

SEPTEMBER 2010 Rs 30

# harmony

celebrate age

## THE INIMITABLE VOICE

Ameen Sayani

### DESTINATION

The royal splendour of Gwalior

### IN FOCUS

An ashram for war veterans in Kerala

### HAPPINESS UNPLUGGED

Silvers share their pursuits

### LEGAL EAGLE

RTI activist K K Bajaj

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SPECIAL: Silver Extravaganza by *Harmony* and Mumbai Film Festival

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# Silver SURGE

Silvers are on the march—and how!

On 16 August, close to 100 million Indian silvers under the banner of various organisations came together for National Protest Day with one strident demand: immediate implementation of the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP). They reiterated what Harmony for Silvers Foundation has been saying for the past six years— not a single state or union territory has even adopted NPOP (let alone implemented it) since the promulgation of the document by the Centre in 1999.

The demand was conveyed to the Union Government by a panel that included S Parasuram, director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS); S P Kinjawdekar, president, All India Senior Citizens Confederation (AISSCON); D N Chapke, Secretary General, AISCCON; and Vijay Aundhe, president, Federation of Senior Citizens of Maharashtra (FESSCOM). As they explained in their communiqué to the government and media, while the Centre has formulated the NPOP, the onus to implement it remains on the state governments. Events like National Protest Day, which was supported by 27 national, state and local level organisations, NGOs, and associations of banks, insurance companies and retired employees, will go far in highlighting the yawning chasm between policy and reality.

That's also the aim of Harmony Silver Awards, which will be held on 1 October in Mumbai. As always, our winners will astound you with their commitment to their chosen cause, whether it is giving children of convicts or sex workers a new lease on life; inventing eco-friendly utilities or health diagnostics; and even electrifying villages as well as the minds of young children. In our October



Donald Woodrow

issue, you will meet these 10 heroes and read their tales of valour and verve.

What's more, this year, to amp up the spotlight on the Awards and their intrinsic message of active ageing, we are introducing a new competition section titled 'Celebrate Age' in the 12th Mumbai Film Festival (21-28 October), in collaboration with the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI). The aim is to encourage filmmakers to focus on the upside of age: silver spice; fun and freedom; new horizons and fresh beginnings. The minimum length of each film should be five minutes. To learn more, log on to [www.MumbaiFilmFest.com](http://www.MumbaiFilmFest.com) and [www.harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org). A selection of entries will be screened at the Festival; the best film will receive Rs 50,000 while the runner-up will get Rs 25,000. Here's the best part: the competition is open to amateurs and professionals; there's no age limit; you can send in as many entries as you like; it can be any kind of film (ad, short fiction, documentary) ; and it can be shot in any format...even with your mobile phone. The last date for receiving entries is 20 September 2010. Give it a shot!

*Tina Ambani*

## A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

*Harmony—Celebrate Age—September 2010 Volume 7 Issue 4*

Publisher **Dharmendra Bhandari** Editor **Tina Ambani** Deputy Editor **Meeta Bhatti** Assistant Editor **Arati Rajan Menon** Copy Editor **Rajashree Balaram** Features Writer (Delhi) **Anjana Jha** Correspondent (Mumbai) **Dhanya Nair Sankar** Consultant Editor **Malvika Singh** Creative Director **Jit Ray** Studio Manager **Haresh Patel** Production Manager **Rohidas Adavkar**

Visual Coordinator **Anuradha Joshi** Graphic Designer **Dattaguru Redekar** Editorial Coordinator **Anita Rosario**

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**Editorial & Marketing Offices:** Reliance Centre, 1st floor, 19, Walchand Hirachand Marg, Ballard Estate, Mumbai-400001. Tel: 91-22-30327108 (Editorial), 30327102 (Marketing). Email: [contact.mag@harmonyindia.org](mailto:contact.mag@harmonyindia.org) **Printed and published** by Dharmendra Bhandari on behalf of the owners, Harmony for Silvers Foundation **Printed** at Thomson Press India Ltd, Plot No. 5/5A, TTC Ind. Area, Thane-Belapur Road, Airoli, Navi Mumbai-400708 (Maharashtra); Thomson Press India Ltd, 18-35, Milestone, Delhi-Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007 (Haryana). **Published** at Reliance Energy Centre, Santacruz (East), Mumbai 400055. **Disclaimer:** The material provided by *Harmony* is not a substitute for professional opinions. Readers are advised to seek appropriate advice from qualified and licensed professionals in the concerned field. © Harmony for Silvers Foundation. All rights reserved worldwide. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited. *Harmony* does not take responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material. [www.harmonyindia.org](http://www.harmonyindia.org)

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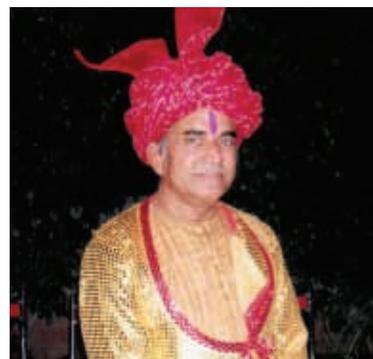
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### TENDER LOVING CARE:

Dr N S Bhandari runs a free daycare centre for silvers in Jodhpur



### HISTORY'S GUARDIAN:

Laxmi Devi Raj helps revamp the Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad

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

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# column one

It's a high point in the life of Harmony for Silvers Foundation, and for *Harmony* magazine as well, which is an intrinsic part of the Foundation. This year, the prestigious Harmony Silver Awards are associating with Mumbai Film Festival (popularly called the MAMI festival) for a 'Celebrate Age' film contest and a retrospective of silver-themed international films. Copy editor Rajashree Balam had the privilege of watching seven of these films over two days. A film buff, Balam had a whale of a time. For you, we have reviewed each of these films, which you can either catch at MAMI or pick up a DVD/VCD as and when they reach your neighbourhood store. Not a single one of these films is bleak—matter of fact maybe, but not bleak. A peculiar collector who values his collections more than any relationship; his house so heavy with the weight of the things that neighbours feel the building might crash any day. So they all leave one by one; the watchman being last. There's also one about a silver with a pet dog Tulip who silvers with her owner.

There's a kind of fun in silvering, when you can put up your feet (something our Silver Awards winners haven't opted for; but that's a story reserved for next month) and just relax with your friends. 'Footloose' ("Happiness Unplugged") features five such groups enjoying their later years reading, playing cards, playing board games or dancing and singing old film songs.

Which brings us to the cover of the month—Ameen Sayani, the voice from the past, resonating with a musical era that we still go back to. Back with a collection of Geetmala songs, he is unbelievably busy in making us feel nostalgic.

—Meeta Bhatti

I received *Harmony's* August issue and was disappointed to see some pages missing and some reprinted. I am sure it must be a technical snag. But at the same time it was comforting to get a quick response from your office with the assurance of a fresh copy. This hiccup aside, I wanted to bring to your notice the extravagant coverage given to dental problems in the magazine. Your article "Happy Teeth" was covered over seven pages. I feel it's too long an article to read on any subject. I also feel it's an issue that could have been dealt with more crisply with all the necessary information.

**N R Bagre, Sangli**

I have been reading *Harmony* for some time and appreciate the service you are doing for silvers. I am 78 years old and retired. I have spent most my working life in Mumbai. Since my wife and I are feeling the strain of living alone, we are contemplating a move to a senior citizens' home at Pune. We would appreciate it if *Harmony* publishes lists of seniors' homes in Pune and other cities so that retired middle-class couples can make an informed and affordable choice.

**L V Thyagarajan, Hyderabad**

I congratulate you for completing six years of *Harmony* magazine. I am 80 years old. After retirement in 1988, I served an NGO and visited hundreds of *teertha* in India and Nepal with my wife. Thereafter, we wrote two spiritual books that are very relevant for senior citizens: *The Sacred Journey and The Mysteries of Creation of the Universe: Spiritual and Scientific Perspective*. If anyone wishes to know more about these books, they can call me at 011-22752360.

**N K Prasad, Delhi**

## CONTRIBUTORS



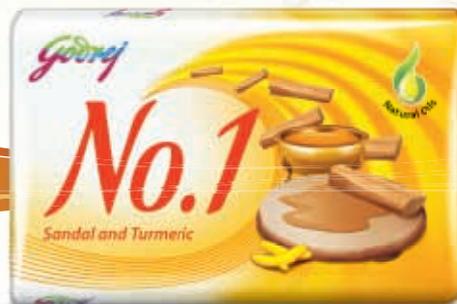
**Dr Duru Shah** ("IVF debate: Making mothers out of grandmothers") offers a thoughtful view on the debate of older women becoming mothers through in-vitro fertilisation. "The risks associated with pregnancy gradually increase with age. There is sufficient scientific evidence to prove that an older woman is more likely to develop high blood pressure and/or diabetes during her pregnancy," she says. Dr Shah is the chairman of Gynaecworld, a leading infertility clinic in Mumbai, and consultant obstetrician & gynaecologist at Breach Candy, Jalsok and Sir Hurlkisondas hospitals, in Mumbai.



**Dr Rekha Sheth** is known as India's first cosmetic dermatologist. Founder of the Cosmetic Dermatologists Society (India), she is also the first dermatologist in the country to have maximum cosmetic clinical studies under her belt. At her cosmetology clinic, 'Dr Rekha Sheth's Skin & Hair Care', she and her team of experts take care of every aspect of skin and hair care.



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*khoobsoorati ko aur kya chahiye!*

Clichés hold no meaning for them and conventions hardly have the power to stop them. They are the spirited rebels; the senior citizens who have refused to give up and sit back. Harmony Silver Awards 2010 honours those to whom the usual rules simply don't apply.

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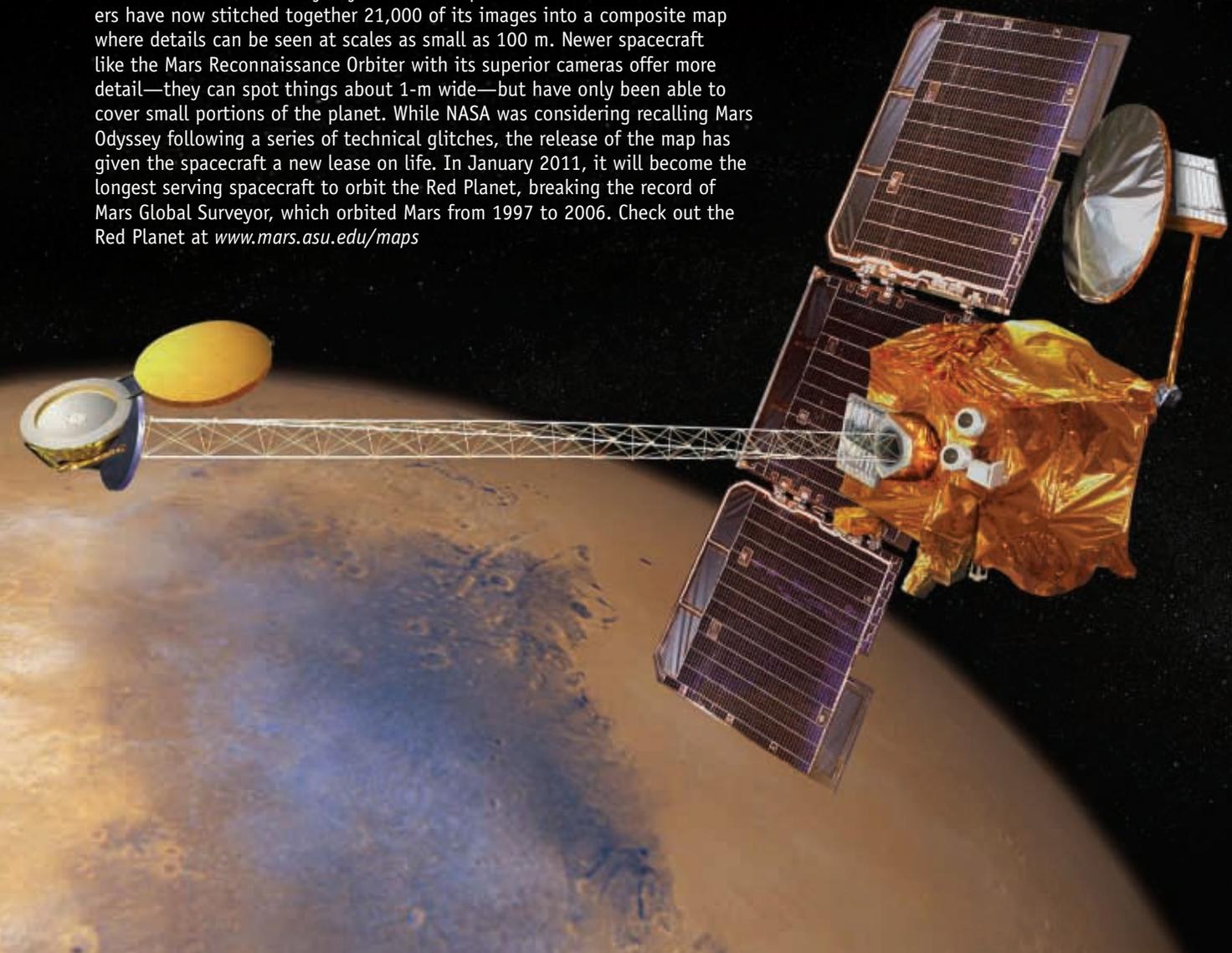
OPEN YOUR EYES TO EVERYTHING  
THAT'S NEW IN THE SILVER WORLD



O»OFFBEAT

## Space odyssey

In doing what no spacecraft has done before, NASA's Mars Odyssey has proved that age is irrelevant when it comes to getting the job done. **The spacecraft, which is the oldest operating around Mars, has succeeded in producing the best ever map of the Red Planet.** According to website *newscientist.com*, Mars Odyssey reached the planet in 2001 and researchers have now stitched together 21,000 of its images into a composite map where details can be seen at scales as small as 100 m. Newer spacecraft like the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter with its superior cameras offer more detail—they can spot things about 1-m wide—but have only been able to cover small portions of the planet. While NASA was considering recalling Mars Odyssey following a series of technical glitches, the release of the map has given the spacecraft a new lease on life. In January 2011, it will become the longest serving spacecraft to orbit the Red Planet, breaking the record of Mars Global Surveyor, which orbited Mars from 1997 to 2006. Check out the Red Planet at [www.mars.asu.edu/maps](http://www.mars.asu.edu/maps)





## Their day(s) in court

Does becoming silver make you naturally more litigious—quite literally? That's apparently the case in the national capital. According to a survey by NGO Agewell Research and Advocacy Centre, over 70 per cent of silvers in New Delhi stay busy fighting cases in various courts, commissions and tribunals. The cases filed by the determined silvers range over a variety of issues from property disputes with neighbours and family members to cases against government agencies, municipal authorities and banks, and applications filed under the Right to Information Act and Consumer Protection

Act. Over 3,000 silvers from Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Ghaziabad were interviewed for the survey.

### Here are some interesting facts:

- 70 per cent of litigious senior citizens have filed two or more cases in different courts.
- Over 72.5 per cent said they file cases to get respect from their children.
- About 63 per cent said fighting cases was an 'occupation' that keeps them active.
- Around 57.85 per cent said they were going to court just to satisfy their egos or because they were 'addicted' to fighting cases.

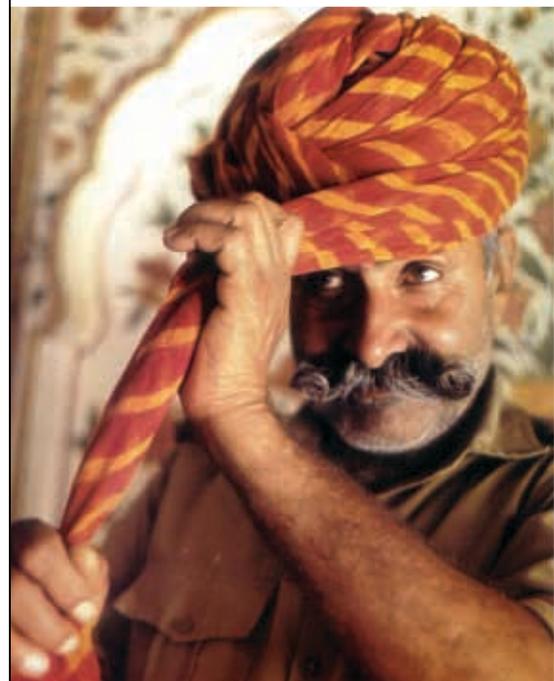


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# NEW NETWORK

## YOUR ACT IS AT WORK IN

**RAJASTHAN.** The state government of India's largest state has decided to make good on the provisions of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens' Act and develop a network of old age homes for destitute silvers who earn less than Rs 1,500 per month. "As there are very few old age homes at present in the state, we plan to decentralise the whole system so we have a home in every *sub-tehsil*," Aditi Mehta, principal secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, tells media. "We would like to develop the homes within a radius of 15 to 20 km from where senior citizens belong to enable them to stay connected to their communities." To get the ball rolling, the department is on the lookout for abandoned or other government buildings that are not in use.



O»NEWSWORTHY

# More silver awards!

While we prepare for the fourth edition of Harmony Silver Awards, we're delighted to tell you that the **Haryana government plans to honour the state's silver heroes** too. In August, it announced the institution of five annual awards with a cash prize of Rs 100,000 each: the Chaudhary Ranbir Singh Centenarian Award for elders over the age of 90 who continue to contribute to society; the Mother Teresa Award for mothers who have fought against all odds so their children may fulfil their dreams; the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Courage



and Bravery Award for silvers displaying extraordinary courage in difficult situations; the Mahatma Gandhi Panchayat Award for panchayats that have done pioneering work for the cause of silvers; and the Mahatma Jyotiya Phoole Lifetime Achievement Award for silvers who have made a significant contribution to the welfare of fellow elders. The state government has already appointed a four-member panel to scrutinise applications for the awards. When the list of winners is out, we promise to let you know.



**THE RM ROUTE:**  
**THE TAIWANESE GOVERNMENT WILL LAUNCH A REVERSE MORTGAGE SYSTEM IN 2012 TO ENABLE SILVERS TO USE THEIR REAL-ESTATE PROPERTIES TO RAISE BANK LOANS AND COVER LIVING COSTS WITH A MONTHLY PAYMENT. A TRIAL OF THE PROGRAMME WILL BE IMPLEMENTED TO TEST MARKET REACTIONS. INITIALLY, ONLY SILVERS OVER THE AGE OF 65 WHO LIVE ALONE (WITHOUT A MONTHLY INCOME, OR SPOUSE OR DEPENDENTS) WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE SCHEME.**

## JUSTICE ON THE MOVE

Silver litigants in Chennai can now look forward to speedy redressal. In August, the **Madras High Court announced that it will fast-track all cases filed by senior citizens**, effective immediately. According to a media release by M Y Eqbal, chief justice of the Court, "All senior citizens whose cases are pending in the High Court with respect to all categories may directly approach the Registrar (Judicial) and furnish details regarding pendency of the cases. This would enable the court to take up the cases on a priority basis." Silvers can also drop the details of pending cases in a special box installed in front of the office of the Registrar-General.



O»TRENDS

# AIDS and ageing

In 1996, antiretroviral drugs revolutionised medicine by enabling people with HIV in the West to live well into their silver years.

By the middle of the past decade, the drug rollout spread to developing countries in Africa and South America. Today, the fallout of that revolution is becoming apparent. As news agency AFP reports, speakers at the 18th International AIDS Conference held in Vienna in July emphasised that **millions of people with HIV will survive into old age only to face medical problems, loneliness and stigma, and worries about finance.**



As Gottfried Hirnschall, director of HIV/AIDS at WHO, says, “Ageing with HIV is not just a clinical challenge, it is also a social challenge that is not confined to one part of the world. The numbers will require new public health thinking compared to the past.”

At the personal level too, silvers with HIV suffer poor quality of life. “They are more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts and often have meagre savings as they never expected to live so long,” explains

Lisa Power, policy director with British AIDS charity The Terrence Higgins Trust. “Many are socially isolated, fearful of the double discrimination against old age and AIDS, and fret about the day when they ultimately would be admitted to hospital or a nursing home.” Fears of discrimination aside, their health is also a very real concern. “In the 55-plus age group, Americans with HIV were three times likelier than a healthy man aged 70 to have a chronic health problem,” affirms Margaret Hoffman-Terry, a specialist at the American Academy of HIV Medicine. “The complications of HIV and the side-effects of strong medicines breed many sicknesses, such as depression, hypertension, diabetes, metabolic disorders, osteoporosis, heart, liver and kidney disease and cancer.”

O»LOVE THAT

# French connection

**THE FRENCH** have hit upon a marvellous way to fill empty nests with chirps of laughter and cheer once again. **Le Pari Solidaire is a government-sponsored initiative that links youth looking for accommodation with lonely silvers** who need help with the tasks of daily living and wish to supplement their income. Instead of paying exorbitant rentals in expensive cities, young students and professionals can get a room for a minimal fee (sometimes even for free); in return, their silver landlords get help with their cleaning, chores and shopping and, most significant, company and a renewed sense of security. A national database enables landlords and prospective tenants to find each other. To learn more, check out [www.leparisolidaire.fr](http://www.leparisolidaire.fr) or [maison.en.ville.free.fr](http://maison.en.ville.free.fr)—*Google.com* will translate the websites into English for you.



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»»ANALYSE THIS

# Protect your money

Silvers are perennial soft targets when it comes to financial scams. According to a recent study conducted by US business information and marketing solutions provider Infogroup, one in five Americans over the age of 65 has been the victim of a financial scam. These numbers would probably be echoed across the rapidly silvering globe. So how do you protect yourself? The study offers six valuable tips:

**1. Take all the time you need to make a good decision.** You don't need to give anyone an answer straightaway, whether it is a salesman or someone trying to sell you a financial product—in person or over the phone. Ask them to give/send you more information so you can look it over carefully and consult a friend or relative if required.

**2. Remember your own advice: 'If it's too good to be true, it probably is.'** Watch out for 'special' or 'free' offers that promise you money, vacation or a car if you attend a presentation. Don't buy or sign anything just to get a free gift or win a contest, and don't send cheques or money orders for any 'limited time offers' you may read about in newspapers or leaflets.

**3. Don't share personal information.** Unless you are speaking to family members or friends you trust implicitly, never reveal any personal or financial information—home address and phone number; bank account details and numbers; credit/debit card details and numbers.

**4. Ask questions.** Don't be shy or embarrassed when it comes to your money. If you buy anything—from a financial product to an appliance or even furniture—make sure you ascertain the hidden costs, if any: processing fees, delivery charges, handling fees, service charges. If there's anything on a bill or statement you don't understand or recognise, or fine print you can't read or understand, ask for an explanation immediately.

**5. Try not to take too many chances.** If you're tempted to enter a sweepstakes or buy a lottery ticket once in a while, or even get a little reckless at a friendly game of cards, make sure you always budget a certain amount to spend—and don't cross it. Never believe any enticing messages via phone, mail or email that ask you to send money to claim an incredible prize or get lottery winnings.

**6. Get help if you need it.** If managing your money—bank statements, tax returns, credit card bills, insurance forms, medical reimbursements—is really hard for you, don't hesitate to get the right advice, either from family and friends that you trust or a qualified financial professional.



Haresh Patel



**RISKY BUSINESS: SILVERS IN AUSTRALIA'S OLD-AGE HOMES AND RETIREMENT FACILITIES ARE LEADING ACTIVE BUT RISKY SEX LIVES WITH MOST HAVING MORE THAN ONE PARTNER, ACCORDING TO A STUDY BY THE GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED COUNCIL OF AGEING. IN THE ABSENCE OF AWARENESS OF SAFE SEX PRACTICES, THIS PUTS THEM AT RISK OF CONTRACTING SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES. THE STUDY CALLED FOR SAFE-SEX WORKSHOPS TO COMBAT THIS THREAT.**



The Greater Bombay Co-operative Bank Ltd, more popularly known as Greater Bank, was founded five decades ago on 10 December 1952 by a small group of philanthropists. Though the founders pursued individual interests, they established the bank with the sole motto of serving the community at large. With this vision, they introduced attractive deposit and lending schemes relevant to the times. The Bank made a mark for itself with high quality service. Having achieved the status of a scheduled bank in 1996, The Greater Bombay Co-operative Bank is making giant strides by attracting customers from the low, middle and upper income strata. This speaks volumes about the faith and the trust reposed in the Bank by the public. Interview with the chairman of **The Greater Bank, Shri Narendrakumar A. Baldota**

**Loyal customers go a long way in establishing the credentials of a financial institution. How has The Greater Bank's customers contributed to its success?**

Customers are fundamental to the success of a business. Whether you are starting out or are long established, a lot of time and money is spent trying to gain new customers. Despite several changes in technology and processes, we have customers who have continued to bank with us over the decades—many have grown multifold in their businesses with the Bank's support and have still continued to bank with us. The benefits of high customer loyalty can be measured in monetary terms as well as in kind. People do business with banks that are trustworthy, so integrity is also a plus point when it comes to maintaining customer loyalty. It also reflects on the quality of our service—excellent and continuously improving.

**The GB has been making giant strides by attracting customers from the low, middle income and higher income groups, all at the same time. Could you illustrate how the Bank has achieved such phenomenal success?**

From inception, it was the great vision, foresight and genuine concern of the Founders of the Bank to provide first class banking services to all, which was an important milestone. The low and middle income groups come to The Greater Bank because they get intimidated by the new age private sector banks and may not get adequate attention in the public sector banks. Here is where The Greater Bank plays an important role—we provide the same level and quality of services and products and that too at an affordable cost. Our charges for products like Demat and CBS are much cheaper when compared to other banks. But the journey has not been easy. To keep this vision alive amidst stiff competition, the Bank has had to exceed customer expectations by being a financial one-stop shop—advising customers, managing wealth and providing best possible services. Look at our various delivery channels! Another very important highlight is that, all our branches are open for customers from 8 am to 8 pm (12 hours banking) and are open on Sundays as well. This has benefited our customers from all income groups.

**It's praiseworthy to have ISO 9001:2000 certification for all the branches. What does it bring for the Bank?**

Here I would like to mention that The Greater Bank has applied for the ISO 9001:2008 certification from Bureau Veritas Certification (India) Pvt. Ltd., offering third party certification services of quality management systems. This certification for The Greater Bank would add another feather to its cap, as it will be in recognition of its Quality Management Systems, best practices and standardised systems and procedures. The scope of the certificate will cover processes across all the branches and departments of the Bank and is expected to be received from BVCI in August 2010 (at the time *Harmony* goes to print). The Greater Bank will be the first co-operative bank to achieve this distinction across all its branches and departments.

**What are some of the novel banking products of The Greater Bank?**

SSS or Simple Savings Scheme (no frill accounts), which allows the customer to maintain only Rs 10 in their accounts. This is a major step towards financial inclusion—it not just benefits the salaried, even daily wage earners can open accounts by depositing just Rs 10. The interest rate of 0.25% provided to a certain section of current account holders. What's more, we will introduce Internet banking before 31 March 2011.

**What kind of stress does Greater Bank lay on personalised customer service and how does it help the Bank and its customers?**

Centralised banking has enabled The Greater Bank to provide better personalised service to our customers smoothly without being impeded by geographic spread of the branches. Thanks to all the information being available at a single location, the Bank now offers a wide array of products and services, without duplication of resources and efforts. For customers it means greater convenience due to extended working hours, anywhere / anytime banking and the ability to access all the required financial services from a single data centre. One of the biggest advantages the Bank gets through CBS is the up-to-date data at each branch. And, of course, branch executives can concentrate on business development and delivery systems more than balancing the books. Another key is saving the space. With CBS in place, there is no need for large over-sized branches—you can have small, cozy, branches with an informal ambience. In fact, many of the banks today that have adopted CBS are going in for a distinct look for their CBS branches!

**What are Greater Bank's unique services for senior citizens?**

Senior Citizens are a treasure to our society. At this stage in life, they should be taken care of and made to feel special. At The Greater Bank, special counters have been set up to provide prompt and courteous services to seniors, all our branches have exclusive timings for them and additional benefit of higher interest rates is provided on term deposits exceeding a year. Another service that is provided to our shareholders above 40 years of age (though they are not senior citizens) is a free health check-up at Lilavati hospital, one of the leading private hospitals in Mumbai.

**On a final note, what do you envision for The Greater Bank in the years to come?**

All technology must end with better customer service and satisfaction and that alone is the bottom line of achievement for any bank. Technology and customer service go hand in hand. The banking sector is bound to grow in future; by harnessing technology, The Greater Bank is well prepared to capitalise on the opportunities that may present themselves in future.



O»OFFBEAT

# Surfing USA!

Sand, sea, beach boys and bikini-clad girls...they are all part of the allure of surfing, which evolved from being an outlawed thrill introduced in California from Hawaii early in the 20th century to a cultural phenomenon that took the US by storm in the 1950s and 1960s. Eventually it went on to become an international sport dominated by professional athletes using lightweight, hi-tech boards. In a bid to remind people of the time “when the waves were still un-crowded and surfing was the preserve of a few crazy, dangerous wild men and women”, as Reuters reports, **The Surfing Heritage Foundation, based in San Clemente in southern California, is recording the history of the sport by talking to surfers in their 70s, 80s and 90s**

about the good old days. The Foundation, whose museum houses a collection of surfboards dating back over a century, will also send out oral history kits to surfing groups across America and the world. “We need to capture these stories while these guys are still here,” says curator Barry Haun. One of the contributors to the project is active surfer 73 year-old Mickey Munoz, who first stood up on a board in 1947. “While the sport may have changed beyond all recognition, most surfers are still the same kind of people,” he says. “They still love to talk about the minute details of board size and tell stories of waves they caught and ones that got away. They still worship that moment of power when surfer and wave unite.”



O»MEDIA WATCH

## RED hot!

This fall, watch out for some (red) hot action at a cinema near you. Directed by Robert Schwentke, *RED*, or ‘Retired Extremely Dangerous’, stars fabulous silvers Helen Mirren, John Malkovich, Morgan Freeman and Bruce Willis as retired CIA agents who just can’t call it a day. We think the sight of Mirren kayoing the baddies with machine guns—and her handbag—should be worth the price of a ticket.

O»H REPORT

# State of CHANGE

**W**inds of change are blowing in Assam with silvers in the state becoming increasingly proactive about their rights. The Assam Senior Citizens' Association has demanded that the state government set up a State Council for Senior Citizens and open geriatric wards in medical colleges, civil hospitals and central primary health centres of the state. The Association, which was established in 1998, has 20 district units and over 100 primary associations across the state.

On 23 July, a delegation from the Association met the director of the Department of Social Welfare in Guwahati to vocalise these demands. It also pointed out the lack of progress on the State Policy for Elderly Persons announced by the government as early as 2008. The only concrete measure that has emerged since is the reservation of two seats in city buses in the state capital for silvers. "The absence of a clear-cut policy has severely affected the lives of the people, especially the poor," says D N Chakravarty, general secretary of the Association who is regarded as the founder of the senior citizens' movement in Assam. He was also the editor of a leading Assamese daily after having retired as director of information and public relations from the state government.

Here's the rub: while the number of silvers in Assam increases every year, hardly about 10 per cent are government pensioners. "This means, while about 10 per cent of the elderly have regular monetary support, all others are dependent on their families or left to the mercy of God," rues Chakravarty, who was nominated a member of the National Council for Older Per-



Subhamoy Bhattacharjee

sons in 2007. "Remember, more than 30 per cent of Assam's population lives below the poverty line."

Kamaleswar Bora, former vice-chancellor of Dibrugarh University and president of the Association, echoes Chakravarty's concerns. "Assam has about 2.1 million elderly people with very little social security," he says. "We need a State Council for Senior Citizens that can ensure the benefits provided by the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens' Act 2007. We also need a uniform policy for elders across the country. For instance, while senior citizens below the poverty line (BPL) are supposed to get old-age pension of Rs 200 per month, the rate is just Rs 50 in Assam."

The Association also has shelter for silvers on its mind. "The few old age homes that we have in Assam are mostly run by private organisations and the charges are very high," adds Bora. "We have asked the state government to establish low-cost old age homes down to the panchayat level, so rural people also get the benefits." Now, the ball is clearly in the state government's court.

—*Tapati Baruah Kaushik*

## Words for silvers

The voice of silvers in Assam just got more resonant. On 31 July, **Uddipan, an Assamese monthly magazine for elders**, celebrated its second anniversary (see picture). The magazine was released in 14 towns in the state on 29 June 2008, with local chapters of the All Assam Senior Citizens' Association hosting the launches. "We are not making any profit out of the magazine but providing a much-needed forum for senior citizens to express themselves," editor-publisher Profulla Chandra Borua, who retired as editor of prestigious Assamese daily *Dainik Asam* about a decade ago, tells *Harmony*. He started *Uddipan* with his own savings. The magazine's kitty grew when Borua received Rs 200,000 as part of the Siva Prasad Barooah National Award for journalism from the Assam-based Kamal Kumari Foundation. Other than articles on legal and financial help and health, *Uddipan* carries articles, short stories and poems written by silver readers. Local chapters of the All Assam Senior Citizens' Association help market and distribute the magazine all over the state.

—*Tapati Baruah Kaushik*

O»H PEOPLE

# Traffic watcher

Irked by the sorry state of roads in India, Vidhyadhar Date, a former journalist has recently penned a book on pedestrian rights, *Traffic in the Era of Climate Change*, after seven years of studying traffic problems. The book cleverly links the problem of global warming with the increased number of vehicles. The 66 year-old tells **Dhanya Nair Sankar** why pedestrian-friendly roads are as essential as food, clothing and shelter

## When did you hit upon the idea of writing this book?

I am a determined walker. I have observed that pedestrians in this country really get a raw deal. Today, we are completely dominated by the car culture. Cars are a symbol of superiority and we have become subservient to them. We have allowed the automobile lobby to overwhelm our lives, our environment and our planning. There is a definite need to democratise the transport and traffic system and give priority to pedestrians as they form a major chunk of the population.

## You have travelled a lot. In which country did you notice the most pedestrian friendly roads?

Scandinavian and European countries have the best roads; they have properly aligned footpaths and walkways. There, pedestrians have the upper hand; motorists slow down if you are crossing. In Japan, the roads are very clean. Even in Colombo, pavements are wide and well-aligned. Their traffic culture respects pedestrians.

## What is the main challenge faced by silver pedestrians in India?

Old people need to walk for better physical and mental strength. However, in India they shy away from doing so because our roads are extremely crowded with automobiles, and polluted. Roads here are



cracked in so many places; walking can be a nightmare for silvers.

## What issues have you addressed in your book?

The book explores the link between fascism, capitalism and the automobile industry. It's a sharp critique on the transport culture and relies heavily on literature and history. However, it is not a mere rant against car owners; instead, it's like an ode to the joys of walking and cycling. I have also talked about the joys of street life, and attempted to raise questions on the automobile-dominated pattern of transport planning, urban development and environment degradation. A study conducted by NASA reveals that automobiles are the main contributors to global warming because of their high energy consumption and the smoke they spew out, thus aggravating the greenhouse effect.

## ACTION PLAN FOR SEPTEMBER



**Welcome to Chhattisgarh!** When you plan your next holiday, think of Chhattisgarh—the state government has announced that silvers (65 for men; 62 for women) will get a flat 50 per cent off on their room tariffs in hotels, motels and guesthouses run by Chhattisgarh Tourism. Just carry proof of age, like a voter's I-card, driving licence or passport. For more details on destinations in the state and accommodation, check out [www.chhattisgarhtourism.net](http://www.chhattisgarhtourism.net)

## BIRTHDAYS

- Chilean author **Isabel Allende** turned 68 on 2 August
- American actor **Dustin Hoffman** turned 73 on 8 August
- Former Cuban president **Fidel Castro** turned 84 on 13 August
- Former cricketer **Sandeep Patil** turned 54 on 18 August

## IN PASSING

- **K M Matthew**, chief editor of *Malayala Manorama*, died in Kottayam, Kerala on 1 August. He was 93.
- India's oldest Olympian, hockey player **Leo Pinto**, died in Mumbai on 10 August. He was 96.
- Marathi poet Narayan Surve passed away in Mumbai on 16 August. He was 83.

# Central Bank of India goes one step further in the service of senior citizens.



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## LIFE'S GREAT MARATHON

I was thrilled to run the Mumbai Marathon in January; my seventh marathon as a super-veteran participant. Bandra Reclamation was the starting point for the Half Marathon, a 21.097-km stretch. Excitement filled the air as we warmed up—11,500 participants—to cross Mumbai's new Bandra Worli Sealink. As the gun went off, the runners surged out of the gate. A pack of serious runners quickly shot ahead while others like me trailed behind. However, at 72, I was in it to merely enjoy it. Indeed, running with corporate top brass like Anand Mahindra and celebrities like Vidya Balan is a unique experience.

Galloping across Mumbai's architectural pride was wonderful. The sun was rising and the runners waved to the pilots of a helicopter keeping watch from above. Mumbai's indomitable spirit was evident when a middle-aged man in a superman costume pulled up alongside, and a physically challenged participant spread hope and inspiration. The greetings from commandos were warm and precious. Tears of pride

welled up in my eyes when I saw these extraordinary officers decorated with medals blazing across their chests.

Once we exited the Sealink, we saw people with bottles of water and trays of biscuits and oranges. The support from hundreds of children was very heartening. At Chowpatty Seafac,



Nigudkar is right ahead in the race for happiness

the heat began to slow us down and I accepted a generous ice cube massage from young boys and girls eager to help. At Marine Drive, the Navy Band belted out songs. There were large crowds, corporate firms and NGOs, holding banners and placards with messages about saving water, cancer awareness and declaring Third World war on terrorism. Humanitarian causes have always found a place in this marathon, where NGOs run for a variety of causes. And at Hutatma Chowk, I caught a glimpse of the eternal flame that was brought from Marathon in Greece, burning brightly since its arrival.

I learnt an important lesson while running the Mumbai Marathon: advanced age is no bar for an active life as long as it is backed by discipline. Indeed, regular exercise extends life while enhancing vitality and improving its quality. This virtually eliminates hospital and medicine bills, and keeps away insomnia and diseases linked to old age. As Oliver Wendell Holmes observed, "Men do not quit playing because they grow old, they grow old because they quit playing."

—Vinay Nigudkar, Mumbai

## RANBIR AND I

My five year-old grandson Ranbir and I live thousands of miles apart; he is North Carolina in the US and I stay in India. But we have a special bond and talk to each other practically every day on the phone. In fact, he wishes me good morning everyday before he leaves for school.

Last year, when I visited them in the US, he was my best companion. He would play with me in the garden after he returned from school every day. And after dinner, he would hold my hand gently and escort me upstairs to my bedroom with great care lest I stumble on the stairs. One day, my husband interfered and asked Ranbir to escort him in a similar manner. He told my husband, "Dai is an



**Pal and her grandson Ranbir: friends forever**

old lady but you are a young man, so I have to look after her!" With one statement, he had managed to make my 77 year-old husband feel young, and me treasured.

Last week, my son was visiting from the US and told us about Ranbir's latest antics. He had written me a letter saying, "Dadi, you please come by big plane from India. If you don't come early I shall not go the school in the morning." He then put the letter into the letterbox outside the house and raised the Indian flag next to it. The postman was amused as was his father! When I heard about this, I was overjoyed. My only wish to the Almighty is that Ranbir continues to love and cherish me this way.

—Saroj Pal, Delhi

## ONE FOR ALL

Unfortunately, the term 'working for the underprivileged' is all but a cliché today. But for someone whose social work began among the children of Partition, it's a raison d'être. And at the age of 77, my father Padmashri Mag Raj Jain continues his tireless odyssey. Through his life's mission in Rajasthan's Barmer district, his focus has been to educate and work for marginalised communities. Always a 'doer', he has facilitated community-led institutions dealing with education for women and children, founded institutions for the physically challenged, opened dispensaries for primary care, taught vocational skills, and trained villagers to participate in local self-governance.

A teacher by profession, my father joined Jawaharlal Nehru's Bharat Sevak Samaj, which marked the beginning of his work in Barmer. Among his initial efforts was reviving traditional water harvesting systems and starting a camel carts manufacturing unit, which supplied carts to 3,000 farmers in the district. As a vehicle to spread awareness, my father also launched a monthly magazine called *Maru Manthan* for the youth. In 1972, he received the Best Teacher Award from the Rajasthan

government. An excellent role model for the youth, my father worked with the Nehru Yuvak Kendra to open the first night college in Barmer and imparted vocational skills. Thanks to this effort, more than 3,000 youth learnt 23 different trades.

But he didn't stop there. Also on his priority list were women's development, literacy, promotion of khadi, conservation of folk heritage and drug de-addiction. The Padmashri followed in 1989 for his pioneering contribution to the development of this desert region. To take his vision forward, in 1990 my father set up an NGO called Society to Uplift Rural Economy (SURE). He has since helped set up 165 self-help groups of women in Barmer and linked them to banks, freeing them from the vicious clutches of moneylenders.

Next, he established the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in 1992. The organisation trains Barmer's farmers in techniques of better agriculture and animal husbandry, and introduced indigenously developed dry land crops through organic farming. It also promotes community-based breeding of the indigenous cow, Tharparkar, which was on the verge of extinction in 1998. In July 1992, my father's special

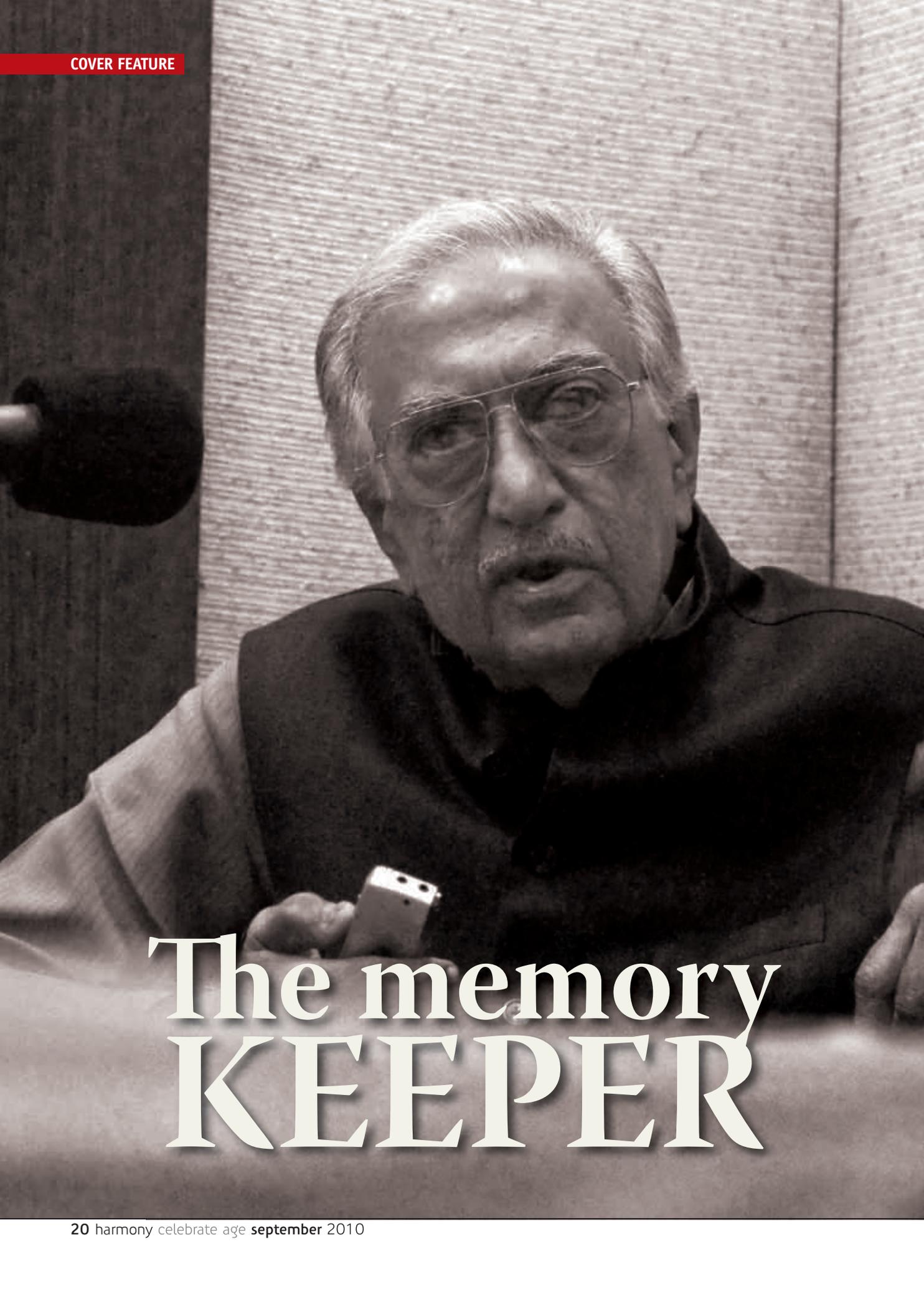


**Mag Raj Jain nurtures social causes and hope**

focus on children led him to pioneer Balika Shivar, the concept of 'residential educational camps' in Barmer, for girls outside the formal education system. Now he is on the brink of inaugurating the Sri Satya Sai Anand Mook Badhir Aavasiya Vidyalaya, a residential school for children with disabilities in Barmer district, a first-of-its-kind initiative.

—Laxman Jain, Mumbai

COVER FEATURE



# The memory KEEPER



Utkarsh Sarjanwala

HIS VOICE HAS SPAWNED A THOUSAND IMITATIONS. YET VETERAN RADIO PRESENTER AMEEN SAYANI IS NOT WEIGHED DOWN BY HIS LEGENDARY AURA. THE 78 YEAR-OLD IS NO LONGER AS ACTIVE ON INDIAN RADIO AS HE USED TO BE, BUT HIS TRYST WITH OLD MELODIES ISN'T OVER YET. BUSY COMPILING RARE OLD SONGS FOR THE FOURTH VOLUME OF A CD SERIES, HE TELLS **RAJASHREE BALARAM** WHY HE WILL ALWAYS ROOT FOR MUSIC THAT TOUCHES THE SOUL

**A** persistent cough is bothering Ameen Sayani. So much so that we briefly wonder if we should reschedule the interview. As he chews on mints to soothe his throat, the greedy voice in our head prods us to be patient. Sayani tries out his voice on the recorder and shares some mints with us—not ‘mints with holes’ but sweet mentholated disquettes that remind us of the mints we used to have in our childhood.

Everything about Sayani takes us back in time to a simpler, subtler world. All the paraphernalia that surround him provoke nostalgia: the old-fashioned wooden showcase in his reception filled with trophies and awards; ledgers and files crammed in his office space; his office, located in an Art Deco building on the busy Colaba Causeway in Mumbai; and above all, the man himself. His voice transports us to a time when we used to adjust the knob on the transistor with feverish anticipation till we heard him calling out in his signature style “*Bhaiyon aur behenon*”...a greeting that seems to be long discarded in public speech.

It took us more than a month to pin Sayani down for an interview. He has been busy promoting a CD compilation of old songs, *Geetmala Ki Chaon Mein*, songs culled from his famous radio show *Binaca Geetmala*, which kept listeners all over India and Asia hooked to their radio set for 45 years since 1952. Awarded the Padma Shri in 2009, Sayani’s life has been hectic with assignments: packaging shows for international radio stations, composing ad jingles, and hosting events. So when he says, “I no longer have

the drive I used to,” we find it hard to believe him. The man who once put in 16 uninterrupted hours at work now needs a one-hour nap in his office chair. His oeuvre, though, remains unparalleled and needs no rejuvenation.

#### IN HIS OWN WORDS

**I never left radio.** I admit that in Mumbai my voice has not been heard for the past seven years or so on Vividh Bharati. But I was active on another radio station till about six years ago through a programme, *Sangeet Ke Sitaron Ki Mehfil*. When that stint came to an end, the programme was aired on radio stations in New York, Dubai, New Zealand and Fiji. Then came the recession and things went a bit shaky in broadcasting.

I have had very enjoyable and successful stints with Radio Sunrise, BBC World Service and its Ethnic Network. About a year ago, I had a year-long stint on air in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In Mumbai, I enjoyed a brief stint of six episodes on Radio City while promoting my CD series, *Geetmala Ki Chaon Mein*. It was broadcast in the afternoon and late night slot.

**The compilations on my CD series *Geetmala Ki Chaon Mein* is derived from my famous show *Binaca Geetmala*, which was one of the most avidly and widely heard radio shows in the world.** In the 1950s and ’60s, it was estimated that all over Asia—even going up to East Africa—*Binaca Geetmala* had drawn over 200-210 millions of listeners every week. I was amazed to discover that thousands of people still have diaries that contain not just the annual pro-

gramme list of songs, but also the weekly programme list dating back 46 years. In fact, there is a professor in Jaipur who has written a book on *Binaca Geetmala*, which contains details even I don't have.

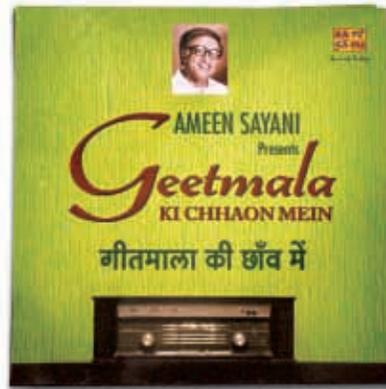
**Geetmala Ki Chaon Mein trains the spotlight on songs that did not gain the sunlight of popularity.** These songs, therefore, were not part of the annual programme list on *Binaca Geetmala*. Nevertheless, there were many such fabulous songs that were left in the shade. I want to rejuvenate them. I have already launched three volumes that contain rare masterpieces along with interviews with legendary actors, singers and musicians. Part of it is based on the racy old style of *Binaca Geetmala* and part of it is gentle. It has a blend of everything: self-deprecating humour; my take on the Partition; trivia; anecdotes; social messages; nostalgia; my love story; my first visit to Radio Ceylon; and little snippets on human behaviour.

**The great music composer Naushad always said that songs back then touched the soul.** I agree with him. Towards the end of the 1970s and beginning of the '80s, the great voices slowly started fading out. I refer to those years as the golden period of Indian music. The lyrics and composition back then—whether romantic, philosophical or simply fun—found their way into our soul. Music today touches the body, which is also a good thing. In today's music there is a lot of *jhoomna jamna*, so even old people like me feel like getting up and dancing [laughs]. It keeps us young and active and healthy.

**Music is like a river whose origins lies far away in our past.** It keeps flowing through every era and, on its way, it collects treasures from all the shores it passes, and redistributes those treasures as it moves forward. So there is a link between the past and the present and tomorrow—that's how all great civilisations and great music ought to be. No matter how

much we experiment with form, let's not move too far away from the origins of our existence. Songs back then were inspired by classical and folk music. Slowly, we imbibed orchestral and vocal styles from the west and arrived at a harmony that resonated with the best of both worlds. Pancham [R D Burman], for instance, had perfected that skill.

Not just in music, but every facet of life, we should learn from the past, mould it for the present and branch out into tomorrow. It's our history that shows us where we erred and where we excelled.




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"The composition and lyrics back then touched your soul. Today music touches your body"

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**People complain that there is too much of needless *shor* [cacophony] on radio nowadays, but how can you blame the presenters?** Each presenter is on air for three to four hours. How much can they talk? I have often suggested to radio stations to keep shorter stints for announcers and have more announcers. We could also air sponsored programmes from outside. Sponsored shows recorded outside the medium have been the backbone of every successful radio station. I have also been urging sta-

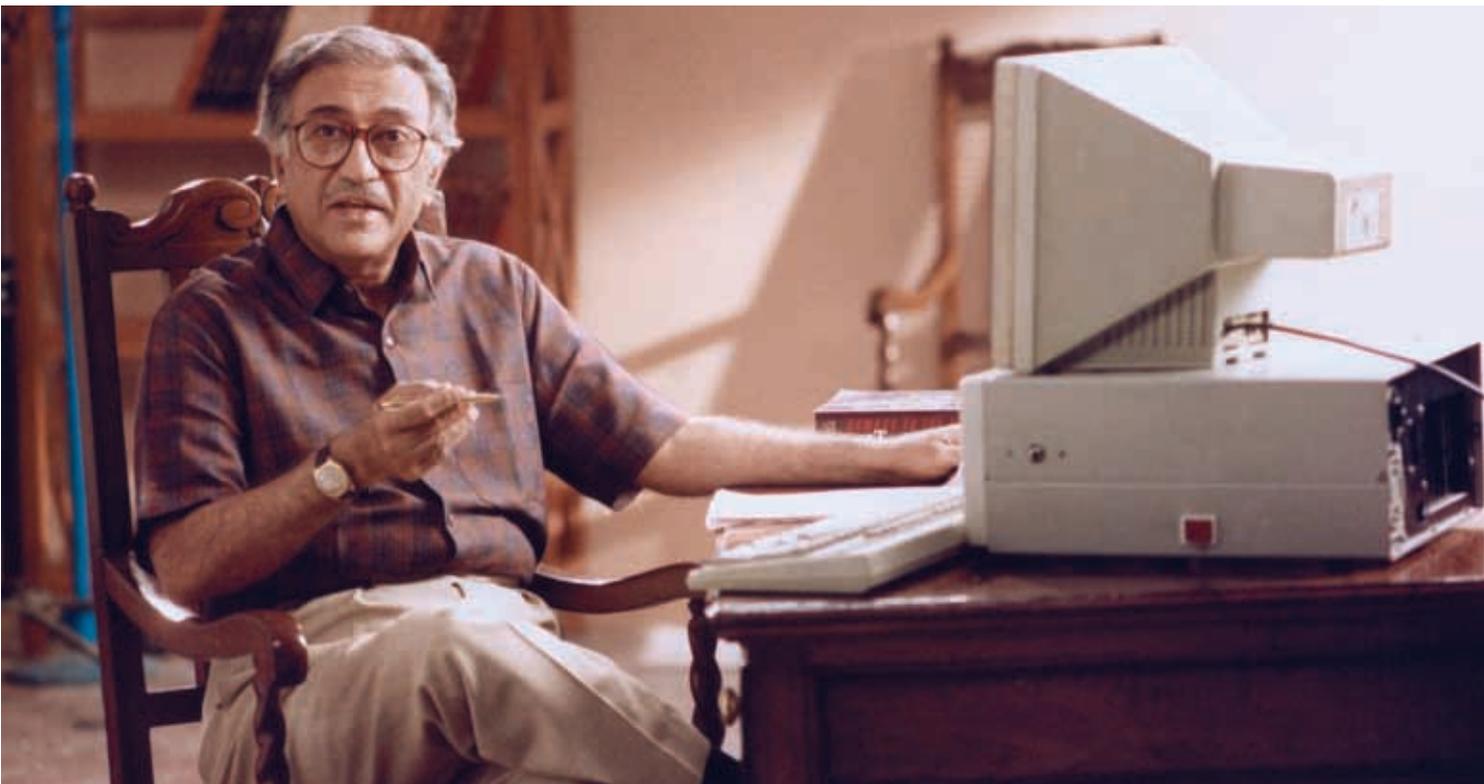
tions to bring back songs from the golden era. I am happy to note that now many FM stations have devoted time to such songs.

**I tell young radio jockeys to develop a unique style that's characteristic to their personalities.** I urge them to speak to their friends, observe the world around them, and read as much as they can. I used to teach at the Xavier Institute of Communications. I get to interact with a lot of budding RJs. Often they meet me for an interview. I enjoy these interactions.

**I developed my style and command over the language while working on the monthly journal that my mother edited and published.** My mother Kulsum Sayani was Gandhiji's *shishya* [disciple]. Gandhiji told her to start a journal for neo-literates, written in simple Hindustani, but in three scripts: Urdu, Devnagari and Gujarati. I assisted my mother on her journal *Rehbar* and while doing so, I absorbed the finer nuances of Hindi and Urdu. That experience helped me use the simplest form of the common denominator language while broadcasting.

**I come from a family that has been deeply associated with the freedom movement.** My great uncle was an associate of Gandhiji. My grandfather was Gandhiji's physician. I have grown up watching these great leaders and these influences have made me a composite person. I want my work to encompass the whole of India, its spirit and the ethos of the world.

**I have had some wonderful friendships in the industry.** I shared a great rapport with Raj Kapoor. He was my elder brother Hamid's classmate in school. Once Raj and Hamid were part of the same elocution competition and though my brother gave a much better speech, Raj was far more popular. He would saunter in, chew gum and grin. At that time I resented him. But when I started broadcasting, I was part of the team that did the publicity for *Barsaat*. Then, from *Sangam* onwards



I took over the radio publicity for all his films. By then, I was fascinated by his charm and speech. He could speak his way into your heart.

I never thought much of Raj as an actor, but as a director he was fabulous. I remember an interesting incident during the publicity of *Mera Naam Joker*. Typically, I never did publicity without seeing a film. For some reason, Raj didn't show me the film before release. I decided to do something different. I went to a senior recordist Madgaonkar *saheb* and asked him to offer reverb effect to my voice when I announced the name of the film. He gave me simulated reverb. We placed a speaker in the staircase and I announced the title with a flamboyant flourish. After the campaign went on air, I saw the film; I was stunned. I told Raj that the publicity was all wrong. Here was a movie where the central character is heartbroken repeatedly. The title, therefore, should be announced with a sigh. As expected, people went to watch the film expecting a lot of fun and were disappointed. Years later, when *Bobby* was released, I worked out a campaign that became very popular—it had a boy and girl fall

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"I want my work to encompass the whole of India, its spirit and the ethos of the world"

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in love and talk to each other about the film on air.

I was also close to Sunil Dutt. Before he started acting, he too was in broadcasting. At events, he used to come with his microphone and interview celebrities, and I would conduct my interviews alongside. We bonded at those times and that friendship lasted till the day he died. He was adamant by nature, yet gentle. If he latched onto something he would see it through. We were hoping he would be the prime minister one day. Sadly, fate had other plans.

**Mehmood was one of my most outrageous friends.** He was crazy and courageous and kept everyone in splits. While directing *Bhoot Bangla* he insisted I act in the film. Though I love to act, I told him I didn't want

to be a comedian if I couldn't be the hero. He said "Ameen *bhai*, you will play exactly what you are in real life, an announcer." So I have had my brief stint in acting. I believe Shashi Kapoor is the nicest person in the film industry. He is humble, soft-spoken, understanding and a delight to work with. I still think *Kalyug* was one of the best films in Indian cinema. We are in touch, though many of the people I was close to are no longer there.

**Kishore Kumar was funnier than what he appeared on screen.** We have gone out on many outings in his old *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* car. He used to drive everyone around the bend. Once he was scheduled to do an interview with me for *...Geetmala*. He kept stalling right till the end. A day before the broadcast, he asked me to meet him at a studio in the suburbs. I hired a cab and lugged the tape recorder with me. When I reached the studio, I was told that Kishore was not planning to come. I was so angry that I didn't approach him for any interview for the next 12 years. Then he approached me to do publicity for *Door Gagan Ki Chaon Mein*. When S D Burman died, Kishore was shattered.



Star-studded: With Amitabh Bachchan (left) and Ashok Kumar and Pran

I interviewed him for the tribute to S D and the one-hour tribute that he offered went on to become one of my favourite shows.

**Time changes not just the world around us, but our attitude towards the world as well.** Now people listen to radio while they are on the move. Back in our days, we used to make time to listen to songs. Even while studying, the radio would play in the background. That does not happen any more. A lot has changed with the arrival of new FM stations, though Vividh Bharati still retains the old-world charm. For many years, I was disturbed to hear FM stations playing only current *dhoom dhaam* numbers. With the advent of sophisticated broadcasting equipment all the programming was done automatically; the equipment selects the songs, schedules the breaks...everything is chalked out beforehand. So the presenter is left with nothing to do but yap. I feel sad about that because we have some good announcers today.

**I no longer have the drive and zest I used to. I think it ebbed after my wife's death in 2002.** Sometimes I feel sad; I didn't give her the time I did when I was younger. Life used

to be hectic then. In 1961-62, I used to handle two jobs: one at AIR and one in the marketing and publicity division of TOMCO. Mornings would be spent at TOMCO; lunchtime for recording at Radio Ceylon; Back to TOMCO till six in the evening, and recording a show till 10 at the radio station. Even my weekends were spent at the radio station.

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"We should learn from the past, mould it to the present and branch out into tomorrow"

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**As a soul immersed in commercial broadcasting, I gave up all my loves.** I was very fond of poetry but I rarely had the time to develop that passion. My greatest love is classical music. I have learnt classical music, and I have attended all the big *baithak* and shows. But radio overshadowed everything. I was also fond of acting on stage. I used to act in a lot of Hindi, Gujarati and English plays in college. I have even been directed by Adi Marzban. Now I have no time left for any of those things. I begin my day

at 7 am. We are a small family—just me, my son and daughter-in-law. We have chores assigned for each person. I chop the fruits for breakfast and lay the table. Then I do the *mudra pranayama* for 45 minutes. By the way it's the laziest *pranayama* in the world [laughs]. I reach office at 11.30 am, then take a nap in the afternoon and get back to work. I have no grandchildren so I treat all young children as my own grandchildren.

**All my life, I have worked and focused on one central theme that is an intrinsic part of my ethos: the disintegration in human and international relationships.** Through my programmes, I have always tried to create a kind of pleasant atmosphere that is conducive to friendship, unity, peace and justice. I also feel one of the greatest ways of achieving that friendship and unity is to clean up the way we communicate. One reason for all the mess in our country is the lack of clarity in our communication. I would like to have a world that is peaceful, clean, healthy and gentle. Which reminds me of Kishore Kumar's famous song: *Aa chal ke tujhe main leke challoon, ek aise gagan ke tale, jahan gum bhi na ho, aasoon bhi na ho, bas pyar hi pyar palein....*

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# Forward march

FOR SOME EX-SERVICEMEN IN KERALA, RETIREMENT IS A WAY TO A NEW LIFE. NISARY MAHESH RECOUNTS HER VISIT TO THE SAINIK ASHRAM IN KAKKANAD, WHERE PENSIONLESS VETERANS ARE REHABILITATED WITH A SENSE OF DIGNITY. PHOTOGRAPHS: SIVARAM V

**S**martly turned out as always in crisp shirt and trousers, complete with peak cap and white canvas shoes, 92 year-old A P Peters loves chatting about the little things in life. His comrade, 90 year-old K M George, seems a little distracted though his face lights up every now and then. However, T K Bhaskaran, another nonagenarian, wears a charming innocence and is all ears to Peters.

Peters, George and Bhaskaran are bound together by more than friendship; all three were once members of the British Army of India. And after retirement, they have had no independent means of support. Today, along with five other war veterans and a few ex-servicemen the trio call the Sainik Ashram at Kakkanad in Kochi their home.

Sainik Ashram is a residential facility run by the Kerala Ex-Servicemen Welfare Association (KEXWA), which was established in 1995 by Col (ret'd) K B R Pillai, who retired from the defence services in 1991. "I saw a group of men staging a *satyagraha* [protest] and literally begging in front of the Kochi naval base," he recalls. "I learnt that they were World War II veterans seeking a pension. That's when six comrades and I decided to establish KEXWA as a charitable trust."

The Ashram, which offers free accommodation, meals and medical treatment, is a godsend for abandoned veterans and pensionless soldiers, who served with the imperial army for 12 years and had a bullet surgically removed from his back just two years ago. George, whose postings ranged from Iraq to Myanmar during

his four years with the Royal Indian Army Medical Corps, says, "All we get is Rs 400 from the state government. I didn't want to become a burden on my children." To this, 88 year-old Prabhakaran Nair, self-appointed 'leader' of the Ashram's residents, adds, "We would have been on the streets as we were without any money." Nair's friend, Pappi, nods in agreement. A seaman with the Navy till 1947, Pappi had no means of income when his only son died in an accident. Now he lives at the Ashram with his wife.

When they started out, Pillai and his comrades knew a soldier's pride would shun charity of any kind. So they brainstormed on ways to help the veterans remain self-sufficient. "We did not wait for donations or charity to start the Ashram," he explains. "We tried a different approach

Members of the Ashram now lead a dignified life; (opposite page) A P Peters has found both friendship and comfort at the Ashram

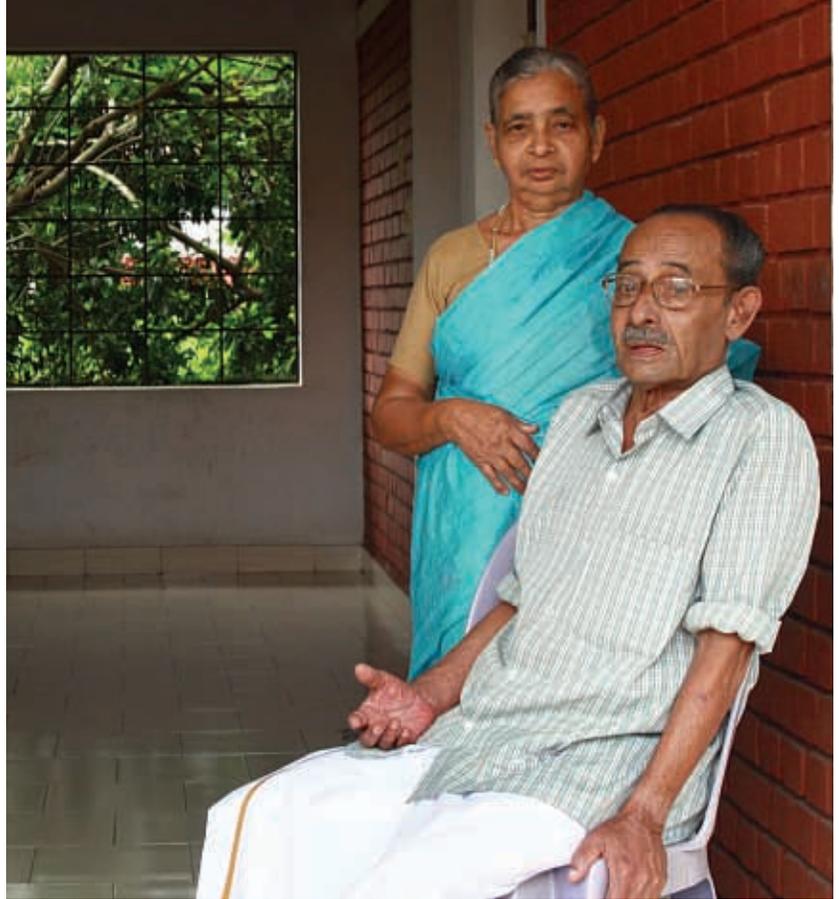


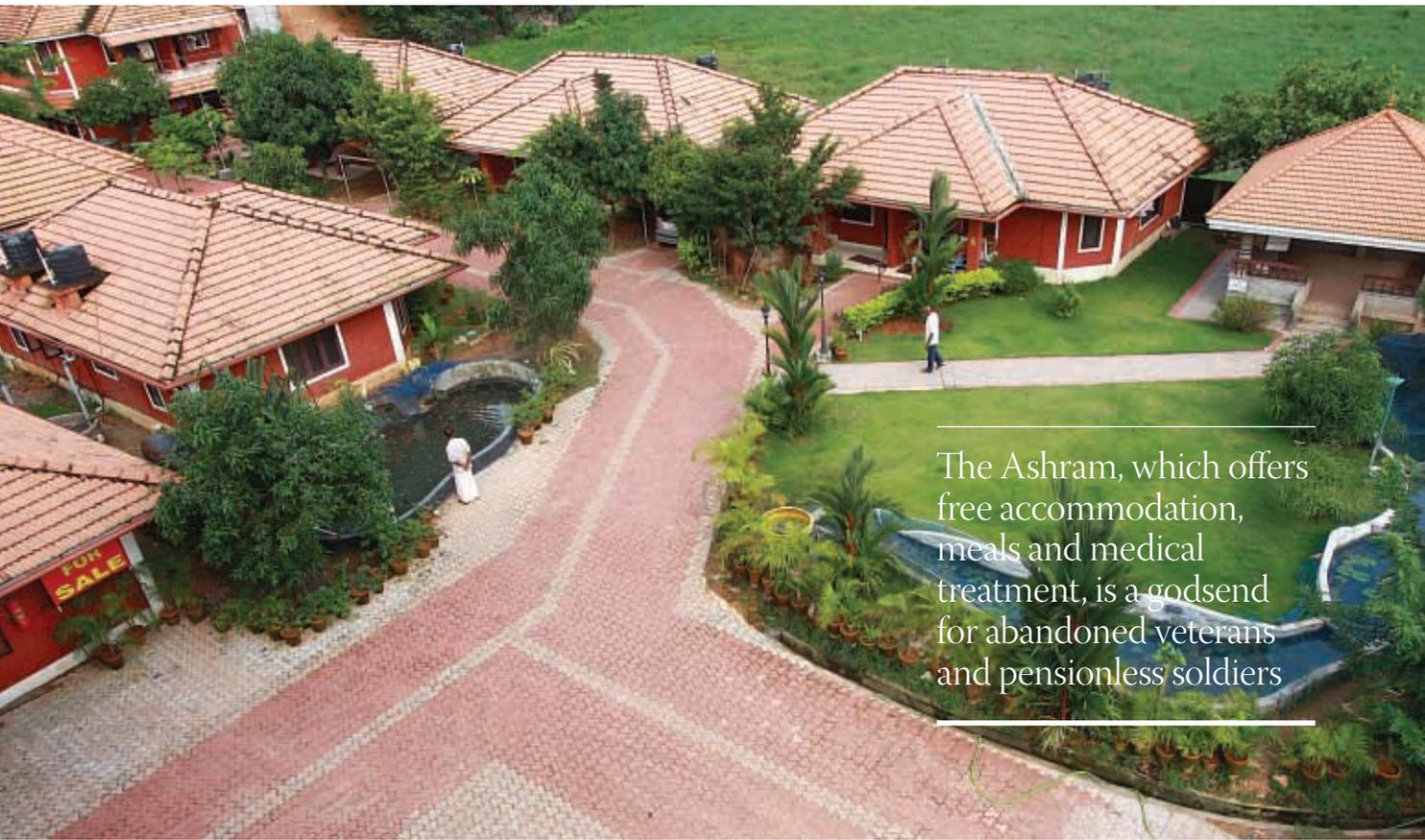
(Opposite page) Elegant accommodation and lush green premises make Sainik Ashram a soothing haven; (right) Pappi and his wife; (below) K B R Pillai

to raise funds.” KEXWA registered a business unit—Kerala Ex-Servicemen Service Organisation (KEXSO)—to start second-career options for ex-servicemen. KEXSO was conceived to generate funds from the company’s own profits to finance welfare activities as well as set up the Sainik Ashram. An advertisement was published in local newspapers in 1995; around 1,000 ex-servicemen from all over Kerala signed up as members. KEXSO soon began to employ ex-servicemen as security staff in hotels, hospitals and industrial establishments. After extensive networking and with the required revenue earned, KEXSO finally opened the Sainik Ashram in 1998. When it started out, the Ashram operated out of rented premise at Palarivattom in Kochi. In its present avatar in Kakannad, it is a spacious three-storied building with a dormitory and six single rooms, and includes plant nurseries and aquariums where veterans can indulge in hobbies.

Fortune smiled benignly at the veterans when Colonel Pope, secretary general of the British Commonwealth Ex-Service League, learnt about Sainik Ashram during a visit to Kochi in 1999. He raised £ 10,000 from ex-British officers in the Indian Army and donated it to the Ashram. “It was a turning point,” recalls Col Pillai, who is president of both KEXWA and KEXSO and lives nearby with his wife. “We used the funds, along with donations from some members, to buy land at Kakkanad and built a full-fledged facility there in 2001.”

Pillai’s optimism about the Ashram is tempered with a tinge of sadness. “When the Ashram opened, we had about 20 war veterans living here,” he says. “Their numbers shrunk to eight as death came calling. There are an estimated 20,000 pensionless ex-servicemen across Kerala. We are looking





The Ashram, which offers free accommodation, meals and medical treatment, is a godsend for abandoned veterans and pensionless soldiers

forward to extending a helping hand to all those who need it." KEXWA is now rallying the retired defence fraternity in Kerala so they can reach out to more abandoned veterans.

Despite the challenges, the association has constantly expanded its self-employment avenues and helps ex-servicemen run taxi services, homestays, fish-breeding ventures and floriculture, to name a few. There are perks too—Pillai says ex-servicemen who find employment as security staff with KEXSO receive provident fund and medical insurance, and KEXWA members who are registered with private limited companies as a resettlement measure continue to contribute a portion of their earnings to KEXWA welfare activities. Many of these abandoned ex-servicemen like other KEXWA members have also pledged their bodies to medical colleges.

The sense of gratitude has spawned many projects. At the Armed Forces Entrance Academy at Kakkanad, veterans tutor candidates seeking a spot in the officer cadres. Those who

coach at the Academy are retired officers who had served in the Service Selection Board. The Veterans Homestay Tourism Project is another KEXWA project that operates a chain of homestays across Kerala under the Ex-Servicemen Tourism Development Organisation (EXTO). Opened in 2005, the chain once included 125 homestays but that has shrunk to just 10 owing to unfriendly tax hurdles.

On a plot adjacent to Sainik Ashram is Sainik Vihar, a housing complex for ex-service men, silvers living alone and silver couples; it brims with the spirit of community living. It has 50 units of four types—single rooms, bedroom-hall-kitchen units, double rooms and independent villas. Veterans can choose to lease premises here and can also live with their spouses.

Sainik Vihar also offers self-employment opportunities in the ornamental fish-breeding and plant nurseries on the premises. These ventures are owned by residents with the assistance of KEXWA. "We want to be in the company of our colleagues so that

we can retain our identity," says a resident, who wishes to remain anonymous. "When I get to mingle with my compatriots here, I still feel I am a part of the Air Force." Adds the widow of a deceased veteran, "The longer one stays in the Army, the harder it is to get attuned to civilian life. The feeling of loneliness that I experienced after my husband's death is wiped away by this community."

Next on KEXWA's agenda is a residential school in Kochi for children of ex-servicemen who retire between the ages of 35 and 40. "Their children will be in high school when their parents retire and will be forced to continue their studies in normal schools thereafter," explains Pillai. "Many children face problems adjusting to the change in style and medium." The school will be run like other defence schools, with Hindi as the second medium of instruction. "We aim to not only reconnect with retired officers but find new avenues to work together," says Pillai with a smile. "Retirement should never stagnate the psyche. KEXWA is an outlet for such frustrations."

# Dark knight

ARUP CHAKRABORTY'S TALENT AND ATTITUDE MORE THAN MAKE UP FOR HIS LACK OF VISION, DISCOVERS **PARTHA MUKHERJEE**



Smitbhadra Datta

I am among the lucky few who don't have to endure the sight of anything loathsome or brutal," says Arup Chakraborty with a chuckle. "Perhaps that's why the world is such a friendly place." Chakraborty's

infectious sense of humour and positive worldview instantly puts you at ease. But his funny bone also touches a deeper chord. Robbed of his sight by meningitis at the age of two, the 54 year-old never loses focus of the big

picture. It's something Chakraborty learnt when he was very young. "All through my childhood, my parents never let me feel handicapped. Instead, they encouraged me to do everything other youngsters did."

Seated in his family home at Rajdanga in Kolkata, you wonder where to begin: his phenomenal range of hobbies and interests; his dreams and ambitions; or childhood memories. Sensing your hesitation, he says, "Baba would take me for a stroll every morning and set my ears to the music of nature. Despite my impaired vision, I could see everything through his vivid descriptions." That's how he learnt to 'listen' to the nuances of life.

Born into a family of modest means, he is the fifth of seven children. His father Parswanath had a government job and his mother was a homemaker. Chakraborty grew up in the company of his siblings and other playmates till it was finally time to school him in special skills. At the age of eight, he was enrolled in Calcutta Blind School at Behala. He picked up Braille almost immediately but school offered him more than a means of communication. "My classmates and teachers welcomed me so warmly that school was like a second home," he recollects. "I was involved in all sorts of activities that a child of my age could take part in, from games and sports to academics, and I grew more and more enthusiastic by the day."

An arts graduate from Asutosh College in Kolkata, Chakraborty joined the Eastern Railway, Sealdah Division, in Kolkata as an announcer at the age of 22—a job he cherishes to date. Always building on the positive, he says that as he lost his sight early, he has never known what he has missed. "I have no concept of colour, nor do I know what the sky looks like or how one's expression changes when one laughs," he says with a mischievous smile. "But if you smile or even pull a long face, I will know immediately."

With sensory intuition that almost borders on a sixth sense—and can even be slightly unnerving at times—Chakraborty explains, "I can feel the presence of the sun through its warmth. When the sky is bright or overcast, I can feel it through the

balmy air or the humidity. And although I cannot see Keka's face, I know she is a charming lady!"

Chakraborty and Keka have the Eastern Railway to thank for bringing them together three years ago. Keka, who is partially sighted, had called the Railway to ask if they had a vacancy for an announcer. Chakraborty, who picked up the call, told her there was no vacancy then but advised her to continue her computer training. And, again, guess who began to coach her? Soon, Cupid's arrow struck and the two got married.

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**"I have no concept of colour, nor do I know how one's expression changes when one laughs. But if you smile or even pull a long face, I will know immediately."**

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During the *Harmony* photo-shoot, the happy couple poses enthusiastically for the classic Kodak moment. But Keka wants to make sure she wears just the right expression. "Relax! Why are you so nervous?" chides Chakraborty, gently patting Keka on the back. Then, again, almost reading our mind, he laughs, "I can sense the mood of people around me by the warmth of their breathing."

When he's not teasing Keka, Chakraborty's fingers flit over the computer keyboard like magic. His PC is equipped with Job Access with Speech, software that opened the World Wide Web to the visually challenged. "I owe what I know about computers to Arup," says Keka. But Chakraborty wants to take his teaching skills to broader horizons, saying he would love to teach computer education to visually challenged students "so they get ahead with their lives as well". The computer screen, though, is

only one of his many preoccupations. "The things he does will amaze you," assures his brother Apurba. "He is a regular member of the DXing community and also a talented singer." To this, Sajal Sen, Chakraborty's former colleague in the Eastern Railway, adds, "Tagore's songs find a new level in his voice."

Cricket is another of his many passions that came to life in almost graphic detail thanks to All India Radio commentator Ajoy Basu's modulated baritone. "In that moment, I realised no handicap is an obstacle," says the indomitable optimist. Ornithology gives Chakraborty's soul wings and he's a regular visitor at various wildlife sanctuaries across India. "I practised listening to birds when I sat on my window sill as a child," he recalls, adding that he plans to create a digitised bird-call directory with his collection of over 200 chirruping sounds.

Chakraborty is also an ardent high-altitude trekker, a passion that has taken him to the Garhwal, the Kumaon range and the Pindari glacier. To make it to the top, he took a special training course for visually impaired trekkers at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), Darjeeling. When in the plains, he is happy tramping around forests in North Bengal's Dooars, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerala and the Northeast. "I was inspired by the famous Bengali writer Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay [of *Pather Panchali* fame] and his description of villages," says Chakraborty.

Summing up his indefatigable spirit, he adds. "Man's quest started with the dawn of civilisation and is still on. Anything is possible if one wills it. Any handicap can be challenged with one's spirit." It's this very spirit that inspires many who know Chakraborty, especially his wife. Despite her troubles—she has ailing parents to care for and a job hunt on her mind—Keka says with a sense of calm, "When he is with me, I feel the world around me is flooded with light."

# HAPPINESS UNPLUGGED

Silvers in different cities are getting together to dance, read, sing and play.  
And proving once again that life only gets better with time



Anand Kumar Soma

## HIGH ON AEROBICS

Secunderabad

**E**very morning, 204 Vayupuri turns into an aerobics classroom. The 10-12 students—women in their 50s and 60s—kick and jump to the instructions of their trainer Venkatesh. And they have been doing it unflinchingly for the past six months.

It all started when 62 year-old Meena Murudeshwar ran into Venkatesh at the local Defence Institute where she noticed him training defence officers' wives. Murudeshwar asked him if he would be willing to conduct an aerobics class on her terrace for her friends. Venkatesh readily agreed. Leaving out hip-hop dance routines, he customised a gentle exercise regimen, the results of which are beginning to tell. "I have not lost weight but I feel so much more active," says 68 year-old Veerta Behal. Lalita Iyer,

a 65 year-old grandmother, who takes care of her two naughty grandchildren throughout the day, looks forward to her 45-minute session every morning. "I cannot lift my leg as high as the others do but I find it rejuvenating anyway and am motivated to continue, thanks to my friends," she says.

The only time the group took time off was when they went on a trip to the Andamans. As of now, Murudeshwar is taking a break after her knee replacement surgery. "I go for walks but I am waiting to waltz back to life on my terrace," she says. Seventy year-old Elsie Fernandes best sums up the spirit: "I go to the class mainly to look at all the smiling faces. It cheers me up."

— Shyamola Khanna



## BOOKMARKS OF JOY

Serampore

Shilbhadra Dutta

**N**andan Book Stall in Serampore might appear to be just one of the thousands of hole-in-the-wall bookshops that abound in West Bengal, a state known for its profusion of literati. However, for a group of silvers, all in their late 50s, it is more than a bookshop—it's their daily habit. Sailen Kumar Dutta, a retired gazetted officer, Anandalal Ganguli, a former economics teacher, Robin Lahiri, a retired chartered accountant, Goutam Bhattacharjee, a polymer scientist, and Anup Ghosh, a retired engineer, meet here every day at 6 pm. Though Sasthi Nandan who started the shop in 1975 is no more, his elder son Uday faithfully follows his father's last wish: "Don't let a reader leave the stall empty-handed—even if he doesn't have money."

For the five silvers though, the shop is more than just a source of great literature; it's a place that has nurtured their friendship for over four decades. It's where they discuss, argue, rationalise and rhapsodise. "That Bengalis enjoy their *adda* is perhaps known to all but the essence that goes into the making of a typical Bengali tête-à-tête can only be grasped when you are at a *thek* [haunt] like Nandan Book Stall," quips Ganguli. At this secluded nook—

that they playfully refer to as "far from the madding crowd of Serampore"—they have found an inner sanctum.

Over piping hot tea served by Uday, they discuss the intricacies of Greek myths; add a corny twist to Shakespearean quotes; read out Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*, and find reflections of their own lives in tales and novellas. Tongue-in-cheek repartee—often borrowed from literature—flows freely as they go through books and talk to each other: "How could you be such a fool?" "I've lately taken a taste in foolery; has not consumerism made such hopeless fools of us that we have come to lose our appetite for humour?" "You've indeed spoken jest in truth and truth in jest. But can we help being the hollow men?" ...and so on and so forth. Customers walk in and out, but the five are huddled in a quiet corner, happy to have found "a gem of a book" or "a new twist to an old story". So we know what Dutta means when he says he is not willing to trade their ritual for anything on earth. "It's not mere reading but the conversations and perspectives we share that bring us back here over and again."

—Partha Mukherjee & Priyanka Mukherjee



Anup Banerjee

## MAD ABOUT MAH JONG

Pune

Earlier I used to think Mah Jong was a silly game played by women who had nothing better to do," says Veena Suman wryly. Today the sexagenarian feels she can never really tire of playing it. "Contrary to my former views, I found it requires both sharp memory and concentration." Every Friday, Suman and her friends Dolly Farwaha, Mangala Kale and Asha Khot meet at her bungalow in Salunkhe Vihar for a stimulating game.

The object of their affection is the Mah Jong set comprising 144 small soap-shaped ceramic tiles painted with various characters in delicate Chinese script; a pair of dice; chips to keep score; and four wooden 'walls' (counters) to stack the tiles. The game requires four players. Players pick up and discard tiles, followed by the others in clockwise rotation. They can make any of the 60-70 combinations of tiles and the one who completes it first wins the set.

The four silvers play nonstop for four hours, their competitive spirit gliding smoothly against their camaraderie. Winning and losing depends on acumen and luck, "so there is no 'post-mortem' among the losers," says Kale. Dolly Farwaha, however, credits Mah Jong with saving her life. Farwaha, who was ill for years, would lie on the bed and imagine herself going back to playing Mah Jong. As she recalls with a grin, "Recently during a check-up, the doctor asked me if I had problems climbing stairs. I told him, 'Not if there is a Mah Jong game taking place there.'"

For all four, Mah Jong is a way of life. A game they played for decades as young wives and continue to enjoy as grandmothers. But as Khot says, they have only thing to be despondent about: "The younger generation is busy with their careers. This game will end with us."

—Mita Banerjee

# SONG OF TOGETHERNESS

Mumbai

**O**n the first Saturday of every month, the Bhavna Trust office in Chembur comes alive with the songs of old Hindi films. For the past year, Balan Iyer, an academician who teaches Vedic Maths, has been rounding up a bunch of music lovers—mostly silvers—for an evening of pure nostalgia, or *Sunehre Pal*.

“I wanted to form a platform where people my age could share some precious moments listening to music that soothes both body and soul,” says the 56 year-old who has been collecting songs for over four decades now. The songs are fed on a digital pen drive, which is plugged to a state-of-the-art music system. Every session starts with Iyer’s introduction on the day’s theme, such as songs of Shamshad Begum, Manna Dey, Noor Jahan, Geeta Dutt, Naushad, O P Naiyyar, and so on.

Iyer has a collection of 8,000 songs, including rare non-film recordings which he claims even All India Radio doesn’t have. He collaborates on the initiative with 62 year-old Jayant Bhavsar, president of Bhavna Trust, who runs a construction business. “Ever since I have been part of *Sunehre Pal*, I have realised that music can dissolve all barriers of age and caste,”



says Bhavsar. “I see South Indian women humming along to songs written in Urdu and teenagers rhapsodising over Geeta Dutt numbers with senior citizens.” Though the group started out with just 40 people, today it numbers 120.

Between songs, silvers and youngsters share interesting trivia about artists. “Rafi *saab* used to visit our house,” recalls 75 year-old lyricist Veena Chitko who hums softly throughout the session. “Nowadays, when the elderly and our heritage are being forgotten, such musical gatherings help us to deal with our old age blues and maintain harmony in our lives,” says 52 year-old Bhupesh Gouniyal. Proof of Gouniyal’s words lies in the success of the last session on Rafi—despite heavy rains, more than 80 people (mostly silvers) attended the event.

—Kriti Sharma

Call Balan Iyer on (0) 9819323860 to know more



# TEA AND TAMBOLA

Delhi

The rain drums a steady beat on the asphalt as we head towards Keshavpuram to meet the tambola group. It's the perfect weather to gobble up savouries, snuggle under the blankets and chill out over mushy songs. The tambola group, though, is getting ready to do anything but relax. They seem more geared to holler, giggle, guffaw, banter, and earn money while they are doing all of that!

The fun began 16 years ago when 55 year-old Kavita Kathuria, the youngest silver in the group, met a group of retired women in the local B3 Park in Keshavpuram. Kathuria used to go to the park to take a relaxing walk after finishing her household chores in the evening. As the friendship between the women grew, they started meeting at each other's house to play a round of tambola. Though initially the games were unscheduled, over time, the women made it a practice to meet once a week. "We make sure we never miss our get-together. Sometimes when guests come home, we even cook up excuses saying we need to go out for a *kirtan* or check-up," says Kathuria with a wicked grin.

When *Harmony* meets the group at 3 pm on a weekend, there are 20 women gathered in Kathuria's flat. The rustle of silk *dupatta* vies against the whisper of chiffon saris. Voices brimming with excitement fill the room—some shrilly, some gravelly, and others well-modulated. The game begins as 63 year-old Suraksha Gulati calls out the numbers. As the roll call gains mo-



mentum, even the most solemn faces are writ with childlike anticipation. After a count of 20 numbers, the first 'lucky-five' winner is declared: 67 year-old Shanti Devi Johri. A couple of minutes after that, sexagenarian Indra Sharma lays her claim to the top line, followed by Lalita Bansal, 61, who claims the two corners. The giggles and leg-pulling continue till the end when Kathuria wins two full houses for Rs 110 each. The game may have come to an end but the soiree is far from over. The women sit back with steaming cups of *chai*, *samosa* and pastries to share jokes, chat and plan their next meeting. By tacit agreement, they refuse to gossip or burden each other with their family problems.

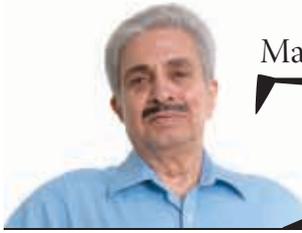
—Natasha Menezes



Mihir Singh

# Body & Soul

weight watch



Madhukar

# Talwalkar

**Easy-to-do:** Get motivated to exercise

**Every time I embark on an exercise programme, I quit in three to four days. I am in my 60s and have always led a fairly sedentary life. Please suggest some easy exercises that I can do without losing interest and motivation.**

We are motivated to do things we benefit from. For instance, if I told you I would give you a million dollars to take a 30-minute walk tomorrow, would you do it? I bet you would! The benefits of exercise aren't quite that compelling, but they are pretty motivating.

**Create your personal list of reasons.** Keep a piece of paper and pen handy for a couple of days. Write down *every* reason for getting fit/losing weight—for instance, one could need “more energy to spend time with your family”.

**Exercise with a friend.** Statistics tell us that people who exercise with a friend exercise more consistently.

**Train for a local 5K to 10K walk in your area.** I've seen many people transformed from couch potatoes to lean, mean exercise machines because they decided to enter and train for a competition like this.

**Reward yourself.** Put aside a small amount of money—say Rs 30—every time you exercise. After a month, see how much you've saved and splurge on something you normally wouldn't buy for yourself.

**Keep records.** Write down your exercise time (in minutes) each day. Keep a running total for the month and year. Calculate your average exercise time per day. Set lofty goals.

## EASY EXERCISES

Here are some simple exercises you can start with.

### Cardiovascular exercises:

**Walking** is the simplest, cheapest and easiest form of

cardiovascular exercise. It is very low impact and extremely convenient. Start slowly, then gradually work up to walking longer and faster. Finding a walking partner can help keep you motivated.

**Jogging/running** is a step up from walking. It is harder and puts more impact and stress on the body. If you are just starting an exercise programme, work through fast walking before moving up to jogging.

You could **cycle** as well as **swim**.

### Resistance exercises

**Wall push-ups:** Stand facing a wall with your feet 1-2 ft away from it. Place your hands on the wall; keep them a shoulder width apart. Bending only at the elbows, lower yourself forward towards the wall then push yourself away from it. Keep your body stiff and straight during the movement.

**Standing rows for the back:** These are done from a standing position. Loop a towel around a vertical pole, column or another fixed object; the end of the towel should be wrapped around the far side of the pole. Bring your feet close up to the pole and lean back gripping the ends of the towel and keep your body stiff and straight. Row yourself up with both arms. Keep the back arched and row with your back.

**Seated dumbbell presses for shoulders:** Use something around the house as weights—soup cans or plastic bottles with water in them. From a seated or standing position, hold the weights just above your shoulders. Push them up overhead slowly.

Next month, I will talk about easy-to-do resistance exercises like bodyweight squats, abdominal crunches and workout for arms and calves.

*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)*



Dr Anjali

# Mukerjee

## Do you need gluten? A gluten-free diet has several health benefits

**Of late, I have been reading a lot about the benefits of a gluten-free diet. What is gluten and what are the foods that contain it? What are the benefits of following a gluten-free diet? Is it recommended for people over the age of 50?**

Diet-related stories in newspapers, magazines and television often create confusion regarding food allergy and intolerance. Considering themselves 'allergic' to certain foods may result in people cutting out foods that may in fact be an essential part of a healthy balanced diet.

Gluten is a form of protein found in wheat, rye, barley and other related grains and hence found in bread, biscuits, cakes, pastries, breakfast cereals, pasta, beer, pizza, *rumali roti*, *naan*, *paratha*, noodles and most soups. In fact, it is the reason behind food being chewable and elastic with soaking ability. A gluten-free diet is completely devoid of foods that contain wheat, oats, rye and barley. People suffering from celiac disease (also known as non-tropical sprue and gluten intolerance), gluten-induced skin sensitivity, wheat allergy, autism, or even attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder are advised to have a gluten-free diet.

### Symptoms of gluten intolerance

Occasionally, gluten provokes allergic reactions in some individuals. Gas and bloating are early symptoms of gluten intolerance that can develop into constipation, fatigue and dizziness. As the condition further advances towards celiac disease, signs like abdominal pain, severe constipation or diarrhoea, anaemia, headache, numbness in hands and feet, increasing allergies, asthma and night sweats also appear.

### Benefits of following a gluten-free diet

A gluten-free diet has several health benefits, including lowered cholesterol and increased energy. It also helps

people with osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, autism, seizures, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, cognitive problems, and attention deficit disorder. Following a gluten-free diet leads to improved digestion, better weight loss and a less bloated abdomen.

### Alternatives for people on gluten-free diet

**Rice:** Fairly bland and good for all purposes, rice flour is an alternative most people try first. It is a good thickener and can be used to make muffins and bread. Rice bread is often described as heavy and dense. Both white and brown rice give fairly equal results.

**Sorghum (*jowar*):** Nutritionally, this grain is high in carbohydrates, fibre, phosphorous, potassium, B vitamins and protein. Sorghum tends to have a gritty texture. As a result, it doesn't hold together well when used for baking breads. It works best when blended with other flours. Try it when baking flat bread, cookies, crackers or pancakes.

**Maize flour:** It has no pronounced flavour and provides smoothness when mixed with rice flour. It makes light but very fragile dough.

**Tapioca (*sabudana*):** Use tapioca starch if corn doesn't go down well with you. It provides a 'chewiness' and helps smoothen rice flour. It can be a substitute for potato starch and cornstarch (cornflour).

**Soy flour:** Used in small amounts, it adds moistness. However, the flavour is very pronounced and a larger amount can be overpowering. If you are allergic to everything else, mixing 1/3 part soy flour with 2/3 rice flour will work reasonably well.

**Pasta:** Pasta made from rice, containing B vitamins, is available. Rice noodles and rice vermicelli (*seviyan*) are also available.



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A gluten-free diet has several health benefits, including lowered cholesterol and increased energy. It also helps people with osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, autism, seizures, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, cognitive problems, and attention deficit disorder

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**Biscuits:** A selection of both sweet and savoury maize and millet biscuits—similar to digestive biscuits—is available; these are ideal with a slice of cheese or green tea.

**Cereals:** Muesli made from raisins, cornflakes, rice flakes, banana chips, coconut chips and dried fruit is a great alternative to wheat. Porridge made from rice flakes and millet is also available. All cereals contain B vitamins and iron.

Here's a gluten-free recipe for you to savour and enjoy:

- Gram flour (*besan*) *chilla*
- 100 gm gram (chickpea) flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 3 tbsp chopped spinach
- 2 tbsp grated tofu/cottage cheese
- 1 tsp shredded and crushed ginger
- 350 ml iced water
- 1 tsp oil

**Method:** Mix flour, salt, vegetables and spices together. Add iced water gradually until you get a smooth batter. Heat 1 tsp oil on a non-stick pan; add one-fourth batter, spread evenly and cook until edges are crispy and brown and the top is dry. Serve with filling of your choice or garnish with grated tofu.

Gluten intolerance can develop at any age. Most people get affected around the age of 40 to 50. The fact that more middle-aged people suffer from gluten intolerance could be because the average time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis is usually more than a decade. Hence, switching to a gluten-free diet at this age will be beneficial for health. It's just about mildly readjusting your taste buds.

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*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 Kanir Bhatia  
Diplomate of The International  
Congress of Oral Implantology  
(ICOI, USA)  
[kanirbhatia@gmail.com](mailto:kanirbhatia@gmail.com)

**Q1. I want to replace my missing upper front tooth. Should I go for a dental bridge or an implant?**

Though a dental bridge can serve you satisfactorily, implants provide better support and usually result in more stable tooth replacement. For a bridge, the healthy teeth adjacent to the missing space will have to be trimmed down to make place for the supporting crowns. With an implant, the missing root is first replaced and a natural looking tooth replacement is fixed onto that. Today, unless one is replacing an old bridge or the adjacent teeth need crowns in any case, implants are the first choice in tooth replacement.

**Q2. I fractured my front tooth and have to remove it. Can I get an implant and new tooth immediately?**

Immediate implant procedures have become very common these days especially for front teeth. Here, after extracting the tooth, the implant is placed at the same time. As FDA has approved immediate loading for Nobel Biocare implants because of their special surface coating, placement of a temporary crown immediately after burring the implant is possible in the same sitting. Hence the patient can get a replacement on the day a tooth is removed.

**Q3. Will my implant crown feel natural?**

Dental implant-supported teeth look, feel and function like natural teeth. The dental implant itself is buried inside the bone and never seen—it's the crown, bridge or denture fixed onto the implant that the patient sees and feels. Also, as Nobel Procera provides customised tooth (coloured, high quality aesthetic crowns), the patient is able to walk out of the surgery with a beautiful smile.

**Q4. What is 'Bone Grafting' and will I need it before implants?**

Successful placement of implants depends on the presence of bone of sufficient quality and quantity. This is not always present in every patient. It was previously thought that in areas where there was insufficient bone it was not possible to place implants. There have now been great advances made in procedures to increase the amount of available bone, either by use of autogenous bone (belonging to the patient) or a range of artificial substitutes or a combination of both. These grafting techniques are simple and often carried out at the time of implant placement. For areas where there is significant lack of bone, more complex grafting procedures can be carried out to restore bone volume. In such cases, grafting may have to be carried out and left to heal for 4-6 months before implants are placed.

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Dr Rekha

# Sheth

## Save your skin: It's never too late to look young

**Over the past year or so, my face has become increasingly tanned and pigmented. My skin looks blotchy with wrinkles and crow's feet. Please suggest a skincare regime I can follow at home. Will options like Botox, fillers and nonsurgical face lifts help me?**

Nobody really looks forward to growing old, for as time passes we are blessed with wrinkles and crow's feet. However, with the right lifestyle and products and a few precautions, you could reduce or delay the advancement of these lines. Ageing of skin could be because of genetic reasons, hormonal changes, UV rays, smoking, pollution and chemical exposure. As our skin ages, the collagen and elastin fibre get weaker and skin becomes wrinkled, healing all the more slowly. Women, however, show the effects of ageing more rapidly after menopause because of falling levels of oestrogen.

There are some **Must Dos** for silvers.

Following a healthy lifestyle and a regular skin care routine will help minimise the effects of ageing. In view of the increased intensity of UV rays, it is advisable to start preventive measures as early as possible. It's better late than never. At a young age, the only thing that is required is regular use of a broad spectrum sunscreen every single day. Using mild cleansing agents like face washes and body washes are preferable than soap.

Use a mild face wash to wash your face—Synergie, Pears, Ponds, Avon, Aviance, are all good. One of the gold standards in mild face washes is Cetaphil, the favourite of dermatologists all over the world. This is available at all drug stores. Use a sunscreen everyday, even if you are indoors. UVA rays, which cause tanning and ageing, easily come in through the windows. Use a sunscreen with SPF over 30. Some of the better ones are Banana Boat, Coppertone and Neutrogena. Now Vichy sunscreen is available in India—this is very effective.

### Take preventive and corrective measures as early as possible to protect your skin from UV rays.

Otherwise, skincare advice depends on the present condition of your skin. These days even youngsters aged 20 to 30 begin to get lines around the eyes. Probably moisturisers containing AHAs would help—Ponds Age Defying cream, Avon's Anew, and Synergie are some of the good ones. Go for a moisturiser that contains antioxidants like Vitamins C, E and A.

Today, there is a whole range of anti-ageing products, medication, modali-

ties, and clinic procedures available for treating wrinkles and pigmentation. Here is a list of some of the effective anti-ageing products available: Retinoids, AHAs, BHAs, polyhydroxy acids, antioxidants, cytokine/growth factor creams, copper-peptide complexes and topical hormones like estriol, ethocyn and anti-androgen. Retinoids are the most effective but they should be used under the supervision of a dermatologist. Anti-ageing clinical procedures (NOT surgery) include non-surgical facelifts, chemical peels, microabrasion, Botox, and fillers like Restylane and Dermalive.

Optional therapies such as Botox, fillers and non-surgical facelifts will definitely help you look better. Botox, is a simple, non-surgical procedure that helps smooth deep facial lines. It vastly improves the quality of the skin by working on the outside from within. It is recommended for lines on the forehead, frown lines and crow's feet, shaping of the eyebrows and facial glow. Fillers fill out facial wrinkles, creases and furrows, making the skin taut and young. It's recommended for laugh lines, wrinkles, lip enhancement and facial contouring, to correct scars and deep wrinkles. Non-surgical face lifts (or thermage) is a non-surgical method for face lift, neck lift and tummy tuck. And the results are almost permanent. It's recommended for loose, sagging skin anywhere on the body (face, neck, chin, jaw line, stomach, arms, buttocks and thighs).

*Dr Rekha Sheth is a Mumbai-based cosmetic dermatologist. Sheth is also the founder of Cosmetic Dermatology Society and vice president of the International Society of Dermatology*



Dr Duru

# Shah

## IVF debate: Making mothers out of grandmothers

**T**he news of 66 year-old Bharati Devi giving birth to triplets in Hisar, Rajasthan, shocked many of us. She had conceived after 44 years of marriage through in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) last year. Two years ago, Rajo Devi Lohan, also from Hisar, was thought to be the world's oldest mother, at 70 years of age—she had conceived through IVF as well and delivered a baby girl. Unfortunately, Rajo Devi is now critically ill.

Since 1990s, pregnancies in post-menopausal women beyond 50 years through donor oocytes are being recorded across the world. In the US, more than 539 births—including twins and triplets—were reported among women over 50 from 1997 to 1999. According to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority of the United Kingdom, more than 20 babies are born per year in Britain to women over 50 through IVF.

A large number of post-menopausal women utilise this treatment for infertility. Unfortunately, the science of assisted reproduction was not as easily available to them when they were younger and could have had children. Yet, the desire to become mothers remains; often the social pressure is so intense that even though they have gone beyond the age of natural motherhood, they utilise newer technologies to fulfil their dreams. However, there are medical, ethical, cultural and socioeconomic repercussions of

women becoming mothers at an age when they should be grandmothers.

Are we then as medical practitioners justified in assisting them especially when we know that post-menopausal women go through complications related to pregnancies? To begin with, 60-plus is too late an age to become pregnant. The risks associated with pregnancy gradually increase with

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### There are medical, ethical, cultural and socioeconomic repercussions when postmenopausal women become pregnant

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age. There is scientific evidence to prove that older pregnant women are likely to develop high blood pressure and/or diabetes. As women age, they have a marked pattern of increased intervention such as a caesarean delivery. They are also likely to have induced labour and instrumental delivery. What's worse, the child born is likely to be orphaned at a very young age and may be deprived of parental love and supervision. That apart, the media attention and publicity may harm unsuspecting future couples opting for these techniques in the ignorant belief that this is quite safe.

As IVF specialists we should weigh the benefits/risks according to individual health. It is also our responsibility to educate and counsel advanced-age couples about the possible risks involved for the mother and child.

The Assisted Reproductive Technology Guidelines 2008 of the Indian Council of Medical Research do not mention the age limit for assisted reproductive technology. There is a need to organise a consensus of women's organisations, social scientists, legal experts and policymakers in this dialogue. When we focus on pregnancy after 50 years of age, it entails the use of donated eggs. Getting donor sperms without any harm to the donor is easy, hence it's easily acceptable. Retrieving donor eggs entails a minor surgery and, in a bid to harvest large numbers of eggs at a time, we need to use hormones, which may also harm the donor, both physically and emotionally. All these make egg donation costlier and may lead to the exploitation of donors from lower socio-economic communities.

As I also practise assisted reproductive technology and IVF, I try to dissuade older couples and offer them 'surrogacy' as an option. But if they are determined, are we justified in preventing them the pleasure of motherhood? I, at least, would not like to be the reason for the deteriorating health of the mother-to-be and creation of a soon-to-be orphan.

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*Dr Duru Shah is consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Breach Candy Hospital, Jaslok Hospital and Sir Hurler's Hospital in Mumbai; she is former president of the Indian Menopause Society*



Shameem

# Akthar

## Bon appétit: Get your appetite back with yoga

Superficially, low appetite appears to be a psychological problem in silvers. However, it is symptomatic of other ailments and accompanied by depression and social isolation. It is related to malabsorption, which in turn may cause anaemia and critical nutrient deficiencies. Low appetite also accompanies clinical depression.

Urinary tract infections, dental problems, serious dehydration, anaemia and nutritional deficiencies from low or indifferent appetite could worsen bed sores and respiratory ailments. Low appetite also slows down wound healing and diminishes the body's ability to fight infections. It is often linked to a lesser known problem called protein-energy malnutrition which is very dangerous as it causes

nervous system ailments, including lack of coordination, delirium and falls. Fortunately, yoga can counter low appetite and take you back to enjoying life's simple joys.

Stomach-pumping cleansing (*agnisara kriya*) is a powerful practice that involves pumping the stomach back to its youthful tone, so that not just appetite but digestion, nutrient absorption and metabolism are revived. It has a toggle effect, boosting appetite when it is dangerously low and controlling it in the dangerously obese. It's a cleansing practice and highly recommended as part of a daily programme. It is also regarded as an anti-ageing practice. A more advanced version of this called stomach-churning (*nauli*) is also recommended.

Other advanced practices include the stomach lock (*uddiyana bandha*), which has similar though enhanced benefits to *agnisara kriya*. This may be done independently or as part of your breathing (*pranayama*) practices. Similarly stomach-compressing forward and backbends may be used. A perfect sequence that incorporates both forward and backbends is the sun salute (*surya namaskar*). Other forward bends that boost appetite are the seated forward bend (*paschimot-tanasana*), head-to-knee pose (*janu sirsasana*) and downward-facing dog (*adhomukhasvanasana*). Backbends that stimulate appetite include the cobra (*bhujangasana*), locust (*salabhasana*) and bow (*dhanurasana*). The camel pose (*ushtrasana*) restores tone to the lengthy digestive tract.

Haresh Patel



### YOGIC MOVES Stomach-pumping cleansing practice (*agnisara kriya*)

This is ideally learnt under expert guidance. However, here are a few pointers to how the practice may be done. Sit or stand. If standing, place palms flat on either thigh. If seated, you may place hands on your knees. Inhale, then exhale deeply, pressing down the hands on the thigh/knees. Though pumping is best done when breath is held after exhalation, in the

simpler version you can pump your belly as you breathe in and out. Do 10 pumps initially. Increase to 30 after a few weeks. This practice has to be done first thing in the morning, before you have consumed anything. As it is a heating practice, ensure proper hydration by drinking plenty of fluids later. Avoid if you have any inflammation like fever and ulcers and if you suffer from high blood pressure, hyperthyroidism or cardiac ailments. **Benefits:** The practice tones the stomach and the digestive tract. It uplifts mood and fights fatigue.

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)



# "An anti-ageing miracle drug does not exist"

YOU CAN'T TURN BACK THE CLOCK BUT SCIENCE CAN HELP YOU FIND GOOD HEALTH AND HAPPINESS IN YOUR SILVER YEARS, SAYS AGEING EXPERT DR SURESH RATTAN IN AN INTERVIEW WITH **VANDANA SHUKLA**

**R**eclaim the world as a silver," suggests Dr Suresh (Inder Singh) Rattan, internationally renowned gerontologist. "The problem begins when we defy ageing. It is a much better approach to create buffering capacities to manage ageing and then enjoy it." This message comes from a scientist who has revolutionised the understanding of the biology of ageing. Dr Rattan, a D Sc in gerontology, is head of the laboratory of Cellular Ageing in the Department of Molecular Biology, University of Aarhus, Denmark. He earned his PhD from the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill, London. Dr Rattan has discovered anti-ageing properties in kinetin and zeatin, plant growth-regulating hormones. And though he has published about 190 research and review articles and a dozen books, his search to find a deeper understanding of ageing continues.

Shorn of his lab coat, Dr Rattan wears many hats. He plays the tabla under the name Shashi Maharaj and has also cut a disc with jazz player Harry Jolkumsen, titled *State of the Art: Small Town People*. Promoting learning among children is another passion and Dr Rattan spends a lot of time popularising science among kids, especially in Punjab. His book, *Where's Baba Gone*, written for children in Punjabi, has been translated into Romanian, Italian, German, French, Greek and Spanish. In a free-wheeling interview, the good doctor reveals the secret of healthy and happy ageing.

**You have studied cells to understand ageing. Can you elaborate?**

Ageing occurs mainly owing to the progressive failure in maintenance and repair pathways. These changes in the body's defence mechanisms lead to impairment of the body. I have studied the effect of exercise on cells and applied it to ageing. In stressful situations like exercise or when we ingest mild toxins, our cells produce hormesis, a stress hormone that counters some of the damage sustained by cells. This is how cells rejuvenate.

I am researching the beneficial effects of mild stress and foods that stimulate hormesis. Incidentally, all spices, particularly turmeric, contain natural and synthetic compounds called hormetins that stimulate hormesis. So in future, one can expect multi-hormetin pills just like multivitamin pills.

**There is so much discussion about arresting ageing. Is this scientifically sound?**

Immortality and eternal youth may never be possible. But a healthy life even in old age is a real possibility based on scientific principles.

**Do products that claim to slow ageing really work?**

There is no anti-ageing pill available anywhere in the world. If something makes you feel good, that's good enough. We must understand that all drug trials, including those conducted for geriatric drugs, are carried out on people aged between 20 and 35;

mainly men. The future of medicine lies in personalised medicine.

**What do you think of cosmetics that claim to erase the signs of ageing? Do these products arrest only the signs of ageing or ageing itself?**

My research on hormesis is used by manufacturers of anti-ageing creams. Doses of 'mild stress' are applied to the skin to arrest ageing. Some algae and kinetin and zeatin cause hormesis in skin cells.

**Do cosmetics companies approach you for any formula?**

Givenchy has recently launched Vaxin for Youth. I was flown to France and Japan to give a talk on hormesis, on which the cream is formulated. I addressed about 500 journalists. The Body Shop has a few formulations and there's Kinerase, which uses kinetin.

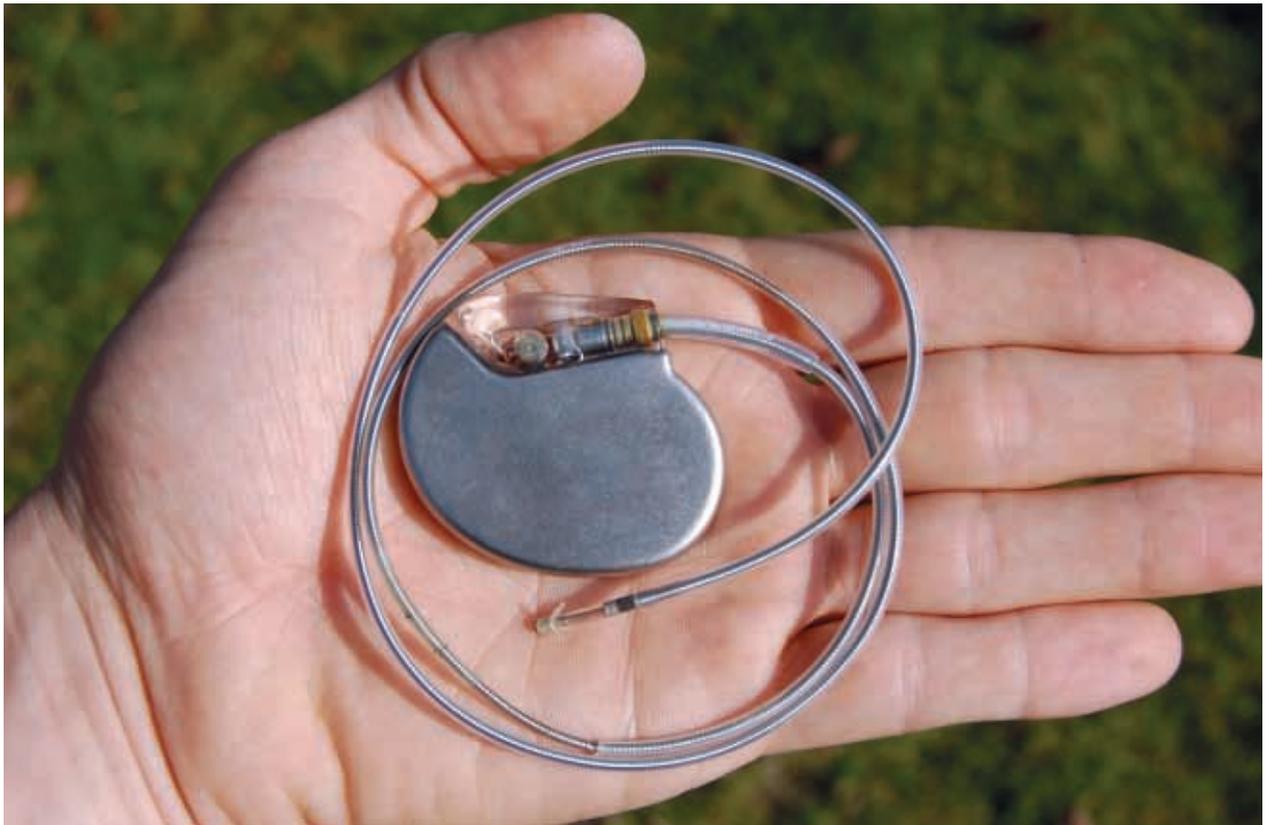
**Many silvers suffer from bone degeneration and Alzheimer's. How can one cope with these debilities?**

Some research has been done on meditation, which triggers stress proteins in saliva. Mental exercises like reverse counting or reading a book in the mirror produce hormesis in brain cells. These may help avoid Alzheimer's. Exercise, Vitamin D supplements and calcium can keep bones healthy.

**Will you arrest your ageing?**

I would, if I could. But if one stops expecting a miracle to happen, one can enjoy old age. You see, wisdom comes only with age.

# MRI ENABLED



Medanta Medicity Hospital in Gurgaon, Max Hospital in New Delhi, Apollo Hospital in Madurai, B M Birla Hospital in Kolkata and SGPGI Hospital in Lucknow have taken a lead by fitting cardiac patients with an **MRI-compatible pacemaker**. Until now, patients with pacemakers were excluded from MRI scans because pacemakers obstruct such scanning processes. The MRI-compatible pacemaker, known as **EnRhythm MRI SureScan pacing system**, will be beneficial for silvers as their need to undergo scanning is greater owing to musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and oncological conditions. “The current pacemakers

include a metal wire that connects the device to the heart,” Dr Praveen Chandra, chairman of intervention cardiology at Medanta Medicity, explains to *Harmony*. “During an MRI, this wire can heat up to high temperatures owing to radio waves, thereby affecting blood vessels, scarring the heart and in some cases inducing a rapid heart condition that could even turn fatal or cause irreversible damage. The wire can also pick up radio frequency interference, damaging the pacemaker’s performance.” As for cost implications, the current pacemakers cost Rs 160,000, while the EnRhythm costs just Rs 30,000 more.

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**The government has earmarked Rs 12.3 billion for the new National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS).** Over 70 million people will be screened for diabetes and hypertension as early as possible and given appropriate treatment. Around 32,000 people will be trained to provide targeted screening, diagnosis and management of non-communicable diseases.

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# Cancer cure in sight

Cancer cure gets another shot in the arm. Scientists at the National Chemical Laboratories, Pune, have discovered a **compound that limits the spread of cancerous tumours**. It has been identified in a type of bacteria—streptomyces bacterium, known to have medicinal properties—that acts against chemicals known to help tumour cells grow and migrate. The study could help in developing drugs that can cure cancer. “We are calling the compound CPI-2081; it inhibits the enzymatic proteins that are known to degrade other proteins,” Jay Prakash Singh, a scientist involved with the study, tells *Harmony*. “Tumour cells

exploit the tendency of proteases to spread to other areas. Therefore, we



can say that CPI-2081 inhibits tumour cell migration, possibly by inhibiting proteases.” Cancer tumours generally

grow inside or next to healthy organs, making it difficult for doctors to target them. Chemotherapy and radiation have potential side effects if administered in a full-grown, malignant tumour. “If one can restrict their growth and reach, chemotherapy can be used in a localised manner,” adds Singh. “We screened around 50 varieties of the bacteria and found one that acts against cysteine proteases. We tested the key ingredient from the bacterium on human breast cancer and skin cancer cells, and found that it significantly limited the spread of the tumour—in some cases up to 75 per cent.



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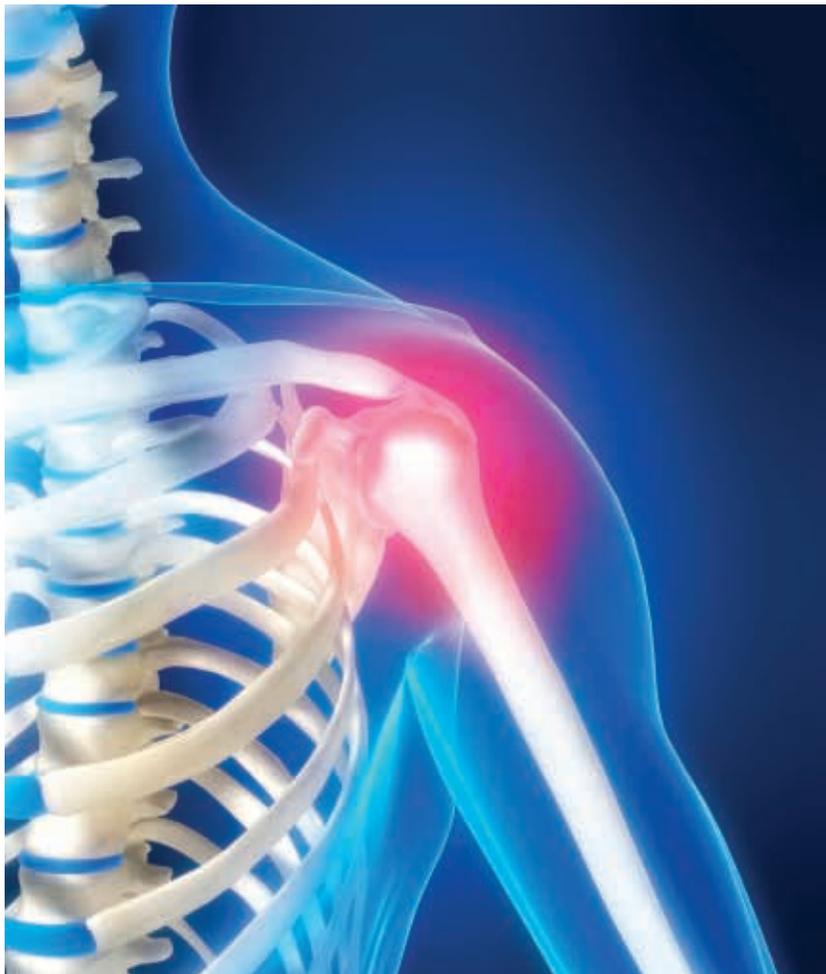
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# Staying mobile



Patients with severe arthritis with a damaged or degenerative rotator cuff (inner sleeve of muscles and tendons essential for shoulder function) can now breathe easy, thanks to an **all-new reverse shoulder replacement surgery**. While conventional shoulder replacement can only be done in patients who have a healthy and functioning rotator cuff, the reverse method is ideal for patients who also have a damaged rotator cuff. The surgery is available at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH) in Mumbai. "It affords excellent pain relief, improves range of motion and the ability to perform daily activities," Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, consultant (arthroscopy and sports orthopaedics) at KDAH tells *Harmony*. "Silvers are often inappropriate candidates for conventional shoulder replacement. They have no option but to live with the pain and accept a decreased quality of life. Reverse shoulder replacement offers them great promise." The recovery process after this surgery is the same as that for conventional replacement. Patients need to stay in the hospital for about five days, with most able to perform basic shoulder functions within one week. However, complete recovery takes up to six weeks.



**Himachal Pradesh will have free ambulance services by the end of the year.** The state government has signed a public-private partnership agreement with Hyderabad-based company GVK-EMRI to run 108 ambulances in the state in accordance with WHO standards. In the first phase, the ambulance service will start on 2 October in Sirmour, Solan, Una and Hamirpur districts. By 25 December, the services will fan out to other districts as well. However, tribal districts of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti are not included.

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Dr A B

# Dey

## Cancer treatment options for silvers: Physical and mental health should be key considerations

Limited data from India suggests that 20 per cent of all cancers are reported in patients above 60 years of age and it is one of the five common causes of death in older Indians. Though the relationship between cancer and ageing is unclear, the increased risk of cancer in old age is possibly owing to poor DNA repair in old age; activation of cancer-causing genes and suppression of protective genes; decline in immune mechanism for tumours; and prolonged exposure to environmental factors causing cancer. Despite higher predisposition, aggressiveness and spread of cancer tend to decrease with advancing age. Still the diagnosis of cancer in many older patients is late because of poor access to the health system, lack of interest in screening, lack of awareness about the problem, and a fatalistic attitude. There are certain cancers that mostly occur after the age of 50, such as cancers of head, uterine cancer of cervix, gastro-intestinal tract, pancreas and prostate. Half of haematological and breast malignancies are encountered after the age of 60.

Older patients should be approached with the same principles of therapy as patients of other age group. Age does not adversely influence the efficacy of treatment, nor does it predispose the patient to higher toxicity. Fitness and mental health should be the consideration rather than chronological age, and all the following options of therapy should be considered:

**Surgery:** The decision to operate should depend on cardio-respiratory performance status, target organ status; fitness for anaesthesia, and presence of other illnesses. Though there is a general trend to avoid surgery, in select situations (early breast cancer) older women show a much diminished risk of recurrence after surgery and better overall results.

### Age does not adversely influence the efficacy of treatment, nor does it predispose the patient to higher toxicity

**Radiotherapy:** Older patients unsuitable for surgery often receive radiotherapy; this can be curative/radical or palliative radiotherapy. Poor health and the presence of multiple co-morbid conditions can increase radiation morbidity while very old patients in good physical health in early cancer can show good response. The outcome of radiotherapy depends on mental state, kidney function, cardio-pulmonary reserve, bone marrow resilience and integrity of skin and mucous membrane. Even radiation in lower doses can be effective if the patient is ill and unfit for full dosage.

**Chemotherapy:** As a general principle, chemotherapy should be given

in full dose and as scheduled, though modification of the drug dosage can be done depending on the toxicity of the drug, state of kidney and liver, and novel drug delivery system.

**Palliative care:** Palliative care involves active care of pain, distressing symptoms and other psychological issues of an incurable or terminal patient. Many patients require palliative care at some stage or the other.

Lifestyle changes, diet and exercise are probably of lesser value in the primary prevention of cancer in old age. On the other hand, secondary prevention by early detection through screening is of great practical value. Cancer is a hundred times more common in males aged 75 years than those aged 25 years. Screening, therefore, is most cost-effective at old age. Some cancers that should be routinely screened for are prostate, colon-rectum, breast, uterine cervix and lungs. Because of social reasons, older individuals may not be keen on cancer screening programmes and raising awareness may be the first step towards prevention.

At the end of the day, the quality of life or physical, mental and social wellbeing in the presence of cancer is the most important issue. The patient's satisfaction with cancer treatment is related primarily to drug toxicity and then to disease control. Older patients usually prefer good quality of life than a long life of pain and misery.

*Dr A B Dey is professor in the Department of Medicine and chief of geriatric services at AIIMS, New Delhi*

# The wonder years

Dispel the fearful images of old age, urges Louise Hay

What do you personally believe about ageing? Do you look at the frail and ill and assume that you'll be that way, too? Do you see poverty among the ageing and think that that's your destiny as well? Do you notice how lonely many older people are and wonder if you will be in the same position? We don't have to accept these negative concepts. We can take our power back. Feeling vital and energetic is much more important than a facial line or two, yet we've agreed that unless we're young and beautiful, we're not acceptable. Each day we look for something that's wrong with us, and we worry about every wrinkle. This only makes us feel bad and create more wrinkles. This is self-hatred, and it only contributes to our lack of self esteem. What are you teaching your children about ageing? Do they see a dynamic, loving person, enjoying each day and looking forward to the future? Or are you a bitter, frightened person, dreading your elder years and expecting to be sick and alone? What kind of elder years do we want to help them envision and create?

In 1900, our life expectancy was 47 years. Now we're accepting 80 as a normal lifespan. Why can't we take a quantum leap in consciousness and make the new level of acceptance 120 or 150 years? I see living much longer becoming natural for most of us in a generation or two. Forty-five used to be middle age (I am now in my 84th year). For generations, we've allowed the numbers that correspond to how many years we've been on the planet tell us how to feel and how to behave. As with any other aspect of life, what we mentally accept and be-



The later years of our lives are to be the years of our greatest treasures. I know that what I call 'youthening' can be done; it's just a matter of finding out how

lieve about ageing becomes true for us. When I look around and see frail, sick, frightened older people, I say to myself: "It doesn't have to be that way." Many of us have learned that by changing our thinking, we can change our lives. But in order to do so, we 'Elders of Excellence' need to get out of the victim mentality. As long as we see ourselves as powerless individuals; and as long as we depend on the government to 'fix' things for us, we will never progress as a group. However, when we band together and come up with creative solutions for our later years, then we have real power, and

we can change our nation and our world for the better. It's time for all of us (and especially the elders) to learn to take control of our own health. We need to learn about the body-mind connection to know that what we do, say, and think contributes to either disease or vibrant health.

There's a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow. The later years of our life are to be the years of our greatest treasures. We must learn how to make these the best years of our lives. We learn these secrets later in life, and they are to be shared with the generations coming up. I know that what I call 'youthening' can be done; it's just a matter of finding out how. Here are some of the secrets of youthening, as far as I'm concerned:

- Release the word old from our vocabulary
- Turn 'ageing' into 'living longer'
- Be willing to accept new concepts
- Take a quantum leap in thinking
- Modify our beliefs
- Reject manipulation
- Change what we consider 'normal'
- Turn disease into vibrant health
- Take good care of our bodies
- Release limiting beliefs
- Be willing to adapt our thinking
- Embrace new ideas
- Accept the truth about ourselves
- Give selfless service to our communities.

We need to know that our future is always bright, no matter what our age. We can do this if we just change our thoughts. It's time to dispel the fearful images of old age. We want to see our later years become our treasure years.

*Excerpt from Experience Your Good Now! (Hay House; 2010) Louise L Hay is an American author and metaphysical lecturer and teacher. She is also founder and chairman of Hay House Inc, which publishes books on creativity and self-healing*

“I had to wait almost four decades before my soul could take wing”

PARAN BANDOPADHYAY, 70

LIFE,  
CAMERA,  
ACTION

Shilbhaira Datta

After my mother died and my father left home in Jessore [now in Bangladesh], I was brought up by my paternal aunt. We lived in Dumdum, Kolkata. Along with local kids, I used to stage one-act plays at the Para-Club during vacations. On one such occasion, I was judged ‘Actor of the Evening’ and I earned a medal! It was a thrill for a boy of seven, who thus stumbled upon his true calling: acting.

However, I was forced to subdue my passion to become a professional actor. You see, for a young man brought up by a relative, drama was not an option. So after I graduated in commerce, I landed a job with the West Bengal government in the Department of PW Roads in 1962. But heaps of dusty files were not exactly inspir-

ing. I thus played the double role of my life—sitting behind a desk and even being promoted to senior positions while desperately seeking creative succour.

I sought out drama as an extracurricular activity and soon met the great Ritwik Ghatak. I was ecstatic to land a role in *Sanko*, written by him and directed by Amal Kar, a Prachi Tirtha Production. I also acted under the aegis of IPTA [Indian People’s Theatre Association] and even directed a handful of IPTA productions under one of its wings, Kalakar. These included *Spartakas*, *Ashanto Chille* and *Haraner Nathjamai*. In 1975, I got a break in audio drama and my role in *Ayna*, a Doordarshan telefilm, added to my credentials. Next came film, and in 1980 I acted in *Atmajo* and *Swada*.

Critics took note and so did the audience. It was the only thing that made the nine-to-five drudgery bearable.

Finally, the moment I had been craving for 38 years arrived: my retirement in 2000. At the age of 60, the second chapter of my life had begun. Between 2000 and 2010, I acted in about 35 films like *Dekha*, *Sanjhatir Rupkathara* and *Desh*, and my performances in serials such as *Trishna*, *Alokito Ek Indu* and *Ek Nombor Mess Badi* caught the attention of both viewers and critics. My crowning glory is being described as “an actor who can portray perfectly any character while reflecting the subtlest nuances of human nature”. Suddenly 38 years doesn’t seem like such a long journey.

—As told to Partha Mukherjee & Priyanka Mukherjee

## ANIMAL MAGNETISM

EXPERTS ANSWER YOUR QUERIES AND CONCERNS ON JOBS AFTER RETIREMENT

### I am a retired army officer and animal lover. I am thinking of starting a kennel. How should I go about it?

Running a kennel is a time-consuming and tough occupation, so make sure you have a good understanding of canine behaviour. You need to have a capital of at least Rs 300,000 to start. You need about an acre of land to set up the kennel. The place should have a good boundary wall with iron or steel fencing. Conduct market research and get updated on various breeds, their popularity, quality and health. There is no need to start a kennel with several breeds; identify one to begin with. Consult a veterinarian before designing your facility for maximum comfort.

Get the American Kennel Club or Indian Kennel Club certificate for your dogs; this would certify that your dogs are pure breeds and in good health. The offices of these clubs are located in all major cities and they personally certify your dogs after a thorough check-up. Getting these certificates build credibility. Advertise in local newspapers or through fliers; you can also put up posters near colleges and malls to attract clientele or even advertise online. Take your dogs to local dog shows. You need to employ at least four to five people for cleaning, grooming and walking, to look after marketing and to deliver the dogs to customers. Running a kennel is a challenging art that can be



a successful business only if you are passionate about dogs.

—Fardeen Mehdi runs a kennel called *Pets Paradise in Hyderabad*

### I am a retired photojournalist. I want to start a travel firm for seniors. How do I get started?

As travelling has caught on among all age groups, this is a good area to venture into. Your passion apart, you need to have strong networking and quick decision-making skills. As you want to start a small-scale set-up for a niche group, you can begin with an investment of about Rs 10,000, but make sure you have a computer, good Internet connection and a printer. You can start by advertising on travel websites, blogs and social networking sites. Later, word-of-mouth publicity and media coverage will help. You could hire a young person for a small stipend to run minor errands or collect payment from customers, though with Internet banking you can do away with this as well.

A lot of your work depends on your ability to research and come up with innovative travel packages for your target group. You could go for offbeat options like hill stations, bird sanctuaries, temple tourism, spiritual/yoga tourism and organic tourism. Depending on your travel group and

nature of tourism, you could tie up with hotels—they usually give good discounts to large groups. Your success in such a venture depends solely on how innovative your travel packages are and how well you network with hotels and your target group.  
—Mumbai-based *Rushikesh Kulkarni runs Breakfree Journeys, a travel firm*

### I retired as an English teacher, but I know French as well. How can I use my language skills to earn a modest living?

With a lot of Indians going abroad and the boom in the hospitality and IT sectors, demand for the French language has risen. To be a private French tutor, you need to have completed your diploma or degree in French from a reputed institute. You could first begin by teaching younger schoolchildren. It is best to affiliate with a private coaching class initially as it will help you to make contacts and give you further grounding. Later, you could start individual or group classes from your home. Ideally, you should target students who have at least completed Class X. You can advertise in local newspapers; later, word-of-mouth publicity helps.

Each course should be typically divided into three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced. Each level comprises 30 hours of teaching. You could charge up to Rs 5,000 for the basic level, Rs 6,500 for intermediate level and Rs 8,500 for the advanced level. Teaching is usually done by English to French translations, audio sessions and reading aloud. Your success will depend on how well you reach out, your patience and how well you can gauge a student's potential.

—Bengaluru-based *Ajanta Talukdar is the director of the Language School, a language training institution*

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# Power to all

Armed with the RTI Act, septuagenarian K K Bajaj is on a mission to bring transparency to Gujarat's electricity sector. Dhanya Nair Sankar reports

The calm on K K Bajaj's face is in sharp contrast to his restless spirit. Until 1997, the Ahmedabad-based silver was an electrical and telecommunications engineer in the field of electricity generation, transmission and distribution. After spending 35 years in the sector, the 73 year-old is now giving 'power' to people—literally. Today, if electricity companies in Ahmedabad charge Rs 100 to Rs 750 less as late fee, it's owing to Bajaj's relentless efforts. A messiah for the city's taxpayers, he uses the Right to Information (RTI) Act to report financial irregularities in the electricity sector and prevent spurious use. On a mission to bring transparency to Gujarat's power sector, he is working to safeguard renewable sources of energy.

Bajaj's passion first sparked when he graduated from Ahmedabad University as an electric engineer about four decades ago. In his 35-year career he has worked with major private companies. He started off as a junior engineer in Tata Power where he worked for almost two decades. Then he went to Saudi Arabia and became the manager of a power plant in Jeddah. In 1997, he retired as a senior manager from Duran Power Ltd and established his own consultancy firm that undertook operation and maintenance contracts of power plants.

Perhaps it was rigorous grooming in this sector that further fuelled Bajaj's interest. "The energy and power sectors are important for the development of every state but this is also a sector mired in financial irregularities. And it's the consumers who face the brunt and end up paying more taxes. Irked by this, I thought something needs to be done to bring in

more transparency," says Bajaj who joined the Consumer Education and Research Society (CERC), a non-government organisation committed to promote and protect consumer interests, as honorary director in 2000.

In 2003, the Electricity Act was passed to consolidate laws related to generation, transmission, distribution, trading and use of electricity. "This Act paved the way for a regulatory mechanism," explains Bajaj. "Accord-

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Since 2006, Bajaj has filed over 60 RTI applications. He has also tried to expose alleged financial misdeeds of taxpayers' money by Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd.

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ing to the Act, all states should have an electricity regulatory commission. Prior to this, state governments had the power to decide the tariff, but now all decisions are taken by this regulatory commission. It was intended to give respite to consumers and help companies tide financial crisis. It was also meant to make companies more accountable." But he soon understood that regulatory bodies were quasi-judicial bodies where the government started to take control by introducing bureaucrats. Hence corruption and misuse persisted.

When the RTI act was finally passed in 2005, Bajaj saw it as a golden opportunity. "The Act is a boon for the masses. How else would we know where our hard-earned money is

going and how is it being utilised? It is then that I realised that the Act could be used to protect the interests of consumers," says Bajaj, who learnt the nitty-gritty of the Act for a year and decided to launch his weapon in 2006. Today, he files RTI applications to monitor transmission and distribution losses, metering of electricity connections, and the number of electrocutions of humans and animals caused by high-tension wires. He has also tried to expose alleged financial misdeeds and squandering of taxpayers' money by Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd. Since 2006, Bajaj has filed over 60 RTI applications.

One of the major problems consumers in Gujarat faced was the issue of late payment; they were charged exorbitant fee in the guise of late fee. "The state electricity act gives a customer 10 days grace period and another 15 days notice period for paying the bill," says Bajaj. "One needs to just pay 0.5 per cent interest for being late by a day. However, it is only after 25 days that companies are supposed to charge you reconnection charges, which are Rs 100 for residential, Rs 200 for commercial and Rs 750 for industrial connections."

But consumers came to him showing the most outrageous figures. Bajaj then filed an RTI enquiry asking four power companies to reveal collections from reconnection charges with corresponding dates. "The truth came out," says Bajaj, a note of triumph in his voice. "The Gujarat Electricity Regulatory Commission ordered all the four power companies to pay back Rs 70.2 million to customers."

Bajaj's method is simple. When consumers approach him with a com-



Samir Pathak

horsepower pump connections but operate 40-50 horsepower pumps. Metered connections just increase by a mere 3 per cent every year. As a result, millions of taxpayers' money is lost every year owing to distribution losses." In the past five years, his relentless efforts have brought distribution losses down by 21 per cent.

Indeed, Bajaj's knowledge of the power sector is thorough and astounding. He insists nobody should be given free power supply as misuse while distribution is greater. "Suppose you generate 100 per cent electricity, you get money for 60 per cent. There isn't any revenue for the 40 per cent that comes under the 'free' purview. This amount is misused; hence the losses. The government provides free power to farmers, but it is better to charge them a subsidised rate as other people pay to cover that up. We protested and now the government has taken notice," he explains.

In Ahmedabad, Bajaj also heads the Energy Cell that helps resolve complaints on bills, meters and other related issues. It also educates consumers on saving electricity. When Bajaj is not busy filing RTI enquiries, he writes about the issues for major newspapers and magazines. "First, there was only one electricity company in Gujarat. Since 2005, the state has three more companies. The competition has broken the monopoly and improved the supply; today, the state faces fewer power cuts. Consumers also have a choice," says Bajaj on the improved overall condition of the sector.

Bajaj is also visiting faculty at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology, Ahmedabad, and creates awareness among people about electricity-friendly products like CFL lights and proper fan regulators. "The power sector in Gujarat has certainly improved, but we need to pay attention to renewable energy resources like wind, solar and biomass," he says. "Everyone should take small steps to save power."

plaint against an electricity company, he first files an RTI application to get the answers. "Then I try to resolve the issue through negotiations—80 per cent of the time it works," he says. "If it doesn't, we seek legal action. We either go to the consumer forum or we use the Electricity Act, which has its own grievance mechanism. It's not easy as the companies owing to their clout sometimes approach the High Court; sometimes they harass consumers or me. Unsatisfactory answers are given as well. But it's important not to give up."

Bajaj admits his wife's support has helped him immensely when facing challenges. "At times it is terrifying as the applications he files are against big companies with money and muscle power behind them," says his wife Nalini, a volunteer for various charities to help government hospital patients get their medicines on time. "But the happiness he feels after solving a grievance surpasses our fear."

For his part, Bajaj doesn't have the time to brood over threats; he has too much on his plate to mull over.

When not battling cases of late fee, he is concerned about the safety of high-tension wires. "Every year, more than 400 people and 600 animals die because of electrocution. A wire should go dead the moment it breaks away from the main line. Officials tell me wire tapping may be a cause, but what about animal deaths? How can animals tap electricity?" When Bajaj filed an application for this, the answers revealed that vegetation growing around transformers invite animals that cause deaths. The compensation given to families for fatalities is a mere Rs 10,000. Bajaj plans to file a PIL to unearth this issue.

Another problem consumers unknowingly face is of distribution losses. "Each power company loses more than 40 per cent of electricity while distribution," he spells out. "Companies are not bothered to regulate this because they make up for it by charging consumers. We filed RTI applications with the state regulatory commission and found that only 30 per cent users have metered connections, while 70 per cent still pay much less. Many farmers have between 5 and 10



Courtesy: Pill on time

# Keeping tabs

For silvers who don't remember to take their medication on time, here's an antidote. This little battery-operated gizmo is called **Pill on Time**, a timely reminder fitted with an alarm that can be synchronised with your prescription schedule. To nudge you along, the device includes two alerts that go off 10 and five minutes before the alarm does. **Caution:** Don't use this timer for medicines that dissolve

in water, powdered and liquid medicines, and drugs that need to be stored at specific temperatures.

*At present, the device is only available in Pune. MRP: Rs 150. Contact: Pill on Time, 442/2B, Pramila Apartments, Gokhale Road, Model Colony, Pune. Tel: 020-25659189*

# SILVER SCREEN

*The 12th Mumbai International Film Festival, in collaboration with the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), will open on 21 October 2010. Among the entries that have arrived from various countries, there are many that focus on silvers, and their lives, loves and losses. Rajashree Balaram brings you a sneak preview*

## MY DOG TULIP

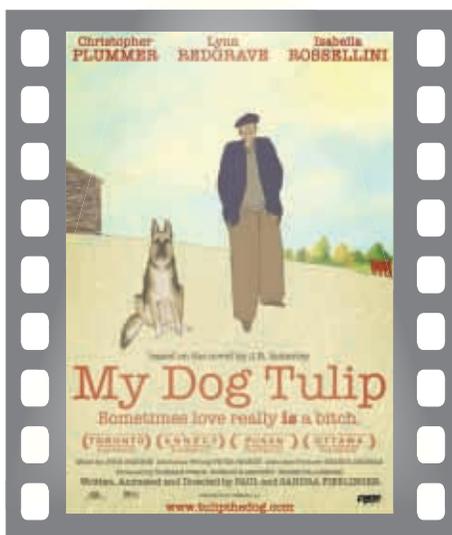
Animation, English

**Directed by** Paul and Sandra Fierlinger

**Voices:** Christopher Plummer, Lynn Redgrave, Isabella Rosellini

"Alsatian bitches are known to bite the hand that feeds them." The wry humour in the opening narrative of *My Dog Tulip* goes on to underline every scene and word in the crackling animation film. Adapted from British author J R Ackerley's book with the same title, the movie unfolds from Ackerley's wisened perspective (in Christopher Plummer's absorbing voice). At the centre of the plot, is the symbiotic bond between the author and his dog—an unruly attention-craving Alsatian bitch Tulip. Tulip arrives in Ackerley's life when he is in his 50s, a content bachelor working as editor of BBC magazine *The Listener*. (Speculations about Ackerley's sexual orientation abound in the British press. He is purported to have been openly gay at a time when admitting to one's homosexuality could trigger a minor riot.)

Ackerley's sustained efforts to raise Tulip as a well-behaved canine companion often precipitate into side-splitting hilarity. The scenes and dialogues focusing on Tulip's sexual preoccupations and bowel movements are undoubtedly



graphic but backed by Ackerley's chaste British-accented English—in an oft-clinical and resigned voice—it spares you from squirming in our seats. Instead, you will find yourself letting out a delightful bark of laughter more than once at the wit and nonchalance. The absence of a linear plot lends the movie the engaging nature of a collage of short stories, all focusing on Tulip's interactions with the various characters who walk in and out of her life: a compassionate vet (Isabella Rosellini); Ackerley's starchy middle-aged sister Nancy (Lynn Redgrave); and the many pedigreed dogs and mongrels who sniff at Tulip's nether ends hoping

against hope for a quick, frenzied romp.

Though the movie is mostly funny, Ackerley's silvery character adds a weight of touching despair: the isolation and loneliness he suffered in his childhood and teens find expression in his search for an "ideal friend a mental image of which comes closest to a plain jug containing a delightful mix of good companionship and intelligence". Tulip, "the plain jug" finally weathers with the author to a fine old age. "Are not all human contact based on one person's wish to claim to the affairs of another? Everyone wants everyone to be different from what they are," Ackerley wonders when Tulip dies. We can't agree more to that. Woof, woof!



## LE BEL ÂGE [RESTLESS]

French

**Directed by** Laurent Perreau

**Cast:** Pauline Etienne, Michel Piccoli

Claire (Pauline Etienne) and her grandfather Maurice (Michel Piccoli)—a former resistance fighter who has painful memories from the German occupation of France—live in a huge mansion at the edge of a seaside town. The friction between the two bristles like a living breathing creature. Claire is reckless, vulnerable and self-absorbed. At night, she indulges in drugs, alcohol and sex just to stay true to her popular brand of teenage rebellion. Through the day, she perseveres to become a swimming champion. Cranky Maurice too gives into his craving for hedonism, paying women to pose nude in his chamber. His tough shell breaks open only when he meets up with old cronies and remembers his dead daughter and a love affair that left him with a bleeding heart and a bullet embedded in his sternum.

Though Maurice and Claire rarely share the same frame, it's this deliberate isolation from each other that highlights the chasm between the two. Reconciliation, though uneasy, springs forth when Claire wins the swimming competition and has no one to share her triumph with while Maurice lies in bed struggling for life. Both put up a nasty fight for their ego before they finally realise that the agony that divides them also unites them.

All of us have been young. And all of us will grow old. Maybe that's the only non-negotiable truth that both the young and the old need to accept to bridge the gap.



## BOXHAGENER PLATZ

German

**Directed by** Matti Geschonneck

**Cast:** Gudrun Ritter, Samuel Schnieder

Ottie Herschel (Ritter) is a spirited women in her 70s. Herschel visits the local cemetery every day to water the plants and flower beds. She is accompanied on her jaunts by her grandson Holger (Schneider). Along the way, she unabashedly recounts scandalous anecdotes of her previous husbands with Holger. Herschel returns home every day to her bedridden husband Rudi (Hermann Beyer) to whom she cheekily reports the flirtatious advances of the many men whom she resolutely shuns—one them being a fishmonger (Horst Krause), a former Nazi hardliner.

Set in 1968, the movie captures the spirit of an East German neighbourhood struggling against the limitations imposed by Soviet rule. Holger's naïvete sparkles beautifully, more so because of the wizened faces around him. The 15 year-old is particularly drawn to an ageing political philosopher Karl (Michael Gwisdek) who regales Holger with tales from his student days when he was a member of the Spartacus army rebelling against the brutal Nazi movement. Karl—a widower—and Herschel have nothing in common except for the tenderness and passion that they inspire in each other. The placid rhythm of their lives is irrevocably altered when Krause is killed one night. Speculations fly: Could it be Rudi who committed the murder out of jealousy? Or was it Karl who killed him for his Nazi leanings? The resolution of the movie is as much about abandoning the search for truth as it is about finding the inner peace that eludes us all.



### APART TOGETHER

Chinese

**Directed by** Wang Quan'an

**Cast:** Ling Feng, Lisa Lu, Xu Kaigen

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Nationalist Party were engaged in a civil war in which millions lost their lives. The CNP retreated to Taiwan with millions of soldiers—a move that split apart many families and relationships. In 1987, when the retreated Taiwanese soldiers held a protest demanding the right to return to the mainland to reunite with their loved ones, they were granted the right to pay an annual visit.

One such veteran is Liu Yansheng (Ling Feng) who had left his pregnant lover Qiao Yu'e (Lisa Lu) in Shanghai. The painfully shy Yu'e is now married with a large boisterous brood of children and grandchildren. The movie opens with the letter that Yu'e receives from Yansheng. As Yu'e's granddaughter reads out the letter to the family, the yearning in Yu'e's eyes stands out because of her attempt to dismiss it. Though the children are both excited and resentful of this imminent intrusion in their lives, Yu'e's husband Lu Shenmin (Xu Kaigen) is steady as a rock.

Yansheng arrives in Shanghai with a hidden agenda: to reunite with Yu'e. Yu'e is torn between her ardent love for Yansheng and her commitment towards her kind husband. The movie reminds us of dramatic Bollywood plots woven around the same concept. But it's different for the nuances of Chinese life and culture that it explores and its delicate portrayal of a love affair between silvers and the eventual controversy and acceptance that follow it.



### 10 TO 11

Turkish

**Directed by** Pelin Esmer

**Cast:** Nejat Isler, Mithat Esmer

Though resilience is a virtue that all of us are expected to hone as we age, it's not as easy as the spiritual gurus have us believe. There are rooms within our hearts where we let the cobwebs grow, because sweeping them away could, oddly, sully memories that are far too precious.

*10 to 11* presents this inner conflict through a gossamer-fine storyline. Mithat Bey (Mithat Esmer) is an eccentric Turkish octogenarian looking for the past on the streets of Istanbul: old books, manually-powered torches, old clocks, old bottles, old stamps. His apartment is devoted to his much-ridicule fixation. Books and newspapers dating back to the 50s are piled high till the ceiling. Unopened bottles of alcohol of various dignities sit solemnly on shelves; brand labels and price tags of groceries are taped neatly to sheets of paper. Residents of the apartment where he lives want Bey to sign the municipal papers that could qualify their apartment for redevelopment and fetch them larger earthquake resistant flats. Mithat, however, is more worried about the leakage in his ceiling that could damage the much-loved contents of his world—something that he chose over his wife years ago. As residents evacuate the apartment, Mithat steps out of his shell to forge a nervous, tender bond with Ali— a bond that dies a quick silent death. *10 to 11* is a mirror in which we see ourselves as we truly are at the conclusive chapter of our lives: wise, lonely, much-tortured, courageous, proud, and ultimately redeemed.



**STÍNU NEUTEČEŠ**  
**[NO ESCAPE FROM THE SHADOW]**

Czech

**Directed by:** Lenka Kny

**Cast:** Jaroslava Adamova, Helena Dvorakova, Pavel Landowski

A long marriage need not necessarily be a happy one. Sometimes, mutual tolerance chiseled through years of companionship can be a guise under which simmers a cauldron of discontent, vitriolic resentment and even hatred.

Stinu Neuteces tears apart the many myths that we coddle close to our heart about marriage and relationships among silvers. Eugene (Jaroslava Adamova) and Gregory (Pavel Landowsky) are two Czech war veterans married for 60 years. Both are in their 80s and cannot bear the sight of each other, though Eugene studiously goes to collect the medals routinely awarded to Gregory at sundry national events for his distinguished service in the fight for the freedom of Czechoslovakia.

Tormented by a secret from their collective past, Eugene approaches her lawyer granddaughter Katya (Helena Dvarakova) to help her get a divorce from Gregory. Katya is baffled by her grandmother's sudden desire to strike out on her own and tries to dissuade her at first. On a visit to her grandparents' farm, she finally sees the suffocation and claustrophobia up close and witnesses up close a relationship come apart. A movie for all of us, who are holding on and for all of us who are ready to let go.



**LES SIGNES VITAUX [VITAL SIGNS]**

French

**Directed by** Sophie Deraspe

**Cast:** Francis Ducharme, Marie Helene Bellavance

Simone Leger (Marie Helene Bellavance), a striking Harvard graduate, visits a sanatorium to collect the remaining belongings of her grandmother who has died peacefully in sleep. Simone has a smile that speaks of many secrets withheld (one that is divulged startlingly at an unexpected moment is that she is handicapped). After her grandmother's death, Simone decides to spend her days volunteering at the sanatorium. However, Simone's intense conflict within herself and her attempts to find solace in the company of the dying make her more autumnal than the inhabitants of the home.

Director Deraspe refuses to give death a makeover in this bleak—and, therefore strangely, more beautiful—film. A neglected paralysed inhabitant craves morphine to end her torment. A terminally ill woman wants to live because she has been truly loved. A woman dying of a gangrenous limb spews sarcasm and venom at her visiting children. A man suffering from Alzheimer's strolls along the corridor nonchalantly nude. Away from all the anguish and suffering is Simone's chef boyfriend Boris (Francise Ducharme) who loves her passionately and proposes marriage more than once only to be refused. As the movie progresses, we realise that while the others are dying, it's Simone who has actually given up on life. *Les Signes Vitaux* gently illustrates that death awaits us all, and though it may be ugly and sadistic at times, it also introduces us to the life we could have lived.

When they set their heart on something, nothing can stop them from achieving their goal. They are an inspiration for many; the senior citizens who are determined to make a difference. Harmony Silver Awards 2010 honours those whose belief is their strength.

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# ROMANCING THE RUINS

Of kings and conquests, quaint fables and spinach *papad*—a time traveller turns queen for a day at the gorgeous Gwalior Fort, as silver reader **Nina Dinshaw** tells us.

Photographs: **Khursheed Dinshaw**

**T**he promotional brochure called it “a living heritage of heroism”. For me, Gwalior, the grand old capital of the Rajput dynasty, is a city with a story waiting to be told in every corner. For a lover of history, what could be more glorious?

The ambience of this ancient historical capital in Madhya Pradesh was almost palpable. As successive clans left their stamp on the city, they created a treasure both unique and timeless, full of winding pathways, grand palaces, temples with strange names and historical monuments. But all roads lead to the magnificent Gwalior Fort, site of imprisonments, battles and *jauhar* (*mass sati*); a jewel that Mughal emperor Babar once described as “the pearl among the fortresses of Hind”.

The fort is not easy to find. Don't be discouraged, though. The locals are charming and helpful and gladly point the way. When we took a wrong turn and were finally forced to ask for directions, a gentleman running some errands volunteered to escort us all the way to the gates of the monument. We apologised for taking so much of his time but he just smiled and said, “*Athiti devo bhava.*” (The guest is God.)

The road to the fort is in good condition and you can drive right up to the entrance, marvelling at this beautiful creation of Mansingh Tomar as you approach. The most impressive feature of this 8th century marvel is the riot of colour—turquoise blue, pastel green, shimmering yellow, all still visible even from a distance—and the myths and deities recreated on its walls.

We were lucky to have an enthusiastic and entertaining guide, Samar Singh, who combined fact with fable, and even threw in a little drama to make the fort come alive. Of the nine queens of Mansingh, we were told eight were Rajputs from royal families. The ninth was a commoner whom he fell in love with and for whom he had to build a separate palace. Visible from the fort, it's called Mrighanayani Palace, after Mansingh's nickname for his ninth wife, Mrighanayani or ‘doe-eyed’.

Once we were done admiring this structure and Mansingh's love for his beautiful young bride, our guide took us to the Man Mandir Palace built by Mansingh between 1486 and 1517. One of the largest rooms here is the *sangeet kaksh*, where the king and his queens would indulge their love for

music by inviting the best musicians from across the region to perform. The eight queens, all in *pardah* (veils), would be seated a storey higher than the king and the musicians, each behind a separate grid. Thus they could see and hear the musicians but could not be seen. Our guide had a way with words and said that anyone who even glanced in the queens' direction faced a possible beheading on the spot!

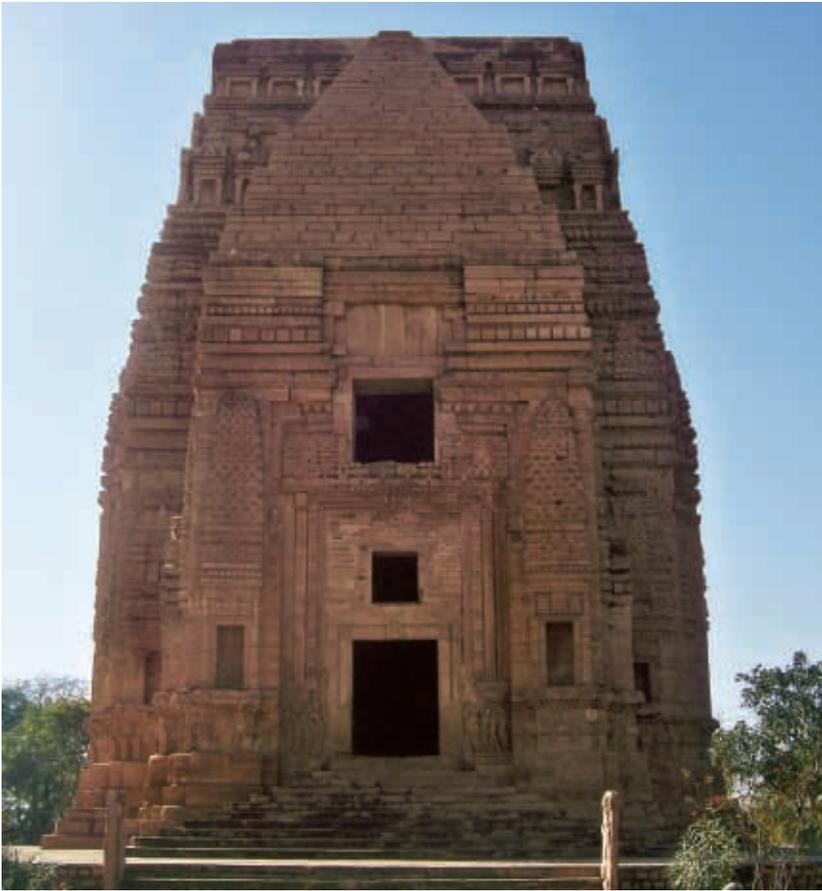
But by far the most striking room in Mansingh's palace is the *kesar kund*, which held the queens' swimming tank. It gets its name from the *kesar* or saffron that maids-in-waiting would mix in their bath water, both to keep them fragrant in a time long before soaps, and to lighten their complexion. The *kesar kund* also served another, rather grim, purpose:

Neatly stacked in piles, *papad* make shops look picturesque



Gwalior Fort: Mirror to historical beauty and battles





Gwalior, the grand old capital of the Rajput dynasty, is a historical city with a story waiting to be told in every nook and corner



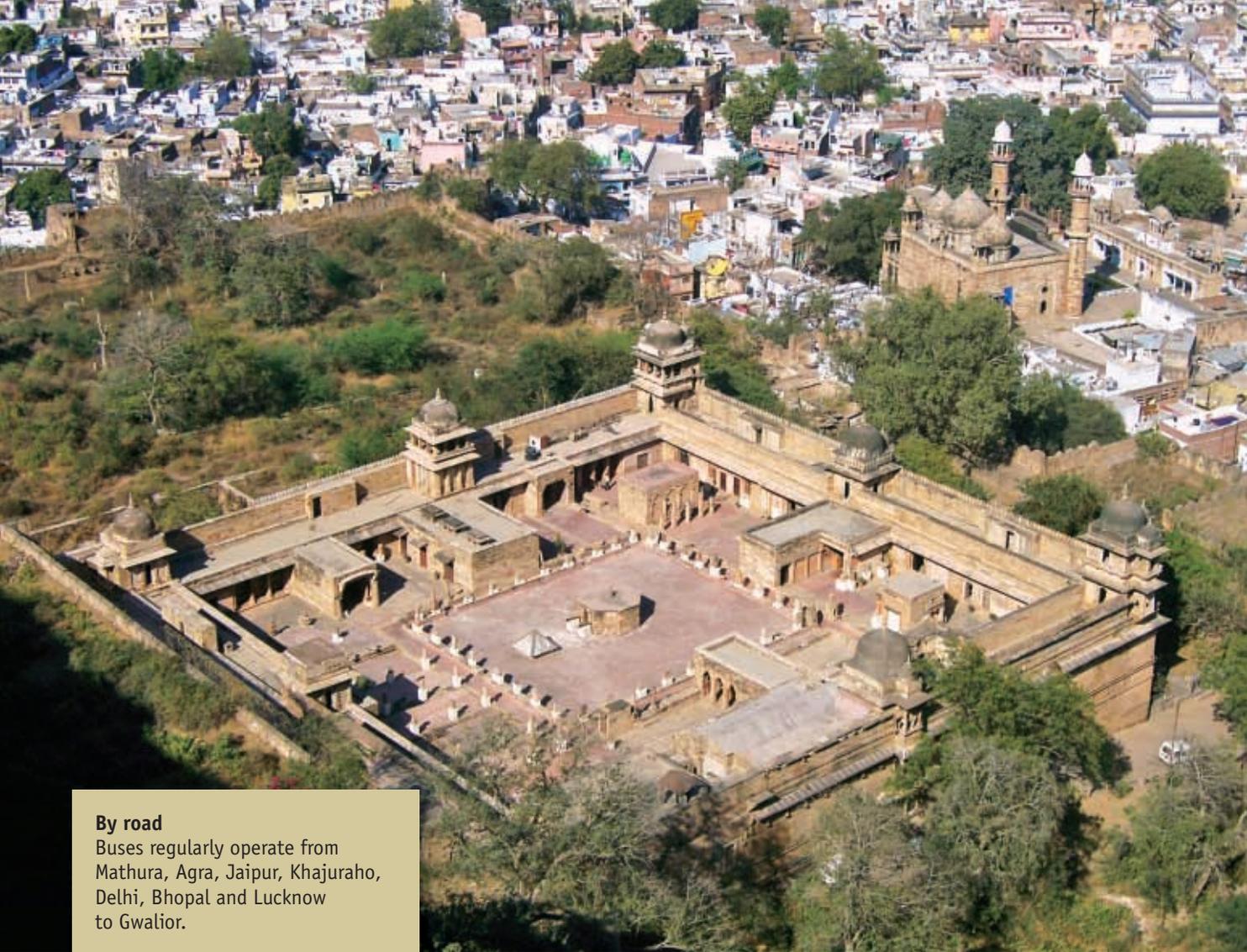
whenever a Rajput king was killed in battle and the rival Mughals began to advance on the palace, the Rajput queens would drain the water in the room, set it on fire and commit suicide as *sati*, staying true to their husbands by ending their lives before they could be captured and enslaved by the enemy. This room, therefore, was also known as *jauhar kund* (room of *sati*). The thought that the very room used by the queens to beautify themselves should turn into a mass crematorium made me shudder.

Despite all the beauty and craftsmanship inherent in the designs of these palaces, the fort is very much a place of war, with all the trappings of a final bastion. Even the steps in the lower rooms—uneven, ranging randomly from small to extra-large—were designed to literally trip up the enemy or anyone unfamiliar with their design. Like me!

Near the palace is a five-domed temple, Vikram Mandir, constructed by Mansingh's son Vikram Jeet Singh Tomar and later remodelled by the Mughals. Our next stop was the Saas-Bahu temples, each one a thousand years old and built by Raja Mahipal. Legend has it that the temples were built by a Rajput king whose mother worshipped Lord Vishnu but whose wife was a devotee of Shiva. To keep them both happy, he built Sahash-trabhau (literally, a thousand arms) dedicated to Vishnu, the God of a thousand arms, and a smaller temple dedicated to Lord Shiva nearby. Hence the name Saas-Bahu *mandir*, their ruins stumbled upon by two British archaeologists.

Also within the fort is Teli Ka Mandir, or the oil trader's temple, thus named because it was funded by a merchant. He must have been a very wealthy man as this is the tallest structure in Gwalior Fort, soaring about 30 m

**Teli Ka Mandir (above); a riot of colours at Gwalior Mela (left); and the Mughanayani Palace (opposite page)**



#### By road

Buses regularly operate from Mathura, Agra, Jaipur, Khajuraho, Delhi, Bhopal and Lucknow to Gwalior.

#### By rail

Gwalior railway station is located on the Delhi-Chennai and Mumbai-Delhi rail connection. Shatabdi Express and the Taj Express are the two popular train services to Gwalior.

#### By air

Indian Airlines and Kingfisher Airlines offer daily flights to Gwalior. The airport is 8 km away from the heart of Gwalior city.

#### Best time to visit

October to March.

#### Where to stay

A number of palaces have been renovated into heritage hotels in Gwalior such as the Usha Kiran Palace at Jayendraganj Lashkar, Tel: 0751 2444000. Another good option is Central Park at Madhav Rao Scindia Marg; Tel: 0751 244043

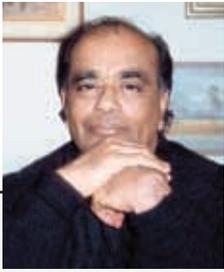
above the ground, with grand, intricate carvings all over. “When Mughal emperor Aurangzeb captured the fort in the 17th century, he tossed the idols out of the inner sanctum and had the entire structure plastered with white lime to hide all the carvings,” revealed Samar Singh. Imagine the sense of awe when, in 1881, two archaeologists peeled away the plaster to reveal the hidden splendour. “Restoring the temple took a painstaking 12 years,” added Samar Singh.

Now, Gwalior can get hot in the day, so I was glad to have my sun hat and bottled water.

And though we were getting tired by now, we couldn't leave without sampling Gwalior's famous *gajak*, a sweetmeat made of sugar, jaggery, flour and sesame seeds and sold in little handcarts and shops across the

city. Another specialty is the *papad* made of *maida* and *sabudana* and we passed many picturesque shops where these were stacked neatly in piles. These *papad* come in three flavours: plain, tomato and spinach! The chatty shop owner explained that they were made by hand, the dough flattened to resemble thick pancakes, then placed in a greased plate, steamed in a huge vessel of boiling water and then taken to an open area to dry in the sun. I simply had to buy a packet!

I'm glad the locals were friendly, because had the shopkeeper not recommended a visit to the Gwalior *mela*, we would not have been strolling amid stalls selling everything from clothes and toys to intricate knick-knacks—and of course, crisp, freshly fried *papad*. Such a colourful end to a perfect day!



# DREAMS UNLIMITED

Today's youth have a mind and world of their own, says **Timeri Murari**

When I graduated from school, years ago, I peered around the landscape of opportunities. I saw a limited horizon—doctor, engineer, armed forces, IAS. Parental ambition nudged me towards engineer, though I hated math. I had thought of joining the Air Force, admired their uniforms, and dreamt of becoming a fighter pilot and shooting down enemy planes. Unfortunately, in my final year, I was prescribed glasses. From my class, a third went into medicine; another third into engineering; a couple into the armed forces and the IAS; and the rest joined their family business. My family didn't have a business I could have joined and assured myself of a future. I tried my hand at engineering, briefly, decided I couldn't even balance my chequebook, and defected to writing. At that time, apart from R K Narayan, a mentor, there were not many Indian writers around. I was the only Indian writing for *The Guardian* in London. I know that as Amitav Ghosh told me he read my writings when he was in Cambridge, studying to eventually become a writer.

The other day I read that a 'circus school' was opening in Kerala. As a boy, my first ambition had been to join the circus, and I wish there had been a school back then. I thought I'd become a great trapeze artist, swooping across the big top to catch hold of beautiful girls spinning at me through the air. Or maybe even a clown, with a red nose, white face, and tearful eyes. My problem was that I hated seeing animals forced to jump through fiery hoops. Of course, my family would never have permitted their child to

graduate from a circus school. They wanted an MBBS or a BE after my name, not a BCirc. Even a MCirc would not have made them happy. How could they explain that to relatives and friends, when they gathered at weddings and social occasions, to boast about their brilliant children with standard, acceptable degrees attached to their names? Our child is an MCirc in trapeze!

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**This generation has a wider view of the world. It's an exciting time to be young with such an unlimited world out there to explore**

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Thankfully, in 21st century India, the horizons are limitless for the young. There are still the old standard ambitions forced on them by ambitious parents—medical school and now computer science instead of mere engineering. But there is an open world beyond. Certainly, this generation has a wider view of their world. My childhood was limited to reading books, listening to the radio, sports and going to the movies. Now, they have all that—maybe not sports so much—and more. The Internet gives them more information and misinformation than my limited world of newspapers and periodicals gave me back then. They play video games and chat to friends on Facebook and Twitter and SMS each other.

With these new skills, they can follow their hearts. They can be deejays and earn a very good living on radio, television, and perform in clubs. They are our new celebrities from spinning their CDs. Or they're musicians with their own rock bands, playing fusion music or composing for the movies. A young friend is one of the best jazz musicians in India and plays regularly with international groups. They can go to film schools and learn direction and photography. They can become archaeologists, anthropologists, or any 'gist' they want. Young women now work in the back offices of multinational corporations, head banks and represent India as ambassadors. They're even excelling in sports. They can become fashion designers, models, entrepreneurs in their own right when once they were limited to the old MBBS or BE or an air hostess, for the more adventurous types. Air hostess! Today they are in the cockpits, piloting jet fighters, helicopters, Boeings and Airbuses. At least they are fulfilling my thwarted ambition although back then they would have been lucky to be allowed to pilot a bicycle.

It's an exciting time to be young with such an unlimited world out there for them to explore. But even that world is still closed to millions of our kids who cannot access this new world. I believe that unless we free their imaginations and potential—now locked away in poverty—India will never become a truly great country.

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

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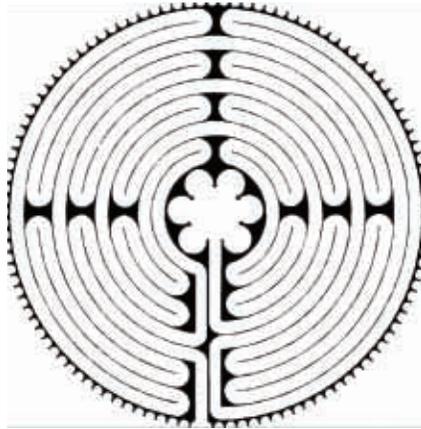
## PASSAGES

# Raga and rhythm

A K Fox Strangways, a connoisseur of Indian music, visited India in 1913 and met musical stalwarts like Ashreka Hanga Ram of Gwalior, T B Sahasrabuddhe of Poona Gayan Samaj and Upendrakisor Roy of Calcutta, and wrote an interesting analysis of the raga in his book *The Music of Hindostan*, which was published in 1914. An excerpt....

The 24 hours are divided into eight watches, beginning at 6 am. The Hindus attach much importance to, and are wonderfully unanimous as to, the ascription of a Rag to a particular hour of the day or season of the year, although 'advance' musicians may be found among them who say it has meaning. A musical distinction, however, may be extracted from the Rags themselves, independently of the melodies sung in them or of the words to which these are set... an analysis shows that we may divide the Rags into 'sad' and 'merry'; the 'sad' have an average of three flats to an average of two flats in those which are 'merry'. Again, if we divide them into morning and evening Rags, the morning have an *amsa* ranging about G, the evening about E. And the same thing, though in a less marked degree, may be deducted independently from the second column. So that there is a real musical basis for this ascription of time of day and of ethos. The ascription of time of year is possibly more fanciful.

But the truer explanation of this deep-seated feeling is more likely to lie in the history of Rag, as far as we may hope to know it. What is antecedently probable and, indeed, is evident... is that songs were sung long before Rag as such was formulated. The Hindu account is that there were four sources of Rag: local tribal song, poetical creations, the devotional songs of the mystics, and the labours of the scientific musicians. The principal ground for this belief is, no doubt,



that all four causes are in full operation in India today, and are evolving the Rags of the next thousand years; a secondary reason for thinking it to be the case is to be found in the names of Rags such as Kanada, the Carnatic; Hindol, a swing; Jogi, a mystic; Sarang, from Sarangadeva, a musician of the 13th century. The most important of these sources, because it is the most constant and widespread and unconscious, is the first: tribal song....

The philosopher has been at work upon the psychology of the music and, without any special theories as to the emotional value on the 'mental effect' of this or that note or combination, determines on general grounds the ethos of the Rag, its appropriateness to occasion or to circumstance, or its effect upon the body, or its affinities with the various affections of the spirit or aspirations of the soul. These views linger in some of the names of the Rags—Din-Ka-(puria), 'of the day'; Sham-(kalian), 'evening'; Basant,

'spring'; (Gauri-) mano-hari, 'pleasing to the mind'—or in the legends about them. As of Dipak (marava), which enflamed not only the mind, but the body of the singer so that even the Jumna could not put out the fire. Descriptive names of this kind were commoner and more elaborate in old days. The famous Maha-vyutpatti (Sanskrit-Tibetan vocabulary, 7th century or later) has a list of 60 Rags, the translations of which are: 'with a voice like the thunder-cloud,' 'like the trumpeting of the elephant,' 'like a sparrow,' 'like the serpent king,' 'like Indra'; or again 'smooth,' 'refined,' 'making fully to comprehend,' 'not puffed up,' 'delighting every organ,' 'having the chief voice in all sorts of sounds.' And so forth.

Last of all, when by these three processes the number of Rags had reached hundreds or thousands, came the mathematically minded musician who tabulated the scales as deviations from a normal scale (*grama*), calculated the departures in quarter-tones (*sruti*), and rung the 13,678 changes (*prastara*) on the seven notes (*svara*); reduced the 108 traditional ways of counting time by syllable (*aksara*), i.e. a development from the longs and shorts of poetry, to 35 ways of counting it by time-unit (*matra*, lit syllable) which are rhythms (*tala*); and provided both Rag and Tal with an intricate memoria technica to which not everyone possess the key. This kind of musician is commoner in the Carnatic than in Hindostan, where theory has reared a less imposing edifice.

## PLEASURE, FOUND

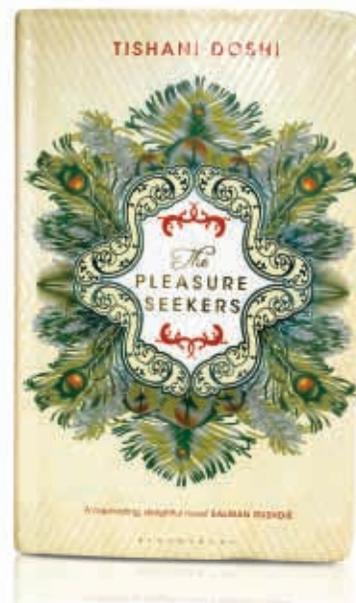
### THE PLEASURE SEEKERS

BY TISHANI DOSHI

BLOOMSBURY; RS 499; 314 PAGES

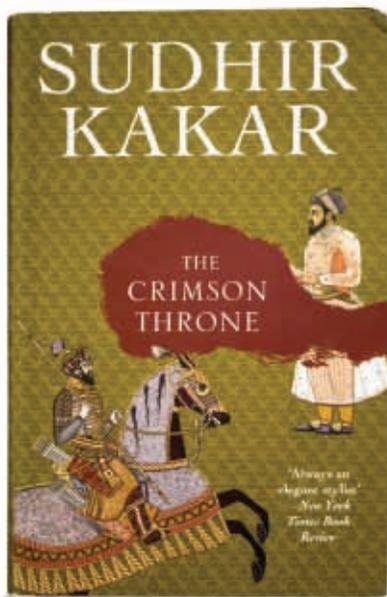
If you're a poet with a Welsh mother and Indian father and enough cross-cultural memories to fill trunks of nostalgia, it wouldn't be surprising if you chose to write a book about it. That is the genesis of Tishani Doshi's debut novel where she fictionalises her parents as Siân from Wales and Babo Patel from Madras whose paths collide in London in 1968. Though Babo's father Prem summons him back to India this love is not to be denied, championed as it is by Prem's almost blind yet all-seeing mother Ba. So Siân arrives to set up home in Chennai with Babo and thus plays out their richly textured saga, with their

life in their little house with orange and black gates and the arrival of their daughters Mayuri and Bean. Woven in with their lives replete with love, loss, illness, heartbreak and resilience are events that rock a nation, from Indira Gandhi's assassination to the Gujarat earthquake. All of a sudden, there they stand, at their silver wedding anniversary with people wondering "exactly what they've been doing for a quarter of a century". Doshi flits from Tamil Nadu to Gujarat and Britain and Wales with the same effortless-ness as her words, which are profound and fun, yet devoid of any pretension, imbuing this book with lightness and



lyricism and making it not just an ode to her parents' marriage but a celebration of love, with all its challenges and delights. A pleasure, indeed.

—Arati Rajan Menon



With generous dollops of sibling rivalry, scandal, sex and political intrigue, psychoanalyst and author Sudhir Kakar chronicles the end of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's reign and the ensuing struggle for succession in *The Crimson Throne*. The story is told

## DILLI DARBAR

### THE CRIMSON THRONE

BY SUDHIR KAKAR

PENGUIN; RS 450; 254 PAGES

through the accounts of two visitors to the Mughal court: Italian Niccolao Manucci and Frenchman Francois Bernier; both become renowned for their powers of healing and are embraced in the higher echelons. The two men who grow to detest each other couldn't be more different—while Manucci is a boy from the streets who learnt all he could from his mentors, Bernier is a sophisticate who has always been to the manner born. Manucci has indulged his love for women in brothels, while Bernier prefers unspoilt young men. And most significant (to this story at least), while Manucci grows close to the scholarly but vain Dara Shukoh, Shah Jahan's eldest son who is guided by

an inclusive vision of Islam, Bernier goes on to espouse the cause of the austere, exclusionary Aurangzeb. At the fulcrum is Shah Jahan who seeks to compensate for his failing health with sexual excesses, which both men feel were in part responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire. As with all Kakar's forays into fiction—blend of fact and fiction; the most notable being *Mira and the Mahatma* in 2005—he gets under the skin of his characters, filling in historical blanks with his vivid imagination until they come alive in the reader's mind, not cardboard cut-outs but flesh-and-blood people with very real dilemmas. History has never been so intriguing.

—Arati Rajan Menon

## SLICE OF SUBURBIA

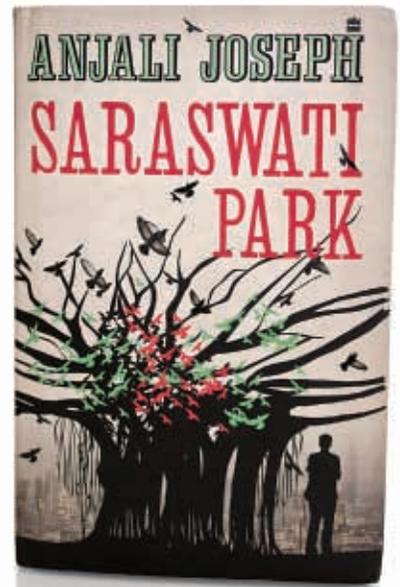
### SARASWATI PARK

BY ANJALI JOSEPH

HARPERCOLLINS; RS 399; 261 PAGES

Every churning ocean has its islands—oases of calm where life plays out in ordinary, even predictable ways, untouched by the tumult a hair's breadth away. Saraswati Park is one such place, a suburban housing colony in Mumbai where Mohan and Anjali live, their children having fled the nest for better prospects overseas. Mohan is a professional letter-writer; he sits outside Victoria Terminus, his clients ranging from ignorant village migrants to savvy (yet unlettered) prostitutes, and yearns to become an author, his dreams fuelled by the second-hand books he collects. Tending home and hearth, Anjali's yearn-

ings appear to be limited to the soap operas she devours but a part of her is keenly aware of the invisibility of her existence. And then their nephew Ashish, sexually conflicted and emotionally vulnerable, comes to live with them, jolting the carefully calibrated rhythm of their lives, forcing them to confront their own personal evolution. Journalist Anjali Joseph impels her protagonists to play out their cycles of love, loss, longing with a confidence that belies the fact that this is her debut novel. Remarkably, this 32 year-old's self-assurance is strongest when she writes about the heartbreaks and frustrations of ageing, as well as its



surprising little pleasures. A lesson in how ordinary lives can be fused into an extraordinary tale.

—Arati Rajan Menon

**Most silver citizens would give anything to experience youth again.**

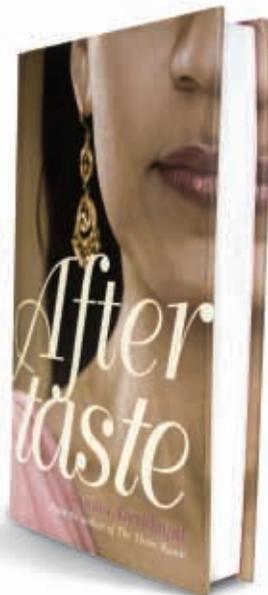
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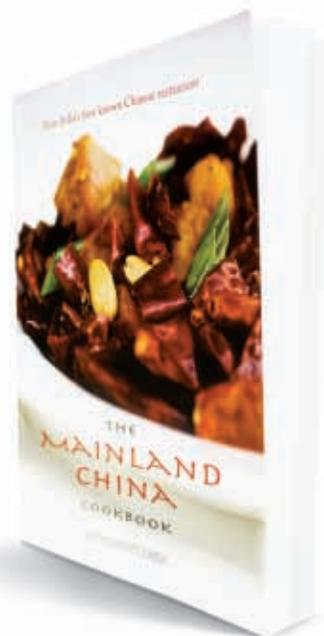
## BRIEFLY

Journalist and author **Namita Devidayal** delves into the heart of a Mumbai 'baniya' business family in **AFTERTASTE** (Random House; Rs 399; 296 pages). The protagonist Bimla Kulbhushan Todarmal (or 'Mummyji') is a benevolent manipula-

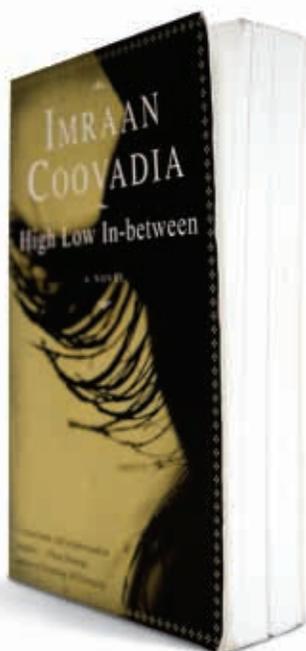


tor who keeps her family together by pampering them with money, gifts and, of course, plenty of food. She's no slouch at commerce either—when her husband's business suffered, she broaches the idea of a *mithai* store, Bimmo di Barfi, which since evolves into an eatery, Bimz. Her four children are less easily managed: Rajan Papa, the school dropout who is always short on cash; Sunny, the head of the business who finds solace from his unhappy marriage in the arms of his mistress; Suman, the beauty of the house who always wants what she cannot have; and Saroj, always in the shade of her sister's beauty. All of them have reason to despise Mummyji, yet an unforeseen event causes them to react in ways that are unpredictable. Devidayal etches her characters beautifully; their insecurities and greed tempered by love and humanity make them abundantly human—and the book eminently readable.

Mainland China is a chain of restaurants across India that prides itself on 'authentic' Chinese food. Now, with the release of **THE MAINLAND CHINA COOKBOOK** (Random House India; Rs 499; 192 pages), you can serve up some of their delicious fare at home while reading about the journey of the brain behind the enterprise, **Anjan Chatterjee**, who grew up in the 1970s in Tangra, a Kolkata neighbourhood of Chinese immigrants. Intrigued by the cuisine and anxious to go beyond Indianised Manchurian and chilly chicken, he pooled in his life savings to travel to the land of the Great Wall and soon learnt that Chinese food, like most things Chinese, is governed by the principles of yin and yang. In this book, Chatterjee shares 108 recipes from four regions (Peking, Shanghai, Sichuan and Canton) along with separate sections on sourcing ingredients, and the utensils and methods



required for Chinese cooking. Try it out; perhaps—like the chef in the Mainland China ad on TV—you'll get a kiss from the grateful recipient of the feast.



Set in KwaZulu-Natal, a South African province, **Imraan Coovadia's** heart-wrenching **HIGH LOW IN-BETWEEN** (HarperCollins; Rs 299; 268 pages) explores Durban's middle-class Indians and their ceaseless struggle for identity in an ever-changing political situation.

When Nafisa enters her home one day and finds her biologist husband violently dead, she is sucked into a world of illegal organ trade and bribery mired with scientific and political controversies. What's more, she has to deal with her dysfunctional family—her photographer son and her brother, who is a religious fanatic—as well as convince her patients to get treatment for AIDS, which is rampant in the area. Coovadia's literary style transforms a book about corruption, political expediency and moral impoverishment into a lyrical cry for justice and sanity—not surprisingly, the book won the coveted Sunday Times Fiction Prize 2010.

They never take the easy way out but pursue the right path, however tough it may be. They are the leaders; the senior citizens who have taken the road to change. Harmony Silver Awards 2010 honours those who have chosen to follow their heart.

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## CHAT SMART

Here's a smarter way to save on long distance phone calls—video chat. And if you think that sounds complicated, you couldn't be more wrong. Check out *Grandma's Video Chatting Guide* put together by Jason Toff. When Toff noticed that his grandmother enjoyed staying in touch with the whole family, he decided to work out a step-by-step chatting guide that turns silvers into video chatting pros in no time. The video, along with a printable guide, can be accessed at [www.google.com/chat/grandma](http://www.google.com/chat/grandma). Go ahead, take your NRI grandchildren on a video tour of your house, introduce them to your friends or show off your latest culinary creation.

## cybercasing

*pp.* Using online location-based data and services to determine when a home is unoccupied with a view to robbing it.

**Example:** Data stored in digital photographs can help criminals locate individuals and plot real-world crimes, a practice two researchers called **cybercasing** in a recently published paper. The site *Pleaserobme.com* was one of the first to expose the problem by displaying tweets tagged with location information, although it has since stopped the practice.

—Niraj Chokshi, "How tech-savvy thieves could 'cybercase' your house"; *The Atlantic*, 22 July 2010

## toxic knowledge

*n.* Knowledge of a potential genetic predisposition for a particular disease, especially when that information creates anxiety and other psychological problems.

**Example:** But there's something about the precision of a DNA test that can make people believe that chemistry is destiny—that it holds dark, implacable secrets. This is why genetic information is sometimes described as **toxic knowledge**: giving people direct access to their genetic information, in the words of Stanford bioethicist Hank Greely, is out and out "reckless".

—Thomas Goetz, "Sergey Brin's search for a Parkinson's cure", *Wired*, 22 June 2010

## CHEMTRAIL

*n.* A jet contrail that has been laced with chemical or biological agents. Also: *chem-trail*, *chem trail*.

**Example:** Wonder how the Bush administration arranged for the destruction of the World Trade Centre? Curious why the government planes are releasing toxic **chemtrails** into our atmosphere? Step right up, because for a record 26 days, KPFK-FM (90.7) not only provided answers but offered to hook you up with that sweet DVD set, unveiling the fuller, darker truth.

—James Rainey, "Schism at KPFK leaves factions warring over programming, fundraising and leadership", *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 2010

## umbraphile

*n.* A person who seeks out or has an intense interest in eclipses, particularly solar eclipses.

**Example:** A growing number of eclipse-chasers, or **umbraphiles** as they are also called, travel to the corners of the earth specifically to see total solar eclipses, and tour operators have sprung up to get them there. Beyond providing the thrill of standing on the moon's shadow, or umbra, an eclipse is often the centerpiece of a travel adventure in exotic climes.

—Christina Koukkos, "Eclipse chasing, in pursuit of total awe", *The New York Times*, 17 May 2009

“ I do not try to dance better than anyone else. I only try to dance better than myself.

—Russian-American ballet dancer and choreographer Mikhail Baryshnikov

## neurolaw

*n.* The philosophy and practice of using neuroscientific evidence and theories in the legal system. Also: neuro-law.

**Example:** But what about people who rape and murder—should we feel empathy for them? Should they be allowed to argue in court that their brains made them do it? Enter the new world of **neurolaw**, in which neuroscience is used as evidence in the courtroom.

—Barbara Bradley Hagerty, “A neuroscientist uncovers a dark secret”, NPR, 29 June 2010

## qwerty tummy

*n.* A stomach illness caused by typing on a germ-ridden keyboard. Also: QWERTY tummy.

**Example:** One common bug that researchers have turned up is staphylococcus aureus, a classic causer of food poisoning, signs of which include nausea and diarrhoea. Accordingly, stomach sicknesses caught from computer equipment have been dubbed **qwerty tummy** after the ‘Q-W-E-R-T-Y; keys on a keyboard.

—“Your keyboard can give you food poisoning”, MSNBC.com, 2 July 2010

## APOCALYPSE FATIGUE

*n.* Reduced interest in current or potential environmental problems owing to frequent dire warnings about those problems.

**Example:** Heading into one of the most important climate-change summits ever, global warming has an image problem. For the first time in 25 years, a majority of Americans rank economic concerns above environmental ones, a major poll shows. People also are exhibiting signs of what some environmental experts call **apocalypse fatigue**.

—Mike Lee, “Climate-change skeptics getting warmed up”, The San Diego Union-Tribune, 6 December 2009

“ I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

—American poet Maya Angelou

## e-cigarette

*n.* An electronic device that heats a nicotine-laced liquid into an inhalable vapour. Also: ecigarette.

**Example:** In court papers, the FDA said it considers the devices, also known as **e-cigarettes**, to be unapproved drug-delivery gadgets. e-cigarettes are the size of regular cigarettes and deliver a vaporised nicotine mixture to users. It contends that e-cigarettes are not traditional tobacco products and that the products promise, among other things, to “alleviate nicotine withdrawal symptoms”. The FDA compares the devices to nicotine gum, which it regulates because suppliers promote the gum’s ability to help people kick smoking habits. FDA officials are also concerned that e-cigarettes could increase nicotine addiction and tobacco use by children.

—Del Quentin and Lindsey Layton, “FDA can’t block importing of ‘electronic cigarettes’”, The Washington Post, 15 January 2010

## Security for silvers



According to police observations, 70 per cent of the crimes committed against senior citizens are by people known to them. Mumbai Police has launched a security portal ([www.hamarisuraksha.com](http://www.hamarisuraksha.com)) through which senior citizens can register their contact details and details of their domestic help and cooks. A databank of such information can act as a deterrent for potential criminals and, in case of a crime, even help the police trace the accused in a shorter time. Volunteers of the site are going door to door collecting information from senior citizens all over Mumbai. The data of each registered senior will be later integrated with the Elderline (a helpline for senior citizens). In future,

when silvers call 1090, the operator will have quick access to the silver’s photograph and personal details. The service is simple and free—register today.

## WE GO 50 YEARS BACK IN TIME

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# And we twist...

**S**hammi Kapoor has done it—and so has Saif Ali Khan. The twist, which originated in Congo and caught the imagination of the world, changed the rules of dancing forever by reflecting a new spirit of free living and sexual liberation. In 1960s, American singer and songwriter Chubby Checker and rhythm-n-blues singer Hank Ballard released their No. 1 hit *The Twist*, showcasing the dance, which went on to become a cult phenomenon. And it was so simple to do: pretend you're putting out a cigarette stub with the ball of your foot while twisting to and fro; at the same time, move your torso from side to side as if drying your back! The years have failed to diminish its popularity. In 1993, *Twist*, a film by Ron Mann, documented the craze; John Travolta and Uma Thurman danced to it in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* in 1994; and a year later, Faber & Faber published *The Twist: The Story of the Song and Dance That Changed the World* by Jim Dawson.



### THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: **SEPTEMBER 1960**

- On 4 September 1960, hurricane Donna struck Puerto Rico, where it killed 107 people before moving northward through the US, where it killed 22 more, before dying down on 13 September.
- On 10 September 1960, Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia won the gold medal in the Summer Olympics marathon setting a world record (2:15:16.2) and running the entire 26 miles and 385 yards (42.195 km) barefoot. He was the first black African in history to win a gold medal in the Olympics.
- On 19 September 1960, India and Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty, agreeing to share the water of the Indus River and its tributaries.
- On 24 September 1960, USS Enterprise, the first atomic-powered aircraft carrier was launched in Virginia.

# Then: Cushion cover Now: Shoulder bag

Transform a ratty old cushion cover into a snazzy shoulder bag. All you need is a cushion cover that opens at the end, two grip clamps and 1.5 m of heavy cotton cord. Attach the grip clamps to each side of the opening of the cushion cover and attach the cord by tying into firm knots. Secure the knots with some craft glue. If you don't want to buy the grip clamps, sew on the handle with a sewing machine or a strong, double hand stitch.

## FACTS

- » Textile recycling is reusing or reprocessing used clothing, fibrous material and clothing scraps from the manufacturing process.
- » Textile reuse is not defined as 'recycling' by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as reused garments and wiper rags re-enter the waste stream eventually.
- » Today, many clothing companies create new pieces of clothing from scraps of old clothes by combining and making new additions; the eclectic garments are then marketed as a type of style.

Hareesh Patel



## **MORE RECYCLE IDEAS...**

Old socks make excellent cleaning rags; just cut the back edge of the sock from the ankle to the toe.

If you are skilled with needle and thread, you can recycle old clothes into pillows, purses, dolls and stuffed animals.

Make a 'family memories' patchwork quilt with old clothes—ties, handkerchiefs, your children's old T-shirts.

“Human life is more valuable than anything else. When this thought struck me, it changed my outlook to life.”

**K V Aboobacker, 64, for giving free medicines to the poor**



Sivaram V

At first glance, Aboobacker’s Self-Service in the small town of Ponnani in Kerala looks like any other friendly neighbourhood pharmacy. But ‘ABSS’, as it is fondly called, is a drugstore with a soul—it dispenses medicines free of cost to those who cannot afford them. The proprietor **K V Aboobacker** clocks in 18-hour days at the store, tending to long lines of people who flock here from neighbouring districts until the wee hours of the night for medicines and supplies. Opening the pharmacy was a turning point for the 64 year-old, who shut down his hardware business of 17 years to answer a higher calling. When he’s not behind the counter, he’s busy chasing down doctors and hospitals for spare medical samples that he can distribute free. “I used to assist the doctors who used to go door-to-door as part

of the Muslim Social Service Organisation,” explains the sprightly silver. “My rapport with them has stood me in good stead.” He purchases the rest of his supplies with contributions from his family and donations from well-wishers. A self-made man, Aboobacker quit his education after Class X to work and supplement the family income. But he never stopped learning, gleaning knowledge about medicines through reading and interaction with doctors over the years. Aboobacker’s wife and three children have always backed his generous mission—“our motto is to try to meet every patient’s need”—but it’s the respect he has earned and assistance he receives from the Indian Medical Association in terms of networking with doctors and free medical supplies that have truly done him proud.

—Nisary Mahesh

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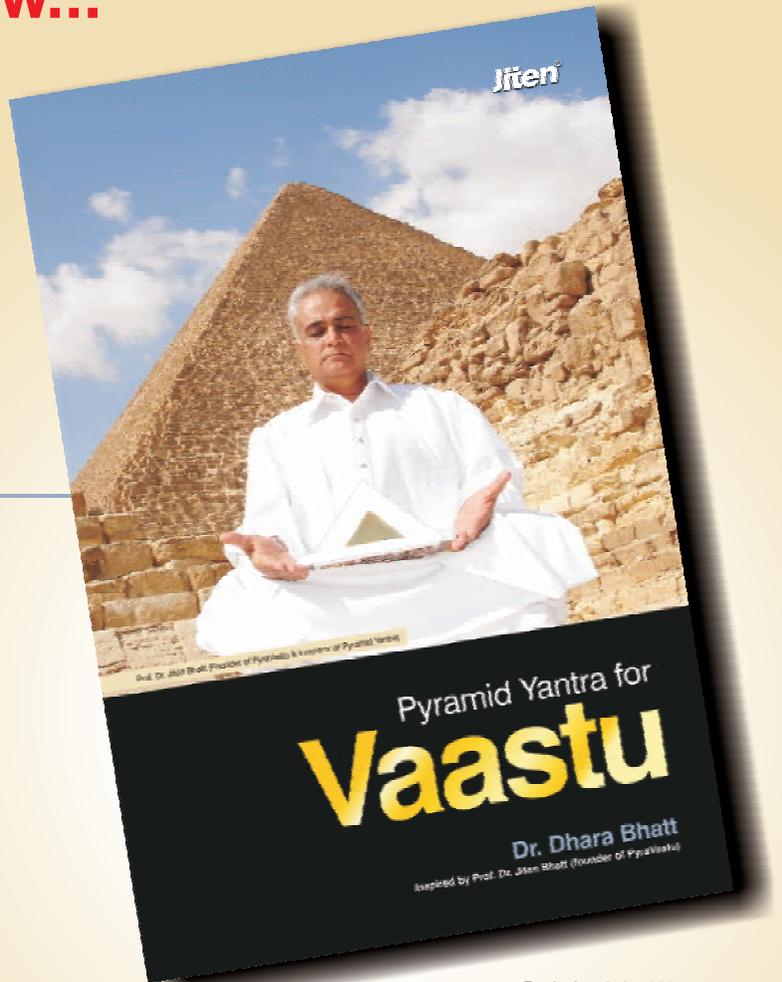
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