



# harmony celebrate age

NOVEMBER 2014 ₹ 40

*The magazine for silver citizens*



- Rajen Joshua changes the face of a village in Andhra Pradesh
- Rohan Shreshta focuses his lens on dad Rakesh

curtain call  
arundhati nag



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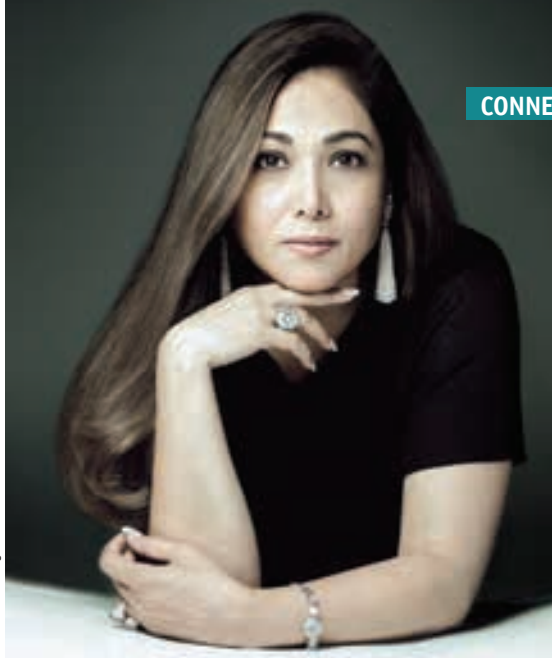
# Clean India

As responsible citizens, it is our duty to critique the government in power, notwithstanding the party, and be vigilant and aware. There are times in a country's journey, though, when the government takes us by surprise, going beyond expectation or promise, making us ever so proud.

The Swachh Bharat Mission is one of those watershed moments. On a day that we celebrate the legacy and life of the Father of the Nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, broom in his hand, announced a mission "inspired by patriotism" that went "beyond politics". Despite the naysayers, the heft of monetary and institutional support behind this scheme is proof of its intent; the Government appears to be leaving no stone unturned to make its 'clean' tsunami a reality. From roping in ministries and ministers to NGOs and schools, campaigns and contests across a variety of media and ground-level initiatives, the message is clear: clean is not a choice, it's an imperative if India is to make any sustainable progress as a nation.

I couldn't agree more. For a nation with such rich history, tradition and culture, our levels of public filth are unfathomable and inexplicable. National pride means little devoid of pride in our neighbourhoods, our facilities and amenities, our cities. This initiative is one that was long overdue. And, most encouragingly, it is an initiative that co-opts one and all, from every stage of life.

Suresh Natarajan



For their part, silvers can play a significant role in the stewardship and execution of projects, large or small, to contribute to the mission. *Harmony—Celebrate Age* is replete with such instances. For instance, this month, in our 'Orbit' pages, we tell you about the Basaiyye Nagar Jagruk Nagrik Kriti Samiti, a silver-driven group in Aurangabad that has launched a neighbourhood cleanliness drive, ensuring that garbage is collected and disposed in a timely and hygienic manner.

This is just one of the many organisations, largely informal, across the country that are doing laudable work in their local spheres of influence. Now, the Swachh Bharat Mission has assumed the role of an umbrella, bringing all these change agents together, working for a common cause, a cleaner, greener, more sustainable country.

Indeed, there are myriad ways to make a difference. Find yours—the country needs you.

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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Cover photograph: PRASAD DURGA

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# column one

"Theatre has chosen me," she says. In turn, Arundhati Nag has chosen to give theatre her life. As the pride of Bengaluru and her labour of love, Ranga Shankara, enters its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the veteran artist tells us, "I believe places like these have a destiny of their own; I'm just a pawn. The opportunity of Ranga Shankara has used me to fulfil itself just the way our children find the womb to give birth, nurture, and then set them free." On our cover this month, Nag shares her personal journey, as dramatic as her finest work, revealing the many textures of her life; indeed, her triumph over personal tragedy is an inspiration to women of any age.

Equally inspirational is the story of Rajen Joshua, who threw up his degree in automobile engineering and commercial pilot's licence to steer a new path. The efforts of Joshua and his wife Manil Jayasena have helped transform Anantapur, a drought-prone district in Andhra Pradesh, bringing hope to as many as 250,000 people across 350 villages.

There's a lot to warm the heart this issue. Rohan Shreshta thanks his father—and trailblazing film photographer—Rakesh Shreshta for introducing him to the camera and allowing him to soar: film, fashion and underwater photography, writing, a whole new adventure. Silver twins Meyyammai Murugappan and Visalakshi Ramaswamy celebrate their pride in their heritage and love for their cuisine in *The Chettinad Cookbook*. And Australian-born, Indian-at-heart Braja Soresen wanders off the beaten track in Delhi.

Come join her, and us, on our monthly adventure.

—Arati Rajan Menon

In these fast-changing times, large joint families have given way to smaller nuclear units. In a joint family, the elderly were automatically looked after with care and respect by the family, whereas in nuclear families, the time and space they get are limited.

But the elderly have an important role to play as grandparents. In cases where working parents can't give their kids adequate time and attention, grandparents can fill the gap by showering love and imparting good values, with care and patience. For their part, silvers need to keep themselves in good shape. By taking care of their health and developing their own interests, they can keep themselves and others around them happy. This will ensure they keep playing an important role in the life of their children, grandchildren and society at large.

**Bansi Singh**  
Mumbai

The wisdom gained through life is invaluable and the knowledge shared by the old is indeed a boon for the young, if they lend an ear. I would like to share a warm story in this regard.

Once there lived in China a boy called Karaphuda. His grandfather was his guardian. Though they were poor, they were abundantly blessed

by nature. A sakura (cherry blossom) tree and a mud-walled house were their sole property. Karaphuda never got a chance to go to school; his grandfather was his teacher.

One day, he asked his grandfather: "Is it possible for a man to make no mistakes?" The grandfather smiled and told Karaphuda to take the broom and clear the fallen leaves in their garden.

The next day too, the grandfather—not answering his question—asked Karaphuda to clear the land. This went on for many days. Soon, Karaphuda lost his temper and told his grandfather, "Our home is on an open land and falling leaves is a part of nature. Then why do I have to uselessly clear it?"

With a smile on his face, the grandfather replied, "Yes, my dear son. Just as falling leaves, making mistakes too is a part of nature of man. What matters most is to understand them, accept them and correct them. Just the way you kept clearing our land, we should not be waiting for problems to fade away with time; we need to make a little effort to face them and mend them right." Karaphuda felt the warmth of his grandfather's words. He was indeed wiser now!

**Arshil Jah**  
Via email

## CONTRIBUTOR



Our columnist in 'At Large' this month, **Manjiri Prabhu** is an independent filmmaker for television and a writer. She holds a doctorate in communication science; her thesis *Roles: Reel and Real* is a reference book for students of Hindi cinema. A pioneer among women writers of mystery fiction in India, she is known as the 'desi Agatha Christie'. She has written eight books, including *The Cosmic Clues*, *The Astral Alibi*, *The Cavansite Conspiracy* and *The Gypsies at Noelle's Retreat*. Prabhu is also the co-founder and festival director of the Pune International Literary Festival.



P24: Warm foods for winter

P28: Tone your back

NEWS ● VIEWS ● PEOPLE ● RESEARCH ● TRENDS ● TIPS



4.9 million

single-member households where the resident is over the age of 60 years

47.57 per cent of Indians who live alone are silver, a jump from 30 per cent in 2001

rural  
56.29%

urban  
16.53%

♀  
3.62  
million

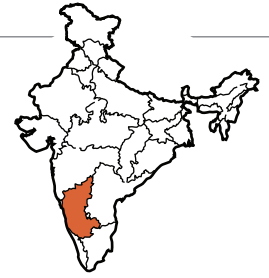
♂  
1.35  
million

► NEWSWORTHY

# SHE'S ALONE

72.83%  
of silvers over the age of 60 who live alone are women

"This is not surprising given the life expectancy at older ages," S Irudaya Rajan, professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Kerala, tells *The Indian Express*. "At old age, women live longer than men; most of them are widows. They have no option but to live alone as children are unwilling to take care of them. About 400 million leave their residence to live in other areas, leaving the elderly behind. I call this the social cost of migration."



## KARNATAKA CARES



Karnataka is thinking silver—and we like it. On the occasion of World Elders' Day on 1 October, the state government launched **help lines in 12 districts:** Bengaluru Rural, Chickballapur, Chikmagalur, Chitradurga, Haveri, Chamarajanagar, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Koppal, Raichur, Yadgir, and Hassan. The number for all: 1090. Going forward, help lines will also be launched in Mandya, Kodagu, Gadag and Ramanagaram districts. That's not all. The state has also announced that it will provide **free dentures to silvers with complete tooth loss below the poverty line** from late November under the 'Danta Bhagya' scheme—45 dental colleges in the state will chip in to help.

**CLEAN BRIGADE:** Basaiyye Nagar Jagruk Nagrik Kriti Samiti, a group of about 50 silvers in Aurangabad, has launched a cleanliness drive in their neighbourhood. "The absence of a proper garbage collection and disposal system in the city has given rise to a number of mosquitoes," says Anant Motale, who initiated the group. "We have not seen fogging activity in our neighbourhood for over a year. After our repeated attempts to persuade the civic body to take some action in this regard failed, we decided to clean the area ourselves." Next up for the group: tree plantation. Way to grow!



## SAFE SWAP

Everyone loves a good bargain. But is it enough to get you off the road? News agency Reuters reports that in a bid to stem traffic accidents, **stores and establishments on Osaka's Senbayashi Street have begun to provide discounts to people over 65 who have turned in their driver's licenses.** In Japan, when you voluntarily return your license, you get a 'certificate' of your driving history—the proof required to avail the discount. The initiative was the brainchild of Asahi Police Station, which has jurisdiction over Senbayashi Street. According to the report, 10,772 silvers in Osaka Prefecture returned their licenses last year.

## BRITAIN AT WORK

According to new data from Eurostat, the statistics arm of the European Union, UK pensioners between the ages of 65 and 69 are among the hardest working in the Union.

27%	22.4%
Estonia	Romania
21.7%	5.2%
Portugal	France
5.9%	11.1%
Spain	Germany

The total average of people over 65 working in the 28 EU countries is 15.9 per cent—Eurostat tells us that 62.8 per cent do so primarily for financial reasons while 37.2 per cent seek job satisfaction.



# SLIP & STAND

Preliminary research shows that experiencing 24 trips during a walkway session reduces the chances of falling in the following 12 months by up to 50 per cent



Sometimes a fall can help you stand taller. Researchers at the University of Illinois in Chicago have designed a way to make silvers slip—to devise a way to keep them from falling. They placed silver volunteers on a walkway that alternated between smooth, sporadic and abrupt movement, causing them to slip and stumble. While overhead cables fastened to their clothes protected them from injury, sensors attached to their arms and legs analysed their movements and responses. “Preliminary research shows that experiencing 24 trips during a walkway session reduces the chances of falling in the following 12 months by up to 50 per cent,” study leader Clive Pai tells The Associated Press. “This is because older adults can learn to catch themselves. We need to explore this technique further to train them to be more steady on their feet and avoid damaging falls.”

**ADVANTAGE SILVER:** While many commentators cry themselves hoarse over a silvering world, a group of international researchers argues that in a Western, industrialised democracy, **an ageing population could be a competitive advantage.** According to scientists from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, the Max Planck Institute and the University of Washington, an increasing

number of silvers will bring net benefits to society including productivity gains owing to an increase in the educational levels of workers and greater innovation because of the changing relationship between leisure and work and new imperatives such as sustainable healthcare and renewable energy.

“To give a more complete picture of population ageing, it is necessary to

include both positive and negative effects of population ageing,” writes lead researcher Elke Loichinger in journal *PLOS One*. “While our study focused on Germany, the findings are applicable across many ageing societies. The particular context of another country will determine the degree of their relevance. For example, an increase in educational attainment levels can be found almost universally around the globe.”

### A BRAINY IDEA

Sometimes it's the idea itself, rather than the technology used to execute it, that is cutting edge—and we love this one. In a bid to make city living gentler, **Edinburgh University has kitted out a group of silvers with brain scanners as they move through the streets to discover what stresses them out.**

As London newspaper *The Telegraph* tells us, these custom-built EEG headsets record brain activity and identify an environment's negative and positive 'hotspots' that affect emotional state and mobility. "Mood affects people's judgements and actions," says Professor Catharine Ward Thompson, director of the OPENspace project at the University of Edinburgh. "Well-designed places with good ambience are more likely to engage us. Having the opportunity to relax in natural environments is likely to restore our ability to stay alert and be active." Based on the findings, the team will make its recommendations to urban planners to make cities more silver-friendly.



To learn more, go to  
[www.aarprealpad.org](http://www.aarprealpad.org)

## THE REAL DEAL

When a tech powerhouse and arguably the world's most powerful advocacy group for silvers come together to create a device, you know it's going to be special. Introducing the **RealPad, brought to you by Intel and AARP!** Powered by a 1.2GHz Intel Atom™ Z2520 processor, the tablet features a 7.85-inch screen, runs on the Android KitKat 4.4 operating system, and features a 5MP rear camera and 2MP front camera. Here are some highlights, according to website [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com):

- **Customised interface:** Intended for the tech newbie, it's easy to use, navigate and extremely intuitive.
- **RealQuick Fix feature:** It allows users to view the complete status of the tablet

on a dashboard (from battery life to WiFi connection) and fix any bugs with one click.

- **Inbuilt tutorials:** Simple video tutorials are preloaded to teach silvers how to use the tablet and, once comfortable, make the most of its features. Lessons include how to download apps, access and browse the Internet, and set up video calling and email accounts.
- **Customer care:** Free customer service and remote help sessions are available 24/7 via a toll-free number or email.
- **The cost:** The competitive price is indeed one of the highlights of the tab. At \$ 189 (about ₹ 11,700), it is an affordable, accessible option for first-timers.

## THE CALICO MISSION



In these pages, we told you a few months ago about Google's new company, Calico, which aims to devise interventions that that slow ageing and counteract age-related illnesses with a multidisciplinary team of scientists. Now, this landmark project has a website—[www.calicolabs.com](http://www.calicolabs.com)—and its own mission statement: "Calico is a research and development company whose mission is to harness advanced technologies to increase our understanding of the biology that controls lifespan. We will use that knowledge to devise interventions that enable people to lead longer and healthier lives. Executing this mission will require an unprecedented level of interdisciplinary effort and a long-term focus for which funding is already in place." We're excited.



# Auntyji!

The Indian 'aunty' is finally finding her place in the sun. On the heels of an insanely catchy exhortation to *Auntyji* to *Get up and dance* comes

***Upping the Aunty*, a Tumblr account by Canadian-Indian designer Meera Sethi (see pic).**

Viewing street style through the prism of South Asian "aunties with swag", this fun and feisty project, supported by the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council, is both chronicle and celebration.

"*Upping the Aunty* aims to challenge our understanding of fashion, how it is defined and created," says the account. "It also aims to celebrate and honour our aunties, their personal style and unique role in our lives." Check it out at [uppingtheaunty.tumblr.com](http://uppingtheaunty.tumblr.com). And if you want to be part of the project, send in a new or vintage photo of a stylish aunty (with her permission, and the photographer's!) to [auntyji@meerasethi.com](mailto:auntyji@meerasethi.com)



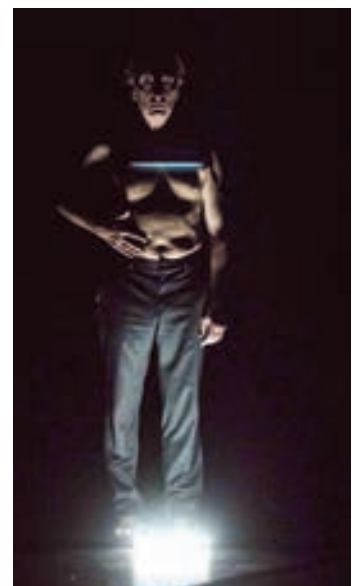
**86 SHADES OF GREY:** AMERICAN OCTOGENARIAN GEORGIA GORRINGE RECENTLY TURNED FIRST-TIME AUTHOR WITH *NO GOODBYE*. THE 176-PAGE ROMANCE, ABOUT A DESPERATE HOUSEWIFE WHO GETS TURNED ON BY A VOICE ON TALK RADIO, SIZZLES WITH MUCH INNUENDO AND SOME SERIOUS SEX SCENES. WRITTEN UNDER HER PEN NAME, GEORGE MARIE, THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE ON [AMAZON.COM](http://AMAZON.COM).

## BODYTALK



### SAGS, WRINKLES AND EVEN READING GLASSES BECAME ASSETS TO FLAUNT"

**TERPSICHORE** would have been proud of this one. Last month, the Elixir Festival at the renowned Sadler's Wells Theatre in London played host to **KnowBody**, a **unique six-work show featuring silver dancers** in all their majesty. In a near-rhapsodic review, London newspaper *The Guardian* raved about the programme, where "sags, wrinkles and even reading glasses became assets to flaunt". With the youngest dancer clocking in at 54, the inspirations for the show ranged from Pina Bausch to Frida Kahlo, melding melody, movement and the combined experiences of well-lived lives in a grand celebration. We hope our dancers take a cue.



## THE ALPHA EFFECT

Did you know that the animal kingdom has its share of Type A personalities too? And a new study by the University of Exeter in the UK suggests that **alpha females and males are at a greater risk of disease and premature ageing owing to unequal workloads.** Their study of white-browed sparrows, published in journal *Functional Ecology*, revealed that the dominant sparrows who did most of the work suffered from oxidative stress. These were the birds that took the lead in breeding and defending the group's territory. In humans, oxidative stress is considered the culprit for accelerated ageing and a range of ailments, from heart disease to Alzheimer's. "We wanted to investigate whether the hardest working members are the healthiest, and whether this allows them to work harder than everyone else. Our study has established that social dominance in some species may entail hidden physiological costs, with implications for the patterns of health and ageing in societies," writes lead author Dr Dominic Cram.



**IF AGEING DOES NOT NECESSARILY LEAD TO NEURON LOSS, WE COULD HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO LEARN AND RETAIN NEW KNOWLEDGE, EVEN IN OLD AGE"**

## OLD IS NEW

**N**ever believe a cliché—old dogs can learn new tricks! Researchers at the University of Surrey contend that, **contrary to prior belief, animals do not always lose the nerve cells that transmit information over time.** For the study, Dr Augusto Coppi and his team at the university's School of Veterinary Medicine studied a range of animals—mice, guinea pigs, cats, dogs, sheep, horses—and discovered that the number of neurons decreased only in elderly guinea pigs. All the

other animals produced new neurons in a process called neurogenesis—in dogs, for example, the increase was to the tune of 1,700 per cent. "This could be an example of where the concept of one-health medicine, which links animal and human health, could directly translate this research into improving quality of life for elderly people," Dr Coppi says in a media release. "If ageing does not necessarily lead to neuron loss, we could have the potential to learn and retain new knowledge, even in old age."

**Fly  
to  
LONGEVITY**



Working with the humble fruit fly, **scientists at University of California–Los Angeles have identified a gene, AMPK, which can extend lifespan by up to 30 per cent.** The finding has important implications for humans. "When we activate the gene in the intestine or the nervous system, we see the ageing process is slowed beyond the organ system in which the gene is activated," team leader David Walker writes in journal *Cell Reports*. "This is important because protecting the human brain or other key organs from ageing could prove to be technically difficult. However, slowing the ageing process throughout the entire body by triggering AMPK in a more accessible organ, such as the intestine, could solve that problem."



# LEARN ON



Photographs by **Hareesh Patel**

**S**ilvers at the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, Mumbai, and the Progressive Senior Citizens' Association in Andheri, Mumbai, came together for a lively game session and discussion on memory enhancement, hosted by memory trainer Mahavir Jain. Held on 21 September, also World Alzheimer's Day, Jain introduced the audience to the science behind age-related memory loss and offered quick tips on improving memory, including writing, positivity and stress-free observation. In the next part of the session, every member was up and active when they were handed simple observation-based game sheets and puzzles to work on.

In preparation for the Diwali festivities and as part of the Sharad Purnima celebrations on 7 October, an art session on making *diya* (see picture on top) was conducted by Sonali Mistry, a student from the JJ School of Arts, now a regular to the centre. Introducing acrylic water-based paint to the silvers, she revealed a gamut of co-



lours, beads and decorative fixtures, suggesting ways to use these elements in brightening up an earthen *diya*. Our arty silvers intuitively picked out colours to paint their *diya*, in the end displaying a collection of vibrant *diya*.

On 16 October, in an excursion to the Western Railway Headquarters in Churchgate, Mumbai, which houses a grand railway museum, silvers got a

peek into the past (see picture above) as they ambled through the museum along with their guide, Smita Rozario. During the tour, many questions were asked and information sought about the railway systems of the past. From old photographs of railway stations to antique British crockery and grenade shells from World War II, there was a buzz in the air as they constantly compared yesterday to today.



**Walk the talk.** It's time to pound the pavement. Calling it 'a magic pill to slow ageing,' British scientists contend that a half-hour daily walk prevents obesity and diabetes, lowers the risk of some cancers, slows the progression of dementia, cuts arthritic pain, and battles stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. "All these changes are not seen in people who run marathons; they are not seen in people who lift weights in the gym, or spend four hours running on the treadmill. These are seen in people who walk, and who walk for half an hour a day," Dr James Brown, from the School of Life and Health Sciences at Aston University, pronounced at the British Science Festival in Birmingham in September.

## Then: Empty bottle Now: Soap dispenser

Some liquor bottles look too aesthetic to throw away—but what's the point of hoarding exquisitely designed bottles if you can't reuse them? One way to use those old bottles is to make an elegant liquid soap dispenser. You can get the pumps to dispense the soap from old body cream or hand-wash bottles, or buy them from your local home décor store. Before you screw the pump onto the bottle, ensure that the liquid soap you use is of a suitable density to pass through the pipe of the pump. For bottles with grooves on the mouth, the pump can be screwed on easily, but not all alcohol bottles have that system. For bottles that use corks, insert the pump (pipe first) into the cork through a drilled hole, and then fit it onto the bottle like a normal cork. The advantage of fitting the pump into the cork is that the pump can be of any size, as long as it allows the liquid soap to pass through. After the set up is done, check for leaks. You can use this technique to create an entire line of pump bottles for perfumes, hand-wash liquid, shampoo and other toiletries by using bottles of various sizes and designs.



### RECYCLING FACTS

- In India, most liquor stores are obligated to return 15-20 per cent of your money when you return an empty alcohol bottle to them.
- Glass is recyclable—bottles that are disposed are first crushed into pieces and then melted at 1,400-1,600 C. The liquid glass is then remoulded into the desired shape.



### MORE RECYCLING IDEAS...

1. MAKE A NIGHT LAMP BY STUFFING EMPTY ALCOHOL BOTTLES WITH FAIRY LIGHTS.
2. USE A FUNNEL TO FILL THE BOTTLE WITH MUD AND THROW IN SOME SPROUT SEEDS. SOON YOU'LL HAVE YOURSELF A LITTLE GARDEN IN THE BOTTLE THAT YOU CAN HANG USING STRINGS.





## CATCHMYPAIN

**Available for:** Android 4.1 and up; iOS 5.1 or later

**What it does:** This revolutionary app can help you identify health problems such as fibromyalgia, arthritis and lumbar spinal stenosis by simply inputting your pain data. If you're one of those people who tend to be vague and unsure while describing pain areas and its intensity, CatchMyPain is a possible solution. You can point out pain areas on a body model, input the severity of pain, your current happiness, stress and fatigue levels and medication intake. This information can then be emailed as statistical reports to your doctors and caregivers from within the app itself.

**After installation:** When you open the app, sign up for an account. Click on 'New pain entry' to add a new entry, 'Pain entries' to view past entries and 'Send to email' to share entries through email. Adding a new entry is simple; just choose which body part(s) you feel pain in on the body model, enter the time frame, intensity, description, and stress levels. In 'Pain profile', enter detailed information, such as what you were doing at the time of the pain, influences, and what reduces or increases the pain.

In the mood for some brain challenging fun? Before you surrender yourself to the mindlessly addictive Candy Crush requests, give the adventurous world of brain-gaming on your mobile or tablet a try. Playing games is proven to help reverse the decline of cognitive abilities and improve attention and memory in silvers by requiring users to multitask. Here are some brain-training apps we recommend: Words with Friends, a free word-building game similar to Scrabble where you play people around the world; Lumosity, an app with multiple games designed by neuroscientists, which can help fight dementia and identify it early on; a variety of crossword apps; and QuizUp, a quiz game with multiple topics that you can play with family or friends, which helps improve long-term memory.

## LIFE360

**Available for:** Android 2.3 and up; iOS 7.0 or later

**What it does:** Keeping up with family members doesn't get easier than with this multi-faceted app made specifically for several generations living together. Life360 is a stress-free and cost-effective way to keep tabs on all your family members by placing them on a map. An answer to 'Where are you now?' without the annoyance of having to call someone repeatedly, it works by auto-detecting the most visited locations and sets them up as 'places'. The caregiver gets an instant alert when their family member checks in to most frequented locations. The app was designed keeping in mind the extremely busy schedules of people who need to be in touch with several family members at the same time. It also helps silvers know where to contact their caregivers at any given time. The free group instant messaging service ensures that all information is relayed even if one runs out of money.



**After installation:** If you are initiating the family 'circle' or group, you will be asked to make an account, and then add family members by clicking on the plus sign next to your image at the bottom of the screen. In the pop-up window, fill out their names, email ids, and whether they have a smartphone or not. While the app works on basic phones too, it doesn't guarantee precise locations. Make sure you don't log out of it as long as you're out of home. To set up locations that are most frequented as "places", go to the menu option, click on places, and then 'add places'. Place the 'pin' icon on the map on the exact location, or enter the address manually. You can also add labels like temple or yoga club to the places.



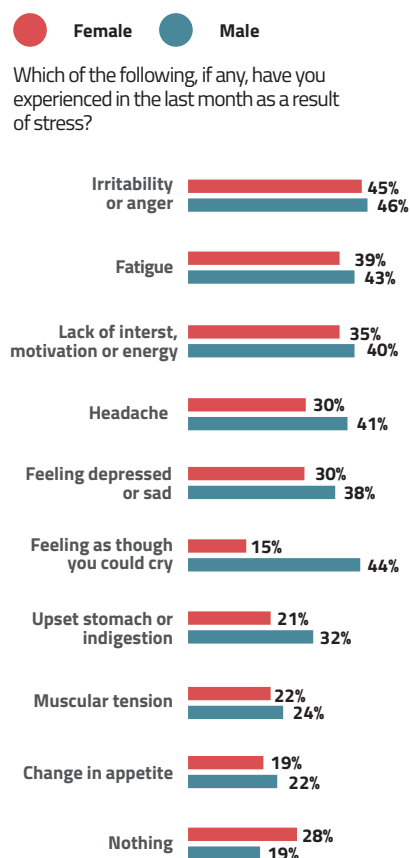
# Different HEARTS

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women; nearly one in three women in India die of it, according to some studies. It is also known to affect your mental health. However, a new study shows that **mental stress affects the heart in men and women differently**. The

Duke Heart Centre in the US studied 254 men and 56 women being treated for heart disease; they were made to carry out three mental stress tests—arithmetic, mirror tracing and anger recall—and in between each, the changes in their heart rate and blood pressure were recorded. The researchers found that while men respond to mental stress with changes in heart rate and blood pressure levels, in women, the reactions were more acute: decreased blood flow to the heart, increased negative feelings, and increased formation of platelets, which eventually led to blood clots.



## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS ON MEN AND WOMEN



### LOWER YOUR STRESS LEVELS

- Identify stress areas and work towards reducing them
- Keep a journal to record reasons for stress
- Avoid unhealthy coping habits such as smoking or drinking
- Practice meditation, yoga or exercise
- Eat healthy and reduce caffeine and sugar

### smell and mortality

A team of medical researchers at the University of Chicago has come up with a bizarre—and somewhat ominous—correlation between the sense of smell and mortality. Those who fared badly in a smell test were more likely to die. Nearly 3,000 silvers aged between 57 and 85 were tested on their ability to detect five different kinds of odours separately. Before the follow-up test five years later, 12 per cent had passed away. Nineteen per cent of those with moderate smell loss died, compared to 10 per cent of those with an excellent sense of smell; worse still, those who nearly failed the smell test were at double the risk of death. While the team hasn't yet figured out why exactly the olfactory sense is a predictor of death, they believe that loss of sense of smell is a definite sign that something is wrong.





## SMALL STEPS

**A** little bit of change can go a long way. **Elder men can reduce their chances of heart attack by nearly 80 per cent by changing their diet and lifestyle in small ways**, according to Sweden's Karolinska Institute.

The researchers conducted a study on 20,000 men aged between 45 and 79 who had no history of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension or cancer, by analysing their lifestyle habits and identifying five low-risk behaviours. Besides a healthy diet, these behaviours included moderate alcohol consumption (10-30 gm a day), no smoking, walking or bicycling 40 minutes a day, exercising one hour per week, and not being obese.

After follow-ups for 11 years, the researchers concluded that those men who followed all five of these low-risk behaviours had 79 per cent lesser chances of heart attack compared to those who accomplished none of those low-risk practices. Also, the more the men followed the low-risk lifestyle, the lesser their chances of heart attack—this held true even for those with hypertension or high cholesterol.

### SIGNS OF HEART AILMENTS

- Fatigue
- High cholesterol
- Swelling or puffiness
- Chest discomfort
- Disturbed sleep
- Inability to keep up with exercise levels
- Indigestion

Scientists at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel, have found that cancer cells grow and spread the most at night—thus, they suggest that administering anti-cancer drugs at night could be more effective. In their tests, mice with tumours were given an anti-cancer dose to fight breast cancer at various times through the day. The results revealed a major difference in the size of the tumours associated with the timing they were given the drugs; the night-time dose was most effective.

NIGHT TIME IS THE RIGHT TIME

## IT'S IN THE BLOOD

**Genetic risk for stroke** and atrial fibrillation can be determined from a blood sample. According to researchers at Lund University, Sweden, there are 12 genetic variants present in those with risk of strokes and atrial fibrillation; one in five people with these variants have double the risk of developing atrial fibrillation compared to those with lower genetic risk. According to them, as atrial flutter is weak and often unclear, it is difficult to identify whether someone is at a risk of stroke; instead, a blood test to check for atrial fibrillation is simpler and quicker. Those already diagnosed with atrial fibrillation had an increased risk of 70-80 per cent if they had the genetic risk variants. For such people, lifelong treatment with anticoagulant drugs would lower the risk.

Atrial fibrillation is an abnormal heart rhythm, has no symptoms, and can lead to heart attack, strokes or heart failure. The risk for this condition goes up as one ages, especially after the age of 65. According to the American Heart Association, genes are a major risk factor; one is more likely to develop atrial fibrillation if a family member has it.



**15% TO 20% OF STROKES ARE ATTRIBUTABLE TO ATRIAL FIBRILLATION**



# The art of giving

Prasad Durga

**D**aughter of Dwaraknath Reddy, former owner of Nutrine Confectionaries, **Anita Reddy** traded the sweet life for one of service. Through the Dwaraknath Reddy Ramanarpanam Trust (DRRT), the 60 year-old has transformed thousands of lives—indeed, her contribution in the field of social work was recognised with the award of the Padma Shri in 2011. “Although my father was wealthy, he gave me a grounded upbringing,” she says. “After he lost a few people close to him, he began to follow the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi and started the Ramanarapanam trust for the welfare of the poor. I was deeply influenced by his philanthropic bent of mind and continued in his footsteps.” DRRT has been the catalyst of initiatives across sectors like housing, education, economic empowerment and art across Andhra Pradesh and even Bengaluru.

In June 2014, Reddy received the prestigious Art Mantram Women Achievers Award for her contributions in reviving the heritage art form of hand-painted Kalamkari. Her tryst with the art began unwittingly, when Purushottam, an impoverished artist from Srikalahasthi, a temple town in Andhra Pradesh, knocked on her door to sell a piece of his work. That meeting 15 years ago was an eye-opener to the dire conditions in which Kalamkari artists lived. Reddy then visited Srikalahasthi, where she discovered the sorry plight of the artists, who had exceptional skills but no recognition. “I did what I always do best: reach people at the grassroots level,” she shares. “I reached out to the community, door to door, spent hours with them, understood

them better, and this eventually helped me to successfully organise them. Next, the objective was to create a suitable market for this fascinating piece of art that was not getting its due.”

In 2000, Reddy set up Dwaraka (Development of Weavers and Rural Artisans in Kalamkari Art) to help the artists become economically independent by creating Kalamkari products that could cater to a global market. This involved reaching out to art connoisseurs, corporate firms, apparel designers, interior decorators and individuals to market the product. “Well, I had a great product at hand, which only lacked the right kind of positioning and exposure. I was passionate about creating a sustainable model that would help the artists thrive. From 350 artists in the year 2000, we are now creating livelihoods for 3,000 people,” says Reddy with pride. This remarkable turnaround is solely attributed to Reddy’s passion for the art. But then, Reddy has always walked the talk. When her children got married, she used Kalamkari artwork on the wedding gifts and cards, creating a special opportunity for the artists to showcase their work. Reddy’s work is not limited to heritage. For the past 35 years, she has championed many social causes, including working with slum dwellers to identify an appropriate legal space for their housing rights. And she has created Dwaraka Plus to empower women artisans. How does her family react to the unconventional path she has chosen? “My family has taken all this in their stride and always backed me.”

—Ramya Srinivasan





### BIRTHDAYS

● Veteran actor, director and choreographer **Kamal Hassan** (left) turned 60 on 7 November.

● Former actor and model **Zeenat Aman** turns 63 on 19 November.

● Bollywood actor and dancer of yesteryears **Helen** (right) turns 76 on 21 November.

● Veteran Bollywood choreographer **Saroj Khan** turns 66 on 22 November.



● Actor and Hindi and Marathi film director **Amol Palekar** (left) turns 70 on 24 November.

● Composer **Bappi Lahiri** turns 62 on 27 November.



### OVERHEARD

"Ageing seems to have gotten a bit of a bad rap. Like, what do you do now? Someone says, 'How old are you?' That's like saying how long do I have left. I can't answer that question. We grow in a lot of different ways. The things I'm doing today are expressions of that. I'm trying to be aware of that. There are things I wouldn't do now that I would have done 20 years ago. I don't feel it. I'm not there."

—American actor **Al Pacino, 74, speaking to media at the Toronto International Film Festival**

### IN PASSING

● Renowned educationist **Kireet Joshi** (right) died on 14 September at the age of 83.



● Indian cricket historian and statistician **Anandji Dossa** (left) died on 22 September. He was 98.

● Marathi poet and writer **Shankar Vaidya** died of prolonged illness on 23 September. He was 86.

● **Mohammad Ghouse**, former international cricket umpire, passed away on 29 September after a brief illness at the age of 83.

● Veteran journalist **Madhav Vittal Kamath** (right) passed away following a cardiac arrest on 9 October. He was 93.



### MILESTONES



● Children's rights activist and founder of Bachpan Bachao Andolan **Kailash Satyarthi**, 60, won the Nobel Peace Prize 2014 on 10 October, along with Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan.



● Lyricist **Sameer** (left), 56, was awarded the National Kishore Kumar Award on 13 October at a function held in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, the legendary singer's birthplace.

## 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.

### BOOK OF LIFE

Our little book, *A Grand Life*, was written by my husband and me for our grandchildren, Trisha, Akshat, Prajna and baby Kush. They are all below the age of 10; when they grow up and read this book, we hope they will learn about the experiences we have shared with them. This is how the book was conceptualised. I wrote the stories, my husband wrote the poems and my son illustrated and got the book published.

But there's more to the story of our precious book.

We hail from Uttar Pradesh but now live in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. Our daughter lives in Navi Mumbai while our sons live in the US. As they are all working couples, we end up travelling to stay with them for long periods and spend quality time with our grandchildren. We play with them, tell them bedtime stories, help them with their homework, participate in their school activities and attend their school functions. Above all, we also learn with them. I consider this a 'golden period' even though there are times when we have to bear the brunt of their tantrums!

My husband was born in Allahabad and is an electrical engineer. I was born and raised in Jhansi and have a master's degree in English literature. We married early and travelled a lot as my husband's job was transferable. After he retired, we settled in Jabalpur.

My husband likes watching news programmes and cricket matches on TV; meeting people; and taking long walks in the morning and evening. He also tutors our maid's children. Sometimes they bring their classmates too. I like to stay at home and read, solve crossword puzzles and play Scrabble on the Internet. Earlier, I used to read fiction but now I prefer biographies, travelogues and books on spirituality. I also dabble in gardening and am trying to understand astrology.



**The storytelling couple brings wonder and colour into young minds**

It was my youngest son who talked us into writing about our experiences with our grandchildren. He has always been very good at drawing, sketching and cartooning and said he would illustrate the book and get it published. We didn't take him seriously, so you can imagine our astonishment when he gave us the book as a gift when he visited us last year. It was truly a wonderful surprise!

Family members who have read our book have found it very nostalgic. We were so delighted that we are now working on another book. Nowadays, there are so many nuclear families with working couples and little children. Through the personal anecdotes in our books, we wish to convey that three generations of people can enjoy the years we spend together and engage and enlighten the little ones in our culture and mythology. I know from personal experience that while the kids love watching TV, they enjoy our company too! All it takes is a little effort to divert their minds.

—Santosh Shrivastava, Jabalpur



## ALL THE WORLD'S A CLASSROOM

It was a tragic twist of fate that led me to teaching but it's one of the best things that could have happened to me. My rather unconventional style and enthusiasm have helped me give young lives hope and a bright future in a way no formal school can.

Before I elaborate on that journey, let me recap the events that brought me to a crossroads. I was married at the age of 16 to a 22 year-old flamboyant Army officer from Kerala. I had my son and daughter in quick succession but my husband insisted I complete my education. I graduated after taking baby steps, and whereas I couldn't speak a word of English when I got married, I teach in English today.

When my husband passed away in 1972 at the age of 45, I had no money, no home and no professional qualifications. You know how it is, 'officer in rank, no money in the bank.' Both my children were in hostels so I returned to Hyderabad to stay with my mother. She was, of course, very keen I remarry but this time I put my foot down. One marriage was enough and I was going to make it on my own.

As I enjoyed being around kids, I joined Princess Esin's Education Centre in Purani Haveli, Hyderabad, and trained to become a teacher of pre-schoolers. Then, a teacher of international repute was specially brought in by Prince of Hyderabad Muffakam Jah to train women teachers for local schools, and it was a wonderful experience.

I went on to open my own school and set up Shaheen Niketan in 1978. I ran the school from my mother's home on Road No 5. I had no money to buy furniture so I used to conduct classes under trees. The idea appealed to many parents, who wanted a fun playschool for their children. In 1984, I moved my school to the garages attached to my daughter's flat at Punjagutta. It was right next to the community hall and as the builder's grandson was in my school, we got a lot of privileges. My school was now flourishing!

About 10 years ago, I sold the school, which then had 150 children on its rolls, and set up a trust to educate poor girls. I have educated 27 young girls to date. I also conduct workshops at playschools, where I train teachers to make learning a happy experience.

My theory is that fun subjects are storytelling, rhymes, art and games while boring subjects are nature studies, maths and languages. So I teach the boring subjects through the fun subjects!

I have also written and published six books based on my own experiences, life in the Army and the like.



Shyamola Khanna

### Moidu makes learning a fun experience

They are not perfect but considering there was a time I was barely literate, it was very satisfying. I am currently working on a book of love stories. Gardening is another passion and I am pleased to say that the garden around my apartment block is my handiwork. It has 12 fruit trees! The *chameli* bush under my bedroom window sends up the most gorgeous fragrance. Now friends in the next block have asked me to do the same for them!

I also love working with thread and creating works of art, and I have created embroidered pictures and artefacts for my home. Two weeks ago, I gave a demo at the YWCA on hairstyling. My list of hobbies is endless and while I give thanks to God for all the gifts I have been given, I have just one grouse: why aren't there more than 24 hours in every day?

—Sultana Shaheen Moidu, Hyderabad



# Divine calling

BRIG SS CHOHAN, 72, GURGAON

I've served in the Army for over 50 years but this is, by far, the best posting of my life: managing two *gaushala* in Gurgaon. I have shared a deep bond with cows since I was four years old and it's almost as if I have come full circle. Tending to these beautiful animals gives me a sense of divine grace and bliss, and I am convinced that there was a greater power that brought me to the Kamdhenu Dham Gaushala and Nandi Dham Nagar Nigam Gaushala four years ago.

Let me give you a brief insight into my connection with animals, and cows in particular. When I was a child, we lived in a small village in Uttar Pradesh. My father was a *zaildar* and I would take the cows to graze, as instructed by my grandfather. I played and lived with cows, bullocks, buffaloes, horses, camels, goats, cats and dogs but I have always shared a special bond with cows. I have also experienced their miraculous healing powers many times. At the age of four, I had a massive fall and hurt

my right eye and ear. I was cured with cow's urine, which has been a daily tonic for me since then. When I was in the Army, I would indulge in an annual ritual that had people literally turning their noses up at me. But that didn't bother me. I used to bathe in cow dung and urine, applying it on my body and washing it off after an hour. It's the best prescription for good health.

So when I was given the opportunity to manage these *gaushala* in August





Himanshu Kumar

2010, I couldn't believe my luck. Run by the Vishnu Charitable Trust, they are home to around 1,800 cows and bulls. The offer to manage the shelters for a modest remuneration couldn't have come at a better time. In fact, when I had fallen off my roof in Palam Vihar in Gurgaon and had fractured my ribs, all it took for me to heal was to use cow dung wraps on my chest.

While in the Army, I was part of the 1965 operations against Pakistan;

I was in Dhaka in 1971 when Bangladesh was formed; I was a captain in Tripura and I witnessed bloodshed and rebellion in Nagaland. I was a part of the R&D services in the Army and was also conferred the Vishisht Seva Medal by the President of India for distinguished service. But the truth is, I have never felt more satisfied and at peace as I do here.

I am also a member of the Animal Welfare Board of India and the cows at our *gaushala* are usually animals that have been injured while roaming the streets. Thanks to a tie-up with the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon, these cows are brought here and nursed back to health at our hospital. When necessary, we operate on the animals; we once removed 52 kg of trash, including plastic and nails, from the stomach of one of these animals. Some of the cows we rescue are blind and each one needs a lot of tender, loving care.

The trust that runs the *gaushala* is a busy place and has 75 people working for it. It runs a *gurukul*, classical music and dance classes, and even karate classes. We have a flour mill and make organic manure from cow dung, which we sell at ₹ 10 per kg to farmers and nurseries. We also sell the offspring of the cows and bulls we tend to, at a nominal price of ₹ 1,100 per animal. I personally check to make sure the cow is not slaughtered or harmed, and not used for commercial purposes. We get the new owners to sign an affidavit and our team visits every three months for health check-ups.

After I retired from the Army in 1996, I tried my hand at a few things, such as managing companies dealing in exports, garment manufacturing and other businesses. Then I travelled to Australia, Mauritius and the US to visit my children. The magical thing is that I have finally found my calling and am happy to say that, this time, I am going nowhere!

—As told to Ambica Gulati

## COOK UP A CAREER

Experts answer your queries and concerns on jobs after retirement

**I retired last year as a banker and live alone. Besides taking care of my grandchildren, I have a lot of free time. I have a passion for cooking and teaching, and have been toying with the idea of cooking classes. Is it possible to start a cookery class at home?**

You don't necessarily need a commercial kitchen set-up to teach cookery; even a basic kitchen, such as the one in your house, would do. But make sure you have enough cooking tools and materials for the number of students you plan to teach in one batch. You wouldn't need to buy five cookers, but you would need to have enough cups, ladles, pans, and so on. Alternatively—and this is quite popular today—you can offer to teach people in their own homes, but you would have to account for travel time and expenses.

Before you begin, you should ideally attend a few cooking classes yourself to get an idea of what teaching entails. It could also give you an idea of how (or not) to teach. If you're good at a certain kind of cuisine or just desserts or baking, you can specialise and offer niche training. Then, draw up a plan of what you would want to teach, and how.

Now all you've got to do is spread the word. It might take you a few weeks of classes to get an idea of the demand and the technical difficulties. But in the end, you'll realise this is definitely one of the best ways to pass time and work on your passion!

—Susan D'Cruz conducts baking and dessert-making classes in Mumbai



## Winter bites: Eat right and stay warm

I am a 64 year-old woman living in Delhi with my son and daughter-in-law. I used to love the winters but, for the past few years, the cold is becoming increasingly hard to bear. Further, I end up falling ill. Please offer some dietary guidelines to protect me from the onslaught of the cold.

Winters are indeed harsh on silvers, who tend to feel colder than younger people. As heat loss is rapid, the energy requirement of the body is more at this time of year, calling for special foods for fortification against cold and related illness. Be sure to include the following foods in your diet to stay warm this winter season:

- **Ginger:** Considered a herb, it has the tendency to increase body heat, which is why it is sometimes contraindicated for use in summers and among patients who are not allowed hot and spicy foods. The rhizome (underground stem) is used as a spice as well as medicine; if taken in small quantities, it keeps our body warm and treats some stomach problems including diarrhoea, nausea and loss of appetite. Further, it relieves



stress, fights respiratory problems like cough and cold and helps strengthen your immunity owing to the high levels of antioxidants it contains. To warm your body in winters, try a cup of ginger tea: Grate 2 tsp of fresh ginger in 1½ cups of room temperature water and steep for 10-15 minutes before drinking.

- **Garlic:** As this is warm in nature and a strong stimulant, people with excess heat in their body should eat little garlic or none at all. It is one of nature's most potent immune system boosters—it exhibits antioxidant activity and improves blood circulation by helping to prevent blood from clumping together. In winter, it helps keep the body warm and energetic and the heart healthy. Garlic is best eaten raw. Crush one or two small cloves.



You can eat it before going to sleep with a glass of water or milk. Regular consumption can help build long-term resistance. However, don't eat more than two cloves a day as it might make your blood thinner and cause serious ailments.



- **Saffron:** Called *kesar* or *kumkum*, this ingredient is useful in relieving colic, flatulence and depression. It is also considered excellent for the skin, promotes memory retention, improves blood circulation, and protects the liver. In fact, it is also said to arrest baldness. Regular consumption of saffron tea is good for the heart. To prepare this, steep three strands of saffron stigma in a cup of hot water for about 20 minutes. You can enhance the taste by adding other spices like cinnamon. In winters, boil with raisins, milk and almonds and drink daily before going to sleep. In this form, it acts as a great tonic and induces sound sleep.

- **Honey:** It is one of the sweetest foods found in nature. And now, science has established that it increases the amount of heat in your body. So too much honey should not be consumed in summers or when you are working in a hot environment. Also, it should not be mixed with hot foods. Honey significantly increases antioxidant levels in the blood that improves immune system activity.



One teaspoon consumed at bedtime promotes natural restorative sleep by preventing metabolic stress owing to depleted glycogen stores. A glass of warm water taken with 2 tsp of honey and 1 tsp of lemon juice early morning reduces fat and purifies the blood.

- **Bajra khichdi:** Stuffed to the core with iron, *bajra* helps heat the body in winters and provides us with disease-fighting phytochemicals that lower cholesterol as well as plenty of fibre. As it controls blood sugar levels, it is good for diabetics. And as it is a gluten-free grain, even people with gluten allergy can include it in their diet. To make *bajra khichdi*, soak 100 gm of *bajra* for an hour



and separate the husk. Mix *mung* dal when it becomes completely husk-free. Transfer the contents in a pressure cooker with water and salt. Cook for 10 minutes. Add hot water if required.

- **Nutmeg:** A lovely, warming spice, many cooks use it for its flavour, especially in winter as the temperature dips. It provides heat to the body and has great health benefits, including the ability to relieve pain, soothe indigestion, strengthen cognitive function, detoxify the body, boost skin health, elevate oral conditions, reduce insomnia, strengthen the immune system, improve blood circulation and guard against leukaemia. Nutmeg is usually taken powdered; no more than a sprinkle in food and drinks or a quarter teaspoon on a daily basis is recommended. Just a little nutmeg grated in your soup or sauce or a few drops of nutmeg oil rubbed on the skin can do you a world of good. Drinking 1 cup of milk boiled with  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp of ground nutmeg relaxes your body and helps you sleep.



- **Black pepper:** The incredible benefits of this wonder spice are actually too many to list. In winter, it is a great aid to battle chest congestion, boost appetite, improve digestion and protect elders from the lurking army of germs and pollutants. It also has anti-fever properties—a peppery soup is the best remedy for winter fevers. Five peppercorns consumed everyday with five Tulsi (holy basil) leaves and 1 tsp of honey cures the toughest of coughs.
- **Almonds:** A great source of warmth to the body, this nut also combats anaemia and is a blessing for your heart. Its heat-generating power is one of the reasons



it is advisable to soak it in water before consuming in the summer.

### ALMOND AND CELERY SOUP

There is nothing as comforting as a warm broth in winter. Almond and celery soup is a delicious preparation.

**Preparation time:** 15 minutes

**Cooking time:** 15 minutes

**Calories per serving:** 156

**Serves** 4

#### Ingredients

- Onion: 1 small; finely chopped
- Celery sticks: 6; finely chopped
- Parsley: 1 tbsp; coarsely chopped
- Dill seed: 1 tbsp
- Almonds: 50g; blanched
- Skimmed milk: 300 ml
- Natural low-fat yoghurt: 3 tbsp
- Egg yolk: 1
- Toasted and flaked almonds for garnish: 1 tbsp

#### Method

Combine onion, celery, parsley, dill seed, almonds and milk in a saucepan. Mix well. Boil the mixture and simmer for 12 minutes till the vegetables turn tender. Remove and puree the contents to a smooth liquid. Return the soup to the saucepan. In another small bowl, whisk together yoghurt and egg yolk. Add the yogurt mix into the soup. Stir well. Heat the soup gently; do not boil it. Ladle warm soup into bowls. Sprinkle with toasted almonds and serve warm.

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



## Kidney care: Protect and preserve these vital organs

While every organ in the body deserves importance, some are extra special. Among them are our kidneys, which excrete waste and keep us healthy. The kidneys will keep functioning normally until something irritates them. However, infections and uncontrolled hypertension and diabetes can wreak havoc on them.

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs located at the rear of the abdomen; each is 10 cm long, 5 cm wide and 150 g heavy. The function and size of the kidneys decrease as we age but, if healthy, they will function properly appropriate to our age without any difficulty. At the age of 30, blood flow to the kidneys is 1,200 ml per minute; at the age of 80, it reduces to 600 ml. In each kidney, there are nearly 1 million minute blood capillaries per unit, which is called the nephron. It is the nephron that removes waste from the blood and excretes it through urine. As a person ages, the nephron count reduces and the excretory rate of the kidney is reduced to 46 per cent.

### Functions of the kidney

The following functions make it clear why the kidney is such a valuable organ:

- It removes toxins and wastes from our body
- Maintains water and electrolyte balance
- Regulates salt content
- Controls blood pressure
- Strengthens bones owing to Vitamin D resorption

- Produces erythropoietin, which helps in the production of RBC and thus prevents anaemia

### Causes of kidney failure

The causes of kidney failure could include:

- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Uncontrolled blood pressure
- Smoking and prolonged use of tobacco
- Consumption of alcohol
- Excessive intake of pain killers
- Obesity

The kidney can fail owing to one or more of the above reasons. Kidney failure can be classified as acute or chronic.

### Acute kidney failure

Acute kidney failure occurs when the blood flow to the kidney decreases suddenly, as in severe vomiting, diarrhoea, heart failure, excessive use of diuretics or painkillers and blockage in the kidney. The symptoms include:

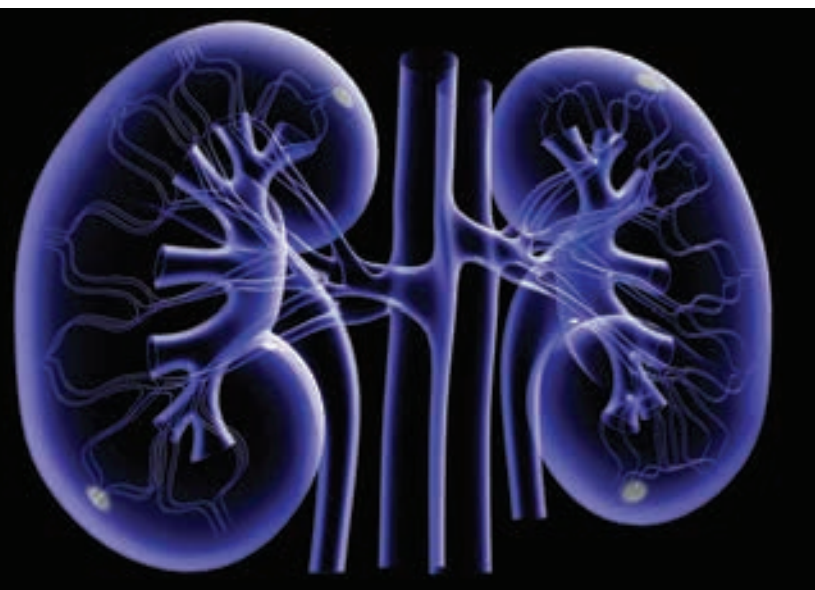
- Sudden accumulation of water (oedema)
- Swollen face and legs
- High blood pressure
- Low urine output

### Chronic kidney failure

Diabetes, hypertension, recurrent urinary tract infection, hypertrophy (enlargement) of prostate or cancer prostate, prolonged use of painkillers and decreased blood circulation to the kidneys can lead to chronic kidney failure. As the symptoms of chronic kidney failure are subtle, it is difficult to detect in the early stage. Loss of appetite, improper sleep, itching, low urinary output, swollen face and leg, blood in the urine, difficulty and burning sensation while passing urine and vomiting are among the symptoms.

### Diagnostic tests

Blood urea and creatinine levels are an important indicator of the health of the kidneys. The normal level for blood urea is 40 mg/dl and for creatinine, it is 0.7-1.2 mg/dl. Values exceeding these indicate kidney failure. Further, the presence of protein in the urine is considered abnormal. Ensure regular checks for hypertension and diabetes. An ultra





sonogram is used to detect the presence of a stone in the kidney and prostate gland and variation in size, and urine analysis is required to detect urinary infection.

### Treatment for acute kidney failure

The solution depends upon the cause. For instance, those who have suffered dehydration owing to vomiting and diarrhoea would be treated with IV fluids that contain glucose and salt. If kidney failure is owing to infection, specific antibiotics would be given. Very few people need dialysis.

Dietary management is very significant while treating kidney-related disorders. If protein levels are high, one can change the type and quantity of protein in the diet. As meat, fish, chicken, milk and egg have high biological values, their consumption should be restricted. Foods high in salt should be avoided, such as baking powder, *papad*, pickles, cheese, meat, yeast, salted chips, popcorn, nuts, biscuits, sauces, canned items, chocolate and artificial beverages. Potassium is an essential mineral in the body. However, if the kidney fails, potassium that is not excreted in urine accumulates in our body and can damage the heart. Thus, potassium-rich fruits like *amla*, lemon, mango, sweet lime, orange, plums, *chickoo* and custard apples and vegetables like drumsticks, coriander leaves, potato, sweet potato and yam should be restricted. Potassium content can be reduced in vegetables by steeping, removing the skin, soaking in lukewarm water for three hours and then discarding the water.

### Treatment for chronic kidney failure

If there is no improvement by treating the causes and adhering to dietary restrictions, dialysis will be required. The indications for dialysis are:

- Extreme fatigue
- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Breathlessness
- Swelling of the face and legs
- Reduced urinary output
- Drowsy state
- Increased blood urea, creatinine and potassium

Kidney transplantation is the best treatment for chronic kidney failure. The age factor is not a barrier but it is not commonly recommended for elders owing to decreased immunity, associated heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. Postoperative infections and kidney rejections are also common in silvers.

### Preventive measures

Before trouble strikes, we must safeguard our kidneys. Here are some easy ways to keep them healthy:

### READERS ASK

**I am 80 years old. I was diagnosed with diabetes 15 years ago but the condition is well under control. A few weeks ago, I developed rashes on the right side of my chest with severe pain in the affected area. I consulted a skin specialist and he said it was a herpes infection and gave me the necessary treatment. The rash has disappeared completely but severe pain still persists in the area and disturbs my sleep. I would like to know more about this infection.**

Herpes zoster is an infection caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox and affects one or more nerves underlying the skin. Typically, the disorder causes a painful, blistering rash, usually limited to one side of the body. More than one-third of silvers with herpes have persistent pain (post-herpetic neuralgia)—the older the person, the greater the chance of developing herpetic neuralgia. Some people experience persistent pain for months to years after the rash resolves. The effectiveness of treatment is difficult to predict. Most people feel better after taking drugs like anti-convulsants, gabapentine and pregabalin. If other treatments do not work, a doctor may inject a local anaesthetic into the affected nerve near the spine to relieve pain. As zoster neuralgia persists in about half the people over the age of 70 despite the best of treatment, you may have to wait for some more time to find relief from the pain.

- Control diabetes and blood pressure with correct treatment.
- Don't take painkillers without the doctor's advice.
- Drink at least 2-3 litre of water a day (if you are a heart or kidney patient already, take your doctor's advice on required quantity).
- Reduce intake of salt—the WHO recommends just 5 gm/day while our consumption is generally 10-15 gm.
- Treat urinary infections promptly.
- Consult a nephrologist if there is any tumour, stone, enlargement of kidney or prostate gland or blockage in the urinary tract.
- Avoid consumption of tobacco and alcohol.
- Exercise every day.
- Get a complete health check-up at least once a year, which includes kidney function tests (urea, creatinine and protein levels in blood and urine).

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



## Back in shape: Sculpt and strengthen with regular practice

Yoga is possibly the only fitness science that works out the back aesthetically. It is possible that those who do yoga do not even think of working the back out exclusively. But it becomes one of the most powerful side-effects of a focused practice. In fact, it makes the muscles of the back stand out with clear-cut finesse, as if they have been sculpted! As the soft or fat folds of muscles, even in the skinny, get removed, 'cuts' (a reference to the sculpted look of muscles) become evident along the entire back.

Apart from looking good, of course, back muscles have a powerful role to play, as anybody with back problem and spinal problems will aver. A weak back is the most prone to pain of the shoulders, neck or lower back. A weak back also means the spine, straining against gravity, suffers without any support from the muscles, furtheracerbating spinal collapse. So, having a super-toned back is clearly beneficial, even beyond the aesthetics.

All yoga poses work out the back, whether they are forward bends or backbends. But while forward bends make the back flexible, it is the challenging range of backbends

that actually tones and strengthens the back. However, many people 'cheat' while doing backbends by not straining in the right manner or focusing on the proper form of a pose. A backbend, if not executed properly, will not be impactful.

For instance, in the basic cobra pose (*bhujangasana*), most people lift their pelvis clear off the ground. Actually, the pelvis should continue to be firmly on the ground, while the hip muscles must be tightened and the body held up by the pure strength of the back muscles, particularly of the upper back. Most people also wrongly shift their shoulders towards their ears, thus shifting the challenge of the pose to their hands and wrists instead of maintaining the awareness and challenge at the back. Often, people open their mouth during the pose. Amazingly, even this simple 'ruse' actually reduces the challenge at the neck and chin. So, backbends need to be done with absolute attention to execution and detail to really benefit the back. Some poses that tone the back are upward-facing dog (*urdhvamukha svanasana*), snake (*sarpasana*), bow (*dhanurasana*), and wheel (*chakrasana*), to name a few.

### YOGIC MOVES

#### Half camel pose (*ardha ushtrasana*)

Sit on your knees as shown. Place palms behind the hips. If the hands do not reach behind owing to lack of flexibility or shoulder pain/stiffness, keep a prop like a hard cushion or yoga block to rest your hands. Inhale. Exhale, lift your hips up and drop the neck behind as shown. Keep

the hips higher—learn to do this for longer, through regular practice. Continue normal breathing

throughout. Avoid if you have a weak neck or inflamed shoulder joints.

**Benefits:** This pose prepares you for advanced backbends. It powers the whole back and the hips. Further, it regularises the thyroid and parathyroid glands, boosts immunity, stimulates the mind, elevates the mood, and is even said to improve the voice.

**Model:** Rajnikant Karia,  
Harmony Interactive Centre  
**Photographer:** Haresh Patel



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



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HIS LADLE LOVE BY PRATIBHA JAIN

# Man for all seasons

**GAUTAM SETH • MUMBAI**

An engaging series about silver men who wield a deft ladle in the kitchen

I have yet to meet anyone to match his ardent and unrelenting passion for food! For the three decades I have known him, he has been whipping up delicacies and ensuring that perfect taste in any dish with his signature touch, whether it is traditional, fusion or gourmet cuisine! From family cooks conjuring up a wedding feast, roadside vendors who take pride in their specialties and chefs at favourite hotels to the women in the kitchen of large, extended families, the common factor remains Gautam Seth, 55, almost always in an avid food discussion with each. He can plan gourmet menus in a jiffy, give recipes and culinary tips at the drop of a hat, and transform uninspired looking dishes into memorable delicacies with a few simple twists. He is also happy to walk the extra mile to source the rarest of ingredients for you—anything for good food is his mantra. In a nutshell, Gautam-sa (as I call him in Rajasthani style) is a true foodie at heart.

When I went to meet him at his flat in Worli Seaface, Mumbai, we chatted incessantly about our childhood, the joint family and our food preferences. Anticipating my arrival, he had prepared his signature dishes for lunch and planned what to order at a new restaurant in town for dinner. He also insisted we walk down the beachfront to his favourite roadside joint. The vendor greeted him like an old friend, and served us delicious *vada pav* in a palm leaf with a flourish.

**Tell me Gautam-sa, what makes you such an ardent foodie?**

I guess being a Rajasthani. Hospitality is really a part of our life. I have always seen visitors and guests being treated with utmost hospitality and warmth. I have grown up amid wafting aromas and food discussions, so I guess somewhere it rubbed off on me.

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“I like to experiment with food. But what I like most is creating dishes with seasonal delicacies. A simple *baghaar* and everyday *masala* added to these seasonal vegetables can magically transform them”

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**Can you remember your first tryst in the kitchen?**

I can't exactly say but I clearly remember that, even in my teens, if I didn't like the taste of a vegetable dish, I would simply go into the kitchen, place a pan on the stove, and add a dash of ghee and *masala*. I somehow always believed that if it's so simple to transform a dish, why not do it?

**Didn't the elders at home object?**

No one ever stopped me, so I guess I became even more interested in food. As I grew up, I started making some simple snacks in the kitchen. I never felt lazy about doing that. In

fact, I remember doing all kinds of work at home. I was always hanging around Manju *bhabhi* [elder brother's wife] and enjoyed helping her.

**I am fully aware of the love and respect you have for her and your elder brother.**

Surendra *bhaisaheb* and *bhabhi* are the epitome of affection and nurturing. Their unconditional love has always held our family together. *Bhabhi* has the rare quality of leadership with gentleness. Her devotion to the family and large, extended family has inspired strong family values in all of us. She has been dedicated in taking loving care of my parents as well as us. She is a great hostess and even a simple dish cooked by her has such special flavours and her magic touch.

**Your family's bonding is indeed remarkable. In fact, over the years, I have seen it grow from strength to strength.**

**Asha (wife):** I think the special thing is that even when we moved into nuclear families, the dedication did not change. All of us are there for each other at any given time. In fact, we can always count on our elders for good advice.

**Gautam:** The other couple that truly deserves a special mention is my elder sister by the same name, Manju *jiji*, and her husband, Ashok-sa Daga. Their dedication and family loyalty have always been something to emulate. They have been a pillar of support for all of us. Looking back, I think I really enjoyed interacting with the chefs in their kitchen over menus and food preparations. It was the same at their family weddings. They always handed over responsibility with such ease and complete trust that it was a joy to be on the host team along with them.





Amit Gaur

**With such enthusiasm and passion, how come you did not venture into the food trade?**

I keep thinking about it. I have always wanted to open a restaurant, *dhaba*

or *chaat* joint at least. But somehow I never got around to actually doing it. I have also been busy with my own profession. From my great-grandfather onwards, our family has been trading in precious stones. I continued

in the same business, being a jeweller, and had my own manufacturing unit. However, given our large extended families, there have always been opportunities to experiment with food. At weddings, I invariably shoulder



Yamini V



the tasks of planning the menus and you are more likely to find me in the kitchen than anywhere else!

### What are your favourite foods?

That's a really long list [laughs]. I like traditional foods, home-cooked meals as well as gourmet dishes. I also like to experiment with food. But what I like most is creating dishes with seasonal delicacies. For instance, the fresh vegetables during winter in Jaipur—green peas, juicy red carrots, crunchy spring onions and radish! Not to forget the seasonal green chillies that actually have a mild, sweet flavour. Nothing beats the taste of freshly cooked food. A simple *baghaar* and everyday *masala* added to these seasonal vegetables while cooking can magically transform them.

**I have always admired how you go out of your way to send these to your relatives across India, and I am lucky to have been on your list!**

The taste of these vegetables makes every effort worthwhile. Don't you agree? I really enjoy hand-picking these vegetables from the market.

**Absolutely! What about the next generation? Do they also have a penchant for cooking?**

Undoubtedly, yes. My nieces and my daughter Shraddha are all fabulous cooks in their own right. Shraddha experiments all the time, and her *dabeli* recipe is to die for! Last when we spoke, she was experimenting with some Japanese delicacies: she had managed to get some amazing vegetarian recipes from her Japanese neighbours. And my son Siddharth is one of the best food tasters I know. More than me, my wife trusts his judgement on the taste of any dish!

**And what have you prepared for me today?**

*Aloo pyaaz sabzi*. In fact, Asha and I prepared it yesterday as we

invited our family for dinner last night. She has also roasted some green chillies on the stove and added a dash of salt and lime. I am sure you are going to love that. In fact, the chillies arrived just two days ago from Jaipur and Asha immediately kept some away as she knew you were coming.

**So how many kilograms of sabzi did you prepare? And how much of ghee did you add? I am sure it is an extravagant, high-cholesterol preparation as always!**

Three kg potatoes and 1 kg onions are cooked in tomato gravy and seasoned with almost 1 kg ghee. This is a Rajasthani specialty. And before you ask me for the nth time, no, we cannot reduce the quantity of ghee or substitute oil for ghee.

**The aroma is enticing and the taste delectable. But for now, I would like to document something less intimidating than 1 kg ghee.**

[Laughs] Then let me share the recipe of fruit *pulav*. It has that perfect blend of spicy and sweet flavours, and it is yet so simple to make.

**Thank you so much, Gautam-sa. As always, I am happy to get yet another special recipe from you.**

### FRUIT PULAV

A chance experiment with a roadside vendor in Bhuleshwar who specialises in *pav bhaji* led to this delicious fruit *pulav*. The *pav bhaji masala* in this dish makes it an excellent accompaniment to the famous *pav bhaji* itself. This dish is also known as *pav bhaji pulav* in the Seth family.

### Ingredients

- Basmati rice: 1 cup
- Capsicum: ½ cup; chopped fine
- Fresh pineapple: 1 cup; chopped
- Green seedless grapes: 8-10; halved
- Sugar: 1-2 tsp
- Butter or ghee: 30 gm

- Cumin seeds: ½ tsp
- *Pav bhaji masala*: 2 tsp
- Red chilli powder: 1 tsp
- Turmeric powder: 1 pinch
- Coriander leaves: Few sprigs; chopped fine
- Salt to taste

### For the gravy

- Tomatoes: 3 (large)
- Green chillies: 2
- Ginger: 1 inch

### Method

Wash and soak the rice for 10 minutes. Now boil until each grain of the cooked rice is separate yet soft. Strain and set aside. Stew the chopped pineapple by cooking in very little water and 2 tsp of sugar for 10 minutes. For the gravy, grind the tomatoes, chillies and ginger. Set aside. Heat the butter in a pan and add the cumin seeds. As they splutter, add the *pav bhaji masala* and chopped capsicum and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the chilli powder, turmeric powder and tomato gravy and cook until the butter separates. This should take about 10 minutes. Now add the stewed pineapples and cook for 5 more minutes. Add salt and cooked rice and gently mix everything together. Garnish with chopped coriander and halved grapes and serve hot.

Gautam-sa says you can substitute pineapples with oranges in this fruit *pulav*. The orange segments don't need to be stewed. They can be added along with 1-2 tsp of sugar once the tomato gravy is cooked. Garnish with fresh pomegranate instead of grapes.

*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*





# Revving up for REVOLUTION

Shyamola Khanna meets Rajen Joshua who kickstarted a social and economic revolution in a remote district in Andhra Pradesh and made it self-sustaining

**R**ajen Joshua could have easily been an adventurer zipping around the countryside on his motorcycle or a pilot combing the skies. But then destiny planted a flag for this 68 year-old in Anantapur, a remote, drought-prone district in Andhra Pradesh, where rocks and scrub have been as much part of the rural landscape as skinny cows and emaciated people.

The cows still look skinny—that's their pedigree—but the people are healthy and happy now, and hope for a good life. The men have a spring in their step and proudly show you around the development in their village while the women talk at length about all that is right with their world, their children and their homes.

None of this would have happened if Joshua and his wife Manil Jayasena hadn't come into their lives. Back in 1981, the couple set up an NGO called Social Educational Development Society (SEDS) but they never dreamt their work would make a difference to as many as 250,000 people across 350 villages.

Returning to when it all began, Joshua says he was fed up with city life and although he had a degree in automobile engineering and a commercial pilot's licence, he found that Hyderabad no longer held any attraction for him. He simply wanted more. So, at the age of 28, he signed up with the Young India Project (YIP), which was drawing many young people keen to work in rural areas into its fold. In 1974, Joshua began working with the NGO in Anantapur. The decision upset his family, who considered him a black sheep. They disowned him as he had 'wasted' his engineering degree and commercial pilot's licence.

Joshua worked with YIP till 1980, when he decided the time had come to make a 'real' impact on the lives of the villagers. "One had to look at development issues in perspective, water conservation, afforestation, watershed development and teaching the people to help themselves," says the change-maker. In 1979, when Jayasena joined him, they were like pioneers in the Wild West: living in a tent, fetching water from a well a couple of hundred me-

tres away, miles of open land all around. As Jayasena is a trained health worker, she set up a small clinic to treat villagers and assist them during childbirth. That 'small' clinic is now a full-fledged healthcare centre and the elders of the village vouch for the speed with which its workers reach victims of snake bites and other accidents.

Joshua, whose thrust was on the land, explains, "I wanted to make the land productive, manage water, harvest rainwater and build tanks and bunds so that there could be a watershed for arid areas in the district. With scanty rainfall, Anantapur's farmers have always struggled and it was my vision to change that so that they did not have to migrate to urban centres to make a living." The fruits of his labour—in the form of check dams, water tanks and pits that retain the scanty rainfall—are now apparent. By no means is the district lush but there are trees everywhere, and water and seeds are easily available.

Joshua began by planting trees on the barren hillsides that had been stripped by foraging cattle and villagers harvesting firewood. With a team of 10 people who had stayed with him from his YIP days, he planted trees and more trees. "Through weekly meetings with the representatives of 10 villages, I helped the people understand how important this was and to develop the watershed. Alongside, we began an education initiative and the development of biogas units. Of course, the health clinic was operational long before that."

The going was tough and there were times when Joshua wondered how much the villagers were willing to trust him. "People's lack of faith in themselves made them doubt my vision. My biggest challenge, bigger than turning dry land into green cover, became changing their mindset. It was these testing times that sometimes made me feel that it would all come to naught. But mine was a relentless pursuit. My faith in my duties towards the people of Anantapur ensured that, unlike the land, my courage never ran dry." Remembers Basha, Joshua's right-hand man, who has worked with him since his YIP days, "In the beginning, we had no money. So Rajen Sir would take part in a



"Thirty years ago, I was just another man looking to make a difference. Today, my wife and I are shaping livelihoods. I worked from under a thatched roof, rode around on my bike to talk to the locals and understand their grievances. Once I understood that, I knew what I had to do. Then, there was no turning back"

motorcycle race. That is his passion, and he would always win some money. After three months, he gave me ₹ 60 as my first salary. I took that money and bought my father a shirt. He was very proud of me that day."

When the village heads gave the couple land to build a home in Anantapur, they were overjoyed. It was the ultimate sign of the faith and trust they had placed in him. Over the years, rooms have been added with financial help from donors from India and overseas. A couple of years ago, two dormitories were built to facilitate visits from school students and others interested in the work SEDS is doing. After starting with a health initiative and working on making the land productive, SEDS has undertaken many programmes that are transforming a once bleak district. For instance, the Clean Development Mechanism has targeted 5,000 families that are being provided with household biogas units. "Once all 5,000 are functioning, I will hand over the reins to the people and take a back seat," says Joshua.

At Roddam village, self-help groups (SHGs) have changed the lives of the women and consequently, families at large. Saraswatamma, 40, says that thanks to this initiative, her 19 year-old daughter K Chandana is studying to be a chartered accountant in Vijayawada. "I was a labourer and used to work in the fields of landowners with my husband," she says. "Today, with the help of micro-financing taught by SEDS and the SHG, I can write my name and am confident of going to the bank. The biogas unit has also given me a lot of relief and my health has improved considerably since I stopped using firewood to cook."

There are two milch cows that bring in enough money to help Saraswatamma educate her children. "The cows came through the community SHG, which helps members with small loans," Joshua points out. Indeed, SEDS has made women the target of most of its development work because there is a firm belief that women are more concerned about bringing about change. In fact, the NGO has 400 local resource people, most of them women.





The staff of school in Cholemari; Manil Jayasena and Joshua with SEDS staff; (opposite page) lunch hour at school

Under another initiative, The Village Level Volunteers (VLVs), local literate individuals work as bookkeepers for micro-credit groups. Then, you have the Village Health Workers (VHWs), women who have been trained to provide health services in their villages and create awareness on health and sanitation. And Tuition Teachers (TTs), young graduates that tutor the village children. SEDS trains these local resource people and views them as a vital link between the NGO and the village.

The NGO has also launched the Dry Land Horticulture (DLH) programme, which involves pitting, planting, fencing, watering, creating organic manure, mulch application and monitoring these activities. Each village is also provided with a Live-stock Capital Fund to support rearing of small animals like sheep, goats and poultry to enhance the villagers' income. And it doesn't stop there. Families are also trained in keeping their livestock healthy.

"Thirty years ago, I was just another man looking to make a difference," says Joshua. "Today, my wife and I are shaping livelihoods. I worked from under a thatched roof, rode around on my bike to talk to the locals and understand their grievances. Once I understood that, I knew what I had to do. Then, there was no turning back. There's a quote I recently read that sums up my journey, '*Main chalta hi raha, rasta mujhe milta hi*

*raha.*' (I kept walking and I kept finding my way.)"

We make our way to Cholemari village, where children now attend school and college, the men have their own SHG and most important, thanks to SEDS, they have learnt how to take their grievances to the government. The villagers recall how elated they were when they won the 'fish war' against neighbouring Peddakodipally village five years ago. "We have a fish tank here in Cholemari but according to an archaic rule, only the people of Peddakodipally could catch fish here," recounts one of the Cholemari elders. "This was because the fisheries society is located in their village and it is they who put the fingerlings in the tank. As a result, no villager from Cholemari was allowed to catch any fish here, even though we used to stare at the tank every single day." The two villages almost came to blows till Cholemari took its grievance to SEDS, which in turn took the issue to the district collector. Eventually, the collector met the SHGs of both villages and came to an amicable agreement—both sides now share the fish!

Four years ago, SEDS completed its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "It was definitely a milestone. The only thing that surpassed our pride was the happiness of Anantapur's poorest of the poor whose lives we helped reclaim. But we would be ungrateful if we do not thank all our well-wishers and sup-

porters who helped us realise our cherished dream," says Joshua. Adds Jayasena, "We have come to a point where we feel we have done our bit. Now, we'd like to pass the baton to the younger generation. They are smarter, hungrier and more conscious of the state of our environment than we were when we started out."

As evening falls, Joshua escorts us to Sanepalli village up in the hills to watch the setting sun. He is keenly awaiting the return of his 26 year-old son Rohith, who will be returning from Australia, where he is pursuing an MBA degree. His daughter Rashna, 32, lives with the couple and looks after the crafts and creative centre in the village. "I have no plans for my son. He is free to choose what he wants and when he wants to do it." As we stand atop a hillock and await the golden hour, all that is visible are windmills and trees, their boughs flirting playfully with the breeze. There's a small shed here that Joshua uses to meditate. An old picture hangs on a wall, depicting a barren landscape, in stark contrast to the rolling hills around and beyond. It is a poignant reminder of how an entire district began to hope after a determined young man made Anantapur his home.

**SEDS welcomes volunteers to join the NGO for six to 12 months at a time. Individuals who are interested can contact [sedsngo@gmail.com](mailto:sedsngo@gmail.com)**

# After celebrating your 25th anniversary, celebrate your first.

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The first time you held hands.  
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before life  
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Photographs courtesy Rohan Shreshta



# Picture perfect

The greatest gift Rohan Shreshta has received from his father Rakesh Shreshta is his artistic perspective. With that, he has embarked on a colourful career that includes film photography and many other forms of the craft, discovers **Neeti Vijaykumar**

**R**ohan Shreshta is very grateful to be his father's son. A man of many talents, the 29 year-old has followed in the footsteps of film photographer Rakesh Shreshta, who revolutionised the genre in the 1990s. Capturing every actor of note in the industry, Rakesh went on to become one of the most sought-after film photographers of his time.

However, Rohan's creative interests extend way beyond Bollywood, to fashion photography, landscaping and underwater photography (he is probably the youngest underwater photographer in India). An adventurous soul, Rohan loves the thrills and spills of scuba diving and travelling while also dabbling in filmmaking and writing.

In spite of the inevitable comparisons with his father, Rohan took up photography at the age of 25 and went on to establish his own style: "I realised I was different, that I have a different perspective," says Rohan. He points out that, nowadays, almost everyone has access to a camera and what distinguishes a professional from the rest is a unique, artistic perspective. "That's something my father never failed to impress upon me."

On his foray into film photography, Rohan points to a delightful parallel between his father and his muse Neetu Singh. Whereas it all began for Rakesh with a photo shoot of Neetu Singh 30 years ago, their respective sons—Rohan and Ranbir—seemed destined to work together. Rohan, then 25, began his career in photography with a cover shoot of Ranbir Kapoor for *Filmfare* magazine's June 2010 issue. In conversation, Rohan tells us more about his father, his source of inspiration and pride, and the turn his own career is taking. Excerpts:

**I've had cameras around me ever since I was little.** When I was 18 or so, I was backpacking in New York with a simple point-and-shoot. It was a 3MP camera and the first one I started playing with. I took some images in Central Park and when I saw the result, I was pretty surprised myself. That's when I realised, "Hey I could actually be good at this!"

**I consider myself a 'photographer', not pigeonholed into a particular type.** I do fashion, celebrity, underwater

and landscape. I am currently in New York. I keep coming back for a few months every year. It's a very inspiring city. I work on campaigns and it enhances my overall development. Here, I get into writing, filmmaking, landscaping and travelling. In Mumbai, amid all the celebrity shoots, I don't get time to myself, so I come here for a different feel.

**My father is the reason I am holding a camera today,** doing the work I do. He has been a massive influence in my life and career. He has been a guide, a mentor, a boss. I began interning with him before I moved to other photographers in various fields.

**He only taught me when I asked him for help.** Until then, he wanted me to figure things out for myself, which is still how it is. Creatively or in any other field of life, you tend to learn best from the mistakes you make. Patience is what he's taught me most. You always wait for that great shot.

**He has the ability to read right through me.** I admire that. I can't fool him; he's seen it all.

**What makes him a great photographer** is his ability to make his subject understand or visualise exactly what he is thinking. Communication with your subject is of utmost importance. If they don't share your vision, they won't get what your desired final outcome should be.

**He was busy and out all day** during the peak of his career. He travelled for two to three years, nonstop, working on so many films. He achieved a great deal in a long career and I honestly couldn't be more proud. Listening to how hard he worked and judging by how many senior people in our industry still call me 'Rakesh's son'... he's worked with the best because he was the best too.

**Back in the early 1990s, cameras and equipment were hard to find in India.** Dad used to travel abroad for them, and even used to get rolls developed in Hong Kong. I used to accompany him on some of these visits. I used to travel with him a lot, to shoots too, when I was younger. I've been on the sets of films like *Chandni*, *Lamhe*, and I've also seen Sonam Kapoor [as a child]. We've been to Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, London, Switzerland. Not all the time, of course; I had to study too.

"Dad and I have very distinct styles of work. His work is characteristically glamorous, strong, raw and edgy, sensuous and unabashed. He pioneered a huge change in the way pictures were shot in the '90s. He loved his colours too. I am the complete opposite. My work is more introverted, muted, and I like to work in black-and-white, sometimes out of focus"



**When I lost my mother, it was hard.** I was 24 and just about to start my career. There's an entire month of 2009 that's erased from my memory [the year she died] but I believe she is in a better place today and she's happy. My dad believes the same. We got through it together, our bond was so strong and being the only kid, it was just the two of us. But it does leave a massive scar.

**My dad and I are sports freaks.** He grew up playing any and every sport as did I. So whether it is football, cricket or tennis, we are glued to the television, constantly voicing our opinions, arguing, thinking we know the game better... typical fans.

**Dad and I have very distinct styles of work.** His work is characteristically glamorous, strong, raw and edgy, sensuous and unabashed, which was huge in the '90s. In photography, especially fashion or people, for that matter, pictures represent the personality of the photographer. That always showed in his pictures and he pioneered a huge change

in the way pictures were shot in the '90s. He loved his colours too. I am the complete opposite. My work is more introverted, muted, and I like to work in black-and-white, sometimes out of focus.

**Sometimes those who work with me expect my dad;** it comes with that pressure. But over time, I grew up, I have wised up. It was scary at first when I started out three to four years ago. I remember my first cover shoot with Kareena Kapoor [Khan], and how I nervous I was; wondering how at the age of 25 or 26 I had got to do a cover.

**Of course, I'm constantly compared to him.** As Dad was such a great photographer, it was like a double-edged sword for me as a budding photographer. Given that he pioneered the celebrity photography industry in India at that time, he is an institution in himself. My father has pretty much covered all the big names in Bollywood across three decades. Even though I'm compared to him, I am very proud of him. ✨



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# CENTRE STAGE

As her labour of love, Ranga Shankara, enters its 10th year, Arundhati Nag tells **Srirekhha Pillai** how theatre has been her anchor during the ebb and flow of life

At a time when 70 mm and Technicolor dreams loom larger than life, rooting for theatre may seem a lost cause. At the turn of the millennium, when veteran artist Arundhati Nag set out to realise a theatre of her own, many dismissed it as little more than a pipe dream. Four years later, in 2004, Nag's dream took concrete shape as Ranga Shankara, which has since become the theatrical pulse of Bengaluru. Even as Ranga Shankara steps into its 10<sup>th</sup> year, it has set the stage for an avid theatre scene in the city, with 3,980 plays in 34 different languages so far, at an affordable rate. On a normal day in the life of Ranga Shankara it's not unusual to see a Kan-nada housewife in her finest Mysore silk, *mallige* (jasmine) pinned up on a neat bun, rubbing shoulders with a college-going kid in low-waist jeans. "Theatre", says the 58 year-old Nag, "is an extremely democratic space that allows a relationship between the performer and the observer. And therein lies its magic."

Dressed in an ethnic cotton sari—Nag wears only cotton, a value passed down by her mother—her face scrubbed clean, with a line of kohl highlighting firebrand eyes, she states, "Theatre has chosen me." Pointing to her monument of love, she says, "I believe that places like these have a destiny of their own; I'm just a pawn. The opportunity of Ranga Shankara has used me to fulfil itself just the way our children find the womb to give birth, nurture, and then set them free." Conceived without gates or doors, Ranga Shankara is an open space, inviting everyone with open arms, as depicted by the embossed likeness of actor-director Shankar Nag, Arundhati's late husband, on one of the glass panes. Interestingly, in theatre circuits overseas, Nag is known as the lady who created theatre without doors!









"FORGET THEATRE, EVEN CINEMA HALLS WERE BEING PULLED DOWN TO BUILD MULTIPLEXES. SHANKAR AND I, FOR LONG, HAD DREAMT OF A DEDICATED SPACE FOR THEATRE IN BENGALURU. WE HAD PERFORMANCE SPACES EARLIER, WHERE THEATRE WAS JUST ONE OF THE ACTIVITIES, ALONG WITH OTHER PERFORMANCES. BUT, WE WANTED A SPACE EXCLUSIVELY FOR THEATRE"



Photographs courtesy Arundhati Nag

Right from the 1970s, when she did almost 48 plays a season, juggling between Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and English, theatre has been Nag's *raison d'être*. Years later, even when she took a break to have her daughter Kaavya, she couldn't keep away from the arc lights and returned with a 28 day-old baby to play the lead in the runaway popular Kannada comedy *Nodi Swamy Navirodu Heege*.

Incidentally, the last conversation she shared with Shankar Nag, before his fatal accident in 1990, was about Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*. Fittingly enough, she staged a comeback on his first death anniversary, paying tribute to him by playing the eponymous character.

Her major plays include Girish Karnad's *Bikhre Bimb*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which was adapted as *Ateet ki Parchaiyaan* in Hindi, and Vijay Tendulkar's *Gidhade* in Marathi. Whether it's in the National Award-winning role as Amitabh Bachchan's grandmother 'Bum' in *Paa* or as the mother superior in *Sapney*, Nag has left her mark on the silver screen too. Currently, she is just back from the shoot of *The Man Who Knew Infinity*, a film on the life of Indian mathematician S Ramanujan, directed by Matt Brown. "I play Ramanujan's mother, who had a detrimental effect on his life. The role apart, the clincher for me was the presence of Jeremy Irons in the film!" she gushes. Nag has worked behind the scenes too, as an assistant director for David Lean's *A Passage to India* and in Shankar Nag's path-breaking TV serial *Malgudi Days*.

That said, her abiding love, Nag insists, is theatre. Set up under Sanket, a non-profit trust chaired by Jnanpith winner Girish Karnad, and with M S Sathyu as consultant, the 12,500 sq ft Ranga Shankara holds over 300 performances a year, besides workshops, lectures, and theatre for children—AHA! "Unlike movies and computer games, theatre speaks to you with flesh and blood," she says. "I'm waiting for life to come full circle at Ranga Shankara with the children who have grown up with us, walking in with their children." Nag's own daughter Kaavya, an environmentalist, with a master's in wildlife conservation, runs Do Bandar, an organic range of soaps and oils, along with her school friend.

Right now, the green and free-spirited environs of Ranga Shankara are abuzz with its 10<sup>th</sup> annual theatre festival: 'Celebrating Indian Theatre from *Shakuntalam* to *Sakharam*'. On the ground floor are etched the names of those who contributed in kind and cash towards making this dream a reality. "Ranga Shankara," says Nag, "has been built on public money. Even if I pop off tomorrow, the city will run it. It's not something my daughter will inherit."

#### EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW

**Ranga Shankara was born at a time when theatres were making way for multiplexes. What gave you the courage and conviction to see it to fruition?**



With daughter Kaavya

Opposite page: receiving the National Award for Best Supporting Actress in 2010

2004  
Set up Ranga  
Shankara

2008  
Sangeet Natak  
Akademi Award

Nothing other than sheer madness [laughs]. Everyone thought I had lost the plot. Forget theatre, even cinema halls were being pulled down to build multiplexes. Shankar and I, for long, had dreamt of a dedicated space for theatre in Bengaluru. We had performance spaces earlier, where theatre was just one of the activities, along with other performances. But, we wanted a space exclusively for theatre. I had just come from my Prithvi Theatre experience, where I was part of those theatre groups which opened it. When I moved to Bengaluru, I realised we didn't have a space like that and started dreaming of setting up a similar space. However, it took me many years to realise that dream.

**The path you walked was fraught with difficulties. Were there moments of self-doubt, when you felt like dropping it all and running away?**

Yes, it has been such a long and tough journey. The site we were initially allocated was amid residential complexes. We asked for an alternate site. It took us three long years just to get the site exchanged. Once we got it, I put in an application to the chief minister's office. Nothing happened for two years. On a New Year's day, I woke up feeling I should do something for myself, and called up the chief minister's office. S M Krishna was the chief minister then. I was asked to rush to his office. Within 20 days, he sanctioned ₹ 20 lakh. But the project cost was over ₹ 3 crore. For one year, I ran unsuccessfully behind corporates trying to fund the rest. When I was asked to account for the government

money, I went back to the CM with an FD of the money allotted by them, along with the interest accrued on it, asking him to take it back as I had not been able to raise the rest. The chief minister then called up the Jindals and asked them to give us free cement. He then issued another ₹ 25 lakh. Thus, we started work on the building with an initial ₹ 50 lakh. When I saw the first claw of an earth-mover going into the earth, I told myself, "Aru, you have now forfeited your right to abandon this project." That day I decided that no matter how many years it took, I had to finish this project.

**How did you raise the rest of the funds?**

Personally, I was broke. I just had enough money to put petrol in my car and come and sit at the site, watching the construction activity. Either you have money or you have passion. I didn't have money but I had passion, loads of it. Those days I had ears only for people who could help me out financially. I had nothing else on my mind. Every night I would go off to sleep thinking about the people I met that day and the calls I made for raising funds. Every morning I would wake up thinking about whom to meet and make calls to. I did nothing else in those years.

**How did you manage personally?**

It was very difficult. When I look back, I wonder how I managed to pull through those days. I did a 'Bru' coffee

"THEATRE  
CHANGES YOU FROM  
WITHIN, TRANSFORMING  
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WHETHER IT'S  
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YOU FEEL CONNECTED  
TO THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE  
HAPPENS EVEN IN THE  
ACT OF MAKING LOVE"



advertisement and movies like *Sapne* and *Dil Se*, besides a couple of Kannada movies. Later on, I stopped doing movies altogether and focused my entire energy on raising funds for Ranga Shankara.

**Your childhood was spent in Mumbai, which has an active theatre culture. Is that where your fascination with theatre began?**

My first exposure to theatre was in Delhi, where I lived till I was 10. The very first memories are of Ram Leela, of seeing a sardarji as Sita, with long flowing hair and a veil to cover his moustache and beard. I was fascinated with his amazing transformation. Later, when we moved to Mumbai, the Marathi roots of my parents kind of woke up and Marathi theatre became our staple. Good quality theatre started coming my way. With that, a certain quality bar was forming in my mind too. I was in Narsee Monji College and happened to audition for a Hindi play for the India People's Theatre Association's (IPTA) inter-collegiate competition, landing my very first role, which was a minor one in a one-act play. I got a consolation prize for it. You wouldn't believe it but I still have that certificate [chuckles].

**Later, you joined IPTA.**

Those days I was this wild girl. The Woodstock Musical Festival had just happened. Pink Floyd was on the international scene; *Hey! Teachers! Leave the kids alone!* was

our anthem; torn shoes with peace emblems were in. We were just around 17 then; all that we did was attend parties, drink coke, and go for drives. One day, while taking my dog for walk I met this friend who had joined IPTA. He told me he would take me to his rehearsal one day and that all big actors, including Prithviraj Kapoor and Balraj Sahni, would come there. So one day I went with him to watch the rehearsal in my short skirt and naughty boy shoes, with comics in hand. Shama Zaidi, who was directing, called out to me, "You girl in the pigtails, will you act?" I said, "If you teach me, I will." That was it! I landed the main role in Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Ek Chadar Maili Si*. Though the play didn't take off, I managed to get into IPTA.

**How did the eclectic experiences at IPTA enrich you?**

We had stalwarts like Kaifi Azmi, A K Hangal, and Sardar Jaffri, people who had made a choice about their motherland and decided to remain in India when the Partition happened. As a 17 year-old, it was a life-changing experience to meet such people who were committed to a nation and proud to be Indians. Also, I believe that theatre changes you from within, transforming every individual cell. It's the same when you immerse yourself in any relationship, whether it's artistic or spiritual. Sometimes this magical moment when you feel connected to the entire universe happens even in the act of making love. To me, the magical moment manifested itself in my relationship with theatre.





At a kids' workshop

Opposite page: preparing for Girish Karnad's *Bikhre Bimb*

2010  
National Film  
Award for Best  
Supporting  
Actress for *Paa*

Photographs courtesy Arundhati Nag

**Those were the heady days when you were drifting between rehearsals....**

I think it was the time, the age, and the opportunity. As I could speak Hindi, English, Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada, I was doing plays in all these languages. In fact, my father used to call me a 'cloud' as I was always on the move, from one play to another.

**Weren't you interested in painting as well?**

Yes. My interest in all things artistic began with painting. I wanted to be a painter, and wanted to join the J J School of Arts but my mother told me, "Do something that will stand you in good stead." Like all middle-class mothers, she felt I would starve if I became a painter. Deep within me, the urge to paint is still there. Maybe one day I'll pick up the paintbrush.

**What was it that attracted you to Shankar Nag, besides the obvious passion for theatre?**

We were opposites [laughs]. I was the cloud; he was this quiet, centred person. Unlike my friends, who were a wild bunch, he was the quiet, brooding kind, who would sit in a corner, doing crosswords, and reading Fyodor Dostoevsky, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. My friends were these rich guys living in sprawling houses and driving around in a Mercedes while Shankar used to work

in State Bank of India's bullion branch. He was the odd one out!

**Picking up the pieces of life after you lost him would not have been easy....**

It was like a nightmare. You don't expect a 34 year-old to vanish from your life. One moment, he was sitting right next to me in the car; the next moment, when I woke up on the hospital bed, I was told he was gone. I didn't even get to see his body as I was unconscious. In that sense, there is no sense of closure, and I feel cheated.

**How did you manage?**

I was left with no choice. Though my family and friends had rallied round, how long were people going to cry with me? I had broken every bone in my body and was in bed for almost a year. My daughter was just five then. I had the responsibility of bringing her up and giving her a good education. She had already lost her father and it would not have helped her to have a moping mother at home. Maybe if Kaavya weren't there, I would have gone back to Mumbai and jumped into theatre. I had come to Karnataka for Shankar; I had no other reason to stay back. But I didn't want to disorient Kaavya. Besides, I had inherited a couple of projects that Shankar had started, and were incomplete. As I was the legal heir, I also inherited the accompanying loans. It took me 10 years to clear those loans. Those were



Prasad Durga

tough times. I had to go to Kaavya's school and request them to reduce the fee structure. I was the mother who would pay her daughter's fees last every year.

**You live in a farmhouse, away from the city. Was that a conscious choice?**

These are choices that you make in life. We have been living there for almost 34 years now. I was 25 when I came from Bombay and started living in the boondocks [laughs]. I told Shankar, "I want the earth, and I want to grow things. If I had to live in an apartment, I can live in Bombay and grow my rose in a Dalda *dabba* and feel very happy about it." I have lived in my farmhouse without electricity and telephones. There have been days when I haven't spoken to anyone as Shankar would be busy shooting. But it gave me an opportunity to read, enjoy nature, and become bold.

**Apparently, your award-winning role in *Paa* got you more national attention than 40 years of theatre. Why don't we see you more often in Hindi movies?**

You have to believe this—no one has come to me with offers. It has been five years since *Paa*, and the kind of recall I have with the public with that one movie, I've never had in my entire theatre experience. I don't have a secretary or a godfather to manage my career. When I met Shabana Azmi and Javed Akhtar some time back, they asked me why they don't see me anymore. I told them that nothing had come my way. Then Javed said, "Maybe it's because you don't live in Bombay." Somehow, Bollywood doesn't seem to think outside Bombay!

**An interview with you can't be complete without mentioning David Lean's *A Passage to India*. How did you land up as an assistant on the set?**

David Lean was the Steven Spielberg of our generation. When he advertised, calling for assistants, Shankar told me, "Aru I would have applied, but I'm busy. Why don't you apply?" When I went for the interview, Richard Goodwin, who was the producer of the film, and Shama Habibullah from the production team, interviewed me. Somewhere in between, I got up and said, "I want to have a smoke." When I came back, Goodwin told me, "You know, David Lean doesn't like people who smoke." I told him curtly, "What I do in my personal life is my business. I don't smoke when I am on the job." Goodwin told Shama, "Here's a woman with balls, let's give her the job." That's how I got it!

**To the world at large, Arundhati Nag is synonymous with theatre. What are your other interests?**

I love cooking. Even if I reach home at two in the night, I cook for myself. When I was broke and didn't have the money to take my daughter to restaurants, I used to invite her friends over during weekends and prepare Chinese, Tandoori, grilled and other stuff. Those days we would have a candlelight or moonlight dinner out in the garden. In winters, we would light a bonfire. It was great fun! I also enjoy classical music. When I wake up in the morning, I light an *agarbatti* and play music. Otherwise, I feel incomplete. In fact, I tried learning classical music but got so busy with theatre that I couldn't pursue it.

**What are your views on ageing?**

Ageing allows you to say many things [laughs]. You can walk into a shop and tell a salesman that he needn't go overboard with the bras and the panties and embarrass the kids. I did that recently! Personally, I don't feel I have aged. In fact my daughter keeps complaining, "Ma, you tend to forget that you are 58, you behave like a 16 year-old." The body, however, has its own way of reminding you of its age. I have a friend who is 75 and tells me, "You know when you wake up and something is paining in your body that you are still alive!" ❀



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# delhi diary

Choosing to wander off the beaten track in the capital, Indian-at-heart **Braja Sorensen** soaks up culture, history and plenty of atmosphere

I'm not much of a tourist; I chose to live in India 18 years ago. I'm from Australia whose vineyards are famous, whose blue mountains grace the inlands, and whose stunning coral reefs decorate the coast. I've covered most of Australia but not as a tourist. In the same way, I've never really visited or toured India; I just live here. My home is Mayapur, north of Calcutta; I've lived in or been to Delhi, Bombay, Puri, Jaipur, Dehradun, Rishikesh, Mussoorie (*O Mussoorie!*), but I don't generally 'tour around'.

I love to discover things for myself and stay far from the madding crowds and usual tourist haunts. Mehrauli, one of the seven ancient cities that make up the present state of Delhi, is a pleasant change for someone like me. History lines the streets here, with the Qutab Minar, the stone ruins of Qila Rai Pithora and the ancient Yogmaya Mandir all in the vicinity. But Mehrauli is more than a place you'd visit to see the sites. Along with rich history, it has splendid atmosphere.

I went first to the Chhatarpur temple, mostly as research for the book I'm currently writing. Despite the many altars in the temple—Shiva-Parvati, Sita-Rama-Lakshmana and Radha-Krishna through to Hanuman, Ganesh, and Durga—the

presiding deity in the temple is actually Katyayani Devi, one of the nine forms of Durga. Legend goes that at the end of the month of *Kartika* (late November), Krishna's *gopi* friends would perform a *vrata* in honour of Katyayani Devi on the banks of the river Yamuna to attain Krishna as their husband. Every day they would bathe in the cold river, eating only simple, un-spiced *khichari*. The altars in the temple complex, the second biggest in India after the Akshardham temple, are dotted around the huge *mandir*, which is spread across 60 acre. Constructed in marble, the temple has *jaali* or perforated stone/ latticed screen work. After spending close to an hour here, I left covered in garlands and other assorted *prasad* the priests bestowed me with.

We went next to Yogmaya Mandir, an older, lesser-known temple just past the Qutab Minar (about 500 m past the Qutab Colonnade). The temple lies within the walls of Lal Kot, the first fortress citadel of Delhi built by Gurjar Tanwar chief Anangpal I around 731 AD. In 12<sup>th</sup> century Jain scriptures, Mehrauli is called Yoginipur, referring to this temple. Said to have been built by the Pandavas 5,000 years ago, this is one of the 27 temples destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni, and is the only surviving temple belonging to the pre-Sultanate days that is still in use.

I love to discover things for myself and stay far from the madding crowds and usual tourist haunts. Mehrauli, one of the seven ancient cities that make up the present state of Delhi, is a pleasant change for someone like me



The deity of Yogmaya, the sister of Krishna, is cared for by people who live around the temple. Their mood is distinctly *Brijbasi*, and I was welcomed in the usual *Brijbasi* fashion: “Radhe Radhe!”

The temple was first renovated during the rule of Emperor Akbar; history states that his grandson Aurungzeb tried to convert the temple into a mosque—the rectangular side room off the main chamber is evidence of this. The deity of Yogmaya, the sister of Krishna, is cared for by people who live around the temple. Their mood is distinctly *Brijbasi*, and I was welcomed in the usual *Brijbasi* fashion: “Radhe Radhe!” It’s not a well-known temple; my driver had to stop and ask along the road, with many people not knowing about its existence.

Nearby is one of the first settled areas of Delhi, another of her ancient cities, Qila Rai Pithora, whose centuries-old stone ruins grace the entrance to a beautiful garden, aptly named The Garden of the Five Senses. You might be forgiven for thinking you’d taken a wrong turn: the area is a quiet, unused patch of land off the beaten path that looks undeveloped but for a few random stores. There’s no real evidence that it is of such historical significance, yet the simplicity of the area appealed greatly to me. At the end of the road, the welcoming sign of the gardens is the first hint of the beauty that lies within: lily ponds, shaded areas, a sanctuary where you could spend hours. I did: I wrote for a long time, then had lunch at the Italian restaurant within the grounds. There were a few couples wandering

hand in hand and some families sitting on the lawns but otherwise it was quiet and, if I may say so, heavenly! I spent the night at a beautiful, peaceful guesthouse, The Estate. Nestled at the end of the gated area of Sultanpur Estate, its 30-ft-high walls offer sheer quietness. It’s what I’d call a ‘domestic five star,’ a small yet spacious guesthouse in the grounds of a private residence. The next morning I surprised myself: I visited Rashtrapati Bhavan. Well, it was Independence Day and I was feeling quite patriotic about the land I consider my home. Being a holiday, more than ever the wide boulevards of Lutyens Delhi were quiet, the city was still, and all was well.

As we were early, we drove from India Gate along the breathtaking sweep of the wide, pristine road that leads to Rashtrapati Bhavan’s regal entrance gates, where the daily change of guard had just begun. And what a spectacle it was! The Presidential Guard—turban-clad warriors on horseback, armed foot soldiers and the brass band—stirred the heart with rhythmic tunes during the horse-and-rider exhibition, finishing with *Auld lang syne*. Yes, I sang, and I’m sure I was the only one there who knew the words. The morning closed with everyone standing for the national anthem. My father—an Army man, trombone player, composer and bandsman—was the bandmaster



of the 4<sup>th</sup> Military District in Australia after emigrating from Scotland. (I still remember the tea cosy he brought back from Bombay on a visit while his band toured the world.) Consequently, brass bands do quite stir my heart, and the showmanship of the horses and riders was spectacular. A brief daily event, perhaps 30 minutes in total with seating and refreshments, it is well worth the time. It left me with a sense of assurance that someone, somewhere, was in charge of this land, and keen to maintain its beautiful culture and heritage.

Like I said, I'm no tourist. But I'd recommend a visit to this stunning landmark to anyone, from any country, any day. Second only to the Versailles in France in terms of size of a rulers' residence, it covers 70 acre in the heart of Delhi, a 2.3-km walk from one side to another, its lovely Mughal Gardens taking up possibly one-third of that area. I was given a tour through the President's house; I loved the gallery and the incredible works of portraiture that hung huge and stately on its walls. But the Mughal Gardens were something else, the flowing waterways and Persian layout a well-maintained salute to the history of Delhi's once-Mughal roots. There were many places to sit and take shelter from the late-morning sun; each was peaceful, filled with birds and lapping water, a pleasure to experience.

My brief visit here was ample. It was still morning, and with extra time up my sleeve, there was really only one thing to do: Khan Market. Only a few minutes' drive through the still-quiet streets, it is perhaps one of the top three shopping areas in Delhi (and the most expensive, but worth every penny). Khan Market was established in 1951 to cater to the upmarket diplomatic community in nearby Chanakyapuri. It still does and consequently its stores are lined with a perfect mix of imported goods and local jewels in delicatessens, bookstores, art galleries, and every other kind of agent for style you can find in Delhi. And of course, it has every possible variation of food. I'd recommend waiting till you get there and seeing what you feel like, then



Haresh Patel

simply asking one of the storeowners or locals—you can't go wrong.

After a quick and very predictable *kurti* purchase from Fab India, the wide roads again swept us back swiftly to the stone-wall-lined Mandi Road and into Sultanpur Estate. The streets in Mehrauli are wide boulevards flanked by thick stone walls that hold back acres of lush green forests. As I live in West Bengal on the Ganges and my home is perched in a picturesque corner of land that is a perfect blend of jungle and rice fields, the wide avenues of Mehrauli are a deep breath of fresh air. The city's Embassy Enclave is from another world, and the route from those beautiful Lutyens streets to the outlying Mehrauli is swift and trouble-free. By the time we returned, it was time for lunch. In-house dining at The Estate was simple but delicious, from freshly

**The spectacular India Gate**

**Opposite page: the lesser-known Yogmaya Mandir; the resplendent Chhatrapur temple**



Braja Sorensen

#### Change of guard at Rashtrapati Bhavan

kneaded, rolled and cooked *paratha* with *achar* and *dahi*, to the surprisingly soft and thinly-battered *paneer pakora*. On my last visit to Delhi, I had lunch at the home of the power couple, writer-historian William Dalrymple and artist Olivia Dalrymple, who live in a farmhouse that is more like a manor on acres of grounds. The surrounding area for miles is the same: farm properties hiding behind high stone walls and closed gates, no traffic but that of residents or their guests, acres of quiet gardens in each farm, and the call of peacocks to wake you in the morning. Or, if you're near William and Olivia's, the *baa-aaa* of their very polite and cultured goats.

Sunday dawned with that call—peacocks, not goats—and I lounged long and lazily around The Estate, not a sound to be heard but for the distant call to prayer of the *muezzin* at a nearby mosque, and an Indian wedding band chirruping away

in its slightly-off-note charm—a nearby, unobtrusive wedding hall was welcoming a bride and groom on this beautifully quiet Sunday.

Down the stairs at The Estate, one can walk through the front gardens and out to a waiting car—whose driver has had to come through guarded gates and nonhonking laneways to reach its door—or exit through a heavy steel gate at the back of the stairway and emerge in a laneway that runs through the village of Sultanpur, filled with markets and sundry tiny shops with shutters and old-fashioned Indian charm. I wandered to the end, turned right, and found a 'Mughal Emporium,' whose wide-open spaces were sparsely but perfectly filled with a variety of goods that were reasonably priced yet traditional and authentic, transporting me back to an era full of grace and charm. Much like the rest of this beautiful part of the capital. ✨



A woman with curly hair, wearing a blue checkered shirt and white pants, is smiling and leaning back on a blue dolphin-shaped water ride. In the background, a man in a light green shirt and khaki shorts is also on a similar ride. The scene is set in a pool with green foliage in the background.

## Experience

### A second childhood

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## PLAY ON



India's remarkable legacy in music, theatre and film are perfectly preserved in cylindrical recordings dating back to the early 1900s. Some of these priceless recordings, which were hitherto considered lost to the annals of time, have been preserved and documented by Amar Nath Sharma, an officer with the Indian Revenue Service. Drawing from his knowledge on the subject and from a rare personal collection of over 200 cylinders, Sharma, along with his daughter, writer and editor Anukriti, has released *The Wonder That Was the Cylinder* (Spenta Multimedia; ₹ 6,000). "India has no archive that documents

### NOSTALGIA

the history of sound recording, whether it is classical or film music," says Sharma. "We have found wax cylinders dating back to 1899 that are played on a phonogram." The search for the remnants took him over two decades. "My tryst began when I stumbled upon some recordings at a *kabadiwala* shop in Calcutta in the late 1980s," he recalls. In fact, Sharma has bought a phonogram from Mumbai's Chor Bazaar. Brimming with intricate and previously unknown details about the era of the phonograph and the wax cylinder, the book provides a fascinating account of India's contribution to early sound recording.





## SOUND BYTES

- Cylinders are hollow wax rolls about six inches in length that are played on a phonogram.
- The phonogram was invented by Thomas Alva Edison but fell into disuse with the entry of the circular disc in 1902.
- Recordings of doyens of Hindustani classical music and Indian cinema like Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Bal Gandharva and Dadasaheb Phalke and *Vande Mataram* in the voice of Rabindranath Tagore can be found in cylinders.



Clockwise from above: Sharma's wide collection of cylindrical recordings; the western notation of Ustad Alladiya Khan's recording; Gauharbai, wife of renowned Marathi singer and stage actor Bal Gandharva, playing the gramophone

# Jatra queens

A new documentary traces the history of female impersonators on stage, reports  
**Shoma A Chatterji**



Photographs courtesy **Debojit Majumdar**

What do actors like Bal Gandharva, Jayashankar Sundari, Chapal Rani have in common? They left their imprints in theatre history as female impersonators in Jatra, a popular folk-theatre form in Bengal. This was at a time when women were not permitted to perform on a public platform. Shedding more light on this art form is *Known Strangers* or *Chena Kintu Ojana* (Bengali), a documentary film tracing the contribution of 15 female impersonators of the Jatra from the early 1900s to 1970s, which was screened in Kolkata recently.

"I was inspired to make this film after I saw documentaries on famous female impersonators of the past century," says Debojit Majumdar, who directed the film jointly with Dipankar Dutta. "One of them was *Sundari—An Actor Prepares* on Jayshankar Sundari, a popular female

impersonator of the Gujarati stage in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bombay. During my research, I discovered an amazing world of facts and memories and decided to document them."

## THEATRE

Playwright and theatre historian Prof Ananda Lal elaborates on how the suffix 'Rani' became a signifier of the actors' identity in essaying the role of female characters. Most of them entered the profession driven by extreme poverty especially during the famine in the 1950s," he says. The film is a tribute to the rich contribution of these actors who went against the grain of their biological sex and sociological gender to merge with the femaleness the characters demanded. Other social issues such as poverty and social ostracism within the mainstream emerge naturally from the script. Three female impersonators—nonagenarians Satyabala (Satyabrata Roy) and Janardhan Rani (Janardhan

Nandy), and 76 year-old Chapal Rani (Chapal Bhaduri)—feature as their real selves in the film and the latter two perform for the camera. Unfortunately, Satyabala passed away during the making of the film.

Most of these actors had a huge fan following who would sit enchanted for hours watching them perform. "My grandfather Rajani Ganguly was a Jatra performer and an avid lover of music and art," shares Babulal Ganguly, son of Bibhuti Ganguly aka Bibhuti Rani. "My father was 15 when he joined professional Jatra, charmed by the art form. As he had long hair and was good-looking, no one could guess that it was a man disguised as a woman! I feel honoured that I had the opportunity to perform as a child artist alongside Upen Rani [Upen Adhikari] in the play *Bir Puja* in the 1940s." To this, Janardhan Nandy adds nostalgically, "Bibhuti Rani was, in fact, bestowed the title of 'Rani' by





Late Satyabala with Bobby; Janardhan Rani in one of his roles; (opposite page) Chapal Rani in one of his performances

a king enchanted by her looks and performance.”

The film elaborates upon how female impersonators may have begun acting in Bengal from the time of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, propagator of the Vaishnava sect in Hinduism, who portrayed the character of Rukmini in a play staged at Chandrashekar Bhavan in 1506. He also enacted the roles of Adya Shakti, Radharani and the Universal Mother.

*Known Strangers* has the lone female voice of Jayashree Devi, who stepped into Jatra when women began to replace female impersonators. “The power that female impersonators infused into every performance is

fascinating,” she acknowledges. “In fact, I have tried to imbibe that. Their makeup, costumes, the way they looked on stage... everything was extraordinary!”

For his (or her) part, Chapal Rani, who continues to give solo performances in temples around Kolkata at the age of 76, says, “I had the good fortune of watching the performances of most of the leading Ranis of the times. I am deeply indebted to Banaphool Rani, who saw my performance and initiated me into Jatra. I was astounded with the grace of Phoni Rani whose voice had a unique blend of power, pitch and sweetness.” In the 1950s, Jatra entered a new phase. “This can be

attributed to Jyotsna Dutta, the first female actress to essay female roles in Jatra,” says Chapal Rani. “Slowly, other women began to step in and we were considered redundant.”

The trend has not completely vanished, though. “My performances are still hugely popular in off-Chitpur [near Kolkata] areas,” claims 36 year-old Bobby (Bobby Dey), one of the few contemporary female impersonators.

Nevertheless, Bobby’s case remains isolated; in Chitpur, the centre of Jatra in Kolkata, females continue to essay women’s roles. “With the entry of women performers, we are now a fallen lot,” rues Chapal Rani.

### In his words

Theatre and film icon Naseeruddin Shah recently released *And Then One Day*, a candid memoir. According to Shah, writing was an amusing pastime till it grew into something much deeper; his friend, historian Ramchandra Guha, encouraged him to complete the book. In his autobiography, the first-time writer discusses his passion for playing and watching tennis, cricket and movies, in that order, and indulges in some self-deprecating humour.



# Comeback!

**V**eteran Assamese film maker Abdul Majid, best known for his award-winning film *Chameli Memsab*, has returned to the sets after a hiatus of 23 years. His last and sixth film, *Uttarkal*, failed to break even, following which he had almost bid adieu to filmmaking. "My love for cinema has been so intense that I grew increasingly restless by each passing year until I decided to make another film," says Majid, sipping black tea at his Guwahati residence as post-production work of his latest venture, *Saat Numberor Sandhandat*, goes on in full swing.

Majid's entry into filmdom was through the stage. "I grew up in Jorhat, where it was a tradition for the final year of the Government Boys' School to stage a play immediately after matricula-

## FILM

tion," he recalls. "We would closely watch our elders rehearse and stage plays in the famous Jorhat Theatre; we began rehearsal for *Kuri Shatika*, an Assamese translation of Tara Shankar Bandopadhyaya's well-known Bengali play *Bingsha Shatabdi*."

Majid went on to make six films, the most remarkable being *Chameli Memsab* (1975), which not only fetched him the much-coveted Rajat Kamal Award but won Bhupen Hazarika the Best Music Director's award. A diehard Ashok Kumar fan who loves watching Satyajit Ray's *Pathar Pachali* and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* ("I don't remember how many times I have seen these two films"), Majid recalls an interesting anecdote related to this film. "When I went with the script of *Chameli Memsab*, Nirode

Choudhury [Assamese writer who wrote *Chameli Memsab*] insisted that the music be done only by Bhupen Hazarika. But meeting a roving minstrel as Hazarika was a herculean task. I finally caught up with him and, to my greatest joy, he readily agreed to score the music." Between 1971 and 2010, Majid was involved in directing plays for as many as 13 different mobile theatre companies.

Acknowledging the fact that Assamese films are no match for big-budget Bollywood movies, the high-spirited and energetic filmmaker, who turns 83 this month, says, "I know it is a difficult proposition, but I still hope people will watch this film. In fact, I hope to make a couple of films in the next few years."

—Tapati Baruah Kashyap



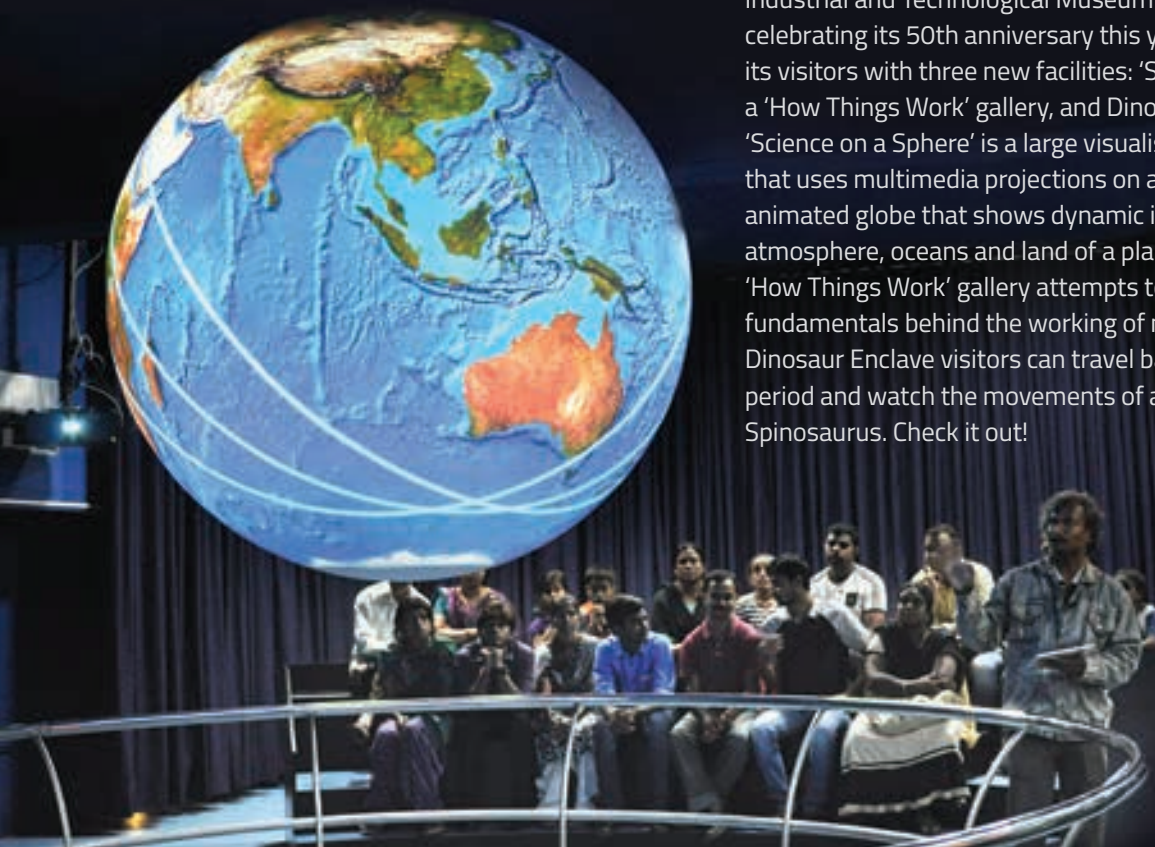
## HAPPY FEET

VETERAN BHARATANATYAM DANCER GEETA CHANDRAN RAISED THE CURTAIN ON A THREE-MONTH LONG EVENT, *40 YEARS OF DANCE*, THIS SEPTEMBER, COMMEMORATING HER 40TH YEAR SINCE HER *ARANGETRAM* (DANCE INITIATION). ON THE OCCASION, *IN THE CLICK OF A MOVEMENT!*, AN EXHIBITION OF AN ESSAY OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAKESH SAHAI, WHO HAS BEEN CAPTURING CHANDRAN'S EXPRESSIONS AND DOCUMENTING HER PERFORMANCES ON AND OFF STAGE, WAS HELD AT INDIA HABITAT CENTRE, NEW DELHI. ACCORDING TO SAHAI, THE SERIES WAS NOT PLANNED BUT RATHER EVOLVED THROUGH FIVE YEARS AND 15,000 IMAGES. "EACH ONE PEERS INTO GEETA'S INNER BEING," SAID THE PHOTOGRAPHER AT THE EVENT. FOR HER PART, CHANDRAN ACKNOWLEDGED, "SAHAI'S CAMERA UNVEILS SOMETHING DIFFERENT EVERY TIME." THE CELEBRATIONS WILL CONTINUE TILL DECEMBER AND IN THE OFFING ARE TRIBUTES IN DANCE BY CHANDRAN'S DISCIPLES AND A LAUNCH OF THE NEW EDITION OF HER BOOK, *SO MANY JOURNEYS*.



## COOL SCIENCE

Good news for science enthusiasts! The Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum in Bengaluru—celebrating its 50th anniversary this year—will enthrall its visitors with three new facilities: 'Science on a Sphere', a 'How Things Work' gallery, and Dinosaur Enclave. 'Science on a Sphere' is a large visualisation system that uses multimedia projections on an immersive animated globe that shows dynamic images of the atmosphere, oceans and land of a planet. While the 'How Things Work' gallery attempts to explain the fundamentals behind the working of machines, at Dinosaur Enclave visitors can travel back to the Triassic period and watch the movements of a life-size animated Spinosaurus. Check it out!



# Spice girls!



Photographs courtesy M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation

Chettinad cuisine is known for its distinct aroma, spicy flavours and rich history. Over the years, it borrowed subtle changes and acquired newer tastes as the Chettiar (trading) community travelled far and wide. Twin sisters **Meyyammai Murugappan** and **Visalakshi Ramaswamy**, 68, chart this culinary journey in *The Chettinad Cookbook* (₹ 1200; 381 pages). “We decided to write a comprehensive book on the food that is evocative of home and family, ritual and celebration to us,” they say. With authentic recipes like *neer kuzhakattai*, *vazhaipoo vadai*, *nandu masala* and *kuruvai arisi payasam*, their labour of love—a decade in the making—attempts to record and preserve the culinary tradition of over a hundred

years for future generations. Indeed, this elegant book doesn’t just evoke the delicious aromas and flavours of Chettinad cuisine but also brings to life the unique cooking tools, utensils and storerooms of the Chettiar kitchen through beautiful hand-rendered illustrations. “The Chettinad food available in restaurants today is a misnomer and the book was conceived to place on record the numerous recipes that do not make it to restaurant menus but are an integral part of Chettinad cuisine,” says Visalakshi Ramaswamy (right), founder of M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation, who is actively involved in the documentation of Chettinad’s craft and culture. “The 276 recipes have been gathered from different people, and polished, tried and tested before being compiled,”

says self-taught cooking enthusiast Meyyammai Murugappan, who has served as president of the National Association for the Blind.

Putting to rest the notion that Chettinad cuisine is laborious, the book contains recipes that are both uncomplicated and nutritious, as well as exotic dishes that require more planning. “Most recipes are simple and easy to follow but, like everything else, practice is the best way to perfection,” say the sisters in unison.

—Sai Prabha Kamath

**To purchase the book, contact  
M Rm Rm Cultural Foundation:  
044-24622505, 24614313;  
email: chettinadculture@gmail.  
com; buy online at amazon.in**





KUZH I PANEEYARAM





JEERA VADAI



## KUZHI PANEEYARAM

(Fried dumplings)

For 45 *paneeyaram*

### Ingredients

Rice (*paccharisi*): 2 cups  
Parboiled rice: 2 cups  
Black gram dal (*urad dal*):  
½ cup levelled  
Sago: ¼ cup  
Mustard seeds: 1 tsp  
Shallots (small onions): 20;  
finely chopped  
Green chilli: 7; deseeded and  
finely chopped  
Coconut: 1 cup; grated  
Water: 1 cup  
Salt: 1 tsp  
Oil: ¾ cup + 3 tbsp

### Method

- Soak rice and dal together in water for 1 hour.
- Drain.
- Grind using 1 cup of water a little at a time, to a smooth batter, preferably the consistency of *idli* batter.
- Add salt to taste. Beat.
- Leave overnight to ferment.

### Next day

- Soak sago for an hour in ¼ cup water.
- Drain. Add to batter.
- Heat 2 tbsp oil in a pan.
- Add mustard seeds. When they splutter, add shallots and chillies.

- Sauté. Add to batter.
- Add coconut. Mix.
- Pour ½ tsp of oil into each mould before heating pan.
- Heat. Drop a tbsp of batter into each mould. Cook on one side.
- Using a skewer, gently turn over each *paneeyaram*.
- Cook until done.
- Repeat until all the batter has been used.
- Serve with *millagai thuvayal* as a snack at tea time or at breakfast.

// The Chettinad food available in restaurants today is a misnomer and the book was conceived to place on record the numerous recipes that do not make it to restaurant menus but are an integral part of Chettinad cuisine"

## JEERA VADAI

(*Vadai* in sweet syrup)

For 30 *vadai*

### Ingredients

#### *Vadai*

Rice (*paccharisi*): ½ cup  
Black gram dal (*urad dal*): 2 cups  
Salt: ½ tsp salt  
Oil: 2 cups

#### Syrup

Sugar: 4 cups  
Water: 1 cup  
Cardamom: 5; powdered  
Saffron strands: a pinch  
*Kesari* powder (orange food

colouring): a pinch  
Cooking soda: ¼ tsp  
Plantain leaf squares: a few

### Method

- Soak rice and dal together for an hour.
- Drain.
- Grind until smooth using a little water to a slightly thinner consistency than *vadai*.
- Add cooking soda dissolved in ¼ cup water to the *vadai* batter.
- Mix thoroughly. Pat a ball of dough on a small piece of plantain leaf into a triangular or round shape.
- Make 3 holes in each *vadai*.

- Deep fry until golden brown. Drain. *Vadai* should be of similar size.
- Make sugar syrup by heating sugar in water until it dissolves and thickens slightly.
- Add powdered cardamoms, saffron and *kesari* powder.
- Remove from heat. Drop *vadai* into syrup one at a time.
- Allow to soak for about 15 to 20 minutes.
- Remove with a slotted spoon.
- Place *vadai* in a single layer in a serving dish.
- Pour remaining syrup over *vadai*.
- Serve as an evening snack or at dinner.



## Star speak

From seeking astrological guidance in life to crafting the first fictional 'astro-detective,' **Manjiri Prabhu** writes on her tryst with celestial stars

To grow up in a household with strong strains of astrology is not easy. And it takes exponential proportions when your mother is an ace astrologer; for one, your friends tend to think that you have an easy consultation pad; and they think you know the answer to every single problem in your life! It's also not easy for me because of the constant temptation at hand; I admit it. I am guilty of pestering my mom Shobha Prabhu for years for the 'right time,' the 'right day,' the 'right year,' and so on and so forth. I have asked her about the good periods in my life, the bad patches to be beware of, for hope when I was desperately struggling, and subjected her to ranting and raving when she was wisely not forthcoming with her predictions.

But I have also paid heed to what she has told me—the first thing being that astrology is not a magic wand. And one should never follow it blindly. Astrology delivers the goods to those who believe and study it, not pursue it with blind faith to provide a magical answer to life's problems. Astrology is like a beacon of light in the dark. It guides you. It will warn you that on your path there's a huge ditch. It will advise you to circumvent it and *sometimes* how to do it. But it will *not* tell you that you will most certainly fall in the ditch and perish! And that is precisely why I respect my mother and her skills.

For me, the journey into the realm of astrology began at a very early age—in my mother's womb to be precise, like Abhimanyu of *The Mahabharata*. My mom was the first lady astrologer of Pune, way back when I wasn't even born. She was a pioneer, teacher, consultant and the perfect 'guide' for the many frustrated, helpless people who

sought some hope through astrology. To them, she was an anchor, their support, affording them guidance without losing sight of the Science. I have seen people admit their intimate problems to her and have seen her giving patient hearing. I have seen them going away feeling less burdened and hassled and certainly more hopeful. She convinces, gives advice freely and boosts their morale through astrology. I always believed that my mom knows it all. After all, she has what she calls 'our X-rays'—the horoscopes that she can read inside out.

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Astrology delivers the goods to those who believe and study it, not pursue it with blind faith to provide a magical answer to life's problems

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Astrology is often also very tainted. There are believers and disbelievers. Disbelievers claim that it is an art propagated by quacks. To them I have an answer: an extract from my novel *The Cosmic Clues*, in which Sonia Samarth, the detective, uses horoscopes to solve crimes. To a dubious question from another character in the book, this is Sonia's response:

"Quacks are a product of half-knowledge and are found in every respectable field, Astrology being no exception. Astrology is a science like any other. And no science can be censured and held responsible for man's incapacities, his deceptions and his natural inclination to greed

and scheming. What you call *illusion* is the result of this interaction of science with man! And yes, I do claim to use the science and knowledge of Astrology to solve the cases, which come to me! Because, I firmly believe, that a horoscope is an X-ray of a person! You can even label it an almost metaphysical representation of the 'real you'. The point is not to *substitute facts* with the 'cosmic powers' as you named it, but to use the planetary positions to *guide the facts*." Which in short, explains it all.

Predictions depend a lot on how much you have studied the Science and how good you are with planetary calculations but, most important, you cannot ignore instinct. My mother's predictions have come startlingly true. From finding lost articles to guessing exam results, we have tried it all. Trying to gauge the character of an interesting person, or finding out if a certain friend was good to do business with or not, whether and when I would travel abroad and, most important, if a particular guy cared for me or not, the list is endless. And honestly, I've tried it all. I *knew* I would be a novelist and in the creative arts, I *knew* when I would get my first job, when I would travel, and even what kind of a guy I would marry, all thanks to my mother! In short, I almost took astrology for granted during all the growing up years of my life. But a striking incident changed the gravity of the Science for me.

I particularly remember an occasion that actually formed the base of my novel *The Cosmic Clues* and triggered a serial. My mother used to regularly look at horoscopes at that point. A film director from Bollywood approached my mother. He said it was





very urgent and he needed to consult my mother privately. My mother, despite being busy, agreed. When he visited her, he asked a single question: “When will I have a child?” My mother stared at his horoscope for a long minute. Finally she glanced at him and said: “You want the truth?” The man was a little nonplussed. “Of course!” he said.

“Well then, you *have* a son. It’s just that you can’t *claim* him as your son,” she explained calmly. It was as if a bomb had dropped. The man paled, his eyes darted from one end of the room to another. He was afraid that someone might eavesdrop. But then, he confessed that she was right. This incident startled me. Until then, I had regarded astrology as a kind of fun, yet necessary, part of my life. But suddenly the enormity of it all struck me. This was

no plaything. This was a hard-hitting, truth-finding device that has been regarded by many with scepticism. Never mind that people made horoscopes as soon as their kids were born; never mind that they secretly consulted an astrologer before the launch of a business, despite claiming that they didn’t. Never mind that almost every single person I knew invariably looked up the astrology column in a newspaper, and never mind that so many couples resort to horoscopes to match before they get married, as well as getting married on an exact auspicious moment: the *mahurat*. And yet, there was this casual disregard for it, relegating its importance and status to the sidelines of our life.

I decided to change this. I suddenly experienced a wave of responsibility and respect towards a Science,

which hitherto had settled snugly in my house like a grand old lady. The film director incident made me realise that astrology is a tool unlike any other, with untapped potential. It had to be exploited in the right manner—especially in solving a crime. And that is how I used it as a crime-solving tool in *The Cosmic Clues* and *The Astral Alibi*. Sonia Samarth is the world’s first astro-detective, thanks to my mother, who provided me with the best of authentic horoscopes for the novels.

When I look back, I realise that I could’ve lived my life in total darkness with no guidance and no inkling of which path to choose. Perhaps it would’ve made life more exciting. But also, more of a struggle, leading me astray. I’m so glad that I chose a beacon of light instead of total darkness.

---

***Dubbed the ‘desi Agatha Christie’, Prabhu is a writer of mystery fiction***

***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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# (Hi)story teller

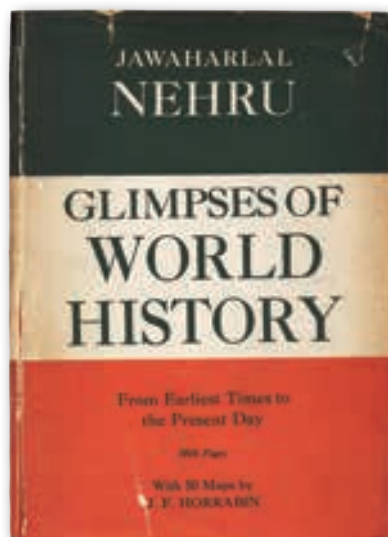
We pay tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru with an extract from *Glimpses from World History* (1934), a series of letters to his daughter that offers a panoramic sweep of the history of humankind

On your birthday you have been in the habit of receiving presents and good wishes. Good wishes you will still have in full measure, but what present can I send you from Naini Prison? My presents cannot be very material or solid. They can only be of the air and of the mind and spirit, such as a good fairy might have bestowed on you—things that even the high walls of prison cannot stop.

You know, sweetheart, how I dislike sermonising and doling out good advice. When I am tempted to do this I always think of the story of a 'very wise man' I once read. Perhaps one day you will yourself read the book which contains this story. Thirteen hundred years ago there came a great traveller from China to India in search of wisdom and knowledge. His name was Hiuen Tsang, and over the deserts and mountains of the north he came, braving many dangers, facing and overcoming many obstacles, so great was his thirst for knowledge. And he spent many years in India learning himself and teaching others, especially at the great university of Nalanda, which existed then near the city that used to be called Pataliputra and is now known as Patna. Later he wrote a book of his travels, and it is this book which contains the story that comes to my mind. It is about a man from South India who came to Karnasuvarna, which was a city somewhere near modern Bhagalpur in Bihar; and this man, it is written, wore round his waist copper plates, and on his head he carried a lighted torch. Staff in hand, with proud bearing and lofty steps, he wandered about in this strange attire. And when anyone asked him the reason for his curious get-up, he told him that his wisdom was so great that he was afraid his belly would burst if he did

not wear copper plates round it; and because he was moved with pity for the ignorant people round about him who lived in darkness, he carried the light on his head.

Well, I am quite sure that there is no danger of my ever bursting with too much wisdom and so there is no need for me to wear copper plates or armour. And in any event, I hope that



my wisdom, such of it as I possess, does not live in my belly. Wherever it may reside, there is plenty of room still for more of it. The world is wide and beyond our world lie other wonderful and mysterious worlds, so none of us need ever be bored or imagine, like the very foolish person whose story Hiuen Tsang has told us, that we have learned everything worth learning. And perhaps it is as well that we do not become very wise; for the very wise, if any such there are, must sometimes feel rather sad that there is nothing more to learn. They must miss the joy of discovery and of learning new things—the great adventure that all of us who care to may have.

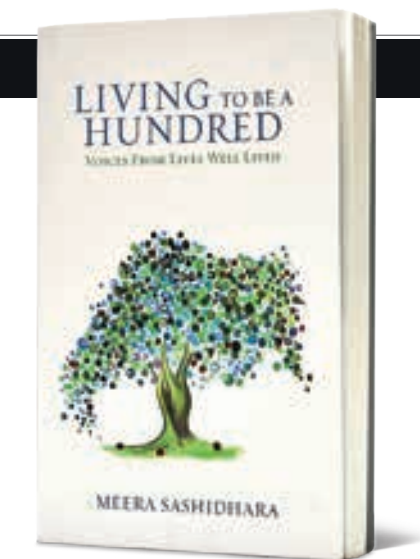
In history we read of great periods in the life of nations, of great men and women and great deeds performed, and sometimes in our dreams and reveries we imagine ourselves back in those times and doing brave deeds like the heroes and heroines of old. Do you remember how fascinated you were when you first read the story of Jeanne d'Arc, and how your ambition was to be something like her? Ordinary men and women are not usually heroic. They think of their daily bread and butter, of their children, of their household worries and the like. But a time comes when a whole people become full of faith for a great cause, and then even simple, ordinary men and women become heroes, and history becomes stirring and epoch-making.

The year you were born in—1917—was one of the memorable years of history when a great leader, with a heart full of love and sympathy for the poor and suffering, made his people write a noble and never-to-be-forgotten chapter of history. In the very month in which you were born, Lenin started the great Revolution which has changed the face of Russia and Siberia. And today in India another great leader, also full of love for all who suffer and passionately eager to help them, has inspired our people to great endeavour, so that they may again be free and the starving and the poor and the oppressed may have their burdens removed from them. *Bapuji* lies in prison, but the magic of his message steals into the hearts of India's millions, and men and women, and even little children, come out of their little shells and become India's soldiers of freedom. In India today we are making history, and you and I are fortunate to see this happening before our eyes and to take some part ourselves in this great drama.

## Survivors all

**LIVING TO BE A HUNDRED: VOICES FROM LIVES WELL LIVED** (Platinum Press; ₹ 195; 230 pages) captures the experiences of people who have lived for a hundred years or more. In the quest to understand more about life's purpose, **Meera Sashidhara** talks to 19 centenarians to get an insight into their life, beliefs, attitude and more. Then unfold inspirational stories of men and women who have witnessed catastrophic events like the Great Depression and world wars and gone through loss of family and faced ups and downs in their financial status and health.

Given the keen interest on the subject of longevity, the author records elaborate aspects of each individual's routine, diet, exercise, lifestyle choices like smoking and drinking, hobbies and travel experiences along with their deeper thoughts on God, religion and death. It is also an up-close account of the life story and



challenges faced by these centenarians and how they saw the world and their own lives change over the years.

The feel-good collection of stories reminds one of the 'Chicken Soup for the Soul' series. While those books are more of an emotional chronicle, this one has a biopic style of narrative, with some stories wanting in details and depth. However, the eclectic mix of people makes it a fascinating read. There are people with different professions (toolmaker, chemist, home

maker, grocer, chief justice—you find them all!), nationalities as well as different financial and educational backgrounds.

It's interesting to note that while the value system is starkly different in each person, the grit and determination to overcome odds and survive are a unifying factor. For example, Andrew Hatch talks casually about marriage as "*Blah blah blah* happened and afterwards, hallelujah! Got married..." and has children born out of wedlock whereas Walter Hall gives this advice to the present generation, "One thing I do not like is that people living together are having children out of wedlock.... It's leaving children rootless." However, in terms of their passion to overcome life's odds, the similarities are palpable. That surviving spirit is perhaps the essence to their longevity and the book powerfully packs that in its pages.

—Ramya Srinivasan

## Personal PM

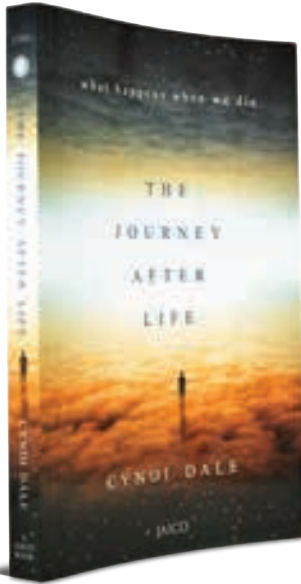
There isn't much we know about our former prime minister Manmohan Singh. Who knew, for instance, that despite being uprooted from his home during Partition, moving to a new town, and having to reappear for emergency examinations in a new town, he still went on to score well without any study materials? Or that, years later, when he was in Oxford, he would let his wife attend an all-night ball just so she could experience what it was like, while he stayed back to look after their toddler? In **STRICTLY PERSONAL: MANMOHAN AND GURSHARAN** (Harper Collins; ₹ 699; 456 pages), the couple's second daughter **Daman Singh** draws an endearing and enchanting portrait of her father—a brilliant, studious and gentle man who went on to assume the most power-

ful post in the Indian government—and her free-spirited, strong and sensible mother who stood by him through all odds. She traces their life journeys, from their respective childhoods, marriage and moves from Amritsar to Oxford to New York and so on, to his appointment as prime minister in 2004. Peppered with personal anecdotes, Singh's mastery over storytelling shines through in this book, switching smoothly between a conversational interview of her parents and a detailed political and social back-story. If you're looking for an explanation about his politics and last few years in the government, though, you'd be disappointed—this book is, as title proclaims, purely personal, revolving around his family, extensive education, pioneering work in economics and everything in between.

—Dharmendra Bhandari







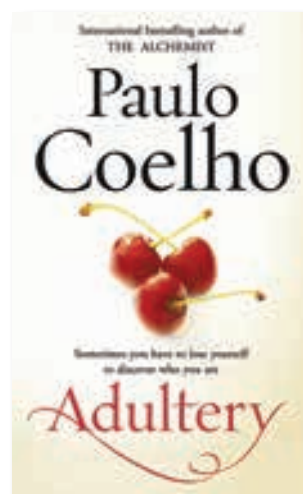
In the wake of recent research on cardiac arrest patients by scientists from Southampton University that suggests the possibility of life after death (at least for a few moments), **THE JOURNEY AFTER LIFE** (Jaico; ₹ 299; 312 pages) assumes significance, as it examines the realm beyond the physical and tactile world. Energy healer **Cyndi Dale** explores the one topic that intrigues us all: Is there an afterlife and, if so, what happens? Drawing on her own experiences as healer and psychic, along with her understanding of thanatology (the scientific study of death and the practices associated with it), Dale has created a manual on how we can prepare ourselves for death. Quoting irrefutable scientific research from biological, physical and chemical sciences, she concludes that death is but a voyage from darkness to light, and from a dense physical state to a higher vibrational state. According to Dale, Alzheimer's involves increasing visitations to the afterworld and an attempt at evaluating life's journey and healing the spirit. It's up to you to agree with her, but you certainly can't summarily dismiss the cornerstone of her arguments: we do not have to wait for death to wake up and start enjoying the true nature of our being.

Touted to be the first novel based on bitcoins, **GOD IS A GAMER** (Penguin; ₹ 299; 310 pages) is an edge-of-the-seat thriller, set once again against a banking background, like all **Ravi Subramanian** works. Zipping through Goa, Mumbai, New York and Washington DC, the author takes us on a rollercoaster ride. As lives across the globe intersect, a deluge of events unfold, setting off unexpected turns and twists. With attention-grabbing political events and technical trends such as WikiLeaks, social marketing, gaming and the use of bitcoins, the plot moves at an electric pace, quickening the reader's pulse. Compared to Subramanian's previous works, it's much more fun playing the guessing game this time round, as most of the characters exhibit



grey shades. Like a pendulum, the needle of suspicion keeps darting from one to the other. Try this one if you like cliffhangers.

Adultery as a theme has been explored brilliantly by Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Unfortunately for **Paulo Coelho**, known for populist philosophical themes, **ADULTERY** (Random House India; ₹ 299; 287 pages) is an attempt too shallow; neither the plot nor the paper-thin characters are convincing enough. Much like other Coelho books, this one too plunges straight into an existential dilemma. For the 30-something Linda who leads a picture-perfect life, it's the predictability of routine life and lack of passion and adventure that sets off emotional turbulence in her life and the clash between the angel and the demon in her head. Somewhere in between are references to the blurred lines between love and infatuation; a superficial attempt at understanding



depression, and allusions to our obsession with technology—smartphones, videogames and tablets. Set in Geneva, with interesting observations about Swiss manners and politics, this one packs Biblical quotes and graphic sex scenes. However, what redeems the story are the final few pages, classic Coelho style, with quotes like "You are heaven and earth, the wind and the clouds, the snow and the lakes." The allegory about the dilemma of intimacy as exemplified by porcupines—when they huddle together in the cold for warmth, they hurt each other; when they move apart, they shiver—is also interesting. Otherwise, for most part, this seems like a rushed job.

# The happy mantra

Equanimity is the key to happiness, says the Buddha



How very happily we live,  
Free from hostility  
Among hostile people,  
Free from hostility we dwell.

How very happily we live,  
Free from misery  
Among miserable people,  
Free from misery we dwell.

How very happily we live,  
Free from busyness  
Among busy people,  
Not being busy we dwell.

How very happily we live,  
We who have nothing,  
We feed on rapture  
Like the radiant gods.

Winning gives birth to hostility,  
Losing, one lies down in pain.  
The calm one lives happy,  
Having set winning and losing aside.

There is no fire like passion,  
No loss like anger,  
No pain like the aggregates,  
No ease other than peace.

Hunger: the foremost illness.  
Fabrications: the foremost pain.  
For one knowing this truth  
Unbinding is the foremost ease.

No good like freedom from illness.  
No wealth like contentment.  
No kinship like trust  
No bliss like unbinding.

Drinking the nourishment,  
Of seclusion and calm,  
One is freed from evil and distress  
And refreshed with the rapture of  
*Dhamma*.

It's good to see Noble Ones.  
Happy their company, always.  
Painful is the communion with fools,  
As with an enemy, always.

So, the enlightened man,  
Discerning, learned, enduring,  
dutiful,  
Noble, intelligent, a man of integrity,  
Follow him, as the moon, the path of  
zodiac stars.

---

*Excerpt from The Dhammapada, a collection of the Buddha's sayings in verse form*



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WOULD YOU FIND  
SOMEONE ABOVE  
55 YEARS  
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IN TUNE WITH YOU?

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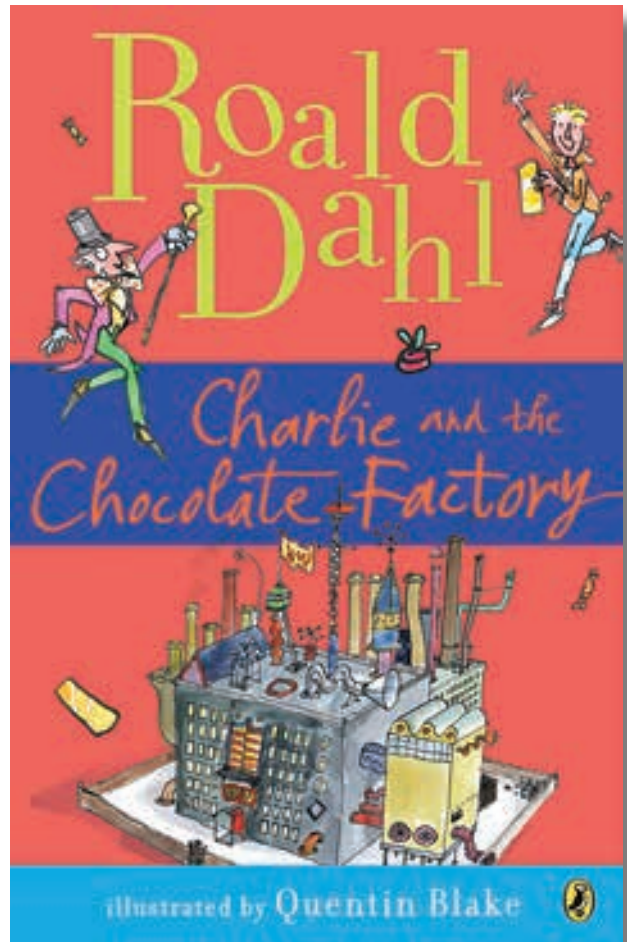
# Dahlicious!

It's 50 'whipple-scrumptious' years since *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* fired our imagination, taking us on a delectable adventure to indulge in hot molten chocolate rivers and bite into marshmallow pillows, everlasting gobstoppers and chewing gum meals. Not many modern stories, perhaps with the exception of the Harry Potter series, have embedded themselves in our collective consciousness like the tale of the young Charlie Bucket inside the chocolate factory of the eccentric chocolatier Willy Wonka.

Conceived in its rudimentary form as a bedtime story for Dahl's son Theo, the timeless story is said to be inspired by Dahl's own experiences of growing up in England with chocolate makers Cadbury and Rowntree's trying to steal trade secrets by sending spies to each other's factories, posing as employees. Thereafter, from the book to the film and the musical, Bucket's journey has captured the imagination of audiences worldwide.

It's a tribute to the enchanting appeal of the story that, half a century after it was written, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* still figures on the bedtime tables of children around the world

Notwithstanding its popularity, the book had its share of controversy with critics crying foul over the depiction of Oompa Loompas as black pygmies from Africa, citing overtones of slavery. This forced Dahl to revise their racial profile. Similarly, the cover of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the book in UK drew flak for the photo of a heavily made up young girl wearing a feather boa and sitting on her mother's knee, with critics branding it "creepy".



Nevertheless, it's a tribute to the enchanting appeal of the story that, half a century after it was written, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* still figures on the bedtime tables of children around the world. With over 20 million copies sold worldwide in 55 languages, it ranks alongside children's classics like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Though Dahl went on to write many other popular tales like *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Fantastic Mr Fox*, *The Witches* and *The BFG*, the tale of the poor boy who inherits a chocolate factory remains the stuff childhood dreams are made of.

## THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: NOVEMBER 1964

- On 9 November, the British House of Commons voted to abolish the death penalty for murder.
- On 26 November, Pakistan's first television broadcasting channel, Pakistan Television Corporation, was founded.
- On 27 November, the Bhutan royalty abolished the post of the prime minister, held by DASHO LHENDUP DORJI.
- On 30 November, Pope Paul VI arrived in Bombay to consecrate six new bishops of five continents.

“Ageing is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength.

—American writer and activist  
Betty Friedan (1921-2006)

## DOUBLE-HATTER

*n.* A professional fire-fighter who also works as a volunteer fire-fighter, usually in a rural area.

**Example.** No one knows how many **double-hatters** Ontario has—most are quiet about their off-duty work for fear of provoking union leaders—but it is estimated there are hundreds among the 19,000 men and women who take time off their regular jobs to respond to fires, crashes and medical emergencies in small communities.

—Kate Hammer, “Union turns up the heat on fire-fighters who volunteer on days off,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 September 2014

## statement socks

*n.* A pair of socks chosen to make an impression, to stand out, or to express something about oneself.

**Example.** **Statement socks** are an easy and often inexpensive indulgence. Though high-end designs are certainly available (you can buy \$ 185 socks at Barney’s, should your path in life lead to that), you can also buy the socks at stores like Forever 21 and Target, the latter of which says it “has seen a steady interest” in statement socks since introducing them in 2012.

—Megan Garber, “Like lingerie for men’: How statement socks became so trendy,” *The Atlantic*, 1 October 2014

## HELLSTEW

*n.* A messy, confusing hodgepodge from which no good can come.

**Example.** With vulnerabilities such as Heartbleed and Pileup likely to go unpatched on tens, if not hundreds of millions of Android devices, the platform is fast becoming a toxic **hellstew** that should send chills down the spines of IT admins.

—Adrian Kingsley-Hughes, “Android fragmentation turning devices into a toxic hellstew of vulnerabilities,” *ZDNet*, 11 April 2014

## PLYSCRAPER

*n.* A tall building made mostly from wood.

**Example.** The buildings they envision have been dubbed **plyscrapers**. Their halting arrival into the mainstream of architecture represents a test case for whether the goal of sustainability can motivate a reversal of both long-term construction norms and the laws that have grown around them.

—Courtney Humphries, “Will cities of the future be built of wood?,” *The Boston Globe*, 6 July 2014

## SCREEN SHIFT

*v.* To send a video signal or file to another device; to begin watching video content on one device and then continue it on another.

**Example.** As **screen shifting** increases, screen agnosticism will almost certainly increase.

—Joanne Frears, “Do you stack or mesh?,” *Jeffrey Green Russell Limited*, 4 June 2014

## Digital crowding

*n.* Excessive, unmanageable, or unavoidable online social contact.

**Example.** With all the focus on the legal aspects of privacy and the impact on global trade there’s been little discussion of why you want privacy and why it’s intrinsically important to you as an individual,” said Adam Joinson, professor of behaviour change at the University of the West of England in Bristol, who coined the term **digital crowding** to describe excessive social contact and loss of personal space online.

—Shannon Doyne, “Do you wish you had more privacy online?,” *The New York Times*, 6 October 2014





# Tee time

BUZZ

Golfing is the classic sport to de-stress; it has the lowest risk of injury and the constant twisting and swinging help keep the muscles flexible. Now, you don't have to break the bank to embrace the sport. Situated in Gurgaon, Hamoni Golf Camp brings golf to the masses with its state-of-the-art infrastructure at affordable rates. With 105 driving bays, 13 greens, 19 bunkers and a beautiful garden café, the golf club, spread across 17 acre, not only offers professional set-ups for serious players but holds lessons for kids, adults and silvers alike. If you enrol for the training programme, you will learn basic golf rules, postures, all about various clubs,

and warm-up exercises. The programme can also be tailored to work around health problems such as muscular pain. Personal as well as group lessons are offered for a fee of under ₹ 1,500 for 45 minutes, which includes ball and club rentals. What's more, driving around in the golf cart, breathing in pure oxygen in the lap of man-made nature and gossiping over French coffee in the club's garden café are added (guilty) pleasures! For details, call (0) 9643151511 or check out [www.hamonigolf.com](http://www.hamonigolf.com)

**Entry fee: ₹ 100; Day pass: ₹ 500; 50 balls and 1 club rental: ₹ 150 (free if you sign up for the lessons)**

“ You can free yourself from ageing by reinterpreting your body and by grasping the link between belief and biology.

—Indian-American author, speaker and new-age guru Deepak Chopra

## parentsplaining

*pp.* Explaining parenting in a condescending way to people who don't have children.

**Example.** I'm sorry, but **parentsplainers** and abuse denialists no longer get to control this narrative.

—R L Stollar, “*The homeschool lobby now has public school children in its crosshairs too*,” No Longer Quivering, 30 January 2014

## sufferfest

*n.* A period of extreme suffering or discomfort brought on by intense physical exertion.

**Example.** The real reason to court a **sufferfest**—to explore or adventure, or whatever you want to call it—is that it makes a person feel alive.

—Elizabeth Weil, “*The Woman who walked 10,000 miles in three years*,” The New York Times, 28 September 2014

## “Feeding the needy is akin to feeding God”

*Gulab Singh Dheerawat, 90, Jaipur, serves free morning tea and lunch to the poor*



Surendra Jain Paras

At the stroke of six in the morning, the poor and disabled in Jaipur line up outside a modest tea shop on Mirza Ismail Road for a free cup of tea and bread to kick-start their day. On average, no less than 150 people carrying cups and mugs throng the shop run by 90 year-old **Gulab Singh Dheerawat**. Many a time the number goes up to 250, but no one goes home hungry. Even if the mug is huge, it's filled to the brim with tea; slices of bread are passed around. Likewise at 11 am, the queue is in place again for lunch, comprising roti and *sabzi*. Fondly called *Gulabji Chaiwale*, Dheerawat's name is taken with reverence by everyone in the neighbourhood. Set up in 1946, Dheerawat's tea shop used to cater to the officers of the nearby Civil Supplies Office in pre-independent India. However, in 1947, his spiritual guru Nagar Mal Sharma told him, "*Pahla cup athithi ko*" [tea should be first offered

to guests], setting off a practice that has continued unhindered for the past 67 years. "Initially, I used to get about 15 people a day," he says. "But over the years, people from the neighbouring areas also started lining up." Gradually, with the help of philanthropists, Dheerawat started serving bread along with the morning cuppa, and lunch too. At times, even able-bodied persons queue up. "When I spot them, I tell them off politely, saying, '*Mera kaam seva ka hai, bhikari banane ka nahi* [my job is to serve and not to create beggars],' Dheerawat says. His wife now lives with his nephews, whom the couple raised, as they don't have children of their own. Living alone in a small rented room near his teashop, Dheerawat vows to continue serving his 'guests' till the last breath, adding, "I undertake everything in the name of God, and the result is gratifying."

—Abha Sharma



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