface to ensure an even edge. Now, weave the tip of the first strip over the next one but under the next two. The second strip should be weaved over the next two strips and under the third strip. Fold the third strip the same as the first and continue the process till only three strips are left. Fold the last three under each other and make sure all the strips are fixed; you can heat the bottle slightly to ensure the strips remain tight. Your vase is now ready for water and some flowers.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. FILL SOME MUD IN THE OTHER HALF OF THE BOTTLE (THE NECK) AND USE AS A PLANTER.
2. YOU CAN ALSO HANG THE PLANTER BY ATTACHING TWO HOOKS AT BOTH THE ENDS OF THE BOTTLE.



PICKMYCART

Available for: Android 4.0.3 and up

What it does: Here's a handy app to help you with your laundry—for starters. Launched in Goa by entrepreneur Vrushali Khadse and designed by Prayjot Mainkar of Androcid Media, PickMyCart also delivers groceries and even your gas cylinder.

After installation: Once you install the app and register, it takes you to the home page with two options: laundry and grocery. If you choose laundry, you get the options of wash and iron, dry cleaning and just ironing. Choose an option and you move to another menu where you indicate the type and number of clothing; you see prices at the same time. Once you choose your laundry (and groceries, if you wish!), schedule your pickup and drop. On the left side is a dashboard where you can see your profile, track your order, invite other friends to install the app, change settings and access help and support. Please note that while registering, the app asks for your location—the location button on your phone should, thus, be on.

The Ghaziabad police has launched **Shakti SOS**, a mobile app for the security of silvers, women and children. The app has a panic button; when pressed, it will alert the nearest police station or control room and the emergency contact entered by the user. Thumbs up!

ZAIUTO

Available for: Android 4.0.3 and up

What it does: Car breakdown in the middle of the road? Here's a quick solution. Launched in Noida and Greater Noida, the Zaiuto app provides complete roadside assistance—from flat tyres and a breakdown to key lock-out, battery change or even to fill fuel. The user-friendly app helps you find assistance in a matter of seconds. Once you ask for a mechanic, you can track his whereabouts. Zaiuto is an Indian start-up by Daksh Sharma and Sunny Jindal, the co-founders of marketing and social media company Iffort. They plan to launch the app in Bengaluru as well.



After installation: Once you install the app and register, you can launch it and find the nearest partner mechanic to your location—illustrated on a map in the homepage. (The location button on your phone needs to be on.) In the 'search' field, you can type in your exact location and then push the 'get help' button. Then, the app takes you to the second page where it will give you options for your problem. Once you choose the problem, it shows the nearest mechanic available and prices. The request will be accepted by the nearest partner mechanic whose location can be tracked—you only need to wait for 30 minutes for him to arrive. You pay online or by cash after services have been rendered. The app includes an automatic collision detection feature in the dashboard on the left-hand corner—in case of a crash, it will send a message and your coordinates to your emergency contact.

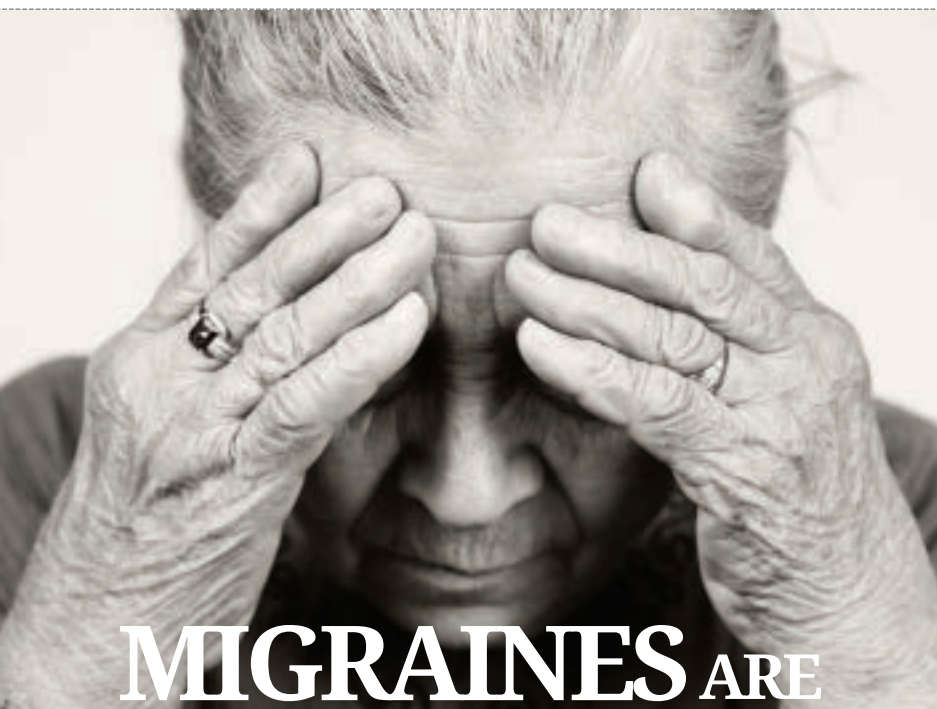
A PINCH OF POISON

Before you assume the worst about poisons and toxins, consider this research study on a biotoxin called 'heme'. Heme, a component of haemoglobin, which transports oxygen in red blood cells, is tightly bound to proteins, rendering it non-toxic. **When released in tiny amounts into the cell, heme acts as a nutrient, not a toxin**, allowing it to take part in important processes such as gene expression. Researchers from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta used biosensors—fluorescent green sensor molecules—to track the activity of heme in cells. They found that an enzyme called GAPDH regulated



the amount of free heme available in cells. When more heme was needed, it was released by nitric oxide, which freed the heme from its binding proteins. This study is important in understanding how poor heme

management plays a role in diseases such as Alzheimer's, heart diseases and even some types of cancer. The study was published in journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.



MIGRAINES ARE DEAD SERIOUS

As if the excruciating pain associated with migraine was not bad enough, here's more bad news. **Women who suffer from migraine are also prone to cardiovascular disease and strokes and are more likely to die from these conditions** than those who are not afflicted by migraine. Researchers from the Institute of Public Health in Germany and Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health in Cambridge, Massachusetts, analysed data from 1,15,541 women, aged 25 to 42, from 1989 to 2011, for cardiovascular events, diseases and mortality. They found that 17,531 women reported migraine and in 20 years of follow-up, 1,329 cardiovascular events occurred, of which 223 women died. The findings were published in *British Medical Journal*.

Asthma alarm: Here's some hope for asthmatics. Researchers from North Carolina State University in the US have developed a **wearable device called the Health and Environment Tracker, which can predict the onset of an asthma attack**. The device monitors a user's environment, heart rate and other physical attributes and features sensing devices incorporated into a wristband and a patch that sticks to the chest. The patch tracks the patient's movements, heart rate, respiratory rate, amount of oxygen in the blood, skin impedance and wheezing in the lungs. The non-wearable component of the device is a spirometer, which patients breathe into to check lung function several times a day. Data is collected and recorded from this device to a computer. If the device detects the onset of an asthma attack, the patient can take early remedial measures. The paper describing this work was published in the *IEEE Journal of Biomedical and Health Informatics*.



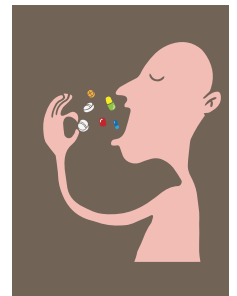
LEAKY BRAINS

Leakage of any kind is never a good sign, and a leaky blood-brain barrier (BBB) can lead to Alzheimer's. Researchers from Maastricht University Medical Centre in Netherlands, used a contrast-enhanced MRI technique to compare 16 early Alzheimer's patients with 17 healthy, age-matched controls. They found that leakages in the BBB—a collection of cells and sub-cellular structures that separates circulating blood from the brain and is essential to keeping brain tissue in healthy condition—may lead to early onset Alzheimer's. Turns out Alzheimer's patients have a significantly higher percentage of leaking brain tissue in grey matter including the cortex, which can eventually lead to dysfunction in the brain and a decline in cognitive performance. The researchers pointed out that BBB leakage means the brain has lost its protective armour and stability of cells. Their study was published online in journal *Radiology*.



We all know air pollution can lead to heart disease. Now we know why. A study by researchers from the University of Washington in Seattle, found that **people living in areas with high levels of outdoor pollution accumulate deposits in their arteries, which leads to atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries.** Here, plaque builds up inside the arteries, clogs them and eventually leads to a heart attack. The 10-year epidemiological study of over 6,000 people from six American states measured calcium deposits in heart arteries by using a CT scan and assessed each person's exposure to nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide, and black carbon or soot, based on their home address. The researchers found that the most harmful pollutants were fine particulate matter and traffic-related pollutant gases or oxides of nitrogen.

Painkillers can be a pain! Popping a pill or two may ease your pain now—but could leave you in a world of pain later. Researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder in Colorado, USA, have found that even brief exposure to opioids like morphine, oxycodone and methadone exacerbates pain in the long run. They administered morphine for a few days to treat rats with peripheral nerve injuries and found this caused chronic pain that lasted months. The opioids exacerbated the release of pain signals from specific immune cells in the spinal cord, which sent these cells into overdrive, leading to spinal cord inflammation. They also heightened the activity of spinal cord and brain cells that respond to pain. The study, published in journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, is proof that treatment can sometimes aggravate a problem.



Photographs by iStock

ARTHRITIS CURE? FAT CHANCE!

Who would have thought **injecting your own fat into arthritic joints could bring relief from crushing pain?** As radical as that sounds, this procedure is the focus of an ongoing trial of 100 patients with moderate to severe osteoarthritis being conducted by surgeons at King Abdulaziz University Hospital in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The surgeons believe the fat will lubricate the joints, improve their function and reduce pain and stiffness. This day surgery, which requires only local anaesthesia, could help millions of people around the world as osteoarthritis is a common, degenerative disease that afflicts silvers.



The bread you eat, especially if you're in Delhi, could be carcinogenic

SLICED & DICED



Here's a bite-size bombshell that will make your jaw drop—**the bread you eat, especially if you're in Delhi, could be carcinogenic.** The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) tested samples of 38 popular brands of bread sold in Delhi and found that 84 per cent of the samples tested positive for residue of potassium bromate and potassium iodate. This was pre-packaged bread including *paav* and buns. The CSE points out that while potassium bromate is a category 2B carcinogen (possibly carcinogenic to humans), potassium iodate could trigger thyroid disorders. These chemical compounds are used to treat flour while making bread and are banned in many countries as they are listed as 'hazardous' to public health. The matter was taken up by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which, on 20 June, banned the use of potassium bromate as a food additive, while potassium iodate has been referred to a scientific panel.

According to Bhakti Samant, chief nutritionist, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai, "We have adapted to Western culture as far as diet is concerned. Bread is not an integral part of our Indian diet and shouldn't be consumed every day as it contains sodium and fats, which can be harmful if consumed regularly." Samant suggests that one mustn't eat more than three or four slices of bread a week. As an alternative, she suggests that one eat *poha*, *upma*, *seviyan upma*, oats *chilla*, oats *upma*, *daliya upma*, idli or dosa, *nachni dosa*, dal *chilla* or eggs with *phulka*.

The first day at school

The first time you rode the bicycle.

The first crush you had at thirteen

The first drama you got a part in

The first day at college

The first date you went on

The first kiss

The first time you proposed

The first job interview

The first board meeting you addressed

The first day after retirement

BUTTERFLIES *never retire*

The first click of the mouse.

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celebrate age

Dating deserts

Back in the early 1970s, the US was the ultimate destination for many educated Indians. But a young PhD in nuclear physics from IIT Kanpur decided to stay back at the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad to work on a fledgling subject called geosciences—an all-encompassing field of science dealing with planet earth. “It was a risk I took and I don’t regret it,” says **Dr Ashok Kumar Singhvi**, 66, whose work on dating the Indian geological landscape, especially the Thar Desert, has won him wide recognition.

Rewinding 40 years, Dr Singhvi starts at the beginning. “Perhaps it was the 1965 Indo-Pak war that I experienced in Jodhpur but I was uneasy with the kind of treatment Indians received in the international arena. I wanted to prove that good work could be done here as well and that respect for us would accrue from the results we produced.”

Dr Singhvi is now an honorary scientist and JC Bose National Fellow at the prestigious PRL. Known as the cradle of space sciences in India, PRL is a unit of the Department of Science, Government of India, and carries out fundamental research in select areas of physics, space and atmospheric sciences; astronomy, astrophysics and solar physics; and planetary and geosciences.

Life came full circle for the geoscientist when, early this year, the President of India awarded him the National Geoscience Award for Excellence (2014) for his contributions, which include establishing a new geochronological method in India; for developing an understanding of global deserts and developing methods to date minerals hitherto considered undateable.

“After completing my master’s in physics from Jodhpur University, I obtained a doctorate with my subject being ‘Hyperfine Interactions and Mossbauer Spectroscopy’ from IIT-Kanpur,” says Dr Singhvi. Armed with a PhD, he started working at PRL at a time when a new branch of science called ‘luminescence dating’ was gaining ground.

“Luminescence dating, through which it is possible to date the earth’s sediments up to a million years, presented me a challenge to apply nuclear physics to date natural rocks,” explains Dr Singhvi. As fate would have it, the young scientist got a chance to meet Dr Martin Aitken, the



Courtesy: Dr Ashok Kumar Singhvi

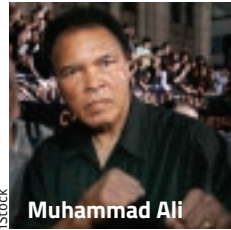
father of luminescence dating, who was on a visit to PRL. Impressed with Dr Singhvi’s work, the senior scientist invited him to Oxford, where he spent eight months. After he returned, Dr Singhvi set up his lab for luminescence dating with the help of PRL. He has since conducted extensive research on Indian surfaces, from the plains of Northern India and the Gangetic plains to the Himalaya and the deserts of Rajasthan and Gujarat. “I have tried to determine the age of the Indian landscape and tell the story of how it has evolved over millennia.”

A meeting in the early ’80s with Prof R J Wasson, an Australian expert, triggered a love affair with dating deserts, the Thar Desert in particular. “Although I came from a city within the desert [Jodhpur], I had never been alive to its importance,” confesses Dr Singhvi. “I started running programmes on the evolution of deserts, reconstruction of past wind regimes, dune migration rate, climatic gradients, past climatic events, past monsoons and past wind circulation patterns. The objective was to understand how deserts had evolved and what the future holds for them.”

Dr Singhvi’s work on the Thar Desert suggests that it extended beyond Baroda in central Gujarat before it began to contract 10,000 years ago. “We provided the history of evolution of the Ganga plain and its link to sea-level changes, tectonics and climate and a chronicle of soils in the Ganga plains and their link with tectonics, over the past few thousand years.”

In 1992, Dr Singhvi hosted a global meet on the evolution of deserts, with experts from 30 countries taking part. “I took all the delegates to Thar Desert. Everybody thought I was crazy because Thar was not a widely known desert but it is now considered the most characteristic desert.” Now, he is busy organising the International Geological Congress to be hosted by India in 2020. “The Congress is like a geosciences Kumbh Mela,” he chuckles.

—Nayem Quadri

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Dalai Lama**Astad Deboo**iStock
Muhammad Ali**Manohar Aich**

BIRTHDAYS

Tibetan spiritual leader **Dalai Lama** turns 81 on 6 July.

Former Indian cricketer **Sunil Gavaskar** turns 67 on 10 July.

Indian contemporary dancer and choreographer **Astad Deboo** turns 69 on 13 July.

Actor **Naseeruddin Shah** turns 67 on 20 July.

Chairman of Wipro Ltd **Azim Premji** turns 71 on 24 July.

Veteran politician **Somnath Chatterjee** turns 87 on 25 July.

IN PASSING

Comedian **Razak Khan** passed away on 1 June following a cardiac arrest in Bandra, Mumbai. He was 65.

Boxing icon **Muhammad Ali** died on 3 June in Arizona, USA, after a 32-year battle with Parkinson's disease. He was 74.

Eminent actor and theatre personality **Sulabha Deshpande** passed away on 4 June in Mumbai. She was 79.

Legendary body builder and India's first Mr Universe, **Manohar Aich**, featured in the October 2012 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*, died at his north Kolkata residence following age-related health issues on 5 June. He was 104.

MILESTONES

- On 15 June, Mohun Bagan announced that it will honour the country's only Dronacharya award-winning football coach **Syed Nayeemuddin** with the Mohun Bagan Ratna. Nayeemuddin was chosen for his overall contribution to the club and the country, both as a player and as a coach.
- On 30 May, **Raghavan Seetharaman**, a Qatar-based Indian banker, was awarded the Green Economy Visionary award for his environment-friendly activities and promoting a green economy for nearly two decades.



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OVERHEARD

"Some people try and look younger in the face but the trouble is, if you've had the face done, what about the hands? I once met a nice 80 year-old lady in Hollywood. There was the face of a 35 year-old on an 80 year-old body. I didn't know whether to flirt with the face or help the rest of the body up the steps! What's wrong with a few wrinkles? It happens. You get wrinkles. What are you trying to be? It's a dreadful sort of ego and arrogance to think, 'All that's wrong with me is I need a little tuck here and I'll be back to what I was.' No, you won't because your mind is older. Your experience makes you older and if your experience is expressed in your face, what's wrong with that?"

—British actor Sir Ian McKellen, 76, to website www.mirror.co.uk

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 HUNDRED AUTUMNS

My life has been true to the *Atharva Veda Suktam*, where a person desires to live for a hundred years and see a hundred autumns. I attribute my centenarian status to discipline. This wonderful life has seen me as a soldier in the Army. I have fought in World War II and saw action in Afghanistan, Eritrea and Abyssinia (now part of Ethiopia in Africa), Libya, Egypt, Jammu & Kashmir and in the Indo-Pak war of 1965.

I graduated from Jaipur's Maharaja's College and was a talented football and volleyball player. On the suggestion of Maharaja of Jaipur Sawai Man Singh, I joined his forces, the Sawai Man Guards, as an officer in 1939. That was the beginning of a 36-year career in the Army, from which I retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1966.

Age has not dimmed my memory and there are many precious moments I still recall. During World War II, I was part of the British troops supported by Indian soldiers. Our job was to assist the British troops and guard frontiers under British occupation. Our commanding officer, an Englishman, fell to Italian guns and was killed. We decided to retrieve his body so we could give him an honourable burial, and I was among the volunteers who went to the spot where he was gunned down. To our great surprise, the Italians temporarily held their fire and allowed us to take away the body of our CO. This was a grand gesture and spoke of soldierly ethics. It was a glorious time and I was decorated with the title, Member of British Empire.

On 15 March, when I woke up at home in Jaipur's Bani Park, I lived to see a hundred autumns. And my family of three sons, their wives and children had assembled to wish me. It was the happiest moment of my life. I cut my 100th birthday cake with a sword. My Army unit, 108 Infantry, and the Rajasthan Ex-Servicemen's League honoured me on my foray into my 101st year, and several war veterans came to greet me, the oldest being 95 year-old Brigadier (ret'd) Raghubir Singh, a Mahavir Chakra winner.

I receive a decent pension, given that I am 100 years old and that the quantum of pension increases over the years. As I come from a family of nobles under the erstwhile kingdom of Gangiasar in Jhunjhunu, I spend a large portion of my pension on restoring our old fort at Gangiasar. I use the rest to pay my bills and my caretaker's salary.



Zakir Hussain

Singh celebrated his 100th birthday with pomp

I am in good health, probably owing to the disciplined life I have led. I did not drink alcohol till I became a lieutenant colonel at the age of 48 and have always enjoyed home-cooked food. I have also always been a happy and contented person and enjoy retired life. In 1995, when I lost my wife, I started feeling lonely. But thanks to my loving children and grandchildren, who took extremely good care of me, I was rejuvenated and started feeling happy again. I believe that in your silver years, your life depends on how your children care for you. I have been very blessed.

An injury I suffered on my left leg when I was posted in Hong Kong aggravated in later years and this caused me to use a wheelchair. I have some hearing problems but I refuse to wear a hearing aid. I have no problem with my eyesight and I still read two newspapers, back to back, every day.

Peace and prayers, apart from the loving care of my children and a strong will to live and enjoy the world around me, have helped me live happily for a hundred years.

—Lt Col (retd) Sumer Singh, Jaipur

TRIAL BY FIRE

When I migrated to the US in 1999, after flying in the Indian Air Force (IAF) for 32 years, I had a very simple purpose: I wanted my son to fulfil his ambition of becoming a dentist.

A transport pilot in the 1965 and 1971 wars, I retired as air commodore in 1997. I knew I couldn't sit around doing nothing because my son was still studying and my pension was meagre. From the life of a king in the Services, the change to the life of the common man was a drastic one. I joined an electronics company in Gurgaon as general manager with a promised pay of ₹ 30,000 but received only ₹ 5,000. Six months later, I moved to a garment export house in Mayapuri as manager, on a salary of ₹ 13,000. This was not what I had imagined for myself after retirement.

So when my daughter married an IAF pilot and moved to the US, where her husband was on deputation, my wife Beena, our son Brijender and I followed. It was 1999. I was 56 years old and starting a new life in Mississippi. I figured I'd get a flying licence within four months and join the civil aviation industry there. But my son said he would like to join Rutgers University in New Jersey and we had to make a crucial decision—it could be either be my licence or my son's college education.

We moved to New Jersey. We all started working to pay his tuition fee of \$ 8,000 per semester, as we didn't have that kind of money. It was very tough. We rented an apartment and bought a second-hand car. We got jobs at local stores and made the minimum wage of \$ 8.50 per hour. But among the three of us, we brought in a decent sum and set up house. We slept on the floor till we could afford to buy beds; we were always on the lookout for good deals at sales, and we shared the household chores. Best of all, we managed to give our son the education he wanted.

There were times we would look back with regret at our decision to leave India. But thanks to my service background, by 2001, I was selected as a supervisor of customer services in the US Postal Service. Getting a government job gave me a lot of satisfaction. But I was at loggerheads with the employees' union, which didn't want to accept an outsider in such a position. My Air Force breeding was a great help in facing these hurdles.

While I was still training, the World Trade Centre was attacked on 9/11. Some of the deadly anthrax-laced letters were processed in the Trenton post office, where I was a



Courtesy: Air Cmde (retd) Marwaha

After retirement, Marwaha made a life for himself in the US

trainee. People started saying I was a Muslim, that I was the culprit. These people could not differentiate between an Arab and a Sikh. I was investigated by the FBI and cleared due to my background in the forces. I was very upset but I knew I had done no wrong. With faith in God and truth on my side, I grew stronger. I worked in the mail processing plant for three years, supervising 30 employees while doing the graveyard shift. I was eventually awarded a commendation in 2004 for sincerity and dedication.

I am now a supervisor at the post office in Piscataway Town in New Jersey. Earlier this year, I received a commendation for outstanding customer service.

Beena is now 67 and retired from her bank job two years ago. My son graduated from Rutgers in 2004 with a double major in biotechnology and computer science (he changed his mind about dentistry). He is working with Motorola as director of operations and business forecasting.

We still miss our country. It gets lonely here. It's the kind of place where you may not meet your neighbours for days. Some of us have set up a Defence Services Institute, where retired Indian officers living in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania meet to socialise and help new families settle in. We watch Indian television together.

I lost the chance to say goodbye to my parents, who passed away while I was in the US. But, considering the inflexibility of the Indian education system, my son might not have found his calling back home.

—Air Cmde (retd) Balvinder Singh Marwaha,
New Jersey, USA



Meet the mango: Consume this nutritional powerhouse in moderation



Photographs by iStock

I am in my early 60s and a diehard fan of mangoes. I love them so much that I have never missed a season since I was a child. However, I was diagnosed with diabetes a couple of years ago and, since then, have been afraid of eating mangoes, given how wonderfully sweet they are. I usually succumb to temptation and am then wracked with guilt. Should I give up mangoes forever or can I eat them in moderation?

The mango is called the ‘king of fruit’—with very good reason. This fruit is priceless and that’s not only owing to its golden allure, irresistible taste and stiff price tag; it also comes bundled with many health benefits. Let us introduce you to a facet of this fruit that you probably didn’t know about.

Powerhouse fruit

The deep orange colour of the mango is an indicator of how rich it is in Vitamin A, making it excellent for the hair, skin and eyes. It is also, therefore, a powerful antioxidant,

which prevents premature ageing and degeneration. Mangoes are chockfull of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that strengthen and invigorate the nerves in your muscles, heart, brain and other parts of your body. With mangoes as part of your diet, you can look forward to a healthy brain and effective nerve functioning, improved concentration and memory.

The mango is packed with Vitamins A, C and lutein and is thus good for eye health. It protects against early cataract and night blindness. This fruit also contains high levels of Vitamin B6 and E. Vitamin B6 helps the body make insulin, which controls blood glucose levels, and antibodies that fight infection and certain chemicals that send messages between nerve cells. Vitamin E helps make red blood cells and prevents blood from clotting.

Minerals like copper, potassium, magnesium and calcium are found in abundance in this juicy fruit. Potassium and magnesium control high blood pressure and leg cramps.

High levels of dietary fibre, pectin and Vitamin C help lower cholesterol levels, aid in digestion and elimination, and boost the immune system.

FUN WITH MANGOES

MANGO SMOOTHIE

Ingredients

- Mango: 1
- Milk: ½ cup
- Chia seeds: 1 tsp
- Melon seeds: 1 tsp
- Whole walnuts: 3; broken

Method

Peel the mango and cut it into large chunks. Add in a blender along with the milk. Blend for a few seconds or until there are no chunks left. Transfer to a glass or bowl. Garnish with chia seeds, melon seeds and walnuts.

MANGO SALSA

Ingredients

- Mango: 1
- Tomatoes: 2
- Onion: 1
- Red and green bell peppers: ½ each
- Lemon juice: 1 tsp
- Green coriander: 1 tbsp; chopped
- Salt and chilli flakes: to taste
- Salad oil: 1 tsp

Method

Chop the mango into cubes. Chop onion, tomatoes and bell peppers. Mix all the ingredients in a bowl and add lemon juice and salad oil. Mix well. Garnish with chopped green coriander.



Raw mango: Nature's medicine

Did you know that raw mango is the best kitchen cure for sunstroke? If you drink a glass of *aam panna* (raw mango drink) daily, you can keep sunstroke at bay. Plus, it is an exceptional source of Vitamin C, thereby keeping the common cold at arm's length. Raw mango or *kacchi kairi* is available throughout summer and people make pickles, chutneys and *murabba* from it. *Aam panna* contains jaggery, which provides energy, and rock salt, which replenishes lost nutrients owing to sweating in extreme heat. However, diabetics should avoid adding jaggery to the concoction.

Its antioxidant properties protect against diseases such as colon, breast and prostate cancer as well as leukaemia. Mangoes help the body maintain its alkali reserves.

Eat in moderation

The mango is extremely healthy and contains zero fat. Senior citizens need not avoid this seasonal fruit. However, they should eat it in moderation; that is, in small portions. Diabetics can regulate their mango consumption by not eating more than 50 gm after a meal. This should be followed by regular exercise and remaining stress-free to manage blood sugar levels.

No particular variety of mango is considered less sweet and thereby more suitable for consumption by diabetics. But here's some good news for diabetics who can't seem to resist the golden fruit—research is underway to develop techniques to make 'sugar-free' mangoes.

Dos and don'ts

Interestingly, the leaves of the mango tree help to **regulate insulin levels** in the blood. A traditional home remedy is to soak the leaves overnight and then consume a filtered decoction in the morning. This is not just a good remedy

for diabetics but treats anaemia and acne, and is recommended during pregnancy.

If you crave a **sugary snack**, mangoes are a much healthier alternative to sweets and pastries. The fruit has a low glycaemic index, so moderate quantities will not raise your blood sugar level.

Unripe mangoes should not be eaten in excess as they may cause throat irritation, indigestion and abdominal colic. Some people are allergic to mangoes, a sign of dermatitis.

Avoid **drinking water** immediately after consuming green mango. Also eating green mango without draining the sap or milky juice may cause mouth, throat and gastro-intestinal irritation.

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



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

Calibrate your chakras

When yoga meets crystal therapy



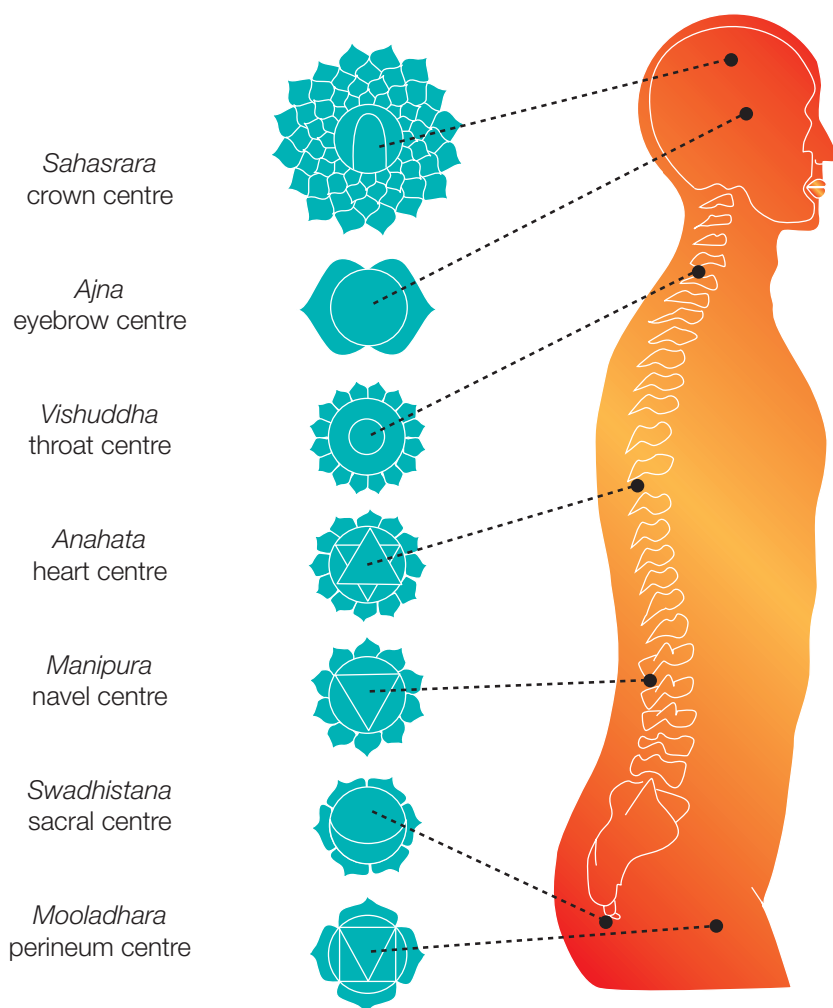
The new sisterhood yoga has developed with crystal therapy cannot be dismissed. Though the extremely rational might arch their eyebrows at the latter as superstition, those who subscribe to it explain that it's based on the science of electromagnetic radiation of all objects and connects to the rationale of synchronicity.

For instance, quartz chips in watches are used to ensure time is kept and that the watch does not react to external stressors unlike the manual watches of yore. This is ensured because the atomic structure of quartz maintains its constancy and is not influenced by other objects, ensuring the clock remains constant. The energy of quartz used in this mechanism is called piezo charge. All crystals and gems have their individual piezo charge. When a particular part of our body (and the corresponding chakra/psychic centre) is disturbed, thus

causing sickness of mind or body, gems and crystals are appropriately used to synchronise and revitalise it. Then, the disturbed part begins to react to the piezo charge of the gem and stops its out-of-kilter route.

So many practitioners use crystals or gems to heal. In many traditional healing systems, too, such crystals were used as jewellery. In fact, the points of contact between the ornament and one's body parts are also based on key acupressure points.

Though crystal therapy is clearly a separate technique in itself, it meets yoga in meditation. The crystals are placed at body spots corresponding to the chakras. With an amazing range of colours in gems and crystals, this can be an engaging occupation! The most basic colours are the seven rainbow/VIBGYOR shades.



YOGIC MOVES

Meditation with crystals

Lie down in corpse pose (*shavasana*). Place the seven crystals in the colours of the chakras at spots on the body or beside it. Then, you can do your usual meditation or run a meditation tape. Alternately, you can use only one crystal on a body part in need of therapy for a similar meditation. Some common gemstones that may be used are red (ruby/onyx) for the *mooladhara* at the pelvis; orange (carnelian/orange calcite) for *swadhistana* at the tailbone; yellow (tiger's eye/topaz) for *manipura* at the navel; green or pink (aventurine green/pink quartz) for *anahata* at the heart; blue (lapis lazuli) for *vishuddha* at the throat; grey/indigo (smoky quartz) for *ajna* at the centre of the forehead; and white (quartz) or violet (jade) for *sahasrara* at the crown.

Spanda Karikas

In reality, nothing arises, and nothing subsides. It is only the divine Spandaiakti which, though free of succession, appears in different aspects as if flashing in view and as if subsiding.

One of the most exciting books on yogic philosophy I have been fortunate enough to read is the interpretation

of *Spanda Karikas* by Jaideva Singh. Its authorship is left unresolved simply because those who had attained this state had no interest in becoming famous through their attainment.

It talks of the universe as a dynamic pulse, and how the entire universe is a dance born of throb. It is quantum yoga, an exhilarating mind space where the one who has experienced

the cosmic dance (not merely understood it as a scientist does) breaks down his experience in clear, even austere, language so it can be understood by the aspirant. So right on, when you read it, you know it is by an attained master who leads you through a maze of multiple worlds a yogic aspirant has to pass. A must-read for those who crave a yogic vision.

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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

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

Song of flavours

G Surya Kantham • CHENNAI

A long chat with G S Kantham, 72, reveals the zest and serenity with which she leads her life. Going down memory lane, she talks about her childhood, her passion for music, her talent in the kitchen and much more. What comes through is the equanimity with which she balances her moments of pride and achievements with the simple turns of life. She shares a lovely rapport with my friend Jigyasa Giri, who accompanied me, led the interview and unearthed the various facets that add to Kanthamji's charm.

Namaste, Kantamji! Tell us about your childhood.

I was born in Gunupuram, Orissa [now Odisha], as the fourth offspring of my parents, Mantha Sri Ramalu and Appala Narasamma. My father worked for the government in the Orissa Administrative Service, so his was a transferable job. He would be transferred to a different place every two or three years within the state of Orissa. So, through my childhood, I have lived in a few interior towns of Orissa, as well as in some larger cities such as Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Rourkela.

Did you learn to cook as a young girl? Did your mother guide you through the first steps in the kitchen, so to speak?

[Laughing gently] No, I never cooked before marriage! My

mother was an exceptional cook and fed us well, but neither of my parents ever worried about us sisters having to learn cooking. I guess they just knew we would manage.

How did you meet your late husband? When did you get married? Tell us about your family.

Oh, mine was a typical arranged marriage. Nothing romantic about it! My photograph was sent to some prospective grooms by the elders. My

husband used to say that when he was coming to see me as a prospective bride, he was late in reaching the train station. He told himself that if he caught the train he would consider it a positive sign and if he missed it, he would not come to see me. So you see, the train decided our fate!

I followed in my father's footsteps and held an administrative post with SAIL, a Central Government job, at the young age of 19. I was married to my husband G Ranga Rao at Tirupati in 1965. I was barely 21 years old. He was in the pharmaceutical line in Chennai. Back then in 1965, SAIL had not begun operations in Chennai, so I had to give up my job, something I never allowed my dear husband to

forget. But, in turn, I had a good husband. He passed away when I was 47—that was an unfair blow. But I am blessed with two wonderful sons who are like Rama and Lakshmana and, of course, two lovely daughters-in-law and three adorable grandchildren.

What are your other interests?

I used to sing devotional songs in temples along with my brother from the age of 12. Later, I had the opportunity to sing for All India Radio stations of Orissa and Bengal. I sang *Jayadeva Keerthana* and *Rabindra Sangeet*. I won a few gold medals in singing competitions too. Later, when I started working for SAIL in Rourkela, the management used to make me sing for their prestigious events. I have thus sung before great people such as Pandit Nehru, Dr S Radhakrishnan and Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy.



Photographs by Chennai Pix

Those must have been such proud moments! Did you continue to sing after marriage? Do you still sing at public gatherings?

Yes, the praise and adulation were quite a boost for my morale. After marriage, there was a gap in my activities. But after a good many years, I did get to sing along with Vijayakumar, son of the great playback singer Ghantasala, at many light music programmes. Sadly though, he passed away and that marked the decline of my singing career. After Vijayakumar expired, I sang *Annamacharya keerthana* at TTD [Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam] for five years. I also became a member of TTD. I stopped singing owing to my failing health and mounting family responsibilities.

That is so wonderful and touching! You are indeed so talented and yet so humble!

It is all God's will.

Coming back to the ladle, when did you really begin to cook?

I started cooking as soon as I was married. Although I did not live in a joint family, we had a large extended family; at any given time, there were always 10-15 people in the house. I would do the cooking and soon my dishes were the most sought after in the family. For any function also, I would be given the task of cooking the meals.

Were your dishes very exotic? What were the popular dishes demanded by family and friends?

Actually, they were very simple dishes. I guess I just enjoyed cooking and had a natural flair to cook and serve thanks to my mother's genes! I started getting creative with my cooking almost 20 years after my marriage. I think they used to like

my *pulihara* (tamarind rice), *vadai*, *thayir vadai*, *seeyam*, *payasam*, etc.

Can you share any interesting or memorable incident related to your cooking?

There are so many little incidents. Once during Deepavali, among other delicacies I had made *murukku*. As customary, I packed them for all our relatives and close friends and received great praise too. But my husband's sister's husband, who was known for his short temper, was livid at me for sending the *murukku*!

"I love experimenting with brinjals. Once, when my sons were little boys, I wrote 120 brinjal recipes—all in Andhra Brahmin style! My brother, who was a famous Telugu fiction writer, actually published the book and paid me handsome royalties. But after him, it went out of print and I don't have even a single copy now"

Do you know why? About a month earlier, he had most of his teeth extracted so he couldn't eat them! This incident is both sad and funny. I should have remembered but, truth is, I forgot about his dental situation. Anyway, I told his wife to tell him to put small pieces in his mouth so he could suck on them till they became soft enough to swallow. But I suspect she allowed the situation to dissipate rather than anger him further!

So, what do you like to cook the most?

I love experimenting with brinjals [eggplant/aubergine]. Once, when my sons were little boys, I wrote 120 brinjal recipes—all in Andhra Brahmin style! My brother, who was a famous Telugu fiction writer, actually published the book and paid me handsome royalties. But after him, it went out of print and I don't have even a single copy now.

What was your brother's name?

What was the book called?

Perhaps someone reading this article might still own a copy of it?

It was titled *Vantulu Varpulu*, meaning 'cook and serve'. My brother's writings were quite popular back then. He wrote Telugu fiction and short film scripts too. His name was Mantha Venkataramana Rao.

How long did it take to write all the recipes of the book?

I don't remember much now; I can't even remember how the book looked. I think it took me two years to complete all the recipes.

Do your sons like your cooking? What is their favourite dish?

All sons love their mother's cooking once they are married. When they were little boys and even in their teens, they and my husband used to enjoy themselves and eat all sorts of food from outside whenever I went to Hyderabad or Rourkela to visit my relatives. Now, of course, they say my cooking is finger-licking delicious! They like anything I cook. So do my daughters-in-law and grandchildren. And I enjoy cooking for them.

FROM G SURYA KANTHAM'S KITCHEN

Spiced drumstick curry in coconut paste

This is a homestyle drumstick curry in coconut paste from the regions of Behrampur and Rourkela on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Mrs Kantham learnt this delicious dish from her mother. Healthy and easy to prepare, its consistency is unusual—thicker than dal, almost like a chutney. When served with steamed rice and a side-dish, it makes a simple and complete meal in itself.

Ingredients

- Drumsticks: 2; cut into 1.5-inch pieces
- Oil: 1-2 tbsp
- Split black gram (*udad dal*): 1 tsp
- Red chillies: 2
- Curry leaves: 1 sprig
- Fresh coriander: 1-2 tbsp; finely chopped

- Cashew nuts: 8-10; roasted in ghee to garnish
- Sugar: 1-2 tsp (optional)
- Salt to taste

For the paste

- Coconut (grated): ½
- Red chillies: 2
- Mustard: 1 tsp
- Rice: 2 tsp
- Asafoetida powder: a pinch

Method

For the paste, soak the rice, mustard and red chillies for 30 minutes. Grind along with the grated coconut and

asafoetida powder into a thick paste. Set aside. Heat the oil in a large pan. Add the dal and as it turns golden, add the curry leaves and 2 red chillies. As the chillies turn bright red, add the chopped drumsticks and 1 cup of water. Add salt and sugar and cook until the drumsticks become soft. Now, add the ground paste to the drumstick mixture and simmer for 5-7 minutes. Switch off flame, transfer to serving bowl and garnish lavishly with chopped coriander leaves and roasted cashews. Serve hot with steamed rice or chapattis.



*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*

Experience

A second childhood

Wouldn't it be great to have a second childhood? To start life afresh? Because at Harmony, a magazine for people above fifty five, we believe that age is in the mind. Which is why, you should live young.

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celebrate age

Breaking POINT

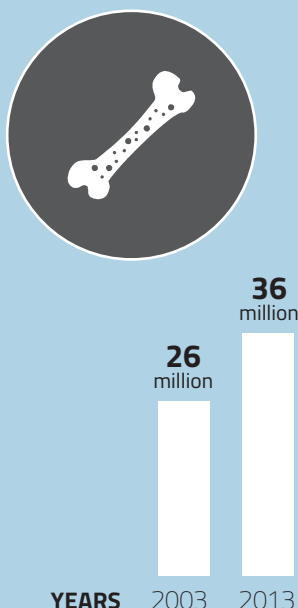
Osteoporosis is a silent disease. Check your bone health regularly, writes **Shivani Arora**

Osteoporosis is becoming an increasingly common metabolic bone disorder in seniors, more so in women. It is important to understand this disorder and take care of one's bones because the downside of this disease is that it can easily lead to fractures. We address common concerns regarding osteoporosis by speaking to **Dr Ambrish Mithal**, chairman, Department of Endocrinology, Medanta The Medicity; chief advisor of the ISBMR (Indian Society for Bone and Mineral Research); and board member of the International Osteoporosis Foundation.

What is osteoporosis?

'Osteo' means 'bone' while 'porosis' means 'porous'. Osteoporosis therefore means 'porous bones'. This is a silent condition, where bones become brittle and break with minor or sometimes even no injury. It is a result of reduction in bone density as well as deterioration in bone quality over years. As we grow, our skeleton accumulates bone mass; we attain our peak bone mass by about 20 years of age. Thereafter, we maintain it for about 15 years. Subsequently, we lose bone mass throughout life,

Number of osteoporosis patients in India



***Source:** International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) Asian Audit



If you wear bifocals or trifocals, watch your step while using stairs

80%

of the urban Indian population is Vitamin D-deficient

Women are more prone because they have smaller bones and lose a significant amount of bone mass at menopause

albeit at a slow rate. This bone loss is accelerated around menopause in women for a few years. It happens silently, without warning, till it reaches a critical level and a fracture occurs.

How does it affect the elderly, more so women? Are men also prone to it?

Women are more prone because they have smaller bones and lose a significant amount of bone mass at menopause. Oestrogen is a key protector of the skeleton and prevents bone loss. Once oestrogen declines at menopause, calcium leaks out from the bones, leading to osteoporosis. Men are also prone, although less than women. At the age of 50, the lifetime risk of fracture is one in three for women and one in five for men.

Does the condition show any initial symptoms?

There are no symptoms of bone loss. Symptoms occur only when a bone fractures. Common fractures are those of the wrist, spine and hip. Hip fractures are most serious and can even be fatal sometimes. Spine fractures can occur with minimal or no symptoms—maybe just a backache that may be dismissed as a ‘muscle spasm’, although at times

they can occur with excruciating pain necessitating surgical intervention.

How is osteoporosis diagnosed?

The diagnosis is made by measuring bone density using Dual Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DXA). This is a non-invasive test that takes only a few minutes. It provides the ‘T scores’ of the patient that help diagnose whether the patient has osteoporosis. The National Osteoporosis Foundation of the US recommends this test routinely for women over 65 and men over 70. It should be done earlier if there is reason for accelerated bone loss like use of corticosteroid medication or other conditions that cause bone loss. It is also very useful to do a lateral spine X-ray to pick up unidentified silent spine fractures.

What is the mode of treatment for osteoporosis?

The fundamentals of prevention and treatment of osteoporosis are nutrition and exercise. Adequate calcium and protein in the diet is a must. The chief source of calcium is milk and milk products. Those who are diagnosed with osteoporosis should take calcium pills. An intake of at least

FALL PREVENTION TIPS



Regular physical activity, including exercises for balance, strength and posture



Talk to your doctor if you suffer from dizziness or feel unsteady



Wear sunglasses outside to minimise glare and squinting



Consider attending a 'fall prevention' or 'falls and balance' programme



Wear shoes with good foot support—broad heel, non-slip soles



Maintain a healthy diet that includes fresh fruit and vegetables and calcium-rich foods



Use a walking aid, if needed, for balance



Get your eyes tested annually by an optometrist



Review all medications with your doctor on a regular basis

1,000 mg calcium daily is advisable.

The other critical factor is the Vitamin D status. Vitamin D is essential to absorb calcium; without Vitamin D, the calcium in our diet is not absorbed and thus does not reach our bones. Vitamin D deficiency is widespread in India owing to our tendency to avoid the sun, and the fact that our skin pigment reduces the efficiency of Vitamin D synthesis. Also, food in India is generally not fortified with Vitamin D whereas in most Western countries, milk and milk products are. It is mandatory to correct Vitamin D deficiency to get optimum benefit from osteoporosis medication. This usually means about 2,000 IU/day Vitamin D for Indians.

Some drugs can reduce bone resorption, like bisphosphonates. Alendronate and Risedronate are given weekly; Ibandronate monthly.

The most popular and potent bisphosphonate these days is Zoledronic Acid, given as an intravenous infusion once a year. For bone formation, the preferred drug is

ELIMINATE HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS



Floors: Try to keep furniture in its usual place, remove cords, loose wires and clutter. Ensure rugs and mats are securely fixed and smooth



Bathrooms: Install handrails and a non-skid mat or tape



Kitchen: Mop up spills near the sink and stove immediately. Install non-skid rubber mats. Keep kitchen items used regularly at a comfortable, easy-to-reach height to avoid reaching and bending



Lighting: Keep staircases, entrances and halls well lit. If you get up during the night, turn on lights; use automatic lights and glow tapes

PTH (Teriparatide) which is used as a daily 'pen' self-injection for 18-24 months. These drugs can reduce risk of fracture by 40-50 per cent.

With the widespread deficiency of Vitamin D among Indians, is osteoporosis a major cause of worry for the elderly?

Yes. With estimates showing that about 80 per cent of the urban Indian population is Vitamin D-deficient and hip fractures occur about a decade earlier than in Western countries, osteoporosis is certainly a major concern for our ageing population. In the 2009 International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) Asian Audit, expert groups estimated that the number of patients suffering from osteoporosis in India was 26 million in 2003, with projections indicating 36 million patients by 2013.

In 2013, sources estimated

that 50 million people in India are either osteoporotic (T-score lower than -2.5) or have low bone mass (T-score between -1.0 and -2.5). 🌟

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.

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RAGA & RHYTHM

Eternal songstress P Susheela shares her musical journey with Saritha Rao Rayachoti

If you happened to live in Southern India in the 1960s and '70s, your favourite soundtrack would undoubtedly carry the mellifluous voice of P Susheela. There's a 'Susheela song' for every emotional nuance—from the coy admission of love to a mother's wistful lullaby, from haunting lament to fervent devotion, from the undertones of desire to indulging in whimsical wordplay. And every generation has its favourites. After all, she has been singing for over six decades!

Bursting onto the playback music scene at the tender age of 16, Susheela stole the hearts of fans, music composers and directors in the Southern Indian film industry with her crystal clear voice, intricate modulation and flawless intonation. In the 1950s, vocalists like P Leela, M L Vasanthakumari and Jikki ruled the film music industry with their distinct styles and ability to sing in more than one southern language. Susheela went on to dominate the field in the decades to come, not merely on the basis of her voice, her mastery over language and musical style but her adaptability to the changing tastes of the audience and insight into the working personalities of different music composers.

Susheela has been conferred some of the most prestigious accolades in the country, including the Padma Bhushan, five National Awards, over 10 state awards and numerous titles. At the age of 80 today, Susheela is still making waves. She was recently recognised by *Guinness World Records* for rendering the greatest number of songs in Indian languages. Although this eternal songstress has many monikers—Melody Queen, Nightingale and Gaana Saraswathi—none of them quite conveys her ability to tug at your heartstrings when she starts to sing.

The early years

Susheela was drawn to singing from an early age. The musical climate at home allowed her interest to blossom and she began training in classical music. "I can recall constantly singing some song or the other while at home and passing on tasks or errands entrusted to me by mother to my unsuspecting younger sisters," she reminisces. "My father could play the veena very well. He wanted me to sing classical Carnatic music like the much-respected Smt M S Subbalakshmi."

While it is commonly believed that Susheela's first recording was a duet with A M Rajah for the movie *Kanna Talli* (Telugu)/*Petra Thaa*i (Tamil) in 1952, Susheela recalls it being her second song from the same movie. "The first song in this movie was the *Gajendra moksham padhyam*," she says, "The recording was over in a jiffy and I remember the composer Sri Pendyala Nageswara Rao being mighty pleased with the end result."

A career in melody

"Playback singing is all about making your singing suit a beautiful heroine or a handsome hero, as the case may be, without diluting musicality," she says. "That can be tricky, at times, while handling intense phrases with lots of *gamaka*, as one needs to put them through without a hint of classicism and yet without losing an iota of musicality."

The phrase 'prodigious talent' does not quite encompass the intense training that Susheela underwent in the early years. "It called for singing over all the instruments, which was tough," she recalls. "If there was one mistake by any-

Milestones

1969

National Award for *Paal polave/Naalai indha velai, Uyarndha Manidhan* (Tamil)

1978

National Award for *Jhummandi naadham, Siri Siri Muvva* (Telugu)

2008

Padma Bhushan Award

2016

Guinness Book of Records recognition for singing the most (17, 695) solo, duet and chorus-backed songs in six Indian languages

2016

Asia Book of Records has recognised her for having recorded the most (18,330) solo, duet and chorus-backed songs in 12 Indian languages





Courtesy: www.psusheela.org



Being felicitated by Lata Mangeshkar; at a studio recording with SPB (right) and MSV

one, the entire process had to be restarted. Time went into positioning the musicians behind the microphones so the volume would be at the desired levels. An orchestra-heavy or typical classical number stretching to 10 minutes with many percussion instruments, chorus singers and various instruments took a long time to rehearse, as each section would need to be verified by the composer.”

Over the years, Susheela developed a working rapport with stalwarts such as S Rajeswara Rao, Viswanathan-Ramamurthy, A M Raja, T M Soundararajan, P B Sreenivas, Ghantasala, K V Mahadevan, Ilaiyaraja, S P Balasubrahmanyam (SPB) and K J Yesudas. She’s sung for composers as varied as V Dakshinamurthy and A R Rahman.

“Each composer had his own preferences, which would need to be understood and imbibed for the eventual output to be in alignment with the composer’s taste,” she elaborates. “You encounter composers who keep incorporating changes into an already-taught tune, and endlessly so. There are certain composers who, while singing an already-taught phrasing or line, would sing it differently in the next instance and the singer would be in a quandary as to what actually should be taken up for singing. There have been cases where the film director has asked for the tune to be changed and this would be after all those gruelling rehearsals. Learning the song all over again, rehearsing and then singing would then need to be done from scratch.”

Having been witness to the sweeping changes in the music industry across decades, Susheela believes in one piece

of early advice that has stood her in good stead. “The value that was automatically ingrained in me was to sing with clarity, keep in mind that every song veers towards a particular sentiment or a mix of sentiments, and bear that in mind while delivering phrases and words.”

Memorable moments

In Susheela’s early years, her defining influences were Hindi songs of the early 1940s and *bhava geet* or light music composed by S Rajeswara Rao. “I recall slapping a sari against the washing stone, to dry it, of course, while singing *Tummeda oka sari*, a *bhava geet* composed by Sri Rajeswara Rao. As the intensity increased, so did the force behind every slap on the stone. Eventually, there was very little to say about the state of the sari!” Little did she know back then that she would sing for S Rajeswara Rao one day!

Susheela recounts a humorous incident that occurred during a recording with M S Viswanathan (MSV). “A mouse managed to find its way into the recording room and on seeing it, I let out a squeal that shocked MSV. He came rushing in without a second thought and was very relieved when he realised that all the drama was something inane.”

While Susheela does not have a specific routine or diet to keep her voice in excellent shape, she ensures she does not talk too much before a recording. Few people are aware that some of her most popular songs were not rendered quite as effortlessly as one believes. “I have sung several songs with a bad throat—*Athhaan ennathhaan* and

Raajaavin paarvai come to mind immediately.” And being the consummate professional she is, she never let a bad throat come in the way of a good recording.

Guinness record

In January 2016, *Guinness World Records* recognised Susheela’s prolific singing career—she has recorded an astounding 17,695 songs solo, duet as well as chorus-backed, in over six Indian languages since the 1960s. And this does not include songs she recorded in the 1950s and those in six additional languages!

“The process of compiling the list began with the launch of the website www.psusheela.org by a select group of my fans back in 2003,” she shares. “When they found the count could qualify me for a *Guinness* record, they initiated a three-year-long, arduous process where several emails were exchanged and tonnes of information captured, formulated and sent across for review by the *Guinness* people. This also involved my fans going through the title cards of each and every movie I have sung in!”

“The value that was automatically ingrained in me was to sing with clarity, keeping in mind that every song veers towards a particular sentiment”

The number painstakingly compiled by her fans came as a surprise to Susheela herself. “I had no idea that I had sung so many songs, deploying the primitive technology prevalent in those days. The team of fans who worked on this tells me that this number is now bound to exceed 25,000. The record will need to be updated soon. The list of songs compiled by my fans took several years and the least I can do is thank them.”

Influences

Susheela counts many people as her influences. “My father, who encouraged me in my musical quest, my husband who ensured my focus was never off my career and the entire producer, director, music director, lyricist fraternity that helped me in my career.”

She is very grateful to her late husband Dr Mohan for his many sacrifices. “He was very, very particular that there should be no impediments in my career. He would not even allow me to cook. He would buy gramophone records of mine the moment they released; he listened to them and always had comments to offer.”

A day in the life

While Susheela’s son, Jeyakrishna, daughter-in-law Sandhya, and their younger daughter live with her in Chennai, their older daughter is studying in Bengaluru. Susheela is a private person but when she isn’t recording or travelling, the highlight of a typical day is time spent with her fans. “In the evenings, some of my special fans step in, playing some rare songs of mine to me, especially from our Facebook page. Some of my colleagues also keep coming to visit me.”

Technology does not faze the 80 year-old; she uses it effortlessly. “I am pretty comfortable with touchscreens. I do a lot of surfing, watching movies and listening to rare music online on my tab. The moment a new device finds its way to me, I do not look up until I have a handle on it.”

Susheela is also very spiritual and spends a lot of time in prayer and quiet contemplation. “To me, spirituality is happiness realised,” she says. “Readily smiling and following my heart help me remain fresh in my thoughts. I get drawn to temples and deities, which fill me with peace and joy.”

Giving back

Today, as a judge on television talent shows, Susheela comes across children embarking on a career in music. “They are tremendously talented, with voice trainers to guide them. If great compositions come their way, they are bound to go places.” Her advice to them is timeless and simple: “Remain humble and learn every new song as if it were your first.”

Susheela also started a trust in 2008 to address the needs of financially disadvantaged musicians—several instrumentalists, past singers, chorus singers and composers are recipients of the monthly pension scheme her trust offers. “The trust has also made spot payments on several occasions where the need for funds has been urgent and towards hospital bills for treatment of serious ailments.”

While Susheela is unable to divulge too many details about her upcoming projects, her music, like her, seems to be drawn towards the spiritual. She says, “There are a few albums in the offing, all of them devotionals.”

Abiding principles

Susheela attributes her serenity to her attitude to life. “Letting go of the past and accepting the present goes a long way towards removing stress.” On a parting note, she adds, “The most important thing in life is to be unconditionally happy. Happiness emerges when we let go of what is holding us back, like dwelling on the past, living in past glory, harbouring prejudices and worrying about the morrow.” ✨

History, culture and religion converge in UP



Travelling around Uttar Pradesh is akin to an amazing rollercoaster ride. And that is an understatement. For a visitor traversing this North Indian state is buffeted by a complex yet incredible blend of interwoven experiences. Historic events that influenced the destiny of dynasties, empires and the country; religious sites that shaped the spiritual soul of the nation and parts of the world; a land blessed and watered by the river goddess Ganga; cuisine that exudes good taste; monuments that have dazzled the imagination of visitors from around the globe... Uttar Pradesh has it all. The Taj Mahal in Agra, one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, is undoubtedly the jewel in its crown, but it's a crown that is studded with a brilliant array of gems...

Within striking distance of the historic city is Fatehpur Sikri, which, for a brief flash of glory, served as the capital of Akbar's vast empire before it had to be abandoned as the dream city literally ran dry. It is often said that while the Taj Mahal is a solo violinist, Fatehpur Sikri is a symphony orchestra.

Not far from Agra are the twin cities of Mathura and Vrindavan around which are woven the childhood legends of Lord

Krishna. The Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple in Mathura stands over the prison cell where the miraculous birth of Lord Krishna, (whose divine discourse with Arjuna, the Pandav Prince, is the heart of the Bhagvad Gita), took place. Vrindavan is where the rather impish child-god spent his childhood, teasing the gopis, stealing butter pots, wooing Radha and terrorizing demons. Yes, the twin cities are replete with legends that unravel as one takes a boat cruise down the Yamuna whose shores are lined with busy river ghats where pilgrims take purifying dips under the gaze of palaces and temples.

Mathura also serves as a base for Bateswar where 101 whitewashed Shiva temples line the banks of the Yamuna River as it meanders through the stark and beautiful ravines of the Chambal. The almost forgotten village (which is what makes this rural area so charming) plays host to an annual cattle and animal fair.

While there may be a score plus one shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva in Bateswar, his true abode is in Varanasi or Kashi as the holy town is referred to in the scriptures. The 87 ghats that line the western banks of the holy river Ganga as it flows through the fabled town seem to telescope into each other. They are alive

with the frenzied devotion of pilgrims and the milling of curious tourists. The chanting of mantras and tolling of temple bells fill the air and boats cruise the length of the waterway, taking in the colourful sights of the waterfront city crammed with temples, palaces and, of course, the famous burning ghats.

One of the highlights of the city is the Ganga aarti which takes place every evening at sunset. In front of a packed audience which gathers around Dashashvamedh Ghat, in boats and on land, priests perform a beautifully choreographed fire ballet, swirling flaming lamps in homage to the river goddess. If for some reason you miss this spectacular ceremony you can always catch the sunrise aarti, the following day, at Assi Ghat at the southern-most of the ghats. The morning ritual is followed by a cultural performance – classical music and dance – in an adjoining pavilion.

Like a trapeze artist, one then waltzes from the high voltage hype of Varanasi to the serene surroundings of Sarnath, just 10 km away. This quiet little town's claim to fame is that it was here that the Buddha held his first discourse after attaining Enlightenment and set the Wheel of Life in motion. A deer park, ancient stupas, gilded Buddhas, a Sri Lankan temple, the broken



factfile

- Uttar Pradesh has two international airports at Lucknow and Varanasi. There are a number of domestic airports including one at Agra.
- Indian Railways has a vast rail network criss-crossing the state with stations in most important cities as well smaller destinations.
- Most important tourist sites have accommodation options that cater to all budget segments.

remains of an Ashoka Pillar... The four-lion sculpture that once sat on top of the pillar is now the emblem of India and is the centrepiece of the city's museum. There is a lot going on in Sarnath but its main draw is that it is an important stop on the Footsteps of Buddha pilgrim trail.

In fact, there are a number of other important Buddhist pilgrim sites in Uttar Pradesh. These include Kushinagar where the Buddha attained nirvana and Shravasti where he spent 25 of 45 monsoon seasons after attaining Enlightenment. The two destinations have an international flavour as monasteries and temples of different countries like Japan, Thailand, South Korea, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Tibet and China have taken root here. Another site on the Buddha circuit in Uttar Pradesh is Kapilavastu whose ruler was the father of the Enlightened One.

Allahabad which hosts the Maha Kumbh mela every 12 years at the sangam of the three holy rivers – the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati; Bareilly, the gateway to the Kumaon Hills; Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Ram; Jhansi, where a brave rani with her young son strapped to her back and her sword flashing death rode fearlessly across a battlefield; Meerut, the launching pad of India's First War of

Independence; Kanpur, which has among many treasures, a Jain Glass temple and one of the finest zoos in the country; Dudhwa National Park and other wildlife sanctuaries where tigers rule supreme and migratory birds come to brood and nest...

But it is in Lucknow, the state capital, that one finds the cultural heart of the state. As the power of the Mughals started to wane in Delhi, the nawabs became the flagbearers of genteel style. Everything in their courts was refined, including their cuisine. The feel of a delicately spiced kabab melting in the mouth is as much on a tourist's must-do-and-see list as is visiting and admiring the grand Imambaras, palaces and monuments that are legacies of the city's a glorious past.

Lucknow is also an excellent base to explore the neighbouring sites of Bithoor, on the banks of the Ganga and the site of the famous Indian Uprising and the Siege of Cawnpore; the sacred forest of Naimisharanya on the banks of the Gomathi River and the boon-granting dargah of the Sufi Saint Haji Waris Ali Shah at Dewa Sharif.

In addition to these important tourist sites that punctuate the state, Uttar Pradesh is peppered with smaller sites that capture the spirit of the nation. Yes, Uttar Pradesh as a tourist destination suffers from an embarrassment of riches. Here different streams of its historic, cultural and religious heritage create a sangam of unforgettable experiences.

—Gustasp & Jeroo Irani



For more information visit Uttar Pradesh Tourism at <http://uptourism.gov.in>



Photographs courtesy: Shailesh Gandhi

A call to arms

Shailesh Gandhi is not only a whistleblower to a corrupt government administration but inspiring a generation of RTI activists to take the battle forward, writes **Shail Desai**

Shailesh Gandhi is the public face of citizens' power in India, a man who fearlessly brought many a crooked politician, bureaucrat and government servant to book. More important, he has proved to nameless, faceless citizens that information is power, and inspired them to join the 'revolution' ushered in by one of the most powerful tools ever given to the common man: the Right To Information Act (RTI).

Gandhi's foray into public service took place soon after the RTI Act was introduced in Maharashtra 13 years ago.

But what makes his decision to become an RTI crusader even sweeter was that it was a deliberate choice. It was not Gandhi's first calling but one he discovered thanks to a chance comment made by a former faculty member at an alumni meet, reveals the 68 year-old, Mumbai-based RTI pioneer.

Gandhi became an activist at the age of 55. It was the culmination of a series of serendipitous events that brought him to this juncture. When he was very young, he dreamt of becoming a lawyer. However, coming from a family of engineers and doctors, whose impression of a lawyer was

a man in a black coat chasing potential clients outside a court, it was not to be.

After his schooling, he acquired a degree in civil engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology - Bombay (IIT-B). Even that happened quite by chance. "I was to opt for mechanical engineering but the idea of starting my own enterprise always appealed to me," recalls Gandhi. "Somebody told me that if I pursued civil engineering, I could get into the contracting business with an investment of ₹ 10,000-20,000. So I jumped right in."

Those were times when banks were nationalised and they offered schemes with zero margins for young engineers. On graduation, in 1969, Gandhi had made enough money in the contracting business but he found it "rather slow". So he took a loan and set up a factory to manufacture plastic bottles and caps—and soon made it big in the business.

However, doing something that was socially relevant was always on his mind, a thought that was reaffirmed a good 30 years later. "At an IIT-B alumni meet in 1998, I met a faculty member who casually reminded me how critical I was of society at the age of 20, when I was in college. He asked me whether I had made anything of that. I was around 50 years old then and I didn't feel India was much better. It triggered a cascade of thoughts again and I decided to do my bit."

Gandhi had to wait five years before he could actually embark on this course-correction. In 2003, he sold his business and got together with like-minded folks who wanted to bring about change. He had learnt of the newly promulgated RTI Act, which had been introduced in Maharashtra the same year, and also found his first assignment!

"I met former police officer Y P Singh, who mentioned a major racket when it came to police transfers. That set the ball rolling for me," says Gandhi, whose name subsequently went on to become synonymous with the RTI Act.

The following day, Gandhi sent an assistant to procure a copy of the RTI Act, studied it and soon filed his first application. He asked the Public Information Officer of the Police Commissioner of Mumbai for the names of political leaders who had recommended police transfers. "I was

refused initially but I got the information after six to eight months," he says. "It made a small difference, at least for a while, and opened up a new world for me."

The budding activist soon began to realise just how explosive a tool the RTI Act could be when used appropriately by common citizens. He began to understand how the Act worked, its potential to monitor the government's functioning and expose corruption, and its ability to empower regular folk to become change-makers. These were exciting times as the RTI landscape was just beginning to take shape. Gandhi worked quickly, collaborated with other RTI activists and even became a part of drafting the national RTI Act. What followed was a full-time shift to social work.

Encouraged by the sheer power of the legislation and buoyed by the momentum he had built, Gandhi battled the mighty without fear or favour. He took on the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, state and central governments, elected representatives and government officials, as well as conducted RTI workshops for citizens' groups interested in learning how to effectively use this tool. Alongside his work as an activist, he also groomed other RTI activists so they could take the battle against corruption forward.

Asked to name some of his memorable cases, Gandhi points to the Crawford Market redevelopment plan where, thanks to his RTI application in 2007, he saved ₹ 1,000 crore of the taxpayers' money and preserved the heritage structure. Then, there was the case of Police Inspector Prakash Avare of the Mumbai Police, who had been accused of raping a minor in 2004 but had been reinstated in the force the following year. After applying for a copy of the letter that had reinstated Avare, Gandhi received a reply from the Mumbai Police, saying the cop had been dismissed from service. He also names the case where his RTI application exposed Maharashtra minister Swarup Singh Naik, who had taken the medical route to avoid a jail term in 2006.

Gandhi had thus thrown down the gauntlet more times that he cared to count, and received wide recognition for his work. Then, in 2008, destiny had a bigger role for him—and it came with an ironic twist. He was appointed as a Central Information Commissioner (CIC), an appointment he is critical about to date!

“The law states that a CIC must be elected in consultation with the prime minister, the leader of the Opposition and a minister of the Union Government,” he explains. “But appointments to this post have always been arbitrary, based on political patronage rather than a merit-based selection process. We had forwarded four names of our own citizen candidates, along with recommendation letters and sent them out without expecting anything to really happen.”

Of the four names, one was that of R B Sreekumar, Director General of Police during the Gujarat riots, who had then voiced his opinion against the Narendra Modi-led government. He was instantly rejected as a candidate the night before the names were to be declared. Much to his surprise, Gandhi found that his name had suddenly been recommended!

“It was a random occurrence, more to do with blocking someone rather than choosing the right candidate. They called up a businessman from Mumbai to ask about me. Although he had never met me, he had followed my work through the newspapers. He recommended me, I received a call from Prithviraj Chavan (then Minister of State in the Department of Personnel and Training, Government of India), and that’s how I was selected,” says a still-incredulous Gandhi.

Ironically, the seemingly whimsical and arbitrary nature of his appointment typified everything that was wrong with governance in India—and the biggest weakness in the system set up to support the RTI Act. “I could have been a complete idiot. Nobody up there knew me, yet I was selected for this post. This is a deeper problem, for RTI and most of our governments. Some say I did not deserve to be commissioner but the truth is that there is no real process in place anyway.”

Extending the same logic to other statutory watchdog bodies, Gandhi points out that there are no criteria to fill top positions in the National Commission for Minorities, National Human Rights Commission and Lok Ayukta. “These are our checks when it comes to the balance of democracy but as the right people aren’t a part of it, they don’t work,” he rues. “As a result, the nation lands up spending a lot of money without actually getting anything out of it.”



Gandhi (seated second from right) with then prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri during a visit to New Delhi in 1964; Opposite page: with actor Aamir Khan on the sets of the talk show, *Satyameva Jayate*

In his role as a CIC, Gandhi delivered a number of landmark orders. Satyananda Mishra, who also worked as a CIC, says his colleague’s appointment was like a breath of fresh air in the commission. “He was the first non-civil servant to be appointed and he brought in a different dimension to the whole place,” he affirms. “He believes transparency is supreme and is a very passionate person. His commitment to RTI is unmatched.”

Among Gandhi’s most crucial work during his stint as CIC was to direct the Reserve Bank of India and other banks to disclose information under the RTI Act, something they had stubbornly refused to do up until then. It was an uphill battle but one that ended in eventual triumph. In December last year, the Supreme Court upheld 11 orders delivered by Gandhi, a landmark judgement in terms of transparency and accountability in government functioning. “I think it was one of the high points of my career because I was often criticised for being an activist and for having little idea of how the government functions,” says Gandhi, who has received numerous awards for his colossal body of work.

In a lighter vein, he recounts one of his most unusual RTI requests. “The Public Information Officer (PIO) once came to me and insisted that I look at a query. Someone who was dissatisfied with my decision had put in another query—to find out ‘how much bribe has Shailesh Gandhi collected in the last few years?’ I asked the PIO if we had any records on this and he looked back at me in amaze-



"A lot of the issues for which we file RTIs are sorted out over the phone in other countries. For instance, if you need to check the status of a ration card application, it is impossible to even think of receiving a rational answer over the phone here. Such issues should be ironed out"

ment, asking how that was possible. So I told him to reply, saying there was nothing on record; it was the truth!"

Gandhi also focused on clearing the backlog that had accumulated before he joined office, having had a good understanding of it during his days as an activist. "My team of volunteers would sit during hearings, analyse what had actually happened during these hearings and how much time it took to clear a particular query. We then came out with a report on our findings."

While most commissioners across the country disposed of 1,500-2,000 cases every year, Gandhi proved it was possible to clear at least 4,000 cases. "My average each year was about 5,400 cases and, in the last year, 6,000 cases," he reveals. "It is possible to address 7,000 to 8,000 cases each year. The delay is negatively impacting the RTI movement."

Although the tenure of a CIC is five years, Gandhi retired prematurely in 2012 after serving for three years and nine months as he had reached the retirement age of 65. During this time, he also received his fair share of criticism, which he took in his stride. "In his hurry to speed up case disposal and clear the backlog, he at times refused to hear a complete plea. He always had the public's interest at heart but his approach could sometimes be very frustrating," says Krishnaraj Rao, a Mumbai-based RTI activist, who credits Gandhi with grooming activists like him during the early days.

On his return to Mumbai, Gandhi resumed work as an activist but is now selective about the issues he takes up. "What is most remarkable about Mr Gandhi is his

utter dedication and humility. After he came back from Delhi, he quietly slipped back into activist mode and is evangelist-in-chief for the RTI Act," says senior journalist Sucheta Dalal, the managing editor at *Moneylife India*, a financial publication and online portal that has organised several RTI workshops with Gandhi

Gandhi is pleased at the way ordinary citizens have reacted to the RTI, and avers that there were 6 to 8 million applications received last year. Many, he rues, are unnecessary. "A lot of the issues for which we file RTIs are sorted out over the phone in other countries," he points out. "For instance, if you need to check the status of a ration card application, it is impossible to even think of receiving a rational answer over the phone here. Such issues should be ironed out."

To get more citizens enthused about in the RTI movement, a part-time certificate course has been started by the University of Mumbai, thanks to Gandhi, who has since approached the NMIMS School of Law in Mumbai to introduce it as a subject in the third-year curriculum. "I am designing the syllabus and setting question papers, which is a very different experience for me. After all, the last question paper I saw was back in 1969!"

While his crusade on the RTI front will continue, Gandhi is currently working on a book that decodes the language of the law to eliminate its misinterpretation. "I want to simply look at the language of the law, without referring to anything else, and interpret what it means. I would also like to present a view and a counterview, and let people decide for themselves." ✨

:: cover feature ::

WIT & WISDOM

She has acted in just 16 movies in the past 33 years, but she made sure you noticed her in all of them. She tends to play characters who get lodged in your head and then sneak up on you to make you laugh at the oddest moments. **Ratna Pathak Shah's** brand of humour bears a unique heft of tightly wound sarcasm and delicious wit. After a searing performance in *Kapoor & Sons* followed by an unforgettable outing in *Nil Battey Sannata*, she opens up to **Rajashree Balaram** about her views on film, society, family, education and why she thinks she is not a naturally gifted actor

"Art should force you to think, to make you face the ugly part of yourself, to accept that you are a bigot and a small-minded person. Only then will you learn to expand your heart and your mind"

"Social media, to me, is a whole lot of undigested thoughts—much like vomiting all over the place. There is too much being said already. I don't want to add to the noise"

"I am growing old and I am very happy about it. But, having said that, my hair definitely limits my options as an actor"

It has been a decade since *Sarabhai vs Sarabhai*, the popular sitcom on Star One, came to an end. Yet people continue to write letters to the channel pleading for a second season. Though the fantastic comic timing of all the actors on the show made it one of the top TRP brags of its time, it was the snide jibes of Ratna Pathak Shah's high-society Maya that audiences couldn't get enough of. Never before has such a snobbish character been so ardently adored. "It was the fine scriptwriting that made it such a hugely popular show. If it weren't for those lines, we would not have had the bandwidth of expressions to act out," says the 59 year-old as we sit in her tastefully designed apartment in suburban Mumbai. Pathak is wearing a simple yellow kurta and printed salwar, her salt-and-pepper hair gathered into a casual knot.

Though she is warm and chatty, it becomes clear that she is not going to make it easy for anyone to read her. Her poker face when she is laying on the wit is delightful; her sarcasm off screen is just as sharply honed; and her eyes are unwavering. She doesn't back off from a good argument, and it helps that she has a strong opinion on almost everything from religion, theatre, God and the hypocrisy of Indians to the standard of education in India, the lack of good roles for ageing women and the intrusive nature of social media. Most people know

her as the better half of actor Naseeruddin Shah and as the co-founder of 37 year-old theatre group, Motley. But there are other facets to Pathak that are far removed from the spotlight. She also runs the Avehi Abacus Project, a unique educational initiative, launched nearly three decades ago, and one that has been quietly working to broaden the experience of schooling beyond subjects and scores. "In 1989, Shanta Gandhi who was the director of Bal Bhavan, Delhi, retired and moved to Mumbai, and brought with her the concept of integrated approach to education," she explains. "The idea was to look at education from the point of view of a child, and not as biology, math, history and geography. Basically, it was all about how to form opinions, ask the right questions, and make the right decisions—a mind enrichment programme that could run parallel with the formal school system. We have three programmes: Sangati, which has been implemented in over 900 municipal schools in Mumbai; Manthan, a two-year programme meant for those who are studying to be teachers; and Saath Saath, a gender-based programme that addresses how notions of gender affect both boys and girls. Unless both boys and girls learn to think of themselves as human beings first, we are not going to have an 'ungendered' society," Pathak says she loves working in the field of education because it is one of the most powerful ways to make a positive, lasting impact on society.

Shah
with the
cast from
*Sarabhai vs
Sarabhai*



Courtesy: Hats Off Production

Daughter of renowned theatre and movie actor Dina Pathak, she and her sister Supriya are counted among the best character actors in the industry today. Yet when we ask her about her less prolific portfolio, she shrugs her shoulders: "I've always been very picky, not that filmmakers were queuing up outside my door. Then motherhood just consumed me. It remains the most beautiful role of my life, one that I wouldn't trade for anything on this earth." Pathak is both a doting and strict mother to actors Imaad, Vivaan and Heeba. "My kids have taught me patience. I can't imagine how my mother handled me. I was rebellious and terrible." One can understand where all that wonderful humour comes from—she knows best how to laugh at her own self.

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

Is cinema as exciting today as it once used to be?

Cinema is a business proposition for most of the people involved, and there is always a battle between trying to find something to say your way against a way that is acceptable to people who are putting in the money. There is that element of danger in the business of creating any kind of art form and, in a way, that is what drives us artists towards it. It is unfortunate that we only talk of films in terms of failures and success, and budgets and box-office figures. We need to move beyond that and analyse what a film is trying to say and how it is trying to do so. Eventually, art that moves us is always art that has a point of view. A novel that has disturbed you stays with you longer than one that has not. Art should force you to think, to make you face the ugly part of yourself, to accept that you are a bigot and a small-minded person. Only then will you learn to expand your heart and your mind.

"I am not naturally gifted as an actress, and certainly not a funny actress. For *Idhar Udhar*, I had to learn everything on the job. It was uncharted territory and, therefore, great fun"

Being so passionate about acting, why have you been restricted with your presence on screen over the years?

When I started out, I wanted to be a dramatic actress, but I never got those parts—thankfully. I got funny parts. And that surprised me because I always thought of myself as a straight-laced bore. So when Anand Mahendroo gave me the funnier of the two characters in TV show *Idhar Udhar* all those years ago, I was in seventh heaven. I am convinced that that role saved me, because otherwise I would have sat around waiting for a dramatic role. Also, I am not naturally gifted as an actress, and certainly not a funny actress. For *Idhar Udhar*, I had to learn everything on the job. To make things more challenging, there are no great teachers of acting in India, let alone funny acting. It was uncharted territory and, therefore, great fun.

But your performances always look so effortless.

That's because there is a lot of effort that has been put into it! It is not as easy as it appears.

So, would you say theatre is the best form of education for actors?

Not necessarily. If you have done the wrong kind of theatre, you will end up being as fake and mannered as a lot of the actors around are. We need to re-imagine the whole

business of acting. But then again, in India, what will an acting teacher train a student for? Hindi movies? How much of a challenge is that going to be? Today, acting is all about how to be a Bollywood star, so the prep is limited to horse-riding, dancing, being able to carry posh clothes and getting the right pout for a selfie. Bollywood doesn't challenge you too much. So, to be fair, when an actor is never going to get an opportunity to use her voice in a certain way, why should she even bother to train herself?

Who are the most promising actors, according to you?

In theatre, I admire Shruti Vyas, Puja Sarup, Parna Pethe, Ratnabali Bhattacharya. These are a bunch of actors who are extremely skilled—they sing, dance and act, and they sometimes also devise their own work and write their own stuff. In the movies, Kalki [Koechlin], Konkona [Sen Sharma], Richa Chadda, Alia Bhatt, certainly. Vicky Kaushal, for sure. And yes, Ranveer Singh! I love to watch him. He is a guy who has the smarts in a way that I have

not seen in a long time. He is so nice and brash, and thank god he is from a non-Bollywood family! It was getting kind of incestuous here with someone being someone's uncle or aunt or brother.

Theatre must be a great release for you.

Theatre gives me a chance to occupy my mind with ideas that are so much greater than what I am capable of, and to play with words that are so much more beautiful than what I can come up with. Theatre is the only place where I can exercise. A dancer has steps that she needs to practise. What can an actor do? Theatre teaches you over and over again to act. Also, flukes happen more often in films than in theatre. Rajesh Khanna was a case in point; he was not an actor but a phenomenon that happened by fluke. And one day the phenomenon stopped happening, and it was devastating to see what followed.

Does Mr Shah critique your work? He must be brutal.

The word 'brutal' in conjunction with criticism lends it a very negative connotation. Critiquing is about watching something and understanding what worked, what didn't and why. Naseer and I definitely critique each other's work, but we are both too tough to be shattered by what the other has to say. I offer critical feedback only to a person I am interested in. For the rest, it is so much easier to coo 'wonderful' and be done with it. As for Naseer, he is intimidating because he is demanding something from you that demands you to exert yourself. I am happy to be making that exertion. It moves me into a direction that I would otherwise be lazy to try.

Actors are known to be temperamental, and yours is a family full of actors. How do you live under the same roof?

We have our moments. We fight, we sulk, we storm out of rooms, and we slam doors. But fortunately, so far at least, the rational aspect of all of us comes to the fore. The irrational does not stay alive for very long, thank god. We do have our moments, but nothing has caused a rift that has been unbreachable yet. I hope I am not speaking too soon! Jokes aside, there is a great deal of respect; all of us actually like each other. We would have liked each other even if we weren't related. And theatre gives us a space where we can all interact together. If we had been in different professions, with other unique demands on our time and mind, I wonder how we would have connected.

You got Heeba, Mr Shah's estranged daughter from his first marriage, from Iran to India, just after you got married to him. In his book, he has admitted that if it weren't for you, he probably wouldn't have had a chance to reconnect with her. What prompted that move?

It was just one of those decisions that needed to be done. I was helped immensely by the fact that Heeba was an extremely positive person at that time, which she continues to be. Despite being just in her teens, the dignity and openness with which she came into our lives was fantastic. She didn't bring any baggage with her, and so it was very easy for us to accept each other into our lives. And then our son Imaad was born and she accepted Imaad with amazing joy and warmth. It just goes to show that it is, ultimately, unhappiness that makes people

behave so badly with each other. It is so much easier to open your heart to happiness wherever you find it. I learnt this from my *maami* who opened her heart some more with every setback in her life. She is 88 today and full of beans, and such an inspiring figure for all of us.

Do you think our society makes ageing a more unforgiving experience for women?

I think there are many things that are downright unfair to women than men. Older actresses have a harder time getting good roles than older actors. And it would be such a waste to pretend that one is younger—I am growing old and I am very happy about it. But, having said that, my hair definitely limits my options as an actor.

Do you think the presence of women in cinema can only change when the audience is willing to accept them in non-traditional, offbeat roles?

We don't have much of an opinion about women. We are used to seeing women as either *sati* or whore. We are also used to seeing men in neat binaries as villains or heroes. It is hard to write any nuances into characters then. Also, there are few women writers and even they are encouraged to write about men. Basically, women aren't writing their stories as yet, as much and as often as they should. We are beginning to, but it will take time.

What else grabs your mind besides cinema and theatre?

I think the way in which our society is going ahead is definitely becoming more and more of a lasting interest to me. When my mum and aunts used to discuss the changes in society and the impact those changes bring, I used to get fed up, but now I find myself saying and thinking in similar ways. I am concerned because I have sat on the cusp of a quantum leap in terms of societal change. The Internet and mobile telephony have changed the world in such significant ways that I have not been able to process it yet. I have been on both sides—my parents' generation that was making the shift from colonialism into independence and into a sense of India, and this generation for whom that sense of India has changed so dramatically. It bothers me deeply.

Why?

I have never been one for homogeneity. I like variety and I am proudest of this aspect of Indian culture. We have incorporated variety in every aspect of our lives, from the way we talk and dress to the way we eat and sing. There is no one

Opposite page: Shah with husband Naseeruddin, and children Imaad, Heeba and Vivaan (extreme left)



Haresh Patel



“We have our moments. We fight, we sulk, we storm out of rooms, and we slam doors. But fortunately, so far at least, the rational aspect of all of us comes to the fore”

way of doing things; we are improvisational. It was not enough for us to have a McBurger; we wanted an Aloo McTikkiburger! This can only happen in India. We are in large parts a country that was—and still is—happy in its plurality, but more and more we are trying to acquire a homogenised Western culture. We are letting ourselves be trapped by one way of looking at the world, one idea of Hinduism. We forget that Krishna danced with 16,000 *gopi* because each of those *gopi* wanted her version of Krishna. From child to lover, Krishna was all of that for them, for us.

So you fear a rigidity setting in?

I cannot stand what is being done to us at the moment. I am more worried that young people in India are toeing this line, and it is the worst form of hypocrisy. You say your world revolves around your parents, but you are willing to put your mother out on the streets if she is too old and gets too hard to live with. This dichotomy and hypocrisy is what we need to get past. But we are more focused on being vegetarians who won't let non-vegetarians live in the same apartment. I am a vegetarian myself, but I cannot bear the vegetarian mafia that is so aggressively at work. I am worried that all of us are finding it harder to live with each other. Where is the India that could coexist peacefully with each other in all its diversity?

Are you active on social media?

There is too much being said already. I don't want to add to the noise. I don't want to say something unless I have something really different to say. Everyone is saying more or less the same thing. It would be more useful if I can act on it, or find a way to put my thoughts across in a play or a film. Social media, to me, is a whole lot of undigested thoughts—much like vomiting all over the place. In 1950, Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot*, a play in which two characters have an exchange between them that seems so incredibly meaningful so many years down the line. One line goes ‘nothing to be done’—the characters repeat that over and over again. And then they both look towards the audience and one of them asks the other:

“What are these people doing?”

“They are talking.”

“What do they talk of?”

“They talk of themselves.”

“Why? To have lived is not enough?”

“No, it is not sufficient.”

I cannot tell you how much these lines keep coming back to me every time I hear about social media. For me, to have lived is enough. I have had a great time living this life. 🌸

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The first time you mustered up the courage.

The first time you bared your heart.

The first time you heard "Yes".

The first date.

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before life

and the babies and the bills intruded?

Because for the first time

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you can fall in love with each other
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Flavours of Italy

From the cave culture of Matera to the gothic architecture of Florence and Siena, **Manjiri Prabhu** shares some discrete tales



The first time I ever heard of Matera was when I was invited to the International Women's Fiction Festival in September. My curiosity peaked when

I saw pictures of stark rocky landscapes, so unlike the Italy of my past travels. But it was only when I landed there that the full impact of what it meant to be in Matera—a UNESCO world heritage site—hit me.



The Torre del Mangia at
Piazza del Campo, Siena



The Matera skyline

Opposite page: Siena Cathedral; the frescoed high dome at the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence

From Paris to Bari by air and then an hour's drive to Matera meant that I was exhausted by the time I arrived late evening in this historical town. The driver dropped off my bags in a cobbled square illuminated by orange-yellow streetlights. A long flight of uneven, cobbled stairs wound steeply down between houses and into eternity, as I stared in dismay at my heavy bags. I had been travelling for a fortnight and it hadn't struck me for the slightest moment that bags with wheels would be useless in Matera. Luckily for me, the helpful receptionist of the hotel where I was staying appeared just then and gallantly carried my bags down the 100-odd steps. He was breathless by the time we reached the hotel!

My room, on top of a curvy line of steps—yes, more climbing—was my very first introduction to the 'cave' culture of this wonderful town. The huge hotel room was like a scooped out sitting room with rock walls, and led to the spacious, high rock-ceilinged bedroom. If that were not all, the hotel reception, lobby and dining area were also scooped out of rock in a similar manner; I was straightaway transported into the Flintstone era!

Every day was a unique experience. With fascinating decors of boats, bottles and anchors; quaint squares lined with sit-out restaurants; cobbled streets and old churches, Monacelle, where the festival took place, held me captivated.



The massive, colourful, frescoed high dome; a huge wall clock with frescoes of four prophets; stained-glass windows; marble floors and glowing candle plants gave a solemn look and feel to the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore

The vast town of Matera looked like an abandoned stone village, but lit up like a magnificent bejewelled spread as the evening colour stole over the structures. Or, as a pamphlet very aptly put it, “transformed into a giant Nativity scene”.

Soon I figured out some interesting facts. Matera has been a World Heritage Site since 1993, especially the Sassi district with cave dwellings and churches made out of dugout rock. People resided in these caves till the 1950s, often living in stark poverty, until they were forced out by the government. Today, Sassi is an incredible, complex yet fascinating network of rock streets, dwellings, hotels, churches, stairways and you-name-it. It has also been a favourite shooting site for biblical films like Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* in 2004.

During the working week, the lovely Matera felt abandoned and lonely, as if waiting for something, someone. It left me wondering about the deserted streets and eerie silences. And then it happened! By Friday evening the place was transformed. Rock shows sprung up at every square, pantomime processions and dancers thronged the streets, restaurants spilled over with visitors and laughter. The two faces of Matera struck me as exceptional. The change from silence and solitude to mirth and merriment was startling. I fell in love with Matera—earthy and dark fairytale-like—a place like no other.

Reluctantly parting from the caves and caverns of Matera, I headed to Florence, where my friend Enrica, her partner, and their hyperactive twins received me warmly. Early next morning, I set off towards the Piazza del Duomo, where the most popular tourist monument in Florence—the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore—another UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located.

Strolling down Santa Maria Novella train station into a side lane past the massive wall of the Santa Maria Basilica, it was easy to follow herds of people to the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore. With its marble off-white, pink and slate-green chequered, graphic gothic-styled architecture, this 5th century monument’s magnificence would never be ably reproduced in a photograph.

Lighting a candle at the tree of candles in the exquisitely structured Basilica, I prayed silently. The massive, colourful, frescoed high dome; a huge wall clock with frescoes of four prophets; stained-glass windows; historical paintings; marble floors with dates and glowing candle plants gave a solemn look and feel to the Cattedrale.

I walked into a kind of Parisian street with portrait artists busy sketching tourists on their propped-up easels. Landscapes and paintings of the Duomo were also on display. After idly watching the scene for a while, I headed through the side streets to the market. I had been there



A market in Florence

years ago. After losing my way a couple of times, I finally found the right lane and, my goodness, how the market had grown! It was now a criss-cross of multiple lanes, lined shop after shop with leather goods, jewellery, hats, stoles and scarves. If the prices weren't sky high, I would've probably purchased a suitcase full of stuff. Instead, I bought a couple of Italian silk scarves, bargaining and haggling with the Bangladeshi vendors. Finally, happy with my bargain, I made my way back to the station.

On my last day I decided on a quick visit to Siena, another lovely Tuscan hill town. On Enrica's instructions, I took Bus No. 1 from the station, which halted at a central spot in the town of Siena. Once again following the crowd, I walked past cobbled lanes, elaborate curved squares with tall statues of Italian royalty or political figures, heading towards the historic centre—the famous Piazza del Campo—another World Heritage Site. The narrow lanes, with tall stone buildings almost merging overhead, were lined with picturesque shops selling colourful souvenirs. But it was the Piazza del Campo that took me by surprise, perhaps because I didn't know what to expect. A staircase led down from under a low arch and opened into the largest saucer I had ever seen! It was as if a giant hand had scooped up a huge bowl of earth to create the town square. The Piazza, where horse races take place twice a year, was a startling revelation.

Tourists lazed on the shell-shaped floor, basking in the sun, while others clicked pictures of the Torre del Mangia, the magnificent tower at the square. After lounging for a while and walking the entire stretch of the square, I had a quick bite of pizza and browsed through the shops for souvenirs. I once again climbed the steps and headed for a quick look at the Siena Cathedral. The cobbled lane curved past quaint shops and opened into another square, introducing the 12th century cathedral—another marvel in marble of the Romanesque-Gothic style.

I wandered the sunny lanes of Siena, just breathing in the flavours of Italy or peeping into shops that resembled the caves of Matera. One shop in particular—resembling a scooped-out cave—was a magical place with piles and piles of colourful ceramic articles. I longed to transport it to India with me. But all I could do was gather memories and take them back with me.

As I spent the night playing with Enrica's twins and chatting with her, I reflected on the contrasting nature of the three sites. Matera, with its startling almost biblical landscapes; Florence, with its exotic floweriness; and Siena, like a mélange of the two—distinct towns with distinct features. But they still represented the myriad faces of Italy, a country steeped in history and culture. With so much to absorb and assimilate, I realised it won't be long before I come back to Italy again. 🌸

sculpture

MAN AND METAL

Lord Krishna wielding a golden axe against a rogue elephant; a copper-and-brass cobra attacking a human figure; a band of musicians entertaining birds with sitar, flute and violin.... Legends from Indian mythology take fascinating shapes in the hands of versatile metal sculptor S Nandagopal, 70, who has often looked into the past for inspiration; he transforms ancient narratives into contemporary anecdotes through enamelling, engraving and silver-plating. In keeping with the defining characteristic and traditional concept of 'frontality' of the Madras Art Movement to which he belongs, these sculptures can only be viewed from the front. "These sculptures are not placed against a wall and yet you do not go to the back to see it. All notions of three dimensionality and mass are obliterated by making holes in the sculpture to show that nothing lies at the back. Hence you can call my pieces 'frontal narrative sculptures'," Nandagopal tells us. For his new creations, which were on display at a show, *S Nandagopal – Recent Sculptures*, at the Art Alive Gallery in New Delhi recently, Nandagopal has scaled down his metallic sculptures from life-size to a range of 3 ft to 5 ft. "The present series of work demanded a smaller scale as the subject chosen also, in a way, dictated it."



Hanuman
(welded copper,
brass and enamel)



Srivastava (extreme right)
with Kasaravalli (centre) and
Shyam Benegal (extreme left)

“Films are my path to self-discovery”

Growing up in Lucknow, **Om Prakash Srivastava**, 61, was drawn to film as an art form and nurtured the dream to be a filmmaker. Though life's circumstances led him to take up investment banking as a career in his initial years, he forayed into filmmaking later. Under his production banner Reelism Films, Srivastava has made documentary films of varying genres and styles for over a decade, such as *A Few Days More*, a heart-wrenching documentary on the treatment and journey of cancer patients; *The Elite Neighbourhood*, which explores the relationship between heritage architecture and urban skyscrapers; and *Vultures of Lalitpur*, which offers insight into the successful breeding of vultures in Uttar Pradesh's Lalitpur. In 2005, he attended a workshop organised by the

documentary

Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, where *Dweepa*, a 2002 Kannada film directed by parallel filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli, was screened. And it didn't take long for Srivastava to observe that the narrative tools used in the film starkly differed from the formulaic plot-points of mainstream cinema. Kasaravalli's almost art-like approach to cinema enthralled him. “I wanted to watch him at work and learn about his creative process. And what better way to do it than to film him while he was filming one of his films. This way, I could spend more time with him and learn the art of storytelling.” Thus,

Srivastava's recent documentary film, *Life in Metaphors – A Portrait of Girish Kasaravalli*, gives us an intimate glimpse into the world of Kasaravalli and closely examines the relationship between the artist and his art. As director, Srivastava has studied

the cinematic tools used by the auteur and journeys deep into his vision to explore the infinite possibilities of cinema. In an interview with **Rajarshi Bhattacharjee**, Srivastava talks about what draws him to Kasaravalli's films, his love for documentaries and future projects.

What aspect of Kasaravalli's filmmaking attracted you the most?

Films are an expensive affair; extravagant filmmaking will only increase production costs, especially if you are making a non-commercial movie. However, Kasaravalli's films have none of that. It is more about capturing emotions and moods. The first thing that struck me about *Dweepa* was the simplicity with which he told his story; his shots were elegantly staged without overriding the narrative. He uses metaphors to elevate the narra-



tive. In his 2006 film *Nayi Neralu*, for instance, the arrival of dish antennae in a village indicates the arrival of technology, connecting the village to the outside world. Kasaravalli's cinematic style is not about using cutting-edge technology; he is best described as a no-fizz filmmaker.

What did you discover about Kasaravalli as a director while making *Life in Metaphors*?

Watching him in person was a revelation. Despite being rooted in Karnataka, his films have a global relevance, many of his films try to capture a side of the world that is fast-disappearing, but they do so with humanity, not judgement. His prowess is such that even the mundane transforms into the sublime. I discovered that actors shouldn't act in front of the camera; they should capture the nuances of the character instead.

Can you elaborate on the power of cinema?

I remember being spellbound by Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*; though the film dealt with the serious topic of bureaucracy, Sen had sugar-coated a tough message to make it easier to swallow. That's what a great story

does—it makes us think, feel and see all at the same time. A good film paves the way for a cathartic experience, which is why people connect to films on a personal level.

How does digitisation effect the medium?

Digitisation has made filmmaking a lot easier. The language of cinema keeps evolving and adjusting itself to ever-changing technology. There is a heated debate on the use of celluloid and digital. Digital shouldn't try to mimic its predecessor; it should have a language of its own. Every medium has its strengths and weaknesses and it's up to the director to capitalise on them.

What kind of films do you want to make and why?

Films are like undertaking a quest of self-discovery. I make documentaries because it is more fluid as a medium. As Hitchcock once famously said, "In documentary films, God is the director." However I'm interested in making features as well. As a filmmaker, I want to explore all formats.

What advice would you give people who want to make films in their later years?

To start with, read everything you can find about cinema, watch as many films as possible and start making films. The only way you can learn is by making mistakes. If you truly love the medium, age is only a number.

Tell us about your future projects.

I'm making a film on Banaras. I feel none of the existing films have captured the 'Banarasi' flavour. My film will be about the idiosyncrasies, habits and culture that give the city its unique identity. Another project explores the generational gap between parents and children. In the end, my objective is to learn by working with the masters and honing my craft.

'Cross' connection

Contemporary artist Madhvi Parekh brought her latest series of paintings, *The Last Supper*, to Bengaluru for the first time last month. In a significant deviation from her previous inspirations—Durga and Kali—Parekh found a new muse in Jesus Christ after a memorable trip to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Israel, with her artist-husband Manu Parekh in 2007. The striking images of Christ were reinforced in her mind after later trips to cathedrals and museums



Courtesy: NGMA

in Eastern and Western Europe. "I liked the form of the Cross. I slowly started drawing him. It took a while to get it right, as it was different from what I was used to drawing," Parekh, 73, tells *Indian Express*. "Finally, with a lot of practice, it happened." The paintings, a growing collection of sombre stories from the New Testament, generously outlined with Mars Black pigment, were on display at the National Gallery of Modern Art.

24 shades of life

After staging over 250 shows all over the world, comedian and theatre actor Rakesh Bedi wowed Mumbai recently in *Massage*, a one-man play in which he dons the role of 24 characters. The play traces the journey of Happy Kumar who comes to Mumbai with big dreams and finds success as a masseur. Originally written by renowned Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar and translated into Hindi by Dr Vasudha Sahastrabuddhe, Bedi spent nine months carving the 24 distinct characters—including a producer, an actress, a cabinet minister's PA, a watchman—with finesse. "People come to see a one-man show, but they leave with so many characters to ponder on," says the 61 year-old actor, who holds the audience in raptures for two hours with his solo performance. "Even when I'm on stage, I keep an eye on the audience; not once have I spotted anyone looking at their watch, and that's gratifying." Presented by Pratik Arts Theatre and directed by Harbansh Singh, *Massage* will return to Mumbai and Delhi this August after a show in London this month.



Courtesy: Pratik Arts Theatre



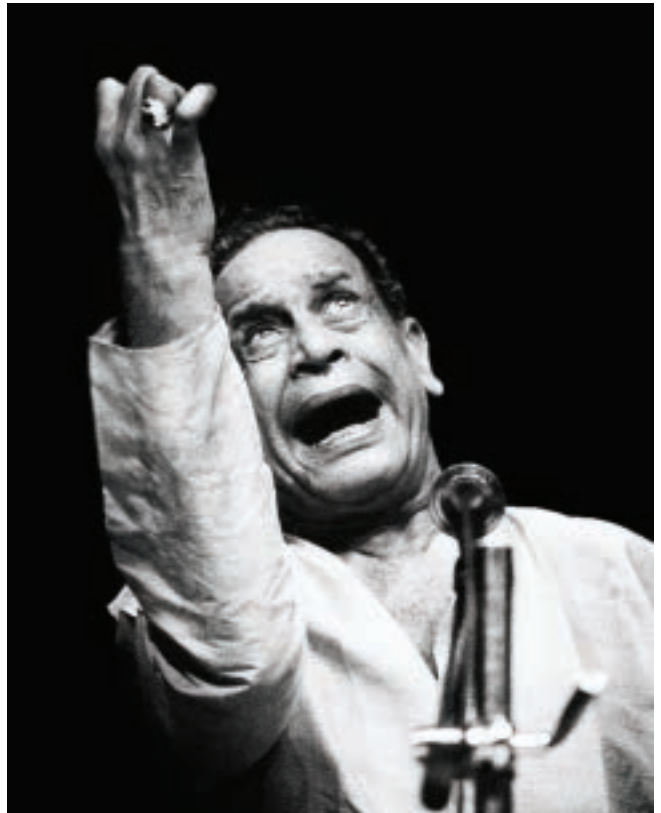
Photographs courtesy: Pundole Art Gallery

Seamless synergy

Veteran painter Laxma Goud and Auroville-based ceramist Adil Writer recently joined forces to create a unique storytelling experience in an exhibition titled *In Collaboration* at Pundole Art Gallery in Mumbai. With no exhibition in mind, Goud and Writer began working last December; Goud revisited his early erotic paintings on Writer's deftly crafted wood-and-gas-fired ceramics, resulting in a seamless synergy of different media. Writer presented Goud with his unfinished shields, treasure boxes and books and Goud completed them by painting with high-temperature stains and etching before they were fired in a furnace, creating a series of ceramic works that were on display. Speaking about the collaboration, Writer tells us: "The experience was magnificent. There was constant sparring between two strong-headed people. Because he was entering my territory, I could tell him a thing or two about the ceramic medium. But he guided me into exploring new territory on my clay and I know that my work has changed forever."



Rahul Gudipudi



The X factor

There was a time when a classical dancer was considered 'not arrived' if Avinash Pasricha had not captured him or her through his lens," writes Madhavi Puranam, editor of *Nartanam*, in her editorial for the quarterly journal of Indian dance. The journal's recent special issue features *The Narrative Artistry of Avinash Pasricha: A Collection of Photographs*, a visual tribute to the works of the veteran photographer on his completing 50 years in dance photography. "Avinashji's work is an archive of Indian dance. Over the years, his visual artistry has evolved from mere photography to gaining historical significance," Puranam informs us. "Pasricha has that X factor—his works reveal a very mature understanding of the dance, deep knowledge of the form and intimacy with the performer."

photography

For his part, Pasricha believes in capturing expressions and emotions rather than perfect postures. "I like to shoot close-ups to capture the dancers' involvement, especially what is shown in their eyes," he reveals in *Nartanam*. The 140-plus-page visual treat features dancers from almost every genre of Indian classical dance—from Protima Bedi (Odissi) and Yamini Krishnamurthy (Bharatanatyam) to Darshana Jhaveri (Manipuri) and Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma (Kuchipudi). "Photographing the process of Sarma transforming from a male to a female has been the most exciting part of dance photography," he expresses.

"While we've tried to do justice to the lesser-known dancers, we couldn't help but keep some of the most iconic ones," says Puranam, whose team painstakingly sifted through Pasricha's



Photographs by Avinash Pasricha / Courtesy: Nartanam

(Clockwise from top left) Kuchipudi exponents Raja and Radha Reddy; Hindustani vocalist Pt Bhimsen Joshi; Bharatanatyam dancer Malavika Sarukkai

extensive oeuvre spanning decades. The issue also gives us a glimpse into Pasricha's journey into music photography, where he has captured some fine moments of India's greatest, such as M S Subbulakshmi, Ustad Bismillah Khan and Pt Bhimsen Joshi.

Get your bowler hats on!

In a quiet town in Kutch, Charlie Chaplin is alive and kicking

📷 Sumukh Bharadwaj ❖ Natasha Rego





It's the unlikeliest of processions you would expect in a small Indian town. But Adipur, a few kilometres from Gandhidham, in Gujarat's Kutch region, is known for its annual parade of Charlie Chaplin impersonators—particularly Chaplin's iconic character, The Tramp.

Every year, on April 16, the birth anniversary of Chaplin, over a hundred women and men, girls and boys, even little toddlers dressed in crumpled old coats, bowler hats, toothbrush moustaches and cane in hand, march down the streets in The Tramp's signature bowlegged walk. The grand event is a month in the making as the town rehearses for the grand finale. On this day, the town erupts with enthusiasm as camel carts with larger-than-life cut-outs of The Tramp and boom boxes blaring traditional and Bollywood dance music trail by. Yes, in Adipur, The Tramp is alive.





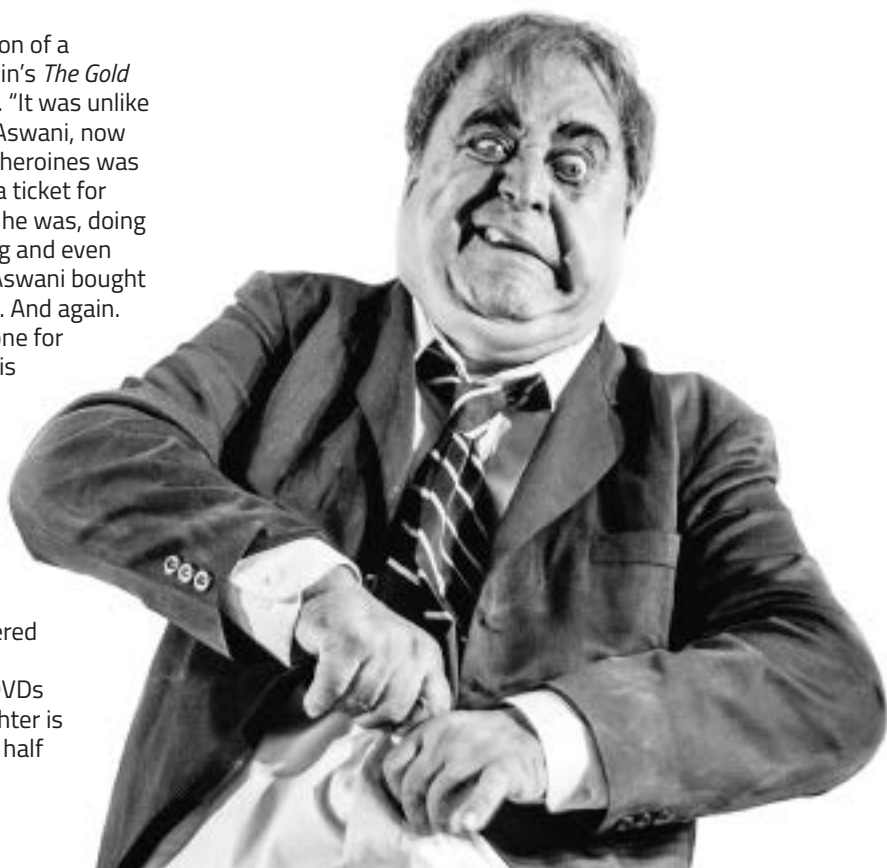
The Chaplin impersonators belong to the Charlie Circle, a club set up in 1973 by Ashok Aswani, an ardent follower of Chaplin's work. "Many many years ago, my fiancée [now wife] and I cut a cake and distributed it to our neighbours and relatives. Today, we have the whole city, young and old, celebrating with us."





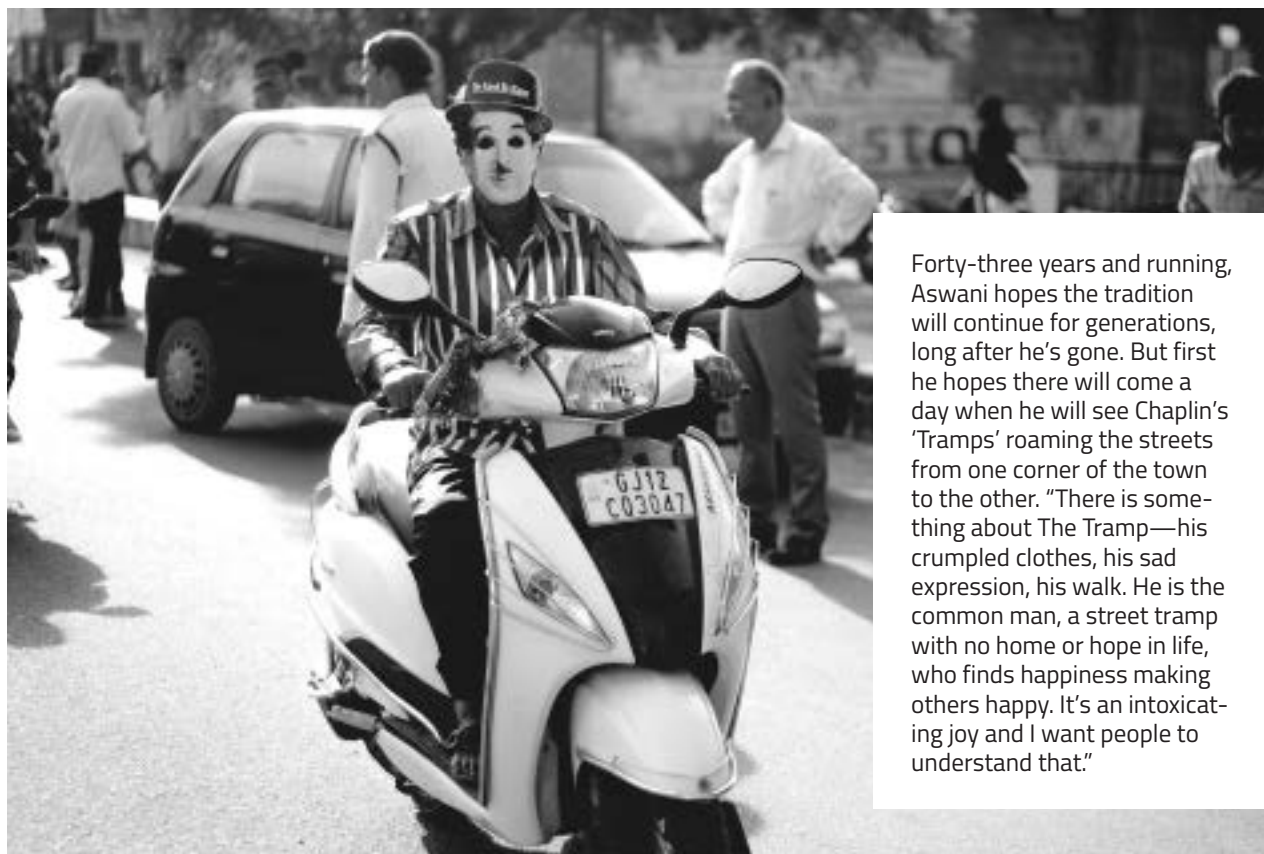
It was the summer of '66 when the young son of a pharmacist first spotted the poster of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* at the Oslo theatre on his way to work. "It was unlike any other movie poster I had seen!" recalls Aswani, now 69. "Amid all the pretty faces of heroes and heroines was this fascinating yet common man. I bought a ticket for 30 paise and sat in the front row. And there he was, doing the craziest things. I fell off my seat laughing and even got scolded for it." When the movie ended, Aswani bought a ticket for the next show and went in again. And again. "If there was a fourth show, I would have gone for that too." That day, Aswani was fired from his job as a typist in the Food Corporation of India but it also marked the beginning of a lifelong obsession with Chaplin.

Aswani eventually enrolled at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. But never one to take academics too seriously, he dropped out after six months and returned to Adipur. He became a registered Ayurveda practitioner and along with his prescriptions, started handing out Chaplin DVDs to patients...as a remedy! "As they say, laughter is the best medicine. Laughter makes you feel half your age."





Aswani started Mime Vrudh in 1973, which later became the Charlie Circle. Having taken a few miming classes at his brief sojourn in FTII, he taught the craft to theatre artists in Adipur. "It became an obsession. We got a high from the Charlie mimes and they eventually took to it even more than me." Over the decades, thanks to Aswani, Chaplin entered the homes and lives of many. "The children especially love to wear the cap; Charlie starts from there for them. Even the girls dress up. I see them for a few years and later they get married. And just when I think, 'Charlie chala gaya', they come back with little Charlies. It's a wonderful circle."



Forty-three years and running, Aswani hopes the tradition will continue for generations, long after he's gone. But first he hopes there will come a day when he will see Chaplin's 'Tramps' roaming the streets from one corner of the town to the other. "There is something about The Tramp—his crumpled clothes, his sad expression, his walk. He is the common man, a street tramp with no home or hope in life, who finds happiness making others happy. It's an intoxicating joy and I want people to understand that."



The oil man

K D Malaviya singlehandedly took up the cudgels against the combined might of multinational oil cartels and their supporters in India to establish ONGC, writes **Raj Kanwar**

Keshava Deva Malaviya's life has two distinct but fascinating chapters. The first chapter that began in 1929 was almost entirely devoted to the freedom struggle. He had by then obtained a degree in vegetable oil technology from Kanpur's famed Harcourt Butler Institute of Technology and could have got a cushy job. Instead he plunged head on in the freedom movement. Between 1929 and 1942, Malaviya went to jail on nine different occasions. Jawaharlal Nehru was his fellow inmate during one of his incarcerations; their relationship was to play a historic role in the years to come in the creation of a national oil industry in the country.

The second chapter that began in 1952 with his election to the first Lok Sabha turned out to be epoch-making. Nehru had made him a deputy minister in the Ministry of Natural Resources & Scientific Research headed by Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. Ironically, his portfolio of Natural Resources did not include either oil or the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR). It was possibly intended to be a rebuff to Malaviya. The then director-general of CSIR, Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar, had sway over the world of science and technology in India that was all-pervasive. He was in favour of permitting multinationals to prospect for oil and gas in India. Multinational companies such as Standard Oil Company (Stanvac) and Burmah Shell waited in the wings hoping to jump at any opportunity. Bhatnagar had almost decided to give a prospecting license to Stanvac in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, and a proposal to that effect had already been put up for Nehru's approval. Prospecting rights in Bengal and Assam had already gone to Burmah Shell that had been operating there for decades. To cut the long story short, Malaviya with Nehru's help managed to overcome all these formidable hurdles and finally laid the foundation for the formation of a national oil company. Thus, Oil & Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) made a modest beginning in 1956. Malaviya was but the natural choice to be the first chairman.

How I met Malaviya

I was then a stringer for three mainstream English dailies. At the time, there were just a handful of journalists in

Dehra Dun; I was the youngest and the most academically qualified. I would meet Malaviya whenever he visited Dehra Dun. He had the special knack of issuing statements that would make news. Like Nehru, Malaviya too had a fondness for Dehra Dun and would often visit the town with his wife Durga. Thus, I was able to develop a good personal rapport with him. With the birth of ONGC in August 1956, the scope of my news coverage from Dehra Dun vastly expanded. I made direct contact with the few senior officers who had arrived to set up infrastructure for the newly born ONGC.

I did not think twice when *Indian Express* asked me to join as a reporter on its staff in Delhi. Even though the reporting of news in the capital was a different ball game, I soon learned the nitty-gritty and made some useful contacts. My beat was Delhi University, which helped me cultivate a friendship with student leaders. I called on Malaviya on a few occasions. Durga Malaviya had by then started liking me and extended me her innate courtesy and hospitality. ONGC then didn't have a PRO and Malaviya asked me once if I would like to join ONGC. I happily said 'yes' for the simple reason that I would be posted in Dehra Dun. My father was not keeping good health then and needed looking after. But destiny willed otherwise. I was selected via the Union Public Service Commission as an editor in the Directorate of Public Relations & Tourism, Himachal Pradesh, which was then a union territory. I was there for nearly 18 months.

At ONGC

Eventually, I joined ONGC in 1961 and was posted to Baroda. I demurred, but Malaviya told me that Baroda was the happening place where I would find ample opportunity to make use of my journalistic talents. He was right to some extent. We were just about half a dozen officers there trying to set up the nucleus of a regional headquarters that would look after the expanding exploration and allied operations in Gujarat. Ekbal Chand, an IAS officer, was then the chief administrator in charge of the entire Western region. He had known me well enough from Dehra Dun and treated me like family. He called me one

morning and asked me to take up additional responsibilities such as labour relations, hospitality of Russian expats and general coordination. I promptly agreed as it would provide me with a good learning experience.

Hands-on chairman

Malaviya knew many of the officers by name as he had handpicked them. He never did flaunt his rank; on the contrary, he showed utmost courtesy and politeness.

Malaviya was a hands-on chairman and would ring up the employees if he needed to know anything urgently. Thus, all of us stayed alert for we never knew when Malaviya's call might come. He would ring me up if he wanted to issue a statement from Delhi about some newsworthy development in Gujarat. It was then my job to dictate the draft press release to his secretary Nayyar, who would take it down in shorthand. On another occasion, there was a rig blowout in Ankleshwar, and Malaviya wanted to release the news from Delhi. I had the temerity to question his suggestion, saying that a release from Delhi would be too late for the Gujarati press and it would then carry irresponsible news. Eventually, a compromise was arrived at and it was decided to release the news simultaneously from Delhi and Baroda. I hastily dictated the content to Nayyar and a time was fixed for simultaneous release of the official version.

Labour pains of a different kind

Both the Ankleshwar and Cambay projects had recruited hundreds of employees on a contingent basis without observing the rules stipulated in various labour enactments.

Wherever large employers come, trade unions follow. Baroda-based Sanat Mehta of Hind Mazdoor Sabha was the first to form the ONGC Employees Union. A second ONGC Employees Union under the aegis of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) appeared on the scene too under the guidance of Khandubhai Desai, who was then a top INTUC leader based in Ahmedabad. Each

of these unions claimed to be the true representative of ONGC employees and sought formal recognition. I had by then done enough homework on labour laws. I asked both the unions in writing to give me proof of membership. Mehta promptly provided the list of members along with the receipts of membership fee. The INTUC union demurred and avoided giving a point-blank answer. I explained in writing the entire situation to the chief administrator and accorded, with his approval, official recognition to Mehta's union.



Courtesy: M G Sable

Malaviya was a hands-on chairman and would ring up the employees if he needed to know anything urgently. Thus, all of us stayed alert for we never knew when Malaviya's call might come

That greatly upset the redoubtable Khandubhai Desai who complained against me to Malaviya, accusing me of bias. So gullible was Malaviya that even without seeking a report from Baroda, he issued instructions for my transfer to Sibsagar in Assam. Baroda journalists were aghast at my sudden transfer. Mehta's trade union, too, condemned my transfer. Even though I felt sad and betrayed, I decided to take it in stride.

A man of integrity

Despite this petty issue, I held Malaviya in great esteem. He was honest and sincere to a fault; no one could ever doubt his integrity. He was truly the founder of the national oil industry. Malaviya died on 27 May 1981. What an uncanny coincidence given that his mentor, Nehru, too had died on the same date in 1964.

On the afternoon of 19 December 1981, then prime minister Indira Gandhi rechristened ONGC's premier research and development institute in Dehra Dun as Keshava Deva Malaviya Institute of Petroleum Exploration (KDMIPE). A jam-packed auditorium solemnly heard Gandhi deliver a touching eul-

ogy to Malaviya who had died barely six months ago. The PM's tribute touched a chord in Durga Malaviya's heart; she was in tears. Devendra and Asha, too, were touched by the fulsome tribute to their father. That was the least the country could do for a man who had devoted the entire second half of his life to creating a network of national oil companies in the country.

The writer is a veteran journalist based in Dehradun and the author of the official history of ONGC, Upstream India

The African connect

It was in 1974 that **Veena Sharma** first set her sights on the enigmatic continent of Africa. She was accompanying her husband K D Sharma, then high commissioner of India to Tanzania. The “high degree of politeness and respect” the natives displayed beguiled her, making her shed preconceived notions about “a backward and even unruly populace”. Thus began her long journey of exploring a landscape endowed with amazing cultures and familiar customs that resulted in a wide range of publications, including her first book *Folk Tales of East Africa*, published by Sterling in 1982, and a *Hindi-Swahili Dictionary*, published by the Central Hindi Directorate in 2010. The latest in the list is *Advaita Vedanta and Akan: Inquiry into an Indian and African Ethos*, published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, last year. The endeavour was to bridge “two disparate traditions” while getting acquainted with the diverse, stimulating and ancient influences of India and Africa.

An alumnus of Panjab University, 75 year-old Sharma earned her doctorate from the Centre for African Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1992, and was head of the Swahili Service at All India Radio for 22 years till her retirement in 2001. She has also taught the ‘Philosophy of Leisure’ at the International Centre of Excellence, Wageningen, Netherlands. Sharma also runs Prajna Foundation, an NGO dedicated to educational and cultural activities and the development of underprivi-



Nandita Singh

leged youth and children. **Suparna-Saraswati Puri** quizzes the author about her esoteric explorations and fascination for Africa.

authorspeak

What sustains your continued interest in African studies?

Once, my elder son Vikram and I were travelling in a local bus from Lushoto, a hilly town in the northern part of Tanzania, to Dar es Salaam where we lived. A small fault developed and the bus came to a standstill. The driver and his helper both tried hard—opening the bonnet, getting under the engine, knocking on various parts—all to no avail. After perhaps more than an hour of these futile exercises, a person from a nearby village came and corrected what was supposedly some minor fault. During all this while, the

passengers with their small children, some even with chickens and hens, sat quietly and patiently. Vikram and I wondered how, if it were India, all the passengers would have created a big ruckus and each would have come up with his/her advice on how to fix it! I witnessed the same quiet dignity when in 1986 I got to visit a drought shelter in Ethiopia. Mothers with babies stuck to emaciated breasts could be seen sitting by fires trying to cook *enjire*, their local flat bread out of the rations supplied to them. There was a sense of silent acceptance that did not allow them to complain or beg.

Living there, I developed an interest in the Swahili language and passed a higher Swahili examination. During our stay in Africa, I also got the opportunity to be exposed to works of African writers. Their erudition and use of the English language attracted

me. So, while working for the AIR, I put in due diligence towards a belated doctorate. Around the end of the 1990s, the Central Hindi Directorate asked me to prepare a short Hindi-Swahili dictionary, which I completed after retirement. Thus, the Africa connection continued!

What was the broad idea behind the book *Advaita Vedanta and Akan*?

In 2009, Kanchana Natarajan, a dear friend of mine, advised me to apply for a Fellowship at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. I made a proposal on the foremost idea that came to my mind, based on a juxtaposition of two worldviews: African and Indian. During our stay in Tanzania, we had noticed how little the Africans and the Indians settled there knew about each other's cultures. Even living side by side, they seemed to interact according to preconceived ideas about each other, constructed through the prism of colonial education. For me, personally, it was a learning experience as it provided an opportunity to understand my own tradition more perspicaciously.

Can you recall your meetings with African religious leaders?

One of the things that caught me by surprise was the need to pay the traditional wise men/women if they agreed to talk to you. This was contrary to my experience with saints and sages in Benares, Rishikesh and Uttarakashi who give their knowledge freely. Once, the chief priest of the Ashanti king in Kumasi asked for an equivalent of ₹ 10,000 in Ghanaian currency. My interpreter, a student from the University of Kumasi, got it reduced to about one-third that amount! Elsewhere, a senior priestess asked me if I wanted to become a priestess. In Ghana, priests or priest-

esses do not choose their vocation; rather they are 'possessed' by the deity that chooses them as their priests. I was also lucky to be present for one of the Akwasidae festivals—celebrated by the Ashanti people—held in the palace. The king came dressed head to toe in heavy gold jewellery, several kilos of it!

Can you share your culinary experiences in Africa?

Stews served with starchy staples such as boiled mashed yam or cassava are common fare in Ghana. In areas closer to the ocean, fish becomes a

"I have striven to look at leisure from the Vedantic perspective, wherein a state of leisure would be a matter for discovery in the here and now. It is the attainment or realisation of a compulsive and universal human urge—the urge to know oneself as a non-limited, free being"

common ingredient in these stews. Kidney beans are also popular. Okra or ladies' finger is also used for a sticky, slimy texture. As a vegetarian, food was my stumbling block in Ghana. There is no concept of a diet without meat there. So, before going to a restaurant, we had to ensure they would serve soup without meat stock. We also frequented an outlet where they served delicious fried yams. Peanut brittle and salted tiger nuts sold along all traffic crossings make for a wonderful snack.

Can you elaborate upon your interest in Advaita Vedanta?

As someone brought up in a household that did not believe in too many rituals or external display of religios-

ity, I grew up with the conviction that there was a singular divine energy that ruled or pervaded our lives. It was more a belief in it as an all-inclusive abstraction rather than as a particular form. Advaita, with its rational moorings and insistence on experiential validation, suited my mental makeup.

How has travelling influenced your ethos as a writer and scholar?

Travelling has made me realise every culture has its beauty and its own logic for upholding certain belief systems. It is also beautiful to see how different cultures give aesthetic, artistic and ethical expression to their beliefs.

What does a discipline like Philosophy of Leisure entail?

I have striven to look at leisure from the Vedantic perspective, wherein a state of leisure would be a matter for discovery in the here and now. Leisure, in this understanding, is a survival need. It is the attainment or realisation of a compulsive and universal human urge—the urge to know oneself as a non-limited, free being. All efforts towards this realisation are leisure 'activity'. It does not require much equipment and expense.

What made you write on Kailash Mansarovar?

The question I explored in that book was why we undertake a physical journey in physical space when the goal is an inner spiritual evolution. Ironically, the potential of the yatra is actually realised when it is over. The journey of the spirit begins after the physical arduousness is over. It is then that one realises the great Beyond lies outside the vastness of space and the massive conglomerate of rocks and stone called Kailash, which is seen to be the representation of Shiva.


The Voice of the rain

In this blank verse, **Walt Whitman** (1819-1892) celebrates rain as the nourisher of life

*And who art thou? said I to the soft-falling shower;
Which, strange to tell, gave me an answer, as here translated:
I am the Poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain,
Eternal I rise impalpable out of the land and the bottomless sea,
Upward to heaven, whence, vaguely form'd, altogether changed,
and yet the same,
I descend to lave the drouths, atomies, dust-layers of the globe,
And all that in them without me were seeds only, latent, unborn;
And forever, by day and night, I give back life to my own origin,
and make pure and beautify it;
(For song, issuing from its birth-place, after fulfilment, wandering,
Reck'd or unreck'd, duly with love returns.)*

iStock

Among the most influential and innovative American poets, Whitman is referred to as the father of free verse. His collection of poems, Leaves of Grass, is considered groundbreaking

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl with dark hair playing in a pond. The man is in the water, wearing a dark shirt, and the girl is sitting on a wooden dock, wearing a white dress. They are both smiling and splashing water. The background is a calm body of water with some ripples.

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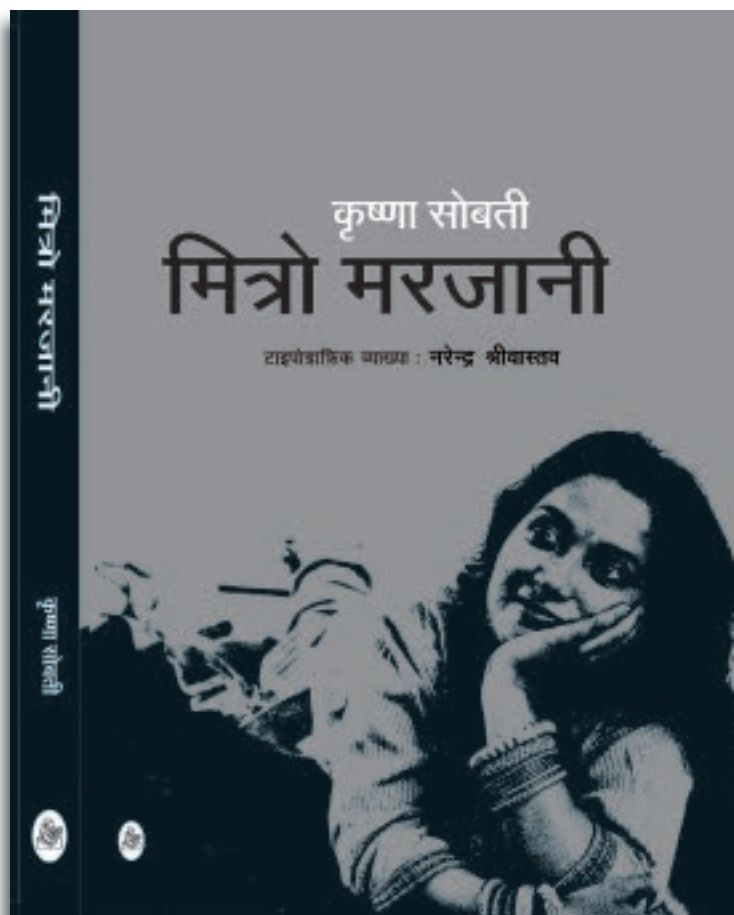
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A woman's voice

When she gave vent to the carnal desires of a married woman, Krishna Sobti broke social norms, traversing hitherto uncharted territory in the realm of Hindi literature. Sobti's lively, uninhibited and unapologetic portrayal of a young woman's sexuality in *Mitro Marjani* is as compelling and provocative today as it was in 1966, when it shook the literary world and raised eyebrows.

Set in the dark interiors of a haveli seething with anger, lust and resentment, *Mitro Marjani* is the story of Sumitravanti, the unstoppable daughter-in-law of the Gurudas household. The story unravels through a maze of voices. Mitro is introduced sensorially by the sounds of physical violence from her husband and her angry screams. Besides the explicit sexual tone of the main protagonist who taunts a closed society, the crisscrossing voices employed by Sobti in the book allowed her to break free from the stereotyped and straitjacketed notions of women's fiction. Sobti herself was surprised at the free spiritedness of Mitro. To quote her, "*Mitro Marjani* was not a writer's story.... I was amazed at the surprises Mitro gave me at every turn. Brought up outside the walls of patriarchy... Mitro is her mother's daughter who can voice her desires and get away with it. She has no inhibitions about talking of things tabooed by tradition. She really impressed me."

Translated into English as *To Hell with You Mitro*, the book propelled Sobti to overnight fame. It was even adapted for stage by Dinesh Thakur's ANK theatre group. Besides Mitro, the Sahitya Akademi Award winner's oeuvre boasts spirited female characters like Mehak of *Dil-o-Danish* (*The Heart has its Reasons*), the protagonist in *Ai Ladki* (*Listen Girl*) and Aaranya of *Samay Sargam* (*The Music of Solitude*)—assertive, strong-willed and open about their needs and desires. Fiercely protective of her independence as a writer, Sobti,



considered the grand dame of Hindi literature, declined the Padma Bhushan in 2010, keen to maintain her distance from the establishment. And 50 years since she was conceived, Mitro is still seen as a symbol of resistance against the patriarchal structures of society.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: JULY 1966

- On 2 July, France detonated a 28-kilotonne weapon—the first of its nuclear weapons—in the South Pacific Ocean in an experiment codenamed Aldebaran.
- On 11 July, British Motor Corporation and Jaguar Cars announced plans to merge as British Motor Holdings.
- On 16 July, Chinese Communist Party chairman Mao Zedong inspired millions of followers by swimming 10 miles in an hour in the Yangtze river at the age of 73.
- On 29 July, singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was injured in a motorcycle accident near his home in Woodstock, New York, leaving him out of action for a year.

MINIAC

n. A person who is enthusiastic about making or collecting miniatures.

Example: Like so many **miniatics**, as some of the collectors and artisans call themselves, she came to the modern mini movement by way of a childhood love of dollhouses.

—Abby Ellin, “Miniatics live in a small, small world”, *The New York Times*, 6 May 2016

Frunk

n. A trunk that is mounted in the front of a vehicle.

Example: It’s one of two external storage cubbies the Model 3 offers, with a trunk at the back and a **frunk**—or front-mounted trunk—up where the engine would regularly be in a gasoline car.

—Chris Davies, “I tried the Tesla Model 3: Here’s what you need to know”, *SlashGear*, 1 April 2016

Vertical forest

n. A tall building designed in a way that enables trees to be planted on all or most of its balconies.

Example: Modern architects have long dreamed of building **vertical forests**. Now, growing urban density and the strain it puts on green space are pushing their vision forward, here and abroad.

—Alex Bozickovic, “Green mile”, *The Globe and Mail*, 11 May 2016

Billionaire bait

n. An item designed to appeal to a person who is extremely rich.

Example: The house was classic **billionaire bait**: outrageous candy room, a garage for about a million vehicles with a car turntable, a replica of the Transformer Bumblebee that was about as tall as a human, a handful of arty, chrome-covered weapons, an infinity pool.

—Bianca Barragan, “How two real estate agents spent \$300k getting notch to buy his bonkers \$70-million mansion”, *Curbed Los Angeles*, 13 July 2015

“Maturity, one discovers, has everything to do with the acceptance of ‘not knowing’

—American author Mark Z Danielewski

Mathwash

v. To use mathematics, logic, or a similar rational argument to make something inherently subjective appear to be objective.

Example: **Mathwash**—verb; the ability for anyone to sex up common procedures as having a certain rational, mathematical basis, even when they don’t.

—Robert Jackson, “Mathwash—verb; the...”, Twitter, 12 May 2016

CHECK BOX FICTION

n. Fiction that includes certain story elements, particularly those related to the characters’ race, gender, or sexual orientation, in a token way.

Example: “**Check box**” fiction really undermines the quality of my reading experience. What is “check box” fiction? It is a story that includes elements indicating diversity in the cast of characters that has zero impact on the story.

—“That good story”, *libertyatallcosts.blogspot.in*, 19 May 2016



Courtesy: Caveo

BUZZ

Weekend wows

Impelled by the urge to do something for the betterment of silvers, Devanshi Seth worked as an IT analyst before starting Caveo, a geriatric care service in Bengaluru, in 2015. The centre conducts activities on weekends that are approved by the geriatric counsellors from Banjara Academy in the city and are therapeutic for silvers. The activities include farming, body movement exercises, and pairing a senior with a friend or family, among others. In fact, the organisation celebrated Mother's Day at UB City mall in Bengaluru, with an activity booth and rounds of entertaining games and quizzes. Vouchers for tech classes were distributed to a lucky few along with the opportunity to spend a day with a personal shopper for a wardrobe makeover. You can participate in the activities at Caveo by becoming a member, or on a per-activity basis; the fee for each activity ranges from ₹ 500 to ₹ 2,000. To learn more, call Devanshi Seth at (0) 9886919090 or email devanshi.caveo@gmail.com

Permalescent

n. An adult who is, and appears likely to remain, emotionally or intellectually immature.

Example: But perhaps the most rage-inducing thing about the Collective is—it'll probably work. Yes, it's replacing independent living with an ongoing studenthood, a sort of **permalescence**.

—Jonn Elledge, "Collective living's fine for students but for everybody else it stinks", *The Guardian* (London), 28 April 2016

Roboat

n. An autonomous or remote-controlled boat.

Example: Robots are at their best when doing jobs humans shouldn't. Sometimes, this job means doing boring work, like slowly crossing the ocean recording data. Other times, this means looking for explosives under the water. The US Navy's Unmanned Influence Sweep System, or UISS, is a robot boat (or **roboat**, if you will) meant to perform the latter.

—Kelsey D Atherton, "Navy wants a minesweeping robot boat to protect their fragile ship", *Popular Science*, 7 November 2014

Undersnark

n. A snide or sarcastic remark delivered subtly so that the subject does not see or recognise the criticism.

Example: **Undersnark** is stealth snark, borderline snark, the thematic undertweet of snark ecosystem. Undersnark can provide plausible snark deniability.

—Josh Marshall, "Undersnark is stealth...", Twitter, 15 April 2016

STREET SCORE

n. A valuable or useful item found on the street or in the trash.

Example: **Street score** in Brooklyn!!! It's been a while since I've found a gem in the trash. But this morning I stumbled upon a super clean copy of *Voodooonny* by Lafayette Afro Rock Band.

—johnnyfego, "street score in...", Instagram, 6 December 2015

“It’s a small gesture for our winged friends”

Chinnasamy Sekar, 56, Chennai, feeds over 5,000 parakeets every day



Chinnasamy Sekar, popularly known as Chennai’s ‘Birdman,’ admits he has more reasons than the sound of an alarm clock to wake up daily at 5 am. “I have hungry parakeets visiting my terrace every day,” says the 56 year-old, whose house is a regular food-and-water pit stop for parakeets that fly in from the woods beyond. A camera technician, Sekar has been making headlines across the globe with his avian-friendly gesture. It started with two parakeets finding refuge on his terrace during the tsunami of 2004; he ensured they had food and water. Today, their numbers have swelled to 5,000, with the result that Sekar’s third-floor house on the busy Royapettah High Road has become a tourist spot for avian enthusiasts. During the floods last year, over 7,000 parrots flew in. “As food was scarce in the city, I assume they communicated with each other and landed on my terrace,” says Sekar, who had to arrange for 75 kg of rice per day then. On normal days, he serves close to 45 kg of rice daily. “I might go without a meal, but ensure food for them,” he reveals. A few of his neighbours also pitch in with bags of rice. While the birds feed on rice that has been soaked for a few hours, Sekar stands on the ground monitoring public movement. “Children pelt stones and scare the birds away,” he rues. Now that the house where he feeds the birds is up for sale, Sekar is planning to sell his rare collection of over 4,000 vintage cameras he has collected over 35 years to buy it. Admitting his family has been supportive of his “humble” gesture, Sekar adds that as a society we need to be proactive to prevent species from going extinct. “If we don’t pitch in now, we will soon be left with a smaller animal population.”

—Jayanthi Somasundaran

Photographs by Chennai Pix



Sri Akhilesh Yadav
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh



The government has adopted steps
to secure the life of those traders
who make contribution for making
the economy of Uttar Pradesh progress



CHIEF MINISTER'S ACCIDENT INSURANCE SCHEME

The Uttar Pradesh Government is implementing the Risk "Chief Minister Accident Insurance Scheme"
for the benefit of traders registered with the Commercial Tax Dept., U.P.

Salient features of the scheme are as follows:-

1. Name and address of the insurance company : The Oriental Insurance Company Limited, Circle Office-II, 9th Floor, Vikasdeep Bhawan, 22, Station Road, Lucknow. Phone: 0522-2635140, 2635280 Fax: 0522-2635140
2. Period of the insurance scheme : From 31.03.2016 to 30.03.2017
3. Type of coverage & the sum insured : Rs. 5 lakh in case of murder/death due to accident/total permanent disability or in case of sustaining partial disability in an accident, the claim will be payable on percentage basis based on the certificate issued by the Chief Medical Officer of the concerned district showing percentage of disability
4. Who is the insured : Traders registered with the Commercial Tax Dept., U. P.
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 - (b) In case of a Partnership firm : Any Partner
 - (c) In case of a company : Chief Executive Officer (C. E. O.)
 - (d) Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) : Karta of Hindu Undivided Family

Beneficiaries

In case of murder / death:-

The deceased registered trader's legally wedded wife/husband.

If two or more wives are alive, the sum insured will be distributed equally. In case, the wife/husband is not alive, the insurance company will pay the sum insured on the basis of the succession certificate issued by the competent court.

If the registered trader is unmarried, then the insured amount will be paid firstly to his father, and in case in which the father is not alive, then to his mother and in case father/mother both are not alive, then to the legal heirs/beneficiary on the basis of succession certificate issued by the competent court.

In case of total or partial permanent disability:-

To the insured trader. If, in case, more than one partner sustains total or partial permanent disability at the same time, then the insured amount will be divided among them equally.

Claim Payment Procedure :-

The Claim Form is available at the office of the Sector Officer/Jt. Commissioner (Exec./Corpo.), Commercial Tax. Besides this, it is also available on the department's website

www.comtax.up.nic.in. The claim has to be submitted through the Sector Officer/Jt. Commissioner (Exec./Corpo.), within the specified time, along with the document given below:-

In case of death:-

The Claim form, the Death Certificate, the First Information Report (FIR), the Panchnama/the Post Mortem Report, the Forensic Lab Report in case of death due to poisoning, Registration Certificate, the attested copy of the new form-11 under the VAT arrangement, the Testimony of the First Witness, the nominee's photograph and the signature as certified by the Sector Officer/Jt. Commissioner (Exec./Corpo.) Commercial Tax and other records in support of the claim, if available.

In case of disability:-

The Claim form, the Registration Certificate, the attested copy of the new form-11 under VAT system, the Testimony of the First Witness, the nominee's photograph and the signature as certified by the Sector Officer/Jt. Commissioner (Exec./Corpo.) Commercial Tax and the disability certificate given by the Chief Medical Officer of the district concerned to provide the evidence to support the disability claims, other records, if available.

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