

harmony

MAY 2016 ₹ 40

celebrate age

The magazine for silver citizens

PROACTIVE

Microfinance man

CHANDRA SHEKHAR GHOSH

HEALTH

**PREVENTING DIABETIC
NEUROPATHY**

FOOTSTEPS

**MENAKA P P BORA IN STEP WITH
DANCER-MOTHER INDIRA**

SPIRITUAL SOJOURN AT UDUPI

SILVERS GOT TALENT

RENAL-FRIENDLY DIET

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Understanding INDIA



Dabboo Ratnani

Sustainable social policies can't be built on thin air—they need to be backed by comprehensive research and understanding of the people they wish to benefit. That's why the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) is not just a good idea, but an imperative.

Conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of Union Health and Family Welfare and jointly funded by the Ministry, the United States' National Institute on Ageing, and the United Nations Population Fund – India, this mammoth study will track the health and socioeconomic conditions of 60,000 Indians over the age of 45 for at least 25 years (*see 'Orbit'*).

To understand the importance of LASI, we need to look at the very nature of a longitudinal study. What makes it unique is the timeline—such a study observes the same subjects multiple times over many years. This enables researchers to track and determine patterns, connect events, gauge trends, predict changes and establish validity. The biggest advantage, of course, is the sheer amount of data they collect. Consequently, information collected through such a study focused on ageing can

prove invaluable across a spectrum of sectors—from health to finance, assistive technology to housing.

In fact, one of the biggest stumbling blocks in Harmony's journey to reflect the experience of Indian silvers, address their concerns and highlight their potential has been the lack of data available, the absence of research and surveys, the paucity of India-specific studies to guide and inform us. LASI will address this lacuna to a great extent.

Of course, the benefits will not be seen overnight. But this process, though long by its very nature, will build awareness and understanding; informing us of the realities of silvers, catalysing policies and initiatives that address these realities, and provoking a greater dialogue on the ageing experience in a rapidly silvering country. This, indeed, is good news.

Tina Ambani

A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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'WHERE YOU LEAD...'

Vimala Kannan runs an early intervention centre for the mentally challenged in Chennai

GIFT OF GIVING

Dr Ramanjaneyulu nurtures special children in his school in Secunderabad

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Total number of pages in this issue of Harmony-Celebrate Age, including covers: 84

पूरे हुए वादे,
अब हैं नये इरादे



Your grievances will now be
closely monitored at
the highest level in the Government

Country's first-ever Integrated Portal,
jansunwai.up.nic.in for prompt, effective and
transparent redressal of the people's
grievances launched
by

Shri Akhilesh Yadav
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

On the personal initiative of Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Akhilesh Yadav, an integrated grievance redressal mechanism, 'Jan-Sunwai', has been developed, through which disposal of the complaints, received from the Chief Minister's Office, District Magistrate Office, Superintendent of Police Office, Tehsil Diwas and also online complaints will be salvaged. For any kind of grievance redressal using this system, the facility of applying online in the office of District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police will be available from 25th January, 2016 and in other state level offices from 20th February, 2016.



Sallient features of the portal

- Your complaints/grievances and applications will be electronically sent to the concerning officers/departments through e-marking, which will speed up the process of disposal of complaints.
- You will be able to send your complaint and application online from your home, which will not only save you from visiting any office or department, but also save you from unnecessary running from pillar to post.
- You can view the status of your complaint made through the Chief Minister's office, office of District Magistrate, Office of Superintendent of Police, Tehsil Diwas, Jan Suvidha/Lokvani centre or online on the portal at any given time.
- The complainant will be informed through SMS at every level including registration, forwarding, disposal etc.
- Facility of viewing the disposal report on the portal has also been made available to the complainant from transparency point of view.
- Complainant will be able to send reminder through the portal itself to the concerning officers, in case the grievance is not redressed within the stipulated time frame.
- In future, the complaints received through other departments/sources will also be disposed off using this portal.
- The Chief Minister's office will closely monitor disposal of the complaints received through the portal.

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column one

This month's cover feature strikes very close to home. With a large part of the past three years spent caring for an ailing parent, my family has grappled with multiple challenges, such as making the home care-friendly and bringing in medical equipment, changing diet and lifestyle patterns, helping the patient cope with realities and transitions, and dealing with caregiver fatigue. However, the most acute is the search for a reliable caregiver. To find someone trustworthy and empathetic, professional and punctual is hard enough. Then, there's the X factor—ability to connect with the patient, in the absence of which all the earlier attributes become irrelevant. These challenges are echoed in homes across India, as we explore in "Who Cares?" While home-based healthcare options are slowly emerging in India, especially in major cities, there is still a wide gap between demand and delivery to be addressed.

Elsewhere, inspiration abounds in the form of silvers who take on challenges with aplomb and commitment, across diverse fields. Proactive Chandra Shekhar Ghosh's journey from humble beginnings to establish Bandhan Bank is the quintessential lesson in the power of self-belief. And the efforts of Indira P P Bora, whose footsteps are being so admirably followed by daughter Menaka, to take the ancient dance ritual of Sattriya to the world are testament to the strength of legacy and tradition.

Other highlights include columnist Raj Kanwar's memories of Nehru from a gentler era and a journey to Malpe and Udupi, a land of myths and miracles, which will leave you reflecting upon deeper truths. Enjoy.
—Arati Rajan Menon

I enjoyed reading the April 2016 issue of *Harmony-Celebrate Age*. I liked the magazine and its contents very much. Needless to say, Kiran Nagarkar is a favorite author. Also, Lansdowne is one of my favourite spots. I have gone through most of the articles including your detailed reporting on the Chan-apatna craftsmen working on the age-old tradition of making toys. It is so fascinating; I wish the Government and agencies take more active interest in promoting the craft.

Sumanta Bhowmick
New Delhi

I was at the steering of my car in the queue at the toll booth when I noticed that the toll collector was slow and cautious in carrying out his duties. He would count cash twice before returning change to his customers. Therefore, the queue moved slowly. I wondered at his cautiousness—in my mind, it had more to do with fear of failure. This made me think of us Indians as a people. We are influenced by the nature of our upbringing. We are timid and low on self-confidence and this reflects in our behaviour as we grow older. The country has predominantly been poor and hence had always seen the influence and superiority of other people (foreigners). The environment across the community has always evolved around this, owing to which courage as a quality is not groomed. Today, when I look at the place India commands in the global arena, and see the economy grow, I feel confident of an imminent change. The younger generation that reads about such success stories and witnesses similar ones around them develops a feeling of courage and confidence. This may lead to the disappearance of our fear of risk and failure.

Manoj Kabre
Bengaluru



As a neuro-physiotherapist based in Mumbai, I find this to be one of the best magazines for senior citizens. Stories featured here provide emotional support to seniors who have lost hope. I find that it motivates them to live their lives as fully as they did when they were young.

Kapil Dongre
Mumbai

A recent report on 'Health in India' by the National Survey Sample notes that there are 1,033 women to 1,000 men in the 60-plus demographic, going by the 2011 Census data. This is an interesting phenomenon for a country infamous for female foeticide and mistreatment of women in general. This pattern is being termed the 'feminisation of ageing'. However, old age sicknesses and financial concerns plague the lives of single elderly women in India, especially owing to their financial illiteracy. A majority of female silvers depend on others for their living. It is tough for them to be left to their own devices for the first time at such a late stage in life and survive. This ratio of elderly women to elderly men is something the Government should take into consideration when developing welfare schemes.

Satish Mirchandani
Jabalpur

inside

P9: Defy your age

P20: The call of the wild

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



▶ MEDIA WATCH

ROLE MODEL

With confidence to burn, this former PE teacher sent in a job application to a popular outerwear company. Now, 81 year-old Ásdís Karlsdóttir is the star of Icelandic company 66° North's latest ad campaign! "It's been a real adventure for an old lady," she tells website *icelandmonitor.mbl.is*. "It was really fun, something different. I guess people have always thought of me as a little different. I don't drive a car and recently I bought a baby pram to go grocery shopping because I don't want to bother people to drive me to the supermarket."

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

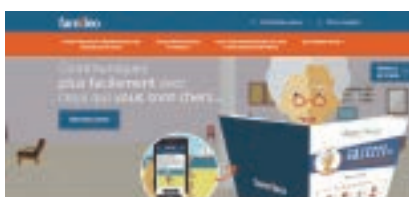
The social network is growing. According to researchers at Penn State University, **silvers are Facebook's fastest growing demographic.** Other than the need to stay connected to family, get back in touch with old friends and communicate with like-minded people, they found that curiosity is another motivation for silvers to sign up. The silvers featured in their study, published in journal *Computers in Human Behaviour*, visited Facebook 2.46 times a day and stayed on the site for a little over 35 minutes each day; they believe that simple and convenient interface tools will enable social media sites to attract even more elder users and motivate them to stay online longer. "Those who are motivated by social bonding are more likely to use the Like button, which shows the importance of simplicity in interface design for senior citizens," S Shyam Sundar, a professor at the university, tells news agency IANS. "The Like button is about as simple as you can get. Also, surveillance is the idea that you're checking out what people are up to. This is something that many older adults do. They want to see how their kids are doing and, especially, what their grandchildren are doing!"



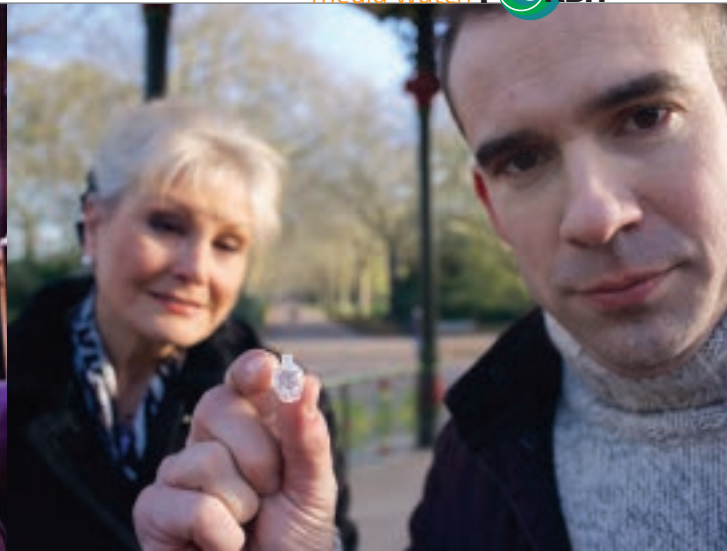
TIMELESS AGELESS

If you love your 80s music, chances are you've seen Billy Joel croon *Uptown girl* to **Christie Brinkley**. Over three decades later, at the age of 62, the supermodel continues to turn heads. To learn what makes her tick, check out *Timeless Beauty: Over 100 Tips, Secrets, and Shortcuts to Looking Great* (Grand Central Life & Style). While her go-tos include yoga, cardio and a vegan diet, she asserts, "I really believe attitude plays a huge part in how you feel." You can buy the book in both Kindle (₹ 675) and hardcover formats (starting at ₹ 1,520) at www.amazon.in

Turning heads @ 62



Facebook in a book: Two French friends have thought up a fantastic idea to bring the joys of the Internet to lonely, tech-challenged silvers. Famileo (www.famileo.com) is a service that compiles a magazine from all the posts, messages and photos of a family on a social media site and delivers it regularly to silvers at their home or care facility. All silvers need to do is sign up for the service. Super like!



Photographs by Robert Hollingworth

Show and tell

Can you predict ageing? Or prevent it? These are just some of the gazillion-dollar questions a new BBC series, ***How to Stay Young***, seeks to answer. Hosts 71 year-old journalist Angela Rippon and 37 year-old infectious disease specialist Dr Chris van Tulleken travel the world to investigate how much of the way we age is genetic and how much relates to our lifestyle. Here are seven key learnings from the show, according to website *bt.com*:

1 An easy test could be a powerful predictor of longevity. Sit down on the ground without using your hands, arms or knees, and stand up the same way. To score, start with 10 points and lose a point every time you use a hand or knee, or a half point if you wobble. If you score 8-10 you'll lead a long healthy life, 6-7.5 and your chances drop by half, and so on. The silver lining: a low score can be improved with physical exercise.

2 After smoking, stress and weight play the biggest role in ageing. Valuable stress-busters include yoga, meditation, exercise and 'me' time.

3 Eating more high-resistance starch can help reduce heart-damaging internal fat. High-resistance starch is found in pulses like lentils and chickpeas. While scientists are developing drugs to help reduce internal fat, diet and exercise are your best bets.

4 Saying no to meat helps. According to one study, overall mortality is reduced by a quarter for vegans compared to meat eaters and they're half as likely to get heart disease. Animal protein stimulates an important growth hormone but, over time, the same hormone speeds up ageing.

5 Building muscle mass is essential. A study contends that dancing is more effective than repetitive cardio at the gym.

6 Having a dog around can help lower stress and battle hypertension. People performed better at a stressful mental arithmetic test (and their blood pressure was lower) when their dogs were in the room.

7 Scientists are actually developing anti-ageing drugs. One drug being developed mimics the effects of Laron Syndrome, which decreases growth rate.



SILVER WORLD

Welcome to the silver world. According to *An Aging World: 2015*, a report by the US Census Bureau and the National Institute of Aging (NIA), the current population of elders will double by 2050. Today, the population of silvers over 65 constitutes 8.5 per cent (617 million) of people worldwide; that number is expected to jump to nearly 17 per cent (1.6 billion) by 2050. "People are living longer, but that does not necessarily mean that they are living healthier," says Richard J Hodes, director of the NIA, in a media release. "The increase in our ageing population presents many opportunities and several public health challenges we need to prepare for." Here are some highlights of the report:

Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over:

2015: 8.5%



2050: 16.7%



Global life expectancy at birth will grow almost eight years from 68.6 years in 2015 to 76.2 years in 2050.

x2

Asia's population of silvers over 65 is expected to more than double from under 8 per cent in 2015 to 18.8 per cent by 2050.



The global population of the oldest old (people over 80) is expected to more than triple from 126.5 million in 2015 to 446.6 million in 2050.



By 2020, the number of young children and older people as a percentage of the global population will both be around 9 per cent. After that, childhood rates will decline as elder rates grow.

62%

By 2050, less than 20 per cent of the world's older population will live in developed countries, with 62 per cent living in Asia. In comparison, 6.6 per cent will live in North America.



Older people are working longer in many developed countries, but many more older people are working in low-income countries.

More than 90 per cent of the older population receives a pension in more developed countries such as Japan, the US, Australia and Italy. However, public pensions cover less than a third of the older population in China and a tenth of the older population in India.



FUND FOR THE FUTURE

It was a promise made last year. And as media reports confirm, the Centre has made good on its word to set up a **welfare fund to utilise unclaimed money to benefit silvers**. Estimated to be over ₹ 9,000 crore, the amount, which has been languishing in PPF, employees' provident fund and

small savings schemes, will now be repurposed to provide silvers better financial and medical security and a better quality of life. The money is expected to be used to fund schemes related to pension, healthcare, health insurance, welfare of elderly widows, old-age homes, day care for elders, and ageing-related research. The Government has

already released a notification directing public institutions to assess unclaimed amounts and transfer them—after a rigorous process to ensure there are no claimants—to the 'Senior Citizen Welfare Fund' before 1 March every year. The fund will be set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Study time

This is long overdue. In March, the Government launched the **Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI)**—the largest study on the elderly, it will track the health and socioeconomic conditions of 60,000 Indians over the age of 45 for at least 25 years, and report on how growing old affects the country. Undertaken by the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, in collaboration with the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Southern California, LASI is being conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of Union Health and Family Welfare and is jointly funded by the ministry, the United States' National Institute on Ageing, and the United Nations Population Fund - India. "The importance of the study derives from the increasing portion of elderly population in the country," health secretary B P Sharma tells media. "The study will provide valuable data on their health needs and issues faced by them given changing social structures, and help us draw policy tools to address their issues."



A GENTLE SHIFT: Moving house is never easy and downsizing your home in the silver years can be truly daunting. That's why we love this idea so much. American Amy Wright in Northern Kentucky has created reSettled Life, a 'senior transition and estate sales' company that helps silvers plan, pack, move, unpack and resettle in their new home. We urge Indian entrepreneurs to visit www.resettledlife.com and take a cue.



BON VOYAGE!

The Railways has increased its reservation quota for silvers by 50 per cent with effect from 1 April—now, there will be between 80 and 90 reserved berths for you in a train.

HOME improvement



A look into phase one of the ageing-in-place laneway house prototype

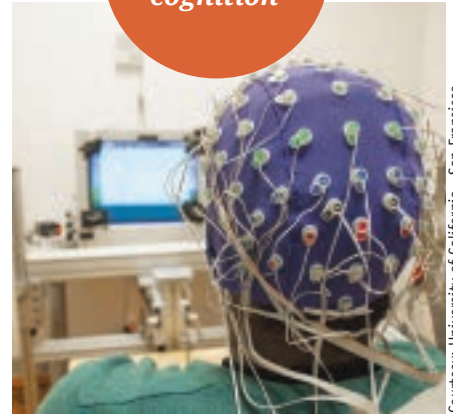
Courtesy: Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary

Active ageing requires an enabling environment. To facilitate 'ageing in place', the University of Calgary has embarked upon a multidisciplinary project to design and test a series of house prototypes. As newspaper *The Globe and Mail* tells us, the first prototype, unveiled last year, is a 400-sq-ft home with features like handrails, lit flooring, easy-access storage and reconfigurable furniture that are aesthetically pleasing as well as technology such as a smart screen with memory prompts on the refrigerator and a webcam for remote doctor consultations. "Grab bars and ramps are things which are considered essential in seniors' homes but they're ugly and they don't make you feel good," John Brown, associate dean of the University's Faculty of Environmental Design, tells

the paper. "We wanted to achieve an invisible prosthetic with this house; or at least a prosthetic with a high design value. A home isn't a medical facility; it's a domestic space. There's a level of dignity that people shouldn't have to give up in old age."

Based on feedback, the team has launched its second prototype that will be even 'smarter'; the tech add-ons include a weighing scale built into the floor to alert caregivers on rapid weight gain or loss, movement sensors on the floor to warn of any change in daily routine, and 'plug-and-play' modules for medical equipment like oxygen and dialysis. The third prototype is expected by the end of the year, by which time the team will aim to take these homes to the market, while trying to keep them, as Brown puts it, "affordable and attainable".

gaming
to better
cognition



Courtesy: University of California - San Francisco

Game on!

IT'S TIME to take your turn on your grandchild's gaming device. **Dr Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist at the University of California - San Francisco, who studies the impact of video games on the ageing brain, has helped develop his own: NeuroRacer.**

As website *oregonlive.com* reports, the game, which requires players to multitask by driving and identifying signs at the same time, has been proven to improve cognition. The game is very responsive to performance and keeps scaling its challenge accordingly, Gazzaley explains on the website. So as a player gets better, the game gets harder. "We know from many years of research that older adults are challenged on tasks that involve multitasking," he says. "We could see that same finding in the game. When they attempted to multitask, they did not do as well as the 20 year-olds. But after one month of game play we were able to improve their ability to multitask in the game even to the 20 year-old level. We also found that other cognitive control abilities, like attention and working memory, also improved significantly. This encourages us to advance to the next scientific validation and hopefully develop real products and tools that can help older adults and other individuals who are suffering from deficits in attention and cognition." To learn more about his work, go to www.gazzaleylab.ucsf.edu/neuroscience-projects/neuroracer/



THE HEART APP

Available for: iOS 6.1 or later, Android 2.2 and up

What it does: This new app developed by cardiologist Rajeev Rathi from Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, New Delhi, helps you determine the warning signs of a heart attack. The app asks users questions related to their concerns about a heart attack and based on the answers, it shows if the person is at risk. User-friendly and operable in Hindi, the app aims to minimise fatality through early intervention and spread awareness. However, as the app is quick to point out, it cannot replace the clinical judgement of a doctor.

After installation: Once installed the app opens up to two tabs: 'Warnings of heart attack' and 'Could my discomfort be due to a heart problem?' Clicking on the latter opens a page with questions and multiple choices for answers. The questions include sequential procedure queries that heart specialists follow while diagnosing a patient. Once all the questions have been answered, there is a flash that tells you whether the situation is urgent, high, low, unlikely or indeterminable as well as a detailed conclusion with recommendations on what you should do. Additionally, there is a 'Heart Info' tab that gives you comprehensive information on heart attacks, warning signs, what to do in an emergency, and treatment and prevention strategies.

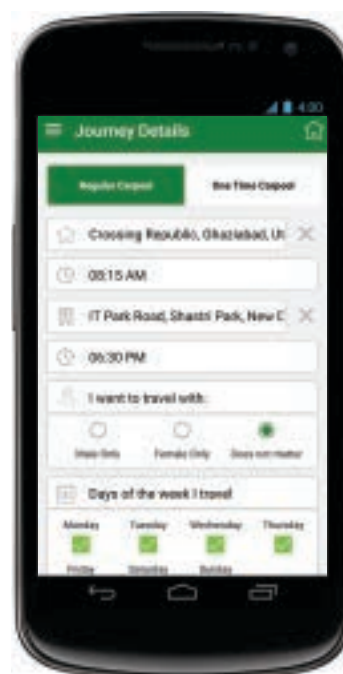
Web-based app **Paratisaad** has been launched by the Mumbai Government Railway Police (GRP) to facilitate quick action in case a commuter faces a security issue. Integrated with the WhatsApp application, all online complaints filed by commuters are immediately delivered to a WhatsApp group of GRP officers, who then ensure immediate action. The complaint can be filed in Hindi, English and Marathi; there's also the option of uploading pictures. The link, helpline.mumbairypolice.gov.in, can be accessed from any browser and is also available on the Mumbai GRP website.

POOCHO CARPOOL

Available for: Android 2.3.3 and up

What it does: With the Delhi government apparently determined to regularise its 'odd-even' traffic scheme, its Transport Ministry has introduced this app to make life a little easier for commuters. The aim is to help you find a carpool option in a radius of 1 km to 5 km. There's also a chat feature to converse with prospective car poolers without sharing phone numbers. The app is simple and safe.

After installation: The home-page is creative and eye catching; the first step is to fill in your personal details, including name, age, gender, email id and an identification card detail. The second step is related to the car—if you have a car, you feed in the car number and type and confirm that you have a valid driving license, insurance, and valid pollution-under-control certificate. Next come details about the journey—whether you wish to carpool on a regular basis or if this is for one-time use. Then, you feed in pick up point and time, destination point and time, which days of the week you will be travelling, and your preferences regarding the gender of your fellow traveller. Following this, the app gives you a list of prospective people to carpool with, with the warning that a vehicle should not have more than four people and the recommendation that you carpool with people you know rather than strangers. All that's left is to send an invitation and message to carpool to the people you select. A useful feature is that the app lets you inform your fellow travellers when you're on your way or if you can't make it on a particular day.





Silvers got talent

It was a grand day for Mumbai's silvers as they took the stage at Umang 2016, the city's biggest talent show for elders. On 16 April, over 100 participants, glittery and glamorous in their performance costumes, gathered at the Birla Matoshree Sabhagriha in south Mumbai to participate in the 8th annual show presented by the Rotary Club of Mumbai - Nariman Point, Rotaract Club of Rizvi Law College and Inner Wheel Club of Mumbai - Nariman Point, in association with Silver Innings Foundation, an NGO working with senior citizens.

Photographs courtesy: Silver Innings Foundation



Clockwise from top left: The group from Nirmalaniketan dancing to *Me ahe koli*; students of Nana Nani School for seniors performing traditional Maharashtrian folk dance Lezim; group song by Nana Nani School; a participant from Family Welfare Agency performing to *Bum bum bole*

Opposite page: Hansa and Bhaskar Mehta dancing to a fusion of romantic numbers; 77 year-old Aruna Patnakar in her rendition of Madhuri Dixit's *Maar Dala*

“Unlike other talent shows, there are no prizes for winning the top three positions at Umang. Everybody is a winner,” says Sailesh Mishra of Silver Innings Foundation who co-hosted the show with his colleague Hira Mehta.

With women participants outnumbering the men by a large margin, the colours, grace and beauty shone outright. As 70 year-old Shanti Garewal danced scintillatingly to *Chikni chameli* and 77 year-old Aruna Patnakar dedicated her steps to Madhuri Dixit, the audience comprising proud children and grandchildren wolf-whistled at the energetic silvers and danced along.

“We are seeing a shift in the attitude of our seniors. Women were once not so keen to thrust themselves in the limelight, but it seems senior women now want to share the spotlight or even upstage the men!” expresses Mishra who, along with his co-host, couldn’t help but join in several of the performances on stage.

From solo vocals and a *jugalbandi* performance to a one-act play, Koli dance, Maharashtrian Lezim and a romantic performance by Hansa and Bhaskar Mehta, among other thrilling performances, Umang 2016 was a grand success.

Get a patch of green. According to a new study by Harvard University, having access to a garden or living near a park or within reach of the countryside helps people live longer. This research of the link between vegetation and mortality rates, published in journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, revealed that those who live in the urban jungle had a 12-per-cent higher death rate than those with access to green spaces.



Then: Tennis Ball Now: Holder



RECYCLING FACTS

- Tennis balls are basically made of rubber covered in a layer of wool or nylon felt. About 300 million balls are produced in a year, which can contribute to 32.3 million pound of waste worldwide.
- Historically, tennis ball recycling has not existed. However, in 2015, three companies—Advanced Polymer Technology, Ace Surfaces and reBounces—joined to create a recycling system. Recycled tennis balls are now used to create surfaces for tennis courts.

Have the grandchildren left a bunch of tennis balls lying around the house? Here's an easy way to reuse them. Things you require: tennis ball, marker, sharp knife, suction cup or Velcro, glue, and 'googly eyes' or other craft material to decorate. The first step is to mark a line at the lower half of the ball where you would like to make a cut for the mouth. Very cautiously, cut the mouth with a sharp knife and poke a hole at the other side of the ball.

Make sure it's wide enough for a suction cup or Velcro, as you will mount the ball through this and insert the suction cup. Use the glue to decorate the ball. One option is to stick a pair of googly eyes there; else, you can stick other craft materials like sequin, glitter, etc—the idea is to give it some character and have a little fun. Now, mount the ball on your fridge or wall and use it to hold a pen, keys or even notes inside its mouth.

MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. MAKE A BIG HOLE AT THE TOP OF THE BALL, INSERT SOME DIRT AND USE IT AS A POT FOR SMALL PLANTS. MAKE SURE TO KEEP IT IN A PLACE WHERE WATER DRIPPING WON'T BE A PROBLEM.
2. MAKE A MOUTH IN THE BALL, CUT AND ATTACH A ZIPPER TO IT—YOUR TENNIS BALL IS NOW READY TO BE USED AS A COIN PURSE.



Photographs by iStock

Heartbreaking loss

This cliché might just be true—losing the one you love can actually break your heart. According to a study by researchers from Aarhus University, Denmark, **people who lose a partner are at increased risk of atrial fibrillation, a condition where the heart starts beating abnormally.** This increases the risk of stroke and heart failure. The researchers collected data from 89,000 people diagnosed with atrial fibrillation between 1995 and 2014. Of these, 17,478 had lost their partner. It was found that the risk was highest eight to 14 days after the loss, following which it declined gradually. It was also found that people above 60 were more than twice at risk, as were people whose partner's death was deemed to be unexpected. People with partners who were healthy in the month before they died had a 57-per-cent higher risk of developing an irregular heartbeat. The study was published in the UK medical journal *Open Heart*.

A non-invasive solution

THIS MAY SOUND LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A SCI-FI THRILLER BUT IT'S DEADLY SERIOUS FOR PATIENTS OF PROSTATE CANCER. SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND THAT **STEREOTACTIC BODY RADIATION THERAPY (SBRT) MIGHT JUST BE A VIABLE NON-INVASIVE ALTERNATIVE TO SURGERY IN THE TREATMENT OF PROSTATE CANCER.** SBRT INVOLVES SENDING HIGH-DOSE RADIATION INTO THE BODY AT VARIOUS ANGLES THAT INTERSECT AT THE PROSTATE. THIS ALLOWS A CONCENTRATED DOSE TO REACH THE TUMOUR AND LIMITS THE RADIATION DOSE TO SURROUNDING TISSUES. THE FIVE-YEAR CLINICAL TRIAL WAS MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL BUT FOCUSED ON THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTRE IN DALLAS. THE RESEARCHERS FOUND AN ASTONISHING 98.6-PER-CENT CURE RATE, WHICH CAN BE COMPLETED IN JUST FIVE TREATMENTS VERSUS THE CURRENT CONVENTIONAL FORM OF RADIATION THAT INVOLVES 44 ROUNDS OF TREATMENT OVER NINE WEEKS. THE STUDY INVOLVED 91 PATIENTS DIAGNOSED WITH STAGE 1 OR STAGE 2 PROSTATE CANCER. PARTICIPANTS WERE FOLLOWED FOR FIVE YEARS AND ONLY ONE OF THEM EXPERIENCED A RECURRENCE OF CANCER.

(Enlarged prostate and advances in treatment: Page 19)



HELLO SUNSHINE!

There's something that actually could set your heart racing—and, unexpectedly, it's sunlight. Or, in its absence, Vitamin D supplements. A recent study by researchers from the University of Leeds in the UK found that **a daily dose of Vitamin D can improve heart function in people with chronic heart failure.** They say that as seniors make less Vitamin D3 in response to sunlight than youngsters, heart patients are generally deficient in Vitamin D3. This study included 160 heart failure patients receiving conventional treatment. For a year, half were given Vitamin D3 supplements and the other half received a placebo. Cardiac ultrasounds were used to measure the amount of blood pumped with each heartbeat. It was found that this rose in participants who received the supplements.

Testosterone to the rescue: It's known that testosterone levels decline as men age. Those who try to do something about it may be doing themselves another favour—if they are prone to heart disease, that is. A study by researchers from the Intermountain Medical Centre Heart Institute in Utah in the US found that **testosterone therapy helped elderly men with low testosterone levels and pre-existing coronary artery disease reduce risk of major cardiovascular events** like stroke, heart attacks and death. The study found that those who did not undergo testosterone therapy were 80 per cent more likely to suffer a cardiovascular event. The results were presented at the American College of Cardiology's 65 Annual Scientific Session.

SEEING IS BELIEVING To cure the eyes, look within. No, literally. Researchers from the School of Science at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis in the US have found that **stem cells derived from human skin cells can be turned into retinal ganglion cells (RGCs) to prevent or cure glaucoma**, a condition that can cause blindness. The research could potentially help in the treatment of many types of optic nerve injuries. The scientists took skin cells from volunteers with an inherited form of glaucoma and from volunteers without the disease, and genetically reprogrammed them to become pluripotent stem cells, a cell taken from a tissue and genetically modified to behave like a stem cell. They then directed these cells to become RGCs, which serve as the connection between the eye and the brain and send information from one to the other for interpretation. Glaucoma is the most common disease that affects RGCs. There was a rider, though—when glaucoma patients' skin cells were turned into RGCs, the cells became unhealthy and started dying at a much faster rate.



Photographs by iStock

PULSE POINT

It might seem extreme until you know why, but the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation has designated 2016 as the year of pulses! According to a new study, **eating three or four cups (130 gm) of pulses like chickpeas, beans, peas and lentils can lead to weight loss**. Also, researchers from Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Canada, found that including pulses in your diet can not only help you shed weight, it can help you keep it off too—and you know just how tough that is.



INTERVIEW

Dr Sanjay Pandey, consultant, urology and renal transplantation, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, discusses enlarged prostate, a common issue among silver men, and its treatment

What is an enlarged prostate?

The prostate gland is a reproductive organ in men. It is the size of a walnut and located at the base of the bladder and surrounds the urinary passage or urethra. An enlarged prostate, or benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH), is a common age-related problem in men. The prostate gland gradually enlarges as one grows older and can eventually block the urinary passage.

What are the symptoms of an enlarged prostate?

The symptoms that arise out of a progressively enlarging prostate relate to obstruction in the flow of urine—straining while passing urine, decreased force and calibre, incomplete emptying—which results in over-activity of the bladder. Increased frequency of urination by day and night, urgency to relieve oneself, occasional leakage and susceptibility to infections with high residuals in bladder are common symptoms, which can finally lead to retention or complete blockage.

What are the treatments?

Enlarged prostate can be treated both medically and surgically. It is treated with medicines if detected early, owing to uncontrollable passing of drops of urine or if it is found during a health check-up through sonography. But when patients come in late with an enlarged prostate that has led to retention, a catheter is inserted for immediate relief and, if conditions permit, surgery can be conducted to treat the problem completely.

Transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), or the endoscopic removal of enlarged prostate, is a surgery through which we remove the enlarged part of the prostate and leave the outer shell, or capsule, just like scooping out a coconut. (The outer shell is where most of the cancers develop, so for cancer of the prostate the entire gland is removed.) This creates a clear channel through which the patient can pass urine. However, when it

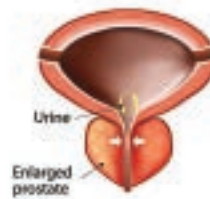
this can be used as a permanent solution to enlarged prostate.

However, healing can be slow in the elderly. I treated a 105 year-old patient, Mahant Girija Dutt Giri, from a village near Kutch recently. With no medical care for years, he gradually went into complete retention. A suprapubic catheter was inserted because one could not be inserted locally owing to complete blockage; he insisted on a cure and agreed to an operation. We assessed his fitness and found that he had maintained his body, so we went ahead with the surgery. He took longer than usual to recover, but now he tells me that he feels like a boy again!

Normal prostate



Enlarged prostate



“If the problem is picked up early, the patient can be treated and even cured with medical management alone. Patients who don’t undergo medical management end up in surgery because their symptoms are progressive”

comes to surgery, the patient should be fit in all aspects, from the heart to many other organs.

An alternative to surgery is the suprapubic catheter, where a tube is inserted through the abdomen, bypassing the obstructed area, and the bladder is punctured. This causes the bladder to decompress, expelling urine. This catheter is inserted when the patient requires immediate relief;

What are the advances in the treatment of an enlarged prostate?

Twenty years ago, there was only surgery: open or telescopic. Treatment has now advanced for prostate diseases, especially benign enlargement, which can be treated with medicine that acts only on the prostate zone. If the problem is picked up early, the patient can be treated and even cured with medical management alone. Patients who don’t undergo medical management end up in surgery because their symptoms are progressive. The problem here is, because there are medicines available, elderly people, or society, or doctors, prefer medicines to surgery. But that may not work out for everyone. If a patient has co-morbid factors where anaesthesia is not possible, he can definitely stay on the catheter. But, if a patient is fit, it would be wrong to deny him the right to get the best possible treatment.

Cat woman

Belinda Wright's office in Delhi is all about big cats. They're on pencils, coasters and mugs, and framed in dramatic poses on the walls. But this unusual décor only hints at her colossal body of work to protect the tiger in India.

Founder of the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), Wright was born in Kolkata in 1953. She has been instrumental in getting wildlife laws in India amended, is helping local communities to reduce their dependence on the forest and battling the biggest enemy of the tiger: poachers.

Wright is a highly decorated activist and an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Her first official recognition came in 2003 when she received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for "services to the protection of wildlife and endangered species in India"; most recently, she received the NDTV Indian of the Year 2015 award.

A love for nature is virtually in her genes. Wright's father Bob believed in giving and was associated with many charities and her mother Anne was a founder trustee of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), India. She grew up in Kolkata on a rambling home with a garden. "We had all kinds of pets, horses, dogs, a leopard, a tiger and a lion, and I have been obsessed with tigers for as long as I can remember. I couldn't imagine a world without them."

Recalling her first experience with 'conservation', she says, "The year was 1967 and there was a drought in Bihar. There was help for the people but my mother kept worrying about the animals. So she went with some people to the jungle. They got some drums and put water in them every day."

Wright started her career as a wildlife photographer in 1971 and took up many assignments with *National Geographic* magazine. She has co-authored five books and made 13 wildlife documentary films, winning two Emmy Awards for her 1984 National Geographic documentary *Land of the Tiger*.

It was her experiences as a photographer that kicked off a long-drawn battle against poachers. She spent a lot of time at Kanha National Park, where she exposed animal skins being sold. Wright has also worked extensively to expose the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horns and other wildlife



Courtesy: WPSI

products in China and Nepal, and was a member of the team that discovered the trade in big cat skins in Tibet in 2005.

Saddened by these goings-on and realising that enforcement was her calling, Wright set up WPSI in 1994. She moved to Delhi to be closer to policymakers and law makers. WPSI now has a dedicated army of 60 people driving change at the grassroots level in areas such as the Sunderbans where, for instance, a community project introduces the locals to alternative sources of livelihood. And in Odisha, WPSI works with forest authorities and a local NGO to keep poaching and human-elephant conflict in check. "We feel that poachers usually avoid areas where there is wildlife tourism. But sadly tourists often don't respect nature and think nothing of disturbing the animals and demanding loud music. We need to work hard at establishing responsible and sustainable wildlife tourism."

WPSI has hosted over 300 law enforcement and conservation workshops with forest and police officers in 17 states. "India's Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 is a good one but any law is only as good as its implementation," she points out. "In the past 22 years, at least 1,867 people have been accused of tiger poaching but only 89 people are known to have been convicted in just 28 court cases. Many of these cases took a decade or more to reach a conclusion. Through its legal training programme, WPSI aims to improve investigations, and the documentation and prosecution of wildlife court cases."

—Ambica Gulati



Pankaj Udhass



Pankaj Kapur

BIRTHDAYS

Former UK prime minister **Tony Blair** turns 63 on 6 May.

Writer **Nayantara Sehgal** turns 89 on 10 May.

Ghazal singer **Pankaj Udhass** turns 65 on 17 May.

Author **Ruskin Bond** turns 82 on 19 May.

American singer-songwriter and artist **Bob Dylan** turns 75 on 24 May.

Actor **Pankaj Kapur** turns 62 on 29 May.

Actor **Paresh Rawal** turns 66 on 30 May.

IN PASSING

Actor **Patty Duke**, who won an Oscar for playing Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*, died of sepsis from a ruptured intestine on 29 March. She was 69.

Veteran journalist and writer **Babu Bharadwaj** died of cardiac arrest on 30 March in Kozhikode. He was 68.

Myneni **Hari Prasad Rao**, considered the father and architect of the Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS), died on 5 April in Chennai. He was 88.



Prince

Satyanand Munjal, co-founder of the Hero Cycles group, passed away on 14 April at Model Town, Ludhiana. He was 99.

Pop music superstar **Prince Rogers Nelson**, popularly known as Prince, died on 21 April at his home in Paisley Park in Chanhassen, Minneapolis. He was 57.

MILESTONES

- Former Chief of Army Staff (COAS) **General (retd) Joginder Jaswant Singh** was awarded the highest French civilian honour, Officier de l' Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur (Officer of the Legion of Honour) on 12 April. He was honoured for his role in modernising the Indian Army, which led to robust exchanges between the Indian and French armies and paved the way for warmer ties between the two countries.
- The National Geoscience Award for Excellence 2014 was conferred upon **Prof Ashok Kumar Singhvi** for his outstanding contribution to the field of sedimentary technologies. President Pranab Mukherjee presented the awards at a function held in New Delhi on 5 April.
- In March, renowned Malayalam writer **M Sukumaran** was chosen for the C V Kunhiraman Literary Prize comprising ₹ 10,001 in cash, a citation, and a statuette designed by artist B D Dathan.

OVERHEARD

“I still feel young and seeing pictures of myself looking old surprise me as I don’t picture myself that way! Every birthday’s a big thing. There’s a certain shock to it. I’m in here, and then I’ll see a picture of myself and, you know, I’m old. And stuff happens. My hands get sore.... But the hair helps. And also I think that I have pretty good genes.”

—American actor
Christopher Walken,
73, in London
newspaper
The Guardian



iStock

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.

GIFT OF TEACHING

Early in my career, I worked with accounting and finance till I met a gentleman who was to alter my goals for the rest of my life. He was Mr C S Rao, who had retired from the State Bank of India and was a trainer at the bank's staff college in Hyderabad.

I met Mr Rao when he was training the staff at the company where I was working. I grew increasingly fascinated with his intellect and work. Finally, I quit my job and threw in my lot with him; together, we worked on training the staff at many corporate companies. In 1995, Mr Rao entered into a franchise arrangement with an institute for spoken English in Chennai and here, too, we doggedly tried to raise the bar of spoken and written English for software aspirants.

This was a time when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were being promoted, one of the basic goals being 'education for all'. The sudden focus on education gave rise to the 'public-private partnership' (PPP) model in the field, which had been mooted by the Centre and the states.

I grew acquainted with the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) in India, and through them I was tasked with studying how far private enterprise could step in to help improve standards of education in India. The powers that be in the CfBT headquarters in the UK were suitably impressed and asked me if I would help set up CfBT in India. That's how CfBT came to India in 2003. While the CfBT Education Trust, UK, is a not-for-profit education consultancy and service organisation, CfBT Education Services (CfBTES) is its Indian arm that is helping raise standards in teaching and learning in schools here.

With our training sessions in government and 'affordable' private schools, we realised that all the stakeholders in education would have to be involved if we were to put into



Prasad strives to improve the standards of education in India

effect some innovative practices. So, in 2005-06, we began to involve parents, management, children and teachers. We focused our efforts on 'affordable private schools', which were actually small players who were neck-deep in debt, with very few resources; yet their efforts had to be appreciated. We have worked with 50 schools; 35 in Hyderabad, mostly in the old city and 15 in Chennai. The biggest challenge is 'teacher attrition'. Teachers are poorly paid and are willing to change schools for even ₹ 100 more.

My efforts at making changes continue as I feel every teacher should be conversant in good teaching methods, and that every school needs to nurture teachers and students in the best possible way. In rural schools, we use street plays and rallies to create awareness among parents about their children's right to quality education. We also use many techniques to draw in parents and get them involved in the education of their children.

I am proud to say that we have been able to increase teacher and student attendance as well as the quality of the midday meal served to the students. As for the organisa-

tion, CfbTES has been honoured as 'A Social Innovator in Education' by the NASSCOM Social Innovation Forum 2016. It was also awarded the Mphasis Education Grant in 2016.

These are only tangible markers in my journey in the field of education; the intangible rewards are many. I have worked with this organisation for 14 of my 56 years and plan to continue as long as I can.

—*Gudivaka Venkata Satyanarayana Prasad, Hyderabad*

BLIND FAITH

In Braille every dot has a meaning. One misplaced dot and you change the spelling and, at times, the meaning of the word. With few publications available in Braille, accuracy becomes important. I have taught over 200 people to read and write Braille. Together we have published several sorely needed textbooks, reference books and storybooks that have always been in short supply.

While growing up in a village in Chalisgaon, in Jalgaon district in Maharashtra, in the 1950s, I never imagined my life would turn out the way it has. I was seven years old when I contracted the dreaded smallpox, as a result of which I lost my sight. Only 2-5 per cent of people who get small pox have complications like blindness owing to corneal scarring—and I was one of them.

Naturally, this rendered me unfit for my family business of farming, and my parents decided it would be best for me to move to Nashik to study. From Nashik, I made my way to Mumbai and then to Pune in pursuit of an education.

Patil (right) donned the hat of a radio newscaster on Louis Braille's birth anniversary



Courtesy: Poona Blind Men's Association

I eventually ended up with a master's degree in sociology from Pune University in 1987 and was already teaching history and music in a blind school in Maharashtra's Beed district. Next, I was offered an opportunity to be a Braille instructor in Yerwada Central Prison in Pune.

The idea of working with convicts was intimidating but Mr T Sequira, the placement officer at the Poona Blind Men's Association, was very encouraging. He said I should view it as a challenge and that gave me all the courage I needed. I must say the convicts proved to be good learners and soon we had the presses churning out book after book, including many on financial subjects, which is hard to come by in Braille.

I have received some recognition and awards along the way, the first one being the Maharashtra Rajya Puraskar for outstanding work, in 1983. The Central Government followed it up with a similar award in 1991. I even secured the President's Correctional Service medal in 2001. I had joined the Poona Blind Men's association in 1982 and was on its managing committee. I was also associated with *Antaryoti* magazine for the visually impaired for over three decades, first as assistant editor for 25 years and then as editor for eight years. Along with this, I did some interesting things like raising funds for the Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan started by Baba Amte. I have been associated with rehabilitation of the visually impaired, a hospital for the blind, and a Braille library, among other projects.

On the personal front, I got married in 1980 and raised a family along with my wife who, by the way, is not visually impaired. We are grandparents now and live in a joint-family setup, in complete harmony, in Pune. I have four grandchildren, all of whom are more than willing to offer me support and accompany me wherever I want to go.

Most people I have met have been extremely encouraging including Mr Nitin Kelkar, director of All India Radio (AIR), who encouraged me to take on a radio newscast this year on Louis Braille's birth anniversary. The Pune Blind Men's Association had contacted AIR and I was selected to represent the association and read the news.

So, on 4 January, I did a newscast and, much to my delight, it was very well received. I received congratulatory calls all day and a handful of television channels also carried interviews and sound bites. One radio newscaster's wife even said she could not tell the difference between someone who was visually able and my performance, which was a huge compliment for me!

It's taken 62 long years from the farmlands of Chalisgaon to being a newsreader for a day—and they couldn't have been more enlightening.

—*Dhanraj Patil, Pune*



Love your kidney: Eating right can support renal health

I am 56 and suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure. I have a family history of kidney disease and would like to look after my kidneys through a healthy diet. Please suggest a few kidney-friendly foods and tell me what to avoid.

Kidney (renal) failure occurs when the kidneys cease to function normally. Statistically speaking, kidney function reduces by 10 per cent between the ages of 30 and 40 years. One should reduce the load on kidneys with age to prevent kidney disease.

Diet is the main tool to treat your problem. You can manage blood sugar levels, control your blood pressure and prevent kidney problems just by watching what you eat, when you eat and learning to manage your condition. You should talk to your doctor about having your blood tested for glucose levels, cholesterol and renal function (kidney function) on a regular basis. It is usually advisable for people like you to follow a very specific diet to slow the progression of the condition, alleviate symptoms and prevent nutrient deficiencies.

Dos and don'ts

- **Regular intake of fluids:** This is a must as fluids tend to evacuate toxins from the body. A moderate intake of tea and coffee is also recommended.
- **Cut out high-oxalate foods:** Foods with high oxalate content like spinach, beetroot, nuts and chocolate should be eaten in limited quantities as they can play a role in the formation of stones.

- **Restrict animal protein:** To prevent undesirable load on the kidneys, control the intake of animal protein to help minimise build-up of nitrogen-containing wastes (i.e. urea, which is the product of protein metabolism).
- **Maintain sodium and potassium balance:** Dietary intake of sodium and potassium needs to be limited.

Eating right

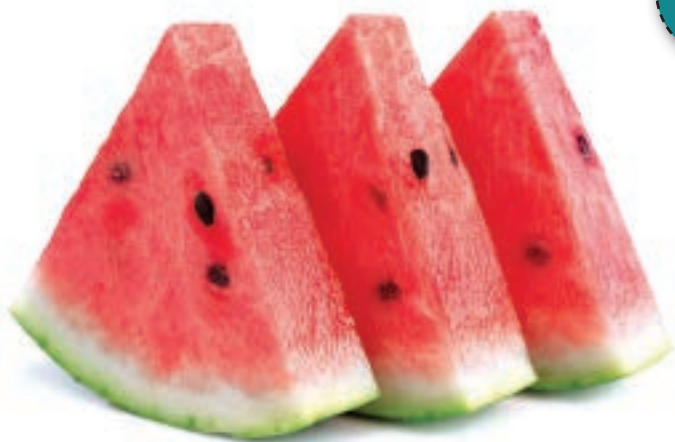
Thus, you need a well-balanced diabetic diet with low fat and low sodium, restricted protein and high fibre. A diet rich in wholegrain cereals, fruits and vegetables that provide a good amount of antioxidants, phytonutrients and fibre is recommended for prevention of hypertension and kidney problems, and promotion of cardiovascular health. Phytonutrients are naturally occurring protective chemicals found in foods of plant origin. People who consume a diet rich in fruits and vegetables have lower incidents of many disorders, including cardiovascular problems, diabetes and certain kidney disorders.

Additionally, foods you can take any time that are kidney-friendly include plain tea, *nimbu pani*, clear soup, plain aerated soda, vinegar, diluted *lassi*, fruits such as apple, orange, sweet lime, papaya, pear, watermelon, guava, *jamun* and tomato, and vegetables such as cucumber, radish, carrot, cabbage and capsicum.

Indeed, fruits and vegetables should form the basis of every diet. They are fat-free, low in sodium and provide essential nutrients such as Vitamin C, folate, fibre, antioxidants and phytochemicals. Evidence shows that eating at least four servings of kidney-friendly fruits and vegetables a day may help prevent development of cardiovascular diseases and cancer.



Photographs by iStock



READERS ASK

Is long-term use of artificial sweeteners such as saccharin and aspartame harmful to health?

Artificial sweeteners are chemical compounds that provide an intensely sweet flavour when used in minute amounts. Though their caloric content is negligible, it is advised to restrict the intake of these sugar substitutes to the minimum as most of them are made of saccharin and aspartame, which may harm your body in the long run. Ideally, only diabetics and people looking to lose weight are seen using artificial sweeteners as they help them cut down sugar intake. This, however, creates a paradoxical scenario as saccharin and aspartame-based sweeteners may, at times, lead to weight gain.

The scientific breakdown of this is as follows. Artificial sweeteners, as they claim, are indeed zero on calories (or negligible). This inadvertently causes the body to demand high-calorie foods to compensate for the deficit. Thus, one is found munching on high glycaemic index carbs and even trans fat. On one hand, their use in moderation won't seriously harm the body. On the other hand, continuous or long-term usage is counterproductive and is seen to be the cause of thyroid malfunctions, memory loss, hair loss, acidity, obesity, etc. Essentially, 1 tsp or 2 tsp of sugar a day may do you less harm than the sweeteners.

Foods to be taken in prescribed amount include wheat and gram flour, rice, beans, milk, yoghurt, paneer, chicken, fish and sweet fruits. Choose whole grains (complex carbohydrates) rather than refined. Foods to be avoided include organ meat (liver, kidney, heart, brain), sausages, sweets/cakes/pastries, ice-cream, puddings, mangoes, custard apple, raisins, grapes, *chikoo*, dates, dry fruits, nuts, potatoes, sweet potato, fried foods, pickles, *papad*, alcohol, refined flour and processed foods.

Benefits of kidney-friendly fruits and vegetables

- **Apple:** The skin of this refreshing fruit is an excellent source of fibre. A medium apple has about 47 calories.
- **Blueberries and cranberries:** These delicious fruits are rich in antioxidants and help prevent urinary tract infections. There are about 50 calories in 7/8 blueberries.
- **Kiwi fruit:** A medium kiwi fruit of 60 g has 29 calories and offers a good range of vitamins.
- **Melon:** This is rich in a form of carotene known to fight cancer. A slice of melon has 24 calories.
- **Pear:** A medium pear has about 60 calories and is rich in fibre and beneficial nutrients.
- **Pineapple:** This fruit contains a potent enzyme, bromelain, that is used to aid digestion, reduce inflammation and protect against cardiovascular diseases. A large one (80 g) has 33 calories.
- **Plum:** A medium plum has 20 calories. Plums are a good source of Vitamin C and potassium.
- **Watermelon:** A slice (200 g) of this refreshing fruit contains 62 calories with Vitamin C and some carotenoids.
- **Tomatoes:** They contain antioxidants, beta carotene, and vitamins C and E.
- **Cruciferous vegetables:** Vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower are beneficial for health. This family of vegetables is also rich in beta carotene, vitamins B2 and C, folate, calcium, iron and fibre.
- **Carrots:** Carrots are a rich source of beta carotene; the antioxidant helps protect against cardiovascular, cancer and renal diseases.

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



YOGA RX BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

War and peace

Exploring the link between Kalaripayattu and yoga

Yoga and Kalari (as Kalaripayattu, Kerala's ancient martial arts, is called in short) are very fused, with the difference often being that yoga and many of its poses are part of the preparatory arsenal of Kalari. That is not so odd, as yoga shares that with most other martial arts. The stretches of yoga are essential to prepare a warrior's body towards the deep and almost unnatural flexibility required for kicks. The stretches are an equally important aspect of post-fight recovery.

Apart from the practices, yoga and Kalari share Ayurveda's healing mediation. Both rely heavily on Ayurveda for the lifestyle modifications required to be a practitioner. The dynamic poses of yoga prepare the body of a warrior by

creating the white muscle fibre (also called fast-twitch muscle) needed for speed. The static poses of yoga prepare a warrior by creating the slow-twitch muscle (red in colour) for endurance and healing. Despite being heavily built or bulkily muscular, a Kalari warrior is also very light and flexible, with superhuman stamina and healing powers. That comes from the preparatory aspects of this martial art, which is where it is very similar to yoga. The *marma* points (energy points on the body) that a warrior knows (to inflict maximum injury as well to self-heal) also form the subtext of yogic science. The exotic poses come from the particular way the body is twisted pushing into these marma points (*see column on acupressure and yoga: February 2016*).



The animal walks that are preparatory practices in Kalari are similar to yoga in the extreme stretch they offer. These are poses executed on fours, resembling the animals after which they are named. They involve a low crouching walk and demand intense physical stamina and build on mental power. For example, consider the wheel pose (*chakrasana*). In yoga, it is practiced in its static form. Even its exciting variations (hand lift, leg lift) are done in a static form. Some-

times, in ashtanga yoga (which is more closely related to Kalari in this fashion), the transitions that involve the wheel are dynamic. However, in Kalari, you may walk backwards or forwards on your fours, and even sideways, thereby challenging the breath, arm strength, coordination, cognitive ability and mental and physical stamina. Below, we give you a pose common to both yoga and Kalari; in the latter, it is used to walk on all fours, forwards and backwards.

YOGIC MOVES

Upward plank pose (*purvottanasana*)

Sit with your legs stretched out in front, palms flat beside the hips. Inhale; raise your hips off the ground by pressing into the palms and the feet (keeping them flat, though initially that may be difficult). Throw the head back and hold the pose by straightening the legs and keep the feet flat. Hold for a few breaths. Exhale; relax hips back to the ground. In Kalari, you may lightly bend the knees (this version with the knees bent is called the half upward plank pose/*ardha purvottanasana*) and 'walk' the hands backwards and follow with the legs. This involves 'walking' on fours, looking ahead. **Caution:** This is not to be attempted by those with weak wrists or vertigo. The dynamic form may be tried only by those who already have a strong yoga practice, and have a regular practice of its static form.



Harmony Archives

Vivekachudamani

Adi Shankaracharya's *Crown Jewel of Discrimination* or *Vivekachudamani* can be an exciting book for those on the path of *jnana* yoga or yoga of the intellect. The emphasis in this book is on how irrelevant the idea of 'I' or the worldly self is. It is an exhilarating explanation by a self-realised master of the actual experience of moksha. For a reader on the path, it can provide very exciting signposts. For many on this path, the sense of being slightly out of sync with the rest of the world is not an unnatural experience. So, reading *Vivekachudamani* comes as a consolation because of the resonance it creates, and the assurance that the

strangeness or isolation one experiences is only a stage that must be transited towards a higher bliss.

Though the *jnana* yoga books all describe this state from the standpoint of their author, there is also an underlying unification of experience. Yet, again, all books are different in that each may have a highlight of a particular stage; as, for instance, the distinction between Adi Shankaracharya's own *Aparokshanubhuti* and *Vivekachudamani*. In the latter, there is a constant reminder that the 'I' as one experiences is an illusion—interestingly, even neuroscience validates this point, as clarified in the best-selling book *Phantoms in the Brain* by V S Ramachandran.

Here are a couple of highlights from this classic on the yoga of the intellect (from the translation by Swami Madhavananda, published by Advaita Ashrama):

- "The absence of the ideas of 'I' and 'mine' even in this existing body which follows as a shadow is a characteristic of one liberated in life."
- "That kind of mental function which cognizes only the identity of the Self and Brahman, purified of all adjuncts, which is free from duality and which concerns itself only with Pure intelligence, is called illumination. He who has this perfectly steady is called a man of steady illumination."

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



HEART TO HEARTH BY PRATIBHA JAIN

An engaging series about silvers who believe nurturing the body and mind is the key to joy

Zest for life

Geeta Nair • CHENNAI

There are endless recipes and endless experiments. Open the refrigerator and allow your imagination a free hand—this is what Geeta Nair, a 60 year-old Keralite from Chennai, believes in. “I love all things and dislike nothing,” she says with a deep chuckle. Her zest for life reflects this statement. She loves housekeeping, gardening, cooking, travelling, reading Disney books and spending her life with four-legged creatures. Her home is spotless, fragrant and beautiful and one cannot imagine that it is a busy dog-boarding house. As we speak, the wind-chime collection from each of her travels adds enchanting background music. And then, the delicious food spread on the table... it is tough to believe she manages it all by herself.

But she does. All by herself!

Geeta, your house is a visual treat.

Thanks. I like being surrounded by beautiful things.

And by your doggies?

Yes, of course. For no one can love you like them. I grew up being a dog lover. And so are my children. My son Rahul tells his doggies when I visit, ‘Paati [grandmother] has come.’ And truly speaking, I am happiest with my four-legged grandchildren.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Delhi and studied in Delhi and Rajasthan. I am a graduate

from Maharani College, Rajasthan University.

Your friends speak of your impeccable cleanliness. Were you always interested in housekeeping?

On the contrary, my mother never asked me to do anything at home. She believed if the need arose, I would surely manage. In fact, I remember burning the rice the day my BA results arrived and I had achieved distinction in home science.

“I experiment a lot. I love challenges. If I taste something new, I come home and try it out. Invariably, I manage to achieve the taste and feel delighted”

My father laughed and asked me, ‘Is this what you learnt in home science?’

Well, he would surely be proud if he saw your lunch spread today. Do you have a cook?

I like doing my work by myself. I have someone who comes in for dishwashing, but the rest of the work—cleaning, cooking, gardening and taking care of the doggies—I do all by myself. It keeps me agile and fit.

That is quite remarkable, considering you live in a country where domestic staff is easily available.

Yes, but my parents were like that too. I like to be active, so much so that I can hardly sit through an entire movie. In fact, cooking is a stress-buster for me. If I am upset over something, the best remedy is to get into the kitchen.

Is there any cuisine you enjoy cooking?

Anything and everything. Even though I am a Keralite, I grew up eating north Indian food. I experiment a lot. I love challenges.

If I taste something new, I come home and try it out. Invariably, I manage to achieve the taste and feel delighted.

Does your husband enjoy being the guinea pig?

On the contrary, Asokan is a health freak. He likes to eat whatever he believes will keep him healthy. He is happy with his soups and salads.

So do you cook separately for him?

Not all the time, but I manage both ways. Lunch is on my own, so at that time the kitchen is about me and myself.

Did you learn cooking from your mother?

I guess I did. She was an excellent cook. She herself was a strict vegetarian, but she could cook non-vegetarian food with a flourish without ever tasting it.



Do you enjoy preparing traditional recipes as well?

Yes, I do. Today's menu is a typical Kerala meal: sambhar with baby onions and *melam* masala, tomato *pachchadi* [a gravy with tomatoes], *pacha manga pachchadi* [raw mango chutney], cabbage *toran* [side-dish] and *idichakka toran* [jackfruit side-dish].

What is special about the menu?

The flavour of crushed mustard! In the *pachchadi* as well as the *thayir pachchadi*, the recipe calls for soaking mustard seeds and grinding them along with the coconut. That mustard flavour is a Keralite specialty. But let me share a tip. It is always difficult to grind mustard in small quantities, so what I do is simply crush the mustard seeds (in a mixer) into a slightly coarse powder and stock it. Whenever required, I add a dash of it to the dish and, thus, there is no compromise on taste. You can add it to any curd dish and enjoy the flavour.

I am looking forward to trying your recipes.

I am not fussy about the ingredients. When I was in Atlanta visiting my son, I opened his refrigerator and prepared four dishes with the same ingredients. That's the magic of food. You can experiment endlessly.

How were you as a youngster?

I was a tomboy. My brother was the quiet one. My mother always said about the two of us, 'Wrong soul in wrong body.' I played like boys and with the boys. I was not interested in girlish things. But I also helped my father in the garden.

I have been admiring your well-maintained patch.

This is a small bit. I remember our kitchen garden and the lush mango trees and how we used to barter the

Photographs by Chennai Pix



TOMATO *PACHCHADI*

mangoes with our neighbours for their jackfruits. I used to climb the trees all the times.

And now?

I still do impulsive things. When I recently travelled to Singapore, I suddenly just gathered the courage to wrap a python around my neck. I have always been very scared of them. But that day, I overcame my fear and could see them as beautiful creatures. It was a moment's decision. Also six years ago, I decided to go in for a new look. So I chose 8 March—as it is Women's Day—to experiment with my hair and get a cut. I enjoyed it and have stuck to doing so every year on the same day.

You must have received a lot of compliments. Like many Keralite women, you too are blessed with beautiful tresses.

[Laughs] And to add to the fun, the texture has drastically changed from being extremely curly in my younger days to almost straight now.

A wholesome gravy with tomatoes, the special ingredient here is the crushed mustard seeds that lend a unique flavour. Much loved in most Kerala homes, this is simple and easy to make.

Ingredients

- Tomatoes: 200 gm
- Turmeric: ¼ tsp
- Red chilli powder: ¼ tsp
- Crushed mustard seeds: ½ level tsp
- Salt to taste

For the paste

- Grated coconut: 150 gm
- Green chilli: 1; deseeded to reduce heat
- Cumin seeds: ¼ tsp

For the tempering

- Coconut oil: 1 tbsp
- Mustard seeds: ½ tsp
- Dried red chilli: 2; deseeded
- Curry leaves: a sprig

Method

Quarter the tomatoes; add a cup of water and boil with turmeric, chilli powder and salt until the tomatoes are tender. Grind the grated coconut, green chilli and cumin seeds into a paste using very little water and add to the tomatoes. Bring to boil. Add crushed mustard seeds, stir and switch off the flame. Heat coconut oil in a pan and add mustard seeds. As they splutter, add red chilli and curry leaves. Pour this tempering over the tomato *pachchadi*. Mix well.

Whenever I meet old friends, the first thing they ask is if I have done hair straightening and find it hard to believe that it has happened naturally.

What is on your bucket list?

Parasailing and bungee jumping. I will get around to them one of these days. I believe that at my age, one



RAW MANGO PACHCHADI

must take up any opportunity that presents itself. Later, you may regret why you didn't. For the first time, I am rehearsing for a play where I am playing the lead role of an 80 year old woman. When I was invited for it, I wondered whether I would be able to memorise all the lines. I took it up as a challenge and pleasantly surprised myself. I used to perform as a dancer when I was young, but it took a backseat after marriage. A while back, one of the ladies' clubs where I am a member set up a dance evening and I found myself dancing with the same zeal as when I was young.

According to you, what is the most important quality one must inculcate in life?

Having zest for life. Next is discipline. With these two, you can't go wrong.

I can see that. It's amazing how calm all your four doggies are.

Two of them are mine. The other two are guest doggies. But the guests will always copy the hosts. And mine are

A delicious dip with raw mangoes, fresh yoghurt and coconut paste, this dish, unusual and unique to Kerala cuisine, is cooling in summers.

Ingredients

- Raw mango: 1; peeled and cut into medium-sized bits
- Grated coconut: 100 gm
- Green chilli: 1; deseeded to reduce heat
- Fresh yoghurt: 100 gm
- Crushed mustard seeds: ½ level tsp

- Sugar: ½ tsp (optional)
- Salt to taste

Method

Grind the grated coconut and green chilli using very little water. Add the raw mango pieces and grind for 5 to 10 seconds. Remember to crush it fine without making it pasty. In a serving bowl, mix the paste, yoghurt, crushed mustard seeds and salt. Add sugar if you want a slight sweet hint to it. Serve as an accompaniment to a meal.

extremely well-behaved and disciplined. I don't ever leash any of them. I take them all for walks without a leash and there has never been any trouble whatsoever.

How many can you board at a time?

Around 10. It gets hectic but I don't mind it. I like returning them well-groomed and well-behaved!

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



MONEY MATTERS BY PRIYA DESAI

Bank on MFs: Diversified portfolio, flexibility and liquidity make mutual funds an attractive investment option

As I was shuffling through newspapers recently over a cup of tea, I spotted a graphic 30-page insert booklet, 'Making Investing Simple for Supandi with Prof Simply Simple'. Curious as to who was going the Amar Chitra Katha way to educate investors, I turned the pages to discover that it was an investment education initiative by Tata Mutual Fund.

India has millions of mutual fund (MF) investors. While some find their investments blooming, others find them wilting.

Confusion galore

When it comes to the concept and functioning of MFs, there is less clarity and more confusion. To make an informed decision, it's important to seek answers to certain questions:

- Why am I investing in an MF scheme?
- What is the nature of the scheme?
- What is the timing of the investment?
- Why does one scheme of an MF vary from another?
- Why do similar schemes of different MFs not necessarily result in similar gains or losses?
- What is the likely quantum of income from the investment, and over what period and why?
- How will the investment return change depending on duration?

Stocks, bonds and mutual funds are some of the popular financial instruments for those looking to invest in avenues other than fixed deposits. Investing in stocks by small investors can entail high risk depending on how the stock prices move. If on the other hand the same amount is invested in one or more MFs, the

investor has a better chance of benefitting from diversification in more stocks. Let us see how this happens.

The fundamentals

There are a large number of MF companies such as HDFC Mutual Fund, UTI, Tata Mutual Fund, Reliance Mutual Fund, Religare Mutual Fund and other big and small fund houses. Each fund has a large number of MF schemes under rubric such as equity, equity and debt, sectors, tax exemption, etc.

An important feature of an MF investment is that investors can buy any number of units and remain invested according to their choice. The amount due to sale gets credited to their account

With an unending list of schemes to choose from, an average customer finds it difficult to differentiate between the options and choose the right ones. This often leads to investing in schemes marketed by brokers, agents and sometimes even those recommended by friends.

The mechanism

MF houses pool together money invested in a particular scheme floated by them, and invest in various stocks. The fund manager, an expert in stock market and investing, decides the stocks and bonds in which the

collected amount is to be invested through an asset allocation mechanism. Thus, an investor is indirectly investing in the stock market, while banking on the expertise of a fund manager. Depending upon stock market movements, the composition of stocks is varied from time to time. Naturally, the volatility of the stock market will be reflected in the value of investment in any mutual fund.

An investor is allocated a number of units in an MF depending on the amount invested and the value of a unit at a point in time. The base value is normally ₹ 10. Once the scheme is floated, this value either increases or decreases, depending upon the asset holding of that fund, and is available on a daily basis. This is called Net Asset Value (NAV): value of a unit of the scheme at a given time. Thus, if an investor has invested ₹ 1,000 at a NAV of 12, he gets 83.3333 units. If after a year its NAV is 13.5 and he sells them, he gets ₹ 1,125. His gain is ₹ 125 or 12.5 per cent.

Flexibility and liquidity

An important feature of an MF investment is that investors can buy any number of units and remain invested according to their choice. Again they can sell the number of units of their choice. This can be done through a broker, agent or directly through the fund house. The amount due to sale gets credited to their account. Thus, flexibility and liquidity are two important features of a MF. By investing a predetermined sum on a regular basis for a long term, an investor can take the benefit of a systematic investment plan (SIP). This has the advantage of averaging the costs owing to the ups and downs in NAVs.

The rules of dividend earning, short and long-term capital gains and loss applicable to MF investment are the same as those for stock and share investment. MFs declare dividend at different intervals. Dividends are completely tax-free. If any gain accrues owing to sale of units in less than a year, it is taxable, but long-term gains are non-taxable.

Dividend disbursal

After a fund announces the dividend per unit, for instance ₹ 2.5, the value of the unit goes down to that extent on the day of distribution. Some funds give dividends two or even three times a year, while many announce dividend just once a year. Some skip the dividend for one, two or more

dividend earned is converted into units at the price on the dividend distribution date and added to the account. Thus the magic of compounding often makes your investment grow multifold over a number of years. For instance, if ₹ 100,000 was invested at the initial unit price of ₹ 10 in HDFC Growth Fund in 2000, its present value will be over ₹ 1,200,000 at the current NAV.

Mind-boggling choices

An investor has a wide choice while deciding to invest in an MF. Under each fund there are different schemes with different features. An investor benefits by deciding the goal, duration, etc, before opting for a particular fund or scheme.

There are equity-linked saving schemes (ELSS) that meet the requirements of tax exemption. Investment in such schemes with a lock-in period of three years is ideal for tax purposes. It is important to read the fine print of a selected scheme.

A mixed bag

Like other vehicles for financial investment, MFs too have pros and cons. An investor benefits from professional fund managers charged with the responsibility of tracking share market movement and investing with the goal of appreciation in the investment. Individual investors may lack the valuable experience to handle their investment in shares. Investors also benefit from the diversified portfolio of an MF as well as the liquidity aspect. MFs are relatively simple to handle, as the units are easy to buy or sell. But as with other such schemes, everything is not hunky-dory with MFs too. Professional managers are no guarantee that a MF will perform well. It is important for every investor to know that share market volatility will be passed on to MFs. Costs of administration too are passed on to investors, affecting the final dividend.

No single mantra

It is advantageous to buy units of a scheme when prices are low. When the market is bullish, unit prices increase handsomely, resulting in large gains. SEBI, the market regulator, has made it compulsory for MFs to mention the distribution commission and expense ratio on the bi-annual consolidated account statement received by investors. But it is the investor who needs to call the shots by tracking the NAV at regular intervals. The test of an MF scheme is in its dividend record and appreciation of the investment. If it's long-term gains an investor is looking at, mutual funds could well be the answer.



years. While a well-managed MF generally announces dividend once a year at least, it is not mandatory.

Whether an investor gets the announced dividend depends upon the dividend, reinvestment or growth option selected at the time of buying. If a dividend option is chosen, dividend will accrue as and when declared. In a reinvestment or growth option, the

- Equity funds – large, medium and small cap
- Debt funds (also called income funds)
- Diversified funds (also termed balanced funds)
- Gilt funds
- Money market funds
- Sector-specific funds like power, technology, banking
- Index funds

The author is an economist based in Mumbai



Small is BIG

PARTHA MUKHERJEE MEETS CHANDRA SHEKHAR GHOSH, THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR WHO LAUNCHED THE COUNTRY'S YOUNGEST BANK

Unlike other bankers, Chandra Shekhar Ghosh is not driven by profits and balance sheets. A social entrepreneur with a conscience, his commitment is rooted in personal struggles and gut-wrenching experiences with the poor, both in Bangladesh and Kolkata, where his family migrated in 1971.

Thus, while honchos in the private banking sector gaze through plate-glass windows from plush, leather-backed chairs, Ghosh contemplates a very different reality. "In the early 1960s, there was this little boy who helped his father

make *rosogolla* over a *chulha* in his sweet shop in a village in Tripura. That boy was me," recalls the 56 year-old, taking us back to where it all began. "Later, we shifted to Bangladesh and returned to India during the mass exodus triggered by the Bangladesh Liberation War."

From his father's humble sweetshop to becoming managing director and CEO of Kolkata-based Bandhan Bank, Ghosh's journey is a heart-stopping tale. Seated in his elegantly decorated office in Kolkata's Salt Lake City, he pauses between words and adds, "I have experienced what the struggle for existence means."

"One morning, I noticed a vegetable vendor in a busy market, borrowing money from a loan shark at the rate of 700-per-cent interest. That's when it struck me that microfinance was perhaps the answer, as formal financial services had failed to strike at the root of the money-lending system"



This sums up the foundation on which India's newest full-service bank is built, a bank that launched operations with 501 branches across India in August 2015. But what makes Bandhan Bank really special is its focus on microfinance, especially for rural folk in eastern and north-eastern India. Despite its pan-India presence, its priority is to meet the financial needs of people overlooked by the formal banking system, thus helping to create self-employment opportunities that would also have a positive impact on areas such as education and healthcare.

Bandhan Bank is the culmination of a 15-year endeavour that saw Ghosh launch his first venture, Bandhan, a non-profit that funded small projects run by women entrepreneurs, back in 2001. Five years later, in 2006, Ghosh registered Bandhan as a non-banking finance company (NBFC), before it matured into a full-fledged bank in 2015.

This is the documented part of Bandhan's evolution. Not chronicled is the series of events that turned a lad of meagre means into a visionary. "We were six children and my parents had to fight against many odds to raise us. It never ceased to amaze me how, even with very limited resources, we were able to continue our education," says Ghosh, who learnt very early that 'less is more'. After he finished his early education in Tripura, Ghosh returned to Bangladesh to earn a master's degree in statistics from

Dhaka University. He then joined the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a developmental NGO, as a field officer. "In BRAC, I found my role model in Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, the organisation's founder and chairman. He opened my eyes to how rich moneylenders exploited the hunger of the poor."

There was one incident in particular that convinced Ghosh he had found his calling. "I met a young, malnourished man lying in a shack in a village. He said the poor in his village lived mostly on boiled potato, which they ate three times a week while they starved for the other four days. The man told me they bought potato for ₹ 15 borrowed from the local moneylender at an astronomical interest of ₹ 75, which had to be repaid in three months. Failing this, they would have to pay off the debt by working in farmlands owned by these moneylenders free of cost."

Moved beyond belief, Ghosh never forgot the horror he felt in the pit of his stomach at these words. It was a sensation he felt many times over after he returned to Kolkata in 1997, when he joined Village Welfare Society (VWS), a developmental NGO. During his work there, he came close up with the pain of poverty once again. "One morning, I noticed a vegetable vendor in a busy market, borrowing money from a loan shark at the rate of 700-per-cent interest," he remembers. "That's when it struck me that microfinance was perhaps the answer, as formal financial services had failed to strike at the root of the money-lending system."

Ghosh thus quit his job with VWS to start Bandhan to create a sustainable model that would financially empower the poor. He floated the non-profit at Konnagar in Hoogly district and Bagnan in Howrah district in 2001 with just two employees and ₹ 200,000 in capital raised from relatives who had tapped into their savings to support him. From this modest pool, Ghosh provided small loans to poor borrowers in Konnagar.

"I started offering microcredit services to small-scale women entrepreneurs," he recalls. "One woman who borrowed ₹ 3,000 to start a small enterprise to manufacture paper pouches used to pack medicines in chemists' shops. Over five years, her business grew so big that she had to employ other people. She proved that even a meager sum



"We focus on immediate disbursement of loans as small as ₹ 1,000 to women borrowers identified by our field staff. We give small loans at 22-per-cent interest on a reducing balance without any collateral. This prompts borrowers to repay on time so that they can take a fresh loan soon"

of money, if used properly, can change one's life." On a slightly different note, he adds, "From experience, I have seen how my mother used to make ends meet with barely any resources. Also, women are always safe customers."

In 2002, Bandhan received its first round of institutional funding, of ₹ 2 million from the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). "His confidence and commitment as reflected in him starting Bandhan with his own savings and honesty impressed us," says Brij Mohan, then executive director of SIDBI. "His persuasiveness and simplicity were also strengths. Behind his simple exterior, Ghosh has sharp business acumen and invests a lot in relationships including his staff. He also has an excellent sense of numbers and always thinks big." The idea to structure Bandhan as an NBFC to raise capital came from SIDBI, shares Ghosh. "I followed their advice and obtained the loan of ₹ 20 lakh [₹ 2 million], which helped me scale up operations."

Ghosh's dream had finally taken wing and, in 2005, Bandhan launched its 100th branch in Kolkata. By then, it had also given small loans to 1 million borrowers. The following year, Bandhan was registered as an NBFC. A year later, in 2007, Bandhan was listed by *Forbes* as the second-largest microfinance firm in the world. And in 2009, Bandhan launched its 1,000th branch when it notched up 2 million borrowers.

Ghosh finally realised his ultimate goal last August when Bandhan Bank was inaugurated, in the process achieving many milestones. The bank became the first microfinance entity in India to transform into a universal bank; it also became the first bank to be set up in eastern India after

Independence; and Chandra Shekhar Ghosh became the second Bengali founder of a bank after Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, who founded Union Bank of India in 1829.

Commenting on Bandhan's transition from being a provider of small, unsecured loans to rural borrowers to a full-fledged bank, Y C Nanda, former chairman of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), says, "Getting a banking licence is a great feat for a newly established NBFC. Ghosh has challenged how banking is being done in India as Bandhan is a bank for those bypassed even by our nationalised banks."

Asked what makes Bandhan so successful, Ghosh reveals, "We focus on immediate disbursement of loans as small as ₹ 1,000 to women borrowers identified by our field staff. We give small loans [up to ₹ 50,000] at 22-per-cent interest on a reducing balance without any collateral. This prompts borrowers to repay on time so that they can take a fresh loan soon. I was determined to have Bandhan follow a people-centric model."

This success is reflected in the fact that just seven months after it was launched, the country's youngest bank already has a loan book of ₹ 10,500 crore, more than 600 branches, more than 2,000 service centres, 19,500 employees and 50 ATMs serving 1.43 crore account holders across 27 states.

In 2014, Ghosh was named Entrepreneur of the Year by *The Economic Times* and Businessman of 2015 by the *Financial Chronicle*. Still, he remains humble and rooted. "I am neither a banker nor an economist," he insists. "All I want is to remain the face of the poorest of the poor." ❀



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A living LEGACY

The efforts of Indira P P Bora have helped turn Sattriya, an ancient dance ritual, into an aesthetic statement. Today, her daughter Dr Menaka P P Bora endeavours to make the dance form experiential as well as experimental. **Tapati Baruah-Kashyap** listens to the mother-daughter duo trace their journey of becoming global torchbearers of Sattriya



Reverberations of *khol* and *borgeet* greet us as we enter Kalabhumi, the residence-cum-dance academy of eminent dancer Indira P P Bora at Chandmari in the heart of Guwahati. A group of young learners is practicing the gentle moves of Sattriya (pronounced 'hattriya') in the presence of their illustrious guru. The visit of her daughter Dr Menaka P P Bora—a classical dance soloist, contemporary choreographer, ethnomusicologist and actor—from London has further enervated the atmosphere.

For 71 year-old Indira, Sattriya—a classical dance form born from the ritual dances of the Vaishnava monasteries of Assam—is a living tradition and an integral part of the state's culture. As one of the first female pioneers of the dance form, Indira revived and rejuvenated the 16th century art form without losing its essence. A disciple of the legendary Rukmini Devi Arundale at Kalakshetra, who gave her several opportunities to showcase the form to a global audience, she was the first woman to receive the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in Sattriya and the first Assamese artist to be recorded and broadcast on BBC Asia Network in Birmingham in the UK. Her Sattriya dance recordings are archived in the Lincoln Centre for Performing Arts in New York City. Following her dreams of putting Sattriya on a pedestal, her daughter Menaka, a winner of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Yuva Puraskar, is taking the form far and wide to a whole new audience, while preserving its traditional fervour. After completing her doctorate and research fellowships in ethnomusicology at the Faculty of Music, University of Oxford, she has been appointed the first Indian artist-in-residence at the University. Menaka shares more about her mother, their journey and their art....

My mother was the first female to step into the then strictly male domain of Sattriya. She introduced the *margi* technique—the ability to codify each and every movement without losing its sum and substance. According to her, stylistic changes needed to be made to the abhinaya as the ritualistic art form was *lokadharmic* [for local devotees]. In addition, the expressions needed to be sharpened and made emphatic for the stage as, culturally, the Assamese have softer expressions. I have been doing ethnographic research at Oxford University, a research method used for the first time in Sattriya research to observe and analyse the cultural body languages of Sattriya monks and Assamese population in general and how that might influence

Photographs courtesy: Menaka P P Bora



our unique regional ways of expressing both pure *nritya* and abhinaya in Sattriya. I have been experimenting with presentation methods as part of the dance performance to communicate to wider audiences.

Even before I could talk, I was attracted to dance.

When I was young, I used to watch my mother train under traditional gurus and musicians from the monasteries. At home, even when I was studying, I was drawn to the live sounds of the *khol* [drum] playing during her rehearsals. It was natural for me to learn and imbibe the art; I also learnt to play the *khol* and *bhortal* [big cymbals]. I grew up reciting *borgeet*, the traditional devotional prayer-songs of the *sattri* [Vaishnava monasteries in Assam], which are inseparable from the *bhakti-rasa*. Fortunately, I was allowed to learn Sattriya from the same gurus who worked with my mother.

My mother is my first guru.

She initiated me into the world of Sattriya and Bharatanatyam. Subsequently, I formally learnt Bharatanatyam from the Dhananjayans in Chennai in 2000. Well-known playwright-filmmaker Girish Karnad mentored me as an actor, while I perfected my Sattriya under 'Bayanacharya' Ghanakanta Bora of the famous Kamalabari Satra in Majuli, Asia's largest inhabited river island, which is one of the centres of Sattriya dance and music.

As a daughter and only child of my mother, I was genetically drawn to her artistic expressions. She tells me she was practicing dance rigorously even while I was in her womb and that is why dance is in my DNA. I think I have a stream of consciousness [borrowing from Virginia

"I feel I still have a lot to learn from my mother. She has this unique ability—her abhinaya can bring tears to your eyes. Nevertheless, she allows me to develop my own interpretations of the form"

Woolf's idea] of how my mother performed on stage. I did my Bharatanatyam *arangetram* in Chennai when I was nine and was fortunate to become one of the youngest invited soloists to perform solo Bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra Koothambalam. After the show, I received rare saris and accessories worn by *Athai* Rukmini Devi Arundale from K Shankara Menon, then director of Kalakshetra. It remains one of the most powerful memories of my life.

My father Prafulla Prasad Bora has been the man behind our success.

In fact, he has played a silent but significant role in building our careers. I consider him a 'feminist father'. He does not like it when we spend time in the kitchen or doing house chores; instead he encourages us to be in the dance studios. He was a director in the oil industry and is a strict disciplinarian. A well-known film critic of the 1960s and 1970s, he was a close associate of Bhupen Hazarika and wrote *Cinema in Assam*, the first English book on Assamese cinema, way back in 1972. Though he always insisted that I complete my academic studies, he gave me enough opportunity to learn under several renowned gurus. After I did my BA in English

literature from Stella Maris College, Chennai, I remember the renowned scholar Dr Kapila Vatsayan once telling me that I must do my graduation in a major subject and thereafter branch out to different subjects, which I have tried to follow honestly.

For me, Sattriya is a daily ritual. I have used my training in contemporary forms as an advantage to understand how people from varied cultures and countries express themselves through their bodies and how we can learn

“A dance dominated by *bhakti*”

Indira P P Bora on her life and passion

I was brought up in a business family—my parents owned tea plantations and a plywood company in a town called Sonari in Assam. The turning point in my life was when my maternal uncle and Sangeet Natak Akademi award-winner Dr Pradip Chaliha, a scholar and performing artist of Sattriya and my first guru, came to visit us when I was 10 years old. In those days, it was still not considered respectable for a girl to dance professionally but I loved dancing—in any style. My uncle offered to teach me Sattriya; for five years, I learnt the dance under his tutelage. He convinced my parents to send me to Kalakshetra in Madras

where I learnt Bharatanatyam for 13 years; legendary artists such as Leela Samson and the Dhananjayans became my friends there. *Athai* Rukmini Devi Arundale could see the beauty of the Sattriya dance; she encouraged and allowed me to perform the dance in many of her shows.

Sattriya is a dance with fluid gestures and is dominated by *bhakti*. Like Odissi and Manipuri, the body language is characterised by a soft lyricism; that’s the way people move in Assam. It is a living tradition and is still being practiced in the *sattras*. I researched Sattriya with monks—who later became teachers—such as Ghanakanta Bora, late Bhubon Chandra Bora and late Dr Maheswar Neog, a renowned scholar of Sattriya who encouraged

me to revive the disappearing dance tradition.

At present, the younger generation is showing considerable interest in learning Sattriya, though there are very few young males taking it up. At Kalabhumii, which began its journey in 1982, we have more than 500 students learning Bharatanatyam, Sattriya and folk dances of India; we also hold dance festivals twice a year.

Today, when I perform along with my daughter, we hope to bring a little happiness to the world through the message of Sattriya. We adapt it for a foreign audience to promote this ancient dance tradition globally; indeed, the world would become a richer place when we share our traditions.

and adapt certain injury prevention methods of using our bodies during rehearsals and performances. My exposure at Laban Centre in London with some great mentors and teachers has been useful in understanding the principles of Pilates, body conditioning and dance anatomy, which I am using to understand and codify specific Sattriya movements from a scientific viewpoint. Right now, I am training young monks from the *sattras* in these methods. My recent recitals at the British Museum in London were sold out and I have received invitations from BBC TV to appear on their arts programme.

My mother and I are an inspiration to each other.

My mother brought the dance heritage of Assam to the mainstream and, now, I am determined to take it far and wide, to newer audiences while remaining true to my roots. For my mother, the most memorable moment of her life was performing in Pune in front of wounded soldiers of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War. But I feel the best moment of my life is yet to come.

It is always a spiritual moment for me to share the stage with my mother. It is on rare occasions that we collaborate and perform together these days. I feel I still have a lot to learn from her. She has this unique ability—her abhinaya can bring tears to your eyes. Nevertheless, she allows me to develop my own interpretations of the form. We have intensive rehearsals before every show that we enjoy much more than the stage performances. We fine-tune our crafts during the rehearsals and learn to criticise each other so we can become better performers. We call it a journey of sadhana.

Apart from Sattriya, my mother and I bond over films.

We love to go and watch world films at independent cinema halls in London and Paris when we are travelling. We try to take coffee breaks in small unknown chai houses and cafes in India and Europe. I always shop for my mother. She often has no idea what to buy for herself or wear for a certain occasion. Very often we will argue about our dress styles. And we steal each other’s shoes as we have the same shoe size.

Some of India’s top classical dancers who also happen to be my mother’s friends call me ‘young Indira’. I can’t help or escape that! I have worked extremely hard to reach this position. My parents have given me the foundation as well as the freedom to learn, and unlearn, to become a good human being...but there is a long way to go.

There are times when we have differences of opinion.

Very often, we have backstage arguments but bond before getting on stage—it just happens! We are a generation apart and differences are but natural. Despite that, I am happy that we agree upon various aspects of the dance, particularly those relating to our performances. More than a mother, she is my friend.

By nature, my mother is easygoing. But I am always restless and yearn for perfection in whatever I do. As a daughter, I am inspired by her attitude in dealing with life’s problems—she is always happy, makes others laugh and never takes life too seriously. She always says, “Nature gives us peace and happiness”. I totally agree with her—nature is the biggest healer. ✨



Agra: Into the heart of India

It is said that the world is divided into people who have seen the Taj Mahal and those who haven't. And even those who have seen that exquisite elegy in marble many times, it appears to be more beautiful than ever before.

Do magnificent edifices have 'souls'? The Taj Mahal certainly does. No one can

be indifferent to the mausoleum's magic. Overseas visitors gawk bemusedly at it. It's not uncommon to see tears rolling down the cheeks of tourists or couples holding hands as they gaze transfixed at one of the Seven Wonders of the World while children scurry across the gardens with the engaging innocence of childhood.

The Taj, rising like a mirage amidst landscaped lawns of a 42-acre complex,



Sravasti: In the shadow of the Buddha



Sravasti does not indulge in grand gestures. However, the quiet little town in Uttar Pradesh wins over visitors, devout pilgrims and curious tourists, with its many charms. As one starts to explore the town, one realises that it sits upon layers of history and that the past has not been displaced by the present. Its one single and probably most significant claim to fame is that the Buddha made it his base for 25 of the 45 monsoon seasons – the only time he dropped shallow roots in his nomadic life to spread his message – after attaining enlightenment under a bodhi tree.

seems to surge above the chaos and commerce of the city of Agra which is its home. One of the most photographed, filmed, and eulogized buildings in the world, the gorgeous mausoleum draws visitors back again, and again.

Every day, crowds file through the great gateway of the Taj, commissioned by Shah Jehan in 1632 as a memorial to his queen Mumtaz Mahal who died while giving birth to her 14th child. Framed like a picture postcard, its perfectly proportioned beauty never fails to take one's breath away. Almost in a daze, people walk up to the monument and some run their fingers over the cool marble and then silently enter the cenotaph chamber. A simple marble fretted screen circles the "dummy" tombs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jehan which were built to avoid looting. The real ones lie below in a basement. In fact, the original gem-studded screen was stolen.

Despite the passage of time, the Taj Mahal exudes an almost unreal luminosity as though the monument exists in another dimension. The khadim, traditional caretakers of the mausoleum, ensure that things are done as they have been for centuries. The once-mighty Mughal empire collapsed and so did colonial rule. But the khadim are still there.

Many tourists don't realise that in Agra,

there is a world beyond the Taj Mahal. There is, for instance, the magnificent Agra Fort, built by Akbar between 1565-73, in red sandstone. Some 4,000 men laboured on it though it was his grandson Shah Jehan who built the marble palaces within it. The magnificent stone-pillared Diwan-i-Am (Hall of Public Audience); Shah Jehan's Moti Masjid (Pearl Mosque) which glows in the sun as though lit from within; the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audience), decorated with superb carvings; the chamber where Aurangzeb had locked up his father Shah Jehan... The room has a superb view of the Taj Mahal, a perk he allowed his father in his captivity. The tomb of Itmad-ud-Daulah, also in Agra, is often ignored because it was subsequently overshadowed by the Taj. It was built 15 years earlier by Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan for her Persian-born father who served as a prime minister for the Mughals. Its classic elegance contrasts with the muscularity of Emperor Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, 10 km north of Agra.

Soami Bagh or Dayal Bagh, 15 km away from Agra, is also worth a look-see as its Hindu style of architecture is in stark contrast to the Mughal legacy of Agra. This is the headquarters of the Radhasoami religious sect and is the location of the Dayal Bagh temple, a Samadhi for the founder.

This fact alone has made Sravasti one of four main pilgrim sites on the Buddhist pilgrim circuit. The other three are Lumbini in Nepal where Buddha was born; Bodhi Gaya in Bihar where he attained Buddhahood and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh where he abandoned his mortal form and attained nirvana at 80.

A bullock cart trundles past the ruins of a stupa; monks in orange robes relax in a garden where the Buddha might have held discourses with his disciples; herds-men shepherd their flocks down narrow pathways that the bisect fields pregnant with the promise of a bumper harvest... International touches have been grafted onto these rural India cameos of Sravasti and they take the form of monasteries and temples built by a number of Asian countries where Buddhism is the predominant religion. These include Tibet, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, China, South Korea and Thailand.

Towering over the Thai complex is an enormous gilded Buddha with oriental features. He looks down on devotees who travel from faraway lands to seek his blessings. Some kneel and bow at the base of the statue; others circle it with palms pressed together and a few sit in trance-like meditation on sprawling lawns.

Though the flavour of Sravasti is predominantly Buddhist, it is spiced with other religions. According to the Ramayana, Lord Ram appointed his son Lava as ruler of the district. The town is also significant to the Jains as two of their Tirthankaras—Sambhavanatha (3rd) and Chandraprabha (8th)—were born here and the Shobhnath temple is dedicated to the former.

Historically, Sravasti is named after the Vedic king Shrivastava and during Lord Buddha's time it was one of the six largest cities in India. As so often happens, time took its toll and the city slipped into obscurity. Then in 1863, Sir Alexander Cunningham who was one of the founding fathers of the Archaeological Survey of India excavated the city's past buried under centuries of neglect.

Thanks to his and subsequent excavations, the ruins of two stupas—Augulimala and Anaathapindikā—help pilgrims connect with an era when the Buddha shared his enlightenment with those fortunate enough to be blessed by his grace. The Buddha did not care for miracles, he believed

factfile

- Agra Airport is 13 km from the city centre. Delhi (220 km) is the closest international airport.
- Agra Cantonment is the main railway station of the city. Other stations within the city are Agra Fort and Agra City.
- Most major five star hotels chains have a presence in Agra. In addition, there are a number of budget hotels.

The construction of the temple began in 1904 and even today, work continues on embellishing the temple.

But what is deeply etched in the collective memories of India and the world is the sight of the Taj by moonlight, glowing milky white, with only the faint glow of a lamp from somewhere deep in the tomb. There, the khadim, bundled in blankets, keep never-ending watch as they have done for centuries.

—Gustasp & Jeroo Irani

factfile

- Lucknow (170 km) is the closest airport. Though Balrampur (17 km) is the closest railway station, Gonda (24 km) has better connections.
- By way of accommodation, Sravasti has a few options including Lotu Niko Hotel, Hotel Pawan Palace and Ashok Greens Hotel.

his message was the core of his teaching, yet he was compelled to perform a few to placate his followers who needed reason to strengthen their faith and to give a fitting reply to his detractors.

Today, followers flock to Sravasti which is still cocooned in the embrace of the Enlightened One.

—Gustasp & Jeroo Irani



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



Feet first

Diabetic neuropathy can be kept under check with precaution and care, writes **Shivani Arora**

Photographs by iStock

One of the many complications of diabetes is diabetic neuropathy or diabetic foot. Numbness, tingling and loss of sensation in the feet are the most common symptoms of diabetic neuropathy; in severe cases, it might even lead to foot amputation. Internationally acclaimed diabetologist Padmashri **Dr V Mohan**, chairman, Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, explains how people with diabetes can watch out for these symptoms and take precautionary measures to avoid further damage.

What is diabetic neuropathy and what are its symptoms?

Diabetic neuropathy is a nerve disorder—affecting especially the nerves of the feet—caused by uncontrolled blood sugar. It first starts with a tingling sensation in the feet and progresses to causing numbness. In some cases, it also causes deformities in the foot and toes. The most common form of neuropathy is peripheral neuropathy where sensation is lost in both feet.

Are all people with diabetes prone to neuropathy?

Most studies of diabetic neuropathy have been done in Western countries. There is paucity of data in developing countries, particularly India, where a large proportion walks barefoot. At Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, a prevalence of 33.1 per cent was reported among diabetic subjects in 2011. In the Chennai Urban Rural Epidemiology Study (CURES), Pradeepa and colleagues from our centre have reported an overall prevalence of neuropathy at 26.1 per cent (age-adjusted 13.1 per cent) with no significant difference in gender. A study conducted by Vaz NC, Ferreira A, Kulkarni M, Vaz FS, Pinto N reported a prevalence of 60 per cent among diabetic subjects in rural Goa and a prevalence of 30.9 per cent in the Chunampet Rural Diabetes Prevention Project [conducted by Dr Mohan and colleagues] in rural Tamil Nadu.

What are the other implications of neuropathy?

Owing to lack of sensation, a person is unable to sense where they are landing, thereby becoming prone to accidents and injuries; also a thorn or nail prick may go unnoticed. Patients are likely to suffer from thickening of the skin, i.e. formation

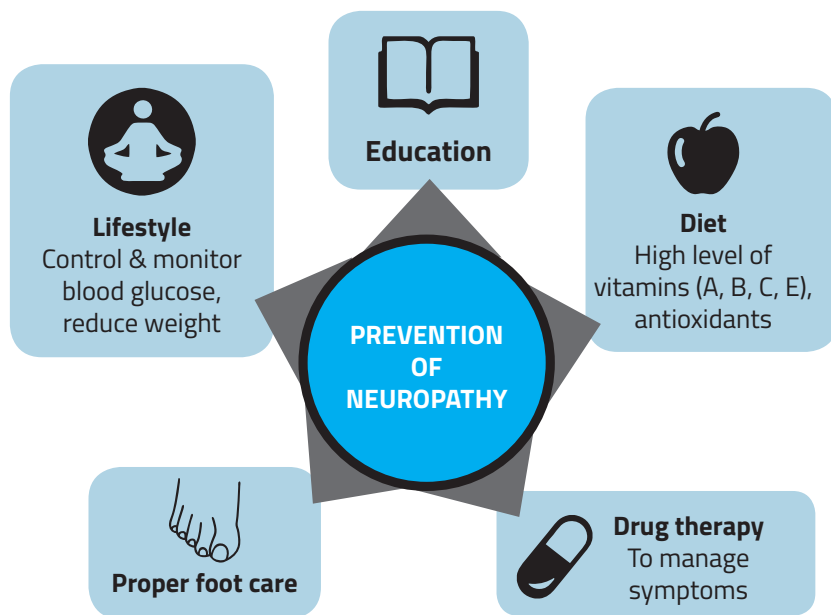
of corns and calluses, which might develop into foot ulcers. In severe cases, neuropathy might lead to gangrene and foot amputation.

What are the different modes of treatment?

While there is no specific drug for treating diabetic neuropathy, methylcobalamin, alpha lipoic acid and a few other medicines are used with variable results. For painful neuropathy, drugs like Pregabalin and Gabapentin are used. However, it is best to manage your blood glucose levels and protect your feet from injuries. Most diabetic clinics today are equipped with a podiatry clinic for treatment of the feet and their ailments, where major amputations are often prevented by timely care.

How can we prevent it?

Though neuropathic problems in diabetes cannot be eradicated completely, effective diagnosis and management are possible through a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on prevention, education, regular foot examinations, aggressive intervention, and optimal use of therapeutic footwear to reduce morbidity associated with foot



complications. Meticulous care by a diabetologist, podiatrist, orthopaedic surgeon, or rehabilitation specialist experienced in the management of persons with diabetes is mandatory. The key prevention strategies for neuropathy include the steps shown above.

What is your advice for patients with diabetes?

Diabetic patients must watch out for symptoms of neuropathy and report to their physicians during routine checks. If neuropathy has already set in, they need to wear proper footwear and take special care while clipping nails as they may end up cutting more than just the nail owing to lack of sensation. Here are some other precautions:

- Examine feet daily for blisters, bleeding, and lesions between your toes; use a mirror if it is difficult to see the entire foot.
- Keep the feet clean by washing daily with lukewarm water and soap.
- Avoid extreme temperatures, such as hot or cold surfaces.
- Dry the feet carefully and pay special attention to the spaces

between the toes to prevent athletes' foot.

- Trim nails straight across with clippers or scissors.
- Do not walk barefoot—use footwear even inside the house. One clean pair can be kept for this purpose.
- Do not sit cross-legged for a long time.
- Do not cut corns or calluses with a blade or knife.
- Do not smoke.
- Use the correct footwear.
- Have regular foot examinations.

With nearly 70 million people with diabetes, India is known as the 'diabetes capital of the world'. How do we fare when it comes to awareness and timely intervention in diabetic neuropathy?

With nearly 90 million people with diabetes, China is, in fact, ahead of India. But India may soon overtake China—this is not something we want! On a positive note, the comprehensive care provided by diabetes centres in India includes



DIAGNOSING DIABETIC NEUROPATHY

- **Screening test:** The test uses a nylon filament mounted on a small wand. The filament delivers a standardised 10-gm force when touched to areas of the foot. Patients who cannot sense pressure from the filament have lost protective sensation and are at risk for developing neuropathic foot ulcers.
- **Biothesiometry:** This simple test looks at sense of vibration and is a measure of large fibre neuropathy.
- **Nerve conduction studies:** This test will check the flow of electrical current through a nerve. An image of the nerve impulse is projected on a screen as it transmits an electrical signal. Impulses that seem slower or weaker than usual indicate possible damage to the nerve. This test allows the doctor to assess the condition of all the nerves in the arms and legs.
- **Electromyography (EMG):** This is used to see how well the muscles respond to electrical impulses transmitted by nearby nerves. The electrical activity of the muscle is displayed on a screen. A response slower or weaker than usual suggests damage to the nerve or muscle. This test is often done at the same time as nerve conduction studies.

neuropathy assessment and services. Few countries can boast of so many well-qualified and equipped diabetes centres like us. Indeed, India is slowly emerging as the 'diabetes care capital of the world'. ✨

:: cover
feature ::

WHO CARES?



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Driven by a silvering population, home-based healthcare in India is gaining ground. Though there are an increasing number of professional options available, better standards of service, cost-effectiveness and specialised care are the need of the hour, reports Ramya Srinivasan

It's just another hurried morning in the Kumar household in Bengaluru. Praveena Suresh Kumar, 36, is juggling chores while getting her two daughters ready for school. Her husband Suresh Kumar is doing the morning email roundup on his Blackberry. Meanwhile, Suresh's mother, Lakshmi Natarajan, who lives upstairs as part of the extended family, goes about her morning chores with the help of her aide, Saraswathi. Mrs Natarajan has acute rheumatoid arthritis and requires assistance to walk even a few steps.

"Saraswathi lives with us and has become a part of the family. She takes great care of my mother-in-law and looks after her daily needs. Given our hectic lives, it helps to have a dedicated person to look after her. Our daily routine would collapse if not for her," shares Praveena, who was introduced to Saraswathi by a mutual friend.

Home-based elder care is fast becoming a necessity in many Indian households. And stepping in to fill this void, in the large metros at least, are home-care agencies whose numbers have witnessed a spurt in the past five years. In 2014, consulting firm Pacific Bridge Medical estimated the Indian home-care market to be around \$ 2.3 billion, growing at 18 per cent per year.



Lakshmi
Natarajan
with
caretaker
Saraswathi

The number crunch

This seemingly simple demand-supply scenario belies a complex and sobering reality—that India is a rapidly ageing population, something that will have serious ramifications only a few years down the line.

According to the *State of Elderly in India* report released in 2014 by non-profit HelpAge India, by 2050, the number of seniors will have risen to over 300 million, up from 98 million in 2011. This means that in just 34 years, one in five people, or 20 per cent of the Indian population, will be aged over 60, up from 9 per cent at present.

This tectonic demographic shift can be explained by many factors, the most significant one being that 65 per cent of India's population is currently under the age of 35, a majority between the ages of 16 and 30. So while we revel in being a young and vibrant economy, it is this vibrant new India that will need senior care in the not-too-distant future.

Care wanted

There are many reasons that account for India's ageing population. Dr V S Natarajan, a leading geriatrician from Chennai, points out that one of the main reasons is longevity. "Advances in medicine

have extended the average age of humans," he says. While this is good news, healthcare professionals point out that as people live longer, the elderly have to cope with chronic illnesses like arthritis, cardiac disease, respiratory problems and Alzheimer's, which need constant monitoring and care.

Ageing brings physical and mental challenges that compromise independence, setting the stage for elder care. "Twenty years ago, I barely saw a dementia patient. But the number of such patients is shockingly higher today," Natarajan reveals.

Another reason silvers are resorting to caretakers is the breakdown in the joint family system and the rise in nuclear families. A couple of decades ago, one would simply depend on a family member for home care and everyone was happy to pitch in. When someone fell ill, the women in the family were expected to step up and don the role of caretaker. More and more, women are now working and struggling to balance work and home, let alone care for a senior member of the family.

Sociologists point out that migration is another reason more silvers are living alone today. Increasingly, their children are moving far from home or overseas, making it impossible for them to provide physical and mental support to their ageing parents.

Praveena and Suresh Kumar, the couple from Bengaluru, decided to return after 15 years in the United States just to take care of their parents. However, a decision like this is never easy, what with so many logistical and financial factors to consider.

The Kumars typify what sociologists are calling the 'sandwich generation', young couples who are literally sandwiched between raising young children and caring for ageing parents. Having to manage their own personal and familial commitments, couples like these have little or no time to look after their parents. But there is one thing they have to potentially solve the problem: disposable incomes that allow them to outsource elder care.

There is another reason for the rising demand in caretaker services. Perceptions are changing. Unlike earlier, wealthy, urban silvers are now willing to spend their savings on home-care services.

Business is booming

Home-care service providers offer nursing attendants, nurses, doctor visits, physiotherapy and medical equipment. Some providers also have



“Compared to a hospital, the ICU-at-home facility works out much cheaper, between ₹ 3,000 and ₹ 7,000 per day, whereas in hospitals, it could be between ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000 per day”

Vivek Srivastava, CEO, Health Care At Home

specialised offerings such as home cardiac care, pulmonology and oncology, palliative care and ICU services. However, the greatest demand, by far, is for nursing attendants during post-operative care. After surgery, elderly patients are not strong enough to take care of themselves and require focused care at home. Many require assistance with basic chores such as bathing, walking, grooming and eating, and being accompanied to the hospital for checkups. The services of nurses are availed only when significant medical intervention is needed and hiring a nursing aide is the most feasible option.

Another service slowly gaining popularity in metro cities is the ICU-at-home facility. “Compared to a hospital, such a facility works out much cheaper, between ₹ 3,000 and ₹ 7,000 per day, whereas in hospitals, it could be between ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000 per day,” says Vivek Srivastava, CEO of Health Care At Home (HCAH). The fact that an increasing number of silvers are choosing home care is reflected in the astonishing increase in the numbers that typify this market. “We are expecting to see a 40-50 per cent increase in our compound annual growth rate in the next few years,” claims Srivastava. HCAH operates in areas including Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jammu, Shimla and Mumbai.

“Home healthcare in India is still at a nascent stage. With well over 80 per cent of business being catered to by the unorganised sector, there is still a long way to go. The last three years have been instrumental in creating awareness,” says T R Narayanaswamy, chief executive officer, One Life Home HealthCare, Chennai. “By 2020, the total Indian healthcare market is estimated to be pegged at \$ 280 billion,” adds Srivastava. “Of this, the home-care segment will be around 3-6 per cent, a huge number.”

On ground, here's what growth in the home-care segment looks like. In the past three years, Portea Medical expanded to 24 cities in India and four in Malaysia, with 4,000 staff handling 75,000 visits per month. One Life Home HealthCare, based in Chennai, has finished its first year with close to

TICKING THE RIGHT BOXES

How to identify the ideal home-care service agency for you

- ☐ **Is the agency the right fit for the service you require?** For example, some agencies may have nursing aide services but may not support doctor visits or supply medical equipment. Some have nursing services but not palliative care. Make a comprehensive list of the services you require and ensure that the agency matches your needs.
- ☐ **Is the agency the right price fit for you?** If not, evaluate alternatives. Perhaps you can consider a piecemeal approach by using the services of your family doctor for home visits and the agency for specific services (physiotherapy, nursing, etc) you need.
- ☐ **Does the agency have a good reputation?** Do your fundamental research on the Internet and through word of mouth.
- ☐ **Does the agency provide the right technology support?** If the silver lives alone, with the family in a different location, technology enablement can matter, as it helps remotely track the health of the patient.
- ☐ **Be aware of your rights**—talk to the agency to understand their policies and procedures, the background checks they conduct on their personnel and the backup systems in place in case your primary caretaker is unavailable for the day.
- ☐ **If you are not satisfied with the service, do not hesitate to ask for a replacement.** Compatibility between the patient and the caretaker can expedite the recovery process.



**Selma Pinto
with her
mother**

8,000 service visits. Medwell Ventures acquired Bengaluru-based Nightingale Home Health Services to focus on home healthcare. Today, it covers 5,000 families in its annual care plans. India Home Health Care, based in Chennai, now operates in four cities. In addition, even hospital chains such as Max Healthcare and Columbia Asia offer home-care services.

While some agencies have a pan-India presence, others such as Homital Medcare and TriBeCa Care focus on niche cities.

So, all is well?

Although silvers and their families are spoilt for choice, hiring a caretaker for an elderly parent or relative has its pitfalls. As this is still an unorganised and unregulated market, there are no checks and balances in place.

Topping the list of concerns is safety and security. "A majority of our clients come to us after disappointing experiences with untrained staff and clinically mismanaged services from the unorganised sector," says Narayanaswamy.

Mysuru resident Selma Pinto, 59, shares her bitter experience with an attendant from an agency. "We had a 19 year-old girl taking care of my 84 year-old mum. The girl was good at her work and we grew to trust her. Then, one day, I returned home to discover many valuables missing. I think I was more upset that she had left my mum alone."

Privacy is another concern for families that hire caretakers. "The simple fact that there is someone present all the time makes it difficult to be normal in your own home. Even if you have a separate bedroom for the patient and the caretaker, it is still awkward," says 38 year-old Uma Premanand, a homemaker in Mumbai, who hired a nursing aide in 2011 when her mother-in-law (late) Meenakshi Viswanathan suffered a hip fracture.

Things can get problematic if silvers are forced to switch caretakers when the previous one is no longer available. Agencies usually have a backup in place but the transition can be painful for the patient. "We had one lady who was extremely disciplined and would get my mother-in-law to do her physio exercises on time. After a while, she was replaced by another lady, who was very laidback. It



“For most family members, caretaking is exhausting after a while. They could be prone to depression, and may need counselling to deal with the situation

Dr V S Natarajan, geriatrician

is not easy to get accustomed to someone new,” says Premanand. Accountability is also low and quality of service varies considerably. Agencies point out that they have policies and procedures in place to train their personnel but, often, the services offered are inconsistent; the quality of service also depends on the skillset and commitment of the professional.

Everyday battle for the family

Although the silver undergoing home care is definitely at the centre of this story, there is another individual whose life is impacted: an immediate family member, usually the daughter or daughter-in-law, who endures maximum emotional impact.

“There was a time I used to go out and meet people but with mum’s health condition, someone has to stay at home in case of an emergency, and that’s usually me. Over time, I have become a homebody. It was difficult at first, but I have grown accustomed to it,” says Pinto.

Meanwhile, Suresh Kumar from Bengaluru reveals, “We were in the US for many years as a nuclear family. Then we shifted to India into a joint family setup. It was a major transition for all of us, especially for my wife, who looked after my mother all day. Next, we had to adjust to our personal space being shared by a hired caretaker.”

He adds, “My job involves a lot of travel; there were a couple of times when my mother had to be rushed to the emergency room and my wife had to handle this on her own. I watched her struggle physically and mentally, trying to adjust to her additional responsibilities. There were times I was worried that it would affect her health.”

In Premanand’s case, she had young children at home when her mother-in-law had the hip fracture.

“Juggling kids’ activities, drops and pickups, and housework without upsetting my mother-in-law was very tough. Even though the attendant was there, she preferred me to be around.”

Dr Natarajan says that, at times, he is more worried for family members than the patients. The sudden change in routine, societal expectations, financial burden and lifestyle is very challenging for the family. “While most people start with dedication, showing enormous amount of love and care, they find it exhausting after a while. This is especially true of people with relatives suffering from disorders such as dementia. In such cases, the family member could be prone to depression and guilt, and may need counselling on how to deal with the situation.”

THE WAY FORWARD

Recommendations of Prof S Siva Raju, TISS, to improve home care in India

- ❑ Make geriatric healthcare a part of primary healthcare services
- ❑ Train peripheral health workers and community health volunteers to identify and refer elderly patients for timely treatment
- ❑ Provide specialised training for medical officers in geriatric medicine
- ❑ Supply elderly patients from poor and low-income facilities with free or reasonably priced treatment through public-private partnership
- ❑ Use day-care hospitals to play an important role in providing close supervision and follow-up of patients with chronic diseases (cost of a day-care centre is less than a nursing home)
- ❑ Use NGOs, charitable organisations and faith-based organisations to play a key role
- ❑ Regulate home-care services to promote ageing in place



**Uma
Premanand
with her
mom-in-law
Meenakshi
Viswanathan**

In some cases, the family member could be aged as well, and dealing with their own health issues. When 58 year-old Ramaa Lakshmi Narayanan from Chennai was a working woman, she depended on her mother-in-law Janaki Venkataraman to take care of her children and the household. Now, life has come full circle. Narayanan has diabetes and high blood pressure and is undergoing physiotherapy for pain in her knees. But she also takes care of her 92 year-old mother-in-law. "Although I have hired help, some days are particularly tough, given my health condition. If I fall sick, my husband has to take the day off from work or we need to find another way to work around the problem," she says.

Although paid home-care services offer some relief to the family members, the financial burden can be enormous, especially for middle-class families. The cost of a full-time professional caretaker can range between ₹ 20,000 and ₹ 45,000 per month. In Tier-I cities, this service costs 10-15 per cent more

than in Tier-II and III locations, while come-and-go services cost much more than live-in attendants. On the other hand, core nursing services cost 50 per cent more than aides do.

Some families have managed to successfully work out innovative methods to deal with these costs. When Janaki Venkataraman's health demanded home care, her grandchildren quickly conferred on a WhatsApp group and decided to share the financial burden.

However, where pooling in resources to share the financial burden is not possible, some families make compromises such as hiring a caretaker only during the daytime and monitoring the patient in-house at night. Although a huge help, home care is also a bitter pill to swallow but one that many cannot avoid.

Emotional roller-coaster

Ageing is a challenging process for everyone. Not only is the body slowing down and changing, illness sets in for many, a reality that is hard to accept. Add to that the emotional issues associated with ageing.

Among the many challenges is the loss of independence, either partially or totally, for many silvers, as systems and organs begin to age. Chronic illnesses like arthritis, cardiac and pulmonary disease, stroke and partial paralysis, and weakness caused by the wages of silent killers like diabetes necessitate dedicated care.

While using the services of a caretaker may improve the lives of silvers and their families, it's not as cut-and-dried as it seems. Making the transition from being an independent individual to leaning on hired help for the smallest of things can be emotionally crushing. Dr Natarajan remarks, "We may be doing well with physical treatment but are still lagging significantly on providing mental support."

Janaki Venkataraman shares her story, "I was in my early 40s when I lost my husband. From a life of despair and financial struggle, I raised five children to be independent. Till even a few years ago, I managed all the household chores myself. But today, I can no longer do things with the same ease. My body has slowed."

The younger generation may not realise it but what may seem like a minor adjustment could seem like a life change for the elderly. So even adjusting to a new caretaker is a challenging proposition

THE COSTS OF CARE

The typical costs involved in availing the service of home-care agencies

Type of service	Costs (approximate figures, varies across agencies)
Preventive care (doctor visits and lab tests)	One-time visit: ₹ 800-1,700 Annual: ₹ 12,000-25,000
Nursing service visits	One-time visit: ₹ 250-1,000
Long-term nursing	12-hour care, monthly: ₹ 20,000-30,000 24-hour care, monthly: ₹ 30,000-45,000
Nursing attendant	24-hour care, monthly: ₹ 20,000-36,000
Total knee replacement aftercare and other physiotherapy treatments	One session: ₹ 450-850
Diabetes care plan	Annual: ₹ 15,000
Holistic eldercare (nursing attendant, physiotherapy services, ancillary services such as lab tests and medical equipment rental, complimentary doctor visits)	Monthly: ₹ 19,000-40,000
ICU at home	Per day: ₹ 3,000-7,000

for some. Lakshmi Natarajan, the mother-in-law from the Kumar family, explains, “Owing to my arthritis, I have been requiring help at home for the last couple of years. My biggest issue is when an existing caretaker leaves. It takes me a few weeks to adjust to the new person, and make her understand my dietary requirements and lifestyle preferences. As I spend a significant portion of my day with her, the emotional connect also matters. There was this one instance when a caretaker left in just two weeks, and it was really frustrating for me to adapt afresh.”

Dr Shaunak Ajinkya, consultant psychiatrist, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai, emphasises the importance of counselling and focused geriatric services to deal with issues relating to silvers. This helps them accept their predicament and makes them feel less lonely. “In the West, it is a specialised field but in our country, the concept has drawn a blank.”

He adds, “Here, it is usually the local family physician that caters to the needs of older people. Not that physicians can’t look after older people, but as the body ages, it undergoes many changes and that’s what a geriatrician specialises in. Just the way you have paediatricians for children, you need to have geriatricians for older people.”

What does the future hold?

There is sufficient data to ring alarm bells among policymakers and the powers-that-be in government in India. But precious little has been done to address the fact that, in the blink of an eye, 20 per cent of Indians will be senior citizens.

That’s why a new initiative called the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) is viewed as a positive step (*see “Study Time” in ‘Orbit’*). Launched in March, the study will follow the health and socio-economic conditions of 60,000 Indians over the age of 45 for at least 25 years and report on how growing old affects the country. Hopefully, this massive initiative, conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of Union Health and Family Welfare, means the Indian government is finally acknowledging that the dramatic demographic shift in India’s population means mounting pressure on socioeconomic fronts such as insurance systems and pension outlays, healthcare expenditure, fiscal discipline and savings levels. And that it will work to implement policy changes to address these challenges.

While India is waking up to this pressing reality rather late, developed countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have already implemented strong restorative programs. The objective of these

“Geriatric services is a specialised field in the West, but in our country, the concept has drawn a blank

Dr Shaunak Ajinkya, consultant psychiatrist,
Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai



programmes is to provide short-term and timely home care for seniors and restore them to a state where they can be reasonably self-dependent.

As Prof S Siva Raju, chairperson of the Centre for Population, Health and Development, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, informs us, “Australia’s home-care services are offered free of charge for a few weeks for all assessed eligible clients. They are either referred at the community level for the Home Independence Program (HIP) or, following a hospital admission, for the Personal Enablement Program (PEP).” These are short-term, individualised programmes (eight to 12 weeks) that involve daily task analysis, work simplification and endurance building to restore the silver to a healthy and confident state.

Many countries also offer cash allowances for seniors. Italy, for example, has a cash-for-care scheme. Prof Siva Raju says, “In Germany, a combination of home care and residential services along with cash options is offered to the eligible elderly. The government is responsible for registering service providers, negotiating the price and overseeing the quality of services offered.”

Thanks to a strong familial system that has come to the rescue so far, India has lacked the fundamental recognition that the elderly need focused home healthcare. But times are changing—rapidly. And if one out of every five Indians is going to be a senior citizen in the next 30 years, it’s time to gear up, move towards a state of preparedness, and do right by Generation A. 🌟

HELP AT HAND

HCAH	http://www.healthcareathomeindia.com/	1800 102 4224
Portea	http://www.portea.com/	1800 121 2323
Nightingales	http://www.nightingales.in/	Bengaluru: 1800 103 4530 Hyderabad: 040-40020001 Mumbai: 022-22847777
India Home Health Care	http://www.indiahomehealthcare.com/	Chennai: 044-43594456 North Bengaluru: 080-4092 3923 South Bengaluru: 080-41714100 Pune: 020-40042000 Hyderabad: 040-40119600
One Life Home HealthCare	http://www.onelifehealthcare.in/	+91 97903 33411
Homital Medcare	http://www.homital.in/	+91 84471 84471
TriBeCa Care	http://www.tribecacare.com/	033 40277777

The first day at school

The first time you rode the bicycle.

The first crush you had at thirteen

The first drama you got a part in

The first day at college

The first date you went on

The first kiss

The first time you proposed

The first job interview

The first board meeting you addressed

The first day after retirement

BUTTERFLIES *never retire*

The first click of the mouse.

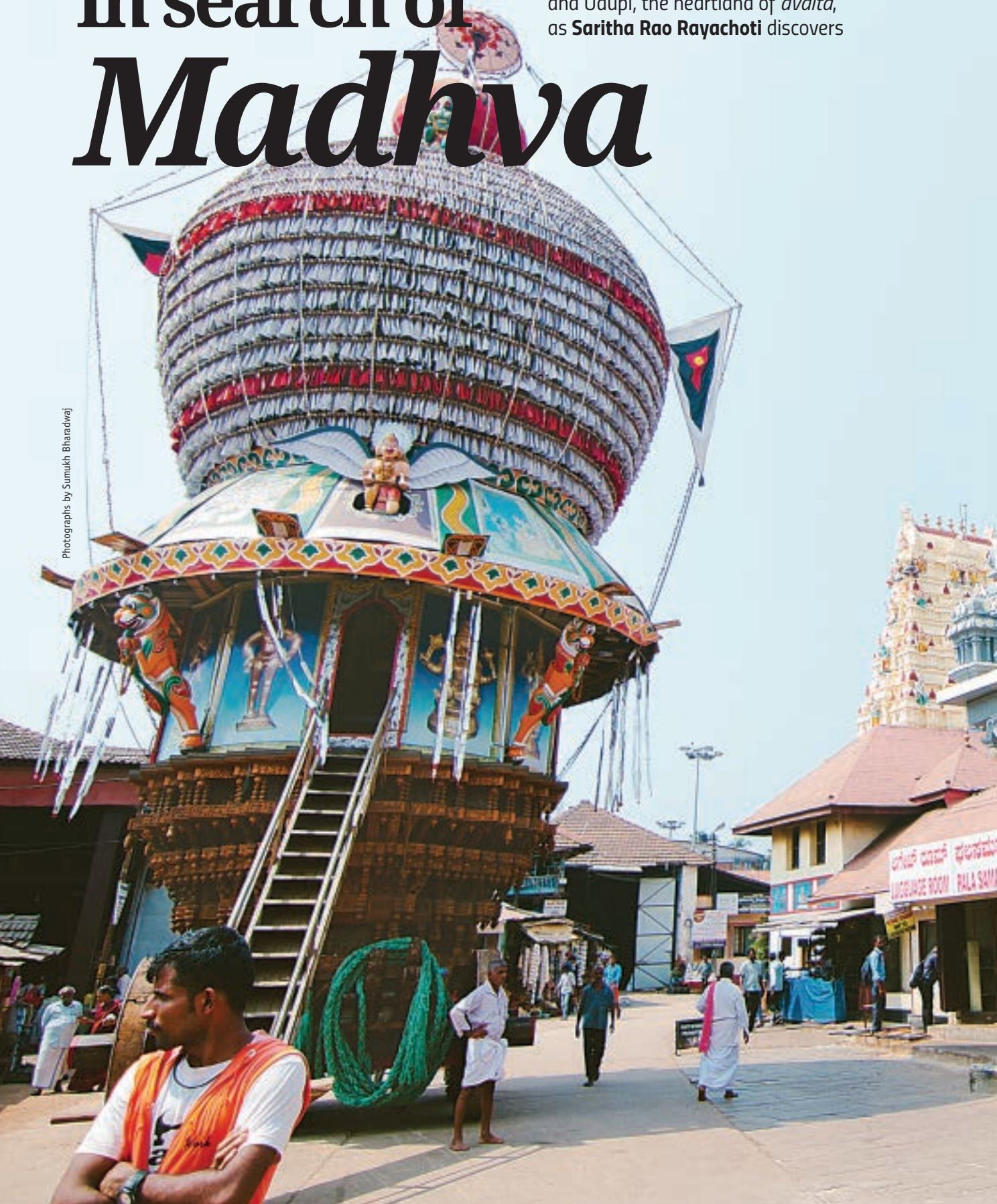
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In search of *Madhva*

Spiritual legends abound in Malpe and Udupi, the heartland of *dvaita*, as **Saritha Rao Rayachoti** discovers

Photographs by Sumukh Bharadwaj





It is the 13th century. A ship from Dwarka sets sails along the western coast of India, crosses the coast of Goa and navigates further south. A storm descends upon the sea rendering visibility poor along a particularly treacherous stretch. In the haze, the crew spots a blur of orange in the distance, on what seems to be land. In the absence of any other navigational device, they use it to steer the ship to safety.

The spot of orange, as the story goes, was the saffron upper cloth that the philosopher Madhvacharya waved from the shore at Malpe to guide the ship. Legend has it that the grateful crew offer him two logs of wood used as ballast to balance the ship, as tokens of gratitude. Madhvacharya discovers that these are not logs, but mounds of *gopichandana*, considered sacred among worshippers of Krishna. *Gopichandana* is a variety of caked mud from a pond in Vrindavan that is presumed to be scented by the emollients and perfumes of the Gopis who bathed there during the time of Krishna.



Here at Malpe, we hear about the miracle—that Madhvacharya calmed the ocean with a powerful swish of his upper cloth. It is compelling enough to convince one of the near divinity of Madhvacharya. I begin to wonder about this marked shift in our group's collective beliefs, from the rationalists that we are in our daily lives, to seekers of miracles in spiritual narratives

Imagine Madhvacharya's delight when he discovers that these mounds also encased idols of Krishna and Balarama. He installs the Balarama idol at a temple in Malpe and brings the Krishna idol to Udupi, which eventually becomes an important pilgrimage centre for Vaishnavism.

In the fierce midday sun, Malpe beach is a blinding expanse of white sand. I realise for the first time that day that the above version of the *gopichandana* story is solely mine in the way it is narrated. But here at Malpe, shielding ourselves from the afternoon glare, we hear about the miracle—that Madhvacharya calmed the ocean with a powerful swish of his upper cloth. It is compelling enough to convince one of the near divinity of Madhvacharya. I begin to wonder about this marked shift in our group's collective beliefs, from the rationalists that we are in our daily lives, to seekers of miracles in spiritual narratives.

We are on a day trip to Udupi, a small town in Karnataka, also known in days of yore as Rajathapeetha and Shivalli. At the heart of Udupi stands the Krishna Temple with its idol installed by Madhvacharya (1238-1317), a Hindu philosopher who propounded the philosophy of *dvaita* or dualism, that the *jeevatma* (the self or individual soul) and *paramatma* (God or the Supreme Soul) are separate. The temple is surrounded by eight *matha* or monastic orders: Pejavara, Palimaru, Adamaru, Puttige, Sodhe, Kaniyooru, Shiroor and Krishnapura. They oversee the administration of the temple by rotation, every two years.

We began our visit with the pertinent question as to why devotees are required to visit a Shiva temple before the Krishna Temple. Chandramouliswara is considered the *graamaddevta*—presiding deity of the region—and devotees pay their respects to him before proceeding any further. The shrine is a squat humble structure, typical of the temple architecture in these parts, with no lofty *vimana* or *gopura*. Drawings of *dwarapala* flank the doorway to the sanctum.

At the Anantheshwara shrine next door, Madhvacharya's parents prayed for a child for 12 years. And it was here, almost 80 years later, that he is said to have been last seen. The story of Madhvacharya began and ended here. The word *anantha*, however, means just the opposite—endless, with neither beginning nor end.

At the Kanakana Kindi, or Kanaka's Window, we hear the story of Kanakadasa (1508-1606), a poet-composer from a shepherding community who wished to see the deity of Krishna. Social restrictions of those times did not permit him entry the temple. One day, the wall that blocked his line of sight crumbled and the deity turned on its base towards the west to grant the ardent devotee his wish.

The window is small, with three vertical slots, and every visitor stands in the place of Kanakadasa for the twice-removed first glimpse of Krishna's idol. How many of us are aware of this moment of empathy with Kanakadasa, so evocatively set up as a ritual? To stand where he stood, and yearn for a glimpse of the deity as he did!

One approaches the main temple from a side entrance. The sanctum does not have a doorway, only a window with nine holes, called the Navadwara Kindi, through which one can see the idol. It perhaps alludes to the intricate allegorical tale of King Puranjana in the *Bhagavata Purana* where the *navadwara*, literally, nine gates, denote the nine apertures of the human body through which we experience the world. Surprisingly, there are numerous references to this window as the Navagraha Kindi, although there are no symbols of the *navagraha* carved on the window frame.

The deity itself is striking, depicting Bala-Krishna, little Krishna, whose hands clutch a butter churner and its rope, mirroring not only his fondness for milk, curd and butter, but also, as some devotees tell me later, the churning of the human mind through worship to gain realisation.

We are now ushered to a shrine for Mukhya Prana or Main Life Force, as Hanuman is also known. Mukhya Prana is a title usually attributed to Vayu, the wind god, for his vital role in the functioning of the human body. Hanuman from the *Ramayana* and Bheema from the *Mahabharata* are considered incarnations of Vayu, as is Madhvacharya.

On our way out, we notice numerous gaily painted chariots, with small flags and sparkly streamers flapping in

Clockwise from top left: devotees at Kanakana Kindi; the idol of Goddess Durga at Kunjarugiri; a priest offers *akshata* of tamarind seeds and rice at Pajaka Kshetra; butter churners at a local shop



factfile

GETTING THERE

By air: Mangalore is the nearest airport, about 60 km away.

By rail: Udupi is the nearest railhead but Mangalore City or Mangalore Junction may be more convenient.

By road: Udupi is 60 km away from Mangalore on the Kochi-Panvel Highway.

ACCOMMODATION

On a pilgrimage, there are many options to stay in Udupi itself, as part of the eight *matha* or in one of the hotels. This would be a convenient base to explore the place. Else, Mangalore has options for every budget.

WHAT TO BUY

Gopichandana, idols of Udupi Krishna, butter churners, other religious essentials.



the light breeze. On one of them, I spot a poster of Parashurama, who looks imposing, his steely gaze cast over the rooftops, and across the land, to perhaps his *kshetra* that we are to visit later that afternoon. We are handed out small pellets of *gopichandana* and this comes as a timely reminder for us to be on our way to Malpe, the site where the mounds were gifted to Madhvacharya and where I begin to wonder about the nature of spiritual narratives.

After regarding the hot sands of Malpe beach with some circumspection, we hear that the temple is about to close and we must make haste. This is the temple that houses the idol of Balarama that Madhvacharya also received in the mound of *gopichandana*. It is a rushed visit, and I am barely able to make out the deity in the dim light of the sanctum. The temple itself is small and serene, with the sanctum in the middle of a courtyard.

We press on and make our way to Pajaka Kshetra, often mispronounced as Paduka Kshetra. After praying at the Anantheshwara Temple in Udupi for an offspring, Madhvacharya's parents Madhyageha Bhatta and Vedavati moved to Pajaka Kshetra where, on Vijayadashami day in 1238, Madhvacharya was born. He was named Vasudeva.

Vasudeva went on to be initiated into *sanyasa* as a teenager and named Purnaprajna when he became the head of the monastery. He went on to refute Adi Shankara's *advaita* philosophy and became renowned as Ananda Tirtha and Madhvacharya. His debates in favour of *dvaita*, or dualism, earned him many followers, collectively known as *madhva*. The name of Madhvacharya commands such reverence

that it is hard to imagine him as a little boy, however precocious he might appear in the stories we hear.

There is a modest shrine for Anantapadmanabha in the courtyard. In the corridor surrounding the courtyard, large baskets of the sort used for harvesting or carrying coconuts or chillies dry in the sun. A young woman sits on the floor preparing garlands of sweet smelling *bakula*. A small copper container holds what looks like the fossil of a mollusc, with a few *parijatha* flowers strewn over it. A resident tells us that it is a Sudarshana *Saligrama*, and is kept as part of the *puja* in the sanctum here as a *pratika* (representation) of Krishna's *sudarshana chakra*.

Later, I come across a reference that said that the statues of Krishna and Balarama Madhvacharya received were also made of *saligrama*, ammonite fossils found only in the Gandak river basin in present-day Nepal. It is here in this courtyard that little Vasudeva had his *aksharabhyasa*, his first lesson in the written word. Even today, parents bring their children here for their first inculcation. When Madhyageha held his son's hand and traced a letter on a surface of rice grains, I wonder if he realised the role of the written word in his son's life.

Soon enough, we are led to a tank outside, Vasudeva Tirtha, with a small shrine for Parashurama. On the steps of the tank, halved coconuts and red chillies dry in the sun while the resident cat is sprawled in the shade. It is an unassuming place, one I would love to return to, whether it held any special significance or not. But as we discovered, it did.

What if every miracle held the kernel of a metaphor? Madhvacharya's calming the ocean personified his role as a guide to those floundering in search of a spiritual identity. The metaphor of the sprouted twig is obvious, that Madhvacharya would go on to revive Vaishnavism. Were these narratives meant to be dual and layered...?

A hillock in Kunjarugiri is closely linked to the story of Parashurama who is said to have established a temple for Goddess Durga here. Around the hill he is also said to have created four tanks named after his weapons: Dhanushtirtha (bow), Banatirtha (arrow), Gadatirtha (mace) and Parashutirtha (battle axe). As a little boy, Vasudeva had his ritual bath here.

There is a sun-dappled leafy enclosure with a path around a banyan tree. The legend to this is, little Vasudeva was playing in the yard, when his father asked about the twig in his hand. The boy replied that it was Vaishnava Dharma. His father pointed out that the twig was dry. The boy planted it and it is said to have sprouted. This may be the site, and not the very tree that grew from that sapling, but we are grateful for the large canopy that we sit under. When we return to the shrine from another entrance, the stories continue in the vein of the fantastic. Two large stone slabs are displayed here as the ones Vasudeva is said to have covered vessels of milk and curd with—a little farfetched, even if Vasudeva was nicknamed Bhima for his strength!

Before we return to Mangalore, we decide to sit awhile near the Vasudeva Tirtha near a tamarind tree that is unremarkable, except for the heart-warming story behind it. When a moneylender arrived to collect his debt from Madhyageha, little Vasudeva is said to have offered the lender tamarind seeds as repayment. This is a story I love, about a child who assumed responsibility for his father's debts, and that of a moneylender who had the grace to not only humour the child but absolve the debt. I like the fact that the signboard describes the incident without a miracle, but even as I bask in this moment of discovery, I overhear a narration that the tamarind seeds turned to gold. The miracle takes the magic out of the moment for me because it is competitively similar to the one about Adi Shankara and the story of the golden gooseberries.

Slowly, the realisation dawns on me. Miracles are the lifeblood of the spiritual narrative. Here I was, approaching this abundance of miracles as a rationalist would, by breaking down a miracle to its bare components and reassembling it, supported by plausible, scientific explanations. But who am I to refute a miracle when it inspires *bhakti*?

On my return from Udupi, I am drawn to another possibility. What if every miracle held the kernel of a metaphor?

HOW UDUPI GOT ITS NAME

Udupa is the name for stars and *Udupa Pathi* is the name given to the moon or Chandra, who was married to the stars. When Chandra became particularly besotted with one star, Rohini, the other sisters complained to Daksha, their father, whose curse rendered Chandra without lustre. Chandra undertook a penance presumably in the place we now call Udupi, to seek the help of Shiva to regain his lustre. Shiva tucked him in a matted lock of his hair so he could recharge his *soma* even as he waned and waned because of the curse. Hence, Shiva is also called Chandramouliswara, Chandrashekhara or Chandrachoodeshwara.

Madhvacharya's calming the ocean personified his role as a guide to those floundering in search of a spiritual identity. The metaphor of the sprouted twig is obvious, that Madhvacharya would go on to revive Vaishnavism. I found a reference to the hefty stone slabs where it was likened to the two commentaries Madhvacharya authored, *Gitaabhyasa* and *Gitatatparya*.

A rationalist would explain away the Kanakadasa miracle thus—that the idol always faced the same direction and when a powerful tremor hit the region, the wall collapsed and Kanakadasa had his *darshan*. But for seekers of metaphor, the wall itself could represent social restriction. If I took the metaphor further, it could also mean that although there is a window for the masses, and it has been built into the framework, the social restriction still stands.

Were these narratives meant to be dual and layered; miracles for those seeking the literal, metaphors for those seeking the figurative? What about the tamarind seed? Was it about humble acts that would clear karmic debts? Or did it personify little Vasudeva, so small, yet with intrinsic potential as the harbinger of transformation?

At Pajaka Kshetra, I receive the *akshata*, blessings in the form of a few grains of rice. Unlike other places of worship, the rice on my palm also has a few tamarind seeds nestled amid the grains. I pass these seeds on to those in our group who believe that placing it in the *puja* room will grow one's wealth. For me, it is enriching enough that a simple pilgrimage grew into a journey through metaphor. 🌸

Experience

A second childhood

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photography

William Dalrymple

Picture this!

We know him as an author, historian and literary festival director but few know that William Dalrymple is also a photographer. His passion for photography took a new turn recently, when he discovered the smartphone camera. “These [photographs] have been a result of a restless year, between books, when I visited some of the world’s most remote places—from Leh to Lindisfarne, from the Hindu Kush to the Lammermuirs, across the rolling hills south of Sienna,” the 51 year-old told e-paper *Livemint*. He posted his images on photosharing websites and was surprised at the interest that his bleak, vivid and, at times, fantastical monochromes drew. Dalrymple has mounted an exhibition of his photographs at three galleries, titled *The Writer’s Eye*, along with a photo book of the same name published by HarperCollins. The exhibition is on at the Sunaparanta Gallery in Goa and will travel to Mumbai later this year.



Hospital HEROES

In big cities, even the largest public hospitals are too small. The beds are not nearly enough, supplies run low and they are often short-staffed. Miraculously, they make do. Take, for instance, Mumbai's King Edward Memorial Hospital, or KEM Hospital. On an average day, it caters to 230 inpatients, 560 emergency patients, operates on 150 patients and sees a staggering 5,800 outpatients.

Yet, as one doctor puts it, "...what we do is never enough". In a heart-warming, 70-minute documentary titled *Getting Better*, 65 year-old director Gulserene Dastur (seen on left) reveals an often unnoticed side of Mumbai's largest civic hospital. Dastur began work on the film in 2008, a few months after her father died in one of Mumbai's private hospitals. Moved by this experience, she wanted to make a donation to a medical establishment and a doctor pointed her to KEM. "When I was thinking of ways to contribute to the hospital,



"It is an adult show with dialogues that may have to be beeped out. It may come as a shocker that I am part of it because I have been stuck with the *Babuji* image ever since I was 30. It's time to break the stereotype. It is an experimental show and I feel the youth will lap it up."

—Alok Nath, 59, on reinventing his 'samskari' image as the host of *Samskari*, an adult chat show on the web where he will discuss sex and sins with his celebrity guests



I realised that film was the only way I could share what I had seen,” she says. Having no prior experience in film (she had spent 25 years working in aviation), she reached out to colleagues and friends. Fortunately for her, “everything just started falling into my lap”. With a trusty crew, tricky permissions acquired and funding in place (she used her father’s life insurance money), Dastur spent four years interviewing doctors, nurses, ward boys, watchmen, patients, relatives, administrators at the hospital, and professors and students of the affiliated G S Medical College. “We were quickly sensitised about where to stand and what not to do, and after six months, they stopped paying attention to us,” says Dastur. The result is an incredibly humane side of a largely misunderstood institution—where future doctors are taught that patients are not commodities, ward boys take pride in their work and administrators multitask in the face of impossible odds. “The patients came to us. Happy or unhappy, they had a story to tell,” says Dastur. She plans to use her film to attract positive attention to the 90 year-old hospital. “If enough people see it and have a different idea of what public hospitals are like, that’s good enough for me.”

Getting Better was screened at the Godrej India Culture Lab in Mumbai, on World Health Day on 7 April.

—Natasha Rego



EXPERIMENT WITH TRUTH

Saurabh Shukla’s new stage offering—a thriller—is gaining attention for exploring an uncharted genre on the Indian theatre scene. Set against the backdrop of a blistering Kashmir winter night, *Barff* is the story of an urban doctor who makes a house call in a ghost town, where everyone has left but one family. The doctor is shocked to find the parents nursing a doll, which they have taken as their real child. This leads to a conversation that touches deep questions of truth, belief and reality, subjects that the 53 year-old has contemplated since his early days. “As a young man, when I decided to opt for art as a profession, a large section of society warned me that... the truth of life is different than what I imagine it to be. Once I joined art...many believed that I was clueless about the truth of art. But it is one’s belief that forms one’s truth. And we live a whole life believing a truth which does not exist for others. This [play] is my journey, to see the truth of another side.” Starring Shukla as the doctor, Sadiya Siddiqui and Sunil Palwal, the play is showing at Tata Theatre, NCPA, Mumbai on 8 May.



The PARSI connection

The Parsi-Zoroastrian community is making a splash in Delhi with a two-month-long exhibition of everything Parsi. The Everlasting Flame International Programme, inaugurated on March 19, is being conducted by the Ministry of Minority Affairs under its Hamari Dharohai scheme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and the Parzor Foundation (a UNESCO initiative). Says Dr Shernaz Cama, director of Parzor Foundation, “We

are proud to present a Bronze Age civilisation that has survived in an unbroken line of tradition, absorbing the best from East and West, creating a unique heritage of humanity.” From film screenings, photography and painting exhibitions by Parsi artists to scholarly talks and symposiums at cultural institutes across the city, this is a Herculean effort to showcase the strength and vibrancy of a community as it races against time to for its survival.

festival



Photographs courtesy: Parzor Foundation



29 April - 8 May: *My Family and Other Parsis*, a photography exhibition by Sooni Taraporevala at India Habitat Centre

6 May: Teke Ceremony and Puppets from Azerbaijan, by Poupak Azimpour Tabrizi, scholar in Iranian puppetry and rituals

13 May: The Art Collections at TIFR, a talk by Dr Oindrila Raychaudhuri, chief archivist at TIFR

20 May: Parzor Film Festival Screening on Homi Bhabha

27 May: Valedictory address by Amitav Ghosh



Photographs courtesy: Sadaanandan P K

MURALS TO MINIATURES

BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITION, THIS ARTIST HAS TRANSFORMED THE KERALA MURAL INTO A MINIATURE ART FORM. SADAANANDAN P K SPENT FIVE YEARS OF HIS LIFE TRAINING WITH RENOWNED MURAL ARTIST MAMMIYUR KRISHNAN KUTTY NAIR BEFORE HE GAVE THE ART FORM HIS OWN SPIN. "FOR OVER 10 YEARS, I HAVE BEEN ADAPTING THESE TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES TO PAPER AND CANVAS AND CREATING MINIATURE PAINTINGS. I MODIFIED THE WATER-BASED DYES BY BINDING THEM WITH A PLANT GUM SO THAT IT ADHERES TO CANVAS," THE 50 YEAR-OLD TELLS US. THIS TECHNIQUE RESULTS IN MYSTICAL PAINTINGS OF THE SAME VITALITY THAT THE ANCIENT ART FORM IS KNOWN FOR. SADAANANDAN HELD A WORKSHOP FOR STUDENTS OF FINE ARTS AT THE LOKAYUKTA ART GALLERY IN DELHI LAST MONTH, WHERE HIS MINIATURE PAINTINGS WERE ON DISPLAY AS PART OF A GROUP EXHIBITION TITLED *IMPRINTS SPRING 2016*. THIS TREAT WILL BE ORGANISED IN MUMBAI LATER THIS MONTH BY ART FESTIVAL ORGANISER ART IMPRINTS.



A gentleman always

On Nehru's death anniversary, **Raj Kanwar** reminisces about the chivalrous person behind the public persona

As a young journalist in the 1950s, I had the rare privilege of having one-on-one meetings with Jawaharlal Nehru on his frequent visits to Dehra Dun. Meeting Nehru those days was child's play; one had to just reach the Circuit House where he stayed. No security, no PAs, no telephone calls or prior appointments; it was as easy as that! There were just a handful of journalists those days, and the district officials and personnel of the Local Intelligence Unit (LIU) knew them well enough.

My first meeting with Nehru happened in the mid-1950s.

I was then the editor of *Vanguard* weekly and a stringer for some mainstream English newspapers.

Thus, one winter morning I bicycled all the way to the Circuit House porch and parked my bicycle against its outer wall. Ram Prashad, the all-pervasive bearer, accosted me and asked, "Have you come to see Panditji?" My reply was just a nod. A couple of constables with *lathi* lolled about while some others sauntered inconspicuously deep on the expansive lawns under the shades of giant trees.

Ram Prashad pointed towards the lawn, and I saw Panditji strolling there. Mustering courage, I approached him and introduced myself. Nehru saw through my nervousness, and smiled. "I have no news to give, young man," he said. My response was, "I haven't come for any news; I just wanted to see you." Nehru again smiled, and that reassured me. I murmured some inane words. Seeing my nervousness, Nehru asked me about my subjects in college. "I did my masters in political science." By then I had overcome my nervousness and I told him I was the president of the students' union in college. Having spent almost 15 minutes with him, I thanked Nehru. He smiled, and asked me to feel free to see him whenever he visited Dehra Dun. This carte blanche of the invite lifted me to seventh heaven!

Meeting Nehru those days was child's play; one had to just reach the Circuit House where he stayed. No security, no PAs, no telephone calls or prior appointments; it was as easy as that!

Thereafter, I must have met Pandit Nehru on five or six occasions in Dehra Dun. Once I accompanied him to a village called Tuini in Chakrata. When someone asked about the development of the backward Jaunsar Bawar area, Nehru delivered a long speech, making a strong case for what he described as "integrated development of the whole country" rather than piecemeal growth of individual areas. In an open letter to him in *Vanguard*, I mustered enough courage and marshaled many arguments to challenge his premise of "integrated development". I had the audacity to present Nehru the copy of *Vanguard* that carried my open letter. He read the story and smiled.

My most interesting encounter with Nehru, however, came about in Delhi. As a young reporter on the staff of *The Indian Express*, my regular beat was Delhi University. The students' union of Lady Irwin College had invited Nehru for a function. When it ended, scores of girls approached Panditji for autographs. He graciously allowed five minutes for autographs, claiming he had an important meeting to attend.

Long after the queue of autograph seekers had vanished, Nehru was still there; he sat cross-legged on the dais surrounded by a bevy of young, beautiful things chatting and joking. He gave his "important appointment" a miss! In fact, I had never seen Nehru so relaxed, bantering and innocently flirting with the cream of Lady Irwin girls. I sat on the steps to the podium watching Nehru at his flirtatious best. When he looked at me, all I could say was, "Sir, I really envy you!"

Final days

It was by sheer providence that Nehru chose to spend his last days in Dehra Dun, the city he loved more than any other. Here, in the sylvan surroundings of the

Nehru reading *Vanguard* as Kanwar and his sister Kamla look on

Circuit House, under the shade of his favourite camphor tree, he felt at home far away from the madding crowds of Delhi and political intrigues. Here he partook of simple vegetarian meals, took leisurely walks on the expansive lawns, sat under trees, and occasionally read. Here, he visited his old friend Sri Prakasa, former minister and governor, at Kotalgaon, eight miles uphill on the Mussoorie Road. Nehru and Indira also visited Sahastradhara on the penultimate day of his stay in Dehra Dun. Sitting in the veranda of the then recently constructed PWD guesthouse, he and Indira enjoyed the view of the Sahastradhara sulphur springs and the mountains beyond. As the sun was setting far away in the horizon, Nehru returned to the Circuit House, feeling rejuvenated and relaxed.

On 26 May, Cantonment Polo Grounds in Dehra Dun was the scene of action. Nehru haltingly climbed the steps of the helicopter stairway, his usual briskness missing. Indira followed close by, as if she feared her 'Papu' might stumble. That brought to an end his four-day visit to Dehra Dun for rest and recuperation after suffering a stroke during the Bhubaneswar AICC session on 8 January.

After Nehru, who?

Here a little digression will be in order to put Nehru's illness in proper political perspective. The question, 'After Nehru, who?', had assumed a shrill and repetitive stridency across the country. Rumours were afloat that Indira would be inducted into her father's cabinet with an important portfolio. The routine work of the prime minister was already being shared between Gulzari Lal Nanda and T T K Krishnamachari. Later, Lal Bahadur Shastri was made a minister without portfolio; he was allocated much of the prime minister's responsibilities.

On the eve of his departure for Dehra Dun, Nehru had addressed a crowded press conference on 22 May. When the question, 'After Nehru, who?', was repeatedly asked, Nehru felt annoyed, and stoutly retorted, "My life is not ending so very soon." In the midst of the applause his retort evoked, no one imagined how wrong that state-



ment would turn out to be. Alas, Nehru's life ended within five days of that un-prophetic assertion!

The last sunset

Reverting to Dehra Dun, Nehru stood at the open doorway of the helicopter, looking back almost blankly at the small farewell group. There were Congress leaders, senior civil and defence officers as per protocol, and a few journalists, yours truly included. A pale, faint smile appeared on his otherwise rosy countenance. In retrospect, I realised his left hand was less active than his right. Nehru's

left knee appeared somewhat stiff, hampering his brisk trademark gait. Those were perhaps the after-effects of the stroke. Nehru did not appear his usual cheerful self, though he tried hard to keep pretences and succeeded to some extent. He waved at us jauntily with his right hand, but that seemed a laboured effort. There was a strange expression on his face. What did he wish to convey to those of us who had assembled there to bid him adieu? Did he have a premonition about his death? District Magistrate A P Dikshit, during whose tenure Nehru visited Dehra Dun on five occasions, had written a book on those visits in 1965 titled *Antim Charan*. My impressions tallied with his.

On 25 May, Nehru talked many times of postponing his departure for Delhi by a day. He even indicated that he had appointments in Delhi only on 27 May afternoon. So relaxed and comfortable had he felt in Dehra Dun that Nehru yearned to extend his stay. Dikshit suggested that the prime minister stay back through May and June, adding that all important files and papers could be sent here: "*Aur sab kaam yahan se ho jayega.*" "*Haan kaam to sab ho jayega,*" Nehru responded philosophically. Was this a foreboding of sorts? But eventually, the scheduled departure on 26th afternoon was adhered to.

It is said that Nehru woke up several times during the night, and was given a sedative by his trusted attendant Nathu Ram. He woke up one final time before dawn. In the wee hours of 27 May, Indira and physician Bedi were summoned. Nehru seemed disoriented when the duo appeared by his side. Soon he fell into a coma and passed away at 1.44 pm. Though he missed his scheduled appointments in Delhi that afternoon, he did keep the 'final appointment' with his Maker.

The writer is a veteran journalist based in Dehradun



Mother o' mine


In this poem,
Joseph Rudyard Kipling
(1865-1936) immortalises a
mother's unconditional love

If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, and author of The Jungle Book and Kim, Kipling was an English journalist, short story writer, poet and novelist

A photograph of an elderly man with a grey beard and a young girl with dark hair, both smiling and playing in a pond. The man is in the water, and the girl is sitting on a wooden dock, splashing water towards him. The background is a calm body of water with some reeds visible in the distance.

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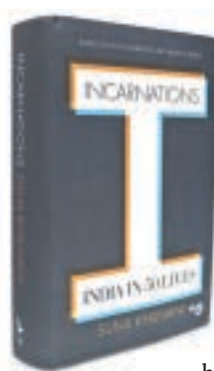
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If you marry an Air Force officer, you marry the Air Force. That is adage No. 1 in **Shyamola Khanna's** debut book **THE COW IN KARGYLL** (Creative Crows; ₹ 299;

211 pages). From the

title it is clear that Khanna is not afraid to laugh at herself, for she is the COW, an amusing acronym for the commanding officer's wife. In this memoir about life in the armed forces, Khanna's perspective as wife, mother and president of the Air Force Wives Welfare Association (AFWWA) stands out. The wives maintain a support system for their superlative husbands; they form the glue that holds the station together. The writer gives a glimpse of the passion and grit that drives these women. Given the camaraderie, humour and secret adventures while bringing up two children, and relocating from base to base with their little dog Tootsie, it seems Khanna has lived a full life.



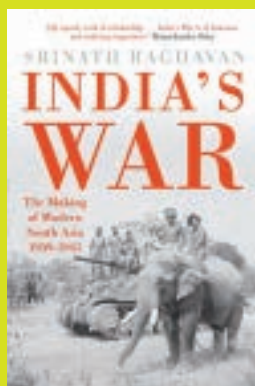
For all of our country's myths, sea of stories and moral epics, Indian history remains a curiously unpeopled place, believes **Sunil Khilnani**, whose **INCARNATIONS: INDIA IN 50 LIVES** (Allen Lane; ₹ 999;

636 pages) attempts to fill that space. The lives explored here—from the spiritualist Buddha to the capitalist Dhirubhai Ambani—light up India's rich, varied past and continuous ferment of ideas. The diverse cast draws up a kaleidoscope of religious thinkers, political rulers, business visionaries, poets, painters and filmmakers. By placing them in their milieu, Khilnani explores how they managed to navigate the intellectual confluences and social constraints of their times to make the choices that changed not just them and society but the very idea of India. Shorn of their saintly and superhero halos, they

appear vulnerable. Thus, if the Buddha is revealed as having been resistant to allow women into his order of monks; Ashoka is painted as "short, fat, and afflicted by bad skin", putting off women in his harem; and Shivaji is shown

to have fought off all resistance, Hindu or Islamic, unlike the popular lore of anti-Mughal conquests; while the Mahatma is portrayed as a closet racist "who never made common cause with Africans". In the process, the writer gives them credit where it is due—to their searching, self-critical natures that animated them in their own lifetimes. He also paints India as a true melting pot of different cultures, opinions and schools of thoughts. To conclude, the 50 lives featured here—spanning 25 centuries—only reiterate the idea of India as a living, breathing organic entity, assimilating varied influences and constantly in a state of flux.

Also on stands

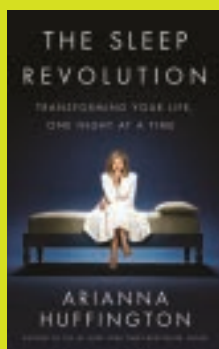
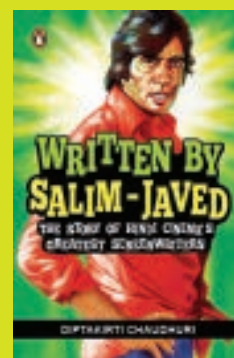


India's War
Srinath Raghavan
Penguin; ₹ 699; 550 pages

A comprehensive look at the involvement and contribution of India in the Allied war efforts, and how it won them World War II.

Written by Salim-Javed
Diptakirti Chaudhuri
Penguin; ₹ 399; 372 pages

The dramatic story of the dream team that pioneered Bollywood blockbusters and created the cultural phenomenon of the Angry Young Man at a time when screenwriting was dismissed as a back-room job.



The Sleep Revolution
Arianna Huffington
Ebury/Random House; ₹ 599; 400 pages

Sounding an alarm on the worldwide sleep crisis, Huffington, the founder of the *Huffington Post*, provides a detailed roadmap to the great sleep awakening that can transform lives and the world at large.



David Leijveld

Poetic recollections

I think the poem is an invention that exists in spite of history,” avers **Meena Alexander**, New York-based internationally acclaimed poet, scholar and essayist. Acknowledged as “one of the finest poets in contemporary times”, her words swim across barriers and boundaries, creating imagery that captures global conflicts. Of Indian origin and with Syrian Christian antecedents, the 65 year-old was born in Allahabad and raised across continents. Having graduated with honours in French and English from Khartoum University in Sudan, she pursued a doctorate from Nottingham University, England.

Professor of English and Women’s Studies at The City University of New York, Alexander accentuates human dignity and grace through her narratives, whether it is “Triptych in a Time of War”, a poem on the aftermath of 9/11, or her famed autobiography, *Fault Lines*. Alexander’s repertoire includes memoirs, poetry, novels, essays, and academic writings. Some of her notable works include *Women in Romanticism: Mary*

authorspeak

Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley (1989), a seminal academic work, novels such as *Nampally Road* (1991/2012) and *Manhattan Music* (1997), and poetry titles such as *Illiterate Heart* (2002) that won the PEN Open Book Award, *Raw Silk* (2004), *Quickly Changing River* (2008), *Birthplace With Buried Stones* (2013) and *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2015).

Winner of the South Asian Literary Association’s Distinguished Achievement Award in Literature in 2009, Alexander has also been honoured with the Glenna Luschei Award among others. Some of her poems have even been set to music; “Impossible Grace” was the lyrical base of the maiden Al Quds Music Awards, while “Acqua Alta” was used by Swedish composer Jan Sandstrom for Serikon Music Group’s climate change project. In an email interview with **Suparna-Saraswati Puri**, Alexander talks about the need to “keep writing” and her recent book of poems, *Atmospheric Embroidery* (Hachette India; ₹ 399; 80 pages).

Having experienced and explored different genres, how would you position poetry?

Poetry is the closest to my heart. The music of poetry leads us to the flickering truths of the heart. Yes, I do write prose from time to time, and I think of it as cutting away the underbrush, getting to the clear well-lighted space where the poem stands. I speak here of non-fiction prose. I have written two novels but I do not consider myself a novelist. My poetry moves naturally with the image rather than emplotment and the development of character.

As a student of literature, name your favourite poets.

Ah, that's always a difficult question! I have admired so many while growing up and learning from them. I'm still learning and discovering! A few names drawn from the ages include Mirabai, Anna Akhmatova, Rabindranath Tagore, John Donne, Wordsworth, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Adrienne Rich, Galway Kinnell. Right now, I am reading Samuel Beckett's shorter plays and prose poems with a sense of wonder.

Tell us about your first published poem.

My first published poem was something I wrote when I was 14 and living in Khartoum where my father was posted by the Indian government. It was a love poem, and was translated in Arabic in the local newspaper.

How does *Atmospheric Embroidery* compare to your other works of poetry?

I am happy with the new volume. But that feeling of having done something real never lasts, and one is forced to start writing all over again, seemingly from scratch. Does it ever get easier to write a poem? I don't think so.

With reference to your new volume, how has your style developed in terms of expressions and imagery?

Perhaps the lines are tauter, much more spare. I always find it hard to comment on my own style.

You seem to be fascinated with journeys and migration.

I imagine this has to do with how I have always travelled, right from childhood. The journey is a trope for life itself, for the passage of time. Perhaps the journey came first

and the idea of settlement came later. There is something nomadic about imagination.

How have contrasting experiences influenced your creative pursuits?

My mind often turns to my early years in Kerala, a great source of images for me. I am seen as an Indian even in New York, so there is that subtle moulding of the response to our lives in the world. Perhaps disparate worlds come together in the symbolic space of the poem.

Vis-à-vis prose, is poetry a constantly evolving genre, especially in the wake of slam poetry, a growing form of expression with the youth?

Surely, poetry is constantly changing, bending with the tides of the present. I would imagine that prose does it too. Neither is a static form. Spoken word is a very powerful art, embraced by many young poets.

As an academic, what do you think engages students most about poetry and what are the challenges they face?

I can never understand why people often think of poetry as harder to grasp than prose. Children often respond instinctively to the music and repetition you find in poetry. This

vibrational response should remain with us into our later years.

What inspires your creative instincts?

All that is strange and fascinating. Poetry, for me, comes from something that lies under the skin of words, and is hard to talk about.

What are you working on?

I am working on a poem about the death of Rohit Vemula. Incidentally, I used to work at Hyderabad University earlier.

Tell us about yourself.

I live in New York City, though I return quite often to India, at least once or twice a year. I love the northern part of Manhattan where I live, and just now I am sitting in my favourite coffee shop responding to questions!

Just jot it!

Maintaining lists can be emotionally therapeutic, writes **Don Mills**

Old people keep lists. It's what we do. Lists keep us organised, productive and help us to remember things when our memory starts to fade.

In addition to the standard "grocery list", "to-do list" and "neighbours that may be communist sympathisers list" that you'd find in any decent American household, I maintain over 200 other active lists at any given time.

Here are a few samples.

List of formal and informal grudges

I can't tell you how many times I've had a wonderful conversation with a dear old friend only to remember an hour-and-a-half later that I hate their damned guts. Sometimes it's difficult to keep track of eight decades worth of historical slights, family transgressions and trivial personal vendettas. So, in order to keep my enemies straight and my grudges straighter, I make sure to write them all down.

Words-I-need-to-look-up list

I get a fair amount of moronic email from damned young people and most are full of words I've never heard. So, in an effort to determine if these pups are being polite, disrespectful or just chowder-headed shortstacks* I like to look them up. (Besides, I'm a wordophile or lingophile or whatever the damned term is for someone who enjoys words.) Tonight I need to look up "pornocchio", "doppelbangers" and the offensive sounding "demi lovato."

*See list of derogatory terms for young people

List of symptoms to review with my physician

At my age keeping track of all your aches, pains and suspicious moles can be a damned grind. But with this list, I simply jot down any unexplained bout of vertigo or unusual gland swelling and hand it to my family doctor for review and diagnosis at my next scheduled check-up.

(I'm anxious to see what he makes of my current list which includes:



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sunken eyes, enlarged spleen, swollen breasts, violent nose bleeds and rice-water stools. Based on my research, I believe I may have either cholera, endometriosis or a dinopeptic germ.)

Don's bucket list

This has nothing to do with asinine dreams of climbing Everest, playing professional Jai Alai or trading smooches with Angela Lansbury—I'm referring to a list of actual buckets I would be interested in purchasing. At the moment, I have my eye on a rather dandy yellow Rubbermaid mop

bucket with detachable wheels and a three-gallon water capacity.

List of people I have outlived

Nothing gives an old man more pleasure that outliving his closest friends and contemporaries. Sitting down with a glass of Ovaltine, a red pen and the obituary page is one of the highlights of my day.

It's also a form of validation. I may not have been as successful as Seymour Hodge or been able to beat him on the golf course—but on the back nine of life I have him by six strokes (and one massive coronary).

This is one part of my "death trilogy" which comprises the "list of people I have outlived", the "list of people I intend to outlive" and the "list of teen pop stars whose careers I intend to outlive".

Derogatory terms for young people list

Just because I can't call them "damned young people" all the time.

Current terms include "chowder-headed shortstacks", "slack-jawed nincompoops", "gormless pecker-heads", "panty-waisted dimwits", "braying jackasses", "tweet-farting morons", "drug-addled poindexters", "pinheaded dullards", "Fubsy layabouts", "whinging sandbaggers", "baggy-panted miscreants", "incorrigible whippersnappers" and the always popular "feral assclowns."

I rotate the last list fairly regularly, so if you have any recommendations, please feel free to pass them on.

Politically incorrect and side-splittingly funny, Mills blogs at www.crabbyoldfart.wordpress.com

WHERE ELSE
WOULD YOU FIND
SOMEONE ABOVE
55 YEARS
WHO'S PERFECTLY
IN TUNE WITH YOU?

HARMONY, OBVIOUSLY.

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We go 50 years back in time to bring you products, people, events and fashion that have influenced the world

Space odyssey

Boldly going where no man had ventured before, legendary science fiction TV series *Star Trek* debuted on NBC on 8 September 1966, spawning an entire generation of dreamers. "I saw this show and screamed throughout the house, 'Mamma! Mamma! Come quick! There's a black lady on TV and she ain't no maid!'" recalled Whoopi Goldberg, reliving the moment she decided to become an actor. The show influenced countless 'Trekkies' like her to dream big, besides instilling a keen love of science, space and technology.

Created by Gene Roddenberry, a former bomber pilot and policeman, *Star Trek* is set in the Milky Way galaxy during the 2260s. The ship and crew are led by Captain James T Kirk, science officer Spock, and chief medical officer Leonard McCoy. Roddenberry introduced a multiethnic crew, including an African-American woman, a Scotsman, a Japanese-American and, most notably, an alien: the half-Vulcan Spock. Their mission was to explore strange new worlds and seek out new life and civilisations. The original series, which aired from 1966 to 1969, spawned four shows on TV and 10 movies, besides countless toys, books and other merchandise.

Incidentally, the opening line of the show, 'To boldly go where no man has gone before', was taken from a



Dinodia Photo Library

White House booklet on space released after the 1957 Sputnik flight. Other phrases that became commonplace include 'Space, the final frontier', 'Live long and prosper', 'Resistance is futile' and 'Make it so'. The show's success can partly be attributed to addressing moral and social issues such as slavery, discrimination and the Cold War. The first interracial kiss on television between Captain Kirk and his communications officer Lieutenant Uhura has since become a defining moment. At a time when stories of racism, social strife and wars ruled the news, *Star Trek* presented a positive image of the future with a simple message: Humanity will survive and thrive in the times to come!

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: MAY 1966

- On 9 May, the People's Republic of China detonated its third nuclear weapon with 'thermonuclear material', suggesting it had developed a hydrogen bomb.
- On 13 May, The Rolling Stones released *Paint it black*, which became the first No. 1 hit single in the US and UK to feature the sitar.
- On 15 May, comedy show *Shoten*, based on a Japanese form of storytelling humour called *rakugo*, was telecast for the first time. Fifty years later, it still enjoys a popular run.
- On 25 May, five years after US President John F Kennedy's call for "landing a man on the Moon", NASA unveiled the prototype of the machine, the Saturn V rocket.

UNICORPSE

n. A technology company once worth more than a billion dollars but now worth substantially less or out of business.

Example: “The speculation in private high-tech companies (the most valuable of which are known as ‘unicorns’) has also ended with a thud,” he said in the letter issued Friday. “A friend of mine said the new name for these companies is **unicorpse** as many of them cannot fund their losses internally for more than a few months and now have almost no access to external funding.”

—Katia Dmitrieva, “Watsa decries ‘unicorpse’ collapse as tech companies lose value”, *Bloomberg*, 11 March 2016

Multicrastinating

pp. Procrastinating by performing multiple non-work tasks simultaneously.

Example: But do we sometimes use “multitasking” to distract ourselves from what really needs to be done? In other words, do we become “multi-crastinators?”...Well, with the New Year, why not make a resolution to make over your work technique to avoid **multicrastinating**?

—“Multi-tasking + Procrastination = Multi-crastination”,
City Clerk Café, 1 January 2013

“Some day you will be old
enough to start reading
fairy tales again.

—British novelist and poet C S Lewis (1898-1963)

Reborn digital

adj. Of or relating to a physical object that has been digitised and stored in an online archive, making it more readily accessible.

Example: Until quite recently, most materials—be the photographs, manuscripts, or government documents—were not born in digital environments. However, digitisation projects have been undertaken to ensure that such historical materials are more widely and eternally available. These **reborn digital** objects, then, have been and can be integrated into dynamic social environments.

—Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, “Searchable signatures: Context and the struggle for recognition”,
CSUSB Scholar Works, 15 September 2013

Vulgarati

n. Members of the elite who are crude or who lack good breeding or taste.

Example: Stunt, who denies the charges, is Formula 1 billionaire Bernie Ecclestone’s son-in-law. Rich and flashy, Stunt was dubbed one of the **vulgarati** by the *Financial Times* after he was seen shopping in Chelsea in a fleet of luxury cars—a Lamborghini, two Rolls-Royces and a Range Rover.

—Solomon Hughes, “Blair-Heir wonks have no hope of succeeding Corbyn”, *Morning Star*,
15 January 2016

Google hands

n. Inadvertent images of the hands of scanner operators who are working on digitisation projects for Google.

Example: A couple weeks ago I briefly mentioned the issue of ghostly Google book scanners’ hands appearing in digitised versions of Google’s books.

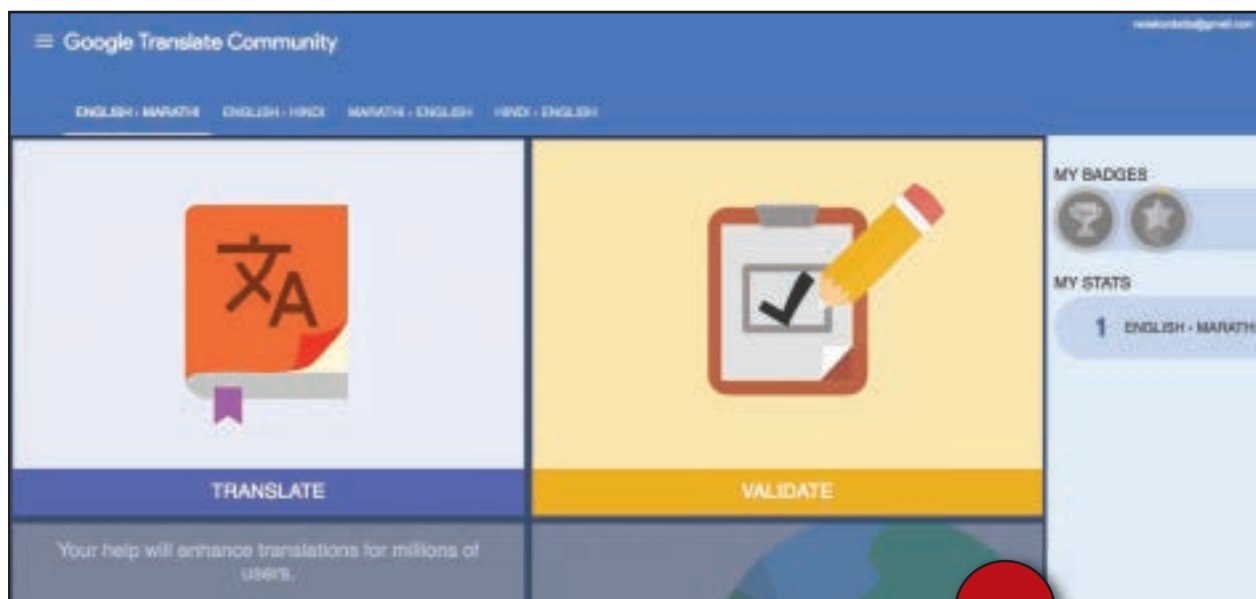
—Marlena Millikin, “the ghostly disruption of **Google hands**”,
Future of the Book, 11 March 2016

Fun sponge

n. A joyless or grumpy person who soaks up all the fun out of a situation.

Example: Yes, Grimshaw is such a misguided choice that even **fun sponge** Barlow returning to drain all the fun from the competition would have been a more preferable alternative.

—Jon O’Brien, “10 stars who would have made better X-Factor judges than Nick Grimshaw”,
Metro.co.uk, 16 June 2015



Found in translation

To better understand context and connotation—the absence of which makes language ambiguous—Google Translate is crowdsourcing translations from native speakers of nine Indian languages to influence its translation algorithms and improve quality. And anyone who speaks two or more languages—one of them must be English—can contribute. Here's how it works: to get started on www.translate.google.com/community, you have to first log into your Gmail account. Then enter the languages you are fluent in and start. There are two options going forward. One, you can directly translate sentences and phrases using

a variety of virtual keyboards based on inscription and phonetics. You can even draw the letters of a script using your mouse or touch pad. Two, if you don't want to directly translate sentences, you can validate existing translations. Over time, you will receive virtual commendation for your services as Google keeps track of your contributions with badges of recognition. This is no guarantee, but in the past Google is known to have awarded its best contributors with gifts like Android phones. So if you'd like to put the knowledge of your language to very practical use, check out the Google Translate Community.

FOLX

n. Umbrella term for people with a non-normative sexual orientation or identity.

Example: According to the T-FFED team, social media enables access to resources, support and information from which "trans and gender-diverse **folx** (especially folx of colour) have been historically barred by gate-keeping on the part of the medical industrial complex."

—Julie Zeilinger, "These amazing activists prove beauty comes in all sizes", *Mic*, 6 February 2015

Vanity capital

n. Goods or services purchased to enhance the buyer's self-esteem or status.

Example: Of course, when the student paper pointed out such a large **vanity capital** expenditure in a year when the University was begging to increase tuition, a budgetary emergency emerged which forced the University to cut all funding to the paper.

—numerobis, "Are university administrators in a war against education?" (comment), *Pharyngula*, 2 March 2016

MoJo

n. Journalism that is heavily dependent on mobile technologies to report, produce, and file stories; a person who practices such journalism.

Example: Thanks to the Smart Phone, traditional journalism (including radio) has morphed into **MoJo**—Mobile Journalism. We're no longer studio-bound. We're no longer reliant on the media release or the AAP copy to generate stories.

—"What's App in news?", *Radio Today*, 21 January 2016

“I wanted to create a network of donors”

Khushroo Poacha, 50, Nagpur, runs a portal to facilitate blood donation and provide free meals for caretakers of hospital patients

With their strong antiseptic odours, hospitals may not be the most inspiring of places. But for 50 year-old **Khushroo Poacha** of Nagpur, an employee of the Indian Railways, his Eureka moments came in hospitals while watching over his loved ones. In 1994, while looking after his grandmother in a hospital, Poacha was witness to a resident doctor being manhandled when a patient died as blood could not be arranged for transfusion. Again, in 1999, Poacha was upset to see a friend lose a loved one as blood could not be arranged in time. Disturbed by these events and armed with a second-hand computer, Poacha set up www.indianblooddonors.com and got his family and friends registered. In the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, a television channel ran a ticker with details of the website for blood requirements. “Within 15 minutes, the site crashed because of excess traffic,” says Poacha. “By the time patients airlifted from Bhuj reached the Armed Forces Medical College in Pune, they had donors waiting for them.” The recent mobile revolution has added ease to the process, increasing virtual footfalls. “When a text request for blood is sent to a specific number it triggers an SMS back to them with the contact details of a donor in their area,” he explains. Established in 1999, the website has almost 10,000 active donors today and has been able to connect over 98,000 people for blood and plasma requirements. Poacha and his wife Fermin have won several national and local awards for efficiently managing the site over the years. Not one to rest on his laurels, Poacha hit upon his



Anshika Varma/Teheka

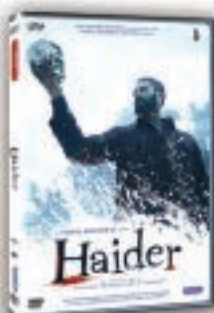
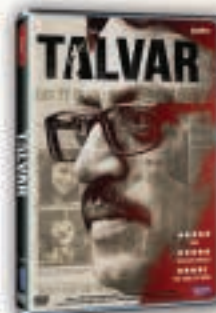
second Eureka moment in 2014 while seeing caretakers in hospitals struggling to get a decent meal because of financial constraints and inability to leave the side of patients. Seva Kitchen (www.sevakitchen.org), which started with 25 packed meals, today serves 800 meals a week in different

hospitals in Nagpur. It has inspired similar endeavours in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and New Delhi. The rules are simple: no leftovers to be served; no money changes hands; no judgments to be passed. Rules Poacha lives by.

—Suchismita Pai



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