

harmony

MARCH 2014 ₹ 30

# celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

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THE WOMAN ISSUE

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lajmi

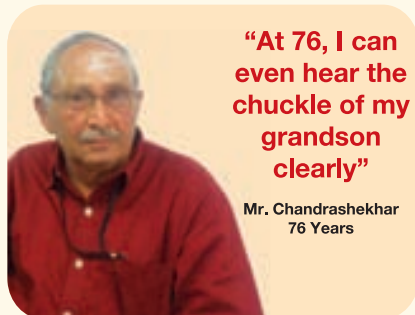
SCRIPTS A  
NEW STORY

DEVDUPT PATTANAIK ON FEMINISM IN MYTHOLOGY ▪ **BAPSI SIDHWA'S**  
**CLARION CALL AGAINST DISCRIMINATION** ▪ IRA ON HER ROLE MODEL  
LILLETE DUBEY ▪ **WORLD'S OLDEST YOGA INSTRUCTOR**  
**TAO PORCHON-LYNCH** ▪ STROKE ALERT FOR ELDERLY WOMEN

# DO YOU NEED A SIXTH SENSE TO REVIVE YOUR HEARING?

  
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Life takes us by surprise every day. Like 76 year old Mr. CHANDRASHEKHAR, who was facing hearing difficulties at a time when usually he would love to hear the chirping of birds & the gentle flutter of a passing butterfly. Reluctant to give up, he finally found a solution which brought back the complete joy of hearing. Here are the excerpts from his interview:



**"At 76, I can even hear the chuckle of my grandson clearly"**

Mr. Chandrashekhhar  
76 Years

## Q1. When did you realize that you had hearing difficulties?

**Ans.** Initially, I would refuse to acknowledge that there was any problem. But gradually, I started realizing that there was something wrong, when every time I had to direct my head towards someone speaking to me.

## Q2. What hearing difficulties did you face?

**Ans.** I could not follow people talking to me, so I would ask them to speak a little louder & clearer. I realized that my one ear was hearing better so I always preferred using that to answer the phone. I also noticed that I was watching TV at a higher volume than before.

## Q3. How did your family and friends react to your hearing loss?

**Ans.** My family was trying to persuade me to

get my hearing checked. It made me feel irritated & I used to retort by saying that I was ok. In fact, I felt exhausted and frustrated trying to focus on understanding what others were saying.

## Q4. Which specialist did you visit to get your hearing checked & what was your first reaction when you were diagnosed with a hearing loss?

**Ans.** I came to know about my hearing loss from an ENT Specialist, who after initial assessment referred me to an Audiologist for further diagnosis. I was reluctant to go for a hearing instrument because of my old age and also because of my perception that I could somehow manage my day to day activities without a hearing aid.

## Q5. Who advised you to go for a hearing instrument?

**Ans.** The Audiologist at Amplifon, duly supported by my family. Further during my interaction with Audiologists, I came to know that Amplifon provides best in class hearing care, state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment and works with highly qualified Audiologists - Truly World Class Standard.

## Q6. What was your idea of hearing devices? Were you afraid?

**Ans.** I did not want to have them thinking that they would be big, cumbersome & visible to

everyone. To my surprise, I got a small and a comfortable hearing solution, hardly noticeable. I had no idea there were so many varieties of hearing instruments for inside the ear and outside the ear. The hearing aids have built-in intelligence to adapt to the surrounding environment.

## Q7. How does your hearing instrument help you in your daily life? Are you happy with your decision of going for it?

**Ans.** I am thrilled. I can now hear sound as well as understand speech very clearly. Initially it took me some time to adjust to the hearing instrument but now I can't imagine a life without them. Everything is much easier now and I am back to my normal routine.



## Q8. Would you recommend other hearing impaired people to wear hearing instruments?

**Ans.** Definitely. Because at this age, you really wouldn't want to miss the beautiful moments that life bestows upon you. Like at 76, I can even hear the chuckle of my grandson or listen to my favourite devotional songs clearly. Thanks to this small device which has actually brought back smile on my and my family's face. I must also appreciate the personal touch, care and customized solution provided by Amplifon which completely fulfills my lifestyle requirements.

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Suresh Natarajan



# Honour her

Women are the real architects of society, people say.

They are right.

A seamless circle of love, the woman creates, nurtures, completes the world; she fashions every step, every shift, every transition in the journey of a life. She is mother, sister, wife, daughter, friend—a force worthy of celebration, as this issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* seeks to do.

Making this issue even more resonant for me is that it comes on the heels of a very special birthday celebration for my mother-in-law Kokilaben, who recently turned 80. The anchor of our family, our shelter from storm, she exemplifies the essence of a woman—she loves and supports us unconditionally; she inspires us with her humility and innate spirituality; she amazes us with her zest for life and incredible attention to detail; and she astounds us with her timeless grace and elegance. We truly are blessed to have Mummy, as we call her, in our midst and doubly privileged to have had the opportunity to honour her on her special day.

In fact, every mother, every woman, deserves to be honoured thus.

Sadly, she is not. While we pride ourselves on our so-called 'development' as a society, our women continue to be marginalised and denied justice. From eviction to abuse, rape to rejection, discrimination to neglect, women across the country, across the spectrum of age, class and region, continue to suffer. While many are beginning to speak out and find support from others, many more remain silent, afraid of criticism and censure, shackled by the views and attitudes of a repressive time.

Here's the rub: silence doesn't dispel the fear; submission doesn't quell the rage; surrender doesn't right the wrong. It's time for women to speak up and speak out, find common cause and, in the case of silver women, cast off the obsolescence thrust upon them by society. Find your voice—and let the family and friends who cherish you amplify it. Every woman is a tigress; the world must hear her roar.

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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**MUSICALLY YOURS**  
*Pawan Naidu from Delhi trains  
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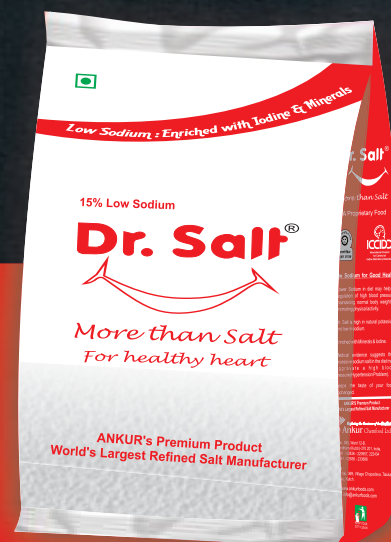
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# column one

The March issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age* is always a favourite. Our 'Women's Special,' it is a perennial affirmation of *shakti*, the strength and steel that accompany sensitivity and soulfulness as exemplified by the remarkable women we feature.

This year, firebrand Kalpana Lajmi, who has always lived life—and made films—on her own terms, recounts "Her Story," insisting she is a "humanist," not feminist. Award-winning Pakistani author Bapsi Sidhwa, whose work has won hearts across India, rues the fact that women are still "bartered and brutalised" in the subcontinent. And the world's oldest yoga instructor, 95 year-old Tao Porchon-Lynch, who believes all of us on earth are connected through our breath, urges us to "Breathe as if you are a tree that draws water from the ground...like you want to branch out and touch the sky."

The charisma and strength these women exude are palpable, a veritable force field of power. This should not surprise us. As mythologist and author Devdutt Pattanaik tells us in an exclusive column, "Nature always favoured females over males". In his view, this is why "culture chose to turn the tables", ushering in a patriarchal set-up.

Elsewhere, theatre-film actor Ira Dubey speaks about following in the footsteps of her renowned mother Lillette Dubey and neurologist Dr Shirish Hastak tells us why we should act 'FAST' in case of a stroke. Finally, we invite you to lose yourself in Briana Blasko's *Dance of the Weave* and stroll along the ramparts of the exquisite Kumbhalgarh fort with us. This is, indeed, a month to celebrate beauty.

—Arati Rajan Menon

Life after 60 is a turning point for many. Your home, which once reverberated with laughter, cries and quarrels, is now silent. You long for company. You miss your kids, and the hugs and kisses they used to give you when they were young. As I found myself on the threshold of a new stage in my life, I began to grow morose as I had no idea how I would fill my days. I suddenly felt my life had come to an end. So I tried to hone my culinary skills as I believed I had none. And to my surprise, I discovered a hidden talent. I read recipes, bought the required ingredients and finally turned them into palatable dishes. I had surprised myself!

At this point, I remembered a number of things I had wanted to do all my life but had never found the time for. So I turned my attention to my stamp and coin collections, sketching, reading and needlework, and rediscovered the pleasure these activities brought me. I had also promised myself two things after retirement: never to wake up early in the mornings, and to tour the country as much as possible.

By indulging in my hobbies, I have in fact become even busier than before. Yes, life has come full circle. No more cares, no more haste, no more duties to fulfil, no more worries. You have all the time in the world to pursue anything that interests you. If at all there is anything to take care of, it is your health. As long as your health is in good form, you're on top of the world.

**Anusuya Hazra**  
Kolkata

With reference to your informative article "Harmony at Home" ('Silver Lining', February 2014), the best way for spouses to have a cordial relationship is to accept people as they are. One should not try to change or transform an-

other person. Always see the positive side of every human being. That will make your life more beautiful.

**Mahesh Kapasi**  
New Delhi



## CONTRIBUTOR



Harpreet Chhachhia

Our columnist 'At Large' this month, **Devdutt Pattanaik** is a medical doctor by education, a leadership consultant by profession, and a mythologist by passion. He has written and lectured extensively on the nature of sacred stories, symbols and rituals and their relevance in modern times. He is the Chief Belief Officer of the Future Group and is storytelling advisor to Star TV. He has authored 25 books, including *The Book of Ram*, *Myth=Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, *The Pregnant King*, *The Book of Kali*, *Sita:*

*An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*.



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**The first click of the mouse.**

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INSIDE

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NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



► MEDIA WATCH

## CHAPLIN, THE AUTHOR

**FOOTLIGHTS, A NOVEL WRITTEN BY MOVIE ICON CHARLIE CHAPLIN, HAS FINALLY BEEN PUBLISHED. IT IS BELIEVED THAT HE BEGAN WRITING THE BOOK, WHICH IS THE BASIS FOR HIS 1952 FILM *LIMELIGHT*, IN 1948. IT RECOUNTS THE ROMANCE BETWEEN A YOUNG BALLERINA AND AN AGEING CLOWN.**







# BILL OF RIGHTS?

**H**ere's a move that's been long overdue. In a new draft note that offers welfare measures for silvers in India, **the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has sought to address the most vulnerable category: 'the oldest of the old' above the age of 80.** The Ministry announced to media in February that it had circulated the draft to other ministries and stakeholders for feedback before sending it to the Cabinet

for approval. Possible measures include broadening the old age pension scheme to people below the poverty line, greater use of technology to help the oldest-old, scaling up healthcare, and establishing more care homes. This is the first time that the Ministry has rendered a special focus on silvers above 80, a rapidly increasing number that forms 10 per cent of the population of senior citizens (people over 60) in India.



**DIRECTIVE IN BIHAR:** IN FEBRUARY, THE BIHAR HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION TOOK SUO MOTU COGNISANCE OF THE SLOW PACE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MAINTENANCE AND WELFARE OF PARENTS AND SENIOR CITIZENS ACT, 2007, RELATING TO MEDICAL SUPPORT FOR SENIOR CITIZENS. IT ISSUED A DIRECTIVE TO THE STATE HEALTH SOCIETY TO FORMULATE AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT FORTHWITH. SECTION 20 OF THE ACT PROVIDES FOR FACILITIES SUCH AS SEPARATE BEDS AND QUEUES FOR ELDERLY, FACILITY FOR TREATMENT OF CHRONIC, TERMINAL AND DEGENERATIVE DISEASES TO BE EXPANDED FOR SENIOR CITIZENS, AND FACILITIES FOR GERIATRIC PATIENTS AT EVERY DISTRICT HOSPITAL HEADED BY A MEDICAL OFFICER WITH EXPERIENCE IN ELDERLY CARE.





## Kudos to KERALA

POLICY INNOVATION IN INDIA IS RARE—AND VERY WELCOME. THE KERALA SOCIAL JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED AN INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE THE FOSTER CARE OF SILVERS THROUGH THE REVISED STATE OLD AGE POLICY 2013. AKIN TO THE PRACTICE OF ADOPTING CHILDREN, THE POLICY AIMS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO ARE READY TO OFFER “FILIAL CARE AND AFFECTION TO THE PEOPLE IN THEIR SECOND CHILDHOOD”, AS THE STATE GOVERNMENT TELLS MEDIA. “THE CONCEPT OF DE-INSTITUTIONALISATION IS ENCOURAGED THROUGH THE POLICY,” SAYS V N JITHENDRAN, DIRECTOR OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE DEPARTMENT. “IF SOMEONE SHOWS INTEREST IN TAKING CARE OF THE ELDERLY AND PROVIDING THEM WITH A HOMELY ATMOSPHERE, THE CHANCES OF THEM TAKING SHELTER IN OLD-AGE HOMES CAN BE PREVENTED. THE POLICY WILL BE MADE INTO A GOVERNMENT SCHEME AND AN ACTION PLAN DEVISED.” PEOPLE WHO VOLUNTEER FOR THE SCHEME WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

# Pensioners' plea

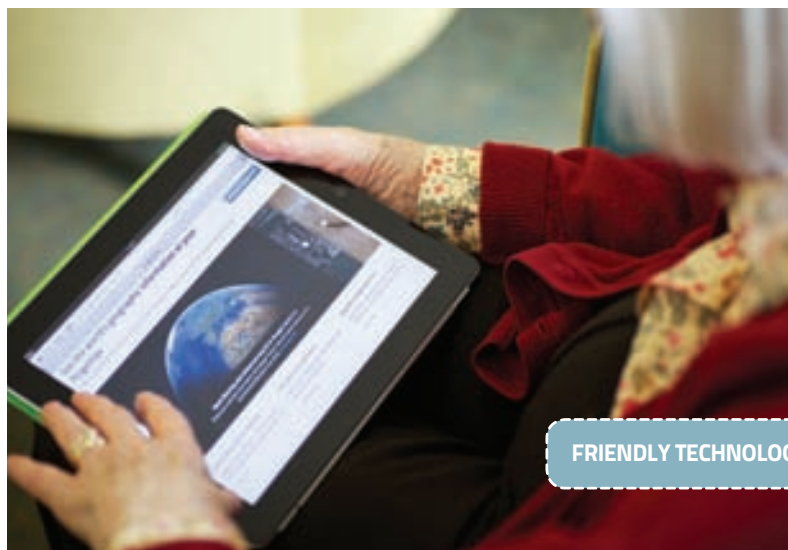


**W**hile political parties are leaving no stone unturned to woo potential vote banks in the run-up to the general elections, the destitute continue to be given short shrift. In late January, nearly 200 people of the elderly and marginalised communities from 18 states, including Jharkhand, Ladakh and Chhattisgarh, participated in a ‘Jan Sunwai’ (public hearing) in New Delhi. The hearing was organised by the Pension Parishad to address **destitution among the elderly** and included an eminent jury comprising UN resident coordinator Lise Grande; Dr Prabhat Patnaik, member secretary, National Legal Services Authority; former information commissioner Wajahat Habibullah; and social activist Aruna Roy. Both the complainants and the jury concluded that the Government was duty bound to implement the recommendations of the Mihir Shah Task Force Committee on the Comprehensive National Social Assistance Programme (Pension). These include an increase in central assistance under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme with effect from financial year 2013-14 and revision of eligibility norms for the Widow Pension Scheme by reducing minimum age from 40 years to 18. “This is the very least the Government can do,” Roy told media. Another powerful note was struck by Mohammed Iqbal, who represents the People’s Action Group for Inclusion and Rights and suffers from acute locomotor disability himself. “I have come to Delhi from Ladakh with the hope that all the tireless procedures such as income certificate, proof of BPL status and other documents that the disabled, elderly and the poor have to furnish to get a paltry pension of ₹ 200 to ₹ 400 should be done away with immediate effect,” he said. “The elderly and poor must get what is due to them.”

**NEARLY 200 PEOPLE OF THE ELDERLY AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES FROM 18 STATES, PARTICIPATED IN A ‘JAN SUNWAI’ (PUBLIC HEARING) IN NEW DELHI**



**HAPPY = HEALTHY!** If you're happy, you'll know it—and show it. A study at the University College of London has established that **people who are generally happy are fitter, more active, and have a significantly reduced risk of all kinds of diseases in old age.** Over a period of eight years, the researchers studied a group of 3,199 Britons over the age of 60—the subjects were asked to rate their level of general happiness and well being in a number of categories on a scale of one to four, and their lives and medical profiles were simultaneously analysed. Eventually, a clear link between positivity and physical health emerged, with those who rated themselves as unhappy being far more likely to develop mobility issues and disease through the course of the study. The study was published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.



## FULL, NOT FAULTY

**I**t's time for a rethink on the silver brain. According to researchers at Germany's Tübingen University, **elders take time to process information and remember things because of the large amount of knowledge present in their brains, not cognitive decline.** The team developed computer models that mimicked memory recall in humans and fed in new words and commands on a daily basis. The models with less information in their memory banks (younger people) were found to recollect information considerably quicker than those full of data (older people). "The 'older' computer model wasn't slower because of its processing capacity," writes lead researcher Michael Ramscar in journal *Topics in Cognitive Science*. "Instead, its increased 'experience' caused its database to grow and gave it more data to process." This finding can be extrapolated to humans. "Imagine someone who knows two people's birthdays and can recall them almost perfectly," adds Ramscar. "Would you really want to say that person has a better memory than a person who knows the birthdays of 2,000 people, but can 'only' match the right person to the right birthday nine times out of 10?"

## TECH EFFECTS

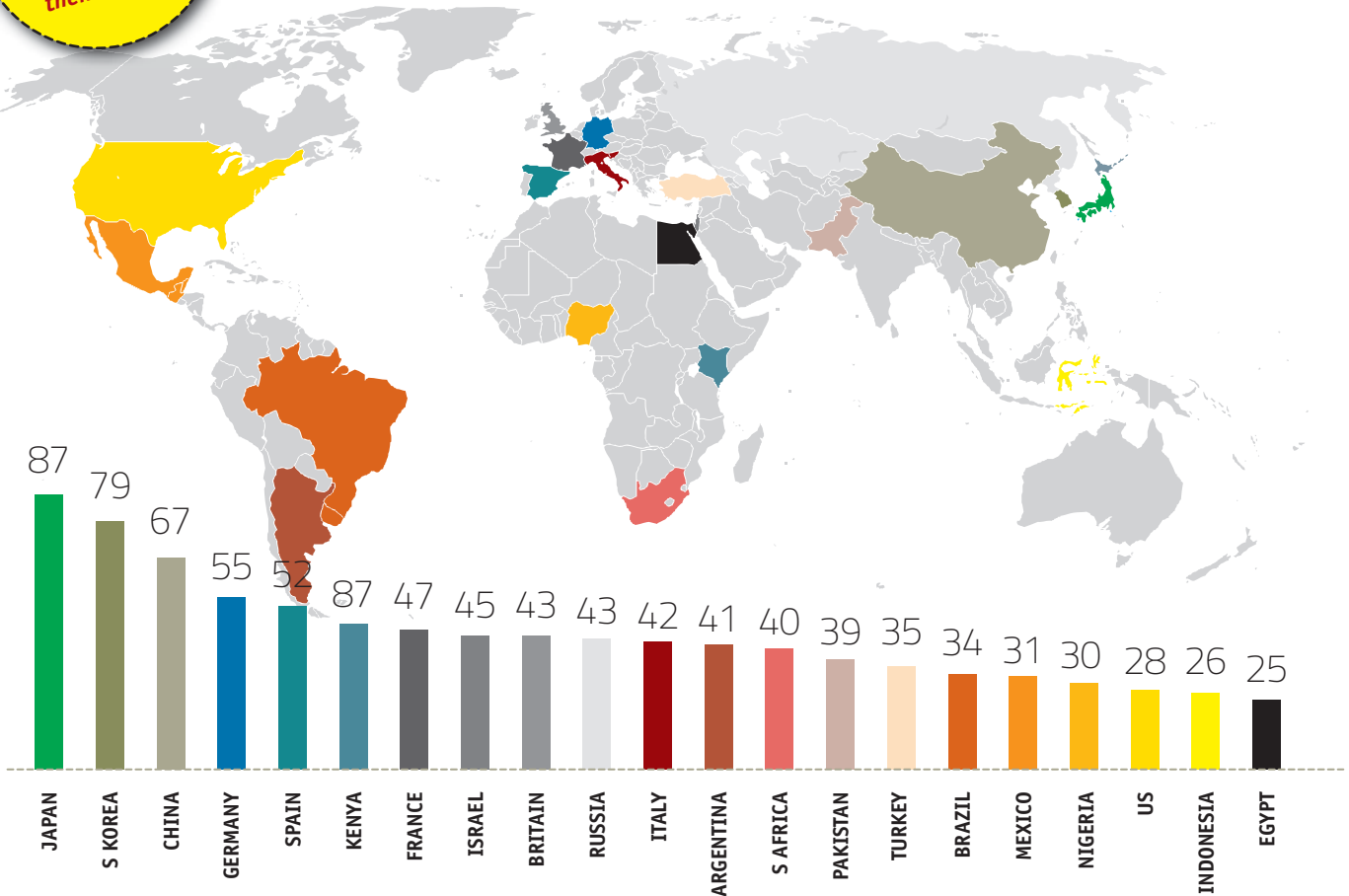
**T**echnology can be quite a paradox. While it is being increasingly argued that today's computer-driven world is making the younger generation more isolated, alienated and anti-social, a recent study by Wichita State University in Kansas reveals that the **use of technology by silvers helps them lead a better social life, reduces isolation and cuts the risk of dementia.** As news agency Associated Press reports, the researchers interviewed over 2,000 silvers receiving home and community-based services about their computer usage, access to

social websites and friend circles and discovered that those who used computers more frequently felt less isolated and had a more active social life. "Computers connect older people who may otherwise be unable to venture outdoors with the world outside, thus reducing loneliness and boosting mental health," says study leader Louis Medvene. "Another study by the University of Luxembourg also suggests that old people active on social media sites are more mentally alert and healthy. We now require further interventions to determine exactly how much impact computer usage has on the elderly."

90% of Japanese describe ageing as a "major problem" for their country

## IS AGEING A CONCERN?

# One world, many perspectives



**The answer** depends on where you're from. At a time when the global population of people over the age of 65 is expected to triple to 1.5 billion by mid-century, **public opinion on whether the growing number of silvers is a problem varies dramatically around the world**, according to a survey of 21 countries by the US-based Pew Research Centre. Here are some highlights:

- Nearly 90 per cent of Japanese, 80 per cent of South Koreans and 70 per cent of Chinese describe ageing as a major problem for their country. Europeans also display a relatively high level of concern, with more than half the public in

Germany and Spain saying that it is a major problem.

- Americans (less than 30 per cent) are among the least likely to be concerned about retirement security or to view the growing silver population as a major concern, while the Japanese are most concerned (*see table*).
- Public concern with the growing number of older people is lower in countries like Indonesia and Egypt, where the proportion of older people in the population is relatively moderate and is expected to remain so in the future.
- There is considerable optimism about the old-age standard of living in countries whose populations are projected to be relatively young in

the future or that have done well economically of late, such as Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and China.

- When asked who should bear the greatest responsibility for the economic well-being of the elderly—their families, the government or the elderly themselves—the government tops the list in 13 of the 21 countries surveyed. However, many who name the government are less confident in their own standard of living in old age compared to those who name themselves or their families.

Visit [www.pewglobal.org/2014/01/30/attitudes-about-aging-a-global-perspective/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/01/30/attitudes-about-aging-a-global-perspective/)





## STARS of the year

**W**hile pensioners doing the 'Full Monty' for their care home has become something of a habit in the UK and Europe, here's a refreshing take. **The Contilia Retirement Group, a nursing home in Essen, Germany, has dressed up its residents as**

**iconic film characters for its annual calendar.** Ranging from the age of 75 to 98, the silvers dressed up as the protagonists from hit films like *Rocky*, *Easy Rider*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Mary Poppins*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and *Titanic*, channelling the stars with props, poses and costumes identical to the original. You can check out the images at [imgur.com/gallery/bJwKu](http://imgur.com/gallery/bJwKu) or [www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/01/nursing-home-calendar](http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/01/nursing-home-calendar)



## PHOTO OP

**In February**, a group of 15 silvers in their 70s, 80s and 90s gathered on Henley Beach in Adelaide, Australia for a **photo installation by artist Andrew Baines for the Foundation for Older Australians' Sea of Knowledge project** ([www.ach.org.au/sea-of-knowledge](http://www.ach.org.au/sea-of-knowledge)). They included a tuxedo-wearing pianist in action, a

lifesaver in full garb, a defence force representative, a javelin thrower, and a vision-impaired person with a guide dog. "My mandate was to create an installation that would challenge common perceptions of older people," Baines tells newspaper *The Australian*. "As the sun's first rays illuminated the mill-pond like sea, pale

pink clouds arrived on the horizon to create my promised ethereal vision. Fifteen people eclectically attired stood proudly to promote that they were a valuable part of society and their wealth of knowledge should be shared and valued." Images from the photo shoot will be sold to support future projects of the Foundation.

# Centre stage

**B**ritish playwright Emma Adams is slowly developing a reputation for combining political comment and simple sentiment to create works that are reflective, inspiring and poignant. Her latest effort, *Home Sweet Home*, is sure to cement that reputation. Directed by Tom Wright, the play aims to look beyond the label of 'old age' to explore individual human realities and debunk stereotypes. "In recent years there have been a number of interviews with actresses who have discovered that, upon reaching a certain age, all the roles for them have disappeared," Wright tells the BBC. "There are obviously two of society's repressive forces working together to create this effect: our attitude to women and our attitude to getting older. Society likes the former to be decorative



and the latter to be, ideally, invisible. Despite the fact that we live in a society in which the proportion of those who are older is rapidly growing we are struggling to see older people as people, and therefore as active and exciting characters. This concern is central to Emma's moving plotline."

## JOIN UP!

IN PARIS, TWO FRENCH WOMEN HAVE LAUNCHED THE PASS IT ON NETWORK, A GLOBAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM FOR POSITIVE AGEING THAT ALLOWS SILVERS—WORLD OVER—TO EXCHANGE IDEAS AND INITIATIVES ON A COMMON PLATFORM. CHECK IT OUT AT [PASSITONNETWORK.ORG/](http://PASSITONNETWORK.ORG/)

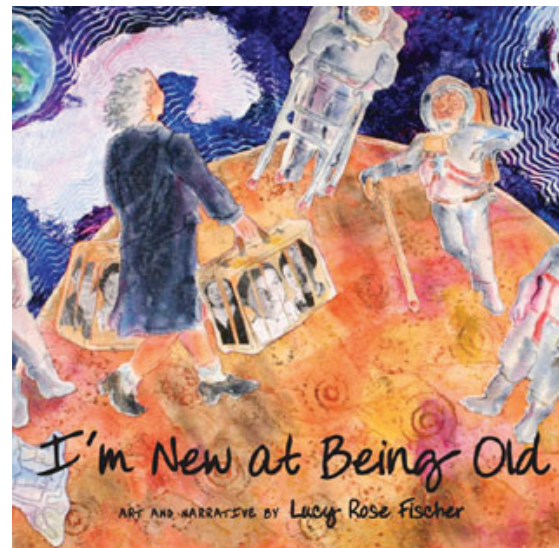
## SING SILVER SING

SURYA TV HAS LAUNCHED A NEW MUSIC-BASED REALITY SHOW, *OLD IS GOLD*, TO SHOWCASE THE SINGING TALENT OF PEOPLE OVER THE AGE OF 50. FOUR TEAMS WITH SIX CONTESTANTS EACH WILL COMPETE FOR A ₹ 2.5-MILLION CASH PRIZE.

# Mirror, mirror

The book aims to prepare other women to "join the World of Older Women"

**Walking the talk** is the hardest thing in the world. Just ask **Lucy Rose Fisher**. A gerontologist by profession, it was the easiest thing for her to talk about the passage of time—until she was confronted with her own process of ageing. That jolt, and how she came to deal with it, lies at the heart of *I'm New at Being Old*. "One morning, I looked into the bathroom mirror and saw a crease above my left eyebrow. 'How did this happen?' I wondered. Something was happening to my face," the 69 year-old recounts in an interview with *The New York Times*. "In my 25-year career specialising in gerontology, I have studied, researched, taught and published scholarly books and articles about ageing. But when I saw traces of my own ageing, I was shocked." Rather than presenting a romanticised view of ageing, the book aims to prepare other women to "join the World of Older Women", hot flashes, memory lapses, creaky knees and all. Her innate sense of humour and whimsical illustrations shine through this 70-page, five-year labour of love, which she self-published to retain complete editorial control. She is also enjoying a second innings as an artist—she paints hand-blown glass bowls and vases in "luminous colours that spill out of me". To learn more about her, her art or order a copy of her book, check out [www.lucyrosedesigns.com](http://www.lucyrosedesigns.com)







**UNDER THE KNIFE:** MORE AND MORE BRITONS ARE TURNING TO COSMETIC SURGERY, WITH THE NUMBER OF PROCEDURES TOPPING 50,000 FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2013. WHILE BREAST ENLARGEMENT REMAINS THE MOST POPULAR PROCEDURE, ANTI-AGEING TREATMENTS CAME IN NEXT—EYELID SURGERY IN SECOND PLACE AND FACE/NECK LIFTS IN THIRD.



## Chemical REACTION

For the past few years, this global chemical giant has made unheralded inroads into the personal care market with targeted formulations for skincare, hair care and sun protection. Now, **with the imminent launch of its Everlasting Beauty concept, BASF is gearing itself up for some serious exposure.** Focusing on prevention, maintenance and correction, the range will comprise different sets of formulations that take individual requirements into account. Three of the first products on offer as part of the concept include Beautiful Day, an all-round UV face cream with an SPF of 20 to 'prevent' premature ageing; Bright Eyes, an anti-wrinkle serum, to 'maintain' firmness and smoothness in the eye area; and So Delicious, an anti-ageing body butter, to 'correct' loss of tone and firmness, patchy pigmentation, dryness and dullness. Details on pricing and new additions to the range will be made available on [www.carecreations.basf.com/index.html](http://www.carecreations.basf.com/index.html)

## The Tiron effect

A joint effort by science and commerce may result in some great chemistry. A team from Newcastle University, funded by global superbrand Unilever and the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), has discovered **Tiron, an antioxidant that packs an anti-ageing punch.** According to the team, the antioxidant provides 100-per-cent protection against mitochondrial DNA damage from UVA radiation and can prevent

premature ageing. But if you think Tiron will be all over your pharmacy in a trice, you may have to hold your horses. "Although the news is exciting and promising, it is early days as Tiron is not a naturally occurring compound and has not yet been tested for toxicity in humans, only in rats," writes Mark Birch-Machin, professor of molecular dermatology at Newcastle University in *The FASEB Journal*.





₹  
2,990



# Aasaan, AGAIN

Easy just got better. Mumbai-based smartphone maker **iBall** has now launched **Version 2 of its trendsetting phone for silvers: Aasaan2**. While retaining the elder-friendly staples that made it so popular, including a large keypad, bigger fonts on screen, the SOS function for emergency help, FM radio and a simple, user-friendly interface, the new version features 8 GB of memory and a bunch of new features like a digital camera, music playback, LED torch, a dual SIM and a talking keypad option, which repeats what is being typed. What we love best, though, is the price: ₹ 2,990. Our only potential quibble is the after-sales service, which was below par on Version 1.

# Happy in HARMONY



**T**he month of February focused on positivity and happiness at the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum in south Mumbai. On 10 February, R L Birla, facilitator at Tej Gyan Foundation, conducted a session on 'Happy Thoughts'. His session included a video representation by Sirshree, Tej Gyan Foundation's founder, where he gave a discourse about freeing the mind of worries, while Birla elaborated upon the benefits of keeping the mind clean and happy.

While this was a more philosophical approach, on 17 February the silvers gathered again to get a scientific perspective on positivity. Psychologist and counsellor Rajini Agarwal explained the significance of positive mental health in the elderly. Her talk was very well received; she posited that selfishness was the root cause of all sorrows, which many people



Photographs by **Haresh Patel**

in the audience agreed to. Bringing the talk alive with examples from her personal life and prompting the audience to share their own stories, she emphasised on the need to avoid negative thoughts, news and people, and surround ourselves with happy people to protect our emotional and mental health.

Meanwhile, on 16 February, the silvers enthusiastically showed up at the Umang Talent Show to have the time of their lives. Organised by the Silver Innings Foundation along with the Rotary Club of Mumbai, silvers from the Harmony Centre joined the performances by silvers from other groups to put up a magnificent show for all to see. First, Harmony silvers Rajnikanth Karia and Saraswati Baheti put up a lively Garba dance show as they were cheered on by their friends. This was followed by Annie Aaranha's soulful rendition of *You belong to my*



(Above) R L Birla conducts a session on 'Happy Thoughts'; (facing page) a spirited show by Team Harmony, Yashwant Bhide and Nirmala Poladia at Umang Talent Show

*heart* that mesmerised the audience as they swayed along to the tune. The next performances by Harmony's silvers included two classical songs by the vivacious music group, including a harmonium and *dholak* that added groove to the songs. Then, Yashwant

Bhide, with his masterful singing of favourite Bollywood classics, floored the audience. Nirmala Poladia concluded the Harmony segment with a dance performance on Lord Krishna. A true show of talent!

—Neeti Vijaykumar



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**Play ping pong.** According to recent research from the Centre of Ageing at the University of California, Los Angeles, table tennis is the ideal silver sport. It improves reflex, eye-hand coordination, mental alertness, speed of movement and balance, lowering risk of falls and injuries. It can also slow down cognitive decline and boost your happiness quotient through the social bonds formed on court. The icing on the cake: there are different variations depending on your quality of mobility—you can play seated or standing, with or without a net.



## Then: Old wooden picture frame Now: Jewellery display



### RECYCLING FACTS

- Wood is touted as the only 100-per-cent renewable, recyclable, reusable and biodegradable resource we have.
- Using reclaimed or recycled wood can save up to 87 per cent of production cost compared to virgin wood.

With a photo frame, the upcycling options are limitless. If the glass is broken, make sure you remove all the glass pieces from the frame, especially the inner edges. To make a jewellery showcase, you can either leave the cardboard (or wooden) back support right where it is, or remove it. With the back support still in place, you don't have to put in much effort at reworking. Cut up a few pieces of lace or picture wires (the sturdy but flexible kind of wires). With the front of the frame facing down, lay them horizontally on the frame in rows of three or four, depending on the size of the frame. To make sure it stays firmly in place,

glue the ends on to the frame and put the cardboard support back on.

If the back support is broken or you think the frame would look better without it, stick a mesh net to the back of the frame. You can get various sizes of mesh nets—with big holes or small—and paint them. Then, refurbish the frame by painting it a new colour. Hang it up on the wall or let it stand by your dressing table. Adorn it with your earrings and necklaces and you have a piece of art that also doubles up as a pretty jewellery hanger!

### MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. USE A WOODEN PICTURE FRAME ON A MIRROR TO GIVE IT A NEW, FANCY LOOK.
2. MAKE A REUSABLE TO-DO OR GROCERY LIST BY ATTACHING A CHALKBOARD SLATE TO A PICTURE FRAME.



## HEALTHKART PLUS

**Available for:** Android 2.2 and up; iOS 7.0 or later

**What it does:** With this free app, you can buy all your meds online (currently for Bengaluru and Delhi only) and have them delivered to your doorstep. Further, you can compare your prescription medicine prices and find cheaper substitutes, which you can then consult your doctor about. With a vast database of drugs, from pills and syrups to vials that cover every kind of condition or illness, Healthkart Plus has been hailed as India's first online drug database app.

**After installation:** Once you're on the start page, just search for a medicine's name, which will take you to its information page. This page has the price, typical usage, side effects and details of substitute drugs. If they deliver to your area (based on PIN code), you can also see whether your meds are in stock and how and when they can be delivered to your address.

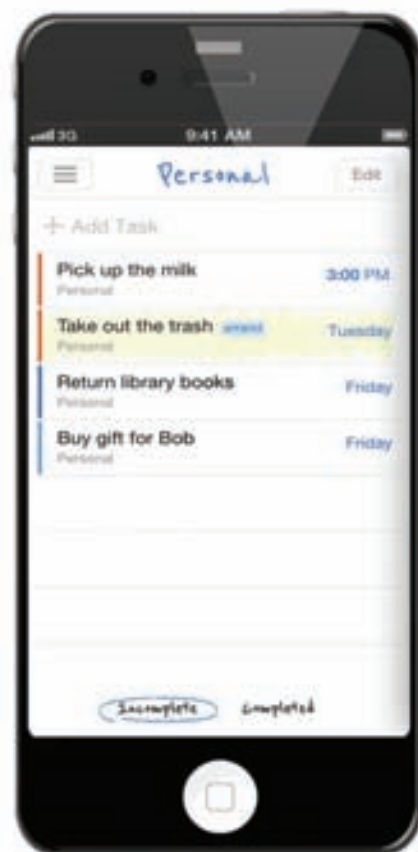
Reading e-books—whether on smartphones, tablets or e-book devices such as Kindle—is a trend quickly catching up all over the world, but it looks like silvers are taking some time to make the switch from their physical paperbacks. According to a study published in the US in January 2014 by *pewinternet.org*, only 12 per cent of people over 65 read e-books. Compare this to 27 per cent for people between the ages of 55 and 64, and 37 per cent among 18-29 year-olds.

## REMEMBER THE MILK

**Available for:** Android 2.2 and up; iOS 5.0 or later; BlackBerry 10

**What it does:** Carry around your to-do list everywhere you go with this popular free app. The best part is that it can be synced with Gmail (through a gadget on Google Labs or an add-on extension on Google Chrome), Microsoft Outlook, Twitter, Google Calendar, and even on its website. It's a simple and hassle-free way to manage your tasks.

**After installation:** Sign up to create an account, and verify your account through the email they send you. On the home page of the app, from the leftmost vertical tab, you can choose various task-viewing options (such as this week, today, tomorrow, etc) or list-view, tag-view, or location-based tasks. Add tasks by tapping on the plus sign at the bottom left of the screen. You can categorise your task into a particular list, set priority, and due date and time. You can also click on 'add field' to specify whether to repeat, add location or tags. Edit and add new lists by clicking on the three vertical dots in the list option; the same is for the tags as well.





## Heavy risk to the colon

**C**olon cancer is the third most common cancer in men across the world. The incidence in India, however, is as low as 4.3 per cent. One of the main factors that contribute to this low rate, according to a 2011 study by the Indian Society of Gastroenterology, is lifestyle—our diet does include as much fat and processed food as that of developed nations. But if a **recent study that links obesity and colon cancer** is to be taken into consideration, India might have something to worry about, considering the alarming rise in obesity among the elderly. Usually, cancer screening is recommended after the age of 50, up to 75, while a

colonoscopy is decided based on the screening results, family history and age factor. But a new study at Michigan State University suggests that obesity in men could be a better—and earlier—indicator of possible colon cancer. Scientists have discovered that increased levels of a fat hormone called leptin, a high body mass index (BMI) and expanding waistlines are directly linked to the risk of developing colorectal polyps, a pre-cancerous growth that eventually leads to colon cancer. The 18-month study followed 126 men between 48 and 65 years of age, none of whom showed any signs or symptoms of health issues, and were made to undergo routine

colonoscopies. Of the study sample, 78 per cent were obese or overweight, with higher BMI and larger waistlines. Their colonoscopy results showed that about 30 per cent of them had developed more than one polyp. It also revealed that the most obese were 6.5 times more likely to have developed three polyps compared to thinner men.

### RISK FACTORS OF COLON CANCER

- Being over 50
- Family history of cancer
- Being obese or overweight
- Consuming highly processed meat
- High fat intake
- Chronic ulcerative colitis
- Smoking and alcohol consumption

### Facts to remember

- As colon polyps and early cancer have no symptoms, regular screening is important. Removal of these polyps can prevent cancer.
- Colon cancer and rectal cancers have many features in common, which is why they are together referred to as colorectal cancer.
- The primary treatment for colorectal cancer is an operation called a colon resection, in which the cancer and a length of normal tissue on either side of the cancer are removed, including the nearby lymph nodes.



**TESTOSTERONE THERAPY DOUBLES THE RISK OF HEART ATTACKS IN MEN OVER 65**, ACCORDING TO A STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA – LOS ANGELES. THE STUDY FOLLOWED OVER 56,000 MEN TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER TESTOSTERONE THERAPY AFFECTED THE HEART IN MEN BELOW AND OVER 65. THE RESULTS SHOWED THAT THE RISK OF DEVELOPING HEART DISEASE WENT UP TWOFOLD IN MEN OVER 65, EVEN THOUGH THEY DID NOT HAVE ANY CLINICAL HISTORY OF THE DISEASE. EVEN AS ALMOST 30 PER CENT OF MEN OLDER THAN 75 HAVE TESTOSTERONE LEVELS LOWER THAN NORMAL, THE RESEARCHERS RECOMMEND BEING CAUTIOUS AND GETTING THERAPY ONLY IF IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO TREAT HYPOGONADISM.



## STAND UP AND GO

**There has never been a stronger case** for the importance of being physically active. Two recent studies prove that staying active extends life after cancer and cardiovascular diseases and reduces heart failures. **Expending over 12,600 calories a week can reduce mortality risk from diseases by as much as 48 per cent compared to burning up only 1,200 calories a week**, according to a study conducted at the Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine in the US. The study looked at about 1,000 men, with the average age of 71, who had been diagnosed with cancer. The participants were asked to enumerate their physical activities way back in 1988, with updates in 1993 until 2008. Even after adjusting for weight and diet, physically active cancer survivors had a 38 per cent reduced likelihood of dying early from cancer, while it was 49 per cent for cardiovascular diseases.

In the second study, it was established that the prevention of heart failure basically involved being more physically active and less sedentary. The study by Kaiser Permanente, California, US, followed 84,000 men for nearly eight years and found that sitting for long periods increased the risk of heart failure in men aged 45 to 69, even if they exercised regularly. Those who were less physically active were 52 per cent more likely to have a heart failure, even after adjusting for sedentary time. Another finding: men who spent more than five hours of their day sitting, other than at work, were 34 per cent more likely to develop heart failure than those who spent no less than two hours a day sitting, their physical activity levels notwithstanding.



## THE DIABETES-DEMENTIA DOWNSLIDE

**I**t is a well-established fact that Type-2 diabetes patients are at a higher risk of dementia. With years, diabetes-related changes in the brain lead to reduced brain volume and an abundant growth of white matter lesions. Earlier, there was hope that Type-2 diabetics could lessen their risk of cognitive decline by following intensive blood pressure and cholesterol lowering treatments. However, studies have dispelled this myth, concluding that these treatments could actually have no impact on cognitive decline in diabetics. The researchers at the Wake Forest School of Medicine in the US studied 2,900 older adults who had Type-2 diabetes for 40 months, of which one group received treatment for high blood pressure and the other for high cholesterol. Nearly 1,400 of these patients had high blood pressure and were treated with either intensive intervention (which reduces systolic blood pressure to 120) or standard intervention (which reduces systolic blood pressure to 140). The rest of the 1,500 patients affected with cholesterol problems were given either a combination of statins and fenofibrate, or statins and placebo. They were all tested on control of cognitive functions, processing speeds and memory skills. Towards the end of the trial, the researchers found that **even though cholesterol and blood pressure reduced or were under control, there was no significant influence on cognitive decline in Type-2 diabetics**; in fact, the cognitive decline was at the same level, no matter what kind of treatment the patients received, placebo or otherwise. Some patients also underwent MRI scans, and here it was found that those who were treated with standard blood pressure intervention had a reduced brain volume of almost 50 per cent.

DIABETES WAS ASSOCIATED WITH A 47% INCREASED RISK OF ANY DEMENTIA, A 39% INCREASED RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, AND A 138% INCREASED RISK OF VASCULAR DEMENTIA

# WORD PERFECT

Beating 250 participants through eight preliminary rounds and two final rounds over a period of three months, retired **Colonel Deepak Gopinath** won the first ever Indian Crossword League in December 2013. "Someone mentioned the contest on my blog and I decided to give it a shot," explains the 61 year-old resident of Bengaluru. "Every week, a challenge would be posted on the web. The top 10 scorers were called to the grand finale after eight weeks. The finals were held in Bengaluru, as seven of the 10 contenders were from here." He started with five points but zipped forward to 50 in the decider, which led him to be crowned champion.

He started solving crosswords in the 1970s, inspired by a cousin from IIT. "With no access to the Internet then, I would sit with a dictionary to crack the codes," he recalls. "Initially, I was just happy to figure out a few clues, but over the years I got pretty good at it." Having served in the Army, Gopinath has travelled across the country to Delhi, Pune, Baramulla and Port Blair, among other places. "I had not been consistently solving crosswords during my travels, but ever since I was posted in Port Blair in 1995, I have been doing them diligently every day."

He also runs a blog since 2009, where he posts the solution to *The Hindu's* crossword every day at 8:30 am, so the solution is available before people leave for work. How has he managed to do it every single day for five years? "My military discipline comes in handy," he says with a chuckle. "I start taking a stab at it around 6:30 am and it takes anywhere between 30 to 90 minutes to solve. Then, I format and add annotations for the benefit of the readers. There have been times when I have put up the solutions even while travelling in a train." Little wonder then, that he



Prasad Durga

has a strict community of followers who religiously visit his site everyday and share their comments.

"There is strong bonding within the community of crossword enthusiasts," he says. "We have met a few times in Chennai and in Bengaluru over lunch. Obviously, we talk a lot about our common passion, but we also chat about other topics." The strong sense of camaraderie in the group can be felt as there is mutual admiration for each other's blogs. "As a matter of fact, I have personally met four of the final 10 contestants even before the contest," he smiles.

When asked if he manages to complete the morning crossword every day, he replies, "Almost 99 per cent. Even otherwise, I still post the solution at 8:30 am and someone else takes a shot at the missing clues." So, are there standard solution techniques that are described in books? "There are books on the subject but my approach is self-learned. For example, with experience, I learnt that the definition of the word is always at the beginning or the end of

the clue, hardly in the middle." He also sets a crossword puzzle every Sunday at 10:30 am for his blog followers to attempt. "Setting a puzzle is not everyone's cup of tea. It's one thing to solve a crossword, but creating one is a different ballgame and needs experience."

What keeps his passion alive after all these years? "It's the novelty of the puzzle each day. You might lose interest in a Sudoku after some time because it's just playing with the numbers one to nine. But in crossword puzzles, it could be the same words but different hints, so there is an excitement to cracking it. Some newspapers carry American cues, like basketball players, so you either know them or you don't. But the cryptic crosswords in *The Hindu* are more fun to solve because you have to work out the hints." When prompted for advice to amateurs, he is quick to respond: "Nothing like practice! You need to have an obsession with words and the perseverance to go at it. Nowadays, the Internet also makes it simpler."

—Ramya Srinivasan



## BIRTHDAYS

- **Mikhail Gorbachev**, former general secretary of the erstwhile Soviet Union, turns 83 on 2 March.
- Indian actor and theatre artist **Anupam Kher** (left) turns 59 on 7 March.

● Former model and Hollywood actor **Sharon Stone** (right) turns 56 on 10 March.

● Australian-American **Rupert Murdoch**, founder of News Corporation, the world's second largest media organisation, turns 83 on 11 March.



- British actor **Michael Caine** turns 81 on 14 March.
- Hindi cinema legend **Shashi Kapoor** (left) turns 76 on 18 March.
- American actor **Bruce Willis** turns 59 on 19 March.

● English musician and songwriter **Eric Clapton** turns 69 on 30 March.

## MILESTONES

● **R A Mashelkar** (right), 71, former head of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, was conferred the Padma Vibhushan on 26 January for his contribution towards science and technology and raising awareness about patents in India. B K S Iyengar, 95, founder of Iyengar Yoga, was also conferred with the high honour.



- Renowned Hindi language writer **Vishwanath Tripathi**, 82, has been selected for the Vyas Samman 2013 for *Vyomkesh Darvesh*, a biography of noted Hindi scholar Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi.
- India's nightingale **Lata Mangeshkar** (left) was awarded the first Sathkalaratna Puraskar on 14 February by Sathkalapeetam Payyanur of Kerala.



## IN PASSING

● Eminent Marathi poet and activist **Namdeo Dhasal** (right) passed away after a prolonged illness on 15 January. He was 64.



● **Aqa Moula** (left), the 102 year-old religious head of the Dawoodi Bohras, succumbed to a heart attack on 17 January.

● **Suchitra Sen**, the reclusive Bengali and Hindi actor of yesteryears, passed away on 17 January. She was 82.

● **Pushpa Kapila Hingorani**, touted as the mother of public-interest litigation, died on 31 January, aged 86.

● **A J Mithra**, India's first zoomusicologist, featured in *Harmony-Celebrate Age* (August 2013), died of cardiac arrest on 31 January. He was 52.

● Legendary *bhajan* singer **Jhutika Roy** passed away on 6 February at the age of 93.

● **Shirley Temple** (right), Hollywood's favourite child star of the 1940s, passed away on 11 February at the age of 85.



● Film director **Balu Mahendra**, often lauded for changing the face of Tamil cinema, passed away on 13 February. He was 75.

## OVERHEARD



"I can't play certain parts anymore. I play the father or the grandfather or the great-grandfather and that can be written in a funny way, so it's fine. I'm hoping that if things work out with digital technology, they can finally make us look younger and I can go on for another 40 years."

—American actor **Robert De Niro**, 70, speaking to British newspaper *Metro*



## HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

### GOD'S OWN WORK

All religions teach you that to serve God, one must first serve the sick. Money is easy to come by but compassion is not. And as I am a doctor, I have been gifted this wonderful opportunity to serve Him. I am 78 years old and not a day goes by when I don't thank God.

At my clinic in Santacruz in Mumbai, I offer free treatment and medicines to people in financial need. I ensure that I tell them that this free service is for those who deserve it. I come across many wealthy people who ask me to treat their helpers and drivers for free. These are people who own expensive homes and cars and are unwilling to pay for their drivers and maids!

My journey began in 1961, when I opened my clinic in a small *jhopadi* [hut]. I started practising with the words of my blind mother in mind. She had said, "Charge minimum to the needy or don't charge them at all. God will look after you, so don't worry about it." Initially, I offered free treatment to widows and the unemployed; teachers, artists, priests and nuns were people who had dedicated their lives to serving society and I felt it was the duty of doctors to look after them.

I started the Santacruz Medical Social Club in 1963. The idea was born when seven of us doctors visited Matheran on a trip. We realised that we were just going to our clinics, earning money and returning home every day—we had no lives. So I started this social circle for a ₹ 5 annual fee. Today, the club has 700 members and is a registered association. Through this club, we collected funds and started a free oxygen cylinder service as well as a sick bed requisition centre. Then, I joined the All India Balkan Ji Bari Child Welfare Institute of India, which was started in Karachi in 1923. We run a school for tribal children near Dahanu which has 450 residents.

I am a social worker by nature and am ably supported by my wife, Urvi, who is a Garba choreographer. My son and daughter-in-law joined my medical practice in 1990 and we now have two clinics in Santacruz. Many families, over five generations, have been coming to us.

Over the years, I have been afflicted by various ailments, from heart attacks to diabetes, a stroke and a skull fracture. All these have passed and, as I said, God is great. I am



**Dr Hora serves God by serving the needy**

totally fit now and can attend to patients again. I believe there are three aspects every general practitioner should pay heed to: one's approach to patients, rapport with them, and sincerity to cure them. Lusting after money will make you rich and fill your bank account but it will not earn you any respect. I have earned that respect.

—Dr Ajay Hora, Mumbai

## ONE STEP AT A TIME

I became a single parent with a one year-old daughter at the age of 28 when my husband died in an accident. It was a particularly difficult period in my life but I eventually accepted and embraced life's realities as they came. I bought a small, cosy home for me and my daughter and raised her independently. My daughter remains my source of strength and I now live with her and her husband in Bengaluru, and enjoy taking care of my grandson.

But it's not about really about 'battling the odds'. The key lesson I have learnt from life is that there is no use complaining or asking, 'Why did this happen to me?' We need to move on as there are so many great experiences to enjoy and you cannot encounter them by shutting yourself away.

I concluded early in life that I had a lot of spunk, which helps when struggling with life's battles. Let me show you what I mean. I have always been interested in sports, in my pre-university days in Ethiraj, during my graduation in Mount Carmel and later when I worked at the Life Insurance Corporation of India. Whether athletics or badminton, I was eager to try my hand at it. Even today, at the age of 68, a brisk 45-minute walk on my terrace gives me much-needed momentum in the mornings.

In the 1960s and 1970s, being a sportswoman wasn't easy. I came from an orthodox family and married into one, and I didn't dare let anyone know about my passion for sports. But I certainly made myself conspicuous by running and doing long jumps in a sari!

It was this same determination that saw me through the daunting challenge of raising a child on my own. Fortunately, we were a circle of 25 families where I lived, and we were very close-knit. With so many helping hands, I managed to bring up my daughter effortlessly, even as a working mother. Financially, it was my choice to stay independent, even as I remained in touch with my own parents and in-laws.

My interest in sports had an influence here as well; during the summer holidays, I used to organise sports meets for children. Those were times when we didn't take children on exotic vacations and a sports club during summer was just what they needed. I also used to run a mobile library for children where they could borrow books every Saturday and got volunteers to take them to sports stadiums to watch professional athletes. Being socially active in my own little community gave me a deep sense of satisfaction.

I suppose the common thread through the years was—you guessed it!— sports. In 2009, I cultivated an interest in the walkathons held annually in Bengaluru. I prefer to walk alone, at my own pace, and my only objective is to enjoy



Prasad Durga

### Sportsmanship and spunk have seen Kumar through life's travails

the walk as I don't view it as a competitive pursuit. It is heartening to notice a significant increase in the number of silvers participating over the last five years. Why, some of them even arrive in groups in buses from across the city!

Another hobby I thoroughly enjoy is writing poetry. I wrote my first poem on my husband's first death anniversary, to put words to my thoughts, and have continued writing since then. I am also an active member of the Poets International Society and have published a few poems in the society's newsletter. Every December, there is an annual convention where poets from across the globe meet and share their works. It is truly an inspiring experience.

I have always retained my sense of humour, remained socially active and bonded with friends and neighbours. This outlook has helped me through my toughest battles. People ask me how I managed to raise a child on my own but I don't think I looked at it that way at all. I simply dealt with it one day at a time in life—just as I take one step at a time on the walkathons

—Rajmani Kumar, Bengaluru



## Bone-setter: Add strengthening elements to your diet

I am a 78 year-old woman suffering from osteoporosis for the past eight years. Though I take supplements regularly, I would like to make some dietary and lifestyle changes. Please advise.

Osteoporosis is a condition that leads to fragile bones and increases the risk of a wrist, hip or spine fracture. In childhood, bones grow and repair very quickly but this process slows as you get older. Bones stop growing in length between the ages of 16 and 18, but continue to increase in density until you are in your late 20s. From about the age of 35, you gradually lose bone density. This is a normal part of ageing, but for some people it can lead to osteoporosis and the increased risk of fractures. On entering one's 30s, it is important to start taking steps to help keep the bones healthy and reduce risk of developing the condition. A healthy diet and active lifestyle can help prevent and control osteoporosis.

An osteoporotic person should focus on eating a well-balanced diet with plenty of dairy products, fish, fruits and vegetables. One should get enough nutrients, especially calcium and Vitamin D, according to the daily requirement. If it is not possible from food alone, complement your diet with multivitamins or supplements. Here are some tips to follow.

- Make dairy products such as low-fat and non-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese part of your diet. Look for dairy products fortified with Vitamin D.

- If you are non-vegetarian, fish like sardines and salmon with bones can be the best source of calcium. Fatty varieties like salmon, mackerel and tuna are rich in Vitamin D.

- Green vegetables like collard greens, turnip greens, kale, okra, Chinese cabbage, mustard greens, dandelion greens, and broccoli are very rich sources of calcium.

- Magnesium and potassium are other important nutrients for your bones. Rich sources include spinach, beet greens, okra, tomatoes, artichokes, plantains, potatoes, sweet potatoes, collard greens, papaya, oranges, orange juice, bananas, prunes and raisins.

- Include Vitamin C in your diet with red and green peppers, oranges, grapefruits, broccoli, strawberries, Brussels sprouts, papaya and pineapple.

- Recent research has found that olive oil, soybeans, blueberries and food rich in omega-3, like fish oil and flaxseed oil, may also have bone-boosting benefits.

### Good health for bones

- **Avoid too much salt:** Eating foods with a lot of salt (sodium) causes your body to lose calcium and can lead to bone loss. Try to limit the amount of processed foods and salt added to the foods you eat each day. Be an intelligent buyer and read the labels on packaged products.

- **Avoid foods rich in oxalates:** Your body doesn't absorb calcium well from foods that are high in oxalates (oxalic acid) such as spinach. Other foods with oxalates are rhubarb, beet greens and certain beans. These foods contain other healthy nutrients, but they just shouldn't be counted as sources of calcium.

- **Avoid foods rich in phytates:** Phytates interfere with the absorption of calcium. Beans are a rich source of phytates but you can still use them by soaking them in water for several hours and then cooking them in fresh water.

- **Avoid wheat bran:** Like beans, wheat bran contains high levels of phytates that can prevent your body from absorbing calcium. However, unlike beans 100-per-cent wheat bran is the only food that appears to reduce the absorption of calcium in other foods eaten at the same time. For example, when you have milk and 100-per-cent wheat bran cereal together, your body can absorb some, but not all, of the calcium from the milk.





## READERS ASK

**I am a 60 year-old man with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). How effective are probiotics in treating the condition?**


Probiotics are organisms such as bacteria or yeast that are believed to improve gut health. They are living microorganisms that are similar to beneficial microorganisms found in the human digestive system. They are available in supplements and foods. Lactic acid bacteria and bifidobacteria are the most common types of microbes used as probiotics, but certain yeasts and bacilli may also be used.

Probiotics have been under study since the beginning of the 20th century and there are studies that support their use in the prevention and treatment of gastrointestinal disorders like IBS, diarrhoea, abdominal bloating, gastritis and ulcerative colitis. In the digestive system, probiotics improve digestion directly by helping the body to assimilate nutrients, through contributing to the metabolism of bile acids and accelerating their elimination, and by producing digestive enzymes. These good bacteria not only help in gastrointestinal disorders but help build up the immune system.

Probiotics come in many forms, including powders, tablets, capsules and foods such as yoghurt and dairy drinks. The form doesn't matter as long as the medium contains enough organisms to grow in the intestines. There are also several non-dairy yoghurt options that contain live probiotic cultures. Yoghurts made from rice, soy and coconut milk are available on the market and also contain added probiotics that can provide the same benefits. Other alternative sources include eating fermented foods like Brewer's yeast, miso, sauerkraut, or micro algae. Whatever the source, always look for the term 'live and active cultures' on the label.

- Your evening drink could be green juice made of broccoli, kale, pineapple and spinach, all of them being rich in calcium.
- Start your dinner with soup and salad followed by 2-3 chapattis and a bowl of vegetables.

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



Your body doesn't absorb calcium well from foods that are high in oxalates such as spinach. These foods contain other healthy nutrients, but they just shouldn't be counted as sources of calcium

### Lifestyle recommendations

- Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages as they interfere with the absorption of calcium and contribute to bone loss. Choose these drinks in moderation.
- Involve yourself in a daily exercise regime to strengthen your muscles.
- Expose your body to sunlight for 15 minutes every day. It helps in the manufacture of Vitamin D in your body.

### Ideal diet plan

- Start your day with a cup of green tea and 2-3 walnuts.
- After half an hour, have 1 tsp of grounded flaxseed powder with a glass of water.
- Breakfast could be a bowl of milk oats with a fruit or a glass of juice fortified with calcium and Vitamin D.
- Mid-morning, have some almonds, raisins, paneer chops, tofu chops, or green salad.
- Lunch should be a balanced diet with two chapattis, a brown dal, one or two green vegetables and definitely a bowl of yoghurt.



**SILVER LINING** BY V S NATARAJAN

## Settling for surgery: Between 'yes' and 'no', follow the doctor's advice

Every disease in old age can't be cured with medicines alone. Certain diseases need surgery. But the majority of silvers do not readily agree to go under the scalpel for fear of surgery. Many elders tend to postpone the prospect of surgery, saying the disease is not too severe or bothersome.

If a medical expert recommends surgery as the best treatment option for a senior patient, it is recommended that the advice be followed. Surgery can completely cure a lot of diseases such as hernia, piles and hydrocele. There is absolutely no point at all in postponing surgery in diseases where it is the only treatment option. By delaying surgery, the disease can get severe and might need emergency surgical intervention. What's worse, we allow other new diseases to emerge in due course of time, which in turn might make the patient unfit for surgery. Emergency surgery always has its own serious complications and, at times, they can be life-threatening.

It is often difficult to identify and diagnose diseases in silvers that need surgical intervention. Owing to declining memory and auditory functions, it is hard to get proper history and symptoms from elders. Atypical presenta-

tion of diseases further makes the diagnosis challenging. For instance, gall stones and appendicitis usually appear with severe abdominal pain associated with vomiting. When such diseases occur in elders, there is neither abdominal pain nor vomiting. Many a time, a mild abdominal discomfort can be the only presenting symptom. Stones in the urinary bladder usually appear with severe abdominal pain. But in silvers, instead of abdominal pain, there is an acute confusion or a state of anxiety.

It is very important to get informed consent from the patient before surgery. It is the prime duty of the surgeon to explain in detail the nature and intensity of the disease, the purpose of the surgery, complications that might occur during or afterwards, and the consequences of not intervening surgically. At no point of time should the patient be compelled to undergo surgery. If the condition is too serious that he can't take a decision, relatives will have to decide.

In old age, several other diseases coexist along with the disease for which surgery has to be done—for example, cardiac problems, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, stroke, asthma, renal problems and psychiatric illness. When these problems coexist, several problems can arise during and after the surgery (post-operative period). Hence, it is essential to evaluate all the other associated diseases and treat them prior to surgery. It is always better for silvers to undertake elective surgery rather than emergency surgery. If the disease appears at a very critical stage, an emergency surgery has to be taken up as doctors have no other choice. However, emergency surgeries are associated with a mortality rate of 30 per cent.

### Types of surgeries

**Immediate surgery:** Immediate surgeries are those that need to be done within a few hours to few days. For example, gangrene (where blood supply to an organ is cut off), cerebral haemorrhage (bleeding in the brain).



## READERS ASK

There is absolutely no point at all in postponing surgery in diseases where it is the only treatment option. By delaying surgery, we allow other new diseases to emerge in due course of time, which in turn might make the patient unfit for surgery

**Urgent surgery:** Few conditions need surgery at the earliest. For example, appendicitis, strangulated hernia, intestinal perforation. In such situations, surgery is done on an emergency basis.

**Elective surgery:** Most surgeries done for elders fall in this category. Surgery can be done after a few days or months. For example, haemorrhoids (piles), gall bladder stones, rectal prolapse, hernia, prolapse of uterus, enlargement of prostate. Though these diseases are not too troublesome, it's always better to get the surgery done once the disease is diagnosed. If not, several other problems can arise with time. Hernia that doesn't initially trouble us starts increasing in size gradually and can even result in intestinal strangulation, which requires immediate surgery.

### Some conditions requiring surgery

**Gall bladder stones:** In later years, gall stones can exist silently without any symptoms in 8-25 per cent of people. Elderly women are likely to be more affected than men. If there are no symptoms for a long time, surgery is not required. If gall stones cause frequent right-sided upper abdominal pain or jaundice, surgery is a must. Elective surgeries undertaken with adequate pre-planning can result in a complete cure in almost 99 per cent of elders. Surgeries performed in haste are associated with a higher mortality.

**Prostate gland:** The prostate is a secretory gland that hugs the bladder in men alone. Once a man crosses the age of 50, his prostate gradually starts increasing in size. This decreases the capacity of the urinary bladder and leads a person to micturitate frequently; sometimes the pathway of bladder can be completely blocked by the prostate. Though it can be treated with medicines, only surgery offers a complete cure. An instrument is passed through the male urethra and the prostate is removed. There is no age limit for this procedure. Even a 90 year-old can undergo this surgery.

**Intestinal obstruction:** The small or large intestine can get blocked suddenly. This can cause sudden abdominal pain and vomiting. The cause for obstruction can be

I have been reading about dementia in journals and on the Internet and have come to understand that it is not easy to make an early diagnosis of this condition. Is there any test by which one can identify dementia in the very early stage?

As you rightly pointed out, it is not possible to diagnose dementia in its early stages. Usually dementia develops after the age of 70, particularly in women. But when there is a family history of dementia or past history of head injury, one should take steps to diagnose dementia even at the age of 60. When there is no such history or no obvious memory impairment that all silvers face at least once in their lifetime, at the age of around 70 one should undergo a memory test. The Mini Mental State Examination or Montreal Cognitive Assessment Test is done under the guidance of a geriatrician, psychologist or a neurologist to assess a person's mental health.

hernia or adhesions owing to previous abdominal surgeries or cancer of the large intestine. Immediate surgery in such cases prevents further complications and deterioration.

**Fracture:** Bones start losing their density and falls become frequent in old age. Sometimes a trivial trip and fall can break a lot of bones. Wrist and hip bones are commonly fractured. Through advanced surgical procedures it is possible to treat fractures easily. Artificial prostheses are also an option for hip fracture. These advanced surgeries are not limited by age and result in faster recovery as well.

### Anaesthesia for surgery

Anaesthesia plays a major role in any surgery. Anaesthesiologists need to completely assess the elderly patient and certify them fit for surgery. The success of a surgery is also determined by the efficacy of the anaesthesiologist.

### Post-operative period

Several problems can arise in elders after surgery, such as a state of confusion, infections, electrolyte imbalance, bed-sores, constipation, depression, haematoma, etc, but these can be addressed with proper care. The bottom line: if a doctor recommends surgery, it is better and safe to follow his advice without any delay.

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





## YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

### Foot fetish: Yoga makes your feet strong, and svelte

The proverbial story goes that to humble the peacock, which was proud of its beauty, it was cursed to have ugly, gnarled feet! In fact, where body aesthetics is concerned, much about your own attitude to hygiene can be guessed almost immediately by looking at your feet. This may explain why nail spas are doing roaring business today, often costing more than a facial or hair spa treatment.

Yoga has its own practices to make the feet look healthy and presentable. Most belong to the energy release (*pawanuktasana*) or energy lock (*shaktibandhasana*) series. They work on the foot from the ankle down to the toes. There are several of these which, though they look rather simple, can be ingeniously difficult and challenging. They help rectify defects in posture, correct or control the problem of the foot arch (that occurs with certain activities like classical Indian dancing, or horse riding), and sensitise the toes to be able to take the load of every step we take while walking or running. They also work

on the ankle joint rather powerfully, which is one of the most important supporting joints to the foot. According to the psychosomatic aspect of yoga, the ankle joint is related to impulse control.

The above series work exclusively on the ankle or feet. However, there are other classical poses that also exercise these powerfully. In fact, most standing balances sensitise the feet and up their awareness. Our posture and control over any fall are mostly owing to the intelligence of the feet that set off 'kinesthetic' signals that the brain interprets quickly. So, balancing poses work here. Some poses like the standing mountain/palm tree (*tadasana*) and the squatting Dancing Shiva pose (*Natrajasana*) work on the ankle and feet as well.

With these practices, the toes become strong, the ankle slimmer (and not thickened as when it is inflamed or in pain) and water retention is reduced in the feet and the rest of the leg as well. Thus, your feet look elegant and support you better.

#### YOGIC MOVES

##### Dancing Shiva pose (*Natrajasana*)

Stand with your feet about one-and-a-half feet apart. Flare the feet outwards. Keep the back of the hands loosely on the thighs. Inhale; go up on your toes. Exhale; take your palms up overhead. Inhale; while exhaling, lower the hips lightly, in a light squat, shifting the awareness to the thighs, hips, ankles. Hold the pose, breathing normally, making the following corrections. Ensure your palms are touching from the inside firmly. Extend your arms so the inner arms touch either ear. Do not lower your hips too much. This actually makes the pose easier. Continue breathing throughout. Hold for a few seconds initially. You may increase the time up to 30 seconds after regular practice. To finish the pose, inhale as you stand straight, returning hips to the standing posture, but still remaining on your toes.



Exhale, drop your heels back to the ground, and then drop hands back to the sides. **Benefits:** This pose works the whole feet, toes and ankle joints. It tones the legs and hips, builds physical stamina, and stimulates the mind. Avoid if you have inflamed joints at the ankles or knees. A gentler alternative is to keep your feet flat rather than going up on your toes.

**Model:** Deepali K Juvekar,  
Harmony Interactive Centre  
**Photographer:** Haresh Patel

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

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## THE GREAT GRANNY DIARIES BY PRATIBHA JAIN SMT BHAGWANTHI NAGPAL, CHENNAI

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

At the tender age of eight, she decided to turn vegetarian for life. Serene-faced and compassionate, she is a mother of five children, grandmother to 12, and great-grandmother to 12, and enjoys interacting across generations. Smt Bhagwanthi Nagpal, 79, a Sindhi residing in Chennai, is the eldest daughter as well as the eldest daughter-in-law. No wonder adjusting and understanding have been a way of life for her—the notions of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ do not exist in her framework. As she says, when one grows up with many people, it’s natural to think of the well-being of the family before taking any individual decision.

**Namaste Bhagwanthiji, tell us about your beginnings.**

I was born in Quetta, Baluchistan, where I lived until I was 14 years old. After that, we moved to Udaipur in 1949 after Partition.

**Do you remember that time?**

Oh yes, one cannot forget that. Our house as well as shop was burnt. We left everything and simply moved trusting in God and His ways.

**And you also got married that same year? Was it already fixed?**

No. My father-in-law lived in Kandahar (Kabul) earlier but he had also moved to Udaipur at the same time. He saw me at some gathering and felt that I would be ideal for his son. He approached my father and urged until my father agreed. We got married in June 1949 when I was just 14 years old. My parents later shifted to Indore, while my father-in-law came to Chennai and settled down here with



Chennai Pix

his family. I have spent most of my life in Chennai.

**How did you cope and adjust in your new family as you were quite young? The family must have also faced the challenge of coping with a new place and new livelihood!**

**Govind Nagpal (son):** My elders were traders of dry fruits. My father often

spoke about the gardens of fresh fruits in Kandahar and trading in fresh as well as dry fruits. They had to give up everything and start afresh in India.

**Bhagwanthiji:** But at home, things were relatively smooth. The men ensured that we had a good life. There were cooks and domestic staff at home. Even my mother-in-law hardly cooked.



**How did you become such a good cook then?**

It was when we moved to a nuclear family that I learnt cooking from my husband [laughs]. He was an expert in the kitchen and was very particular about the quality of food for every meal. Over time, it just became a passion for me. We enjoyed being hospitable and welcomed our friends and relatives who always enjoyed eating at our house.

**Your sons tell me that you are a pure vegetarian. How did that happen as you were brought up as well as married into a non-vegetarian family?**

I think I was around eight years old when I saw my mother chopping mutton. I was repulsed by the blood and gore. Since then, I have been vegetarian. My parents and later my husband insisted many a time that I start eating non-vegetarian food again, but I remained firm.

**This is truly amazing! It makes one believe in *samskara* from past life.**

**Anjali Nagpal (daughter-in-law):** What is even more admirable is that she cooked non-vegetarian food for her husband and children. She has always been easygoing about that. She may not eat non-vegetarian food, but she cares enough to cook for them.

**Bhagwanthiji:** I think it is important to perform one's duties with joy, whatever one's personal preferences may be.

**That is surely a formula for goodwill and equanimity. Is this your life mantra?**

I will attribute it to the simple way of thinking with which we grew up. Earlier, there were no strong personal likes or preferences. It was mostly shared thinking. We did not think of personal freedom. But all that has changed now.

**Do you miss that way of life now?**

We have to accept change and move on. Another example would be inter-caste marriages, which are so common now. When I was growing up, marriages took place within one's own community—they were the people who were considered one's own.

**Do you state your preferences to the youngsters in the family?**

Not at all. It is each one's life and there is no point in being interfering or critical. As far as my grandchildren are concerned, I do not interfere with how their parents want to bring them up. But I do believe that it is important for any couple to have two children at least.

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*"I think combinations—like Sindhi kadhi with steamed rice, sweet boondi with took—are an important part of the Sindhi cuisine"*

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**What do you expect from your family now?**

I am very fortunate to have sons and daughters-in-law who care for me very deeply. They indulge me and keep me happy.

**How do you spend your day?**

I have been unwell this month and hence cannot move about easily, but my daily routine includes yoga, walking, *satsang* and prayer. I also enjoy supervising the kitchen and housework.

**Shankar Nagpal (son):** She has always been quite independent and manages herself quite easily. She also enjoys meeting people and is a good hostess.

**What are some of your favourite Sindhi preparations?**

I think the important thing is the combination. For instance, Sindhi *kadhi* with steamed rice, sweet *boondi* and *took*, which is a fried savoury, is a delicacy. Our family also enjoys *aate ki choori* [mixture of roti bits with sugar and ghee] with rice and the famous *Sai bhaji* with fresh vegetables which is popular as a weekend dish when you want to use up all the vegetables before buying afresh. *Sai bhaji* also tastes delicious with *koki*, which is a thick roti made with chopped onions.

## FROM BHAGWANTHI NAGPAL'S KITCHEN

### *Sindhi kadhi*

#### Ingredients

- Ripe tomatoes: ½ kg
- Gram flour (*besan*): 3 tbsp
- Tamarind: lemon-sized; soak and extract puree
- Drumstick: 1; chopped into 2-inch-long pieces
- Cluster beans: 8-10; cut into 1-inch-long pieces
- Okra: 8-10; slit in centre and cut into 1-inch-long pieces
- Ginger: 1-inch piece; chopped fine
- Green chillies: 2; slit
- Coriander and mint leaves: a few sprigs each; chopped fine
- Red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Asafoetida powder: a pinch
- Salt: to taste



Yamini V

### The tempering

- Ghee or oil: 2 tbsp
- Mustard seeds: 1 tsp
- Cumin seeds: 1 tsp
- Fenugreek seeds: 1 tsp

### Method

Pressure-cook the tomatoes with a cup of water; blend and strain. Set aside the puree. In a heavy-bottomed vessel, heat the ghee (or oil) and add the ingredients for tempering. When the mustard starts popping, add the gram flour and sauté until it turns golden brown. Add the chilli, turmer-

ic and asafoetida powders, sauté for half a minute and pour in the tomato puree with 2-3 cups of water. When the puree begins to boil, add all the remaining ingredients (chopped vegetables and salt) except the tamarind water. Turn the flame to low heat, cover the vessel and allow the *kadhi* to simmer for 30 minutes so that the vegetables become tender and the flavours mix well. Bhagwanthiji says that if the flame is low, there is no need to open the lid and check. Simply allow it to simmer. Add the tamarind water and allow to simmer for five more minutes. Check for consistency; depending on preference, you may add a cup of water along with the tamarind water. Switch off the flame. Serve hot with steamed rice. Bhag-

wanthis says the correct way to eat this is to mix the *kadhi* and rice, and sprinkle some *boondi* on top. *Boondi*, meaning drops, are tiny sweet drops made with gram flour and sugar. A crisp fried dish with potatoes or colacasia known as *took* is also a famous accompaniment.

*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

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# Act FAST

A recent national survey conducted by the Indian Stroke Association (ISA) has highlighted the lack of awareness about strokes, the third largest killer in India, which claims around 3,000 to 4,000 lives every day. Over the years, several studies have established that Indians are prone to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity, all major risk factors for strokes and heart disease. Strokes are especially a concern for women over 50, a result of post-menopausal hormonal changes. **Dr Shirish Hastak**, consultant neurologist and director, stroke services, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, tells **Neeti Vijaykumar** why women are more prone to strokes and elaborates upon the soft symptoms and the need for greater awareness.

## Is it true that older women are more prone to strokes than men?

Yes, strokes occur more frequently in women. Of the 6.4 million stroke victims alive today, 3.9 million are women; only 2.5 million are men. It is important to consider that women suffer strokes more frequently. Women also account for 60 per cent of stroke deaths. One of the reasons could be as simple as the fact that women live longer than men, and stroke is an age-related phenomenon. Women are at higher risk, especially after menopause.

## How is it related to menopause?

Hormones play a big role in how a woman's body functions. One of the functions of oestrogen is to prevent

the blood vessels from getting diseased. Heart attacks and strokes occur when blood vessel walls become diseased. When women become peri-menopausal and menopausal, their risk of getting strokes and heart attacks go up. It is said that the presence of oestrogen not only affects the blood vessel/artery wall but also changes the blood volume. Women generally feel that they're protected from strokes and heart attacks. But it's so only till they become menopausal.

## Menopausal women undertake hormone replacement treatment (HRT). Does that help?

Surprisingly, HRT doesn't protect you from the risk of strokes. Though the hypothesis is that oestrogen protects women from strokes, the reason HRT doesn't work the same way is because nothing can replace naturally produced oestrogen. Even if you take HRT, your stroke risk remains high.

## Are migraines, which affect women mainly, connected to strokes?

### Risk factors for women

- Being menopausal or post-menopausal
- Taking HRT
- Taking oral contraceptives
- Being prone to migraines
- Being overweight with a larger waistline (more than 35.2 inch)
- Blood fat (triglyceride) levels higher than 128 mg per litre

### Other risk factors (common to silver men and women)

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- Lack of exercise
- Family history of stroke

Migraine is more a woman's problem than a man's. In the end, though, it is a pretty common disorder. But if you're a smoker and take oral contraceptives, or some kind of hormonal treatments such as HRT, all these might increase the risk of stroke.

## Are women in India aware of the risk factors?



Not really. Even though senior women have a higher risk, their awareness about stroke is much lower, especially in India. You will be surprised to know that stroke kills twice as many women as breast cancer every year. The general perception among women, though, is that breast cancer is the biggest killer, and that strokes and heart attacks are basically 'male diseases'.

### What are the risk factors?

The usual risk factors are blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. It is recommended that everyone check their blood pressure levels, blood sugar levels and cholesterol regularly. Smoking might not be much of a risk factor in older Indian women, basically because there might not be many who take up the habit. Being overweight also counts as one of the major risk factors. Women with a waist size larger than 35.2 inches and blood fat level greater than 128 milligrams per litre are five times likely to have a risk of stroke, according to the American National Stroke Association.

### Are stroke symptoms in women any different from men?

Women may report unique stroke symptoms along with the routine symptoms. For instance, sudden pain in the face and limbs, sudden hiccups, sudden nausea or sudden generalised weakness, shortness of breath, and palpitations count as soft symptoms. But if these soft symptoms are associated with stronger symptoms such as change in hand-leg function, one-sided facial movement, sudden confusion or trouble speaking, then you have some hard evidence of stroke. Women, compared to men, seem to show more of these soft symptoms.

### It is always said that time is critical in case of strokes. Why is that so?

To understand this, you have to understand how a stroke starts. A stroke is caused by a blood vessel block or



### SYMPTOMS OF STROKE

Routine symptoms can be remembered as 'FAST'

- **Facial movement:** If you ask the person to smile, only one side of the face moves because of numbness.
- **Arm movement:** If you ask the person to raise both his/her arms, one drifts downwards because of numbness.
- **Speech:** If you ask the person to repeat a single phrase, he/she cannot speak properly or there's slurring of words or incoherent speech.
- **Time:** It is crucial, which means you have to get the person to the hospital within four-and-a-half hours.

a rupture of the blood vessel in the brain. Strokes are of two types: ischemic, wherein you have a blood vessel block in the brain; and haemorrhagic, wherein you have a blood vessel rupture in the brain. Each of these strokes has different treatments with different outcomes. Time is critical for all kinds of strokes, but is more so for ischemic stroke. Considering that 80 per cent strokes are ischemic, time is a critical factor in most cases. If you're not in the hospital in the first four-and-a-

half hours, you're likely to lose your hand or leg permanently to paralysis as your chance of recovery drops and chances of irreversible damages go up.

### What's the most important thing that people must know in order to save themselves or their loved ones in time?

It is very important that a stroke patient goes to a centre with proper facilities such as a 24x7 CT scan, and with experts such as neurologists or stroke specialists. It's very crucial that you go to the right place when there's a stroke involved because every minute is precious.

### How long does recovery take?

Recovery from stroke is basically a function of the surrounding brain taking over activity gradually. So you have a damaged brain area because of a blood vessel block or rupture, and then you have the surrounding brain area taking over the daily functions; this is a function of the rehabilitation facilities. This rehab goes on for at least three to six months.

### What about silent strokes?

Silent strokes in the brain also add up to brain dysfunction but do not produce classical symptoms, and hence are difficult to recognise. A person might just lose a little bit of his or her memory, start becoming forgetful and behave abnormally, becoming irritable or depressed. These point to a silent stroke, and may be a contributor ultimately to dementia as well. These are not easily detected and can be detected only by MRI and CT scans.

### How do we control the risk factors?

One simple thing I always say is to completely avoid keeping salt on the dining table. This will probably reduce strokes by 10 to 20 per cent, because increased salt levels mean increased blood pressure, leading to strokes and heart attacks. ❀

# Rock 'n' ROLE

After bowing to a standing ovation following an intense solo performance in Bengaluru, Ira Dubey hurries into the greenroom. The 30-year-old theatre and film actor is eager to meet the one person she missed at her last six shows.

This time, she is not disappointed. In sashays her mother, the elegant and vivacious Lillete Dubey, who at 60 still captures the hearts and minds of theatregoers and film buffs with her performances. "Very good show, Iru, but I've got some notes," she says.

The line between mother and director keeps blurring but Ira has learnt to switch between roles swiftly and effortlessly. Touring with her mother's theatre company Prime Time Theatre Co since she was five, Ira is smack in the middle of five productions, including her mother's *9 Parts of Desire*, which is in the throes of a fabulous run and is slated for another round in Mumbai this month.

But passion alone isn't Ira's guiding light; she couldn't have asked for a more inspiring mentor. While Lillete has acted in films like *Monsoon Wedding*, *The Lunchbox* and her debut film *Zubeida*, it's her formidable repertoire as director, producer and actor in theatre circles that her daughter draws from—whether it's Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like A Man*, Girish Karnad's light family drama *Wedding Album*, or the challenging *9 Parts of Desire*.

Following her mother's lead, Ira professionally broke into the theatre scene about eight years ago, first as an assistant director to her mother and then as an actor. But among her most cherished memories is her first-ever stage performance when she was four years old, in her aunt (Lillete's sister) Lushin Dubey's theatre company, Kids World. She has since acted in a host of productions directed by her mother, acted in films such as *Aisha* and *M-Cream*

Growing up in the "crazy, mad world of theatre" is not her biggest strength; being Lillete Dubey's daughter is. In an interview to Neeti Vijaykumar, Ira Dubey reveals what it means to be her mother's daughter

(yet to be released commercially), and briefly co-hosted television show *Chicks on Flicks*, which aired on Sony Pix.

Ira's deep admiration and boundless love for her mother is apparent as she talks about her early days in theatre, growing up in a "nautanki family" and what makes her mother a woman of substance. Excerpts from an interview:

## **I was brought up in this crazy, mad world of theatre.**

I started acting on stage at the age of five; I started selling brochures when I was six or seven; ushering people around at eight; and by nine, I was a permanent greenroom fixture. When my elder sister Neha, who also used to act and I were old enough to walk, mom would make us tag along everywhere—to rehearsals, work, plays, etc. There was no babying or pampering. We were taught to be self-sufficient and independent at a very young age.

**Studying theatre was an eye-opener for me.** It was an encouraging, defining, liberating experience, being in America, studying liberal arts, going to Yale University on an 85-per-cent scholarship. It was like plunging into the unknown because I was only 17.

**My mother is open to learning all the time.** While she laughs that she never did a course in theatre or trained in it like I did, she is still full of joie de vivre and would be happy to go back and do a course.

**Theatre is a viable profession here, for many reasons.** First, my mother is a living and breathing example of this fact. She has built Prime Time Theatre Company over 25 years and is running it successfully. You may not get to be a billionaire but that's something you accept, because you love theatre so much and you have a passion for it. I discovered that at a very





young age, and that's why I did everything I could to make it happen for me.

**I actually come from a very academic family.** My mother's parents were engineers and doctors, and on my dad's side of the family, they were civil engineers and novelists, which is strange because the rest of us are into theatre. No one imagined that performing arts would be an area we would take up professionally one day. I always say jokingly that we really are a *nautanki* family!

**Films happened to us as a result of moving to Mumbai.** We lived in Delhi till I was 12. My father, who is a corporate person—although he was still involved in theatre but someone had to pay the bills!—was posted to Mumbai. That's why we moved, not because we wanted to get into the movie business or because of mom, contrary to people's perceptions.

It's very challenging, daunting and overwhelming but very gratifying too. It's set in Iraq, a different world altogether, and it's about women there. There's an artist, a young girl, a divorced woman who is looking for love—everyday real women. It's set in a world we've never seen or experienced even though we may have read about it.

**Mom's style of theatre always focused on the truth.** You have to be in the moment and truthful. Nothing else matters but convincing the audience. By the time I was in college studying theatre, I had already done enough theatre to develop my own style. The truth of performance is something my mom has always emphasised.

**The first project I did was with mom,** after I came back from college. I was an assistant director on Pratap Sharma's play, *Sammy*. It's a vast biopic on Mahatma Gandhi's life and was ripe material for me; I just dived into it. I did

My mother has never made a choice for me. Both my parents have been very supportive but they've also let us grow, encouraging us to think for ourselves. My mother may have given me her perspective and I may have asked for advice but the final call is always mine. She's always been that kind of a person, whether as a mother or director

**As an actor, I've always wanted to evolve** with different directors. I've worked with Kunal Roy Kapoor, and would love to work with many other directors as well. I've watched Vikram Kapadia's *Bombay Talkies*, Atul Kumar's *Prince of Hamlet* and several plays by Akarsh. All these directors, for starters, are people I'd like to work with. These areas have nothing to do with my mother or Prime Time, and it is sometimes a struggle to focus on them.

**The raison d'être of my mother's theatre company is to promote English Indian writing.** That resonates with me. I've acted with my mother in many productions because I believe in the kind of work she has done, not because I find it easier, contrary to what a lot of people believe. Maybe because I am her daughter there's a bent of mind and sensibility that's similar.

**My mom has managed to travel all over the world with her plays,** and that's another beautiful offshoot of working with her. We've performed Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album*, which premiered six years ago, in London, America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and all over India; and Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days of September*, among others.

**My latest play is probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life** as an actor. *9 Parts of Desire* is a solo, 75-80 minute piece where I play nine different women.

a lot of research, dissected the characters, and there was a lot of history that needed factual research. It was a very special icebreaker for me because I remember mom telling me even then that I had brought a lot to the table. I had just come back from college, was all of 21, so hearing this from mom kept me motivated. That was a turning point as I was ready to enter the professional theatre stage.

**In cinema, I am a novice.** It's an altogether different medium, where I have a lot to learn, understand, grow and evolve. I've done fun and interesting work in cinema with some wonderful people but it's far from what I've done in theatre. My mother has done over 40 films, and started doing cinema only when we moved to Bombay. She shot *Monsoon Wedding* when I was in high school and she shot *Bow Barracks Forever* when I was in college. I don't watch every single film my mom's in, only the ones I find interesting. I admire the number of things she's done.

**The first play I acted in was *Thirty Days of September*** in 2006, which is still on tour. It's Mahesh Dattani's play about childhood sexual abuse, but it's basically a mother-daughter story. It was a very hardcore subject, where my mom played my character's mom. It was tough and intense, and broke me into that acting space quite well, because it wasn't only that I was playing her daughter, but our characters are very different from what we really are. It

was complicated and dark, and took me to some disturbing places when I was rehearsing the play. But it was also great because there was a lot we shared in that particular play.

**My mom is a woman of substance,** not to sound corny. She's not someone who would do something fluffy or frivolous, which is something that resonates with me. I come from a family where we've been brought up as solid, grounded girls with a strong set of values, very connected to our families. We've been reading, watching films and exposed to the world through our travels from a very young age.

**My mother has never made a choice for me.** Both my parents have been very supportive but they've also let us grow, encouraging us to think for ourselves. My mother may have given me her perspective and I may have asked for advice but the final call is always mine. She's always been that kind of a person, whether as a mother or director. She's the kind of director who tells us what she wants in a scene, what she wants in the character, makes us understand what the scene is about, and then lets us play.

**I am very happy to work with mom,** and it is something I am proud of.

*9 Parts...* has been the culmination of that. It's sort of like our mother-daughter story has come full circle, as this play was also just me and her. It's the first time she's directing a solo, and the first time I'm doing a solo. For about two months, it was just me and mom working on this piece. It has helped mom and me break fresh ground, both professionally and personally. It's about women who are surviving, struggling and loving and losing. I don't know what's going to happen next. I thought I would take a break from Prime Time and do something of my own and I know she will be very supportive, even though I will not be working with her. At the end of the day, she is my mom.

**My mother is a workhorse.** Looking at her, I've realised that if you want to be successful, there's nothing like hard work. That's something we've learnt from both our parents. First, if you want to get something done, you have to do it yourself, as you can't keep passing the buck. Second, there's no substitute for hard work. Her work ethic, love for life and positive outlook are some of the qualities I love.



Yes, she is short tempered and tough as a director, but she is also a very positive human being. If she has a problem, she'll figure how to fix it and get on with things. Mom is also very nitpicky and finicky, a Virgo quality my sister and I tease her about all the time. And she's very curious, like every mother. But I know she always has my back.

**Sundays are our special days together.** We're all big movie buffs, and that is something we bond over on a typical Sunday. We're all foodies and Sunday lunches are lavish with mom's favourite jazz playing in the background. We're also very big on games, which is a Sunday night feature, from Scrabble and cards to Taboo. Very often, our Sundays also include a rehearsal at home. At the starting point of many of our plays, when ideas are just brewing, our living room is a sort of a hub for actors to sit and have endless cups of *chai*, read and engage in discussion.

**Being a director, producer and actor all at once is not easy,** and my mother has been all of that. Hats off to her. 🌸

# What is 60?

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

The number of movies you have to catch up on.

The number of bad jokes you cracked last month.

The number of times you told your grandson

to get away from the TV set and get a life.

The number of places you have to travel to.

What it's not, is your age.

At least not in your head.

Or in your heart.



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

Harmony  
celebrate age





Photographs by Colorblast

# The way of TAO

**T**he 'world's oldest yoga instructor', as certified by *Guinness World Records*, and competitive ballroom dancer, **Tao Porchon-Lynch** has led an extraordinary life. Born to a French father and Bihari mother in Pondicherry, Tao was raised by her uncle. Her mother died soon after she was born and her father, overwhelmed by the prospect of raising a child alone, migrated to Canada. After spending the first 19 years of her life in Pondicherry, she began her own voyage of discovery. She was a model in France as well as in California, on a contract with MGM TV in the 1940s and 1950s. She wrote screenplays and made documentaries in the 1960s and 1970s, and was even a founding member of the American Wine Society. Now, she is a published author with *Reflections: The Yogic Journey of Life*. On the eve of the release of her autobiography, the svelte and oh-so-stylish 95-year-old, who lives in New Jersey, caught up with **Deepa Ramakrishnan** on

a visit to Mumbai, where she squeezed in a breathtaking dance performance with dancer Sandip Soparrkar and his troupe. Here's what she said:

**Mind over matter:** I don't think about the past or the future because tomorrow never comes. One minute after midnight, it's already today. I do not procrastinate. I know that whatever I put inside my mind materialises. So, every time I need to do something, I don't think of how it is going to turn out. If ever it looks like it is going to go wrong, I just think that it is going to be fine, because then something good will surely happen.

**First mentor:** My uncle was a deep influence in my life. His traversing vast, open roads across the world taught me many ideas, which have founded my character, life and beliefs. Being a spiritual seeker, he believed in the one-

ness between all people and creations, something that got passed along to me too, as I came in contact with his friends like Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo.

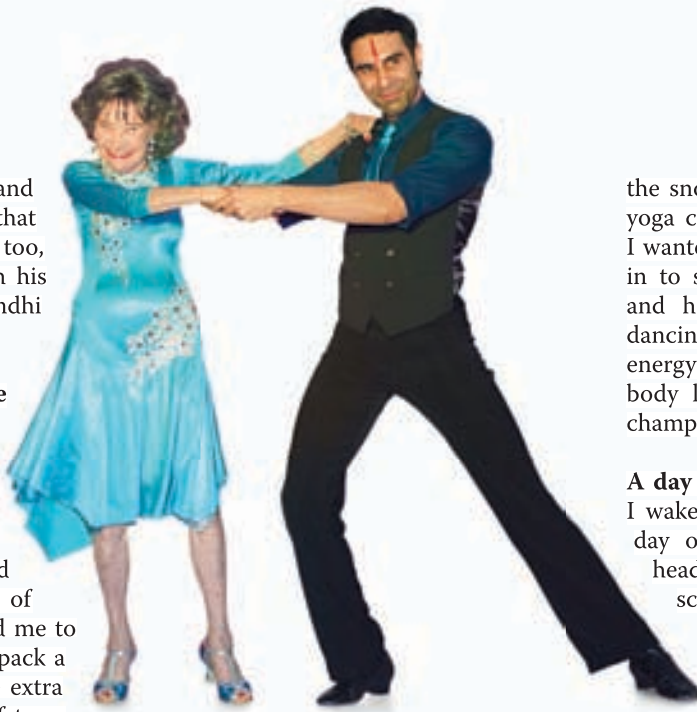
#### **Marching with the**

**Mahatma:** My uncle invited the Mahatma home when he was in Pondicherry on a protest march. I didn't know who he was back then and I thought he was a yogi of some kind. Then he called me to his side and asked me to pack a basic set of clothes, some extra garments and a couple of tops. I asked him where we were going, and he said, 'Never mind where we are going. You are coming with me.' That's how I got to march with him.

**Vegetarian for life:** I converted to vegetarianism at the age of eight. I was invited to a British home for high tea where I was offered tiny sardine sandwiches. I was not used to it and asked them what it was. They told me it was tiny fish like goldfish in the aquarium. I returned home, crying about how the poor goldfish had been killed so we could eat them. I refused to eat anything for 10 days. My uncle reasoned that I could eat vegetables and fruits, as they were fruits of the earth.

**Yoga calling:** During my acting stint in California, Indira Devi, my friend from Pondicherry, came to visit me and asked me why I wasn't teaching yoga as I was practising it. I told her I wasn't good enough. So I returned to India to study from a purist and become more adept. I enrolled myself under BKS Iyengar, whose techniques were among the most beautiful across the world. Later, I joined the incredible Pattabhi Jois, the great Indian yoga teacher, whose deep understanding of the 'Breath of Life' was the path to eternal oneness. It is from him that I learnt about the importance of breathing in yoga and that yoga is not as much about posture as it is about the breath. And it takes me on a journey through the pose. I start the day knowing that within me is the power to breathe. And when I breathe, I feel that tradition of life inside me.

**Dance with me:** When I was in my early 80s, I underwent hip-replacement surgery after a fall. However, on an unusually snowy evening in October 2007, while waiting for




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"I dance to feel the energy that courses through my body like a cork jumping off a champagne bottle. I am waiting to go to Argentina in March to dance the tango"

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the snow to stop falling after my yoga class, someone asked me if I wanted to learn dancing. I went in to see what it was all about, and haven't been able to stop dancing since. I dance to feel the energy that courses through my body like a cork jumping off a champagne bottle.

**A day in a life:** On a typical day, I wake up at 5 am and start my day on fruits and juice before heading out for my yoga classes scheduled throughout the day, sometimes in different directions in town.

I usually return home at 9.30 pm and then get down to doing some writing. Finally, I retire for the night at 3 am. I never really feel hungry and don't eat until I do. And when I eat, I eat very slowly. I don't drink water; the only fluid I drink is fruit juice. I believe that you flush out not only toxins but also the good energy from your body when you drink too much water.

**Positively astonishing:** I refuse to be negative. There is a power inside me and I can tune into it so that it opens the doors to my life. The energy I feel within me will heal me. My uncle had

taught me that my disliking someone was less their fault for who they were than mine because of my attitude towards them. Even when I had fights with my husband, I would put a hand on his heart and one on mine. And when he felt my heartbeat as I felt his, I knew we had both found the only connection that bound us to each other. Every argument always faltered around that one connect. [Tao married American Bill Lynch in 1962; he passed away in 1982.]

**Breathing easy:** I try not to let anybody feel melancholic. I like to make them smile and remember to breathe. In fact, I believe the energy in your heart shines through your breath. All of us on earth are connected through our breath because we all breathe alike. And when we breathe, we are in touch, no matter how far we are physically. So breathe, not with your throat because that will choke you. Breathe as if you are a tree that draws water from the ground. Breathe like you want to branch out and touch the sky.

**Tomorrow and beyond:** I am waiting to go to Argentina in March this year, to dance the tango. I may also see the vineyards there. ❀



# herstory

KNOWN FOR HER FEMALE-CENTRIC  
SOCIAL DRAMAS, FIREBRAND  
DIRECTOR **KALPANA LAJMI** SHARES  
HER PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL  
JOURNEY IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
WITH **SAI PRABHA KAMATH**





**F**resh from her noon siesta, Kalpana Lajmi greets us warmly in her home in suburban Mumbai. Comfortably clothed in loose cottons, the 59 year-old runs her fingers through her trademark short hair while settling down for a conversation. She has had a tiring day at a housing society meeting, presenting her case against redevelopment. "I don't see any point in redeveloping a building that is in good shape. My dad had invested in this place at the right time," the filmmaker tells us, pointing at her modest abode where she lives with her painter-mother Lalitha Lajmi, 81, and pet dog Scooby.

Outspoken and forthright, Lajmi has been a non-conformist both in her life and work; her thoughts far ahead of her time, her journey unconventional. In the 1970s and 1980s, when visual media was largely a male preserve, she directed television documentaries *DG Movie Pioneer* (1978), *Along the Brahmaputra* (1981) and a popular serial on Doordarshan, *Lohit Kinare* (1988). Focusing on women-centric subjects, Lajmi established her career as an independent filmmaker with *Ek Pal* (1986), *Rudaali* (1993), *Darmiyaan* (1997), *Daman* (2001) and *Chingaari* (2006), her films characterised by rare honesty, raw feminine sexuality and hard-hitting depiction of social issues. Lajmi met legendary music composer Bhupen Hazarika for the first time when she was barely 15; the relationship took a serious turn two years later. Hazarika, says Lajmi, "awoke in me the dormant passion for social change". Though not legally formalised, the couple went on to share a steady relationship that lasted four decades, till Hazarika breathed his last in 2011. Currently, Lajmi is in the process of scripting a movie based on Hazarika's life.

# in her own words

**I don't like being stereotyped as a filmmaker who makes women-oriented films.** It is not a conscious effort. But if my voice is being heard by various segments of society, why not highlight the issues of women from all strata? I will never make a film where a woman appears to be a cardboard piece, which is more often than not the case with mainstream cinema. The woman who appears in my story will leave a definite mark.

**I don't like being branded a feminist.** If you want to brand me, call me a humanist. Human emotions and social issues arouse me. Personally, I don't come across as demure and feminine. I have always been forthright, rather brusque. I was labelled a tomboy as a child, though I shed that image later on. Our society has preconceived notions about femininity. Neither my cinema nor I fit into that category. The whole concept of feminism in my films shouts out to let the world accept women as an equal—sexually, emotionally and economically. I have always striven to nurture my female characters on screen that way.

**If I hadn't been a woman, I would have made more movies.** It has been a long journey since I started working at the age of 17. But I have never faced gender bias or prejudice in this male-dominated industry till about four to five years ago. Though I haven't come across a plethora of women technicians, I had an extremely comfortable working equation with men, right from spot boys to producers. However, today there is far more inability to accept change for the better and far more male dominance that pre-decides the role of a woman professionally—that a woman should not be at the helm. It is that kind of regressive Indian male attitude I am subjected to today.

**There is a kind of obstruction in today's lead women actors.** They respond only when the banner is well-known and wealthy. They are willing to work with banners that promote and market them as a brand; far less attention is being paid to developing one's craft and capability as an actor. Actors like Shabana Azmi, Tabu, Kiron Kher and Raveena Tandon were not just bright and vivacious; they were willing to surrender to the director's vision. Advertising has wreaked havoc on cinema. The advertising world has taken over

and put these actors into such huge pay brackets that it is difficult for independent filmmakers to compete.

**The choice of subjects available is a miracle.**

I have been reading a lot from the age of 20. I read everything—fiction, non-fiction—and keep abreast of news, our spiritual heritage, and cultural backdrop. Yet in this sea of information, I have developed more than 50 subjects, of which only six have materialised into films. I feel honoured that critics, connoisseurs of cinema and the audience have categorised me as a visionary; someone who has made films ahead of her time. But that has also isolated me. Today, films whose content is slightly different from the mainstream are raved about. These filmmakers are pushed into the world of greats and called maestros. That certainly hurts. But that has not stopped me from trying to evolve; my eyes and ears are open to fresh ideas.

**Filmmaking is a speculative industry.** Here you are selling a story, an emotion. How do I know for sure if what excites me as a storyteller will excite my audience? Today, a creator and ideator is forced to stop dreaming and pushed into the harsh reality of finance, marketing and publicity. I agree these are important, but not the 'be all' and 'end all'. If the content cannot touch the intellect and the heart of the audience, any amount of marketing will not give the end product longevity. I have always believed that you have to have at least one star presence—a banner, a director or an actor—whereby your independent thought, which may not be able to attract a number into the theatre on its own, will bring in its initial pull. If the subject has been treated well, your passion will become infectious and reach the audience.

**You cannot fight escapist fare.** Independent films have to coexist with them. Unfortunately, non-conformist subjects that do not appeal to conservatives are not encouraged. The mindset of the younger generation is tuned towards the fiscal structure of a movie. No actor wants to get into serious cinema because it is difficult for them to get into the skin of the character. If Indian cinema has to rise and compete at the international level, actors need to dedicate time to shape their craft. Countries like Argentina, China, Iran and Pakistan are devoted to making socially relevant, independent cinema, without forgetting the language of films. We have so much to learn from Hollywood; whether it is low-cost movies or big-budget blockbusters, they do their homework

**1978**

*D G Movie Pioneer*

**1979**

*A Work Study in Tea Plucking*

**1981**

*Along the Brahmaputra*

**1986**

*Ek Pal*

**1988**

*Lohit Kinare*

**1993**

*Rudaali*

**1997**

*Darmiyaan: In Between*

**2001**

*Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence*

**2003**

*Kyon?*

**2006**

*Chingaari*

10 year-old Lajmi with her younger brother Devdas after a school play



**“I HAVE WON PRIZES FOR MY DRAMATIC AND HISTRIONIC SKILLS. WHEN I WAS 16, DEV ANAND WANTED TO GIVE ME BREAK AS AN ACTRESS IN *HEERA PANNA*. BUT I NEVER WANTED TO COME OUT OF MY COCOON. I WORKED AROUND IT, NOT ABOVE IT”**

to perfection. Hollywood greats like George Clooney, Robert Redford, Brad Pitt and Susan Sarandon do at least one socially relevant film a year because they believe in it and support issues. Why are our film stars not coming forward?

**I come from a small and an enlightened community of Bhanup Saraswat Brahmins.** My father Captain Gopal Krishna Lajmi, who retired as deputy conservator of Mumbai Port Trust, was dynamic and liberal. He allowed my mother Lalitha Lajmi to paint and evolve into a teacher; she did her master's in teaching art after I grew up. Though we were not well-to-do, we were intellectually exposed to films, theatre, books, painting and dance. My maternal grandfather Shivashanker Rao Padukone was a poet and my maternal grandmother Vasanthi Padukone was a writer in Kannada and Marathi. She was well read and very forward in her thoughts. Those were the times films were looked down upon. But my

grandparents were so progressive that they encouraged their eldest son Guru Dutt to join the performing arts troupe of Uday Shankar; he went beyond their wildest dreams in the film industry.

**Guru Dutt *maam* used to call me “Russian wrestler” because I was plump and fair.**

He was a genius; his persona has outlived the person because of the gigantic nature of his work. Thanks to him, I am in this industry today. But I cannot turn back and say that he and his work have been an influence over me. He comes from the romantic world of pre-Independence India of Rabindranath Tagore, Saratchandra and Bimal Mitra. Another of my uncles, Devi Dutt, was also bright and ahead of his times; he produced films like *Aakrosh*, *Ardh Satya* and *Masoom*. However, my younger brother, Captain Devdas Lajmi, has followed in our father's footsteps; he lives in Newcastle, UK, and has done very well for himself.

**My childhood was pure, pristine and protected.** As a child,

I was timid and wanted to remain in the comfort zone of my family. In 1942, during World War II, we left Kolkata and came to Mumbai. My love for literature, history and theatre were honed in my school years. But my world opened up at St Xavier's College, where I studied psychology. Sunil Gavaskar, Shabana Azmi, Farookh Sheikh, Pankaj Udhas, Kavita Krishnamoorthy, Smita Patil and Anil Kapoor were my college mates. All of us used to actively participate in our college cultural events; I have won prizes for my dramatic and histrionic skills. When I was 16, Dev Anand wanted to give me a break as an actress in his film *Heera Panna*. But I never wanted to come out of my cocoon. My mother would plan, think and dream for me; she wanted me to study theatre and meet renowned theatre director Ebrahim Alkazi as theatre was revered in Mumbai even in those days. But again, I was not ready to get out of my comfort zone; I worked in it and around it, not above it.



**“BHUPEN’S SOCIAL REFORMS THROUGH SONGS AND POETRY AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM HAD A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON ME. HIS VISION WAS TO ELEVATE NORTH-EASTERN INDIA AND PUT IT ON THE WORLD MAP. HE WAS A HIGHLY EVOLVED PERSON AND GAVE ME TIME TO SHAPE UP INTELLECTUALLY”**



With Bhupen Hazarika and Lata Mangeskar during a music practice session; at mother Lalitha Lajmi's studio

**Shyam Benegal is like a surrogate father to me.** I was a confused teenager when my mother asked me to seek Shyam *maam's* guidance on the way forward. He was her first cousin and had lived with us till he found his footing in films. I always associate him with a world of fantasy and stories. He is the one who introduced me to alternate children's literature. I became an avid reader thanks to him. While he was working with advertising agency Lintas, Shyam *maam* introduced me to western culture and later on to the world of cinema; he told me that the reach and penetration of cinema were farthest than any other art form. That remained forever in my mind and gave me a new direction.

**I never knew the meaning of patriotism till I met Bhupen Hazarika.** He literally held my hand and showed me what poverty, national integration and geographical isolation meant. I had met Bhupen when I was around 15 years old, but got attracted to him when he was giving music to my uncle Atma Ram's film *Aarop* in 1972. At that time, I was assisting Shyam *maam* with his documentaries, advertisements and films; simultaneously, my relationship with

Bhupen grew. He was 28 years older than me and had separated from his wife two decades ago after a traumatic relationship. Both of us were fond of people. He was interested in art, theatre, music and dance, was well-read in Assamese, Urdu and Bengali literature.

**In 1977, I shifted base to Kolkata to live with Bhupen.** I took over his career and became his manager. It was an interesting world; Bhupen's social reforms through songs and poetry and political activism had a major influence on me. His vision was to elevate north-eastern India and put it on the world map. He was a highly evolved person and gave me time to shape up intellectually. Because of his singing career, I travelled with him all over the world.

**My first movie *Ek Pal* happened because of Bhupen.** He introduced me to his friend, tea baron Hemen Baroouah, who agreed to produce the movie. It was difficult to get funds for independent films even then. Shabana Azmi, a wonderful person who has stood by several debut filmmakers, agreed to work with me, as she had seen my work in *Mandi* in 1982. *Ek Pal*, based on



For Lajmi, pet dog Scooby means "hugs and kisses "

a Bengali short story by Maitreyi Devi, went on to run for 25 weeks, thus beginning my journey in the film industry. Though Bhupen didn't believe in the rat race of Bollywood and hated being called a Hindi film music composer, he trusted me implicitly and believed in my dreams; he gave me moral support and stood by me financially. I made my films from the meagre earnings of a poor artist. I was living with a man who was diametrically opposite to what I wanted to become! In 1994, when I wanted to expand my horizon, we shifted to Mumbai, which was a tough decision for him.

**Bhupen and I were temperamental—it took me 20 years to understand him and the next 20 years to live with him.** People ask me why we didn't formalise our relationship. I was a non-conformist; I didn't want bindings of any sort and didn't want to have children. I didn't know how long our relationship would last. How would a legal piece of paper keep us going? But our relationship lasted 40 years, which is long considering many marriages today. Life is more peaceful now, though I miss the turbulence of living with Bhupen.

**I don't want another person in my life.** Though I am going to be 60, I am quite energetic, and my mind is still bright. But had I devoted the amount of time I devoted to Bhupen to my creative process, I would have made many more films. I know it is going to be a lonely life ahead and it is not easy in our country for a single woman, but I don't want to nurture a new relationship now. I used to travel all over the world with him, so much so that not travelling now feels suffocating. Someday I would like to travel to all those places that I have always wanted to go.

**I was born to enjoy films.** Though my mother is a highly acclaimed painter, I have never responded to paintings; I have been drawn to the performing arts. I watch all kinds of movies like *Rambo - First Blood*, *Terminator II*, *Saving Mr Banks*, *Vicky Donor*, *Chennai Express*, *Tere Bin Laden*, *Gangs of Wasseyapur*, among others. I really liked *Paa* which had stellar performances by Vidya Balan and Amitabh Bachchan. We should also be giving credit not just to the directors but new-age writers, who turn in exemplary scripts.

**It is not easy to raise funds for serious films.** I don't have a bank balance that keeps me going until and unless I work. I have worked really hard on my writing in the past three to four years. I work on two to three projects together. I am working on a story on 40 years of living with Bhupen. I have just completed a screenplay for a film called *Safed Doli* for producer Vinta Nanda. I have done a detailed work on actress Priya Rajvansh's murder case, which is kept in abeyance owing to lack of funds.

**I never knew there was a spiritual seeker within me.** Eleven years ago, I came in contact with Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma) and she became my spiritual guru. In this chaos and conflict of living, if my mind is fixed somewhere and I am striving to be honest, it is because of Amma. I am her child and the spiritual connect between us is tremendous.

**Age is a matter of acceptance.** Women above 60 in India are hardworking and constantly on the move. We don't realise we are ageing physically till it hits us one day. We need to understand that our body is like a machine; with age, it will have its own wear and tear. If we accept this, we will not have to undergo the pain and agony of the unknown. Being alert, youthful, bright and peaceful from within will make one ageless. ✨







Citadel in the

SKY

WITH A MASSIVE LONG-WINDING  
RAMPART, THE ANCIENT  
KUMBHALGARH FORT PROUDLY  
DOTS THE ARAVALLI MOUNTAIN  
RANGE LIKE REGALIA

➡ 📷 **Gustasp & Jeroo Irani**





It was a domain detached from heaven and earth. We could feel the presence of the impregnable Kumbhalgarh Fort as it floated in the distance like a mirage. To reach it, we had arrowed through the Aravalli range and Rajasthani landscape while moustachioed men in colourful turbans, sporting gleaming earrings and rakish smiles, warmed themselves in the sun. Partially veiled women adorned with chunky jewellery and colourful skirts would sashay past, while haughty camels claimed right of way on narrow country roads. Nowhere else had we seen such searing colours against a desert landscape. And as a counterpoint, on the horizon appeared two barefoot Jain nuns, frail figures in white, probably heading for the Jain temple complex of Ranakpur nearby.

We had left behind Udaipur, a magical princely oasis of floodlit palaces and dreamy lakes and as we ascended a steep rise, Kumbhalgarh's larger setting came into view—the brown contours of hills that snared the candy floss clouds with their peaks. The fort that day had an arid melancholy beauty, unscrolling across a series of ridges. We hired a guide at the entrance whose aged face cracked into a million laugh lines as he started to tell us about his beloved fort.

As legend goes, back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Rana Kumbha, one of the greatest architects of the

Sisodia clan of Mewar, was distressed. Repeated attempts to build a fort at Kelwada, 80 km from Udaipur, had come to naught. Inexplicably, whatever was built during the day would collapse at night. That was until a *sadhu* promised to help him build an impregnable fort. But there was one condition—it had to be named after him. The king agreed and the holy man led him to the base of a hillock. Here, he ordered the ruler to chop off his head, saying that the main gate should be built at the spot where his head landed, and the palace where his body fell. Rana Kumbha did as he was commanded and to his amazement he saw the headless body of the *sadhu* climb up the hill till it finally collapsed near the summit. The warrior king built the fortress city as the holy man had suggested and named it Kumbhalmer (later it became Kumbhalgarh) after himself and the *sadhu* who belonged to the *mer* clan. Even today, the fort is an impressive structure riding the crest of a mountain ridge and protected by seven massive gates; from miles away it looks like a crown, proudly perched on the hilltop.

We trudged slowly up a paved pathway, retracing the footsteps of the former royal residents of the fort; past the little shrine that marks the spot where the *sadhu's* lopped-off head fell. Dislodging the bloody image of the headless body of the *sadhu* trudging up the hill from our mind, we marched on past the royal stables and watchtowers from

where guards once kept an eye on the movements of friends and foes alike. A plaque outside the restored ruins of a building stated that it was the birthplace of the valiant Rana Pratap who dared to challenge the might of Emperor Akbar's Mughal army. A short haul further up the trail, we finally reached the imperial Badal Mahal or Cloud Palace that sits in solitary splendour at the summit, 3,500 ft above sea level. Here we stopped to catch our breath and appreciate the rewards of our sweaty trek. Below us, the massive fortress walls snaked across the thickly forested slopes of the Aravalli hills that dissolved into the misty horizon like rippling waves.

Remains of the bustling town, once dotted with 350 temples

An abandoned cluster of Jain temples near Kumbhalgarh





THIS FORLORN PALACE WAS AN ENGINEERING MARVEL IN ITS TIME AND EVEN TODAY ITS WALLS, WHICH ARE COATED WITH A MIXTURE OF MILK AND EGGSHELLS, GLISTEN LIKE IVORY

had to remind ourselves that this was once a royal retreat and a bustling hub of pageantry and palace intrigue. Was it our imagination or did we hear the swish of silken skirts? Indeed, this forlorn palace, now haunted by the ghosts of the past, was an engineering marvel in its time and even today its walls, which are coated with a mixture of milk and eggshells, glisten like ivory. Special ventilation ducts under the floor serve as natural air-conditioners.

As we explored the *zenana*, our weather-beaten guide intoned a husky *Hari Om* that reverberated across the chambers for nearly 20 seconds. According to him, the acoustics of this section of the building were intentionally designed to enable the king

to eavesdrop on his harem. We couldn't help but muffle our laughter at the thought.

Outside, in the courtyard, stood a small shrine that marks the spot where the headless body of the *sadhu* came to eternal rest. Coincidentally, Rana Kumbha too met a violent end in the fortress he had built for his own protection. The so-called unconquerable structure was penetrated by the enemy from within when the king's own son Udai, impatient to occupy the throne, crept upon his father who was deep in prayer and hacked him to death.

Magnificent archways in Badal Mahal

(a few still survive), unfolded under the battlement walls. The entire citadel was surrounded by a massive 36 km-long rampart that our guide insisted was the second longest continuous wall in the world after the Great Wall of China. The size of this fortification can be gauged from the fact that it is broad enough to accommodate a cavalry of eight horses abreast.

As our footsteps echoed in the empty chambers of Badal Mahal whose walls were painted with murals of rampaging elephants and we gazed out of windows framed in filigreed arches, we





## THE ENTIRE CITADEL WAS SURROUNDED BY A MASSIVE 36 KM-LONG RAMPART THAT OUR GUIDE INSISTED WAS THE SECOND LONGEST CONTINUOUS WALL IN THE WORLD AFTER THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

However, Rana Kumbha's legacy lives on and the fortified citadel he built in the remote reaches of western Rajasthan still echoes with his grand exploits that locals never seem to tire of repeating to tourists. We descended to the centuries-old village at the foot of the fort and explored the cluster of temples—most in ruins and abandoned—that have survived the ravages of time. We walked down a section of the brawny wall punctuated with bulbous turrets that flexed their muscles threateningly at invading armies. In recent years, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has treated them with chemical cleaners to erase centuries of accumulated pollution and the wear and tear the sinewy fortress has suffered. Today, it sparkles like new and the contrast is striking when compared to a smaller outer wall that is yet blackened with age.

We had mixed feelings about the restoration. On the one hand, we applauded the ASI's efforts and,

on the other, we felt that the restoration had diluted the beauty of the fort. It was akin to a beautiful woman who had aged gracefully and, then, had decided to get a face lift to rid herself of her well-earned wrinkles!

Sadly, there is little the ASI can do to restore the past glory of the temple complexes within the embrace of the walls. The magnificent Bawan Deori, as its name suggests, with 51 Jain shrines combined to form an impressive pillared complex, is a gut-wrenching example. The grand complex lies like a dying dinosaur across the land; its many altars bereft of the sculpted deities that once graced them. The pillared chambers inside the complex that once resonated with the devotional chanting of *pujari* are now filled with an eerie silence, fractured occasionally by the footfalls and laughter of kids from the surrounding farmlands who use it as their playground. Only the beautifully sculpted images of heavenly nymphs that grace the ceil-

Shrine at the spot where the *sadhu's* head fell

## factfile

### GETTING THERE

- **By air:** Maharana Pratap Airport, Udaipur, is about 85 km south of Kumbhalgarh.
- **By rail:** Udaipur is also the most convenient railhead, though Falna station (50 km to the north) is closer.

### WHERE TO STAY

- Dera, Tent Hotel, Kumbhalgarh; Tel: (0) 9783907100, 9983996511; Email: [info@derakumbhalgarh.com](mailto:info@derakumbhalgarh.com)
- Kumbhal Castle, Kumbhalgarh; Tel (0) 9414162347; Email: [hotelkumbhalcastle@yahoo.co.in](mailto:hotelkumbhalcastle@yahoo.co.in)
- The Aodhi, Kumbhalgarh: Tel: (0) 9928015305, 992954242341; Email: [crs@hrhhotels.com](mailto:crs@hrhhotels.com)

### TIPS

Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation organises one-day tours of Kumbhalgarh and Ranakpur from Udaipur.

Popular excursions out of Kumbhalgarh include the marble Jain temples of Ranakpur (32 km away) and a safari drive into the neighbouring Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, which encircles the fort.



Mewar royal family under the banner of the HRH Group of Hotels. Twenty years ago when we first visited Kumbhalgarh, The Aodhi was the only hotel in a destination that still had to earn its stripes on the tourist map of the country. Today, a number of other hotels and lodges dot the landscape that still retains large tracts of forest cover.

Murals of elephants decorate the walls of Badal Mahal; sculpted ceiling at Bawan Deori

ings gave us a sense of what the temple must have been in its heyday.

We were back at a temple complex closer to the base of the fort that evening to attend a sound-and-light show. Though the concept and technology may have been passé, in light of modern-day electronic wizardry, the show was nevertheless a crash course in local history, stirred with all the ingredients of a potboiler bestseller: valour, betrayal, honour, treachery, wars lost and won, galloping horses, a dastardly prince who killed his father, the ultimate sacrifice of a prince's nursemaid, and a lost son who restores the pride of the royal family.

It was well after sunset when we returned to our charming little hotel, the 23-room Aodhi, literally meaning shooting tower or box, and formerly a royal hunting lodge. A mini fortress-like building sculpted into the hill, it is owned and run by the

By evening, there was a distinct nip in the air and for a while the chorus of cicadas was our sole entertainment. Dinner was a sumptuous affair, served around a crackling fire in an open-air restaurant around the swimming pool as folk artists entertained us. Rajput style *lal maas*, melt-in-the-mouth meat cooked in a sizzling chilli-hot gravy; *safed maas*, meat cooked in a delicately spiced yogurt gravy, and *ker sangria*, made from the beans of the native sangria plant; they all flavoured our sojourn in Kumbhalgarh. After dinner, we drove once more to the base of the fort and imagined we heard the thundering hooves of galloping horses, their prolonged neighing as they fell to the thrust and parry of enemy swords; a valorous Rana on his steed plunging into the thick of battle, smothered by the dust kicked up by his own cavalry.... The scene that unfolded in our mind's eye was like an epic Ridley Scott celluloid extravaganza; such is the hold that the fort exerts on a visitor's imagination. We gazed up at Badal Mahal on the summit, flirting with a million stars and a crescent moon. There was magic in the air as Rana Kumbha's creation held the land in a protective embrace. ✨



# Weaving dreams



Photographs courtesy M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation

**H**er relentless documentation has given a new lease of life to the traditional handicrafts of Chettinad in Tamil Nadu, a region popular for its cuisine, architecture and craftsmanship. Founder of the M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation in Chennai, **Visalakshi Ramaswamy** has been working towards reviving ancient craft and preserving the cultural heritage of Chettinad for posterity. From growing up in an expansive and conventional family in Karaikudi (commonly referred to as Chettinad) and getting married into a traditional household from Kanadukathan to voluntarily getting involved with the preservation of the rapidly disappearing tradition and handicrafts, the 68 year-old realised the need for systematic documentation. Ramaswamy recently launched her book, *The Kottan – The Palmyra Basket of Chettinad*, documenting the weaving techniques of Chettinad's ethnic, multipurpose baskets made of palm leaves. Having curated a lifestyle exhibition of the Chettiar community at her home in Chettinad, Ramaswamy is currently involved in setting up a site museum to recreate the actual experience of a traditional Chettiar home. In an interview with **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, the Chettinad connoisseur talks about her latest book and her passion for documenting crafts. Excerpts:

## CRAFT

### How did you get drawn towards documentation of the traditional and rural crafts of Chettinad?

I have grown up in an environment of polite and culturally alive people who have kept many of our rituals and traditions alive. They believed that being respectful was a way of behaviour and instilled in us many simple and pertinent values like hospitality. I have always seen beautiful handcrafted objects being used around me, things that have been part of the living traditions of my life. Every pillar, every door and even a coconut scraper...all these were things of beauty I seem to have absorbed in my time spent there during the holidays. I have woken up to the realisation that many things around me are disappearing and the need of the hour is preservation. Although revival as such may or may not work, documentation is permanent and will last forever.

### When did you begin the documentation work?

The calling to start the M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation came in the late 1990s when I was working on *The Chettiar Heritage Book*. The making of the book was a real eye-opener. While I was working for the book with my



co-authors S Muthiah and Meenakshi Meyyappan and travelling through Chettinad with photographer Muthuraman, I realised that I was blind to what was at my doorstep. In the four years of the making of the book, so much of the architecture, crafts and even culture unique to Chettinad were disappearing. That was when I decided to focus on Chettinad as I was at the right place at the right time.

**How does M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation contribute towards preserving Chettinad heritage?**

When I started the foundation, the biggest challenge was lack of information. There was a scarcity of people who had the knowhow and were willing to part with the knowledge. I realised the need to systematically document the cultural heritage of Chettinad so that it can be preserved and be available for anyone at any time. The foundation holds workshops and documents the craft processes diligently. The major projects of the foundation are architectural documentation, Athangudi tiles, Chettinad lime plaster, Kandangi sari and Kottan basketry. The foundation is self-funded and each project becomes self-sustaining after initial investment of seed money. Kottan baskets woven by craftswomen have won the UNESCO Seal of Excellence for handcrafted products in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2012. The Kottan basket has also been awarded the Geographical Indications Tag by the Geographical Indications Registry.

**What is your latest book about and how is it different from your earlier works?**

My book *The Kottan – The Palmyra Basket of Chettinad* documents the making of *kottan* and is my maiden work as an independent author. It is the culmination of over 10 years of my work in the revival of the lost craft of *kottan* weaving; with the publication of this book,



I feel the craft has come full circle. With the design documentation and techniques recorded in this book, I hope to ensure that the craft process is not lost and it is possible to revive the *kottan* again whenever needed. Having personally experienced the difficulty of finding any historical and technical information or records on traditional

crafts in the region, this book hopes to preserve the *kottan* for the future. I am also in the process of publishing a book on the Kandangi sari of Chettinad and a monograph on the architecture of a traditional Chettinad house.

**What kind of challenges did you experience?**

I have worked with craftspeople for three decades. The biggest challenge has been to get them to return to working with crafts. Most craftspeople prefer white and blue collar jobs. For instance, I know a skilled carpenter whose son is naturally gifted with carpentry skills but prefers to be a salesperson in a shoe shop although carpentry is more remunerative. Youngsters deem a craftsman's job less respectful. Another challenge is finding wider markets owing to lack of local patronage.

**How has life improved for women artisans?**

We mainly work with women although there are men involved in Athangudi tile making, lime plaster technique and textile weaving. I have found that crafts have a wonderful way of bridging communal and religious barriers that are especially prevalent in rural India. In order to work around the class differences in the many small villages in the area, a facility centre was constructed where all the women gather everyday to carry out their weaving, in spite of the option of working from home. The women share their joys and sorrows while their fingers deftly weave their futures in the bright colours of palm leaf.

## GOING GRAPHIC

Munshi Premchand is one of the most celebrated writers of modern Hindi-Urdu literature who dealt with social issues such as poverty, the dowry system and political oppression through his short stories and novels. He wrote over 300 short stories and 14 novels including *Premashram*, *Nirmala*, *Godan* and *Kafan*, and many of his works form part of the school curriculum today. Now, two of his short stories—*Budhi Kaki* and *Do Bael*—will be available in graphic novel format. “Kids these days prefer books by foreign authors,” says Reena Puri, editor of *Amar Chitra Katha*, which is launching the book. “Presenting Premchand’s works in graphic novel format is a small effort to bridge the gap. His works have messages that are relevant even today. While *Budhi Kaki* will teach our kids sensitivity towards the elderly, *Do Bael* talks about compassion towards all living things.” The book will be initially available in Hindi and thereafter in English as well.

# For all walks of life

On a stroll through the 79 year-old Chappal Lane in Shivaji Market, Kolhapur, Khursheed Dinshaw discovers the evolution of an Indian fashion staple



Photographs by Khursheed Dinshaw

The Kolhapuri *chappal* has always remained the quintessential Indian fashion statement—popular among the classes and masses, cutting through boundaries of region, time and age. A key reason for its popularity is its ability to reinvent and modify itself to suit myriad tastes and functions, as the 50-something shops that line the 79 year-old Chappal Lane in Kolhapur's Shivaji Market attest to. New colours and myriad styles now add enchanting twists on an eternal fashion staple.

## FASHION

puri chappal for their comfort and durability. Soldiers would wear them on rough terrain and to scare away animals in dense forests. Today, the *Shetkari* design is inspired by this and worn by farmers. Weighing almost 3 kg, the hollow soles of the *chappal* are filled with *vinchu* seeds that make a crackling sound while walking, protecting farmers from reptiles. In fact, traditional styles that were named after their places of origin like Kurundwadi, Kapashi and Meharban are all made in Kolhapur today.

and Sangul work together. A line of skilled workers sit on the floor with their legs folded in a lotus pose, their work table comprising a thick stone or a wooden slab. They work in the comfort of their home with flexible working hours. While the first worker draws the sole patterns on the tanned hide and cuts them using his half-moon knife, the next worker hand-stitches the top and bottom soles. Though, earlier, string made from goatskin was used for stitching, these days durable cotton thread rubbed with natural beeswax is also used.

Indeed, the history of the footwear dates back to the 18th century when royal patrons used to wear Kolha-

In Kolhapur, *chappal* making is a cottage industry where families of the neighbouring villages of Bhogawati

Not a single iron nail is used in the manufacture of the Kolhapuri *chappal*. While buffalo leather is used to





Myriad designs on display at Chappal Lane in Kolhapur

make the sole, bullock leather is used for the insole and sheep skin is used for making the belt and lining. The authentic look used to be masculine but infusing detailed *zari* work and intricate floral designing have given it a feminine turn. "Delicate work like braiding the leather and decorating the straps with *zari* and other embellishments is done by women," says Jagannath Pawar, a 68 year-old shopkeeper. "The process also ensures that hardly any leather is left over, avoiding wastage." The *chappal* are then dyed using natural colours as desired and oiled to increase their strength and cooling effect on the feet.

Today, traditional designs like 'Ladies Chepli', 'Senapati Kapashi' and 'Khas Kolhapuri' are being tweaked to make them look more contemporary. "Over 70 trendy designs like 'Paper Kapashi', 'Netting Kapashi' and 'Bhui Vadi' are available that are lightweight and flexible," says Vinay-

ak Kadam, who is a fifth-generation Kolhapuri *chappal* maker and runs a shop since 1935. While 'Paper Kapashi' is made from calf leather, 'Netting Kapashi' is embellished with colourful handwork and 'Bhui Vadi' is special for its belt made from bullock's tail. In fact, the soft and comfortable 'bed-to-bath' folding *chappal* for women—inspired by queens who walked on their palace carpets—weighs just 100 gm and can be rolled into a small pouch.

All the innovation is paying off. Priced at anything between ₹ 300 and ₹ 5,000 depending upon the intricacy of craftsmanship, Kolhapuris are not just popular in India but are being exported to the US, UK, Australia and Africa. There's only one drawback: despite their elegance and versatility, these leather *chappal* are not waterproof and are best suited to warm and dry climates. No matter, it's always summer somewhere in the world!

**BOMBAY TALKIES IS BACK** FAMED FILM PRODUCTION HOUSE BOMBAY TALKIES, WHICH LAUNCHED THE CAREERS OF ICONS LIKE KISHORE KUMAR, DILIP KUMAR, RAJ KAPOOR AND DEV ANAND, IS COMING BACK TO LIFE. THE MOVIE STUDIO, WHICH WAS FOUNDED IN 1934 BY FILMMAKERS AND FILM STARS DEVIKA RANI, HIMANSHU RAI AND 'PILLAR OF INDIAN CINEMA' RAJNARAYAN DUBE, WILL BE REVIVED BY DUBE'S GRANDSON ABHAY KUMAR. IN ITS NEW AVATAR, BOMBAY TALKIES WILL RELEASE ITS FIRST FILM, *CHAHEN KOI MUJHE JUNGLEE KAHE*, IN MAY 2014. THE FILM WILL BE DIRECTED BY THE LATE COMEDIAN JOHNNY WALKER'S SON NASIR KHAN WITH KUMAR DEBUTING AS A HERO. THE COST OF REVIVAL OF THE STUDIO IS PEGGED AT ₹ 1 BILLION OVER A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS. IN ITS HEYDAY, THE PRODUCTION HOUSE MADE 102 FILMS, INCLUDING *ACHHUT KANYA*, *KISMET* AND *MAHAL* AND WAS CREDITED FOR ITS HIGH TECHNICAL STANDARDS IN FILMMAKING. IN FACT, IT WAS INDIA'S FIRST PUBLIC LIMITED FILM COMPANY LISTED ON THE BOMBAY STOCK EXCHANGE BUT CEASED ITS OPERATIONS IN 1954 AS IT WAS UNABLE TO SUSTAIN ITSELF.



PHOTOGRAPHY

# A PEEP into the past

Since the advent of photography in the 19th century, the medium has played a major role in our historical, social and political documentation. As is the case with other artistic media—painting, sculpture—in photography, too, women have remained a subject of special interest. An exhibition of vintage photographs, *Subjects & Spaces - Women in Indian Photography, 1850s to 1950s*, from the archives of the Tasveer Foundation, was held in New Delhi recently, which offered a unique insight into the social and cultural milieu of the time. The unique selection of images—studio portraits, film stills, postcards and cabinet cards—traces the journey of women belonging to different backgrounds, right from household realms to performance spaces of the 1940s and 50s.


Photographs courtesy Tasveer



(Clockwise from left) A cabinet card with Parsi women in a studio (1910); studio portrait of an unknown woman reclining on a chaise lounge (1880); a group of Maharashtrian women (1875)





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 looking at each other. The water is dark blue and the dock is made of wooden planks.

**Most silver citizens  
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# All about her

Published in 1929, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf is a feminist text based on a series of lectures she delivered at women's colleges, arguing for space for women writers

Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe? Here had I come with a notebook and a pencil proposing to spend a morning reading, supposing that at the end of the morning I should have transferred the truth to my notebook.

Even the names of the books gave me food for thought. Sex and its nature might well attract doctors and biologists; but what was surprising and difficult of explanation was the fact that sex—woman, that is to say—also attracts agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the MA degree; men who have taken no degree; men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women. Some of these books were, on the face of it, frivolous and facetious; but many, on the other hand, were serious and prophetic, moral and hortatory. Merely to read the titles suggested innumerable schoolmasters, innumerable clergymen mounting their platforms and pulpits and holding forth with loquacity which far exceeded the hour usually allotted to such discourse on this one subject. It was a most strange phenomenon; and apparently—here I consulted the letter M—one confined to the male sex. Women do not write books about men—a fact that I could not help welcoming with relief, for if I had first to read all that men have written about women, then all that women have written about men, the aloe that flowers once in a hundred years would flower twice before I could set pen to paper.

What could be the reason, then, of this curious disparity, I wondered, drawing cartwheels on the slips of paper provided by the British taxpayer for other purposes. Why are women, judging from this catalogue, so much more

interesting to men than men are to women? A very curious fact it seemed, and my mind wandered to picture the lives of men who spend their time in writing books about women; whether they were old or young, married or unmarried, red-nosed or hump-backed—anyhow, it was flattering, vaguely, to feel oneself the object of such attention provided that it was not entirely bestowed by the crippled

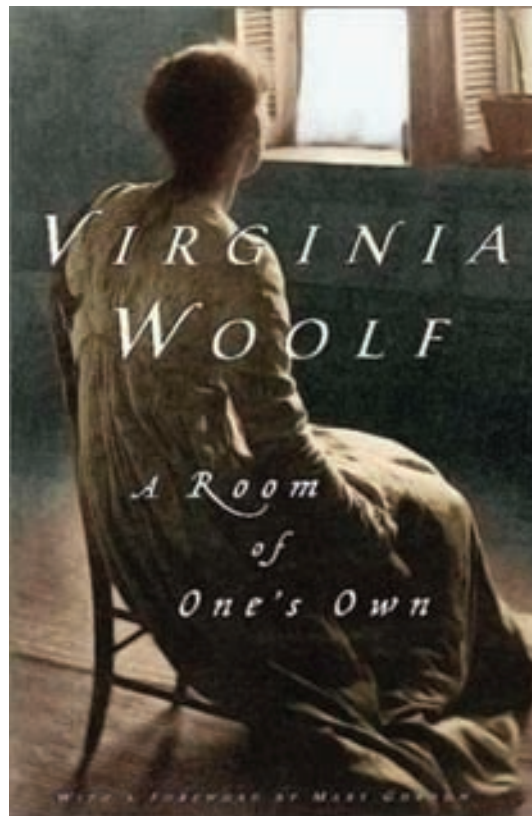
and the infirm—so I pondered until all such frivolous thoughts were ended by an avalanche of books sliding down on to the desk in front of me.... Why does Samuel Butler say, 'Wise men never say what they think of women'? Wise men never say anything else apparently. But, I continued, leaning back in my chair and looking at the vast dome in which I was a single but by now somewhat harassed thought, what is so unfortunate is that wise men never think the same thing about women.

Here is Pope: *Most women have no character at all.*

And here is La Bruyère: *Les femmes sont extrêmes, elles sont meilleures ou pires que les homes.*

A direct contradiction by keen observers who were contemporary. Are they capable of education or incapable? Napoleon thought them incapable.

Dr Johnson thought the opposite. Have they souls or have they not souls? Some savages say they have none. Others, on the contrary, maintain that women are half divine and worship them on that account. Some sages hold that they are shallower in the brain; others that they are deeper in the consciousness. Goethe honoured them; Mussolini despises them. Wherever one looked men thought about women and thought differently. It was impossible to make head or tail of it all, I decided, glancing with envy at the reader next door who was making the neatest abstracts, headed often with an A or a B or a C, while my own notebook rioted with the wildest scribble of contradictory jottings.





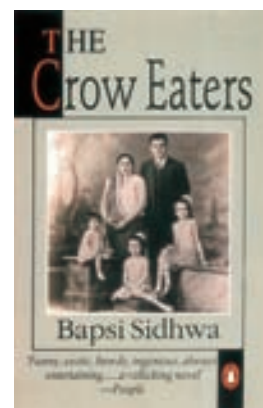
## AUTHORSPEAK

# "I wrote out of the silences in my life"

She is among the pioneers of English-language writers in Pakistan. **Bapsi Sidhwa**, 75, who burst into the lime-light when Deepa Mehta filmed her novel *Ice Candy Man* (also called *Cracking India*) as *Earth*, is known for her whacky sense of humour and dexterous writing. An award-winning author, she has been instrumental in bringing women's issues of the Indian subcontinent to the fore through her works. She has also served on the advisory committee on women's development to former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Raised in Lahore, Sidhwa now lives in Houston, Texas. Her novels have been translated and published in several languages. She has taught at Colombia University, University of Texas and Mount Holyoke College, Southampton University. In an email interview to **Srirekha Pillai**, Sidhwa talks about the right to literary expression, discrimination against women, and what makes Mumbai her favourite city.

**Partition is a recurring theme in your works. Having lived through it, what are your memories?**

Partition was one of the defining moments of our history. The mass exodus and carnage affected millions of lives in the Indian subcontinent. The roar of the mobs was a constant through my childhood. It was a very threatening sound and even as a child one knew they were hurting people. I saw many buildings burn, our Hindu and Sikh neighbours disappear and their houses being occupied by furious, frightened refugees. Once a mob came into our house to loot, but departed when told we were Parsi. Those terrible memories have stayed with me.



**Your debut novel *The Pakistani Bride*, inspired by a true incident, is about a girl who is treated like a commodity. Would you agree that the subcontinent's reality hasn't changed much?**

Fathers, brothers, husbands have more control over the lives of women, even today. Women are still looked upon as chattels, an inferior species. This is especially true among the poorer classes. Women are bartered and brutalised. As women writers, consciously or unconsciously, we bring out the discrimination women face. I don't like to preach about feminism, but the way the stories unfold illustrates their position in society. Fortunately, awareness is being created by activists and one hopes to see women shown more respect.

**Do you think being home-tutored due to polio was instrumental in turning you into a reader, and subsequently, a writer?**

My parents were advised not to send me to school. The doctor told them, 'She'll get married and have babies. She's not going to become a profes-

sor or doctor, is she?' I was taught to read and write in English by a tutor at home. I took to reading all that I could. I remember reading Khushwant Singh as a teenager; there weren't many English writers from the subcontinent then. Loneliness and voracious reading turned me into a writer. I wrote out of the silences in my life and a need for self-expression.

**In the wake of the recent Wendy Doniger episode, what is your take on intolerance towards literary expression, considering that many writers of the subcontinent, including you, have been victims?**

Writers need freedom to express themselves. I am against censoring them or curtailing their right to express themselves. When my book *The Crow Eaters* was being launched in Lahore, there was a bomb scare in the hotel where the event was happening. Later I realised that the Parsi community was behind it. Till then, no one had written about Parsis in an irreverent manner, warts and all. It wasn't until the book was published in Britain to critical acclaim that the Parsis gradually accepted it.

**As a debutant writer, you faced rejection from publishers in the US and England. How did you pull through those days?**

It was heartbreaking, to say the least. Though Curtis Brown, my literary agent, tried finding a publisher for *The Pakistani Bride* in America and later for *The Crow Eaters* in England, the response was on the lines of, 'We love the writing, but Pakistan is too remote in time and place for the novel to be commercially viable.' The rejection slips came pouring from both sides of the Atlantic. Curtis Brown tried to place the books for two years before giving up, while I gave up writing for almost four years after that, till I self-published *The Crow Eaters* in Lahore in 1978, on the advice of a friend who loved it completely!

**Filmmaker Deepa Mehta and you have collaborated on *Earth and Water*. Can you take us through the relationship you share with her?**

**"Fathers, brothers, husbands have more control over the lives of women, even today. Women are still looked upon as chattels, an inferior species"**

I have great respect for her as a filmmaker; it's a tough job and she handles it capably. She is also a good friend, and we agree on intuitive levels.

**Unlike many senior writers who still swear by paper and pen, you have switched to computers. How did that happen?**

I was given a computer when I got the Bunting fellowship at Radcliffe, Harvard in 1986. It took me a while to learn it though. But as I knew how to type, the transition was easy.

**Who are the Indian writers you enjoy reading?**

Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, V S Naipaul, Manju Kapur, Jerry Pinto, and many more.

**You often say that your writing is instinctual. Can you elaborate?**

When I write, I don't need to plan or plot. The storyteller instinct is a gift; without this, it is difficult to write. I feel I write from the unconscious part of my brain.

**You keep visiting Mumbai often. What is it about the city that makes you feel at home?**

Mumbai is full of other Parsis and I feel I'm embedded in the community and my culture here. Being in Mumbai gives me a sense of belonging. I find I share the same weird sense of humour and tastes. Besides, I enjoy being with my cousins.

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# twirl of the *thread*

Without her drape, a dancer is incomplete. A dance initiates a subtle interplay between the yarn and the movement. As the fabric and the rhythm blend into one, **Briana Blasko's** *Dance of the Weave* (Penguin; ₹ 2,999; 155 pages) captures the conversation between traditional textiles and the dance forms of India

Bharatanatyam and Kathakali dancer and choreographer Mrinalini Sarabhai draped in a silk sari from Kornad, Tamil Nadu, also known as the temple sari. Characterised by broad borders, these saris were originally woven for temple deities. Bharatanatyam dancers generally wear costumes made of silk saris with gold *zari* embroidery designs, which form pleats that open beautifully during sitting postures





(Above) *Uduthukettu* of the Kathakali character, backstage in preparation for a performance. In this dance drama, a performer goes through various stages of preparation, which includes layering of the costume and elaborate painting of the face. *Uduthukettu* is the third stage of Kathakali makeup, giving the skirt a bulky look; (left) Odissi dancer Madhavi Mudgal draped in a silk Sambalpuri sari from Orissa. These saris are made on a handloom, in weaves and motifs typical of the Sambalpur tradition, including *shankha*, *chakra*, fauna and flora. Sambalpuri saris are also remarkable for *Bandhakala*, the traditional tie-dye art reflected in intricate weaves, also called Sambalpuri Ikkat (*ikat*)





(Clockwise from top) Kuchipudi dancer Govinda Rajulu Garu unfurling a length of cotton fabric, hand-woven at Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh. Known for its superfine yarn, Mangalagiri cotton has a silky feel. Male Kuchipudi dancers generally wear a silk *angavastram* or upper garment, paired with a side-pleated silk pant; Baul singer Parvathy Baul wearing a Bhagalpur Tussore silk sari in atpoure drape. Her *muga* silk blouse, characterised by its golden bright colour and glossy fine texture, has a woven Assamese border design of geometrical and floral designs in brilliant shades; a worker prepares warp threads at Rehwa Society, a cooperative weaving establishment that continues the tradition of hand-woven saris from Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh. Founded in 1978 to revive traditional textiles and give women employment, Rehwa Society has about 130 weavers associated with it and is known for Maheshwari saris, known for their unique weave and simple, geometric patterns







(Clockwise from top) Contemporary dancer Navtej Johar in a Bharatnatyam dance posture, wearing a hand-woven cotton *veshti* from Tamil Nadu. The *veshti*, worn like a sarong, is known for its comfort and fine texture and gives a dancer freedom to manoeuvre; indigo makers oxidise the dye by using a technique of vigorously kicking their legs in a water-filled vat. Though modern methods favour continuous stirring, the traditional method of kicking stimulates oxidation of the solution; contemporary dancer Shilpika Bordoloi, trained in Bharatanatyam, Manipuri and the martial arts, choreographs movement with the *pallu* of a Gadwal cotton sari with a Pochampally design, comprising traditional geometric patterns in the Ikkat style of dyeing, on the silk border. Easily foldable to the size of a small matchbox, Gadwal saris from Andhra Pradesh are handloom saris with silk borders. Being thin and light, these saris lend themselves to easy movement

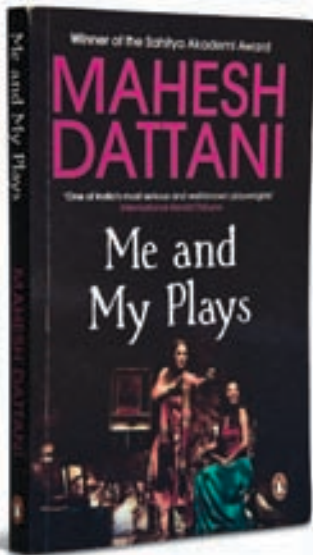




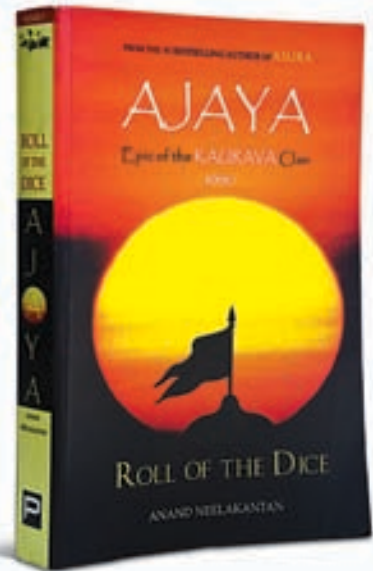
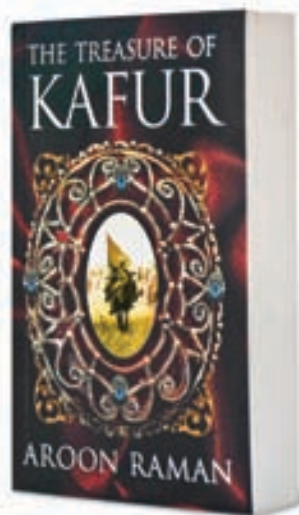
# BETWEEN THE LINES

In **ME AND MY PLAYS** (Penguin; ₹ 299; 246 pages), playwright-director **Mahesh Dattani** presents an essay and two stage plays, *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* and *The Big Fat City*. The essay gives us a peek into his life, the incidents that shaped his personality, the lure of theatre and the slow realisation of his true calling in life. One of the pioneers of contemporary English theatre in India, Dattani is known for his simple wit, acute

observations and flair for honest drama. For instance, *Where Did I Leave My Purdah?* is an intense story about a fading actor and her passion for theatre. The play sways effortlessly between the present and the past, painting the sketch of a passionate and self-absorbed woman while revisiting the horrors of Partition. *The Big Fat City*, on the other hand, is a black comedy set in modern Mumbai, focussing on a bunch of people—a TV star, a wannabe star, a banker who just lost his job—all chasing the mirage of making it big. Even though it's a simple comedy of errors, there's a grave underlying theme that surfaces only towards the end of the play, shocking us out of our reverie. Also included in the book are forewords by Lillete Dubey and Achint Kaur, who played the leading roles in the respective plays.



In his second novel, **THE TREASURE OF KAFUR** (Pan Macmillan; ₹ 299; 399 pages), **Aroon Raman** makes the most of his passion for research to weave a historical fiction, with magical, fable-like elements. Set in the times of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, the fiction, as the name suggests, revolves around the treasure of Malik Kafur, a castrated slave who had risen to become the head general in Alauddin Khilji's army. While some historians claim that much of the treasure, which Kafur usurped by draining kingdoms and the temples of south India, has been discovered, Raman's story takes off on the premise that it is a lost hoard. Despite historical figures that fill the pages, including Emperor Akbar, his celebrated lieutenant Raja Man Singh and the valiant Rajput Maharana Pratap, the treasure remains the star of the story. Raman weaves an exotic tale, with battle scenes, snapshots from Akbar's life, and talking animals. In fact, he keeps you intrigued till the very end. Unfortunately, the predictability of the climax jars and interrupts what is otherwise a gripping storyline.



**Anand Neelakantan** lends voice to the uncelebrated and the vanquished in **AJAYA: EPIC OF THE KAURAVA CLAN** (Leadstart; ₹ 182; 456 pages) in this daring and unconventional take on *The Mahabharata*. He picks up from where he left off in his first book *Asura*, in which he focuses on Ravana instead of Rama. The key protagonist in *Ajaya* is Suyodhana (not 'Dur'yodhana as we know him), the crown prince of Hastinapura. Disconcerted by the disparities around him, Suyodhana challenges them. His struggle with his identity and unfaltering loyalty to his friends are highlighted, as the author picks every momentous incident in *The Mahabharata*—the poisoning of Bhima, the fire in Varanavata, the *swayamvar* of Draupadi—and presents his uniquely irreverent take on them. It is also as much the tale of Karna, struggling as a Suta, and Ekalavya, who combats poverty. In essence, this is the story of the underdogs, including the unusual beggar Jara and his sightless dog Dharma. It's also a powerful account of the caste system prevalent at the time. A heady mix of mythology and modernism, read this one with an open mind.



# The favoured sex

Nature favoured women, but the biological anxiety of men ushered in a patriarchal set-up, says **Devdutt Pattanaik**

Patriarchy is the idea that men are more important than women. Feminism is the idea that both genders are equal. Indian mythology tells stories through which we can trace the fall of feminism and the rise of patriarchy. But first, let us observe nature and try and discover the male-female relationship.

Indian sages were called *rishi*, meaning seers who observed what others failed to see. They observed that in nature, all female forms were valuable as each one created a new life. But not all male forms were valuable; only the strongest or smartest male got the chance to impregnate the female. The female could either pair with one male for her whole life or she could just present herself to him during the mating season. But the male, in most cases, had to compete with other males for her attention. In doing so, he had to show his worthiness by conducting himself in ways that were dangerous, exposing himself to injury when he fought rival males, or to predators when he displayed his colours or plumage.

Nature clearly favours all females but not all males, and this creates anxiety. It is further amplified in humans because we can imagine. While animals grudgingly accept their situation in the hierarchy, humans resist—every human male can imagine a better location. This imagination of male value plays a key role in shaping society through patriarchy and it makes itself known through the list of various forms of marriage found in the *Puranas*. The list includes:

- *Prajapati-vivah*, where the boy approaches the girl's father for her hand in marriage.

- *Brahma-vivah*, where the girl's father approaches the boy for his hand in marriage and even offers dowry.

- *Deva-vivah*, where the daughter is given to the man as fee for services rendered to the father.

- *Rishi-vivah*, where the daughter is given to a sage along with a bull (beast of burden) and a cow (source of food) in order to enable the sage to perform *yagna*.

- *Gandharva-vivah*, or marriage based on love of man for woman, that does not care for social sanction.

- *Asura-vivah*, where the girl is bought.

- *Rakshasa-vivah* where the girl is abducted.

- *Pisacha-vivah*, where the girl is raped while she is asleep.

What is missing in this list is *swayamvara* or the ceremony where the girl chooses her own groom. Some scholars equate this with *Gandharva-vivah*. In *swayamvara*, many men present themselves to the woman, display their prowess in many ways, while she gets to make her choice. Curiously, in *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, both Sita and Draupadi have to accept the winners of archery contests, indicating they have no choice in the matter. Thus, *swayamvara* is no longer about choice; it is about being a trophy to the winner. This form of *swayamvara* marks the end of feminism.

In a society that wanted all men to have wives, women's freedom had to

be curtailed. Laws had to be created so that she did not leave her husband for a better or more desirable man. Thus, chastity of women served to allay male anxiety over their incompetence and inadequacy. With a wife at home obliged to be faithful to him, the man had nothing to fear. His fidelity was not a matter of law but a matter of choice. When he was faithful, he became worthy of adoration, like Ram, the only divinity in Hindu mythology to have the title of *ekam-patni-vrata*, faithful to a single wife.

In *The Mahabharata*, Shantanu cannot get wives he loves until he is able to give them what they want. His first wife Ganga demands complete freedom, which includes killing their newborns. The second wife Satyawati demands that her children, not Ganga's, be declared heirs. Satyawati gets daughters-in-law very differently: she orders her stepson, Devavrata, to simply kidnap them. Kunti selects her own husband while Madri is bought. Gandhari's father is approached for her hand in marriage, but she is not told her husband is blind. Kunti's daughter-in-law, Draupadi, is the trophy of an archery contest and is then equally shared by the five Pandava brothers.

*The Mahabharata* informs us that there was a time when women and men were free to go to whomever they desired. An *apsara* would make love to a *rishi* and simply walk away, like Menaka who successfully seduced Vishwamitra and walked away, abandoning her daughter Shakuntala. When Arjuna does not satisfy her, Urvashi curses that his genitals will fall off. *The Bhagavata* tells the story of Usha, a princess who kidnaps Krishna's grandson Aniruddha, because



he is handsome. Rukmini asks Krishna to help her elope and is often at odds with Satyabhama who had an arranged marriage with Krishna and had brought with her a lot of dowry. Krishna wins the hand of his other wives such as Jambavati and Bhadra by displaying his strength in wrestling and bull fights. Invariably, a *swayamvara* is associated with a lot of fighting, with the hero having to defeat many rivals. It finds an echo in the pattern of male animals fighting each other to get the female.

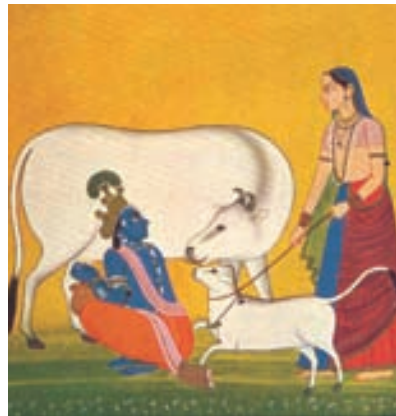
*The Mahabharata* tells the interesting story of Shvetaketu who discovers his mother in the arms of another man. But the father, Uddalaka, is not upset. This makes Shvetaketu wonder about his paternity. So he institutes the law of marriage and insists that the wife be faithful to her husband. But the law also lay down that the husband can ask the wife to go to another man if he is unable to make her pregnant himself. With this law, we see the clear establishment of patriarchy.

In Hinduism, there is no story like that of Eve in Biblical mythology where God declares that women shall be subservient to men. There is no story either like that of the curious Pandora of Greek mythology that holds women responsible for unleashing all problems into this world.

In the Buddhist narrative, to gain enlightenment Buddha has to leave his wife and conquer the daughters of Mara, the demon of desire, thus explicitly associating women with temptation and a distraction from the spiritual path. In the Jain narrative, which is also a monastic order, all *Tirthankara* have male bodies. While the *Shvetambara* sect claims that Mallinath, whose symbol is the pot (symbolic of the womb), is a woman *Tirthankara*, the more orthodox *Digambar* sect, rejects this argument. Thus, we see the idea of women as

temptations, not the tempted, emerging with monastic orders that portray women in an inferior manner.

In Hinduism, though *apsara* are seen as temptations, they are never seen in a negative light. In fact, Vishnu takes the form of an enchantress, Mohini,



Radha's narrative indicates a mindset that certainly does not see the female form as inferior or negative; it is a source of power and freedom

to help the world. He even enchants Shiva, the hermit. Shiva may burn Kama, the god of love, but ultimately he succumbs to the charms of Kamakshi or Kamakhya, the Goddess, and becomes a householder. *The Devi Purana*, where God is seen in feminine form, is a unique feature of Hinduism. In most other parts of the world, God is masculine. Tantrik imagery does not shy away from female sexuality; it is openly celebrated. Even the more conservative Vedantic imagery insists that the Goddess be beside the God to complete the divinity. A God without Goddess and a Goddess without God are seen as incomplete, hence fiery (or

hot); they need the other to be balanced. This is very different from the Chinese mythology where the female is always yin (cold), and the male, yang (hot).

People often associate the rise of Islam in India with the emergence of patriarchal values. That does not explain how Radha came to be the most popular figure in Hindu mythology from 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Radha's relationship with Krishna is anything but patriarchal. Poets suggest that she was married to another man, was older than Krishna, and probably his aunt by marriage, and yet she danced and sang with Krishna in the *raas-leela* at Madhuvan. This indicates a mindset that certainly does not see the female form as inferior or negative. It is a source of power and freedom. Radha weeps when Krishna leaves Vrindavan and goes to Mathura but she does not break down; she finds strength in *viraha-bhakti*, the devotion emerging from separation. The whole Radha narrative speaks of breaking free from the restrictive structures of society.

Around the same time, we have *Adbhut Ramayana*, where Sita is described as slaying a demon with hundred heads, suggesting she is capable of easily slaying Ravana who has only 10 heads, but chooses to downplay her power to establish Ram as God. But this version is not as popular as the other versions of *The Ramayana* that show Sita as subservient. They want to focus on Sita who breaks down when Ram abandons her, not on the Sita who comfortably raises her children alone in the forest, just like Shakuntala, Hidimbi and Kunti.

Clearly, the male storytellers were uncomfortable seeing women as equal to men, or perhaps more powerful. It reveals an ancient biological anxiety in the presence of a woman. As nature always favoured females over males, culture chose to turn the tables.

Devdutt Pattanaik is a renowned mythologist, author, illustrator and motivational speaker

# Mother nurture

The hand that rocks the cradle is the one that shapes the future of the world,  
says Mata Amritanandamayi Devi

Children, once, when *Amma* was giving *darshan*, a youth came up to her. He lived in a part of India that was ravaged by terrorism. Because of the frequent killings and lootings, the people in that area were suffering a great deal. He told *Amma* that he was the leader of a group of youngsters who were doing a lot of social work in that area. He prayed to *Amma*, "Please give those terrorists, who are so full of hatred and violence, the right understanding. And for all those who have faced so many atrocities and have suffered so much, please fill their hearts with the spirit of forgiveness. Otherwise, the situation will only deteriorate, and there will be no end to the violence."

*Amma* was so glad to hear his prayer for peace and forgiveness. When *Amma* asked him what made him choose a life of social work, he said, "My mother was the inspiration behind this. My childhood days were dark and terrifying. When I was six years old, my peace-loving father was brutally murdered by terrorists in front of my eyes. My life was shattered. I was filled with hatred, and all I wanted was revenge. But my mother changed my attitude. Whenever I would tell her that I was going to avenge my father's death one day, she would say, 'Son, will your father come back to life if you kill those people? Look at your grandmother, how sad she always is. Look at me, how difficult it is to make both ends meet without your father. And just look at yourself, how sad you are, not having your father with you. Would you want more mothers and children to suffer as we do? The intensity of this pain would be the same for them. Try to forgive your father's killers for their terrible deeds, and spread the message of love and universal kinship instead.' When I grew up, people tried to get me to join different terrorist outfits to avenge my father's death. But the seeds of forgiveness sown by my mother had borne fruit, and I refused. I gave some of the youngsters the same advice that my mother had given

me. This changed the hearts of many people who have since joined me in serving others." The love and compassion rather than hatred that this boy chose to pour into the world stemmed from the wellspring of love in his mother.

It is thus, through the influence she has on her child, that a mother influences the future of the world. A woman who has awakened her innate motherhood brings heaven to earth wherever she is. Only women can create a peaceful, happy world. And so it is that the one who rocks the cradle of the baby is the one who holds up the lamp, shedding light upon the world.



Woman is the creator of the human race. She is the first guru, the first guide and mentor of humanity. Think of the tremendous forces, either positive or negative, that one human being can unleash upon the world. Each one of us has a far-reaching effect on others, whether we are aware of it or not. The responsibility of a mother, when it comes to influencing and inspiring her children, cannot be underestimated. There is much truth in the saying that there is a strong woman behind every successful man. Wherever you see happy, peaceful individuals; wherever you see children endowed with noble qualities and good dispositions; wherever you see men who have immense strength when faced with failure and adverse situations;

wherever you see people who possess a great measure of understanding, sympathy, love and compassion towards the suffering, and who give of themselves to others, you will usually find a great mother who has inspired them to become what they are.

It should be the goal of every woman to become such a force and, thus, shed light upon the world. The power of motherhood is the unique privilege of women. This is something we should never forget.

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*Popularly known as the hugging saint or Amma, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi is a spiritual leader known for her humanitarian activities*



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# Nanny no. 1

The twinkle-eyed, nimble-footed flying nanny with her magical umbrella, solutions to everyday problems and evergreen melodies, is an enduring phenomenon. Scented with 'something like toast and Sunlight soap,' *Mary Poppins* inhabits not just our imagination, but the everyday world of nurseries and kindergartens. For generations that grew up watching Walt Disney's 1964 production *Mary Poppins*, the perception of nannies since has been coloured to a large extent by the magic of this super nanny and her uncanny ability to transform a chaotic household into a place of order. The extravagant production gave us not just the magical nanny with a sunny disposition, but added a new lengthy word to our vocabulary: 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious'!

It is believed that Walt Disney's daughters fell in love with P L Travers's (the pen name for Helen Lyndon Goff) *Mary Poppins* books and made him promise to make a film based on them. Disney, who was known primarily as a producer of cartoons, was rebuffed for more than 20 years by Travers, who believed a film version would not do justice to her creation. Much of the Travers-Disney correspondence is detailed in *Mary Poppins She Wrote*, a biography of Travers by Valerie Lawson and the recently released movie *Saving Mr Banks*, starring Tom Hanks, Emma Thompson and Colin Farrell. Disney and Travers disagreed on several issues, including the animation sequences, widely used in the movie at Disney's insistence and the Edwardian elements that Travers wanted to bring in, considering the period in which the film was set. Citing contract stipulations that he had final say on the finished print, Disney overruled the writer, leaving her disappointed with the screen adaptation. Apparently, Travers believed that the casting of Julie Andrews was the only thing Walt Disney managed to get right. Despite chartbusting tracks including *Let's go fly a kite*, *A spoonful of sugar*, *Feed the birds*, *Jolly holiday* and *Step in time*, Travers believed the movie had done "a strange kind of violence" to her work. The *Mary Poppins* Travers birthed, much like the author, was far darker and more mysterious than her kind-hearted screen counter-



part. Ironically, it's the glowing warmth of Disney's *Mary Poppins* that became Travers's ticket to fame.

*Mary Poppins* went on to bag a total of 13 Academy Award nominations, the maximum for a Walt Disney production, winning five, including Best Actress for Julie Andrews, who debuted in the movie. And in 2013, it was selected as one of the all-time cult movies on the basis of being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" for preservation in the United States National Film Registry. The endearing nanny who can fix almost everything and break into song at the drop of a hat continues to captivate our collective consciousness and has been adapted on Broadway as well. Clearly, there's something special about *Mary Poppins*!

## THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: MARCH 1964

- On 9 March, the first Ford Mustang rolled off the assembly line at Ford Motor Company. On the first day of production, it sold more than 22,000 coupes and convertibles.
- On 15 March, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor married for the first time in Montreal.
- On 27 March, the Great Alaskan Earthquake, the second most powerful quake in recorded history at a magnitude of 9.2 on the Richter scale, struck South Central Alaska, killing 125.
- On 28 March, wax likenesses of The Beatles were put on display in London's Madame Tussauds Wax Museum.



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## GEROSCIENCE

*n.* The study of the relationship between ageing and age-related diseases.

**Example.** The greying of America and the developed world is now such a widely recognised phenomenon that a new word has been coined—**geroscience**—to describe the intensified focus on studying the human ageing process and figuring out what to do about it.

—Barbara Peters Smith, "Learning about growing older",  
Sarasota Herald-Tribune, 28 December 2013

## Clickbait

*n.* A web page link with text designed to entice the reader to click the link.

**Example.** In last year's feature on the Puppy Bowl, we wrote that cute—from BuzzFeed's animal-GIF **clickbait** to Internet-celebrity cats and dogs—had become big business, owing in part to Animal Planet taking a chance on adorable counter-programming to the Super Bowl.

—Maura Judkis, "Ten things to look forward to in the 10th Puppy Bowl",  
The Washington Post, 29 January 2014

## Life radius

*n.* The distance from home or work within which a person performs most of their day-to-day activities; the distance within which a person lives all or most of their life.

**Example.** Now snow just means putting away my cute shoes, getting up extra early, and a decreased **life radius**; I basically never leave my county.

—Jamie Lynn Neal, "Snow," A Single Girl's Journey to a Life of No Regrets,  
27 November 2013

## Geriaction

*n.* An action movie genre that features ageing actors in the lead roles.

**Example.** Combats, encounters, car chases, gunshots, explosions, punches, kicks, blood and sweat with some good guys and their foes thrown in; the **geriaction** (action from old dudes) subgenre has exploded on the silver screen and it has exploded big time.

—Suruchi Sharma Diwan, "It's time for some geriaction", The Positive,  
7 January 2014



“A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman's birthday but never remembers her age.

—American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963)

## Complisult

*n.* A backhanded compliment. [compliment + insult]

**Example.** “She has a pretty face.” It’s one of the more common **complisults**.

—Soraya Roberts, “Vogue cover of Lena Dunham gives ‘butterbody’ the stamp of approval”, Hamilton Spectator, 22 January 2014

## PEAK CAR

*n.* A time when the use of cars reaches a maximum, after which it steadily declines owing to increased costs, convenient alternatives, and improved urban walkability.

**Example.** Has the United States passed **peak car**? It’s one of the more tantalising questions that energy and urban-planning nerds are pondering these days. Ever since the recession, Americans have been driving less, getting fewer licenses, and using less gas. But is that just the work of the recession or something more permanent?

—Jordan Weissmann, “Crash: The decline of US driving in 6 charts”, The Atlantic, 15 November 2013

## Binge listen

*v.* To listen to music, podcasts, or other audio content compulsively or excessively.

**Example.** I don’t listen to every episode every time they come out, but there are a few podcasts that I’ll load up on and then **binge listen** to when I’m in the mood.

—Anthony Bergen, “Are there any podcasts you listen to regularly?”, Dead Presidents, 4 November 2013

## Parcel mullet

*n.* A lawn that is short and well-maintained in the front of a house, but overgrown and wild in the back.

**Example.** Anyway, be on the lookout for **parcel mullets** as you peruse our Delray/Boynton neighbourhoods and please share any findings...lol.

—Peggy Moran Draper, “A new and funny real-estate term”, Delray Beach Real Estate, 12 August 2013

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## “We need to integrate them into everyday living by imparting life skills”

*Mukul Chandra Goswami, 57, Guwahati, rehabilitates people with mental disorders*



Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

Colourful block-printed *Mekhla chadar*, rugs, folders in ethnic hand-woven cloth, decorative candles, earthen *diya* and jute products are lined up in Ability, a small shop tucked away on VIP Road in Guwahati. With every item crafted by the mentally impaired under the Sheltered Employment Concept initiated by Ashadeep—an organisation working for their welfare—the shop, set up in 2011, has enabled over 90 members find a livelihood. Today, they earn a regular stipend of ₹ 2,000 per month, thus supplementing their family income and in certain cases even becoming primary breadwinners. “We aim to provide psychosocial rehabilitation to individuals who are mentally impaired or disabled,” says 57 year-old **Mukul Chandra Goswami**, founder secretary of Ashadeep, who was awarded the Padma Shri recently. “The focus is on trying to reduce the impact and burden of mental disorders on the lives of both patients and families.” Launched in 1996 by Goswami and his wife Anjana, 54, along with another couple Kabin and Mandira Bezbarua, who are no more, Ashadeep began in a modest manner from the Goswami residence. Today, Ashadeep has a halfway home for residential rehabilitation, an outdoor clinic for treatment and a helpline for those in

emotional distress, besides running Navachetana, a programme for rehabilitation of homeless women with mental illness. Launched in 2005, Navachetana has so far been able to reunite over 437 of the 481 homeless women found in Assam with their families in various parts of India. Spurred by the success of Navachetana, the Assam government joined hands with Ashadeep in 2013 to launch Udayan, a programme to rehabilitate mentally disturbed homeless men in the state. So far, four of the 23 men rescued under the scheme have been successfully reunited with their families. The genesis of Ashadeep lies in the trials and tribulations the Goswamis underwent when Mukul’s sister Nilakshi was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1981. Unable to find a rehabilitation programme closer home, they repeatedly travelled to NIMHANS in Bengaluru for almost 15 years before Mukul decided to quit his job as a banker and start an organisation to reach out to people in his own state with holistic mental healthcare. “During the treatment, we discovered that Nilakshi was as functional as any of us,” Anjana recalls. “It made us realise that the rehabilitation of the mentally ill is as important as their treatment.”

—Tapati Baruah Kashyap



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