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# True COLOURS

There could be no better time to celebrate the real heroes of this country.

In the past weeks, like my fellow Indians, I have watched appalled as a few powerful people—because of greed, mismanagement, neglect and arrogance—have left the arrangements for the Commonwealth Games and our nation's reputation in tatters. We have all seen the disturbing images of the filth, the collapses, the casualties. Confronted by such testimony, it is even more disheartening to hear the statements made by the people in charge who, clearly, have little regard for the taxpayer's money. Like all of us, I pray for a miracle and hope the Games are successful. Either way, however, a nation that prides itself on being tomorrow's superpower has been humbled before the world today. Shame, grief, rage...that's the legacy they have left behind for generations to shoulder.

Contrast this to an unsung tribe of Indians who maximise every rupee, every opportunity, and explore every avenue and route to benefit the maximum number of people. They do this with scant financial backing and political patronage but truckloads of faith. They dream with their eyes open, their minds alert and their sinews braced to fight, prevail and achieve. What sets them apart is one simple word: commitment.

Like the winners of Harmony Silver Awards. This month, you will meet our 10 heroes from cities and towns across India who have raised the bar higher than ever in terms of accomplishment and zeal. As I promised you last month, their stories will enthrall and inspire you. The currency that impels them to become agents of change is not the dollar or Euro but ideas. And driven by their



Donald Woodrow

commitment they use this intellectual capital to optimal advantage to ensure a better life for those around them despite social and political pressure and economic and physical limitations.

It has not been easy to find these achievers and bring them to centre-stage. And we are only too aware that for every outstanding silver who will take the stage on 6 October to receive an award, there are hundreds more who toil unnoticed across the country, confronting the odds and besting them, getting the job done quietly, efficiently, successfully.

As thinking Indians, we need these real heroes to come forward and set an example for a society where venality, corruption, self-interest and apathy are increasingly threatening to become the four points of the moral compass. It falls upon all of us, those that believe in the potential of our people and our country, to scour the country to find these gems and bring them to the spotlight. It's time to show the world India's true radiance.

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

*Harmony—Celebrate Age—October 2010 Volume 7 Issue 5*

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# column one

At any stage in life, one should never have that nagging feeling of 'if only if I had done it...!' For, there's never a time when you can't do something you have always wanted to. Time and again, *Harmony* has proved that by presenting people who could be your role models. You could be there, too. All you need to do is act on your dreams—from picking up a pen to write a letter or book to picking up a paintbrush to brighten a canvas or wall; everything is only a wish away. This year's winners of Harmony Silver Awards are a couple of notches higher—they have adopted causes, children and communities—but in their lives too there was a time when they had to wonder... 'could they?'; 'should they?' They won over self-doubt, if any, and emerged larger than life. Our jury for the year—veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal, Prasar Bharati chairperson Mrinal Pande, ad filmmaker Piyush Pande, United World Colleges' director Smita Parekh and CEO and MD of ICICI Bank Chanda Kochhar—agrees.

We believe this is the right time for you to begin nominating deserving silvers for Harmony Silver Awards 2011. We are looking for people over 55, conscientious, extraordinarily efficient and effective in their plans for society at large, silvers for whom age is just a number. They don't let their physical health become a stumbling block in their campaign; they don't sit back and think of leading easy, retired lives; and they don't hunger for the limelight—their focus is only to bring about change. Indeed, Harmony for Silvers Foundation is as proud to be a harbinger of change as it is to bring you *Harmony-Celebrate Age* with inspirational examples every month. Keep reading and writing to us. Happy silvering!

—Meeta Bhatti

I loved reading Rajashree Balaram's interview with veteran radio presenter Ameen Sayani ("The Memory Keeper") in the September 2010 issue of *Harmony*. It was a superb piece. Since my school days, I have been an ardent fan of him and never missed a single episode of the *Binaca Geetmala* show from 1970 to 1996. I also enjoyed reading Tina Ambani's editorial "Silver Surge" ("Connect").

Ayaz Parwez, Patna

I believe my father-in-law exemplifies *Harmony's* mantra of active ageing. He is 94 years old and recently wrote a book, titled *Valuation of Plant and Machinery*. It is the only one of its kind on the subject and is being used by valuers all over India. He may not be physically very active but mentally and in terms of spirit he remains very active even at this age.

Alka Gupta, Via email

I enjoyed reading "Raag and Rhythm" ("Bookshelf - Passages") in the September 2010 issue of *Harmony*. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Our great stumbling block is that we have neglected music. Music means rhythm, order. Its effect is electrical. It immediately soothes." Indeed, music helps in meditation, spiritual practice and general well-being. Good music for half an hour at a low volume at night results in a sound sleep. While studying too, background music at a low volume actually enhances concentration. Further, music does not recognise manmade boundaries. In fact, I believe more musical collaboration and cross-border music concerts would go far in improving the fragile relationship between India and Pakistan.

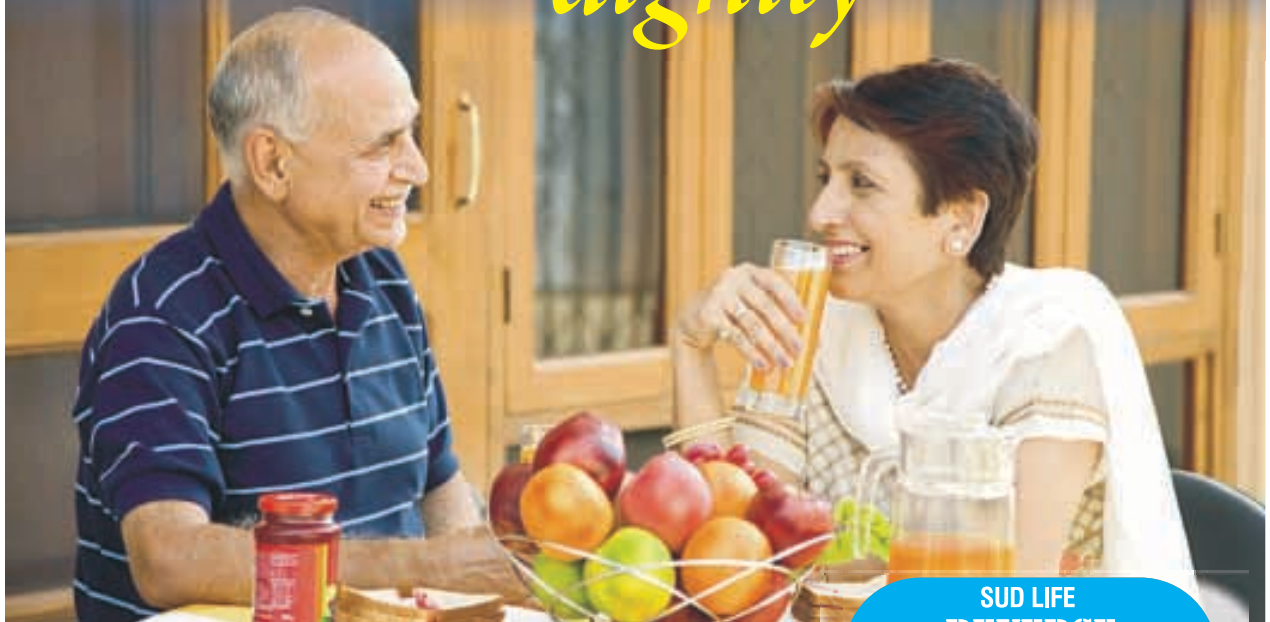
Mahesh Kapasi, Via email

## CONTRIBUTOR



**Priya Mutalik-Desai, 70**, who explains the implications of the New Direct Tax Code ('Exclusive': "Boon or Bust") is a freelance researcher and consulting economist engaged in studies on economic issues. She specialises in industry studies, international trade, and issues related to the World Trade Organisation. After a 15 year-stint at the University of Mumbai as Reader (Economics) at the Department of African Studies and two years at SNDT Women's University as Reader and Head, Department of Economics, she spent 12 years as an economist at the Export-Import Bank of India. Subsequently, Desai worked as a research consultant to various organisations until 2008 such as AMI (Hong Kong) and Spire Consulting (Singapore) and worked as consulting editor for *ATA Journal* (Hong Kong) and took up the position of the Mumbai correspondent for *India Business Intelligence*. She has also written extensively for financial journals and published books as well as articles. Though economics may appear to dominate most of her life, Desai still finds time to nurture other interests including public speaking, editing, swimming, yoga and meditation.

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O»FACE OFF

## Sneaky sunshine

Fact: Glass doesn't protect you from the sun. In fact, **the damage caused by sun coming through glass—say, when driving—can actually be so intense that the exposed side of your face can end up looking up to seven years older than the sheltered side.** Why? While glass blocks out the UVB rays, about 50 per cent of UVA rays (that cause burning and skin ageing) still manage to creep through. This was established by studies conducted at University College Hospital, Bessancon, in France, and the School of Health and Medicine, Lancaster University, according to London newspaper *The Daily Mail*. "Even low-dose UVA, equivalent to a British autumn day, causes up to a 50-fold increase in the expression of genes involved in photo-ageing, which is premature ageing from exposure to UV radiation," say Professor Trevor McMillan and Dr Sarah Allinson from Lancaster University. "Signs include dark spots, wrinkles, droopy and leathery skin and broken blood vessels." The studies were published by Boots, which recently introduced a line of moisturisers that offer UVA sun protection.



## O»EVENT

# Ageing agenda

The theme of the Indian Association for Geriatric Mental Health's (IAGMH) sixth annual conference held in Mumbai on 4 September was **'Healthy Ageing: From Concept to Reality'**. Under this umbrella, participants discussed topics ranging from geriatric disorders to legal matters and psychological and societal trends. "India now has the second largest aged population in the world," said Dr Charles Pinto, president of IAGMH and organising chairperson of the conference, in his address. "While on one hand it is positive news, on the other improved longevity has brought with it many challenges making them the most vulnerable section of the society. The need of the hour is to foster independence among them. Our aim is to involve professionals from around the globe who are involved with geriatrics, bring them together and discuss ways to achieve this." The conference was inaugurated by actor Atul Kulkarni, who said: "It is very important that we continue to evolve as we age and ascertain our independence during the twilight years. This is a crucial aspect of healthy ageing."



## O»NEWSWORTHY

## Act in ACTION

Here's the latest count on your Act: **all the Union Territories and 22 states have brought the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act 2007 into force** so far. These include Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. In case you're wondering, this information is of *cial*—it was provided by Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment D Napoleon in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

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## O»TRENDS

# Silver tweeples

**FACEBOOK, ORKUT AND TWITTER** are no longer the stomping grounds of the youth—silvers in the US are increasingly claiming them as their own. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, **social media usage among people 65 years and older doubled between 2009 and 2010. And in the 50 to 64 age group, it went up 88 per cent.** This year, almost half (47 per cent) of adults between 50 and 64 years use social networking sites, and more than a quarter (26 per cent) of silvers above 65 do the same. To take a specific example, Twitter—where users post status updates in 140 characters or less—is catching on quickly with silvers; 11 per cent of the 50-64 demographic and 5 per cent of those over 65 use it to post status updates or read updates from friends. The survey attributes the increasing popularity of social networking among older Americans to a desire to reconnect with people from their past; finding support in times of poor health; and enabling communication across generation gaps.



To read the full report, go to  
[www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)

## SUN-BOUND

**W**eather appears to be a game-changer when it comes to choosing a retirement destination. **One in four Europeans wishing to retire abroad wants to move to Spain, followed by France, Italy and the US,** according to a survey by employee management consulting firm Aon Corporation. As Reuters reports, over 7,500 workers from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and Britain were polled for the study. While less than half the British workers questioned wanted to continue living in their home country after retirement, 87 per cent of Spaniards were gladly willing to do so. Similarly, while over 80 per cent of French workers were content to stay in France, only 46 per cent of German respondents wanted to carry on living in Germany. “I imagine it must have something to do with the weather,” says Peter Abelskamp, director, Aon Consulting. “The preferred destinations are all associated with sun, sand and a laid-back lifestyle.” The Top 10 foreign retirement destinations in order of popularity: Spain, France, the US, Italy, Australasia, Africa, Switzerland, Latin America, the UK and the Netherlands.





## Older = happier

Life may not begin at 50 but happiness might. A study commissioned by the Gallup Organisation found that **Americans become happier and experience less worry after they reach the half-century milestone.** What's more, they are actually happier with their life at the age of 85 than when 18. The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Science at Stony Brook University in New York, which conducted the study, surveyed over 340,000 adults in the US and asked them about their emotions (happiness, sadness, worry) as well as mental or emotional stress. They found that levels of stress were highest among adults between the ages of 22 and 25 and these dropped sharply after people reached their 50s. Happiness was

actually highest among the youngest adults and those in their early 70s; the people least likely to report negative emotions were those in their 70s and 80s. And though men and women displayed similar emotional patterns as they grew older, women at all ages reported more sadness, stress and worry than men. "Perhaps happiness increases as people get older as they grow more thankful for what they have and have better control of their emotions," writes study leader Arthur Stone in journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. "They also spend less time thinking about bad experiences. Emotional patterns could well be linked to changes in how people see the world, or maybe even changes in brain chemistry."

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## Minus PLUS?

A geism isn't just confined to the youth. A surprising new combined study by Ohio State University and Germany's Zeppelin University declares that **people over the age of 50—when given a choice—actually prefer reading negative rather than good news about young people.** The researchers invited 178 people aged 18 to 30, and 98 people aged 50 to 65, to a laboratory, where they were asked to review an online magazine and pick the



stories that grabbed their attention. While the stories were all the same, some were given a positive spin and others were negative, as the October issue of the *Journal of Communication* elaborates. And while some protagonists were young, others were old. The older respondents homed in on those stories where the protagonists were young, and negatively portrayed; they later confessed reading such articles served to raise their own self-esteem. Meanwhile, the behaviour of the younger respondents was more predictable—they only wanted to read about young people and ignored the stories featuring silvers altogether.





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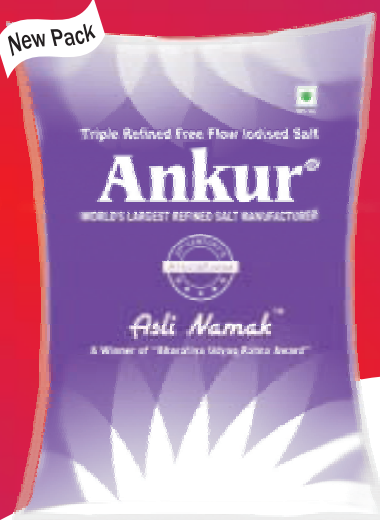


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## O»ANALYSE THIS

## WHY HE FORGETS...

The next time you blame him for forgetting something yet again, remember he may not really have a choice. Scientists from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, say **men are twice as likely as women to be forgetful in old age.** They tested the memory and thinking skills of more than 2,000 people aged 70 to 89 and discovered that mild cognitive impairment (MCI), marked by symptoms such as increasing forgetfulness, was 50 per cent higher in men than in women. MCI involves a level of mental decline that is often associated with dementia and Alzheimer's disease in later years. "The finding that the frequency of mild cognitive impairment is greater in men is unexpected as the frequency of Alzheimer's is actually greater in women," writes lead researcher Dr Ronald Petersen in journal *Neurology*. "It warrants further study and may suggest that factors related to gender play a role in the disease. For example, men may experience cognitive decline earlier in life but more gradually, whereas women may transition from normal memory directly to dementia at a later age but more quickly."

## O»OFFBEAT



## Seeing stars

### THEY ARE SILVERS TODAY.

But a set of galaxies in an ancient, distant cluster were actively forming stars over 10 billion years ago—that's how much time it has taken for their light to reach Earth. This discovery was made by astronomers using NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope and their research was analysed and published in the August issue of *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*. Further, they found that the star birth rate is oddly higher in the cluster's centre than at its edges—the opposite of what has been observed in our local part of the universe, where galactic clusters are full of massive

elliptical galaxies packed with only old stars. "Our study shows that by looking farther into the distant universe, we have revealed the missing link between the active galaxies and the quiescent behemoths that live in the local universe," writes study leader Kim-Vy Tran of Texas A&M University. "We will analyse new observations scheduled to be taken with the Hubble Space Telescope and Herschel Space Telescope to study these galaxies more carefully to understand why they are so active. We will also start looking at several more distant galaxy clusters to see if we find similar behaviour."

## O»MEDIA WATCH

## Rocking out

It might be an unusual setting for a music video but the residents of The Marion, a silver care facility in Sydney, weren't complaining. Australian alternative band Solver took over the home's common room to film ***Too young to worry, a song that promotes active ageing.*** In the video, the band is depicted sneaking into The Marion in the dead of night; when they begin to play, the silvers begin to awaken—and, eventually, rock out to the beat. "Often aged care residents are forgotten about so this was one way to get over that," Evelyn Santoro-Di Leva, a spokesperson for

The Marion, told website [www.australianagenda.com.au](http://www.australianagenda.com.au). "We battle ageist attitudes every day. I find it refreshing that a band in their 20s thought about this sort of thing." The co-producer and cinematographer of the video Henry Smith adds, "We were trying to break down the barriers that prevent elderly people from being recognised as fun. The proof is in the pudding through the shoot. All the people involved with the filming had an absolute ball on the set. Some of the residents also gave the younger guys a run for their money. Like the song says, you are never too old."

# Why you shouldn't ignore a missing tooth.



Once you lose a tooth, the immediate solution is to replace it, especially if it is a front tooth. But what

happens, when you lose a tooth that is not visible when you smile? The tendency is generally to ignore it.

However, any missing tooth can have a negative impact on your quality of life, as well as dental and oral health. When we chew, a healthy tooth strengthens the quality of the bone; similar to how

exercise protects against bone loss. Furthermore, when a tooth is missing, healthy teeth tend to shift position towards the gap due to bone loss, affecting how our upper and lower teeth meet.

This may affect how we place pressure on the teeth when chewing, and have an impact on surrounding muscles and joints, resulting in pain and various other symptoms such as headaches or migraines. Hence, each tooth plays an important role in ensuring that teeth in front of and behind it stay in alignment, and maintaining the health of the jaw bone.

**Modern dental technology can restore your quality of life with teeth that are strong and that look and feel natural.**

## Your dentist has the solution that is right for you.



A ceramic bridge is used to replace any tooth that is missing or beyond repair. It is individually made to match the shade and contour of your natural teeth, so practically no one can tell the difference. There are two methods to replace missing teeth, depending upon your individual circumstances.



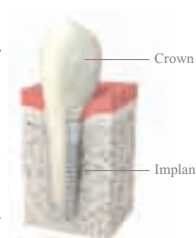
**1. Bridge on natural teeth** consists of high-strength dental ceramic. Built with natural-looking replacement teeth, it is anchored to the adjacent teeth. To secure the bridge, the adjacent teeth must be reduced in size. Certain conditions are required when this method is used. This method does not solve the problem of further bone loss.



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# The anti-ageing trap



What's touted as the fountain of youth may well be a whirlpool of deception. In a new book titled *Selling the Fountain of Youth* (Basic Books), healthcare writer Arlene Weintraub contends that **America's \$ 88 billion anti-ageing industry peddles products that are often unregulated and dangerous with no scientific backing.** As London newspaper *The Guardian* reports, her extensive research has led her to discover that very few anti-ageing products and procedures are evaluated for safety and efficacy and backed by *real* science. She cites the example of the Wiley Protocol,

a popular hormone therapy in the US—many women who tried it are now complaining of excessive bleeding and hair loss, and the creator Susie Wiley has been found to have no medical qualifications. "The main problem is that government regulation is too light and safety rules not as tight as for normal drugs," writes Weintraub. "And as 'ageing' per se is not classified as a medical problem—and thus is not covered by insurance companies—the anti-ageing industry is largely founded on patients buying treatments from their doctors, which can easily lead to abuse and lax safety standards."

## Still shakin'!

Fifty years ago, they called him 'The Killer'. And rock 'n' roll pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis, who thrilled audiences with hits like *Whole lotta shakin' goin' on*, is still rocking hard. In September, he celebrated his 75th birthday with the release of a 10-track CD, *Mean Old Man*, where he performs with his "famous admirers". For instance, *Bad moon rising* with John Fogerty; *Sweet Virginia* with Keith Richards; *Roll over Beethoven* with Ringo Starr and John Mayer. Other collaborators include Mick Jagger, Eric Clapton, Ronnie Wood and Willie Nelson, along with Sheryl Crow, Tim McGraw and Kid Rock. "I could have retired a long time ago," says Lewis in an interview to *usatoday.com*, "but I just keep rockin'!"



## Betty's WORLD

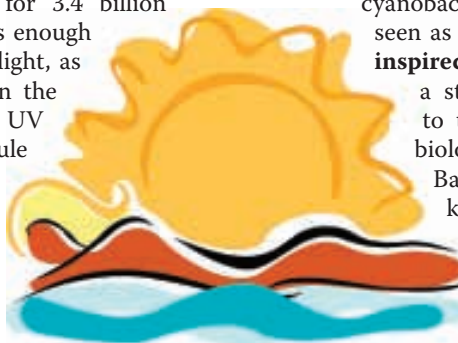
One of America's favourite octogenarians, **Betty White** has enjoyed a long and successful TV career on classic shows like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *The Golden Girls*. In fact, as recently as May this year she wowed audiences with her acerbic humour—a contrast to her usual, saccharine grandmotherly persona—on cult comedy late-night show *Saturday Night Live*. Now she turns author in a two-book deal with G P Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin. The first, ***Listen Up!***, which will be released in early 2011, will focus on her career and unique take on everything from ageing to sex. A year later will follow ***The Zoo and I: Betty and Her Friends***, which (as the title suggests) will feature stories and pictures of animals at Los Angeles Zoo, of which she is a long-time patron and board member. "Much as I love what I do for a living in show business, I love writing even more," she tells Reuters. "So I am thrilled to be working on not only one new book but two of them. And at the age of 88, just think how much I have to say!"



O»FACE OFF

# Back to the future

The future of sunscreens may well lie in the past—more specifically, in cyanobacteria or blue-green algae. These organisms have existed on Earth for 3.4 billion years, thriving even before there was enough oxygen to block harmful ultraviolet light, as website *newscientist.com* explains. In the absence of oxygen, they combated UV exposure by making small-molecule sunscreens called mycosporines and mycosporine-like amino acids (MAAs) that absorb harmful rays. Now, two researchers from Harvard Medical School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Emily Balskus and



Christopher Walsh, have identified the genes and enzymes responsible for producing sunscreen molecules in one such cyanobacterium, *Anabaena variabilis*, which is seen as a significant step towards making **bio-inspired sun protection**. “Our work could be a starting point for devising new routes to these molecules or analogues using a biological engineering approach,” writes Balskus in journal *Science*. “We don’t yet know if biological sunscreens will end up being any better than man-made sunscreen ingredients but they do have the photochemical properties desirable in sunscreens.”

**HEALTH DRIVERS:** BANKING ON THE WISDOM OF GRANDPARENTS AND THEIR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE FAMILIES, THE CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION ROPED IN SILVERS AS HEALTH AMBASSADORS FOR ITS INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE BREASTFEEDING IN THE FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST. IN FACT, THE CAMPAIGN WAS OBSERVED AS *NAANI-DAADI JAGRUKTA SAPTAAH* BY THE NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH MISSION (NRHM) WING OF THE UNION TERRITORY.

## For gentlemen only

Watch out gentlemen—your face is now on the most-wanted list. This fall, international cosmetic companies have rolled out a slew of anti-ageing creams for men that promise to remove fine lines and dark spots, smooth the skin and revitalise facial tone and texture. Here’s what’s on offer: The Anti-Ageing Formula from MenScience (£ 37; about Rs 2,600); M Lab’s Anti-Ageing Treatment Serum (£250; about Rs 17,750); Clinique’s Age Defense Hydrator (£25.50; about Rs 1,800); and Clarins’ Line Control Balm (£37; about Rs 2,600). “Men are concerned about ageing too now, especially among western societies where regard for older men is less prevalent,” Tom Mammone, Clinique’s executive director of skin biology, tells *ft.com*, the online edition of *Financial Times*. “Thus, the anti-ageing market for men looks set to be every bit as big as it is for women.” The approach to marketing, however, needs to be different. “You need unfussy presentation and minimal fragrance; you have to focus on the explicit benefit of the product rather than discussing ingredients,” says Federico Sanchez, chief executive of MenScience, “You have to use simple language, action verbs, to tell men what the product actually does. You can’t go calling it ‘Fountain of Youth.’”





# BOON OR BUST?

Priya Desai examines the pros and cons of the New Direct Tax Code

**T**he New Direct Tax Code (DTC) Bill is a set of direct tax codes currently before Parliament for discussion. It will replace the old Income Tax Act 1961 and is expected to come into force beginning April 2012. Briefly, the new code will remove distortions in structure, introduce moderate levels of taxation, expand the tax base, improve compliance, simplify jargon, and lower levels of litigation. Lofty promises notwithstanding, the current draft has yet to gain universal acceptance. Included in the corps of dissenters are the voices of senior citizens.

Let's see how the new tax code will impact the senior rupee. Currently, the exemption limit for seniors is fixed at Rs 240,000. The new code will raise this limit to Rs 250,000. This constitutes a paltry addition of Rs 10,000, or a small rise of 4 per cent. Senior citizens will pay income tax at 10 per cent on incomes ranging from Rs 250,000 to Rs 500,000; 20 per cent on Rs 500,000 to Rs 1 million; and 30 per cent on incomes above Rs 1 million. In other words, the slabs will only be slightly altered and, consequently, the financial relief marginal. Regarding investment, the new section replacing Section 80 C will shrink the number of tax-saving instruments preferred by seniors. Tax exemptions will apply only to long-term savings in GPF, PPF, annuity plans, pension plans, and life insurance policies. According to this upgrade, seniors will lose the existing tax rebate. Many will therefore opt out of these instruments and not be able to benefit from intended tax breaks.

Here are the nuts and bolts of how the tax code will go against the interest of seniors. Traditionally, under Section

80 C, seniors park their investment funds in instruments suited to their expenditure patterns and requirement profiles. Major instruments include ELSS mutual funds, ULIPs, and tax-saving bank deposits, attractive for their short lock-in-period, typically no more than five years. No surprise then, that long-term and illiquid investments are unappealing to septuagenarians, most of whom won't make it past 75 years. I am talking about individuals who require liquid investments to cover the rising costs of medical aid. A low-end insurance policy worth Rs 500,000, for instance,

**The new code suffers from a pathological blindness to the unshakeable economics of quotidian living**

carries a premium outgo of Rs 2,000 per month, while monthly drugs and tests exclusive of insurance coverage can cost up to Rs 500. Such medical expenses should enjoy exemption. Currently, they do not. In fact, the new code with respect to long-term investments is radically at odds with the concrete drain on seniors' income caused by medical expenditures. In short, long-term investments are absolutely incongruent with the financial needs of seniors, and tax breaks should therefore apply in investment opportunities directly relevant to these needs. Indeed, the new code suffers from a pathological blindness to the unshakeable economics of quotidian living. Owing to reduced interest rates, seniors are earning lesser and

lesser, while inflation compels them to spend more and more. In order to survive, people begin to live beyond their means, sometimes by resorting to debt, the breeding ground for chronic psychological depression and economic anxiety among the old.

Though the government is unwilling to protect seniors, seniors can choose to help themselves. Make good the decline in annual income, owing to reduced interest income accrual, by changing the asset allocation. Divert proceeds from sale of stocks and mutual funds towards fixed deposits. Maximise benefits of the share market by selectively liquidating investment in stocks and mutual funds held for more than one year and, thus, benefit from non-taxation of long-term capital gains. Shift PPF investment to fixed deposits, which are more liquid. Consider a reverse mortgage of the house wherever possible. Exploit the monetary value of static assets, such as gold and silver, by investing sale proceeds in reliable fixed deposits.

Here's how the government can help:

- Increase tax exemptions and retain existing tax-saving exemptions on short-term instruments.
- Introduce exemptions on medical expenses including (not only) insurance, hospitalisation, and quotidian medical outflow.

The government should restore the incomes of seniors to levels that enable them to live with dignity and relative peace of mind. Is anyone out there listening?

*Priya Desai, 70, is a Mumbai-based economist and writer*

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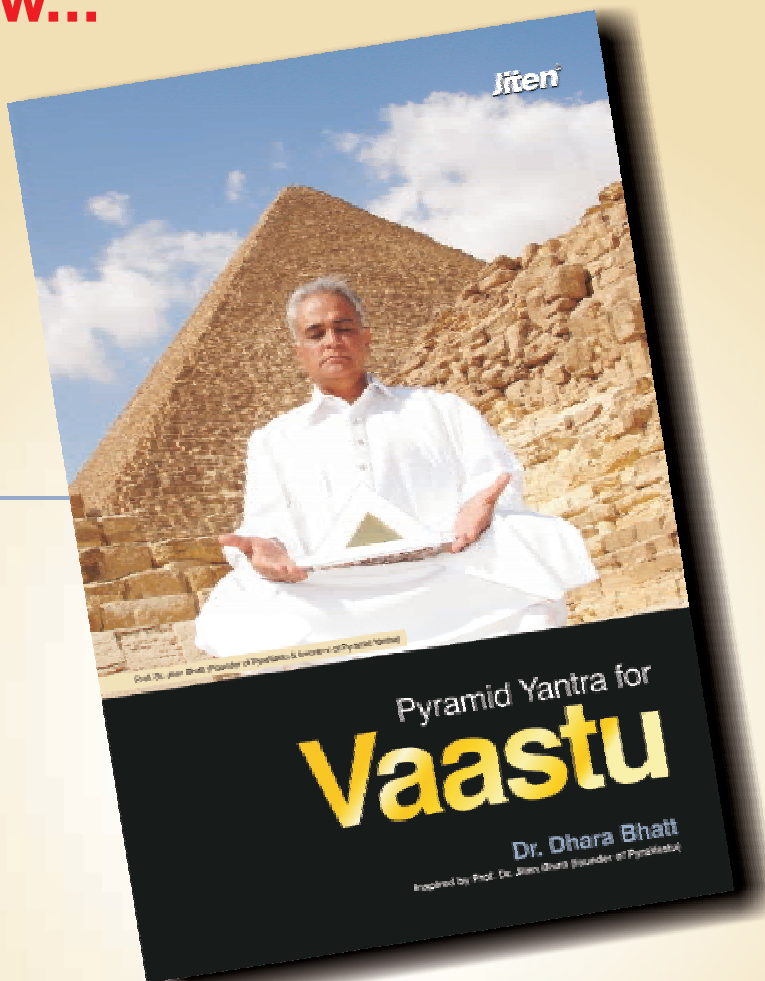
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## HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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### SAVING GRACE

Coming from a family deeply involved in development work, I had all the inspiration I needed to reach out to those less privileged than me. But it was a sudden stroke of fate that encouraged me and a close friend to set up the Kanaklata Mahila Urban Cooperative Bank in Jorhat, Assam, an all-women's bank named after Kanaklata, the first woman martyr in the Quit India Movement.

Between 1974 when I earned my Master's degree from Gauhati University and 1998 when Kanaklata Bank was inaugurated, I also secured a position as a teacher at Bahona College in Jorhat. I simultaneously worked with women's groups while helping them empower themselves economically. I carried out a survey, which led to a disturbing realisation: a large number of women in Jorhat were engaged in various types of income-generating activities but they did not enjoy any economic rights. Most of them said their earnings were taken away by their husbands.

Then, in 1991, my friend, Lakhimi Baruah, showed me a magazine she had picked up in a doctor's chambers. It was a back issue of *Femina* that featured the Surat Mahila Bank. But in

Assam, things move *lahe lahe*... very slowly. Still, we did not lose heart and began contacting people concerned with the banking sector. Finally, on 5 May 1998, when Kanaklata Bank was inaugurated, all the 258 women who attended the function instantly became our shareholders. Today, we have 5,000-odd shareholders, while about 75 per cent of the 14,000-odd customers in our three branches are below the poverty line. That's because 70 per cent of them are SC/STs, tea plantation labourers and minority



Lakhimi Baruah

Devi shows women the road to dignity

communities in Jorhat—officially Assam's 'most literate district'.

In just 12 years, around 5,000 women have availed small loans while over 200 self-help women's groups have benefited from our microcredit schemes. Now many of our customers, who had never dreamt of opening a bank account, request us to keep their 'little secret' from their husbands. What an amazing turnaround!

Twelve years is not a long time but our numbers are very encouraging. In 2009-10, over 3,200 women opened accounts with Kanaklata Bank, while we disbursed loans amounting to Rs 6.42 million. The repayment rate of our illiterate and semi-literate customers is as high as 91.07 per cent. Official recognition for our efforts has come from a Crisil-AAAA rating and the 'Best Performing Cooperative Bank' award in 2007-08 from the International Achievers Summit. Also, while our managing director Lakhimi Baruah was conferred the Jaimati Women of Courage Award by the Dibrugarh Ladies Club in 2009, the Asam Sahitya Sabha gave us the 'Karmashree' award in 2006. Our real 'achievers' though are our customers—each one of them taking a bold stand on self-empowerment.

—Shakuntala Devi, Jorhat

### WOMAN OF STEEL

My wife, Nirmala Jesudason (nee Christian), was recently awarded a PhD by Madras University at the age of 62, a milestone that has capped so many silent achievements. Through it all, she's also had to make so many adjustments that it boggles the mind. But she's always done it quietly and with no fuss.

Nirmala was always a topper in school, college and post-graduation (dietetics and nutrition) in Chennai. We met when she was doing her MSc and got married when we were both just 22. For the next 22 years, she was often alone as I was at sea with the Merchant Navy. Through her pregnancy, bringing up our daughter Poornima and numerous shifts around the world, Nirmala always found a way to keep busy and stay happy.



**Nirmala Jesudason strides ahead undeterred by setbacks**

When we moved to the UK, she ran our home wonderfully on a very tight budget. She hated the cold but never said a word and instead made new friends. When Poornima enrolled in school in Chennai, she and Nirmala couldn't sail with me and Nirmala opened a small embroidery unit along with her sister-in-law.

In 1985, I finally took a shore job in Kochi, and Nirmala qualified as a seafood quality controller. Next, we moved to Dubai, where she helped me with my shipping business and later in our seafood business. When we moved to Canada, Nirmala, then 44 years old, went back to university to update her Indian qualifications and competed with women half her age to win a dietetics internship. She also taught at Dartmouth Community College. Next, we moved to Singapore, where she worked at Singapore General Hospital. She even learnt Malay to help with her work.

In 1997, we finally settled in Chennai for good, and Nirmala, at the age of 49, was appointed chief dietician at the Madras Medical Mission Hospital. There, she set up several dietetic protocols, transformed the meal service and began a competency training module for dieticians that is now used by the Indian Dietetics Association. She is also the American Overseas Dietetic Association Country Representative for India and still attends national and international dietetics conferences.

In 2003, Nirmala joined the Frontier Lifeline hospital, where she still works. She still finds time to play golf twice a week and work out. Two years ago, she found a lump in her breast, underwent surgery and radiation and was back at work in two weeks. Nirmala approaches everything with a positive attitude—whether treating a patient, designing the interiors of my new office or just wrapping a birthday present. That's her gift to us.

—Capt. Stanley Jesudason, Chennai

## REWRITING THE FUTURE

I have been a computer geek ever since I bought my first computer in 1980. Though I have dabbled in many crafts, I am deeply fascinated with the possibilities of information technology. As I also enjoy writing, three years ago, I decided to combine two of my favourite pursuits and started writing e-books. I don't earn any income through the books that I write, but I gain more knowledge on a variety of subjects and it helps me keep my mind engaged in constructive pursuits. All my books are graciously hosted online by [www.karmayog.com](http://www.karmayog.com) and [www.verdurez.com](http://www.verdurez.com). I have written about 30 e-books on various topics: hobbies for seniors; English lessons for an NGO; and a tutorial course in Hindi on basic computer skills for poor women and children. As part of my current project, I am busy with research on unusual careers.

As we age we end up complaining about all the free time that we have on hand and brood on ways to kill time before it kills us. I promised myself that I would not end up falling in the same trap. So I try to learn something new every year: photography, stained-glass painting, making candles and soaps, painting with watercolours...the list goes on. My family—husband, two daughters, son, daughter-in-law and grandson—are very encouraging. At 65, I am leading life anew with fresh enthusiasm.



**Mathur prefers to grin, rather than groan, through life**

Any hobby can be a tremendous stress-buster at any age, but even more so in our silver years. All we need is a fair measure of curiosity and self-motivation. Make a routine and adhere to it as much as you can. There are no deadlines to meet. The choice is ours. We can cultivate misery as a serious pastime, and be competitive about it—'my misfortune is greater than yours'—or we can treasure all the free time that life offers us and make the silver years the best years of our lives.

—Shobha Mathur, Mumbai

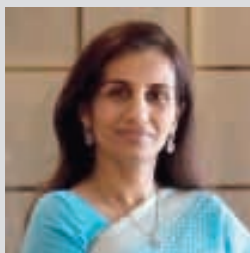
# Silvers of the year!

The winners of Harmony Silver Awards 2010 are no more gifted in vigour, wealth, circumstance or fortune than the rest of us. But they have not let their limitations deter them from questioning injustices, challenging norms, persevering against all odds, and forging ahead. While most of their contemporaries have retired, their good work continues relentlessly, the fight in them still alive, the fire burning bright. Meet the winners of Harmony Silver Awards 2010. And don't keep the winner in you waiting too long.

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# Annaswamy Ranganatha Rao 103

The father of non-formal mathematics, who proves age is nothing but another number, continues to popularise the subject among all age groups in Ahmedabad with his unconventional methods

✦ Dhanya Nair Sankar ✦ Samir Pathak

It is a sultry Wednesday evening in Shreyas Apartments, a residential complex in Ahmedabad. A medley of professionals comprising doctors, engineers, an ISRO scientist, teachers and a school principal have gathered together to solve a perplexing mathematical problem. Possible solutions and the many ways to arrive at them are being discussed passionately. A blackboard is scribbled with various permutations and combinations. Suddenly a feeble voice breaks the cacophony: “Do you want a hint?”

Thus we meet Professor Annaswamy Ranganatha Rao—a centenarian and Ahmedabad’s most respected math pro-

fessor. Amid the highly charged group of math enthusiasts, Rao sits calmly, his eyes concentrated on his slate, and hands chalking out the solution at the speed of light. A moment later when he declares, “I got it!”, it’s almost in childlike jubilation.

At 103, the signs of age are there for all to see: slurred speech, weak vision, bad hearing and frailty. But so is something else—his passion for numbers, which makes his eyes sparkle and lips break into a toothless grin. Hardly surprising that mathematics, a subject that many think of as boring and dreadful, turns exciting and deliciously intriguing





in his company. Passion, after all, has this quality of being contagious.

Rao is known by many names: *Raosaheb*, the Socrates of Ahmedabad and Ghalib of Mathematics. On his fragile shoulders, he carries a legend of popularising math among all age groups. He has taught the subject to three generations of students and along the way set up India's first math lab—a feat that is now made mandatory in all CBSE and ICSE schools. “Math is an abstract subject like philosophy,” says Rao. “It is also a science, and as every science subject has a lab I felt even math needs one. In classroom teaching, math gets converted into theory, and students end up grasping it as such. I prefer to teach math in a way that engages the senses and the brain.” Indeed, Rao's method stokes the curiosity of students, lays bare the fundamentals and makes the subject almost kinetic. He employs three-dimensional models,

“so we also use our hands and eyes, and not just our ears.” The pedagogy may seem rather futuristic but it has its origins in his past.

## “Math should engage the senses as well as the brain”

Born in a village named Jakkasamudram in Salem district of Tamil Nadu, Rao did his schooling in Tanjore and Tiruchirapalli. A whiz in physics and chemistry early in life, he graduated from Madras University after completing his bachelor's in science, following which he moved to Mumbai for a postgraduate degree from Wilson College. Rao credits his younger brother Srinivas Rao for firing his interest in math. “Even when I was in primary school, I was

fascinated by numbers,” he says. “Observing my interest, my brother constantly challenged my skills in arithmetic. As I played with numbers,

I developed an interest in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.” Today, he may be regarded as the best math teacher of the century, but he prefers to credit his teachers for helping him develop and sustain his interest. “Knowing my acumen with num-

bers they would make me compete with my peers and even seniors,” he reminisces happily. “For me, excelling in numbers was always the greatest thrill and challenge.”

Owing to financial troubles, though, Rao could not pursue his doctorate and joined Bahauddin College, Junagarh, in 1933 as a math professor. After teaching there for 27 years, he moved to various other colleges in Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad and Chota

**An abacus designed by Rao has nine beads without any separation as opposed to traditional ones with five beads. This abacus simplifies arithmetic sums**





### The math lab at VSCSC in Ahmedabad helps students overcome their fear of numbers and makes the subject fascinating and fun

Udaipur, holding students in thrall as a math professor and, later, principal. But it was only after his retirement in 1974 that his oeuvre turned incandescent when he conceptualised and set up the math laboratory—the largest and first of its kind in India—at the Vikram Sarabhai Community Science Centre (VSCSC) in Ahmedabad. Open to everyone, the lab features over 200 mathematical models, games and puzzles that demystify theorems and equations. Its walls are lined with interactive teaching aids, posters on the history of mathematics and trivia on famous mathematicians.

“The colourful three-dimensional models have set the subject free from the pages of textbooks,” says Hema Vasavada, a former student of Rao and visiting faculty at VSCSC. “Thanks to the lab, people from all age groups, especially young students, have become interested in this subject like never before. Even during vacations, the place is buzzing with students.” The innovative concept has won Rao several accolades including the National Award for Popularising Mathematics and Science in 1997 from the National Council of Science and Technology Communication—this along with the tag of being the father of non-formal mathematics. To further popularise the subject, Rao has penned several books and puzzle collections (aptly titled *Brain Teasers*) for all age groups.

Having spent half his life as a teacher, Rao is critical of the existing education system. According to him, nowadays, the brain has been reduced to a storeroom instead of being an activity room. “The focus is strictly on obtaining good marks and thus students end up cramming subjects,” he points out. “Teachers should make efforts to make a student think beyond marks, develop their curiosity, encourage questioning and facilitate interactions.” He is also very uncomfortable with the idea of tuition classes. “They have further succeeded in promoting rote learning, which is the biggest culprit in making education such a commercial affair,” he rues. “Those who are good at memorising score good marks, go to the best colleges and get a job. But students who are honest lose out. The process of teaching needs to be modified to ensure students think creatively and independently in any field of their choice.”

Rao’s lateral ideas knock down established moulds of teaching and, therefore, at VSCSC, he is regarded no less than any of the world’s greatest mathematicians. His photograph occupies the same wall as those of stalwarts like Pythagoras, Plato, Euclid, Newton and Srinivasa Ramanujam. The Centre’s director Dilip Surkar says the honour is only fitting. “Among the senior citizens of the country, he is one of the few oldest old citizens who is still active,” he points out. “He

has introduced math models in classrooms that were developed over centuries and relegated to museums. His most important contribution to math is that, today, young children don’t dread the subject but are curious to know more.”

Rao was active in the Centre till last year, delivering lectures and holding long interactive sessions with young students. Age may have ravaged his body but his mind and spirit remain intact. His son and daughter-in-law say he hardly remains idle. “He starts his day by 8 am, and spends the first half of the morning reading the newspaper with a magnifying glass,” says son Arvind Rao. Though mathematics is his favourite subject, he also loves languages and has a superb command over eight languages including Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada and Tamil. He is equally fascinated by philosophy and literature. “I love reading PG Wodehouse and Thomas Hardy,” Rao says, his face breaking into an endearing smile. “I think it’s very tough to make people laugh and I enjoy literature that’s rich with humour.” Of course, he still spends many hours a day solving puzzles. “I love to design puzzles. I am afraid if I don’t do it my grey cells will go dull,” he says with a wry chuckle. Tennis is another passion and when Wimbledon is on, he is awake till the wee hours watching the match. “Roger Federer is the Agassi of today,” says Rao surprising

# "Teaching needs to be modified to ensure students think creatively and independently"

all of us present in the room with his precise observation. "I was quite upset when he lost to Nadal at this year's US Open."

This keen eye for details and his sharp memory continue to astound his near and dear ones. "He can name people right up to the previous seven generations in our family; even I don't remember their names," marvels Janhvi, his daughter-in-law. Except for a pacemaker and weak hearing, he has no health complaints. However, for the past few months he has been using a wheelchair to move around the house and doesn't venture out much. "A sound body gives way to a sound mind, but I feel vice-versa is true as well," avers Rao. "In youth and middle age, we are all active. But after retirement, people have a tendency to slow down and sometimes even stop working. I think this is bad. As you grow old, it becomes even more important to stay mentally active."

Rao doesn't go to the Centre now but his former students visit him at least once a week to resolve geometry. In Rao's class, students gather together to solve complicated sums and theorems and come up with new problems. But according to Dr Atul Patel, an engineer and assistant professor of math at Nirma University, Rao's class is just an excuse for his students to be in touch with their much-adored teacher: "The best thing about Professor Rao is that he believes in his students immensely. Even if we are on the verge of giving up, he pushes us, telling us that we know the answer but we are not using our mind to its full capacity. This kind of belief from your teacher is definitely encouraging." Dr Patel has dedicated his thesis on unconventional methods of teaching math to his mentor. "He doesn't merely scratch the surface of the problem but goes to its roots," says



M H Vasavada (left) and Bachubhai Rawal (right) listen in rapt attention to Rao

Professor N N Roghelia, former student and retired associate professor and head of mathematics department, MG Science Institute. "He is also very perceptive about the psychology of his students; he can bring himself to their level and immediately connect with them. No wonder we love him and come back to him even though he continues to give us 'problems'!"

Roghelia and many other ardent disciples were thrilled when Rao's name was nominated for the prestigious Kalinga Prize for Popularising Science awarded by UNESCO two years ago. The nomination catapulted him to the same league as luminaries like Bertrand Russell, David Attenborough and Arthur C Clarke to name a few. Rao's students, however, were understandably upset when he did not win the award. According to his students, he deserves more recognition from the Indian government. "He has never actively chased publicity," says a member of his class and ISRO scientist Dr N Padmanabhan. "He could have

patented his models and made a lot of money, perhaps even raked in international recognition. But he continues to work on developing math without any concern for public attention."

Though fame is still playing hide and seek with Rao's destiny, the math model created by him is being replicated in many schools and prestigious centres of learning. "IIT Mumbai is planning to start a lab to popularise math," says Mahavir Vasavada, a retired professor of mathematics who was Rao's student 55 years ago. "Besides that, the Gujarat government is also initiating programmes like the Gujarat Science Congress to popularise the subject and even the Math Olympiad candidates come to Professor Rao for training." Despite his legion of fans, however, Professor Rao is evasive of the limelight. When asked what he feels about the celebrity tag attached to his name, he says with a shrug, "I am grateful to my students for loving me so much. I just wanted to be a math teacher."





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# Sekhar Raghavan 63

This social entrepreneur, who teaches mini-populations to turn water into gold, has raised groundwater levels in Chennai, an incredible feat for a metro. His next crusade is to drive eco-sanitation in rural areas

◆ Radhika Mohan    📷 V Ramesh

A passing comment a bright-eyed young man once heard at a discourse by the late philosopher J Krishnamurthy left an indelible impression. Krishnamurthy had talked about the merits of being sensitive, not only to fellow human beings but to animals and the environment. But how do you make the leap from a philosopher's words to becoming a social entrepreneur? The missing link lay in a habit deeply ingrained in Sekhar Raghavan—he abhorred wastage of any kind.

At 63 today, Dr Raghavan is responsible for changing mind-sets towards a precious and scarce natural resource: water. He has taught rural and city folk in Tamil Nadu to adopt traditional methods of water harvesting, to use eco-friendly toilets, reuse wastewater; and conserve water on a daily basis. He is also responsible for significantly raising groundwater levels in Chennai, a mindboggling feat for any major Indian metro. “Groundwater is like a bank,” comes the simple analogy from our eloquent crusader. “While exploitation can be thought of as withdrawing from the bank, rainwater harvesting is similar to depositing money into the bank.”

When you meet Raghavan, the first thing that strikes you is his agile mind. He completed his MSc in physics from Madras Christian College and earned a PhD in theoretical physics in 1975. This was followed by a seven-year stint as a temporary lecturer before he got married in 1981. Still, he had no clue as to his real calling. The youngest of four children, he had spent his entire life in Chennai and didn't want to leave his beloved city. So to make sure he stayed put, he took up a marketing job with a small-scale industry.

It was only in 1992, when he joined the Socio-Economic Research Institute started by like-minded friends and university colleagues, that his vocation beckoned.

While at the institute, Raghavan was researching traditional methods of water management used in Chinglepet. The 2,000 villages in this region had been ceded to the British by the Nawab of Arcot in the 18th century, and the British had meticulously chronicled details pertaining to water management, agricultural techniques, harvests, fertile lands and rainfall. Raghavan spent long hours poring over these records maintained on fragile palm leaf manuscripts at the University of Tanjore. That's when he had an epiphany—he discovered that the produce in Chinglepet in 1765 was one-and-a-half times more than it was today, without the use of pesticides, fertilisers, irrigation or chemicals.

Traditional water harvesting methods included trapping water in surface bodies at the end of a slope. These water bodies, enclosed with a bund and were locally called ‘ery’, and the water harvested was only used for agriculture. Erys were interconnected via canals across villages and had sluice gates to allow water to flow into paddy fields as and when required.

Thus the idea of rainwater harvesting took root in Raghavan's mind. It was the beginning of a revolution. Owing to his relentless efforts, the Tamil Nadu government enacted a law in 2002 and an ordinance in 2003 making rainwater harvesting mandatory across the state. The government also amended the Groundwater Regulation Act of 1987 to include the power to grant or refuse groundwater licences.

“Groundwater is like a bank”





## “Water and sanitation have to be looked at holistically and not in isolation”

But this hard-fought victory was achieved after years of sweat and toil. Starting in 1995, Raghavan sowed the seeds of rainwater harvesting in public consciousness by canvassing door-to-door. Soon, schoolchildren, the media and even government agencies joined his cause. Amazingly, groundwater levels in Chennai have risen considerably. A survey conducted in 2006 showed that temple tanks, which were bone dry in 1999, boasted of perennial water, dry wells were half-full, and groundwater levels had gone up by 20 ft.

“Water and sanitation are like our eyes and have to be looked at holistically and not in isolation,” says Raghavan. “We cannot afford to ignore either of them. My work in rainwater harvesting has to some extent, been responsible in increasing the groundwater levels in Chennai city.”

The Chennai experience culminated in the establishment of the Akash Ganga Trust in 2002, with seed money from another NRI philanthropist who believed in Raghavan's cause. The trust then opened the Rain Centre, a one-stop information and assistance centre for rainwater harvesting. For Raghavan, this was also a personal milestone. An Indian Institute of Technology alumnus in Germany had offered his home in the city to open the Rain Centre, another IIT alumnus contributed funds for it and the Centre for Science & Environment in Delhi offered to renovate its interiors free of cost.

After the trust was established, Raghavan, an Ashoka Fellow of the international non-profit organisation Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, geared up to break new ground. He had been mulling over ways to con-

serve water used in sewage disposal. In 2005, he was ready to take this mission forward. “Ten per cent of sewage requires 90 per cent of water to flush it,” he explains.

Raghavan began sensitising residents of Kovalam, a coastal village in Tamil Nadu, to the relevance of ecological sanitation. The village, comprising mainly Dalit fisher folk, had no sewers or sewage treatment plants and the villagers used a ‘pit’ toilet. A hole in the ground, the pit toilet contaminates groundwater and well water and spreads water-borne diseases.

He thus introduced ‘Eco-san’ toilets to the village in January 2006. A dry composting toilet, the structure is built slightly above the ground and consists of two chambers. One chamber collects solid waste while the other collects liquid waste and wash



Though villagers took some time warming up to the idea of the Eco-san toilet, many of them are now promoting and using it

water. Each chamber is built of hollow cement blocks measuring 5.5 ft×4.5 ft. After the toilet is used, the solid waste is covered with ash, which stimulates bacterial activity that causes the waste to compost. This also minimises unpleasant odours. Moreover, as most villagers in Kovalam cook on wood fires, ash is easily available. Other materials such as leaves, sawdust or straw may also be used. When the chamber fills up, it is sealed and the material is left to decompose for six to nine months. On the other hand, liquid waste and wash water empty out into plant beds. As there is no flushing involved, Eco-san toilets conserve water and do not pollute groundwater.

"I was first introduced to the concept of ecological sanitation at a seminar organised by UNICEF in 2003," recalls Raghavan. "That's when I realised Eco-san was the ultimate in sanitation and was extremely relevant in peri-urban and rural areas." But getting past rural mindsets wasn't easy though the villagers eventually warmed up to the

innovation. "It is better than a regular toilet as it cuts down on the use of water and is always dry," says Kovalam resident C Mahalingam, a regular user of the Eco-san toilet.

These toilets are particularly useful in coastal areas, especially as pit toilets fill up fast and then become dysfunctional. "More people in the village are now asking for these toilets to be constructed and people from surrounding villages are also keen to know more," says R Narayanan of the Coastal & Rural Development Trust of Kovalam. So, in January 2008, nine more Eco-san toilets were constructed by the Akash Ganga Trust in Kovalam, each at a cost of Rs 9,000. But the subsidised cost for the villagers is Rs 2,000.

Eco-sanitation has been adopted in many places around the world and Raghavan has been partnering with various agencies to get more and more Eco-san toilets installed in Kovalam. "Eco-sanitation should be adopted everywhere but sadly is not possible in

cities," he says. "We can only push the concept forward in rural areas."

For three years, the Akash Ganga Trust has been working with the Institute of Buddhism & Economics, an NGO associated with Komazawa University in Tokyo (IBEKU). The institute brings Japanese students to India every year to acquaint them with Indian culture, living conditions and community development. In the process, the institute developed a special association with Kovalam and joined hands with the trust in 2008 to build 66 Eco-san toilets.

Raghavan's work is supported by his wife N Brinda, a lecturer of history at Government Arts College in Chennai. "He is very passionate about water and related issues," she affirms. "Ecological sanitation is one such issue." Despite the enormity of his achievements, this silver is a simple man who does not charge a penny for his services—his real reward comes from leaving his footprint on the planet.



# P Gopinathan 64

He set out with only a dream and three weavers. Today, this indefatigable silver has left a permanent mark on Kerala's handloom industry by empowering thousands of women

✦ Nisary Mahesh ✦ Sivaram V

Fifty years ago, a guileless school dropout wandered among the weaving communities of Tamil Nadu, looking for work. Back then, the young lad never once imagined he would one day rejuvenate the handloom industry of Kerala. That's how P Gopinathan, now 64, embarked on a journey that put Manjvilakom, a small village on the south-western coast, on the handloom map of India.

Today, around 1,800 women in this hamlet spin in symphony with Gopinathan, who has empowered women across six panchayats in the state. Yet not many know that a re-

markable variety of Kerala's best saris, *mundu*, shirts and rugs sold in the state's top outlets are spun by these women organised under 27 *mahila samajam* that comprise Gopinathan's Eco Tex Handloom Consortium. Why, this 'master weaver' is so popular in his village that even children in the narrow streets point the way to "Gopi Mash's" home.

Clad in a simple white shirt and *mundu*, Gopinathan walks you through the sprawling compound of Eco Tex, which is spread across 7 acre. It took 40 years for him to quite literally and painfully piece this plot together. Pointing to a







**Families that earlier relied on the vagaries of fishing can now earn an assured income from weaving**

group of women weaving Kerala saris with colourful borders in a tin shed, Gopinathan says with a soft chuckle, “All these are my children.” It’s ‘Chingam,’ a month of festivities and wedding bells in Kerala, and traditional rugs are in great demand. Thus, in lyrical unison, the women work to the clatter of looms that have been setting the rhythm of their lives for close to 30 years.

Set against a larger canvas, this is what Gopinathan means to Kerala’s weaving industry. He gradually turned Manchavilakom and Poovathur, both remote little known fishing villages, into major handloom hubs, rivalling nearby Balaramapuram, where the weaving industry was already firmly established.

From an individual perspective, this visionary built a new small-scale sector, thus stimulating local economies and generating income for hundreds of families who earlier depended mainly on the vagaries of the fishing industry. Gopinathan has also made

an invaluable contribution to employee retention in the state’s handloom sector, the biggest challenge to this industry. Till then, low wages, lack of employee benefits and the rise of power looms had dealt the handloom sector a serious blow.

Determined to change the scenario, Gopinathan, along with a few others, was instrumental in getting the Kerala government to pass a Bill for

Returning to when it all began, Gopinathan says his father earned his livelihood weaving clothes for royalty but, still, he could neither provide for his 10 children nor give all them a proper education. Gopinathan thus dropped out of school and left to work in Tamil Nadu’s Nagercoil district, which had a thriving weaving industry.

A year later, he learnt to set up looms in Madurai before he did a brief stint in Salem. At 23, his father’s death brought him back to Kerala and he worked several odd jobs to keep body and soul together. It was then that Gopinathan decided to pick up the threads and use weaving to empower poor women in his small village.

The year was 1968 and he began with three looms and a patch of land donated by a Tamil Nadu-based weaver. This was the time he met his wife Subhashini, who was also a weaver. “In those days, there were very few incentives for a start-up,” recalls Gopinathan. So he continued to buy looms

**“We sleep but the loom of life never stops”**

coir, khadi and handloom workers, ensuring a minimum 100 days wages a year and maternity leave with a month’s wages. When the Bill was passed in September 2010, it came as a huge relief for weavers across the state as the handloom sector employs labour mainly on a contract basis, leaving many without work for months at a stretch.



# Gopinathan went door-to-door, coaxing women to learn the art of weaving

and adjacent plots of land, piecemeal, from his own earnings. Soon, his popularity spread and he was elected to the local panchayat.

Next, Gopinathan went door-to-door in his village, often walking several miles a day, to coax women to learn the art of weaving from him free, despite opposition from the conservative villagers. But his efforts paid off as many women took to weaving at home as a means of self-employment. It was Gopinathan's first triumph.

In the early 1970s, when the handloom sector was at the mercy of middlemen and private handloom owners, Gopinathan began to organise the women weavers and enrolled them in a *mahila samajam*, offering them his plot and looms. Thus the Udaya Mahila Samajam, a women's cooperative, was formed in 1972—with four looms and 25 women.

By 1979, there were 27 *samajam* and 400 looms. It also marked the year that the cooperatives merged to form the Eco Tex Handloom Consortium with a simple motto: 'Unity is Strength'. Gopinathan's inspiration was A K Gopalan, who spearheaded the Indian Coffee Worker's Cooperative Movement in the 1950s. "Eco Tex has boosted the morale of women who have not set eyes on a school in their lives," he says with pride. Today each *samajam* is a self-governing body and collectively, the 1,800 women under the 27 cooperative units work on 900-odd looms spread across 7 acre.

Despite this, Eco Tex is in a financial bind. Gopinathan has mortgaged his house and a 1-acre plot he owns to banks to clear the consortium's debts

**Gopinathan with the weavers whom he refers to as his 'children'**





and so he could pay the weavers' bonus two years ago. "Owing to irregular repayments, the loan and interest are now Rs 10 million," reveals the consortium's treasurer R Prasanna-kumari. "We have received notices for attachment of the property but, somehow, we have managed to postpone the inevitable. Our profits are meagre as we sell our products to traders at small margins." The Textile Development Commission did grant Eco Tex a generous sum but the money was spent on new looms, modernising facilities and renovating the shed where the women work.

At the end of the day, though, it's all worth it. "We feel we are part of a large family," smiles Jalaja, the consortium's secretary. "We share our meals and speak about anything under the sun here," adds Gopinathan's wife Subhashini. "As a woman, I can understand the women and their problems better." For instance, Padmavati, a widow who has been with Eco Tex for 20 years, was able to get her daughter married because the 27 cooperatives gifted her Rs 20,000 for the occasion.

Amazingly, Gopinathan did not stop with Eco Tex. In 2004, he opened a weaving school on the same plot, where women from backward communities are taught to weave free of cost. Next on his agenda is a school to train women weavers to ease the labour crunch in the sector. Not surprisingly, his face lights up at the mention of Gandhi's vision for rural India. "I want to raise the minimum wage from Rs 125 a day; it does not even compare with the cost of living today," he points out. "Besides, the sector will attract more workers only if the wages are worth it."

It has indeed been a lonely path, and neither Gopinathan's three sons nor his daughter are connected with the textile industry. But his efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2007, he was conferred the Padmashri. A year later, he was honoured with the



**The looms are both a source of income and friendship for the women who work there**

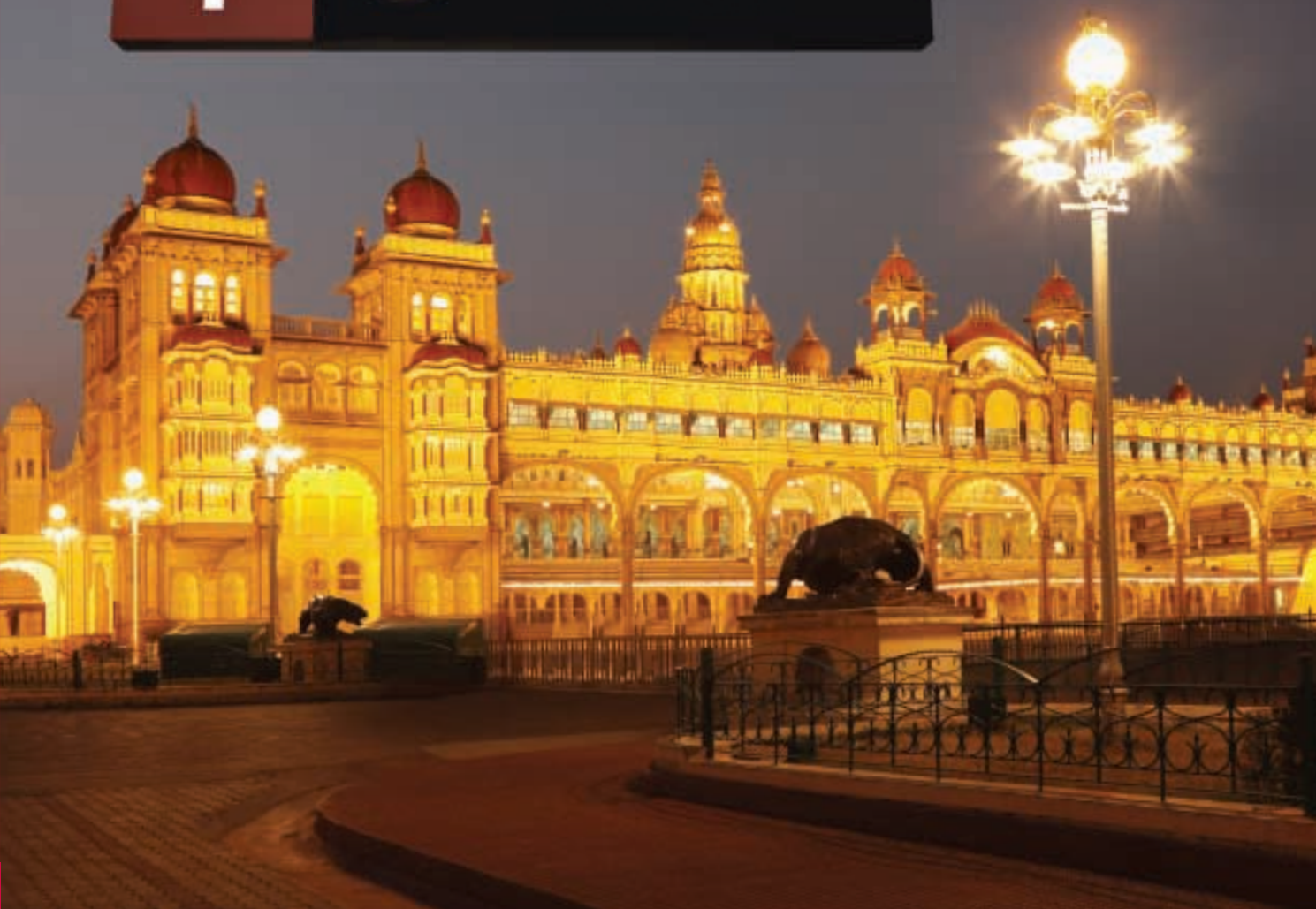
Keralaleeyam Kerala Award and the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial National Research Centre's Gandhiyan Seva Puraskar. He was also conferred the Real Hero-2010 Award for women's empowerment by television news channel CNN-IBN. To applaud his commitment and contribution, the Dubai Health Ministry jointly with a few NRI associations and the West Bengal Handloom Minister have awarded him congratulatory certificates. He has also been given an honorary position in the Kerala State Advisory Board of Handlooms.

On our tireless crusader's amazing impact on the state's handloom sector,

M Satheesan, general secretary of the State Handloom and Textiles Department, remarks, "Gopinathan's contribution is remarkable, especially in his endeavour for labour retention and workers' welfare. Today, the weaving industry is under the threat of labour unrest. Many people are opting out because of low wages. Only people like him who work selflessly, can save the state from this situation." Still, Gopinathan is not in it for the accolades, and perhaps best summarising what drives him, he says, "We sleep but the loom of life never stops, and the pattern we were weaving when the sun went down will continue when it rises in the morning."



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# A Sharfudeen 68

Finding a 'new voice' to get his anti-smoking message across, this cancer survivor from Chennai has managed to have a greater impact on people than many de-addiction programmes

◆ Radhika Mohan    📷 V Ramesh

'Inspirational' does not begin to describe 68 year-old A Sharfudeen, a man who's rolled with the punches, and then some. His personal struggle with laryngeal cancer and his never-say-die attitude have helped him rise above his own crisis and achieve what many de-addiction centres and cancer-awareness programmes cannot.

Sample this testament to Sharfudeen's subtle but powerful impact. Dr E Vidhubala, Head of Department, Tobacco Cessation Clinic, Adyar Cancer Hospital, Chennai, recounts an amazing snippet of hope. She says she received a phone call out of the blue one day, from an inspector with the Southern Railway. "I met Mr Sharfudeen on the train three weeks ago," the caller had told her. "At first, I thought he was deaf and dumb, till he started telling me about his medical problem. I was a heavy smoker all my life, and talking to Sharfudeen opened my eyes. I have called to tell you that it is three weeks since I last smoked."

Life deals you its biggest challenges when you least expect them and Sharfudeen's trial by fire came at a time when his life was a bed of roses. He was happily married, had four children, and a secure job when a doctor delivered a crushing verdict. After being a heavy smoker for 20 years, Sharfudeen began experiencing a persistent sore throat around 12 years ago. The doctors' visits and medicines helped temporarily but the episodes became more and more frequent. Finally, he was asked to go for a throat scan. The scan revealed a lump in his throat, which was removed through laser surgery. He was told that if he quit smoking, he could get a fresh lease on life.

**"I don't want others to suffer the way I did"**

When his speech showed no improvement, Sharfudeen sought a second opinion at the Adyar Cancer Hospital in Chennai and a second scan revealed that cancer had set in. In January 1999, Sharfudeen was suddenly faced with the most difficult decision of his life: doctors told him to choose between his voice and his life. Six months later, Sharfudeen's voice box, or larynx, was removed, followed by two months of radiation therapy.

Since the tumour was in its initial stages, Sharfudeen has experienced complete remission but the surgery, quite literally, left him speechless and unable to communicate effectively. It thus cost him his job. Sharfudeen, who was secretary of the Chennai Government Employees Cooperative Society, had to retire prematurely in 2001. He spent his savings on treatment and the future looked bleak. "The good thing is that he not only understood the enormity of his medical problem but chose to cooperate with the doctors," says Dr Mani, surgical oncologist and head of the Cancer Relief & Research Trust, where

Sharfudeen counsels and guides patients diagnosed with laryngeal cancer.

Not one to buckle under adversity, he learnt to communicate through writing and sign language. But the year 2002 was a turning point—that's when he learnt to use an electrolarynx, an external device which when pressed against the throat reads speech vibrations, and converts them into coherent 'speech'. It took a lot of patience and practice to learn to use the device till he got it right. Finally, Sharfudeen got his 'voice' back!





But even as he learnt to cope with new challenges, he was also spiralling into a cycle of remorse. Whenever he glanced at his wife, he saw silent pain and anguish on her face and fear in his children's eyes. As Sharfudeen's savings were spent on his treatment, his eldest son was forced to forfeit his dream of becoming an engineer and set up a modest business instead.

The good news is that Sharfudeen was meticulous about his medical check-ups and his health was improving. But he was increasingly consumed with guilt. He realised that smoking hadn't just ruined his health; it had also taken a heavy toll on his family. So he decided to lead by example. In 2005, Sharfudeen began to use the Adyar Cancer Hospital's Tobacco Cessation Clinic to send out a powerful message to smokers and cancer survivors. He also speaks at awareness programmes conducted by the hospital in schools and colleges and corporate firms.

"We hold long-drawn out anti-tobacco programmes," says Dr Vidhubala. "But when he speaks through his electrolynx, the impact is far greater than our hour-long programmes. People listen to him in pin-drop silence. Not many publicly admit they are cancer

survivors or talk about their battle with the disease. But Sharfudeen is a rare individual, who is willing to admit to his mistakes and urge others not to go down the same road. He uses his adversity to make a vital difference to society."

Sharfudeen is also secretary of the Larynx Welfare Association, a voluntary group located on the Adyar Cancer Hospital campus. Through the association, a platform for victims of laryngeal cancer, Sharfudeen trains people to use an electrolynx and conducts sessions where members discuss their psychological and clinical fears associated with the disease and share their experiences and even receive pre-operative counselling. More important, the association has helped members believe that laryngeal cancer is not a death sentence. All this thanks to the virtual brotherhood Sharfudeen has fostered among its members. "When I address a gathering of 300 people, only five people may give up smoking but that is reward enough," says Sharfudeen, who also speaks to smokers he encounters wherever he goes.

He earns no remuneration for his efforts, nor does he seek any. In dire

straits, he and his family are currently supported by his brother. But Sharfudeen has unusual zeal, for despite his communication limitations, he is determined to work and earn an honest living. "These are my bonus years!" he explains in a hoarse whisper.

But Sharfudeen does have his dark moments, times when he looks back on a life gone up in smoke. "I don't want others to suffer the way I did," says the resolute silver, showing us text messages from complete strangers on his mobile phone: "I smoked my last cigarette at 12 midnight, after meeting you and listening to your story," says one message; "My family and I are thankful to you. Keep up the good work," says another.

That's because Sharfudeen has always looked ahead while carrying his message forward. Says Dr Vidhubala, "He single-handedly does what we cannot do in a combined effort. We normally rely on de-addiction through medication. In spite of this, the success rate globally is barely 10-20 per cent. Sharfudeen uses neither medication nor counselling to convince people. He is a living example of what smoking did to him and his eyes and raspy voice say it all."

**When Sharfudeen addresses gatherings on cancer awareness through his electrolynx, there is pin-drop silence**





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# Yogeshwar Kumar 59

This Delhi-based engineer from IIT with a creative streak and a Gandhian bent of mind has electrified the hills of northern India with community-driven hydroelectric projects

✦ Anju Mohan ✦ Mihir Singh

It appears an unlikely workplace for a civil engineer who graduated from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology - Delhi. But we plod along anyway, picking our way through potholed streets in Delhi's Vishnu Garden area. There's no signboard to mark the workshop but we eventually stumble upon it and are greeted by a bearded gentleman wearing a peak-cap and clutching a wrench.

When he graduated from IIT in 1974, Yogeshwar Kumar had the world at his feet. Now, the 59 year-old is bent over a lathe, working on a turbine that brings him no remuneration but has transformed village economies across northern and north-eastern India.

"Sometimes we hang out the nameplate of our NGO, Jansamarth, but I prefer not to keep a signboard in our offices even in the rural areas", comes the simple explanation from the unpretentious engineer. "It tends to create a division between the locals and outsiders."

Combining formal training with creative genius and a Gandhian bent of mind, Kumar has been constructing micro-hydroelectric plants in Leh, Uttarakhand, Uttaranchal, Meghalaya, Orissa and Jammu & Kashmir for more than three decades. He has built 15 plants to date, all of them owned and operated by villagers. Funding, he explains, comes from NGOs, and private agencies. "I want to give people power over power, to empower them and create employment opportunities for them," explains our maverick engineer-turned-activist.

This real-life hero, who could easily have been the inspiration for the Shah Rukh Khan blockbuster *Swades*, is awfully down-to-earth. He rues the scepticism that has crept into villagers in the past decade. But his gentle coaxing and beguiling honesty win their confidence every single time. "I only work on an invitation basis," explains Kumar. "I don't want to get into tendering hassles and the ensuing possibilities of corruption." This approach also ensures that the villagers don't have to wait for the state electricity board's gridlines. Even companies and NGOs that wish to sponsor such projects directly contact him.

Kumar's journey began 35 years ago, when he was researching the use of bamboo as a reinforcement material. He had contacted his elder brother's teacher, Professor Virendar Kumar, at Zakir Husain College, Delhi. He followed his mentor to assist him in his study of cytogenetics (the study of chromosomes) in the Valley of Flowers in Leh. They constructed a high-altitude laboratory, the geodesic dome, with a battery donated by noted scientist M S Swaminathan.

Yogeshwar built his first micro-hydel plant on a stream behind the lab to light up and run the incubators. "Next, we collected funds to build a school in Bhandar village so that children involved in cattle-rearing during the day could study at night and get quality education," recalls Professor Virendra Kumar. "The electricity generated during the day was also used for oil extraction and wheat milling. Hence, it served several purposes."

"I want to give people power over power"





# “Providing electricity is not enough. We need to curb migration through self-employment”

Yogeshwar Kumar's second project was in Dogri Kandii Village in Chamoli District, Uttarakhand, in 1977. But as fate would have it, the micro-hydel plant was wrecked in a landslide. As the region is prone to landslides, the village, located near the district headquarters, was forced to wait for the government's gridlines, which finally reached Dogri Kandii a decade later.

Stressing that community participation is key to his model, Kumar says a project begins with the formation of an *Urja Samiti*, a core group of villagers involved in planning and monitoring the project that eventually takes over its operations and maintenance. This *samiti* is formed with the approval of the local panchayat and after securing requisite approvals from local bodies. After laying the groundwork, Kumar then heads off to his workshop in Vishnu Garden to customise a turbine to suit the location, terrain and flow of water. “It is not enough to provide the villagers electricity,” he explains. “It is also important to curb migration by providing them self-employment through the use of electricity.”

Critically, the villagers are also trained at Kumar's modest workshop in Delhi to run and maintain the plants. Once the turbine is set up, meters are installed in each home and the money thus earned is used to pay a villager designated to operate and maintain the turbine while 25 per cent goes to the *samiti*.

Kumar says every time a village opts for a micro-hydel plant over state electricity, it's a huge triumph. “After we began work on Agunda in Tehri District, Uttarakhand, we learnt that gridlines were coming to the region. So we asked the villagers whether they still wanted their own hydel-plant or would rather opt for state electricity. They chose to have their own plant,” he says with a smile. In fact, our visionary innovator did more than just install a micro-hydel plant in Agunda in January 2009. Amazingly, he also introduced wool-carding machines, which are a big hit with the womenfolk, and organised felt-making workshops to produce value-added products out of wool and bring them more business.

“The government's electricity is expensive and we would have been dependent on it,” says Bhagwan Singh, chairman of the *Urja Samiti* of Agunda. “A fault in the lines means no electricity for days. This is our own village project. When there was a breakdown, it was fixed in hours. Everyone gets together if something needs to be done.” While a government electricity connection costs Rs 1,000-1,500 per household, a connection from the micro-hydel plant costs just Rs 500. Even the electricity charges are about a rupee lower. “Saving money is like earning money,” he adds. “Earlier, to buy oil, we used to travel at least 23 km. Now it is available cheaply in our own village. We also have a flour mill and carding machines. The more we earn, the more we can improve our village and empower ourselves.”

However, a mission like Kumar's cannot be powered on skilful engineering and ingenuity alone. “He is a technologist with a very human heart,” says Prof Virendra Kumar fondly of his friend and colleague who helped him set up the Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Studies on Mountain Hill Environment, Delhi University. Yogeshwar Kumar was also an inspiration for Dr P C Maithani, director in the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. In 1977-78, Dr Maithani first noticed a “bearded fellow” who had come to Daboli Khunde, Gopeshwar in Uttarakhand's Chamoli District on a *padyatra* during the Chipko Movement. Little did he know, that their paths were to cross many years later, after Dr Maithani began working with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. “Despite being an IIT engineer, he was not tempted by money,” marvels Dr Maithani. “Following the

**Kumar engages villagers in the project at every step—from operations to upkeep**







#### Explaining machinery specifications to a supplier in Delhi whose business has received a fillip thanks to Kumar's project

Gandhian philosophy of empowering people, he toils to bring not only electricity to rural areas but a means of livelihood. He builds power plants at one-sixth the price quoted by other organisations and companies."

Admiration for his work and a common love for the mountains also forged a bond between Kumar and Rajiv Lochan, vice-president, Samtel Color Ltd. Lochan recalls a time when they were both engineering students and he assisted Kumar on projects. "He is a skilful mechanical and electronics engineer as well," remarks Lochan. "His level of creativity is phenomenal. The beauty of his work is that he reduces costs drastically and makes technology so simple." He remembers a visit to Meghalaya in the 1980s, when Kumar was posted there as special officer in charge in the Meghalaya government's Science and

Technology Department. "The situation in Meghalaya was very difficult then and the locals were unfriendly," says Lochan. "Despite the language barrier, Yogeshwar formed a very strong bond with the locals through his helpful nature. His smokeless *chullah* were a big hit!"

Kumar is indeed multifaceted. After a recent project in Leh, he procured electric kettles from HelpAge India so silvers there could make different varieties of tea to combat the cold! He is also on another ingenious mission for the government's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), conducting experiments at high-altitudes to ensure that troops stationed in crucial areas receive the requisite nutrition. What's more, Kumar has tied up with the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development to pro-

vide villagers practical skills. "After completing the plant in Agunda, we organised a computer-training class," he says. "Today, two shopkeepers in Buddha Kedar have bought computers and one of them wants to set up a railway booking centre once he gets a broadband connection."

N P Nawani, former Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, which worked with Jansamarth to help a UNDP project set up six micro-hydel projects in Tehri district in Uttaranchal, is another fan of Kumar. "He has never built any assets, and to date lives in rented accommodation," he tells us. "He is highly committed and never works for personal benefit." Not surprising that, for a man whose pioneering spirit is driven by a desire to help people, to innovate and find unique solutions to their problems.

# V Mani 72

A man who believes that the world is a dark place only when we close our eyes, he provides children of life convicts in Bengaluru, food, shelter, education and the courage to claim a future unsullied by social stigma

❖ Rajashree Balaram 📷 Prasad Durga

When we meet Venkataragavachari Mani, he greets us with a bouquet of flowers, the cost of which, he later confesses, weighs heavily on his mind. “For a minute, I wondered if I can afford to throw money away on such courtesies.” Mani’s unvarnished frankness can be baffling, but his thrift springs from a generous heart. “Every rupee I save can make a lot of difference to my children,” he says. He is referring to the 154 boys and girls, aged between two and 18 years, who live in SOCARE IND (Society’s Care for The Indigent), a non-profit trust that serves as a hostel for children of convicts serving life sentences in jails across Karnataka.

When we enter the unpretentious three-storied row house in Rajajinagar in Bengaluru, 19 of those children stand in a queue near the gate. They have taken the day off from school to meet the *Harmony* team while the rest are attending class in schools nearby. The youngest—Shyam, all of two years—leads the file. Cherubic, with a smile a mile wide, he confidently proffers his palm for a handshake. Others in the group are quick to follow. You cannot help but return their robust unanimous chorus of “good morning” with an equally loud one of your own. Mani watches the exchange with fatherly pride. As we settle into his cramped office room on the ground floor, the children’s animated voices in the courtyard provide a mildly chaotic background score. Squeals and giggles overlap with the innocent rhymes of ‘ring-a-ring-o’-roses’ and the mandatory calls of hide-and-seek. However, it’s only when Mani starts recounting their stories that we realise how arduous the journey has been to arrive at this scene of cheerful chaos.

“No child’s future should be tainted by his parents’ past”

“Every day on my way to work, I used to pass by the Central Jail,” reminisces Mani. “The sight of the children and wives of prisoners waiting outside the gate braving the rain and blazing sun used to haunt me all day at work. One day I decided that after retirement I would do something to ease their pain.” True to his word, when he retired as assistant general manager from RBI in 1999, he invested his savings—Rs 300,000—to convert his house ‘Desik’ into a children’s hostel. Today the house is filled with children whose destinies were once horribly entwined with the dark crimes—murders, dacoity and sexual offences—committed

by their parents. Many have seen their fathers set their mothers on fire; many others have been mute witness to their mothers poisoning their fathers. “Ninety five per cent of the cases involve one parent killing the other over infidelity or as retaliation from oppression,” explains trustee

Asha Narasimhan, 68. “The children have been orphaned even though they have one parent who is alive.”

Though none of the children may ever fully disengage from their past, now they have at least learnt to let go of their inhibitions and low self-esteem and are reaching out for a future with hope. “I don’t know what I would have become if it were not for Mani Uncle,” says 18 year-old Yuvraj who has been at SOCARE for the past six years. His father murdered his brother’s wife in a fit of rage and is now serving a life sentence in prison. Raised by his grandmother who sold *idli* for a living, the reserved teenager is a hardware networking apprentice at Canara Bank and is aiming for a life less ordinary. “I plan to do my master’s in computer







applications soon,” he says with resolute self-assurance. Like him, 17 year-old Sangeeta, studying at Vivekananda College, is sure of her future trajectory. When we ask her about her goals in life, she doesn’t even blink an eye before uttering succinctly: “professor”. Sixteen year-old Sushma too has her plans chalked out for a master’s degree in business management. For every story filled with optimism and hope, though, there is one taut with remembered misery. Usha, 12, has eyes that speak of a lifetime of pain. Sexually abused by her stepfather, she was rescued following intervention from neighbours and a local NGO, who had her father arrested and jailed. Her mother, who was blind and ill-equipped to take care of her and her two year-old brother Shyam, is no more. Usha and Shyam were brought to SOCARE at the behest of the children and women’s division of Bengaluru High Court.

“I do not probe for information on their past, if it pains them,” says Mani. He still doesn’t know the background of Shilpa, a painfully shy 17 year-old whose footsteps are as muffled as her voice. Sold many times over as a child labourer before the age of 10, Shilpa was found abandoned at a bus station, dazed with trauma. Unlettered all



## Mani believes in offering a second chance and encourages his wards to forgive their parents

through her formative years, she had trouble coping with studies and social interaction when she was admitted to a school. Mani tutored her at SOCARE and later enrolled her in a tailoring class. Shilpa’s intense eyes and gentle voice have won over the admiration of 25 year-old Siddharaju, the boys’ warden at SOCARE—the two plan to marry early next year. “I am raising funds to gift her a fixed deposit of Rs 100,000,” says Mani with all the protectiveness of a loving father.

Though he is now adept at galvanising people to contribute to the cause, he still remembers the time when all he had was a dream, and not too many people who believed in it. “When I heard about his idea to educate and provide a home for children of prisoners, I was sceptical of his idealism,” remembers Shobhana Ravi, Mani’s sister-in-law. “But when he came home with two tiny tots one day, I knew that if there was anyone who could take up this superhuman challenge, it was

him.” Today, Ravi is one of the most ardent champions of SOCARE and helps bring in donations through her vast network of friends.

Mani’s greatest supporter, however, was his wife Saroji who passed away in 2008. “Initially she was apprehensive, but all her reservations vanished when I came home with two tiny three year-old boys,” remembers Mani. As their children were already settled abroad—Mani’s son Desik and



**Children are not just empowered with education, but are also offered opportunities to hone their latent talents**



Though his hands and house are full with children, Mani often broods about the ones left behind. “My dream is to be able to accommodate children from at least 1,000 families.” Lofty, perhaps, but it probably stems from his past when he was the main provider for a large family. The eldest of eight siblings, he was born and brought up in a village near Kanchipuram in an orthodox Tamil Iyengar Brahmin family. He still fondly remembers his simple upbringing; moving to Mumbai in search of job; finding one as a typist at the Accountant General’s office; and then moving onto a successful career at the RBI office in Bengaluru. While working with the AG’s office, Mani also did his master’s in political science from KC College in Mumbai, following it up with a diploma in industrial finance. Along the way he read up extensively on politics, and found himself being drawn to Communism. “I am waiting for the day when casteism is totally eradicated and people are truly free to pursue their chosen path,” he says with all the vehemence of an ideologue. “I am all for statelessness.”

In his rational view of the world, there is no room for moral judgement. He believes in offering a second chance and encourages his wards to forgive and forget. Children are escorted to meet their jailed parents once every three months and parents are allowed to call once every month. When convicts are let off on parole, he invites them over to SOCARE to stay overnight with their children. “We can provide the children with love and compassion,” he says. “But we can never be a substitute to their parents.” Nevertheless his wards flock to him like bees, “Uncle, uncle, uncle”...they call out excitedly. In return, Mani argues, teases and corrects their manners and, through all of it, never fails to treat them as equals. He wearily admits that like children all over the

daughter Sumathi are in the US and the youngest Shobha lives in Sydney—they had no qualms about sharing their space. “My wife adjusted to the sustained influx of children with a quiet acceptance.” Mani launched the cause after prolonged discussions with former DGP (Prisons) L Revanasiddiah. As the convicts belonged to jails across Bellary, Mysore, Gulbarga and Dandupalya, he had to travel to each place to convince jail officials of his sincerity. Even today, SOCARE regularly invites jail officials to inspect their premises and spend time with the children. “I am handling the children of some of the most dangerous criminals in Karnataka,” he says. “One mistake on my part and I could be hauled up.” Children are admitted

to SOCARE with all papers duly processed and signed by the court.

“The process of choosing deserving children is both tedious and painful,” says M S Srihari, legal advisor and trustee. “How does one decide which child is more deserving? Each child’s eyes reach out to you with the same measure of despair.” Mani and his team of trustees screen children on the basis of poverty, age and number of children in each family and after a long dialogue with each convict. In May 2010, he brought home 35 children from Gulbarga. Every new batch takes some time to acclimatise to the new environment. SOCARE has regular sessions with child counsellors to help ease the transition.



**Shilpa, who was earlier a child labourer, found solace in SOCARE and a life partner in warden Siddharaju**

world, it's tough to get them to sit at one place. "Sometimes, they insist on going to the park and I let them because that's the only way I can get them to study for an hour in the evenings." He often takes them to visit the planetarium, zoo and museums. And to hone their individual talents, many are enrolled in classes for taekwondo, computers and Bharatanatyam. All the children have been admitted into reputed English and Kannada-medium schools: East West English School, Parikrama Primary School, Aniketan English School, Mount Scenerio and Rajiv Gandhi Memorial School to name a few. Fees are subsidised and sometime waived, thanks to his appeals to school authorities. "I request them not to divulge the background of these children as this can lead to discrimination among their peers."

Over the years SOCARE has invested in two Omni vans and an auto-rickshaw to ferry children back and forth from their schools. There are 12 resident staff including drivers, cooks, wardens and cleaning staff and 15 part-time teachers who teach the kids in the evening. Adolescents and teenagers wash their own clothes and those of the younger children. Space is a huge constraint, one that has also strengthened the bonds shared by the kids. At night, children sleep in every available space—seven rooms on the ground floor, four on the first floor and the roofed terrace. "When I go on my rounds to switch off their lights, I can hear their whispers and giggles," says Mani with an amused chuckle.

Blankets, clothes and bags are piled high in each room. By day, the covered terrace is a classroom, filled with brightly-coloured benches. "Some children find the life here far too regimented and they wish to go back home," says Mani. "We let them if they insist, but they are clearly informed that they won't be accepted



back if they wish to return." While the facility in Rajajinagar has 66 girls, another larger bungalow, 6 km away in Leggere, was purchased in 2006 to accommodate adolescent and teenage boys. Mani pledged his wife's jewellery to make the down payment on the house which was bought for Rs 3 million. He and his team of trustees are now working out plans to build another house in the vacant adjacent plot donated to them by a patron. Talks are also on to acquire land in Sajjapura Road in Bengaluru, where they plan to set up a crèche, hostel, school, a clinic for the poor and a senior citizens' home.

"He is all heart and I often have a tough time making him understand that we can't just keep accommodating children till we have more resources," says R Venkatanathan, 65, a trustee and close friend of Mani. The trustees, all silvers and friends, have known each other for years now. Their arguments are often vociferous. "Sometimes, some of us even walk out in a huff when we disagree on a point, but we are always united by our cause," says treasurer V Narayanan, 64. The trustees have already made plans to sustain the legacy. SOCARE is registered as a unit of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetam, a world-renowned spiritual organisation. "At least,

SOCARE won't disintegrate just because we are not around," says Mani with a contented smile.

The institution incurs an annual expenditure of Rs 4 million, all of which is met through donations. The daily lunch—a nutritious vegetarian meal of *sambhar*, *rasam*, vegetables, curd, salad, chapattis and a dessert—is supplied by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Mani's children donate to the cause every month and have also rounded up NRI donors who send money regularly. Contributions of all kinds are welcome: clothes, groceries, toiletries, toys and books. "One of our most generous donors is a poor old woman Laxmi who has donated Rs 50 every month for the past nine years," says Mani. "The true mark of generosity is not how much you give but what you retain. I don't want to retain anything," Mani means what he says—his monthly pension in the past 12 years has been spent entirely on the future of the children of SOCARE. It's not surprising then to find out that his 14 year-old granddaughter who lives in Sydney won a prize for her essay on her grandfather. Though he rarely gets to spend time with her, he has no regrets: "My family understands. They know the children of SOCARE need me more than they do."



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# Dr Dilip Velaskar 69

In a stroke of genius, the silver pathologist from Mumbai stretches the boundaries of science, so silvers can embrace a happier heart and healthier future

◆ Dhanya Nair Sankar 📷 Jit Ray

It's an unlikely cradle for a path-breaking scientific invention—an old and rundown industrial estate near the railway station at Mahim in Mumbai. But 69 year-old Dr Dilip Velaskar is clearly oblivious to the niceties of medicine.

When we finally get to his lab, Velaskar greets us warmly, taking a rare break from his work. Embarrassed when we congratulate him on being nominated for Harmony Silver Awards, he immediately launches into the subject he loves talking about most: blood platelets. “I cannot think beyond platelets,” smiles this silver pathologist. Dr Velaskar’s modest laboratory has served as his second home for the past decade. For this is where he has painstakingly researched the role of platelets in cardiovascular events, and finally developed the Rapid Thrombochek Kit in 2009. The kit, a blessing for silvers, uses an aggregometry test to predict the probability of a stroke and other cardiovascular events. A huge leap in preventive medicine, it achieves this by correlating hyperactive platelets with heart attacks. Ruling the fact that people usually wake up to the threat of heart attacks only after the first one, he explains, “Heart attack patients go through a cardiac psychology where, after the first attack, they are unable to completely let go off their fear. More than 3 million silvers in India are vulnerable to strokes.”

With the Rapid Thrombochek Kit hopefully available on the market soon, high-risk patients can be identified and put on anti-platelet medicine or blood thinners such as Aspirin. “I want to prevent the spurious use of commonly available drugs and foster preventive medical care,” he says.

The seeds of this amazing invention were sown in 1975, when Velaskar graduated from Podar Medical College in Mumbai. “I assisted the now deceased Dr V H Salaskar, also known as ‘the founding father of Indian pathology,’ he recalls with obvious fondness. Back in ‘teaching mode’

now, Velaskar continues, “Platelets have two main functions, adhesion and aggregation. Adhesion is the adherence of platelets to any area with damaged blood vessels, while aggregation is the progressive accumulation of platelets, attracted by other platelets. Aggregation causes hyperactivity in platelets, which in turn causes a heart attack.” That is the crux of Velaskar’s invention, which could make the difference between life and death. “After some research, I realised that testing and treating hyperactive platelets can be used to prevent the first heart attack or a stroke.”

His theory provoked much speculation among the scientific fraternity. However, Velaskar took it in his stride. “After studying blood samples of elderly diabetes and heart patients we realised that their platelets indeed showed hyperactivity.” Encouraged by his research, he published his findings in the *American Journal of Clinical Pathology* in 1982, which called his method a “poor man’s technique” as it did not involve sophisticated technology! However, by 1988, more and more pathologists had begun studying blood samples for platelet hyperactivity under the microscope, which is the most popular and cost-effective laboratory instrument.

But how exactly is platelet hyperactivity measured? “First, a sample is studied under a microscope and the platelet count is taken,” he explains. “Next, we add an aggression agent

called an agonist to the sample, which is then smeared on a slide. The smearing arrests the aggression, and the platelet count is recorded again. The greater the difference in platelet count, the higher the aggression rate.” Excited with his findings, Velaskar tried to secure an Indian patent from the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks Office, in 1996. However, he was told there was another candidate who had claimed to have devised the same method. The patent was denied but, undeterred, he continued improving his method. The breakthrough

“I want to foster preventive medical care”





# "Being a silver myself, I now want to know if platelets play a role in ageing"

finally came in 2000, when the automated cell counter machine, which provides a precise platelet count, was finally available in India.

That's when Velaskar started piecing his kit together, an economical and easy-to-use aggregometry (platelet function) test to measure platelet aggressiveness. The current test can be performed only in research clinics by trained technicians. It is lengthy and costs as much as Rs 3,000 for a single test. In contrast, the Rapid Thrombochek Kit can be used in small clinical laboratories for Rs 250 to Rs 300 per test. Small laboratories can purchase the kit for Rs 600 and use each kit up to 10 times. Moreover, the results are available up to an hour later. "I had been looking for cheaper techniques to conduct the aggregometry test and realised that it was not only expensive but that there were just five centres in Mumbai that had the facilities to perform this test," he adds. But when he finally began assembling his kit in 2000, it ran into funding problems. The entire process—from procuring cell counter machines to the various research stages—cost Rs 6 million, much of which has been borne by Velaskar himself. "Spending Rs 6 million over 30 years is well worth it for this innovation," he remarks. Naturally, the Rs 800,000 Velaskar received last year through a government programme called Techopreneur Promotion Programme was a morale-booster. "Indians are brilliant; we just need more government aid so that we can innovate on our own soil," he says.

Validation for his work comes from C Amarnath, professor of mechanical engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology – Mumbai and managing professor of IIT's Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) programme. "Our preliminary



testing on this innovation bore positive results and we finally gave it the go-ahead as it would help prevent strokes, especially among silvers," says Dr Amarnath. While the kit awaits an international patent from the Patent Cooperation Treaty office in Geneva, Switzerland, Indian and foreign pharmaceutical companies are making a beeline for it. "We are still fully evaluating the kit, though it is clear that it is an easy and cost-effective way to check heart thrombosis," says Dr Suvin Shetty, a pathologist at Hiranandani Hospital in Powai, Mumbai.

It's been a long and arduous journey and Velaskar's wife Kalpana has been a pillar of support. A pathologist and blood transfusion consultant with Dhirubhai Ambani Life Sciences Centre in Mumbai, she has been a patient sounding board. "I merely assisted him by finding relevant medical literature, sourcing references and samples," she says modestly. "Being from the same background, I could also sense when something went wrong and took corrective measures." But she admits it was tough "as somebody had to earn

## The kit and the cell counter machine

the daily bread", adding, "He was so involved with research that the responsibility of earning fell on me. I had to juggle work and, after that, our time would be spent in the lab." And while all the work has finally borne fruit, she says she is still far from satisfied. "The kit is meant for the common man," she emphasises. "It should be cheaply and easily available like a blood sugar test. Only then will we feel triumphant."

With less than six months to go before breasting the tape, Velaskar is getting ready for his next challenge. "Hyperactive platelets are also related to metastatic cancer, retinopathies [damage of the retina owing to diabetes] and nephrotic syndrome [kidney damage causing the organs to leak large amounts of protein]. I want to see if I can devise another innovation to prevent these disorders. And being a silver myself, I also want to know if platelets play a role in ageing," he says, his eyes sparkling as he sets off on another voyage of discovery.



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# Ram Snehi 80

His name stirs either fear or anger amid flesh traders, mafia and corrupt officials, or love and gratitude among the thousands he has rescued from the evil of prostitution in the Chambal district of Madhya Pradesh. Righteous, strong-willed, fearless and selfless, this tireless vigilante soldiers on

◆ 📷 Utkarsh Sanjanwala

The frail old woman comes running across the courtyard of the dilapidated dwelling and begins to sob. “I am suffering, *netaji*. You are our only hope. There is no money, only news of pension, and my health is getting worse!” She prostrates and laments at his feet. He comforts her, reassuring her that things will be better. The man in the frame is octogenarian Ram Snehi—a tireless vigilante who has rescued women and young girls from the evil of prostitution in Madhya Pradesh’s Chambal district since 1952.

He was born in 1933 to a farmer of the Bedia community in the notorious Chambal district, famous for dacoits, prostitution and drug trafficking. In fact, prostitution has been the Bedias’ traditional occupation. From catering to the *zamindar* in olden days to truck drivers today, the women have been the breadwinners while the men, beset by alcoholism, their pimps. Snehi’s first real experience and understanding of the problem came when he visited his aunt, a prostitute, in Meerut, in 1953. The degradation he witnessed among the women moved him so much that he vowed to devote his life to abolish flesh trade from within his community.

So acute was the problem, that till 1958, no Bedia had married, as it was strictly forbidden within the community, and girls were ceremoniously initiated into prostitution as soon as they hit puberty. Those who refused were forced into it and often the streets echoed with the screams of young girls as they were beaten up for not earning their quota for the day or refusing to solicit clients. A Bedia soliciting truck drivers on the highway earns anywhere between Rs 15 and Rs 50 from every customer, while those whose relatives are more ambitious are sent to cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi; they even end up in the Gulf or other parts of the

world. “All these women are my mothers, daughters and sisters. How could I just watch all this and do nothing?”

Sitting in a *dhoti* and vest, the lean and scrawny Ram Snehi would have been easily mistaken for yet another villager, save for the demeanour of the people towards him, and the pistol dangling by his side. Glazed, beady eyes beam through his shrunken face, lined with countless wrinkles, which narrates the story of a man who has seen much in one lifetime. Snehi has worked tirelessly with the police and other agencies since 1953, often risking his life by helping young women secretly escape from brothels. Over the past 58 years, he has singlehandedly moved the local administration to rid the region of open prostitution.

“We need to  
stand up and be  
counted”

Brothels once flourished in the streets of Morena, Meerut, Gwalior and other parts of the region under the protection of the local police and administration. The state never really enforced the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA) (1956) until 1991. When moved by a PIL filed by Snehi, the Gwa-

lior bench of the Jabalpur High Court put pressure on the government to crack down on ‘red-light’ districts in the state. In the process, Snehi realised that to make any real impact, he not only needed to fight evil but assure the next generation of a better future.

In 1992, with modest grants from the government and some well-wishers, he started the Abhyudaya Ashram and, later that year, the Vimukt Jati Abhyud Sangh. Tended to by 32 teachers, cooks, clerks and guards—led by warden Aruna Chari—young girls and boys of the affected families of the Bedia community are given food, shelter and a decent education along with much needed love, care and





hope of a better life. "It has been an honour and pleasure working with a *Mahatma* like him," says Chari. "He inspires all of us. He must surely be counted among greats like Medha Patkar, Anna Hazare and Ambedkar."

Snehi's success in getting Morena district declared a sensitive area under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act for prevention of prostitution among Bedias has resulted in his excommunication from his community. Undaunted, and ruing the state government's failure to implement the scheme (also called Jabali Yojana), he has now drawn up a revised Jabali Scheme that calls for a 100-seat ashram for community children in every district of the state, facilities of higher education and training at division level, and other rehabilitation measures.

"My efforts have paid off. Initially, my community ostracised me, calling me a traitor, but now people have come to realise that all they can get in this trade is misery, suffering and deadly diseases like AIDS," says the dynamic silver, who wakes up at 3.30 am every morning to do yoga and *pranayama*. "You are only old if you think you are!" insists the 80 year-old bachelor. Even at this age, he quickly climbs up and flits down the stairs, putting city dwellers to shame. Marshalling the staff at his ashram to take care of a newly arrived guest, his voice resonates with the confidence of a man who has spat in the face of death and danger time and again. A few minutes in conversation with him, one sees another aspect of his personality: his compassion. He dotes over the rescued children at the ashram as if they were his own, and their love for him is clearly reflected in the way they shower him with affection.

At the ashram, a perimeter of small classrooms encloses a large rectangular courtyard. The teacher often stands or sits on the only chair, as children sit on thin *chatai* laid out on the floor. With or without a blackboard, notebook or text book, lessons con-



**"My girls are like tigresses who will tear apart the enemy if and when the need arises," says Snehi, who has enrolled almost all his wards in karate classes**

tinue. The 215 children, ranging from the age of three to 20, learn karate, music, drama and yoga, along with regular subjects like math, science, English, Hindi and history. Sanskrit is also taught with special emphasis on morals and etiquette. Kindergarten students study on the roof, under a cement sheet propped up by simple brick and mortar. Grade X is the only classroom with desks for children, but this too is very dimly lit.

Classrooms double up as sleeping area for girls after school, while the boys sleep in a shed in the courtyard. The state government provided Snehi

with an old abandoned school around which he has slowly built the institute. "I want to make a housing structure for the boys too, but unfortunately this year's grant is stuck in red tape." The state has sanctioned Rs 3.1 million annually under the Jabali Scheme to be given in four parts. Eight months have passed this year, and only an incomplete second instalment has been sanctioned, with a promise to provide the first by the end of the year. In the meantime, Snehi runs the ashram on loans for which he pays interest. "It is difficult to house, feed, clothe and educate all the children at Rs 250 per month a child." Despite these difficul-



“These women are my daughters, sisters and mothers. How could I watch and do nothing?”



Despite difficulties, Snehi never turns away a new enrolment. "At least, they have a chance for a future here," he says

ties, Snehi never turns away a new enrolment. "Here, at least they have the chance for a future."

Over the years, the ashram has nurtured half-a-dozen civil servants, three police officers, and 194 state-level and 37 national-level sports-women. Many others have chosen to stay back and work with *netaji*, or join NGOs combating prostitution, and AIDS, while some head to cities in hope for a better life. "Sports, especially karate, instil a sense of confidence and will power, which is crucial for children as they grow up," he says. "My girls are like tigresses who will tear apart the enemy if and when the need arises. In this notorious region, it's much needed." Each month, a picnic or field visit is also arranged where he personally ensures that children don't miss the simple pleasures of life. "He loves these children as his own," says Umeed Singh, chairman of Abhyudaya Ashram. "He has no money or possessions. Everything that comes to him belongs to the ashram."

At the Abhyudaya Ashram, special emphasis is given to character building, ethics and etiquette. Though the school offers education till Grade X, the trust often helps girls up to their post-graduation. "I particularly encourage the children to join the police or bureaucracy," says Snehi. "If the baton is handed over to youngsters, corruption is bound to go down and crackdowns on the flesh trade will become more potent."

"I came to the ashram five years ago—mother had left us and father remarried," says Shubham, a 15 year-old with nervous fingers and eyes. "I don't like my home, especially because father used to get drunk and beat me. *Netaji* loves us all. Sometimes he scolds us, but we know it is for our own good." To this Shubham's 16 year-old friend Shivam adds, "The school, food, hostel and other facilities are much better than even some private schools around. We have an English teacher, we learn computers, and get to play games and sports."

The sense of contentment evident at the ashram has not been achieved without struggle. Disgruntled pimps and relatives have often tried to target Snehi, but he has always stood his ground and emerged victorious. On one such occasion in 2009, when Neha Charri, a girl who managed to escape her family as they tried to smuggle her to Kolkata, took refuge at the ashram, her family tried to kidnap her, fully armed with mafia in tow. News of their plan quickly reached Snehi through his network, and he immediately locked the ashram. About 50 young boys and the male staff climbed the roof with bricks and stones, as Snehi stood at the gate, brandishing his Belgian pistol. He fired a round in the air, and threatened to do much more as the 20-strong mob armed with rifles, desi pistols and *laathi* stood before him. The Mexican standoff continued until news of the police arrival reached the area and the mob fled. "The state allotted me a weapon only in 1987. Before that I used to carry a bicycle chain with me.



**Earlier Snehi used to carry a bicycle chain to protect himself from assaults; now he is armed with a licensed Belgian pistol**

is as criminal as rape! The system is stupid. The women go to jail, and the men go free. They are more responsible for this situation than women, who are often forced into the trade owing to circumstances. Why else would someone abandon self-respect for Rs 15? Last, young Bedias must be encouraged to marry. I have sponsored 57 marriages and even given the ashram for those who can't afford a venue. The community has been in the flesh trade for over four centuries because of poverty and lack of education. This was the only way they knew how to survive. If we educate them and provide opportunities, the problem could disappear. People need to stand up and be counted. Turning a blind eye or simply blaming a broken system is not enough!"

For his part, Ram Snehi tries to get inside the system and change it. Over the years, he has developed a vast network of intelligence and continues to tip the police off on the trade. "Ram Snehi has done a lot for the region and continues to give us information and tips on the trafficking of girls and continually helps us make arrests," says Kamal Mourya, chief superintendent of police, Morena. "It is commendable what he has done for his community." Snehi is also urging the state to provide pension or livelihood to former sex workers.

Like a lotus that pushes through the muck to enchant the garden with its beauty, Snehi has used all means—legal, illegal, conventional and unconventional—to push through the corrupt system and change the face of a depraved and impoverished community. "Though the evil has been vanquished in the form of openly run brothels, it still continues in the form of human trafficking. My aim is to rid our society of this ghastly crime against women, and I will fight it till my very last breath."

I have had my share of beatings, but as you can see it has all been worth it. One cannot always rationalise with criminals," says Snehi, adding, "Not in the Chambal district!"

Even today, his work continues zealously outside the walls of the ashram. On a field visit to Amba, 34 km from Morena, he stops by an old skinny woman, squatting at the door by the side of the alley. She asks him "Have you come to raid?" He replies, "No, just here to check on you." The sick woman adds, "What's there to check on? We're just sitting here, waiting to die!" He points to another 57 year-old

former prostitute, struggling to feed her family. "The rehabilitation of sex workers and the development of the community need to go beyond flimsy promises on paper. These must be executed with the understanding of ground realities. We will keep going to Bhopal and sit on their heads till the day it happens."

Indeed, Snehi believes a lot more needs to be done. "First, these women need to be looked upon as victims, not criminals," he says emphatically. "Second, harsher punishment must be given to those who procure their services and all others involved. It





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# Sudarshan Mitter 75

Over 20 years, this Faridabad-based silver has given 2,000 poor children the gift of education, enabling them to craft new tomorrows. And bolstered by an extensive network of well-wishers who have joined cause with her, her quiet revolution has gone on to encompass destitute women, offering them hope

❖ Arati Rajan Menon   ❖ Mihir Singh

In the very best of times, the journey from Delhi to Faridabad during the evening rush hour is no cakewalk; today, it's a nightmare. Construction everywhere, part of the capital's grand endeavour to ready itself for the Commonwealth Games; a persistent monsoon shower that has overstayed its welcome and left the day charcoal-grey; and a highway that's clogged with vehicles and people who inch forward three steps only to be forced back two. We leave the chaos behind and enter Sector 17 where we are confronted by a maze of roads and signs that offer little clarity. Help comes cruising in, though, behind the wheel of a Maruti in the form of the dapper Santosh Kushwaha, a 21 year-old with a wide, easy smile. We follow him to our destination: House No. 885, the modest suburban home of Sudarshan Mitter. When we thank him for guiding the way, he points to the door and says, almost nonchalantly, "Thank her. If she hadn't taken me off the streets five years ago, I would be snatching your chain right now."

There could be no more powerful testimony to the transformative power of Mitter's ideas. A homeopathic doctor who would give free medicines and run charitable dispensaries wherever her husband was posted, the silver has gone on to give over 2,000 poor children in her neighbourhood the gift of education over a 20-year span, enabling them to overcome poverty with access to the school system and vocational education, arming them with the skills necessary to survive in the job market. "When we moved to Faridabad after my husband's retirement in 1988, the area was just developing; there were construction workers everywhere," recalls the elegant 75 year-old, who owns the

room as soon she enters it with the sheer force of her personality. "While the men and women were toiling for their living, their children would be loitering about, breaking lampposts. Their energies needed to be tapped constructively." And so began a quiet revolution by a determined woman, to teach the children of labourers, rickshaw pullers, mechanics, domestic help, sweepers and rag-pickers in a park near her home. Her only condition: the parents of the child should be teetotallers and not engage in any kind

## "My caravan of children rolls on"

of domestic abuse. "So many children join, some leave, many carry on till they finish school," she says. "With God's grace, this caravan of children is rolling on till today."

While moulding young destinies is her life's work, Mitter has found another calling: the welfare and rehabilitation of destitute women. About 20 of these women are gathered in Mitter's driveway today; they have just received their monthly rations (oil, rice, *dal*, *atta*, pickle) and have waited in the drizzle to meet us. "There are so many widows with small children who have no jobs," says Mitter. "And then there are old women who have been thrown out of their homes by their children as they can't contribute to the running of the house. The rations enable them to become more self-sufficient. In fact, many of them are accepted back into their homes as they are not considered a burden anymore."

Each woman here, young and old, has a poignant story to tell. Gianvati, abandoned by her husband after her legs were mutilated in an accident. Parvati, mother of five daughters, thrashed and left to die when her husband feared she would give him another—she went on to give birth to a





# “Everyone is not cut out for higher education. But they can still make a good life for themselves”

son, alone. Kalavati, Rukmani, Ramdevi...all clawing their way back to life with the help of ‘*Badi Auntie*’, as they call Mitter. Apart from rations, she offers them medical help, education for their children and, most important, hope for a better tomorrow.

This hope is infectious, as we find when we move on to the Sector 17 Park, Mitter’s ‘coaching centre’ where evening classes are underway. The large ground is a riot of colour, dotted with groups of children, classified according to their age, each group with a teacher—some sitting in a circle; others walking in tandem; still others sprawled across a bench. “I started with 15 children, all alone,” she says, looking around her with undisguised pride. “Now, we have about 160 children and 12 teachers; three paid and nine volunteers.” The weather has kept some of the children away but the ones who are here crowd around Mitter, eager to get their picture taken with her for the *Harmony* shoot.

The teachers, many of whom are silvers, watch with indulgent smiles. Among them is 87 year-old K K Bagga, who teaches math and Sanskrit. “I think I’ve been teaching here for six to seven years; I can’t remember myself!” the former mechanical engineer says with a chuckle. “It keeps me busy and active.” His fellow volunteer 79 year-old Satish Kaura, who teaches math, English, science and commerce, has been coming here for 10 years. “It is the most challenging as well as satisfying thing I’ve ever done.” The same sentiments are echoed by others: 59 year-old Jayashree, who started coming here three months ago after she retired as the vice-principal of a school; 51 year-old Kiran Sharma, who has been here four years, since she moved to Faridabad, teaching “assorted subjects as well as music”; and

26 year-old Ruby, who began to volunteer here six years ago and calls it “a wonderful part of my life”. All of them joined Mitter’s caravan after hearing about it from common friends.

These efforts in the park have empowered the children to stake their claim on the world outside. Public schools in Faridabad like DAV Public School—it has two branches—and Dayanand Public School have given admission to worthy students and teachers at coaching centres volunteer their time to give them a helping hand. “I put my children in public schools so they can learn English,” she says. “Even if they drop out after Class VI, they will still be able to survive in today’s world.”

However, as Hema Choudhury, headmistress of the primary wing of DAV Public School, tells us, once they are in school, very few of the children drop out unless the family decides to relocate to the village. “For the past five to six years, we have lots of children coming to us from Mrs Mitter,” she tells us. “Rather than look at their age, we admit them to the appropriate class based on their abilities and then they flourish. It’s a wonderful project and we will continue to support her endeavours.” In fact, her husband Surinder Choudhury is the principal of the senior school; Mitter calls them “pillars of support”. “For instance, I have 60 students right now studying in one of the branches of DAV and the school charges them less than a month’s fees for the whole year.” When they return to the park in the evenings, the children get help with revision and homework, something their own parents can’t give them. As a result, many go on to finish school and do their graduation. “It changes their lives—one of my students, whose parents are living on the streets, is now studying physics

honours in the prestigious Hansraj College in Delhi University.”

Her intervention has certainly changed the life of 27 year-old Mohinder Singh, a son of labourers, who first went to the park when he was in Grade VI—he was already enrolled in Waso Public School in Faridabad but was struggling with his studies. “My whole attitude to life changed in the two years I spent at *Badi Auntie*’s classes,” he says, a catch in his voice. “She sparked my interest in education. And by the time I finished Grade VIII, I was able to study independently.” He left the park but Mitter’s counsel remains his beacon. Singh, who went on to graduate in mechanical engineering and complete his MTech, is now a lecturer at GB Pant College. “Whatever I have achieved, I owe to her,” he says. “She provided me the first building block of life.” Mohit Keshyap couldn’t agree more. Mitter’s efforts helped him secure admission in the 9th grade at Dayanand Public School; now, the 20 year-old has finished his BCA and is gearing up for MCA. And he remains on call whenever she needs any help. “No one else has given me the mental encouragement that she has,” he says with disarming candour. “She is my guide.”

What makes Mitter an outstanding guide is her realism. “Everyone is not cut out for higher education,” she says. “But they can still make a good life for themselves.” She studies the children carefully to determine their latent skills and encourages them to seek vocational training. There can be no better example than our guide Santosh, who was a rag-picker earlier. “I didn’t want to study but I wanted to learn,” he says. “I can now do TV repair, mobile repair, electrical work, plumbing and driving. It’s enough to support my family.” As far as possible,





**Mitter with three of her success stories (from left, Mohit Keshyap, Santosh Kushwaha and Mohinder Singh); (below) offering monthly rations of pulses, grains and oil to women**



This network has enabled her to sustain her initiatives financially over the past two decades. In February 2006, Mitter set up the Vishwa Darshan Charitable Trust, named after her husband who passed away later the same year, a man who gave her “unconditional support”. Funds come in not just from philanthropists and friends but her former students who have now started earning. “Initially, I would pay from my pocket,” she says. “Gradually, people began to come forward to help.” While schools offer her students subsidised fees, the Trust pays the balance when needed. However, she insists that students chip in half the fees for vocational training programmes to ensure their commitment; once they are in, they stay in.

“I have known her for years and her courage of conviction has grown only stronger,” affirms Rajni Sood who helps coordinate her activities. “She is able to stretch every rupee to the maximum to help as many people as she can.” This extends to the intangibles: pickles for slum dwellers made from lemon peels collected from neighbours; home-made sherbet in empty squash bottles collected from friends and given to the poor; and warm clothes to the neighbourhood watchmen in winters and hot morning tea all year around—“because they also serve, who only stand and wait,” she quotes Milton.

Indeed, Mitter’s faith in humanity is high. “It’s funny,” she says, “the more needy people come to us, the more donors seem to come forward. I think it is part of our culture to give and share.” True to her words, when we leave her, she gives us a packet of her homemade pickle. It’s delicious—a lingering taste of the possibilities that life offers us all.

she helps her wards get jobs once they complete their training. As she tells us, “a couple of students who had an aptitude for music have even gone on to become music teachers.” Six months ago, Mitter enrolled 12 of her children at Creative Steps, an academy for drawing and dance in Faridabad in the hope that they eventually go on to become art teachers. Pinky Gandotra, who founded the academy 20 years ago and has about 200 students rang-

ing from the ages of two-and-a-half to 17, was happy to take them on free of charge, despite initial apprehension from some parents. “I told them that they could withdraw their children if they were not happy,” she says. “Today, the children have become an integral part of the class and are doing wonderful work. I applaud Mrs Mitter for all that she has done. She is so down-to-earth despite her extensive network of donors and well-wishers.”

# Bharat Singh Sisodia 66

After reforming the dangerous Khanjar tribe in Banswara, Rajasthan, and rehabilitating hundreds of opium addicts, this former police officer continues to sow the seeds of social reform, this time as a messiah of health for the poor

❖ Dhanya Nair Sankar 📷 Pankaj Sahu

In 1984, a major communal riot broke out at Banswara, a village in southern Rajasthan on the Madhya Pradesh border. Inhabited mainly by tribes like the Bhils, Meenas, Damor and Charpotas, it is also home to Patels, Rajputs, Brahmins, Mahajans and Muslims. While Hindus and Muslims picketed each other, whipping up fear and ferment, one man faced much of the brunt of the irrational hatred: sub-inspector Bharat Singh Sisodia. Refusing to be partial, he began to lock up anyone who was lawless, earning the wrath of both sides to the extent that the slogan, “Bharat Singh *ko bhagao*, Banswara *bachao*”, became the village catchphrase.

Today, over 25 years later, the same man is lauded as a messiah who has brought quality healthcare and medicines to hundreds. In 2002, he set up the Vagad Sena Sansthan trust, which supplies subsidised medicines by passing on the commission paid by drug companies; provides free medicines and emergency health services to families who live below the poverty line; runs a de-addiction centre; gives accommodation to hearing and speech-impaired students studying in the civic school; and offers boarding facilities to families who come to the hospital here. Probably the most impressive feat considering the area’s history is that the Trust has 175 trustees and 700 members from different castes and religions.

Sisodia has never shied away from a challenge ever since he began his career in Rajasthan Police as a deputy sub-inspector in 1968. During this period, Banswara district lived in fear of a gypsy tribe, the barbaric Khanjars, who would loot, maim and murder villagers and travellers in broad daylight. While the modus operandi of the police was to rough up and thrash suspects, Sisodia was thinking long-term—he wanted to reform the tribe. “The Khanjar tribe living in Magadha village is one of the poorest in India,” he explains. “What’s worse they were treated like criminals even some hundred years ago by the rulers here; although their crimes were not justified, their anger was somewhat understandable.”

“Education and employment are twin weapons to fight rural poverty”

A constable helped him learn more about the tribe. “He was completely well-versed with their living and modus operandi,” Sisodia recalls. “I learnt that these tribes didn’t believe in anyone, especially the police. I also realised that the youngsters went astray early on.” He paints a picture where the

tribals—young and old—led a life of utter debauchery; children would often amuse themselves by stoning peacocks.

“Small things if unchecked ultimately snowball into something serious,” he says sagely. So he started visiting the village regularly and tried to create a rapport with the tribe. “I learnt that consumption of illicit liquor was rampant.







Poor villagers and families of patients queue up for free lunch at the *dharamshala* in Banswara; (opposite) with recovered addicts

So I ordered a complete shutdown of illicit liquor shops in the area.” Eventually, there was just one government-owned store left, which was selling a bottle for Rs 8 against the marked price of Rs 50. “Naturally, the tribals would make a beeline for this shop.” So Sisodia tried another tactic—he convinced the shopkeeper to escalate his prices by telling him he was incurring losses by selling so cheaply. It worked. “Within months, the consumption of liquor was reduced by half.” Then, armed with a firm conviction that “education and employment are twin weapons in the fight against rural poverty”, he began to counsel the tribals to send their children to school and secure small construction and masonry jobs for families who were showing signs of reform. Initially, the other villagers were sceptical; some even accused him of siding with the tribals. But when they realised that the incidences of crime had reduced, they became convinced and even helped Sisodia secure jobs for them. Gradually, over a decade, the crime rate in

the area dwindled almost completely. And to keep it that way, Sisodia employed some of his most trusted team members as plain-clothed vigilantes in the area. Many years later, in January 1997, he received the President’s Award for this feat, as his work spanning the years had successfully brought down robbery, dacoity and theft in this once crime-infested region. “Even as a deputy sub-inspector, he was quite effective in enforcing law and order,” remembers Kapil Garg, additional director general, terrorism and Special Forces (Rajasthan), who was Sisodia’s senior then. “He doesn’t believe in simply locking up people but giving them a chance to reform. At the same time, he was very tough with hardened criminals. The best thing about him is that he never stops believing in people.”

It’s probably because this simple man, an epitome of frugality, understands his people and the poverty that plagues them. Born and brought up in the nearby Dungarpur village,

Sisodia is the third-generation police officer in his family after his father and grandfather. “He is completely in touch with the ground realities and problems of villagers,” says Brigadier (ret’d) Vijay Saxena, a friend of Sisodia from their college days. “Having travelled and lived across Rajasthan, that is no wonder. But what is most surprising is his unwavering compassion for the downtrodden and the underdog. His conviction is unshakable; once he decides to do something, he will do it. No man, beast or God can prevent him from doing what he thinks is right,” says Saxena.

Every hero needs a cause—Sisodia’s next major mission was to crack the rampant opium trade that plagued the Udaipur-Banswara belt. (Banswara is 160 km from Udaipur.) This belt is a key link on the opium route to Burma, Afghanistan and Nepal. In 1998, Sisodia was posted to Udaipur as the additional superintendent of police. “We arrested several addicts and coaxed them to become





## “I have been criticised and catapulted to the highest level. I don’t let either go to my heart”

informers,” he recalls. “Those who traded the drug were shown no mercy and were arrested immediately.” And while the trade itself was being contained, dealing with the widespread addiction posed another problem. “Daylight robbery, human trafficking and prostitution were rampant. Imagine committing the worst possible crimes and not feeling a thing because you were high,” he adds, his voice heavy with emotion. “I remember the case of a young girl from one of the best families of Udaipur who went missing; she was found a week later married to an auto driver, who was also an opium trader. An addict herself, she had no idea what was happening with her.” Disturbed by this incident, Sisodia began police awareness camps in Udaipur in 1999.

But even before his efforts could take off fully, he was once again transferred

to Banswara as the additional superintendent of police in 2000. To his chagrin, he found the situation was no different there. “In villages, opium was used for every celebration, even religious ceremonies,” says Sisodia. “I learnt much to my surprise that consuming opium had been a sort of tradition in this area. Only it was done discreetly earlier. Villagers were ready to kill, sell their women or steal to get their high.”

Sisodia travelled through 115 villages in the district in a span of 12 months and counselled addicts personally. Every evening after work, he would visit families to speak about the ill effects of opium. “He would make sure we were completely cut off from getting opium,” says Tharjeng Patel from Oda village, who is now a worker in Sisodia’s trust like many recovered addicts. Patel was among the

first people to be counselled by him. “We were made to take oaths on our family members’ lives promising we would never touch the drug no matter how disturbing the withdrawal symptoms.” The God-fearing villagers were also required to take a pledge before the local deity in the hope that this would further strengthen their resolve. From these villages, a motley group of 16 villagers and recovering addicts came forward to support his de-addiction campaign. Encouraged, Sisodia decided to start a full-fledged camp for de-addiction.

First, he needed a building to start this camp. He found it in a *dharamshala* inside the periphery of Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital in Banswara that lay in ruins. With Rs 50,000 donated by a businessman in Udaipur and the support of then collector Rajeev Thakur, Sisodia

**The hospital where Sisodia set up a medical shop, Lifeline, that offers free medicines to tribals**

got the Public Works Department of the Rajasthan government to spruce up the premises, which was given the moniker, 'the Centre'. By 2002, he formed a private trust, Vagad Sena Sansthan, to help villagers overcome their addiction.

By way of Sisodia's travels through the villages, he had also learnt how difficult it was to get access to medicines, so he decided to set up a medical shop at the centre, aptly named Lifeline, and help the poor pay for emergency operations. "We get free medicines here, which is a big boon for us," says 48 year-old Kamsa Amarji from Ghatoi village. She comes to the Mahatma Gandhi Government Hospital almost twice a month as her father-in-law is battling heart disease. "The biggest achievement for the Trust is they have reduced the price of medicines by almost 80 per cent," says additional district magistrate, B L Swarankar. "And for the poorest of poor, they are entirely free. As most patients coming here are tribals, they also get access to quality healthcare. Even government-funded medical shops haven't been able to achieve the same results." The Centre's role evolved further when Sisodia realised it could also be used as a boarding house for the families of patients admitted in the hospital. While the rooms are free for families below the poverty line, a nominal Rs 50 per day is charged to those who can afford it.

In 2003, Sisodia retired and moved to Udaipur, where he was keen to continue the work he had begun in Banswara. In 2006, the Trust took over the *dharamshala* in Maharana Bhhupal Hospital, Udaipur, furnishing it and providing bedding and a kitchen for fresh cooked food for families of patients, apart from starting a de-addiction centre. Today, the trust runs five *dharamshala* around the hospital—in all the Trust's total annual spend adds



up to Rs 700,000. "The funds are donated by trustees and their families," says Rahul Saraf, one of the trustees. "Each trustee can donate up to Rs 3,000 a month under his name."

In Udaipur, meals are free, while the rooms, equipped with bed, television and newspapers, are priced at Rs 50. (The poor are not charged.) For Anita Sahu from Madhya Pradesh, the Seth Rameshwarlala Saharia *dharamshala* is like a second home. "My father is admitted in the civic hospital and I have no relatives here, nor can I afford to stay in a hotel," she says. "Here, all the facilities you find at home are available." In 2008, the Trust took over a *dharamshala* at the Harideo Joshi Government Hospital in Sisodia's native Dungarpur, which also provides free rations to boarders.

Sisodia juggles his time between Udaipur, Banswara and Dungarpur, visiting the latter two at least once a month. Despite there being 100 people to support him, he is still considered a one-man army. "He comes by 9 am and spends almost 12 hours

here," says Deep Lal Sen, nursing superintendent at the Panna Tai Mahila Chikitsalaya, who juggles his time between the hospital and the five *dharamshala* in Udaipur. "It is very inspiring to see him engage with people and patients."

His family—wife, two married sons, two daughters and three grandchildren—are also inspired by Sisodia and proud of him although they hardly get to spend much time with him. "Many friends have told me to leave him and at times I have seriously considered the suggestion," says his wife Sushila Kumwar in jest. "But if a man has so much of passion for society, he certainly has a lot of it for his family!" For his part, Sisodia says, "My family has never complained despite my long absences. And their appreciation only motivates me." And so his work continues and the accolades pour in. But our crusader's feet remain firmly on the ground. "I have been both criticised mercilessly and catapulted to the highest level," he says. "I don't let either go to my heart. I just want to do some good work."



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Dr Anjali

# Mukerjee

## Pressure off: A diet to combat hypertension

**I am 53 and have recently attained menopause. I am experiencing signs of hypertension and have been advised to reduce my salt consumption. Can you suggest a diet to help me deal with hypertension?**

After menopause, many hormonal and biochemical changes take place in the body, causing increased sensitivity to salt and weight gain. The added kilos and increased body mass index (BMI) raise the risk of heart diseases. Maintaining a normal weight and following a healthy eating pattern can help ward off high blood pressure. As the first step, stop whipping your body with stimulants like coffee, tobacco and alcohol. Along with managing stress and losing weight, you need to follow dietary corrections comprising foods that help keep your blood pressure in check. Let's take a look.

**Eat more fruits and vegetables:** Fruits are concentrated with potassium, Vitamin C and soluble fibre, all of which lower blood pressure.

**Garlic:** It is a known vasodilator that dilates blood vessels and lowers blood pressure. It contains adenosine, a compound that promotes vasodilatation and is also a muscle relaxant. Both raw and cooked garlic benefit blood pressure. But raw garlic is more potent and hence proves to be more beneficial.

**Wheatgrass juice:** This proves to be an elixir for those suffering from hypertension, as it is a rich source of magnesium and potassium. Once you start getting enough magnesium and potassium, you can actually cut down on the dosage of your medicine. In addition, wheatgrass juice will cleanse and nourish your body, and work wonders on your immune system.

**Celery:** This vegetable is widely used in Chinese medicine to lower blood pressure when used continuously for a couple of months. It is said that consuming at least four stalks of celery for about four months helps high blood pressure.

**Fish:** Fish oils are known to keep a lid on blood pressure thanks to the Omega-3 fats they contain. If you are taking



medication to lower blood pressure, consuming fish like mackerel (*bangda*), tuna and *surmai* at least thrice a week will help you reduce drug dosage.

**Avoid sugar:** Sugar raises insulin levels, and high blood levels of insulin often accompany high blood pressure.

**Stop smoking:** Tobacco directly affects blood pressure. It increases clot formation and the risk of precipitating a heart attack or stroke.

**Potassium:** Introduce potassium in your diet and watch your blood pressure come down. A lack of it can lead to increased sodium retention, calcium loss and raised blood pressure. Potassium helps normalise blood pressure by relaxing blood vessels and helping the body to get rid of excess water and salt.

Fruits such as banana, papaya, watermelon, muskmelon and peaches are good sources of potassium. Potatoes, tomatoes, oranges, spinach, skimmed milk, soybean, almonds, whole grains, pulses and freshly prepared vegetable juices are also excellent sources. **Caution:** Patients suffering from hypertension along with poor kidneys need to control their potassium intake as per their physician's advice.



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## Losing weight, consuming specific vitamins and minerals and proper stress management help combat hypertension

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**Calcium:** Experts believe hypertension is more likely owing to a deficiency of calcium rather than excessive sodium. Consuming adequate amounts of calcium-rich foods like milk, curd, spinach, leafy vegetables, whole *kabuli channa*, *methi*, *jowar*, *bajra* and *nachni* can neutralise the hypertensive effect of eating more sodium.

**Magnesium:** Magnesium deficiency is yet another cause of high blood pressure. Most people need a daily dosage of about 300-400 mg to keep their blood pressure in check. Natural sources of magnesium include nuts, whole grains, wheat bran, and leafy vegetables.

**Walking** is the ideal exercise for hypertensive people. Lose weight if you are overweight as weight loss has an almost immediate effect on controlling blood pressure.

**Eat less salt:** You don't have to embark on a no-salt diet. Sodium restriction may help only if you are salt-sensitive. Adding minerals like magnesium, calcium and potassium, and losing weight will make a substantial difference. There are plenty of ways to adhere to a low sodium diet without sacrificing flavour. Replace salt with a blend of herbs and spices. Spices such as fennel, oregano, black pepper, basil and tarragon have active ingredients beneficial for high blood pressure. A few tips for reducing salt intake:

- Use low sodium salt substitutes.
- Add flavour through herbs and spices.
- Add salt at the end of the cooking.

While some people may require medication to keep their blood pressure under control, most can lower it through changes in diet and lifestyle. Losing weight, consuming specific vitamins and minerals and proper stress management help combat hypertension. Any drug that you take has a direct bearing on your state of health. So why not reduce your need for drugs by making wise food and lifestyle changes?

---

*Dr Anjali Mukerjee is a nutritionist and founder of Health Total, which has 15 centres in Mumbai to treat obesity and other health related disorders. Visit [www.health-total.com](http://www.health-total.com)*



*If you have a question for Dr Mukerjee write to [contact.mag@harmonyindia.org](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org)*

promotion

## Bridging the gap



Dr Mandar Gadkari  
Practising General Dentistry  
with special attention to Implant  
& Cosmetic Dentistry.

**Q1. I have a few missing teeth and I have been advised replacement of these teeth by dental implants. Are implants a good option?**

A dental implant is a substitute tooth root made of titanium that serves the same function as a natural tooth root. Dental implants can be used to replace single missing tooth, multiple and even all missing teeth. Implants have the best long-term success than any other method of tooth replacement because it preserves the bone and provides a stable foundation for a replacement tooth that looks, feels and functions like a natural tooth.

Such implants prevent bone resorption that occurs when teeth are missing. Besides, the natural beauty of the smile is preserved with implants and adjacent teeth are not compromised as complete support is drawn from the bone.

**Q2. I have been advised a CT-Scan in order to plan my implant surgery. Is it really necessary?**

Digitisation is a key driver in implant dentistry. With it, treatment can be planned prior to implant surgery. The Nobel Guide is a complete software for Dental Implant Treatment, using which we can digitally integrate future replacement teeth together with a full view of a patient anatomy via a CT Scan. With the Nobel Guide, we can also examine surrounding bone quality and quantity, thus determining the proper location for implants. This makes planning and placing of implants simple, safe, efficient and predictable, and allows us to fulfill the bio-mechanical, functional and aesthetic needs of our patients. The customised surgical guide can be ordered online.

The surgical guide includes all planning information and allows clinicians to prepare implant sites and gently place implants as planned. The Nobel Guide provides us an option for safe, minimally invasive surgery.

**Q3. What are the overall benefits of computerising the implant procedure?**

By computerising every step of the planning process, the Nobel Guide offers significant benefits to us and our patient. Dentists can inform their patients about all the details of the treatment, including the procedures, time, exact treatment costs and outcome goals.

With Nobel Guide as an option, we can achieve minimally invasive surgery, resulting in less swelling and shorter recovery times for patients, and thereby easily maintain high level of success with the best aesthetic and functional results.



Madhukar

# Talwalkar

**Handy tips:** And some easy-to-do exercises for you

**Often, a beginner loses interest in his/her exercise regime within a month. To prevent such lack of motivation, try and follow these steps:**

If you have been exercising in your basement, join a gym where you can interact with other people and use different equipment.

The key to staying motivated might lie in the kind of music that motivates you. Tune in for best results.

Make sure the clothes you wear are non-restrictive. Appearance is important as well. If you have a great 'new' pair of workout pants, you may be more motivated to go to the gym. If you have been wearing the same T-shirt you have worn for months, it may be time for a little shopping trip.

Focus on your goals. If you have attained them, it's time to set some new ones. Be sure to keep your goals realistic and measurable to prevent discouragement. Once you have an attainable goal, how will you know when you have moved one step closer? If you chart your progress, you will clearly see where you are and where you hope to go.

Everyone's routine is different and tailored to suit their convenience. However, if you remember to incorporate these tips into your plan, you might experience success and be motivated to continue your programme.

Here are some easy exercises that you could follow:

**Bodyweight squats:** Place your feet about shoulder-width apart. With your torso vertical and a slight arch in your lower back, start the movement by bending the knees. Go only as far down as you feel comfortable. If you can go down until your thighs are just parallel, do so. This is the full range goal. Using leg power, push yourself back up to the start point. Use your grip on the bar only for balance

unless you absolutely need to pull yourself up. As you get stronger with squats, don't use the bar. When you can do good, full-range repeats without the bar, you can start using a weight. For this, use two duffel bags (evenly loaded) or two bottles with water (anything that suits you) and hold them at your sides and squat.

**Abdominal crunches:** Lie down flat on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Hold your hands wherever comfortable (on your chest or beside your head—just be sure you don't pull on your head). The typical crunch is taught by instructing you to simply roll your upper torso forward. This is fine to start with. To increase the effectiveness of the crunch movement, push your chest and head up towards the ceiling while pushing your lower back onto the floor. Your anatomy will automatically cause you to follow a crunching pattern. Hold the top of the movement for one second and squeeze hard.

**Dumbbell curls (for biceps):** Stand with your knees slightly bent, arms at your sides, holding your resistance bags or two dumbbells in your hands. The curl movement happens only at the elbow. With your upper arm pinned at your side and bending only at the elbow, lift the weight up to shoulder level. Your palm should be facing forward all the way up and all the way down. Squeeze hard at the top then lower slowly. Repeat with the other arm.

**Bench dips (for triceps):** Sit on the side edge of a flat bench or the front edge of a chair. Place your hands on the edge of the chair right beside your glutes and grip the edge. Your feet should be flat on the floor (about 2 ft in front of your bent knees). Move yourself off the chair so you are now supporting yourself on your hands. Bend your arms, dipping your body down. Go down only as far as you feel comfortable. Push back up and squeeze the triceps. It is important to keep your back close to the edge of the bench as you do this to minimise shoulder stress.

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*Madhukar Talwalkar is chairman of Talwalkar's, one of India's largest chain of fitness centres with 78 branches across major cities. Website: [www.talwalkars.net](http://www.talwalkars.net)*



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Shameem

# Akthar

## Get some 'gum'ption: Yoga can battle weak gums

Weak, bleeding gums are usually symptoms of underlying diseases or organ disorders. Apart from rough or careless brushing, weak gums may be caused by autoimmune diseases like arthritis, diabetes, kidney ailments, a weak liver, circulatory problems and even medication such as birth-control pills, anti-depressants and painkillers. Thus, there is a two-pronged way to approach yogic therapy in gum problems: using practices that work the jaw-line and strengthen gums; and incorporating specific therapy to deal with the main disease that causes it.

A pose that addresses both the issues, for example, would be the cobra or *bhujangasana*. In this pose, the jaw

feels a strengthening, massaging pressure, while the abdominal pressure on the pancreas directly impacts blood sugar levels. Practices like the lion-roaring pose (*simhagarjasa*) actually control some of the embarrassing symptoms of weak gums, like halitosis (bad breath). This pose also acts as therapy in all the major ailments listed above. If your teeth are sensitive and you suffer from gum disease, it is also important to remember that certain practices must be completely avoided, like the yogic breathing practices of hissing breath (*seetkari*) and cooling (*seetali*).

Interestingly, research has proved that stress can cause plaque accumulation

on the teeth. De-stressing would be the ideal way to beat this: using belly breathing, meditation techniques like sleep of yoga (*yoga nidra*) and soothing poses that remove stress from the entire body, like the seated forward bend or *paschimottanasana*. The famous yogic sun bath (done early morning, at sunrise and before the sun peaks at 10 am) is also known to address gum disease by increasing the body's production of natural Vitamin D, known to remove inflammatory conditions. Following a yogic diet with emphasis on fruits like oranges, strawberries and papaya can also boost your Vitamin C levels, the deficiency of which is known to cause gum disease.

### YOGIC MOVES: Animal relaxation pose (*saithalyasana*)

Sit with legs spread out. Fold left leg at knee, placing foot behind. Fold right leg at knee, place right sole against left thigh. Inhale, lifting both hands up. Exhale and gently lower your head to the ground, palms facing down. The forehead should be rested on the ground. (If unable to touch forehead to ground, use a cushion beneath the head on which to rest the forehead.) Continue normal breathing, holding for a few seconds initially, then increasing the time gradually. Then, switch legs to repeat the entire sequence for the other side. Hold the final pose for the equal duration as the first one. **Benefits:** This pose is deeply relaxing and de-stressing. The pressure on the abdomen helps control blood sugar levels; tones important

glands like the liver; and boosts the tone of the digestive gut. This pose promotes absorption of nutrients and improves metabolism.



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 advice given here)

# Trust yourself

Don't set too high a value on what other people think of you, warns **Arthur Schopenhauer**

To set much too high a value on other people's opinion is a common error everywhere. But, whatever its source, it exercises a very immoderate influence on all we do, and is very prejudicial to our happiness. Daily experience shows us, however, that this is just the mistake people persist in making; most men set the utmost value precisely on what other people think, and are more concerned about it than about what goes on in their own consciousness, which is the thing most immediately and directly present to them. They reverse the natural order—regarding the opinions of others as real existence and their own consciousness as something shadowy; making the derivative and secondary into the principal, and considering the picture they present to the world of more importance than their own selves. In all we do, almost the first thing we think about is, what will people say; and nearly half the troubles and bothers of life may be traced to our anxiety on this score. It is solicitude about what others will say that underlies all our vanity and pretension, yes, and all our show and swagger too.

One can see it even in a child; and though it exists at every period of life, it is strongest in age; because, when the capacity for sensual pleasure fails, vanity and pride have only avarice to share their dominion. By way of specially illustrating this perverse and exuberant respect for other people's opinion, let me take a passage from *The Times* of 31 March 1846, giving a detailed account of the execution of one Thomas Wix, an apprentice of one, from motives of vengeance, had



It is solicitude about what others will say that underlies all our vanity and pretension, yes, and our swagger too. Nearly half the troubles of life may be traced to our anxiety on this score

murdered his master. On the morning of the execution, says the report, "The rev. ordinary was early in attendance upon him, but Wix, beyond a quiet demeanour, betrayed no interest in his ministrations, appearing to feel anxious only to acquit himself "bravely" before the spectators of his ignominious end.... In the procession Wix fell into his proper place with alacrity, and, as he entered the Chapel-yard, remarked, sufficiently loud to be heard by several persons near him, 'Now, then, as Dr Dodd said,

I shall soon know the grand secret.' On reaching the scaffold, the miserable wretch mounted the drop without the slightest assistance, and when he got to the centre, he bowed to the spectators twice, a proceeding which called forth a tremendous cheer from the degraded crowd beneath."

This is an admirable example of the way in which a man, with death in the most dreadful form before his very eyes, will care for nothing but the impression he makes upon a crowd of gapers, and the opinion he leaves behind him in their heads.... The anxieties of all of us, our worries, vexations, bothers, troubles, uneasy apprehensions and strenuous efforts are due, in perhaps the large majority of instances, to what other people will say; and we are just as foolish in this respect as those miserable criminals.

Tacitus says, "The lust of fame is the last that a wise man shakes off." The only way of putting an end to this universal folly is to see clearly that it is a folly; and this may be done by recognising the fact that most of the opinions in men's heads are apt to be false, perverse, erroneous and absurd, and so in themselves unworthy of attention; further, that other people's opinions can have very little real and positive influence upon us in most of the circumstances and affairs of life. It is observable that a retired mode of life has an exceedingly beneficial influence on our peace of mind, and this is mainly because we thus escape having to live constantly in the sight of others, and pay everlasting regard to their casual opinions; in a word, we are able to return upon ourselves.

*Extract from The Wisdom of Life by Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was a German philosopher who propagated a pessimistic philosophy that gained a huge following after the failure of the German and Austrian revolutions of 1848*

## EXCERPT

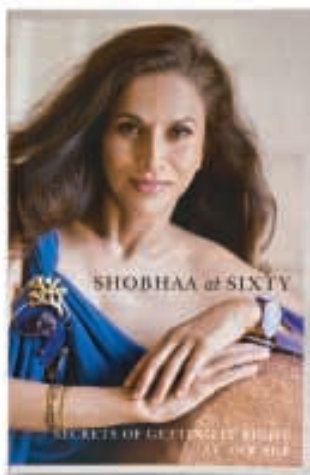
# “Sixty is the new forty”

Though all of us look forward to being active and joyful in our silver years, menopausal blues, arthritic arrest and our body’s sagging angles and curves can take some getting used to. Bestselling author Shobhaa De’s recently released *Shobhaa at Sixty* (Hay House India; Rs 350; 212 pages) shows you how to get on top of the situation. An excerpt...

Most of us by this stage are on some medication or the other and are used to swallowing a fistful of tablets—vitamin supplements, blood pressure pills and so on. Keeping a track of these and consuming them on time is a feat in itself. My solution: get a multi-compartment, clear plastic so you can see the tablets after you separate them. If there is a daily cocktail you have to gulp down at breakfast, keep the lot together in a compartment with a sticker over it that reads ‘BREAKFAST’.... Since I hate dependency on medication, I keep the pills I need to a bare minimum.... On nights when my brain is in overdrive and sleep doesn’t come easily, I don’t fight it or stress over it. I surrender to my sleepless state. I close my eyes in a darkened room and think constructive thoughts. I use the bonus time to plan my morning or mentally tick-off neglected chores. I resist the temptation to switch on the light, get out of bed and wander towards my laptop, or even write. This is really tough since there are times when great ideas are flying out of my head at 3 am. But I know that if I give in to that urge, I’ll be writing till dawn and then my body will face the consequences later! My feet get restless, but I manage to talk them into not moving. I merely make myself as comfortable as possible, fluff up my pillows and recite a mantra or two. Sleep has to follow eventually...and generally does.... Physical and mental fatigue makes my brain go into overdrive instead of tiring it out. Most people have the best sleep when they collapse into bed in an exhausted heap—lucky, lucky them!

So, ladies, admit it. The first time you heard your knees creak while bending to retrieve something it came as a bit of a shock, right? It’s a sure sign that your skeletal system is under pressure and the years are creeping up on you but so what? Face the situation squarely. Nobody escapes

their fate, and you are not an exception. Creaking bones must not be ignored, especially if arthritis or osteoporosis runs in the family. Most women’s diets are short on calcium. I take 1,000 milligrams of it daily and keep my fingers crossed. My own mother suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for nearly 40 years and was in constant pain. By the end of her life, her limbs had become misshapen, her gait had changed and even the smallest movement required tremendous effort on her part. More than anything else, her radiant personality underwent a radical transformation. This used to disturb me more than anything else. She had stopped smiling or enjoying life and her expression altered beyond recognition as her face started reflecting the pain she was suffering. It was a very disturbing phase for the entire family—we felt helpless and frustrated at our own inability to ease the situation. I swore to myself that I would safeguard against such an eventuality by taking whatever precautions were needed. My daily stretches are just one way of retaining spine flexibility. I am told that simple yoga *asana* that stretch the spine are effective in maintaining mobility. I am conscious of my knees becoming stiffer with age and try to keep them active through regular toe-touching (twice a day for 10 minutes each). I also dealt with a frozen shoulder by exercising it thoroughly (simple but regular rotation of the joint helped me a lot) rather than going in for heavy-duty pain killers or physiotherapy at a specialty clinic. To know and understand your body is key. Only then can you address the myriad problems that advancing years bring with them. I try my best to be in complete sync with all my body’s systems. I listen to every sinew and muscle and pretty much know when something is malfunctioning. You too can train yourself to be in tune with your body. Not only will you reduce medical bills considerably, but you’ll also be one step ahead of any ailment.







## YES, PRIME MINISTER

**A JOURNEY**

BY TONY BLAIR

HUTCHINSON; RS 999; 718 PAGES

The longest serving Labour prime minister—and Britain's youngest since 1812—Tony Blair occupied 10 Downing Street from May 1997 to 2007, a turbulent decade during which he mourned the death of 'the people's princess', forged a peace treaty in Northern Ireland and sent troops into battle to Afghanistan and Iraq. Oh, along the way he also managed to have a baby: Leo Blair, born in 2000, his fourth child, was the first born to a serving prime minister in over 150 years. In the foreword to *A Journey*, Blair promises us that the book will be "a frank account" of this very full life. And to some extent he makes good, speaking frankly, if disjointedly, about his efforts to steer 'New Labour' to a more

centrist position; his deteriorating relationship with chancellor Gordon Brown, who succeeded him as prime minister; his buddy Bill Clinton (apparently, it was his "curiosity" about people that prompted his sexual adventures); the peccadilloes of his own colleagues; and the controversies surrounding his strong-willed wife Cherie Booth, whose integrity, according to Blair, is beyond reproach. There is also a torrid love scene where he is an "animal" who "devours her love"; a recollection perhaps best avoided. This candour aside, Blair is remarkably slippery and defensive when it comes to the issues that transformed him in many eyes from saviour to scoundrel, such as relentless spin-doctoring and forcing Britain to be a lapdog to US foreign policy in Iraq. Indeed, it is this bundle of contradictions—the true mark of a career politician—that will draw readers to this book while Blair's cash register rings overtime.

—Arati Rajan Menon

## THE THEATRE OF POLITICS

**KEEPING THE FAITH: MEMOIRS OF A PARLIAMENTARIAN**

BY SOMNATH CHATTERJEE

HARPERCOLLINS; RS 499; 397 PAGES

As memoirs go, former Lok Sabha MP and speaker Somnath Chatterjee's account of his 38 year-long parliamentary career is a perfect example of meticulous bookkeeping. Each leap, jump and fall of politics that happened during his tenure is recorded in precise detail alongside a chronicle of every ministerial misdeed and gross violation of principle and etiquette. ("Out of 1,738 hours and 45 minutes, the fourteenth Lok Sabha wasted 423 hours because of disruptions and adjournments due to disorderly scenes.") Chatterjee says it like it is and therefore the preliminary pages where he talks about his childhood in Bhowanipur and law school in UK, come out a tad drab.

However, the book hastily reaches out for our floundering attention towards the pages coinciding with his entry into Bengal's volatile CPI (M) cadre. Despite the droning tone of the memoir, one admires the octogenarian for his directness. He wastes no effort on making politically correct noises while describing the injustices and constraints helmed by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency; the nepotism of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty; the astounding corruption in the Enron episode; the fracas over the nuclear deal; and the waning idealism in the CPI (M), which ultimately expelled him. Chatterjee does try to make a lazy grab at modesty, but it doesn't come easily with many pages devoted to



the praise heaped on him by the press and his peers. After reading the book, though, we are wont to thank him for suggesting and championing the idea of Lok Sabha TV. In his words: "...this qualifies as the best 'reality show' and beats sitcoms hollow, especially during moments of high drama, of which there are quite a few." Amen.

—Rajashree Balaram

## BRIEFLY

Master of the international thriller, **Daniel Silva** brings enigmatic Israeli art restorer-cum-assassin Gabriel Allon back for his 10th turn in **THE REMBRANDT AFFAIR** (Penguin; Rs 499; 484 pages). Allon is now in retirement, nursing himself and his wife Chiara back to normalcy after their last adventure. But when an old restorer-friend is killed and a Rembrandt goes missing, he is impelled to track it down. The search for the painting's provenance takes him back to the days of Nazi atrocities, revealing dark secrets that an international financier would do anything to hide.



And when the man is found to have links with Iran's nuclear programme, Allon is forced to call in his old Israeli intelligence team. A complex plot packed with intrigue that takes you on a world tour (England, America, Holland, Switzerland, France, Israel and Argentina), this is a real treat for Silva's fans. The beauty of his writing, though, is that even a first-timer will leave this book sated—and rush to the bookstore for Allon's previous escapades.

On the heels of Sudhir Kakkar's *The Crimson Throne* comes another foray into the personalities and intrigue that defined Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's court: **SHADOW PRINCESS** (HarperCollins; Rs 399; 370 pages) by **Indu Sundaresan**. In the final instalment of her Taj trilogy—following *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses*—the author focuses on Jahanara, the emperor's eldest daughter who is forced to put her own life on hold after her mother Mumtaz Mahal dies in childbirth. Tending a grieving father, weathering the politics of the *zenana*, and jostling with warring brothers leaves the princess little time to follow

her heart, which is lost to nobleman Mir Najabat Khan. To make matters worse, her younger sister Roshanara, who resents her for her power and proximity to her father, falls for the same man. Against this backdrop rises 'The Luminous Tomb', their father's tribute to his queen that will eventually overshadow them all. Like Kakkar, Sundaresan fills in many blanks with her imagination; while her style is less scholarly, she offers equally penetrating insights into the politics, society, opulence and architecture of the era. And her princess—who even goes on to have a child with her lover—is a true woman of substance.



It looks like open season on the Mughals—here's yet another book that delves into the empire. Set in 15th century Agra, **Phiroz H Madon's THE THIRD PRINCE** (Jaico Books; Rs 295; 342 pages) is a work of historical fiction. Two stories run parallel: a young concubine named Paru is on the run, while at court, noblemen anguish over Akbar's succession. Their dilemma: the emperor's eldest son Salim (later Jehangir), steeped in women and wine, displays intolerance towards other religions and his grandson Khusrau is too young to handle the vast empire. Hopes are pinned on a possible third prince that Akbar fathered illegitimately—but could this be a girl? An intriguing premise, but the story loses steam after endless pages of mindless vagaries and sexual depravity. And though the tumultuous relationship between Akbar and Jehangir is portrayed well, the other characters fail to evoke any kind of emotion.



# SOLITARY SPORT

Games are no longer about bonding, rues **Timeri N Murari**

Whenever I pass a school, I always pause to look in and see what games the children are playing. It's a kind of nostalgia for those days where I had no worries, apart from minor ones like passing my exams. The major worry was whether I would make the school first XI and I trained hard for it. We had seasons for games: cricket in the summer; hockey followed; and then football. During these seasons we played only that game in school. The other two were banished to the locker until it was the right season for their re-appearance in our young lives. Football boots were cleaned and dropped under the bed, the hockey stick awaited its turn and the new bat could only be tested when it was time for it to take over our lives. In between, my school crammed in athletics and the gymnasium.

As all these sports were compulsory, my school may not have turned out gold medallists but it at least made sure we left it healthy and more or less physically well coordinated. Surprisingly, my skills in football came in handy years later when I was invited to play with a pick-up team of writers, actors and film directors, every Sunday morning in Hyde Park. I was as good as any of them with the ball at my feet, and that earned me a free trip to Mexico for the World Cup and a game against a Mexican village team. We lost, naturally.

Now, I see there are no longer seasons for games in schools. It's cricket, month in and month out. In the break, the boys bowl and bat, even as the less privileged kids play gully cricket on the byways of the cities. There's not

a football or a hockey stick in sight. I guess every kid aspires to play test cricket and end up as rich as our present team of incompetents. But what I regret more is that even the traditional games I played in school are no longer visible. In between the seasons of our three main sports, we had our second level of seasons. There was a marble season, a *gilly-dando* season, a tops season and, of course, the kite season. Again, each one had its special equipment: the glass marbles were beautiful with their interior patterns; for

Games then were tactile. Our senses were wholly absorbed in mastering them. Today children prefer to play games in front of computers, exercising only their fingers

*gilly-dando*, we fashioned them out of a branch; for tops, we practiced endlessly for accuracy in hitting another one (three tries only) and could whip a top to spin on our palms. Kites demanded a lot of pocket money as we had expert kite makers down a narrow lane who fashioned them out of bamboo strips and tissue-like paper and we chose the colours. The *manja* (string) had to be specially made and, hopefully, sharp enough to cut the string of another kite in the fight. Kite flying is still practiced, if only by the poor kids who chase the cut

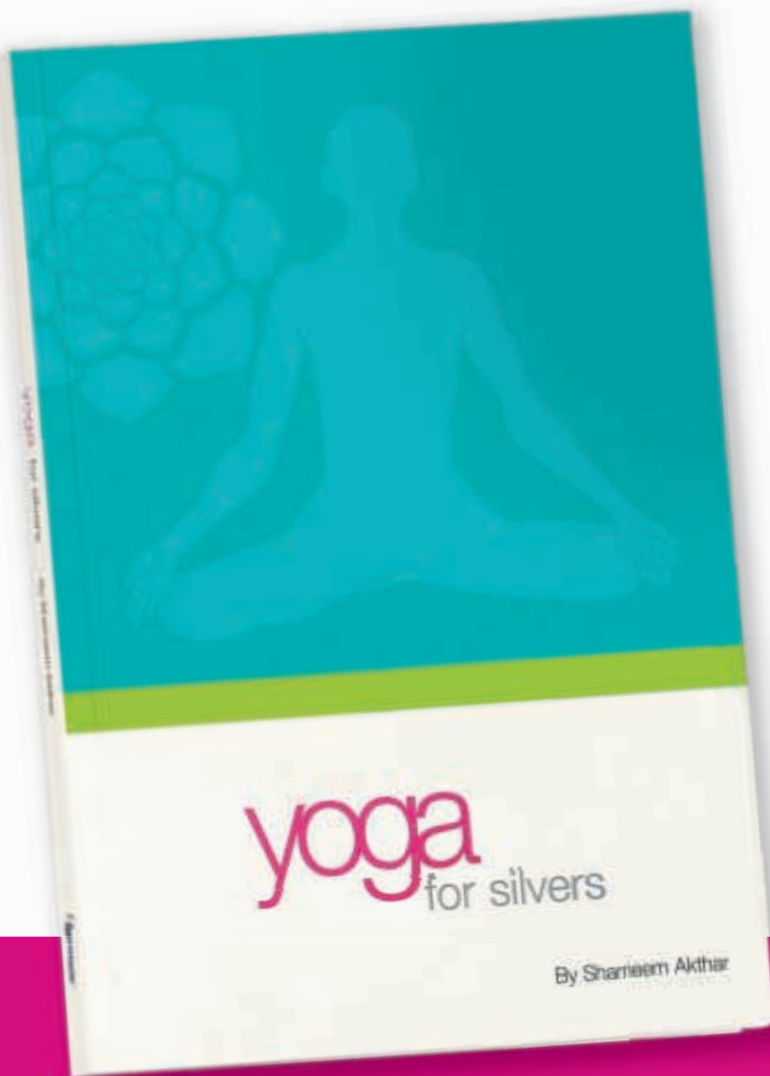
kites across main roads, nearly getting themselves killed. If I see a kite fight I still pause to look up, and watch until one is cut and floats away. I lost quite a few fights, but also won many.

Games then were tactile. Our senses, mental and physical, were wholly absorbed in mastering any one of them. We hurt ourselves chasing balls or kites, we interacted with our team and our opponents, and none of those games were solitary pursuits. Even if I could, I cannot play any of today's popular games. They are all on the computer and their inventors spend millions of dollars creating them for the enjoyment of children who prefer to spend their time in their rooms facing that seductive screen. These games are sold for princely sums that parents have to cough up for their children's insatiable appetite for electronic sports. I know that sometimes children play these games against others, also sitting in front of their computers—not in the same room, but somewhere out there in cyberspace. Their opponents could be in Dallas, Texas or London, England. Apart from their fingers, they exercise little else of their bodies. Or else their ears are damaged by their iPods on full volume—in fact, doctors have noted rising deafness among the young.

In another 50 years, we'll be a non-tactile race, barely able to move our limbs, deaf to the world, glued to computers, with only well-exercised fingers, in a solitary space.

*Timeri N Murari, 65, is an author and screenplay writer living in Chennai*





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## SMILOREXIA

*n.* The obsessive belief that one's smile is unattractive and requires cosmetic dentistry.

**Example:** On the other side is the cosmetic patient who has become a groupie. I coined the term **smilorexia** as the condition where a person desires the mythical perfect smile.

—Michael Zuk, "Confessions of a former cosmetic dentist", *DentistryIQ*, 11 August 2010

## Blackberry diplomacy

*n.* Diplomatic messages sent electronically using a Blackberry or similar device.

**Example:** Mr. Erdogan's warm embrace of Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Istanbul as "a dear friend" and his opposition to further sanctions against Iran mark Turkey's new **BlackBerry diplomacy**, a break with conventional diplomacy, when major shifts take place in real time above the heads of foreign-policy officials and the diplomats with whom they normally deal.

—Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Talking turkey", *The Washington Times*, 23 June 2010

## psychache

*n.* Extreme psychological pain.

**Example:** Holden researches **psychache**, or unbearable psychological pain, and how it relates to suicidal behaviour.... "If they wish to address this sort of psychache, I think they need to focus on which particular frustrated need is relevant for that particular individual," Holden said.

—Laura Payton, "Prisons must work to prevent suicides: expert", *Toronto Sun*, 5 April 2010

“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul—and sings the tunes without the words—and never stops at all.

—American poet Emily Dickinson

## nature-deficit disorder

*n.* A yearning for nature, or an ignorance of the natural world, caused by a lack of time spent outdoors, particularly in rural settings.

**Example:** Now a non-profit educational enterprise, the manor is among the New York-area farms attracting green-minded students and urbanites suffering from **nature-deficit disorder** who yearn to raise produce and livestock for a day, a week or longer.

—Kathryn Shattuck, "City slickers take to the crops, with song", *The New York Times*, 28 May 2010

## Funemployment

*n.* A period of joblessness that a person uses for leisure and other fun activities.

**Example:** A growing group of jobless across the nation are joining a self-proclaimed movement: **funemployment**. It's a group of jovial unemployed who say they're finally doing what they've always wanted to do—whether it is blogging or starting a non-profit.

—Elizabeth Prann, "The happy unemployed", *Liveshots* (Fox News), 18 July 2010



## SUPER PHONE

Imagine having a phone that helps you out in emergencies?

Though it may sound straight out of a sci-fi movie, the new line of handsets launched by Munoth Communications, a Chennai-based firm, has a variety of features especially for the elderly. Besides the large keypad, large screen, an inbuilt torch and GPS, its best feature is the red emergency SOS button at the back of the handset. On pressing it in case of an emergency, such as a collapse, the phone will send out 10 preset SMSes to family, friends and an ambulance service. After the messages are issued, the screen freezes to display the name, password and link to a website where the person's medical records are stored.

Priced between Rs 1,400 and Rs 4,000, the phone also has an inbuilt sensor that beeps when the user is 10-15 ft away, thus ensuring it never gets left behind.

## iPod oblivion

*n.* Obliviousness to one's surroundings caused by listening to an iPod or similar device.

**Example:** AA patrols claim MP3s, mobile phones and other high-tech devices are becoming a deadly distraction. AA president Edmund King, said: "We can't stop the march of technology, but we need to halt the iPod pedestrian, cycle and driver zombies. Whether on two feet, two wheels or four, too many people are suffering from so-called **iPod oblivion**."

—Mark Ellis, "The iPodestrians: 17 road accidents a day caused by people listening to gadgets", *The Mirror*, 8 August 2010

## NEET

*n.* A young person who isn't working, in school, or in a training programme. [From the phrase 'Not in employment, education, or training']

**Example:** "The 21st century will be a magnificent time to be alive," he says, a message which deserves to be disseminated far beyond the literary pages, so as to reach everyone from **NEETS** and unemployed graduates to Lib Dems who cannot believe what they have got themselves into.

—Catherine Bennett, "Phew. At last we can ignore the gurus peddling happiness", *The Observer*, 27 June 2010

## icicology

*n.* The study of icicles —iciclogist

**Example:** A team of Canadian **iciclogists** has put to rest the notion that one frozen cone of drips is exactly the same as the next.

—Laura Sanders, "Video: The different shapes of icicology", *Wired Science*, 13 August 2010

## reputation bankruptcy

*n.* A theoretical system that would give a person a fresh start on the Web by deleting all of that person's online text, photos, and other data.

**Example:** To allow people to escape from negative scores generated by these services, Zittrain says that people should be allowed to declare **reputation bankruptcy** every 10 years or so, wiping out certain categories of ratings or sensitive information. His model is the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which requires consumer-reporting agencies to provide you with one free credit report a year—so you can dispute negative or inaccurate information—and prohibits the agencies from retaining negative information about bankruptcies, late payments or tax liens for more than 10 years.

—Jefrey Rosen, "The Web means the end of forgetting", *The New York Times*, 19 July 2010

## Listening ear

Though most of us tend to be cynical at the mention of any anti-corruption mechanism, one cannot deny that efforts towards such initiatives merit respect and encouragement. The Kerala Ombudsman, a grievance redress mechanism, functions effectively like a court. Citizens can file a complaint and are offered a date of hearing when both parties involved in a case are expected to be present. The ombudsman either resolves the case on the spot or orders investigation if more information is required. Many cases are already being resolved, ranging from inadequate access to drinking water and suspected mismanagement of funds in the construction of public toilets to land encroachment, unlawful construction, polluting industries, and allocation of houses designated for the poor. It's a great medium to check for corruptive practices in the local bureaucracy. Log on to [www.kerala.gov.in/grievanceredressal/ombudsman.htm](http://www.kerala.gov.in/grievanceredressal/ombudsman.htm) to know more.

## edupunk

*n.* An education reform movement that eschews traditional teaching tools in favour of Internet-based learning and other high-tech methods.

**Example:** The troubled economy and changing technology have already fuelled a do-it-yourself education reform movement dubbed **edupunk**, which envisions virtual campuses and lower-cost or even free instruction. The edupunks are picking up where traditional institutions left off.

—Patrick Arden, "Will NYC's college building boom bubble pop?", *The Village Voice*, 27 July 2010

“Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age 18.

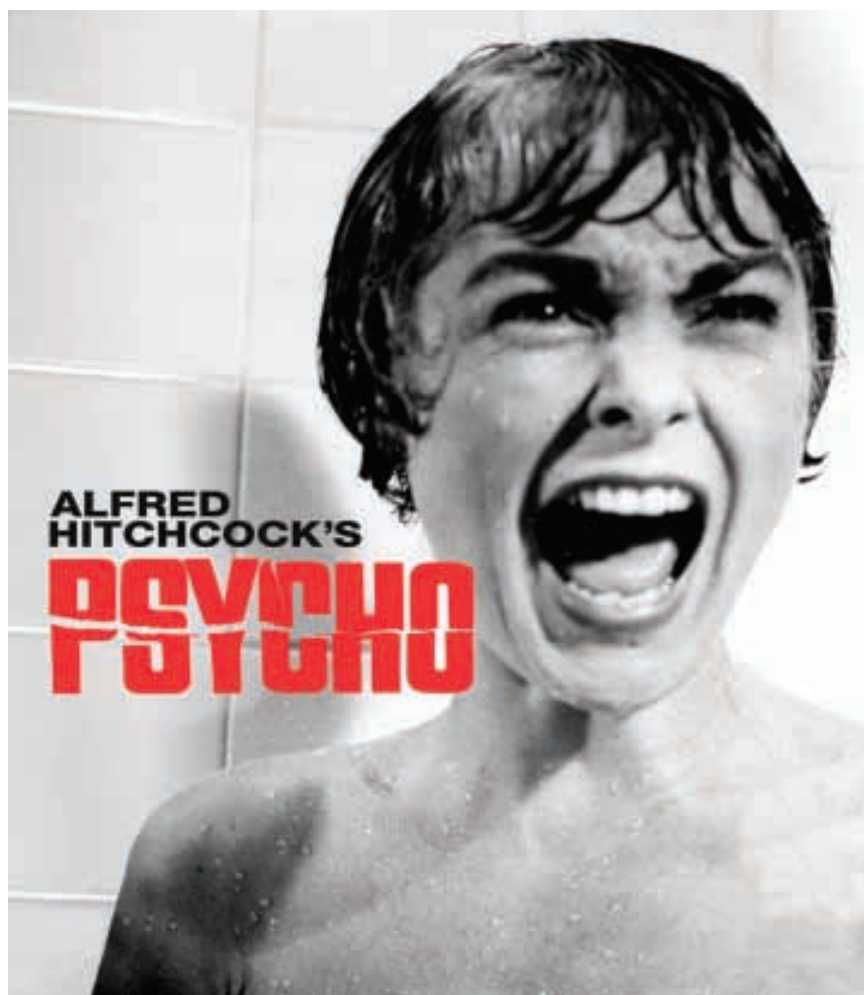
—Albert Einstein



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# Murder most memorable



Fifty years after it was released, *Pyscho* is still counted among the most frightful movies ever made in polls conducted by entertainment magazines and tabloids around the world. Luscious brunette and unscrupulous secretary Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) flees Arizona after embezzling funds from her workplace only to die a brutal death at an eerie motel where she checks in for a night's refuge. The motel owner Norman Bates (played to skin-crawling authenticity by Anthony Perkins) provides the answer to the perplexing mystery, all paths to which lie in hidden labyrinths of his mind. Adapted from Robert Bloch's novel with the same title, *Pyscho* garnered four Academy Award nominations—but surprisingly didn't win any. The famous murder in the shower went on to become one of the most legendary (and plagiarised) scenes in popular cinema. Internet trivia has it that Hitchcock bought many copies of the novel before the movie's release to retain the suspense at the end. He needn't have tried so hard. The more we watch *Pyscho*, the more mysterious it gets.

THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: **OCTOBER 1960**

- On 1 October, Nigeria gained independence from Britain and gained recognition as a republic.
- On 10 October, a cyclone hit the coast of the Gulf of Bengal and extinguished 4,000 lives.
- On 14 October, US president John F Kennedy first put forth the idea of the Peace Corps.
- On 29 October, Cassius Clay—who later became Muhammad Ali—won his first professional fight.

# Then: Ice-cream sticks

## Now: Pen stand

Grab some ice-cream sticks. Align nine of them to make a square base and glue one stick at each edge in the opposite direction. Glue two sticks on the downward side of the base to provide support. Glue two sticks on the opposite edges in the opposite direction of the other two. Repeat this step with the leftover sticks depending on the height you want. Your new pen stand is now ready.



### FACTS

- » Sawdust and wood shavings can be added to a compost heap; they make for good manure.
- » It is estimated that each year up to 420,000 tonne of waste wood is produced by households in the UK alone.
- » Recycling of wood has been a common practice throughout human history. The first recycling of wood is said to have been done by none other than Plato in 400 BC.

### MORE RECYCLE IDEAS...

Make a name plate using ice-cream sticks. Glue 10 sticks together forming a square. Add a yarn or ribbon to hang them with. Paint or decorate to your liking.

Make a photo frame. Glue six sticks side by side. Take four more and glue to form a boundary for the frame. Glue the picture into the frame and then add a string for hanging.



## “Festivals can be celebrated in a simple, eco-friendly way without being reduced to noisy commercial affairs”

**Sheetal, 56, and Vijay Sangole, 58, for a green approach to community celebration**



Dhanya Nair Sankar

**I**n the bustling suburb of Chembur in Mumbai, a quaint garden known as Nana Nani Park is sowing the seeds of environmental change. As the city gears up to bid farewell to its favourite ‘elephant god’, the members of Pestom Sagar Citizens’ Forum, a residents’ welfare association, have devised a unique, eco-friendly way to immerse Lord Ganesha. Concerned about the rising pollution levels in the city’s depleting water bodies, the Forum has created four artificial wells inside the park for the immersion. Sheetal Sangole, a retired schoolteacher, and her physician husband Vijay first came up with the green idea. “I remember my childhood in Chembur when there were three lakes named Teen Talao,” says Sheetal. “But years of redevelopment and consistent dumping of toxic waste like plaster of Paris (POP) during the Ganesha festival have led to the sudden death of these lakes.” Spurred by concern

to save the water bodies, Sangole built a mini-well using an abandoned septic tank in her backyard in 2005. Soon others in the area followed suit. Each well is 8 ft deep and 12 ft in diameter. In their original avatar, the wells were water tanks installed in building societies. Each tank costs Rs 5,000 and is sponsored by Prince Containers. “We commissioned local artisans to paint the tanks to resemble wells,” says Vijay. Many silvers in Chembur are excited about the idea. “It is a calm space that promotes an atmosphere of devotion,” says 80 year-old R G Ramdhmal, a retired banker and member of the Forum. “Though most idols immersed here are made of clay, even POP idols are welcome,” he adds. The Sangoles collect the POP after immersion and send it to the dumping grounds, or purify it and recycle it as manure to be used in the garden.

—Dhanya Nair Sankar



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