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# Laughter and tears

He made us laugh. And then left us to cry.

The apparent suicide of American actor-comedian Robin Williams has left the world shell-shocked. What's more, it has put into focus yet again the dichotomy between one's outer and inner self; how the facade we present to the world is so at odds with our core. And how a person who appears to be surrounded by all the best life has to offer—wife, children, fame, fortune—is ultimately alone.

It's not that the life of Williams has been a genteel, pastel-hued canvas. His struggles with alcohol and drugs and his turbulent romantic escapades have been welldocumented-dark, wild brushstrokes that told of the storm within. Still, one got a sense that he would always overcome, would ride the storm in his inimitable way. A new marriage (in 2011; his third), his three children, a successful stint in rehab this year, and an industry that adored him served to bolster this myth. Until, of course, he rent the canvas asunder last month.

A longstanding battle with depression and a recent diagnosis of Parkinson's disease: this apparently was the double whammy that did him in. It's vital for us all to remember that depression is not a bad mood that comes and goes; it's a clinical disease that needs urgent attention. We must strive to recognise depression and alienation in ourselves and others, lose the stigma and get help. This is especially relevant for silvers. Equally, the



death of Williams is proof that people who seem outwardly 'together', bringing joy to so many others around them, may be in pain. Let's show more compassion and kindness to the people who walk with us, no matter for how long, for we will never really know what it feels like to walk in their shoes.

The biggest takeaway, though, is the need to seek happiness. In World's Greatest Dad, a 2009 film starring Williams, he proclaims: "I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel all alone." Don't let that happen to you; make a proactive effort to find happiness—in the people you choose around you, the places you inhabit, the life you craft for yourself. And once you find that happiness, seize it; hold on tight and never let go.

lua Ambani

Thanks for the laughs, and the lessons, Robin.

### A Harmony for Silvers Foundation Initiative

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The lives, inspirations and remarkable work of five eminent men of science

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### GIFT OF HOPE

Sr Noelline Pinto on empowering women

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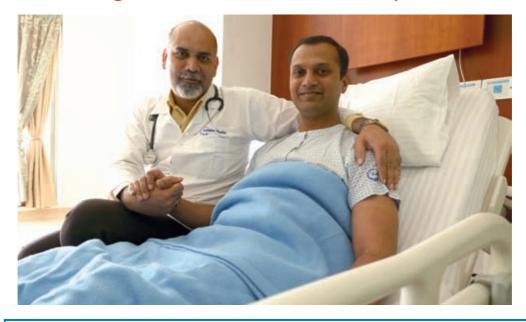
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# column

For a layperson, the nomenclature they use may sound incomprehensible: nanoparticles, mini bangs, sex separation of mosquitoes, bubble column reactors and chrome tanning is just a smattering of the jargon you hear when you examine their oeuvre. But make no mistake; their research has a profound impact on our lives. our communities and our economy. On the heels of structural chemist Dr CNR Rao winning the Bharat Ratna earlier this year, Harmony-Celebrate Age decided to turn the spotlight on some of India's most accomplished scientists with "Stars of Science". We got up close to Rao as well as astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar, malariologist-entomologist Vinod Prakash Sharma, chemical engineer J B Joshi and leather scientist T Ramasami to discover not just their incredible list of achievements but what makes them tick. Some of it, admittedly, surprised us! Himalayan holidays, spiritual and temporal literature, classical music, cinema, yoga, grandparenting and writing-fiction, nonfiction, even poetry—are just some of the pleasures that keep these brilliant men rooted and eminently relatable.

Such diverse passions are reflected throughout our pages this month. We especially recommend walking the spice trail through enchanting old Kochi with its Portuguese, Dutch and Jewish heritage. And immersing oneself in Delhi's-and India's-history with the fascinating author-historian Abraham Eraly, our featured writer in conversation this month. What's more, if food is your governing passion, Pratibha Jain brings us a brand new column-'His Ladle Love'-about silver men who know their way around the kitchen, and can teach us a few things about savouring life. Bon appétit!

—Arati Rajan Menon

With reference to your book review, "Demystifying the Silver Years" (Bookshelf, July 2014), anger and guilt are two negative emotions dominating quite a bit of our lives eventually harming our body, mind and relationships. Both these emotions often arise owing to our inability to accept or change difficult circumstances in our lives.

Whenever we are faced with the prospect of carrying out our duties or responsibilities, generally three paths emerge. The first and ideal one is to accept whatever we need to do without any conflict in our minds. The second is to forcibly do our duty but with dislike and loathing. This, in turn, gives rise to anger, irritation and frustration. The third option is to refuse to do whatever is expected of us, often giving rise to severe guilt. In situations where these three options don't work, the best way is to try and find a fourth option to live life guilt-free.

Imagine a common scenario where a person has to care for his aged parents. While many of us would do it dutifully, some wouldn't enjoy doing it. Worse, some keep doing it with resentment, resulting in arguments and conflicts within the family. They even wish they were not straddled with this responsibility. Such persons also constantly look for legitimate means to escape their duties—temporary or permanent.

On the other hand, if the person refuses to take care of his parents, neglects them or sends them away to live in an old age home, he is rid of his duty, but is filled with guilt and remorse in later years.

In such a scenario, one has to work out a fourth option, where he can do what he wants without feeling guilty or angry. This often involves open communication with all those concerned, voicing issues and problems at the same time. Finally, one must be completely guided by one's



heart rather than the mind, as the heart is always right.

### Dr P V Vaidvanathan Mumhai

The survey by charity Age UK that tells a tale of loneliness and worry among British silvers ("Britspeak", 'Orbit', July 2014) is universally applicable. As the article mentions, loneliness can be devastating for older people and makes them more vulnerable to illnesses. In India, however, where there is no social security system, there are two more worries for silvers: financial insecurity and the fear of children. After educating them to be on their feet, many parents find that the focus of their children is on the parents' property.

### I Gursahani Mumbai

Hearty congratulations on completing 10 successful years of Harmony-Celebrate Age. From day one, I have been a regular subscriber. The magazine has undoubtedly maintained its high standard all through these years. In the June 2014 anniversary special issue, I enjoyed reading the

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write-ups by famous people from diverse fields. Their messages will truly inspire us to live a happy, healthy and fulfilled life. Best wishes for the future!

### Kusum Gokarn

Pune

I was delighted to read your 10th anniversary issue (June 2014). I have been a regular reader of the magazine for the past five years, so it was both a refreshing and nostalgic read. In 'Words to Live By,' my personal favourite from the selection was definitely author Khushwant Singh's sentimental piece about overcoming the death of his wife. 'Awareness and Advocacy' was informative, while the silver heroes featured in 'Harmony Heroes' were truly inspiring. It feels great to know that there are people who strive to make the world a better place. And, of course, the flashback of well-known personalities you covered over the decade was impressive. Overall, I think this issue was a walk down memory lane that evoked fond memories of the great people you have covered and the commendable work you do to inspire us silvers!

### Lalita R K Bengaluru

### **CONTRIBUTORS**



Our columnist in 'At Large' this month, Swami Samarpanananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math. He took his monastic vows in

1980. Since then, he has been associated with various organisational works, mostly educational. "We are passing through a period of cultural transition," says the Swami, who currently teaches ancient and modern scriptures at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math, West Bengal. "Old values, mores and codes need to be rewritten to suit the mindset of the new generation." His first book Tiya: A Parrot's Journey, published by HarperCollins, has been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Guiarati, Kannada and Bhasa Indonesia. His second book, Param, has also been published by HarperCollins. Both *Tiya* and *Param* form supplementary reading at IIM, Indore. His third book, *Junglezen* Sheru, has been recently published by Pan Macmillan. Pathik is his book of Hindi poetry, published by Tavleen Foundation, Indore.



Saritha Rao Rayachoti quit a career in advertising to return to a childhood penchant for storytelling. Her short stories

have been published in anthologies like Urban Shots: Crossroads and The City of Gods. She is today an independent writer based in Chennai who loves exploring diverse aspects of culture: people, places, craft, music, books, cinema and food. She has written over a hundred articles for various Indian print media like DNA, Deccan Herald, The Hindu, Parent Circle, Man's World, Club Class, Madras Plus (now a supplement of The Times of India) and Culturama (formerly At A Glance). She attributes her interests to a somewhat multicultural upbringing having moved cities every three years, not belonging to any one place, yet in a sense, belonging everywhere. She is a self-professed over-thinker and delves into layers, symbols and meaning, sometimes amused by her compulsion to interpret everything. Samples of her published articles are available on her portfolio blog, http://saritharao.blogspot.in



### AN INVITATION FROM **HARMONY**

We are looking for contributions from our readers. Write to us if...

- You had an experience related to money
- You faced a serious health problem and conquered it
- You know of someone who has done something exceptional after the age of 55
- You have a hobby or an interesting travel experience to share
- You have a funny or insightful anecdote about your grandchildren ...and we'll print it in the column 'Your Space' Mail us at Reliance Centre. 1st Floor, 19. Walchand Hirachand Marg, Ballard Estate, Mumbai-400001. Or email at contact.mag@

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INSIDE

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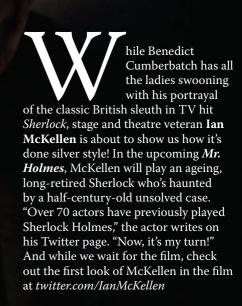
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TRENDS TIPS



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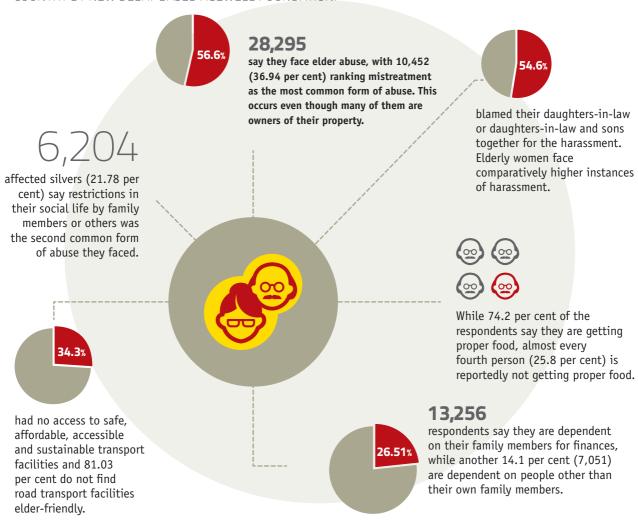
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# TREATMENT TROUBLE

SILVERS ARE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT HOW THEY ARE TREATED—AND IT ISN'T GOOD. HERE ARE SOME TAKEAWAYS FROM AN EXTENSIVE SURVEY OF **50,000** SILVERS FROM **300** DISTRICTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY BY NEW DELHI-BASED AGEWELL FOUNDATION:



**Regrets and re-dos:** Regrets are universal—but they can also serve as a roadmap for life. A survey by *USA Today* magazine tells us that silver Americans have plenty of regrets and want the next generation to learn from them. Chief among them are saving more money and making better investments; taking better care of health; and staying closer with family.



### Right to priority

Good news for our legal eagles! In view of the increasing number of pending right-to-information (RTI) complaints, the Central Information Commission (CIC) will consider hearing the RTI petitions of silvers on priority.

The CIC is the second level of appeal for RTI petitioners. According to data from the body, there are over 25,000 pending RTI cases today.

## Grey forecast



It may be one of the most developed countries in the world. But the UK has failed to adequately address its demographic change, according to *The Grey Pride Manifesto*. The document, prepared by silver charity Anchor, lists a set of recommendations on the basis of an extensive nationwide survey. Here, courtesy London newspaper *The Times*, are some problems that need fixing:

- Older people's hospital wards on average have one nurse for 10.3 patients—compare this to a ratio of one to 4.6 patients for children's wards.
- Close to 60 per cent of silvers say they want to move but can't because of a lack of supply of retirement property.
- Over the past four years, social care budgets have been cut by 26 per cent despite a 14 per cent increase in demand for support.
- The dysfunctional relationship between health, social care and housing needs to be addressed—in 2012-13, patients spent 833,000 days longer in hospital than necessary because of delayed transfers.
- Older people face a disproportionately high incidence of fatalities or injuries caused by road accidents or while using public transport.
- Ageism in the workplace is widespread, with 41 per cent of younger people saying there are not enough jobs for older people.
- Close to 70 per cent of silvers don't have access to the Internet.

"Successive governments have failed to address the issues of an ageing society and without radical change we face an old age of increasing polarisation, suffering and loneliness," says Jane Ashcroft, chief executive of Anchor. "For this reason, we are calling on government to appoint a minister for older people in the cabinet who can lead the cross-departmental approach, as well as a commissioner for older people to champion older people's needs."



### **DIGITAL HARYANA**

The state has created a centralised Pension Disbursement Cell (PDC) to successfully implement an e-pension system in the state. The PDC will enable credit of pension in the accounts of pensioners on the due date and ensure increase in dearness allowance rates as soon as government instructions are issued. It will also ensure immediate release of all arrears; timely revision of pension wherever the need arises; and timely disbursal of LTC allowance after due procedure.

On the anvil: Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Thaawar Chand Gehlot has announced in the Lok Sabha that fully equipped old age homes will be constructed for silvers across the country. According to media reports, Gehlot was replying to demands for grants for his ministry.





### Distracted

A new study by Rice University and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine has revealed that silvers are nearly twice as likely as their younger counterparts to have their memory and cognitive processes impaired by environmental distractions. The study was published in journal *Psychology and Aging*.



# Spatial EQUALITY

ime-related cognitive decline may be a reality. But, happily, there's one part of our brain that processes information the same way—no matter our age. When a team from the University of Adelaide compared the ability of silvers and younger people to respond to visual and non-visual stimuli to assess their 'spatial attention' skills, they found both groups measured up. As website *sciencedaily.com* reports, spatial attention is critical for many aspects of life, from driving and walking to picking up and using objects. "Older and younger adults perform in a similar way on a range of visual and non-visual tasks that measure spatial attention," affirms study leader Dr Joanna Brooks. "Both groups had the same responses for tasks involving touch, sight or sound. For instance, in one task, participants were asked to feel wooden objects while blindfolded and decide where the middle of the object was-participants' judgements were significantly biased towards the left-hand side of the true object centre. This bias was subtle but highly consistent. Thus, while reaction time is typically slower among older adults, certain types of cognitive systems in the right cerebral hemisphere are 'encapsulated' and may be protected from ageing."

**HAVE YOU GENE THIS?** "A single gene—Spns1—plays a surprising role in ageing that can be detected early in development." That's the conclusion of researchers from The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI) in La Jolla, California, as published in journal *PLOS Genetics*. "We believe that this previously uncharacterised developmental gene known as

Spns1 may mediate the ageing process," continues author Shuji Kishi. "Even a partial loss of Spns1 function can speed ageing. Mutations to Spns1 disturbs developmental senescence and badly affects the long-term bio-chronological ageing process." The team's animal tests will soon be followed by human trials.



# The ARTISTS within

Fresh flowers, old wedding cards, and a streak of creativity are all it took for silvers to craft beautiful mithai boxes and rakhi at the Harmony Interactive Centre in Girgaum, Mumbai. The eco-friendly craft session was held on 7 August, a few days before the festival of Raksha Bandhan. Meena Doshi, a silver herself, introduced the concept of making mithai boxes with old wedding cards. She then taught the audience how to make rakhi using fresh flowers like roses, jasmine, magnolia (champa), hibiscus (jaswant) and yellow chafa plumeria, including their leaves, wasting nothing in the process. To make these naturally aromatic rakhi more attractive, each participant weaved the leaves, petals and silver and golden threads in different patterns, proving their bent for creativity.

Soon after, the Centre conducted a drawing competition for silvers and their grandchildren to celebrate Independence Day. On 16 August, 16 grandparent-grandchild teams got together to flaunt their artistry on one of two social themes: a dream of the future of India and environment conservation. Judged by fashion designer Sharvari Salvi, the three best drawings

were chosen. For the duo who won the first prize, Shanta Gangakhedkar and her granddaughter Shrutika, it was all about spending time together. "It was a wonderful experience for both us," says Shanta. "I learnt how to ideate on paintings because of her, and she was very happy when we won the prize." After the competition, the paintings were all displayed at the Centre.





here's a new trend going viral on social media: candid street photography of silvers, sometimes happy and warm, sometimes pensive yet endearing, through an Instagram account called *@notmynonni*. The account, which has 15,373 followers to date and counting, was begun as a photography project by **Tiana Kai**.

# The *Nonni* project

Kai started taking pictures of *nonni* (Italian for grandparents) in early 2013 after moving to Florence, Italy, "moved as I was by all the well-dressed and adorable *nonni*", as she explains on her website. A few months after posting these pictures on her personal Instagram account tagged with #notmynonni, she decided to make it a real photography project, sharing at least one photo of *nonni* a day on Instagram. "I dedicated a large portion of my photography to *nonni* because they reminded me of my grandfather," says Tiana, adding, "They are so adorable!"

Born in Hawaii and raised in Miami, Kai moved to Florence two years ago along with her husband. She now works as a marketing and social media consultant, and has a passion for photography, as seen on her blog, www.tianakai. com, and Instagram accounts, @tianapix and @notmynonni. Through an email interview, Neeti Vijaykumar gets to know more about her photography project. Excerpts:



### How did the idea for @notmynonni come about?

Nonni have been a sentimental subject for me since my grandfather passed away two years ago. My followers on my personal account loved seeing nonni photos, so I created @notmynonni as a place just for them. I also feature the best Instagram photos taken by other people that are tagged with #notmynonni on www.notmynonni.com.

### What has the response been like?

Followers leave the most beautiful comments telling me that these photos bring back wonderful memories of their *nonni* who have passed away, that they look forward to the photos every morning and that I should keep up my dedication. It's amazing to see how open and appreciative people have been.

### Do you take pictures of *nonni* everyday? Do you talk to them?

I would say I take at least one photo of a *nonno* or *nonna* a day. Some days I come back home with 30 images of *nonni*. My camera or iPad comes with me everywhere and I am always on the lookout for *nonni*! Typically, I wait until I see them in the perfect light or frame. Sometimes I talk to them, but I like to capture their natural state of being. If they notice my camera, they just smile at me.

## Please tell us something about your grandfather.

My grandfather, Ray Milici, was an incredible man. He started an advertising agency, MVNP (Milici Valenti Ng Pack), one of the first in Hawaii. He was successful in the business, yet was always so proud of his family. He would always talk about his children knowing that family is the most important thing in life. My favourite memory was sitting alone with him and being able to ask him questions about his life and life in general. He was so open to talking about things and was very honest about what he thought. He taught me to not be afraid and to do whatever makes me happy.



### Do you have a message for all the *nonni* reading this right now?

I've noticed that many *nonni* have played a deep part in people's lives, so I hope they understand how much they are loved by their family and even by strangers through *@notmynonni*. *Nonni* have so much history, I think they should share as much as possible with their family because once they are gone, the family always wishes they knew them better or asked more questions about their lives. The pain of losing someone is so confusing and painful that the mourning process is more accepting when you really know the person you lost. You feel like you can move on better.



Be the change. Silver power is not just a slogan—it is real and potent. In the crowded Mumbai suburb of Dahisar, a group of elders assisted the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on a pilot project to prevent mosquitoes breeding in homes and housing societies. As newspaper *Mumbai Mirror* reports, while people were reluctant to let the unknown

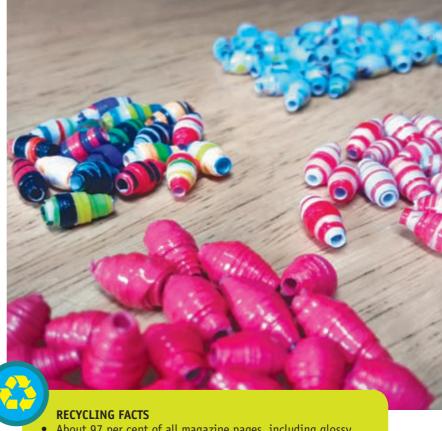
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staff of BMC into their homes to carry out inspections to identify breeding spots, they were much more amenable to let the silvers—familiar faces from their own housing societies—in. As a result, the silvers, who received prior training on how to detect and prevent breeding spots and spread awareness, were able to get the job done, discovering breeding spots in places like AC ducts, decorative pots, vases and fish tanks. The BMC plans to introduce the drive in its other wards as well, enlisting the help of local elders.

# Then: Magazine pages

### Now: Beads

This Diwali, gift someone (or yourself) some eco-friendly paper-beaded jewellery. Using just a few magazine pages, a pair of scissors, toothpick and some glue, you can make colourful beads. To begin with, cut up triangular-shaped pieces of a page. For this, either cut up triangles directly from the page (if you are very precise) or first cut two-inch vertical strips, and then cut diagonally across the strip to form triangles. Remember, the base of the triangle is the width of the bead; the longer the base, the fatter the bead. Next, roll the base of the triangle on the toothpick till it covers the toothpick. Apply glue on the remaining part of the triangle. Now carefully start rolling the remaining part around the toothpick, tightly. For a symmetrical bead, make sure the pointed end of the triangle is always at the centre while rolling. Hold the rolled toothpickbead together for a few minutes until the glue sets. Now, remove the toothpick from the centre of the bead—and your bead is ready! To harden the bead and make it last longer, you can apply a coating of varnish. Now, repeat the process and you make enough beads of different sizes and colours till you can string them around an elastic wire to make a bracelet.



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- 2. ROLL UP MAGAZINE PAGES AND STICK THEM AROUND A HALF-CUT PLASTIC BOTTLE TO MAKE AN ATTRACTIVE STATIONERY HOLDER.







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What it does: A free app for diabetics, this lets you track and analyse your glucose levels. You can organise the data into interactive graphs and send them to your doctor. It's the simplest diabetes logging app out there without too many options and buttons to confuse you. It also supports multiple users.

After installation: When you are recording a new entry, just scroll the counter, add tags (breakfast time, dinner time, exercise, medication, post-lunch or before lunch), and include the date, time and description. You can also check the history of the entries so far by clicking on the second tab on the topmost bar (the clock icon), and then check your progress in a graph format on the third tab (the graph icon).

**MEDVANTAGE:** Mobile apps help silvers adhere to their medications, according to a recent study by a research team at Miguel Hernández University in Spain. And this applies even to those who aren't very tech-savvy. In the study, of a group of 99 silvers, 51 used a tablet app for Android and iOS specially designed to store information about prescriptions, doctor instructions and pictures of prescribed drugs, with options to set up alerts and reminders and record when the medication was taken, which was transmitted to the caregiver. The other 48 did not use the app. The results revealed that self-reported adherence increased by 28 per cent, while the number of missed doses decreased by 27 per cent for those who regularly used the app compared to those who didn't. Also, of those who used the app, 55 per cent had no previous experience of using tablets or smart phones, and yet had better adherence scores than those who were not new to technology. A strong case indeed to put your smartphone to good use!

### POCKET PHYSIO

**Available for:** Android v2.3 and up; iOS 5.0 or later

What it does: Here's a handy, free app for those who have had or are going to have orthopaedic surgery. With an extensive list of preoperative and postoperative exercises in video formats and articles, this app can help you prepare for an operation and speedy recovery. Explained in simple and straightforward language, with every exercise broken down into steps, the exercise tips covered include those for hip or knee replacement surgery and foot and hand surgery.

After installation: There are four options on the bottommost bar: exercise; reminders (for setting up alarms to follow an exercise regime or a doctor's appointment); information; and contact. The exercise options feature a range of tips



with text information and video demonstration for hip precautions, managing pain, self-assessment, breathing exercises, and walking with a frame or crutches, apart from quick cheats to make dressing, bathing and getting in and out of vehicles easier post-op.



# health bytes



# **SCAN ALERT**

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India, the risk of which goes up with increasing age. While the debate still rages on whether older women need frequent screenings, a new comprehensive study by the University of Washington's School of Public Health and Community Medicine and the Swedish Cancer Institute in Seattle shows that mammography is essential in detecting cancer in its earliest stages.

Women over 75 years of age should get regular mammography screenings, as there's a 10 per cent increase in survival rate when invasive cancers are de-

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tected. The study examined the impact of mammography screenings on older women, analysing data of over 14,000 women with breast cancer, of which nearly 1,600 were women aged 75 and above. The results reveal that, over the years, mammography-detected cases outnumber those detected by self and physician-detected cases. Further, mammography screenings detected invasive cancers in much earlier stages, leading to a 97 per cent survival rate, compared to those detected by physicians or patients, which had 87 per cent survival rate. This would also explain why mammography-detected cases were treated with lumpectomy and radiation, and had fewer

mastectomies and less chemotherapy than patient or physician-detected cases. Researchers indicate that as breast density in older women is lower, and mammography screenings cost less and are more advanced, there's a higher chance of early detection.

Parkinson's disease affects mainly those above 60, and is the third most disorder in India. While research continues on what really causes the disorder, a new study has found more than two dozen genes that are characteristic of causing **Parkinson's**, including six that had not been previously considered. Identified by scientists at the National Institutes of Health in the US, these gene variations are potential risk variants: the more variants a person has, the higher the risk (up to



three times) of developing Parkinson's. After sifting through data from public and private organisations, the researchers compared genetic regions of 5,300 Parkinson's patients and another control group of 5,500 people. The gene factors that have been identified are those that regulate inflammation, the nerve cell chemical messenger dopamine, and alpha-synuclein, a protein that has been shown to accumulate in the brains of some patients of Parkinson's.

## **BREAK POINT**

ccording to the Dementia India Report of 2010, nearly 3.7 million Indians over the age of 60 have dementia, of which about 2.1 million are women and about 1.5 million men. This number is expected to rise to 6.35 million by 2025 due to increasing life expectancy. Identifying symptoms early on can help prevent dementia, especially if one is prone to risk factors and does not have a healthy lifestyle. Interestingly, even our walking speed can reveal whether we are at risk of dementia. A study of 27,000 people over the age of 60 reveals that those who walk slowly and complain of cognitive problems are more likely to get dementia. Previous studies have also explored the relationship between walking slow and lower levels of happiness and longevity.

The new study by scientists at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of



Yeshiva University and Montefiore Medical Centre, New York, found that across five continents, nearly one in 10 silvers tested positive for pre-dementia on a simple test that measured how fast they walked and whether they have cognitive complaints. These people were twice as likely to develop dementia in the next 12 years. Scientists describe this as

### NON-MODIFIABLE FACTORS

- Being above 65 years of age
- Family history, genetics
- Presence of ApoE4
- Female gender
- Depression
- Head trauma

### **MODIFIABLE FACTORS**

- Vascular disease
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- High levels of cholesterol or fat
- Nutritional deficiency (especially Vitamin B)
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Obesity
- Diet

motoric cognitive risk (MCR) syndrome and believe that walking slowly predicts cognitive disabilities, which could potentially lead to dementia. Slow speed was measured as slower than about 1 m per second, which is about 2.2 miles per hour (mph).

# Joint failure

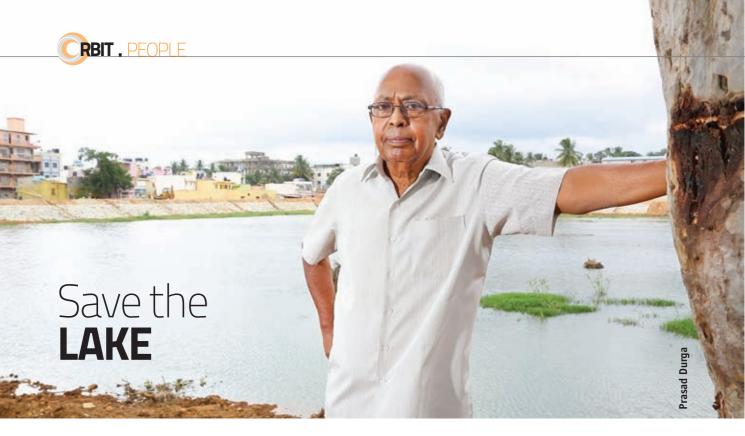
**RESEARCH CONDUCTED** at the Nuffield Department of Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and Musculoskeletal Sciences at the University of Oxford, UK, has revealed that partial knee replacement is a lot safer than total knee replacement. The study found that those who had total knee replacement surgeries were four times more likely to die in the first month after the surgery and 15 per cent more likely to die in the first eight months, compared to those who had partial knee replacement. According to previous studies, nearly half the patients who have severe

osteoarthritis can be treated with partial knee replacement. The study also reveals that patients who underwent total knee replacement were twice as likely to develop



thrombosis, heart attack or deep infection, while their risk of stroke went up by three times and need for blood transfusion four times. Further, as total knee replacement surgeries require that the patients stay in hospital longer, the risk of being readmitted or needing another surgery in the first year was higher. Those who had a partial knee replacement had a 40 per cent chance of repeat or revision surgery in the first eight years. The researchers say that while death from either surgery is uncommon, a partial knee replacement had better functionality, as only the damaged

parts of the knee were replaced. However, they also warned that the choice of surgery was still dependent on the expectations and requirements of individual patients.



he Byrasandra Lake in Bengaluru would have been a pile of litter, had it not been for a 19-year crusade by Venkata Subba Rao, 78, a retired RBI official. After 40 years with the Bank, Rao could have opted for a hassle-free life. Instead, he chose to fight for a cause he strongly believes in. After his prolonged battle to save the lake from vested interests, Rao stood vindicated when he finally won the case. The icing on the cake was when he was crowned the 'Namma (Our) Bengalurean of the Year 2013' by the Namma Bengaluru Foundation, a tribute to the spirit of citizens who fight against all odds to reclaim the heritage of the city.

Rao, who lives in the RBI Colony adjoining Byrasandra Lake, recalls that in 1988, the government decided to develop the lake as a tree park retaining some water areas. Trouble began when the Bangalore City Corporation began to dump debris into the lake in 1992. "We visited the corporation office and then filed a PIL in the High Court of Karnataka," he elaborates. "The Court ordered an interim stay to stop the filling up of the lake and it was made conclusive in the final hearing in 1998." It was only the first challenge in a slew of battles to come. In 1996, three writ petitions were filed by some people falsely claiming they owned the lake area. Another battle ensued when Rao and the residents contested the petitions alleging that false documents had been produced and requested police investigation. Though these false claims were later withdrawn, the row did not end.

In 2000, when Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BMP, earlier called Bangalore Corporation) attempted to fence the lake for restoration, miscreants filed a suit claiming they owned the lake. The fencing had to be stopped owing to an in-

terim stay. "We filed a petition against the stay contesting that the claims were false and void," says Rao, adding that the High Court then allowed the fencing of the lake. Then the RBI colony residents discovered that the lake had been offered as collateral security to a public-sector bank by a builder. Rao and his team filed a caveat in May 2011 and, two months later, it was dismissed by the Supreme Court.

It calls for a sigh of relief as Rao explains how the legal complications concluded. "Finally, in 2011, the lake was handed over to the BBMP [erstwhile BMP], which, in turn, handed it over to Bengaluru Development Authority, another civic body for development," says Rao. "Beginning 1992, we encountered one issue after another, but we persevered."

What was the motivation for shouldering such a cause? Rao says matter-of-factly, "I was convinced that a lake cannot belong to individuals! It was government property, but no one had the time or interest to do anything about it. I just wanted to see the lake restored to its past glory so future generations could cherish it." Rao's law background was also crucial in helping him through the battle. "Also, my friend, late G S Vishweshwara, a reputed senior advocate, fought the case without taking any money," he adds. Luckily, he says, he did not receive any threats.

The high point, however, continues to be the rejuvenation of the lake, with ₹ 38 million earmarked for its restoration. "Nearly 60 per cent of the work is done and the rest should complete in the next five months. A walking park has been created and trees are being planted. I still visit once a week to monitor progress," concludes the Good Samaritan, a symbol of change we all want to see.

—Ramya Srinivasan





### **BIRTHDAYS**

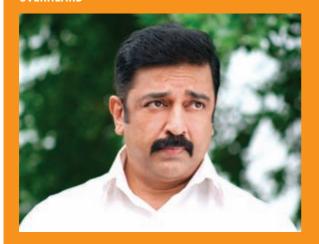
- Film actor **Rishi Kapoor** (left) turned 62 on 4 September.
- Renowned playback singer
   Asha Bhosle turned 81 on
   8 September.
- Theatre and film actor **Shabana Azmi** turns 63 on 18 September.
- Filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt (right) turns 66 on 20 September.





- American horror novel author Stephen King turns 67 on 21 September.
- India's nightingale Lata
   Mangeshkar (left) turns 85 on 28 September.





"Writers do not write roles for older people...they always write for younger people so we all try to look young. But times are changing. Amitji [Amitabh Bachchan] is a great example, so I know I have another 15 years. When I write about an old actor, it is almost autobiographical; young people should write. If the story comes from young people, it will be interesting. Look at Hollywood, which has young writers writing about old actors."

—Actor Kamal Hassan, 59, speaking at the convocation of a film training school



### **IN PASSING**

- Veteran journalist **Sundaram Sankaran** (left) died on 19 July. He was 87.
- Hindi littérateur **Madhukar Singh** passed away on 21 July at the age of 87.
- Classical singer **Sushilarani Patel** died of a heart attack on 24 July. She was 96.
- Legendary guitarist **Dick Wagner** passed away from respiratory failure on 30 July at the age of 71.
- **Pran Kumar Sharma** (right), known for his Chacha Chaudhary comics, succumbed to cancer on 6 August. He was 75.





- Hollywood actor and comedian Robin Williams allegedly committed suicide on 11 August at the age of 63.
- B K S Iyengar (left), featured in our June 2007, died of kidney problems on 20 August, aged 96.

### **MILESTONES**



- Filmmaker, fashion designer and artist Muzaffar Ali (left), 69, received the Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavana Award on 31 July. He was felicitated for his contribution towards peace and harmony through his films and art.
- The first Indian female mountaineer to scale Everest, 60 year-old **Bachendri Pal** (right), featured in our June 2012 issue, received the Bharat Gaurav from the East Bengal Club.





### HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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

## COLOURS OF HAPPINESS

I have been very busy of late. It's been only a few weeks since I launched my website *arts4aged.com* and I am excited at the prospect of helping seniors who are artistically inclined. As many seniors are not comfortable using a computer, I have created art tutorials on DVDs. Through my website and DVDs, I aim to help seniors learn to paint—which can be surprisingly easy if you have a latent talent—and sell their artwork. Ask me, I should know!

I am an engineer and the only one in my family who is artistically inclined. While visiting my daughter in Singapore four months ago, I chanced upon a YouTube art tutorial by Len Hend and was very inspired. When I returned to Chennai, I learnt to paint simply by watching his online video tutorials.

My first painting was an abstract piece of work that I turned into a landscape within a week. I thoroughly enjoyed the process and decided to share my newfound happiness with others by creating a website. I have no interest in taking classes and conducting workshops. The DVDs I have prepared are sufficient. My argument is that if I can do it at the age of 76, anyone who is artistically inclined can do it as well.

Born in Bangalore, I graduated from Bombay University and worked in the UK and later launched my own business in Singapore. When I settled down in Chennai in the early 1990s, I created educational CDs for children and helped the fishing community near Pondicherry build fibreglass boats.

My tryst with technology began in 1998, when my son gifted me a computer. I took a computer class and learnt to use all the design software applications. Early this year, when I decided to give art a shot, my daughter thought I would be staring at a blank canvas. But look what I have achieved! Painting is a relaxing and refreshing experience.



At 76, Guru Nath is discovering the pleasures of painting

Besides, research suggests that it can help keep diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's at bay.

When I started to paint, I was concerned about the costs involved. I knew that easels and paints were expensive but, after much research, I figured a way around it. I created and customised my own frames and easels, and I do all the carpentry work myself. All you need to start on this artistic and amazing path is an initial investment of ₹ 1,000 and you will experience all the happiness I have. I have been interacting with artists in Europe and the US so that I can share their tutorial videos. Most of them have kindly consented, bringing richness and more flavour to my website.

Many seniors become complacent and lazy upon retirement whereas 24 hours a day is not enough for me. One way I keep my energy levels healthy is through my diet, which consists of raw vegetables and millets. In fact, I even bake my own bread. We need to be conscious of our health; it is everything.

-Guru Nath, Chennai



### **LESSON TO LEARN**

My life's story could have easily ended with that clichéd one-liner after my marriage to Tito Dey in the early 1980s: 'And they lived happily ever after'. I was married into a well-to-do and socially well-known Calcutta family. My father-in-law was the famous Peter Dey whose name has been attached to many Bengali films and several Bollywood multi-starrers too. He was a famous ballroom dancer, who designed Western dance sequences in Tollywood and Bollywood flicks in the 1960s and '70s.

Tito inherited the family tradition and we ran a successful dance studio in Calcutta. I had no reason to work and could have easily played the role of a happily married housewife. But I couldn't accept the life of a stay-at-home mom-cum-housewife.

Dey has rediscovered the joys of teaching

With active encouragement from my in-laws, I became an English teacher at St Thomas Day School. I dove headlong into the world of dealing with young boys and girls; not only teaching them a foreign language but shaping their lives and instilling values in them. Soon, I made a mark and started getting bigger responsibilities. Gradually, I took charge of the English department of the ISC section of the school. The high point in my career came when I was appointed ISC examiner—a responsibility I have discharged with great enthusiasm all my life.

Time zipped past and my son and daughter flew the nest. As retirement approached, I felt a sense of trepidation. Was I to now live the life of a retired schoolteacher who knits sweaters for her grandchildren and watches soaps on TV? Or was I fit enough for another round? Couldn't I produce a few more doctors and lawyers?

Luckily, no sooner had I retired from my first job at St Thomas Day School in March 2014 I was called by a former colleague from another school who wanted me to meet her principal at Bhawanipore Education Society School. It was a short interview and I was hired, once again, as an English teacher. My joy knew no bounds! It's not about money; it's not about ego. It is about a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing that I still have something to give back to society.

This school is externally focused and they take their students on long excursions every year and I plan to see the country with them. In fact, I am already looking forward to experiencing the hills of Himachal Pradesh later this year. That I am enjoying my new identity as a teacher is an understatement. I am simply loving it!

My life might sound rather ordinary to most people. After all, I was a teacher who retired and became another teacher. But is that all there is to it? The point is, I didn't let my life become ordinary. I have touched thousands of lives while I could have so easily stayed at home. Today when my former students greet me at social gatherings or alumni meets, I feel very happy. If I have been able to touch so many lives, it is definitely a life well lived.

—Shikha Dey, Kolkata





### **FOOD FACTS** BY NAMITA JAIN

## Quinoa: A superfood for silvers

As we age, some of our nutritional requirements change. Energy requirements decline, particularly if physical activity is restricted. Although this often means eating less, requirements for protein, vitamins and minerals remain largely unchanged.

Therefore, it is important that we choose a nutrient-dense diet, including foods that contain protein, vitamins and minerals such as milk and dairy products, meat, eggs, fish, bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables. There are certain power foods, or superfoods, which can be included in our diet to provide super nutritional benefits, even if taken in smaller quantities.

Among superfoods, there has been a lot of discussion of late about quinoa, a healthy and nutritious cereal with high protein content. The addition of proteins may help slow the deterioration of ageing muscles. There are many animal-based complete proteins like meats, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, and cheese, but what about plant-based complete proteins? That's the question that leaves many people (sceptical of vegetarian and vegan diets) doubting whether a plant-based diet can really provide all the protein needed to sustain the body.

Complete proteins or 'high-quality proteins' are those that provide all the nine essential amino acids needed by the body. That's where quinoa comes in—an impressive plant-based complete protein. Including quinoa in one's daily diet can not only aid weight loss but help alleviate migraines, build muscles, and promote cardiovascular health, all essential for seniors.

- Why quinoa?
- Perfect for vegetarians: It's a complete vegetarian solution and a complete protein containing all the nine essential amino acids and combination of life-supporting vitamins and nutrients.
- Easy to digest and chew: As it is glutenfree, it is also good for people allergic to gluten. Some food grains like wheat cause gastric problems, especially in older people because it is difficult to digest. Grains like quinoa are a good substitute for wheat, nuts and meat. Low in fat and carbohydrates, its flour, flakes and pasta can be used in a variety of dishes.

- Diabetics can relish it: Owing to its high fibre content (almost twice as much as most other grains), it helps relieve constipation, a major problem among elderly. Quinoa also helps prevent heart disease by reducing high blood pressure and diabetes. Fibre in quinoa lowers cholesterol and glucose levels, can lower your risk of developing hemorrhoids and may help you to lose weight as it takes a longer time to chew than other foods. This is also why it makes you feel fuller for longer and is less 'energy dense'. In other words, it has fewer calories for the same volume of food.
- High in antioxidants: Quinoa is high in antioxidants like polyphenols, phenoilics and anthocyanins compared to other cereals like amaranth. It is said to provide significant antioxidant activity and protect the kidneys, pancreas, heart and lungs from oxidative stress.
- Meets calcium requirement in old age: Quinoa contains calcium so valuable to the ageing brain, bones and nervous system. Those who suffer from milk allergies or wish to avoid dairy products can get calcium from quinoa.
- Controls cholesterol: Quinoa is completely cholesterol-free. When we eat quinoa, the soluble fibre content helps the liver use the cholesterol stored in the body, therefore lowering levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Quinoa serves as a healthy alternative to animal-based protein.





Fibre in quinoa lowers cholesterol and glucose levels, can lower your risk of developing hemorrhoids and may help you to lose weight as it takes a longer time to chew than other foods

- Rich in multivitamins and minerals: Quinoa is not only touted for its protein factor, it also has high fibre content, Vitamin E, riboflavin, calcium, phosphorous, potassium, folic acid, beta carotene and magnesium.
- Supports weight loss and maintenance of weight: The high fibre content and protein in quinoa keeps you feeling full longer and can help curb appetite. It has also been suggested that the balanced blood sugar levels associated with quinoa intake may help reduce cravings. Fibre helps food move through the intestines and promotes gastrointestinal regularity.

### Amazing ways to use quinoa

- Add beans, seeds and vegetables to cooked quinoa for a chilled quinoa salad.
- Add quinoa into your favourite soup recipes.
- Blend cooked quinoa into your homemade smoothies and shakes.
- Use quinoa flour to replace wheat flour in many baked recipes.

### Quinoa and smoked tofu salad

You can use paneer in place of tofu, in case of an allergy to soy.

Makes: 6 servings, about 1 1/3 cups each

Active time: 25 minutes

**Total time:** 35 minutes

### **Ingredients**

Water: 2 cups Salt: ¾ tsp; divided Quinoa: 1 cup; rinsed well Lemon juice: ¼ cup

Extra-virgin olive oil: 3 tbsp
Garlic: 2 small cloves; minced
Pepper: ¼ tsp; freshly ground
Baked smoked tofu: 6-8-ounce; diced
Yellow bell pepper: 1 small; diced
Grape tomatoes: 1 cup; halved
Cucumber: 1 cup; diced

Fresh parsley: ½ cup; chopped Fresh mint: ½ cup; chopped

### Method

Bring water and  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp salt to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add quinoa and return to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, cover and cook until the water has been absorbed. This might take 15 to 20 minutes. Spread the quinoa on a baking sheet to cool for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk lemon juice, oil, garlic, the remaining  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add the cooled quinoa, tofu, bell pepper, tomatoes, cucumber, parsley and mint; toss well to combine.

### Nutrition facts per serving

Energy: 228 calories

Fat: 10 g Protein: 9 g Fibre: 4 g

- Sprinkle cooked quinoa onto salads.
- Add fresh fruit and nuts to cooked quinoa for an original quinoa breakfast porridge.

Namita Jain is a wellness specialist and celebrity nutritionist at Diet Mantra and has written bestsellers on diet and fitness. Visit www.dietmantra.in.

If you have any questions for Namita Jain, write to contact.mag@harmonyindia.org



### <mark>SILVER LINING</mark> BY V S NATARAJAN

## Fits in silvers: Late-onset epilepsy can be treated

Epilepsy is medical terminology for the commonly used word, 'fits'. It is one of the fieriest disorders that can cause a panic attack for both the sufferer and the caretaker; in fact, the situation gets worse when both happen to be elders. Late-onset epilepsy—considered a very serious and dangerous disorder until recently—usually develops in people over the age of 60. Most studies have focused only on the relationship between brain tumours and epilepsy. But now it has been confirmed by a large number of studies that the cause of late-onset epilepsy is often benign. And the good news for elders is that the treatment and prognosis are both good.

### Causes

Several conditions can cause late-onset epilepsy. The most important among these are brain diseases and brain tumours. The rest of the important causes have been furnished in the table.

**Degenerative brain diseases** are the single most important common cause of late-onset epilepsy. In some cases, epilepsy happens to be only a clinical manifestation of brain disease. Thus, epilepsy acts as a warning alarm for more serious underlying brain pathology. Epilepsy is also common after the occurrence of an overt stroke. As hemiplegia (the clinical manifestation of stroke) is compar-

atively more common in the old, around 12.5 per cent of hemiplegia cases develop into epilepsy. Epilepsy can occur during the acute, evolving phase of a stroke. In such cases, there is a higher risk of associated mortality because the stroke usually turns out to be much more extensive.

**Heart disorders** can lead to blood clots in the brain or irregular heart rate. These, in turn, can trigger epilepsy. In such situations, there can be associated brain damage. Note that epilepsy here occurs in the absence of overt stroke.

Among the other brain disorders that irritate the brain and initiate epilepsy, **subdural haematoma** deserves a special mention. In simple words, this means 'collection of blood under the skull'. Epilepsy resulting from subdural haematoma is very common in geriatric practice. It is very essential to remember the vital fact that these blood clots can occur without a history of prior trauma in up to one-third of elders. History of recurrent headache, fluctuating neurological signs, drowsiness, confusion or dementia should alert the physician about this potentially treatable condition.

**Brain tumours** account for about 10-20 per cent of all cases of late-onset epilepsy. Most tumours thought to be the trigger for epilepsy in people over the age of 60 are found



26 harmony celebrate age september 2014

to be malignant. After the age of 70, tumours cease to become a major cause of fits.

### Clinical features

Partial epilepsy means the epileptic attack is manifested only in certain parts of the body. Generalised epilepsy meaning fits involving the whole body. When it comes to elders, the incidence of partial epilepsy is higher than that of general epilepsy, owing to the fact that focal brain lesions (lesions that affect a particular part of the brain) are more common in elders. Lesions involving the brain as a whole (general involvement) such as congenital and hereditary diseases are less common among silvers.

In a substantial number of patients, epilepsy occurs only during the night. In some people, the common manifestation of epilepsy can be gastric discomfort, confusional state or even pallor. At times it can be an absent epilepsy, like dropping a pen suddenly. Epilepsy following any traumatic event usually manifests as focal or partial epilepsy. Unlike childhood, epilepsy among elders doesn't cause epileptic 'personality deterioration'.

### **Treatment**

All possible attempts should be made to treat the underlying core factor causing epilepsy. In geriatric practice, treatment should generally be given with more care and caution. Overall health and life expectancy are important considerations when it comes to radical surgery. Unfortunately, many elderly patients might get worse after surgery.

Epilepsy usually responds well to anticonvulsant drugs. A small dose of a single first line drug should be prescribed initially, only to increase it when needed. If the initial anticonvulsant dose does not fully control the attacks, an alternative should be used as substitute. Only when this too fails should a combination of two anticonvulsants be prescribed. The choice of drug in this age group is often arbitrary. Phenytoin, phenobarbitone and carbamazepine are equally effective. Valproate is the most effective drug for primary general epilepsies, which occur in the younger age groups and is less useful in the elderly. The dose regimen should be as simple as possible and a single night-time dose is preferable. It is now suggested that in practice a new patient should be started on 200 mg/day of phenytoin. The dose may be increased if there is no response. With increased knowledge, it is now clear that 'controlled' means that daily dosage is enough to control the fits.

### In conclusion

Late-onset epilepsy is often a sequelae of degenerative brain disease, but the clinical presentation is non-specific and investigations are often necessary to determine the I am a healthy 67 year-old man. Of late,
I have been suffering from frequent bouts
of nose bleeding in spite of no obvious signs of
nasal injuries. Bleeding occurs spontaneously and
stops within a few minutes. Can I ignore it or is it
indicative of a major illness?

Bleeding from the nose is termed epistaxis. The following conditions are more frequently associated with bleeding from the nose.

### Local causes

**READERS** 

**ASK** 

- Trauma: fingernail trauma, hard blowing of nose, fracture or surgery
- Nasal infections
- Foreign bodies in the nose like needle, small pebble, if neglected
- Cancer of nose
- Deviated nasal septum

### **General causes**

- Hypertension
- Blood cancer
- Bleeding disorders
- Drugs like aspirin, clopigril, warfarin, and heparin
- Liver disorders

### Idiopathic (unknown)

Sometimes the cause of epistaxis is not clear. Bleeding from the nose is mostly because of rupture of the blood vessels of the nose. When bleeding occurs, pinch the nose with your thumb and index finger tightly for five to 10 minutes. The bleeding will stop. You can also use a small cotton pad soaked in ice water and press tightly over the bleeding area. If the bleeding continues, you should consult an ENT specialist immediately. In case there is no abnormality, consult a general physician. He will diagnose any systemic causes of epistaxis, if at all present.

exact cause. In the absence of tumour, the course is often benign and the response to treatment is good. To put it clearly, epilepsy can occur in silvers. It can be scary. But keep calm and seek your doctor's help. Once the cause for epilepsy is found, the work is half done. The cause will be treated and the epilepsy will be controlled. Thus, the majority of elders can lead an epilepsy-free life with proper medical care.

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



### **YOGA RX** BY SHAMEEM AKTHAR

### Vanishing act: Erase those frown lines with yoga

The lines on your forehead add character and substance to your face. These special lines are caused by your life's experiences. However, when they are caused by the sun's harshness, weak eyesight (which makes you exert more to see clearly), smoking, lack of proper nutrients (that help lock moisturisers in) or other negative triggers, they add an element of worry and irritation and make you look disturbed. That is when you wish the lines away.

In yoga, many practices promise to make you frown-free. Most forward bends belong to this category: seated forward bend (paschimottanasana); hare pose (shashankasana); baby pose (balasana); and downward-facing dog (adhomukhasvanasana); to name a few. In fact, all classical forward bends can safely be practiced as frown-erasers.

The other set of frown-erasers are inversions. The reason for this is simple: inversions challenge the bones in the face in a positive way, making them denser and better support for facial muscles and skin. Plus, once the bones become dense, they support healing activity within their area be-

cause dense bones are also live factories that create products that enhance blood cell regeneration, removal of dead waste and healing.

Inversions also positively tweak the major axis of glands in the brain—hypothalamus, pituitary and pineal—that create an overall healing cycle that also helps the skin repair, plump up and rejuvenate. The easiest inversion everybody can do (except those with a slipped disc) is the psychic union pose (*viparita karani mudrasana*). Other inversions are usually challenging and need to be learnt systematically, such as the headstand (*sirsasana*), shoulder stand (*sarvangasana*), and plough (*halasana*), to name a few.

One more thing! Though most people do not make the connection, the most youth-giving of all practices is daily meditation for a period of 10 to 20 minutes. It is also the most healing, because it restores the balance and harmony of the entire mind-body complex by nipping problems that arise from the mind at the bud so they do not leave their footprint on the body.



Sit on your heels with knees bent, as shown. Inhale, raising your arms up. Exhaling, lower them to the ground, dropping forehead down, and stretching the arms out on the ground, ahead of the head, as if kneeling in prayer. Continue normal breathing throughout. Initially, some of the features of this pose may not be completed, such as forehead touching or hips resting on the heels, but with regular prac-

tice, it will be reached. Avoid if you suffer from knee or lower back problems. **Benefits**: This pose enhances belly breathing naturally, creating a powerful de-stressing and healing impact. Similarly, it enables healing through enhanced blood flow to the brain and the master glands in the brain. It improves blood flow to the face, toning the face and keeping it young and fresh-looking.

**Model:** Kanchan Nazhre, Harmony Interactive Centre **Photographer:** Haresh Patel

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



# Lord of the Rings

### N S SRIDHARAN • BENGALURU

The first of an engaging new series about silver men who wield a deft ladle in the kitchen

atching Mr N S Sridharan lovingly drop every batch of *kodubale* into the hot oil, allowing the popular teatime snacks to turn golden brown, was an unforgettable experience. He watched over each batch like a protective parent as the *kodubale* sizzled, tossed, somersaulted and finally acquired the perfectly golden glow that brought a smile to his face.

Perhaps slow cooking has that effect. It is an exercise in serenity and patience, as much as it calls for perfection at every step and an incisive eye for detail. All of this describes Mr Sridharan or 'NSS'. Has he infused his professional expertise with these intrinsic qualities or has he imbibed these qualities from his profession? That's something we will never know!

As he wistfully looks back on his 69 years, NSS recounts how he was in the business of supplying delicious *kodubale* for six years, finding immense satisfaction in the job.

In fact, this resident of Bengaluru likens making *kodubale* to an art form. Perfection, he says, is the most important ingredient, for every stage is crucial: from mixing ingredients and kneading the dough to frying, cooling and preserving. With his penchant for perfection, he always kneaded the dough himself. His wife Sulochana proudly declares it to be the secret of his success.

Have you always been interested in the food business?

Not really; I started my career with ITI [Indian Telephone Industries] but after a few years switched my field of work. From 1992-97, I ran a fine vegetarian bakery by the name of Srinivasa Iyengar Bakery in K R Puram, Bangalore, and got a fairly good response.

### Did the kodubale happen after that?

Yes, my brother was supplying kodubale to some shops and doing

"I supplied *kodubale* to Nilgiris, a department chain of stores, and Buttersponge bakery. I was quite content with the scale. I just chose my comfort zone as I was not keen on chasing payments"

well, so he suggested that I do the same. I took over from him and did this from 2000-06.

### Where did you supply kodubale?

I supplied *kodubale* to two places: Nilgiris, a department chain of stores, and Buttersponge bakery. I appointed two helpers and managed.

### Did you not wish to expand further?

I was quite content with the scale. Also, I was not keen on chasing pay-

ments from all and sundry, hence I just chose my comfort zone.

### What are your favourite foods? Do you like eating out?

I like simple home-cooked meals. I don't like to eat out. Life is simple and I like it to remain like this.

### And where are you from? Where did you study?

We are Mysore Iyengars. I was born and brought up in Bangalore and did my PUC (Pre-University Certificate) here. I have lived here most of my life except for a few years when I tried my hand at a fast food joint in Shimoga. That did not work out, so I returned to Bangalore.

# You mean you are Iyengars who belong to Karnataka unlike the Tamilian Iyengars?

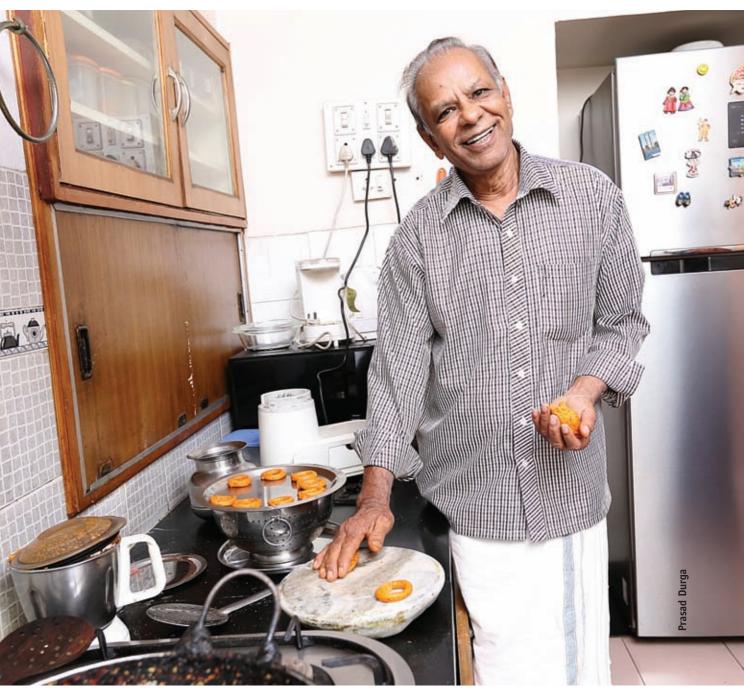
That is right. But you must remember that, earlier, a large part of South India was simply one state. This distinction between Mysore Iyengars and Tamilian Iyengars is a later one.

### How many children do you have?

We have two daughters: Veena Vikram and Vidya Srinivas. Both are married and have a daughter each. My granddaughters Anusha and Ashitha are 18 and five. We lead a simple, content life.

### That is a formula that seems to be vanishing in today's world....

I agree. I think people are becoming self-centred these days. Earlier, we were happy to share and adjust with others at home. Now, everyone thinks of their earnings only for themselves. How can this ever lead to a feeling of contentment? Differences in status are obvious now than ever before.



By this time, all the kodubale had been fried to a luscious golden colour, drained and laid to rest on a large steel platter. As his wife transferred all the leftover oil to a container, a question sizzled in my mind.

My last question: what do you do with so much leftover oil?

Sometimes we use it in our home cooking if that happens immediately. But mostly we just give it to the domestic staff and ask them to consume it soon.

I am looking forward to your *kodubale* recipe. Is this prepared on any special occasions?

Yes, it is considered a *pindi* during Gokulashtami. It is also known as ring *murukku* in Tamil Nadu. It is a popular snack in many of our homes. I am really happy to share this recipe with you. We have enjoyed this interview. Do let us know when you try the recipe. Hope it comes out perfectly!



### **KODUBALE**

(Fried snack from Karnataka)

Karnataka is known for its traditional tea time snack: *kodubale*. These magical rings are hand-rolled to perfection and fried a crisp golden brown in scalding hot oil. This recipe uses a little less than 1 kg of mixed flour from which about 125 *kodubale* can be prepared. NSS says that as it is a snack that can be preserved for a few weeks, it is generally prepared in large quantities. To make fewer *kodubale*, reduce the quantities accordingly.

### Ingredients

- Plain flour (maida): 500 gm
- Rice flour: 250 gm
- Semolina (chiroti rava): 125 gm
- Sesame seeds: 25 gm
- Cumin seeds: 15 gm
- Coconut: 1 small (or ½ a large coconut)
- Chilli powder: 2 tsp (NSS prefers the mankattiro variety of chilli powder that is quite spicy; hence, he adds just 1 tsp)
- Asafoetida powder: ¼ tsp
- Salt: 15-20 gm
- 0il: 1/4 cup
- Salt to taste
- Oil for deep frying: ½ litre

### Method

Mix rice flour, semolina and plain flour, and add sesame and cumin seeds. Add a ladle (about ¼ cup) of hot oil. Mix well. To test the exact quantity of oil, take a fistful of flour and press it in your palm, it should hold well without crumbling immediately. If it crumbles, add some more oil and test again. Grind the coconut, chilli powder, asafoetida and salt into a fine paste with as little water as necessary. Add this coconut mixture into the flour mixture and knead into dough. Add a little water if required. Knead well so that the dough becomes soft and smooth. Cover with a damp cloth so that it does not dry up. Add ½ litre oil for deep frying in a large thick-bottomed wok (kadai) and turn on the flame. On the other side, roll large marblesized portions of the dough into thin cylinders, approximately 1/4 inch thick and 21/2 inches long. Join the ends and pinch them together to make a circle. You can roll the dough on a wooden board and place on a plate. Check if the oil is hot enough, though it should not be smoking hot. When a dozen pieces are ready, drop them one by one in the hot oil. You can fry 12-15 kodubale at a time. They

will immediately rise to the surface. Now lower the flame and allow the kodubale to fry in medium flame. Turn the *kodubale* a few times so they turn an even colour. When they are fried golden brown on both sides, remove from oil. It takes around 5-6 minutes per batch. Place them on a plate lined with absorbent tissues to remove excess oil. Fry the remaining batches of *kodubale* in the same manner. While one batch is being fried, the next batch has to be rolled out and kept ready for frying. Cool the kodubale to room temperature and store immediately in air-tight containers.

Kodubale stay fresh for up to a fortnight. And if they are fried in palm oil (popularly available as 'Ruchi Gold Oil'), they remain crisp for a month.

Pratibha Jain, an author and translator from Chennai, is the co-author of two award-winning books Cooking at Home with Pedatha and Sukham Ayu. Her area of specialisation is documenting Indian traditions through research, translation and writing

# What is 60?

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

The number of movies you have to catch up on.

The number of bad jokes you cracked last month.

The number of times you told your grandson

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

The number of places you have to travel to.

What it's not, is your age.

At least not in your head.

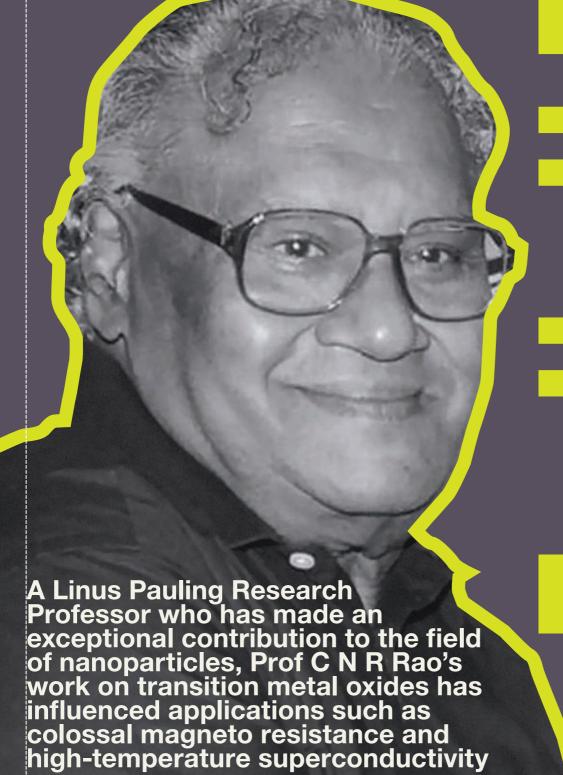
Or in your heart.











# Man with a mission BHARAT RATNA PROF C N R RAOTELLS

BHARAT RATNA
PROF C N R RAO TELLS
RAMYA SRINIVASAN HIS
REVOLUTIONARY SCIENTIFIC
WORK CAN BE SUMMED UP IN
IUST ONE WORD: DISCIPLINE

owering bamboo shoots and the sound of quietly flowing water draw you into the hallowed portals of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JN-CASR) in Bengaluru. It's the perfect introduction to a modern shrine, whose rite of passage revolves around a test as tough as it is pure: knowledge.

Max Ehrmann's Desiderata greets visitors to the spotless reception area of the stone-clad building, which houses the International Centre for Materials Science. Also framed are Swami Vivekananda's words, "Knowledge alone will make man perfect." Together, they are a fitting prologue to the life and work of Prof C N R Rao, globally

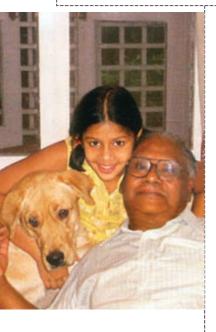
renowned scientist and this year's recipient of the Bharat Ratna.

Tempering his words with a wry smile, it is Prof Rao who shoots the first question. He asks what 'silver' means and whether the conversation will be recorded. "I don't trust the memory of youngsters. I can recall a lot of things from books and papers but I realise that this generation needs to be reminded of everything," he chuckles, setting the tone for the interview. Known as the scientist who famously dismissed computers as "distracting", Prof Rao has lived his life by two watch words: 'simple' and 'straightforward.' Cutting through the clutter has always given him an edge in his field of research: solid state and structural chemistry.

The seeds of his brilliance were sown early by his unconventional parents, who had the courage to home-school their only child, till middle school, at least. This, at a time when homeschooling was still decades away from becoming an alternative to formal education. "My parents felt school was a waste of time and believed they could offer me more as I was years ahead of my level," says Prof Rao, matter-of-factly. "My mother was my teacher



Prof Rao and wife Indumati being greeted on their arrival at Bengaluru after receiving the Bharat Batna "I was doing my research on spectroscopy, and there was not a single good spectrometer available in the entire country! I used to borrow one from Dr C V Raman's lab"



With granddaughter Suguna and pet dog Simba

and I spent hours in her company listening to stories. She was excellent at arithmetic and my father taught me English, stressing the importance of learning idiomatic usage and not grammar alone. When I told my parents I wanted to study in Banaras, I was barely 17. They fully supported my decision. In retrospect, my wife Indumati and I still wonder how my parents could have given me so much freedom in my formative years." The quest for education as well as excellence is deep-rooted in Prof Rao's family and this weighed in the lad's favour. His father worked in the then Mysore state education department and had a master's degree in history, economics, politics and education, while his mother observed spiritual discipline.

Even at the age of 80, Prof Rao's childlike excitement for science and research sparkles as he describes his journey. "I wrote my seventh grade exams at the age of 10, and finished my graduation at 17." He says the legendary Dr C V Raman was a big inspiration and had once visited his school to deliver a lecture to the students. Dr Raman had also asked his teacher to bring a few students across to his lab at the Indian Institute of Science and he was among the group. "Dr Raman spent an hour telling us about his work in the lab and I was transfixed. I had a natural inclination towards science even at that tender age."

After he graduated, Prof Rao went on to acquire a master's degree in science in Banaras Hindu University and, by then, his commitment to chemistry was unwavering. "I scored second in my MSc because I was not good at mugging," he laughs, betraying a hint of regret at not having ranked first. He wrapped up his doctorate at Purdue University in the US in under three years and published a staggering 30 papers during that time. "I would come

up with some idea and write a paper on it and it would be accepted by leading journals. It never failed to surprise me."

At the age of 25, Prof Rao had a choice of either pursuing his studies in the US or returning to India—he chose the latter. He returned to Bengaluru and joined the Indian Institute of Science as a lecturer. "In those days, the plight of science in India was pathetic. Here I was, doing my research on spectroscopy, and there was not a single good spectrometer available in the entire country! I used to borrow one from Dr C V Raman's lab, and once travelled all the way to Aligarh to take some measurements from an instrument there. Beg, borrow, steal was the idea! Despite all this, I managed to publish many papers back then," says Prof Rao, who went on to win the Dan David Prize, widely regarded as being tougher to win than the Nobel Prize.

When he was seriously contemplating moving back to the US, Prof Rao received an offer from IIT - Kanpur, as head of the Department of Chemistry. "I set up the best chemistry department in the country in IIT Kanpur. Even today, there is no other place in India that can beat it. Anyone who is something in the field has worked there," he says, almost like a proud parent. Recognition first came from Dr C V Raman, who had read a book on spectroscopy authored by the young scientist. "Dr Raman commented that anyone who could write a book like that should be a member of the Indian Academy of Sciences." After that, international awards and medals poured in, the first among them being the Marlow Medal by the Faraday Society. (Prof Rao is still the only Indian recipient of the Marlow Medal.) On receiving the Bharat Ratna, Prof Rao recalls, "I received the call from the Prime Minister himself when I was at Thiruvananthapuram airport. But I only fully understood the impact when I landed at Bengaluru airport and was greeted by a virtual stampede."

Prof Rao's genius and passion had taken root in childhood. Still, it is not easy to comprehend publishing 1,600 research papers and authoring 48 books. As if sensing disbelief, he smiles, "Discipline...." He wakes up at 4:30 am every day and says

the morning coffee he shares with his wife at 5:30 am is "one of the most important things in life".

Despite his age, Prof Rao still writes every day for an hour. As he finds "gadgets distracting", he handwrites everything and never uses a computer. "I only have a laptop for making presentations. Otherwise I have no use for them. When you write on paper, your thinking speed is in sync with your speed of writing. On the computer, you tend to type a lot of nonsense," he quips. However, he is quick to clarify that he doesn't have an aversion to IT. "I only find it unfair that a majority of talent is sucked into this field at the expense of all others because it offers more money. We still have only a small number of PhDs in computer science." He adds with heartfelt regret, "Bengaluru is the worst affected city of this trend, where moneymaking seems to be the main goal. I have got students from across the country, predominantly from Bihar and Bengal, working with me but I have not received a single student from this city yet." Our illustrious silver attributes this "moneymaking" trend to our college education. "Science education is fine even up to schooling. But there are a lot of second-grade colleges and once you get in there, the cracks start to show."

Scientist par excellence he may be but Prof Rao has other interests too, evident as he deftly shifts from discussing M S Subbulakshmi to Madhva and Sankara philosophy. He also loves the Stieg Larsson trilogy. "You should watch Peter Brook's Mahabharata," he recommends. "It is the best interpretation of the epic." His table is stacked with music CDs as he is a classical music enthusiast. Asked to name his favourites, he quickly reels off the names of the veterans of South Indian Carnatic music. "I like Maharajapuram Santhanam, Madurai Mani Iyer and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. But, nowadays, I find Hindustani classical more appealing. No one is better than Pandit Bhimsen Joshi."

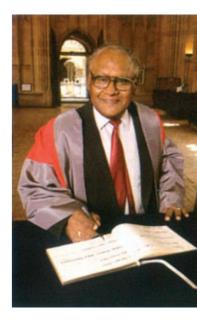
The conversation veers towards his beliefs and Prof Rao says, "I do believe in God and philosophy, but I don't care for rituals. Although I was born into a Brahmin family, my father took a path-breaking decision

and decided not to do my *upanayanam* [sacred thread ceremony]. They didn't even get a horoscope done for me." He adds that his eclectic bent has earned him membership of the Pontifical Academy in the Vatican.

Indeed, education and learning are a way of life, not only for Prof Rao but his entire family. His wife Indumati graduated in English literature, worked as a teacher and later wrote a thesis on the education of underprivileged children in Oxford University. In fact, he and his wife have co-authored a series of books for children to make chemistry friendly for students. Prof Rao's love for education has seen him champion reforms in science education. As chairman of the Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India, he is the driving force behind the five IISERs (Indian Institute of Science Education & Research) in the country and has helped design their policy guidelines. Incidentally, IISER - Pune, is headed by Dr K N Ganesh, who is also Prof Rao's son-in-law.

Contrary to what one might assume, Prof Rao does take time off from his work for family vacations. "I enjoy going to the Himalaya for holidays with my entire family." In his autobiography, *Climbing the Limitless Ladder*, he mentions, "My wife has been a terrific partner. I have not gone shopping with her but we have common interests in literature, music and theatre. Prof H C Brown used to say that he did only two things in life: one was to do good research and the other was to keep his wife happy. I have strictly followed this principle."

Does he still actively engage in research? He quickly retorts, "Of course! I don't involve myself with administration and only focus on the science.... I recently published a couple of papers on artificial photosynthesis and have worked on a book that should be out soon." However, at the age of 80, is he contemplating retirement at any point? The evergreen scientist laughs, "I would like to quote [Atal Behari] Vajpayee, who was once asked the same question. He said, 'When I am not even tired, there is no question of being retired.' Ultimately, I hope I pass away sitting and working in my lab."



#### **MILESTONES**

- Awarded the Dan David Science Prize for being the 'world's foremost solid state and materials chemist' (2005)
- Padma Shri (1974);
   Padma Vibhushan (1985);
   Karnataka Ratna (1985);
   and Bharat Ratna (2014)
- One of only three scientists to receive the Bharat Ratna; along with Nobel Laureate and physicist Dr C V Raman (1954) and aeronautical engineer and former President of India Dr A P J Abdul Kalam (1997)
- Served as Chairman of the Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India

PROF J B JOSHI HAS DONE AS MUCH FOR ACADEMIA AS DIRECTOR OF THE MUMBAI-BASED ICT AS HE HAS DONE FOR INDUSTRY. HE HAS ALSO NURTURED SCIENTIFIC TALENT IN RURAL INDIA, AS **NEETI VIJAYKUMAR** DISCOVERS

n his impeccably decorated house in Dadar, Mumbai, Prof Jyestharaj B Joshi turns down the volume of the classical music as we enter a large hall that could double as an anteroom where geniuses discuss great ideas. A large, round table occupies the centre of the room, with chairs stacked in a corner. Prof Joshi is seated on a swivel chair, contemplating a whiteboard filled with row upon row of figures neatly scrawled on one side.

With a smile, he enquires about the objective of our interview. The professor is a man who relies on a logical sequence to everything he does, attributing mathematical equations to problems, understanding their objectives and working towards solutions. He speaks slowly and thoughtfully, as he talks about his work, his students and his family.



A chemical engineer and professor with the Chemical Engineering Department of the Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT), Prof Joshi was bestowed the Padma Bhushan this year. The award honours his work on two main fronts. One, for steering the ICT to rank among the top 10 chemistry departments in the world while increasing the number of international publications, citations and PhD admissions per year. Second, his achieve-

ments as an independent researcher in the area of designing reactors and mixers, equipment used in mixing chemicals to produce textile dyes, perfumes, polythene and other chemical-based products. The equipment he has designed includes stirred tanks and bubble column reactors for gas and liquid reactions; pollution control equipment that has received international acclaim; and centrifugal extractors for large liquid extractions. Indeed, the



Working on a project at ICT in Mumbai

thrust of his work has always been to innovate and improve existing designs of equipment, to optimise their efficiency and durability so industry's reliance on imported equipment diminishes.

Prof Joshi hails from Masur village in Satara, Maharashtra, where he schooled. "My family was very active in the Independence movement," he recounts. "During the British rule, our house was confiscated three times by the British administration. Every time it was to be auctioned, the village folk would collect money to buy the house back and give it to us again." Although a farmer, his father seized every opportunity

he could to serve society. "When I started doing my own research [for his PhD and later for reactor designs], I realised that scientific research is done to satisfy one's personal curiosity and to try and understand the laws behind nature. But I wondered whether, while doing so, we could also do something for society."

After his graduation from University of Mumbai, Prof Joshi went on to earn a doctorate in chemical engineering from the University. He was a teacher with the University Department of Chemical Technology (now Institute of Chemical Technology) from 1972 and its director from 1999 to 2009. He also spearheaded the effort to get the institute autonomy, which it did in 2004, before it was conferred the status of a university in 2008.

"While in college, I was fascinated by two things: the profession of teaching, and doing something innovative in design," he shares. Back then, he knew he would become a teacher and a scientist, and that his research would result in something innovative.

Prof Joshi's love for teaching blends perfectly with his love for the young generation. "When I started teaching 40 years ago, I faced similar young minds, but there is a quality difference in students from then to now. As I understand it, they want to make life more meaningful. Communication is stronger and there is a wonderful dialogue."

In May 2009, just before he was to turn 60, the official retirement age, Prof Joshi was offered a prestigious professorship as Homi Bhabha Distinguished Chairperson at the Homi Bhabha National Institute, which ended in July this year. In 2008, he was offered the J C Bose Fellowship at ICT. He also holds the post of adjunct professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Louisiana State University, and he flies to the US at least once a year to guide and develop research. He is also an honorary distinguished professor at Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. "As I am still very active, I am sure I will keep getting offers for fellowships and teaching for the next 15 years."

Prof Joshi is happy to elaborate upon some of the work he has done with his students, including designing an improved wood stove for use in villages. "The problem with the existing stove is that the energy utilised from wood is only between 10 and 12 per cent," he explains. "Besides, it is a health hazard owing to the release of carbon monoxide and particulate matter. We developed a new model where the burning efficiency is around 50 per cent, and there is no release of carbon monoxide and particulate matter."

While research on this project started two years ago, the stove was ready earlier this year, so its impact is yet to be assessed. But the potential is vast. According to a government report, 18.2 crore families use bio fuel-based stoves, mostly in villages. But the stove developed by Prof Joshi is potentially three times more efficient. He also helped develop an eco-cooker four years ago, with increased efficiency of up to 70 per cent. The eco-cooker comes in two models: batch cookers for individual families, and continuous cookers, developed later in 2013, for large-scale cooking. "Continuous cookers work in such a way that, at one end, you can continue to add rice, lentils and other raw food materials, while at the other end you get the cooked food," he tells us. "The government feeds almost 11 crore children through its school meal programmes. Continuous cookers can make nearly 15,000 meals per hour."

Prof Joshi speaks in excited tones of a project he is currently working on: harnessing energy from waste biomass. "We import crude petroleum and spend about ₹ 10 lakh crore per year. The budget of our country is ₹ 100 lakh crore," he says, and proceeds to explain the objective behind his project. "We have large amounts of waste biomass, estimated at 1,000 million tonne. As waste biomass is a carbon-hydrogen-oxygen compound, there is a possibility of getting carbon-hydrogen compounds of up to 300 million tonne by just knocking out oxygen. This would translate into 300 million tonne of crude petroleum, just waiting to be generated from all the waste biomass in our country, which is still much more than the amount we import.

Our daily fuel and cooking gas needs are basically a carbon-hydrogen compound. Imagine the benefits of alternative energy on our economy!"

Along with his PhD students, Prof Joshi also conducted workshops in villages in India to promote science awareness between 2006 and 2009. He points out that the majority of India's award-winning scientists hail from villages or have spent most of their lives in villages. "It is already well-known that there is a lot of talent deep in the hinterland."

When he was director of ICT, he worked with the Marathi Vidnyan Parishad, a trust that creates science awareness in rural India. "It was a combined effort, and we made a huge impact. On average, we covered 300 villages and taluka every year." The impact was so great that the number of students registering for research in the institute increased three times. Interestingly, Prof Joshi was appointed president of the Marathi Vidnyan Parishad in August 2014, a move that has him very excited as he plans to restart the science awareness drive. "I want to bring to their attention the excitement of research and how it can be fulfilling," he says.

When not in his lab, delivering lectures or conducting workshops, Prof Joshi enjoys spending time with his family, visiting concerts and watching movies. "There is a rule in our house: when I am at home, I am a father and a grandfather. When I am with myself, I may be thinking or writing but as soon as my granddaughter walks in, I am back to being a grandfather. It has become a routine," he says with a chuckle. In fact, Prof Joshi speaks with pride of his son, a computer engineer who has developed a way to monitor pulse patterns and determine diseases, combining an ancient Ayurvedic practice of analysing pulse patterns.

A lover of philosophy, Prof Joshi leaves us with some food for thought. "We use only a small percentage of the time we have. We spend a lot of time thinking of the future, repenting about what we have done, and so on. I personally enjoy my job. I don't do it for a salary. I am 65 and don't need it."





Top: Prof Joshi with family Above: Receiving an award from late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

## **MILESTONES**

- Fellow of Indian Academy of Sciences (1991)
- Shantiswarup Bhatnagar Prize for Engineering Sciences (1991)
- The Goyal Foundation Award for Engineering Sciences, Kurukshetra (1998)
- Lifetime Achievement Award, Indian Chemical Council, The Apex Professional Organisation of the Indian Chemical Manufacturers (2008)
- Fellow, Third World Academy of Sciences, Triesty (Italy) (2008)
- Padma Bhushan (2014)

# The sky's the limit

KHURSHEED DINSHAW MEETS ASTROPHYSICIST DR JAYANT NARLIKAR, BEST KNOWN FOR CHALLENGING THE BIG BANG THEORY, AND FOR TAKING SCIENCE TO THE MASSES

une University campus is the perfect catalyst for research, its lush environs a rich muse for all things academic. In the heart of the campus is the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), founded by one of the best scientific minds India has ever produced in this field: Dr Jayant Narlikar.

It is in these hallowed surroundings that we meet a scientist who has quite literally reached for the stars. When you prepare to interview this celebrated astrophysicist, one question springs almost involuntarily to mind: 'Is there alien life on Earth?' But Dr Narlikar is no Fox Mulder. "I like working in science, especially mathematics. It is like recreation to me," he says, as a conversation opener.

Glance at the door to this office and you get an insight into just why Dr Narlikar is a scientist of international repute. A placard on the door reads, 'The Big Bang is an exploding myth'. Dr Narlikar has championed alternative models, where instead of just one 'big bang' that is assumed to have created the universe, he has proposed mini-bangs or minor explosions that drive the universe. "When you explode, you push things away and that is why galaxies are moving away. The minor explosions can be explained using physics, and when you put it all together along with the expansion of the universe, it can be found that they have an oscillatory character." His pithy explanation, which sums up years of path-breaking research, leaves you dumbfounded.

In the mid to late 1990s, Dr Narlikar was president of the Cosmology Commission of the International Astronomical Union. Along with his doctoral advisor, Sir Fred Hoyle, he developed the Hoyle-Narlikar Theory of Gravity involving the Mach Principle. His research has also covered quantum cosmology and action-at-a-distance physics.

In 1999-2003, Dr Narlikar headed an international team in a pioneering experiment designed to sample air for microorganisms in the atmosphere at heights of up to 41 km. Biological studies of the samples found live cells and bacteria, which suggested that the earth is being bombarded by microorganisms, some of which might have seeded life on our planet.





At the IUCAA campus

Hailing from Kolhapur in Maharashtra, Dr Narlikar completed his higher studies at Banaras Hindu University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in science. His father Vishnu Narlikar was a professor and head of the mathematics department there, while his mother Sumati was a Sanskrit scholar. He shrugs, "I have inherited my father's love for reading."

Apart from his parents, Dr Narlikar credits his uncle Huzurbazar Moreshwar for helping him hone his academic skills. He lived with Narlikar's family for two years when he was in Benaras to acquire a master's degree in mathematics. "I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> standard and Moru *mama* noticed that I was interested in math. My father had placed two blackboards on our veranda wall and my uncle wrote a challenge on the smaller one for me," chuckles Dr Narlikar. It was a difficult problem and would not be erased

from the blackboard until the young boy either solved it or confessed that he couldn't. Narlikar unravelled the answer in three days. So his uncle erased it, only to replace it with another problem! The cycle went on and Narlikar managed to solve 70 per cent of his uncle's posers. "My horizons widened considerably because of this but my parents did not try and influence the academic field I was to pursue," he says.

Dr Narlikar's love for math was the reason he was sent to Cambridge for the Mathematical Tripos, the toughest undergraduate examination in mathematics at this world-class university. Vishnu Narlikar had also participated in the Mathematical Tripos and secured a first division rank. "Those who managed first division are called Wranglers as they can argue or wrangle the subject. Being a Wrangler in Cambridge was my goal. My father had also won the Tyson medal, which is given to the individual who stood first in astronomy. After my father, I was the next Indian to win this medal, 30 years later," says the Wrangler and Tyson medallist, breaking into a broad smile.

The young scientist received the J N Tata endowment scholarship to study in Cambridge, where he earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics and, later, a PhD and master's degree with a specialisation in astronomy and astrophysics. "We went by boat from Mumbai to London. It took us 18 days. My parents and uncle, Vasant mama, had also come to see me off. When on the boat, I got used to English food. On the first day, Vasant mama suggested that we have a soft drink and asked the waiter for it. He replied and neither my uncle nor I understood what he had said. My dad explained that he had asked us to take a seat," laughs Dr Narlikar, who gradually came to grips with the English accent.

Cambridge was a new and sometimes surprising experience for the budding astrophysicist. "It was like switching from a superfast train to a passenger train. In India, the syllabus for the entire year is covered in eight weeks whereas, in Cambridge, I had a supervisor who I met once a week and he went through my coursework and either set some questions or tried to answer my

## "E M Forster was a humanities product but he was also interested in science. I was just 28 then and Forster was 84. He was an example of how I would like to grow old"

difficulties," adds Dr Narlikar, who won the prestigious Smith's Prize in 1962 and Adams Prize in 1967. Back then, Dr Narlikar was exposed to some brilliant minds. His doctoral guide at Cambridge, Fred Hoyle, became his mentor. "He was not afraid of defying the majority and treading the 'ekla chalo re' path," recounts Dr Narlikar, who set off on many a trek with Hoyle during his 15-year stint at Cambridge. He also served as the founder staff member of the Institute of Theoretical Astronomy in Cambridge, founded by Hoyle.

Dr Narlikar says there are three people who have left their mark on his life. The first is his father, who was a good teacher, so much so that when he came across his father's old students, they would remember him with affection, says Dr Narlikar, who keeps fit with 45 minutes of yoga followed by 45 minutes of walking every day. His second inspiration is Fred Hoyle, a charismatic scientist, who combined his understanding of science with a desire to bring science to the masses through science-fiction books. "I have followed him to some extent by writing my own science-fiction books, of course not in the same, exalted way as he. It is my tribute to him." His third idol is E M Forster, author of bestseller Passage to India, who was his neighbour at Cambridge. "He was a humanities product but he was also interested in science. He would ask questions on scientific matters he had read in the newspaper. I was just 28 then and Forster was 84. He was an example of how I would like to grow old," confesses Dr Narlikar, After his return to India, Dr Narlikar joined the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), where he took up a professorship and also developed the Theoretical Astrophysics Group, which became internationally known for its work in the field of quantum cosmology.

His next milestone was setting up the IUCAA in Pune, in 1998. After his retire-

ment in 2003, he continues to be its emeritus professor. "I chose Pune because we wanted IUCAA to be located near a good astronomy facility," he explains. "TIFR was setting up a radio telescope in Narayangaon, 90 km from Pune. We could use the telescope for our research and teach in the quiet environs of Pune University. Dr Narlikar has always been passionate about writing and has been using this talent to take science to the masses since the 1970s. In 1974, the Marathi Vidnyan Parishad, an NGO which popularises science in Marathi, had organised a story writing competition and its theme was science fiction. Dr Narlikar submitted a short story under a fictitious name to avoid any bias. Titled Black Hole, the story earned him the first prize. His novel Virus, based on how people deal with a computer virus attack, won the Maharashtra State Award in Literature in 1996. Dr Narlikar has also appeared on radio and television shows to popularise science, for which he has been honoured with UNESCO's Kalinga Award.

Despite his many academic and literary pursuits, Dr Narlikar also found time for romance. He married Mangala, who had a PhD in Mathematics. "It was a semilove-cum-arranged marriage," he reveals. "We were brought together by our families but it was left to us to decide whether we wanted to get married or not. What I like most about her is that, like me, she is rational and not superstitious." Their daughters, Geeta, Girija and Leelavati, have inherited their parents' academic bent. Geeta is a professor of biochemistry at the University of California - San Francisco, while Girija is a computer scientist and runs her own firm in Mumbai. Leelavati is a computer scientist with the National Chemical Laboratory in Pune. "My daughters used to call me their 'storyteller' because I used to make up stories for them that were not related to science," recalls the doting dad. "They were more like fairytales."



With wife Mangala and daughters Geeta, Girija and Leelavati

## **MILESTONES**

- Wrangler and Tyson Medallist in the Mathematical Tripos at Cambridge
- Recipient of Smith's Prize and Adams Prize
- Padma Bhushan (1965);
   Padma Vibhushan (2004)
- UNESCO Kalinga Award for popularising science (1996)
- Maharashtra Bhushan (2011)

# Hide and seek



THE SECRET TO SUCCESS FOR DR T RAMASAMI, A PATH-BREAKING LEATHER SCIENTIST AND FORMER SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, HAS BEEN GETTING HIS PRIORITIES RIGHT, REPORTS **VINITA NAYAR** 

r T Ramasami is every bit the scientist you imagined him to be. Lean, bespectacled and with a clinical approach to life, he lives and breathes his destiny as a pioneering leather researcher, scientist and, later, bureaucrat. We meet



him in the office of the director of the Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI), the central hub in the Indian leather sector with roles in education, research, training, testing, designing, forecasting and social empowerment. It is from this seat that he once helmed the institute and now reflects on a mindboggling career that he speaks of in a matter-offact tone. Now, after eight years as secretary in the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, he has just retired and is yet to chart his course.

"Retirement is the arrival of a destination. I have no desire to accept any position outside the Government. I don't want to go back to the lab, no. We [Ministry of Science & Technology] have funded almost every research institution in the country. It was a policy body. If I were to undertake any position [at CLRI], it would be a conflict of interest because the policies and research at the institute would benefit from them, and I cannot benefit either." After his retirement, he has been wooed by several institutions but his conscience has held him back from accepting any offers. "I have denied myself the opportunity. I have moved on from leather."



at the institute, first as a scientist from 1984 to 1996, and then as its director up to May 2006, after which he was appointed secretary to the Government of India. During his tenure at CLRI, he provided new insights into the molecular basis for chrome tanning, which enabled the Indian leather sector to combat environmental challenges.

His technological innovations include new mineral tanning systems, rare earth-based product innovations maintain large market shares in their respective segments.

This scientist is also a hero of sorts in the tannery sector in Tamil Nadu, where he led CLRI in delivering clean technology that saved 764 companies from shutting down-all within just nine months. This clean technology, Do-ecology tions, contributed to saving 250,000 jobs, ₹ 60 billion in industrial turnover and ₹ 35 billion worth of exports.

"Learning, establishing and accomplishing achievement are three phases anywhere in the world. But social acknowledgement of achievements can happen only in your own country"



At a science event

As director of the institute, CLRI gained 37 per cent of global share in scientific publications and 7.5 per cent share in creation of intellectual properties in the form of patents. He himself holds 37 patents, of which 12 have been commercialised. He has authored over 220 research publications, eight chapters in books and numerous general articles.

What's more, through the work of CLRI, India also gained leadership in 'fashion forecasting', with him putting together a team to pick the colours of leather for the global market 12-18 months in advance. "India's share in leather colours has gone up 70-100 per cent," reveals the scientist.

Dr Ramasami was the eldest of three boys and hails from Srivilliputtur, a temple town in Tamil Nadu. After schooling, he attended pre-university at St Joseph's College in Tiruchirapalli (Tiruchy) and later joined Alagappa Chettiar College of Technology, a constituent college of the University of Madras, where he acquired a B Tech degree. He then enrolled for a master's degree in leather technology before he went to the UK for doctoral research in inorganic chemistry at the University of Leeds. After that, the budding scientist carried out postdoctoral research in chemical energy at Ames Laboratory, Ames, Iowa in the US and on Electron Transport Phenomena at Wayne State University in Detroit.

The year 1983 was a turning point in his life and a time of much soul-searching. A comment from an aunt triggered an avalanche of thoughts that would steer the young, talented scientist back to his roots. "My aunt asked me whether my one-point focus on science was out of dedication or whether there was an element of selfishness, in that I did not care for others. A week later, I was back in India." He had 11 months' leave and on his return, Dr Ramasami was offered a job by CLRI in the

role that would help rebuild the institute. At that time, the institute was struggling and there was even talk of shutting it down. "I didn't take a decision. I went to England for six months and weighed the options— US or India—and took a decision. At the time, three things went through my mind. The first was to give up the pursuit of a career and serve a cause, changing the science environment in India." Dr Ramasami explains his second line of reasoning, "Learning, establishing and accomplishing achievement are three phases anywhere in the world. But social acknowledgement of achievements can happen only in your own country." The third reason was his mentor, Yelavarthy Nayudamma, who had contributed immensely to the initial development of CLRI and played a major role in getting it international recognition. When Dr Ramasami consulted him about moving back to India, Nayudamma told him not to return as he felt India could not offer many opportunities to the talented scientist. But Dr Ramasami decided to return nonetheless. "I could give back by going back and training more students. My students would carry forward this knowledge. Art must be imperishable."

Dr Ramasami has been conferred both the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan. But each honour comes with an intriguing story. "In 1989, when the Government offered me the Padma Shri, I refused it as I had not done enough. I accepted it in 2001. In 2011, they were proposing to offer me the Padma Bhushan. I refused as no serving secretary should receive it. I accepted it only in 2014 because credit will go to the Department of Science & Technology. If I had taken it after retirement, the credit would have gone to me."

During his time in the Department of Science & Technology (DST), 83 agreements were signed with 83 countries for science and technology cooperation and

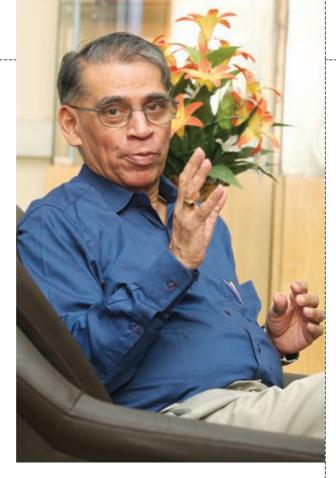
DST invested \$ 375 million in reciprocal countries like the US, Germany, Australia and the EU. "We strengthened our relationship with Japan," he adds. "There is an R&D facility for Indian scientists in Japan. Similarly, we have built science facilities across the world for Indian scientists." During his tenure, DST launched 74 new initiatives and programmes for promoting science and technology in the country.

Dr Ramasami also served as member-secretary of the Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and member or chairman of over 80 committees during this time. He dwells briefly on how the first Science Policy Resolution of India was drafted in 1958. "For 25 years, there was no

one who touched the one and three-fourth page document—a very fundamental document. In 1983, during Indira Gandhi's time, a Technology Policy Statement, focusing on the need for self-reliance, was drafted. In 2003, the NDA government released a Science Technology Policy and 10 years later, Dr Manmohan Singh's government enunciated the Science Technology Innovation Policy, where I played a role."

At 66, this veteran scientist is not ready to hang up his boots. He may have retired but still works 12 hours a day and recently worked on six "high-principle" documents for the Government of India. "These are nation-building processes. India's foreign policy mentions 'science' in two places and sprinkles the word 'technology' in six places. In our foreign policy, the public diplomacy of science and technology can play a very important part. I have drafted a science and technology perspective for Indian foreign policy."

The papers he has drafted cover topics that include gross expenditure in R&D in India, strategic technological management for the defence sector, public-private



partnership for industrial research and development, change management for sustainable progress, and science and technology perspectives for India's foreign policy. "I didn't have the time to do this when I was secretary. This is a synthesis of many years of thinking and these documents have an impact on all organisations in the country," he points out.

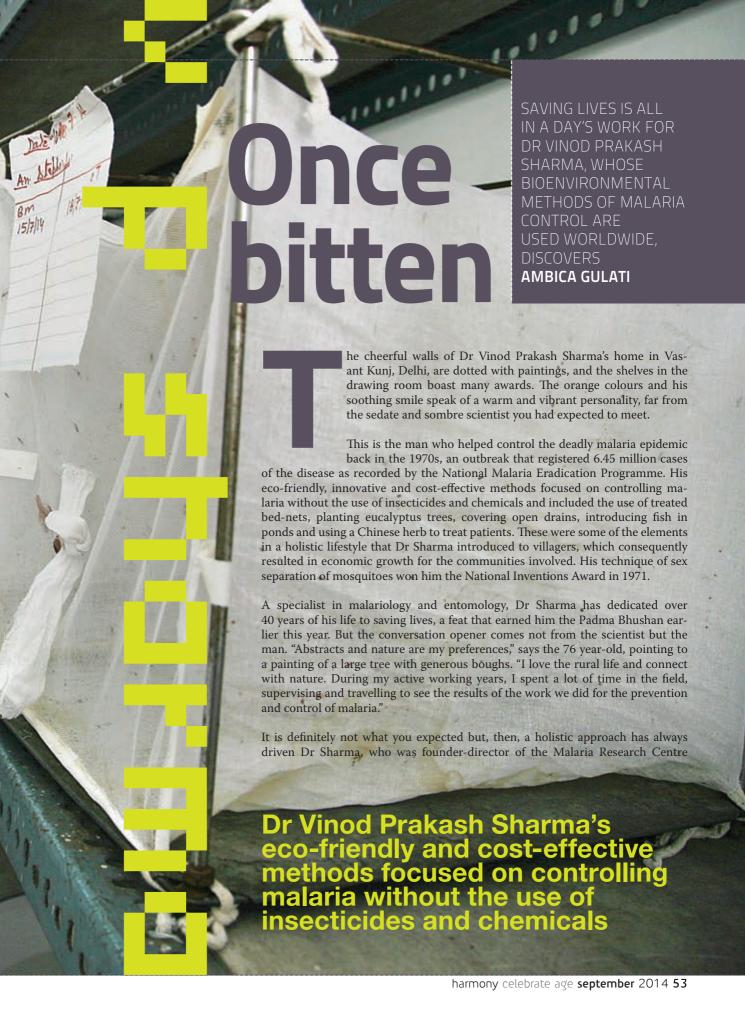
After his stint in Delhi, Dr Ramasami returned to Chennai, where he lives with his brother. He says marriage was never an option for him. "I didn't find any need for emotional bonding other than what I have. I also believe my personal life is maladjusted to the natural behaviour of human society. I did not want anyone to share the burden," says the scientist, who, according to a 2009 survey in the UK, was named among the 10 most important people who impacted the leather world in a hundred years.

Interestingly, this brilliant scientist is a closet poet and has written over 2,000 poems but has never published any. "These poems are to make auto-suggestions to myself. It is mind-management and I don't want the outside world to know my inner self while I am alive."

#### **MILESTONES**

- Recipient of the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award (1993), Padma Shri (2001), Om Prakash Bhasin Award (2001) and Padma Bhushan (2014)
- One of the few scientists who has been awarded the exalted Vasvik Prize twice—once for his contribution to engineering sciences and the second time for environmental sciences
- His contributions resulted in saving 764 leather tanneries in Tamil Nadu and 250,000 jobs and garnering an industrial turnover of ₹ 60 billion
- Has contributed to 'fashion forecasting' or picking the colours of leather for the global market 12 to 18 months in advance
- As secretary in the Department of Science & Technology, drafted the present Science & Technology Policy of the Government of India





"I have never been a people-pleaser. I used to go to the Ministry of Health only when absolutely necessary. I also expected people to show results with their work, not favours"



At the NIMR lab

(now National Institute of Malaria Research, or NIMR), and who retired as additional director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research in 1998. "Being born in this spiritual and mystical land, holistic is probably the best thing we have," says the scientist, who has been associated with premier research bodies and institutions in India and overseas. "India is different from the rest of the world. It is the only country where every home has a puja ghar, people are warm and a mystic resides in every second home. Someone told me of a famous man with a shoulder problem. He was cured by a baba through energy healing as medical help was unable to cure him. This can only happen in India."

Despite his spiritual bent, Dr Sharma hails from a family that lives and breathes science. His wife Dr Manju Sharma is also a Padma Bhushan, internationally recognised for her contribution to the promotion of biotechnology. And their son Amit Prakash Sharma is a scientist with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Technology. Was the father instrumental in shaping the son's career

choice? "No," he says. "It was Amit's decision. He opted for research and we supported him." Dr Sharma points upwards to a space above a door where the scrolls of honour of the Padma Bhushan-winning couple shine, encased in glass. Then you notice it—there's space for a third!

Born into a family of engineers, this was not to be this budding scientist's destiny. "It was a time when engineers got stable jobs but I was certain that I would not make a career in that domain." Instead, attracted to research, he opted for the biological sciences. He secured a PhD degree from Allahabad University and then went to the US, where he was a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Notre Dame and Purdue University. His stint in the US convinced him to work on controlling malaria in India. "I have faith in reality, not fiction," he smiles. Disciplined research, writing and grassroots community involvement cut the path to accomplishing his goal. "We had 10 field offices across the country. We went to rural areas in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, educating people and helping them cover their drains, ditches and marshy patches. We planted eucalyptus trees around marshy lands as they absorb water, so the wet land would become dry. This controlled mosquito breeding. We also introduced fish in water bodies to keep them clean."

Not stopping there, the scientist and his team introduced the locals to solar gas cooking and introduced hygienic practices. "Overall development was ensured to prevent the outbreak of the disease. We also distributed solar lamps," recollects Dr Sharma, whose many bioenvironmental malaria control innovations are now used in vector control worldwide. And once the changes introduced by his team took root, local communities began to look beyond a battle for survival. The overall improvements in health and lifestyle allowed them to contemplate their future for the first time, ushering in cottage industries.

"The people got into edible fish culture and other subsidiary industries such as making fishing nets," he points out. "As much as 80 per cent of Karnataka was free of mosquito-breeding sites, thanks to trees. In

Nadiad in Gujarat, where we worked extensively, fish is now everywhere; when we started, it was not readily available. People also began to open agencies for supply of solar gas and solar lamps." Dr Sharma reminisces about the time Digvijay Singh was chief minister of Madhya Pradesh and invited him to draft a strategy to control the outbreak of malaria in Betul. "I was initially surprised, as my wife was the one who worked with important personalities!" he laughs. "When I reached Betul, the civil hospital had been shut down as it could not accommodate the number of patients coming in from nearby districts. I spoke with the local people, got the MLAs involved in educating and cleaning the place, and the incidence of malaria came down radically in just 18 months."

A firm believer in taking the best learning and technologies and introducing them to India, Dr Sharma shares, "At a conference in Canada, I learnt about the use of treated bed-nets for controlling mosquito bites." And he introduced them in Assam. One of his most notable contributions to malaria prevention and control, though, was his technique of sex separation of mosquitoes. In the US, he saw scientists working on sex separation for mosquitoes, as only one sex would breed. Using this method, they were able to separate only a few thousand mosquitoes a day. To improve this, Dr Sharma developed a sieve through which mosquitoes could be separated faster.

With a holistic approach as a beacon, Dr Sharma mentions the Chinese herb artemisinin, which was tested by the Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI). "A semisynthetic derivative has proved effective against drug-resistant and cerebral malaria cases. When CDRI was conducting human trials, they approached NIMR and I helped identify places such as Rourkela where trials could be conducted. Even though this herbal treatment is very effective, pharma companies have managed to popularise drugs including fake drugs, and this is not a popular choice anymore," he rues.

Keeping his nose to the grindstone and refusing to fall prey to distraction kept Dr Sharma focused throughout his career. "I have never been a people-pleaser," he



affirms. "I prefer to keep busy doing my work." He remembers how some of his staff would try to win favours by volunteering to take care of his son as the couple was busy, but he did not encourage it. "I used to go to the Ministry of Health only when absolutely necessary. I also expected people to show results with their work, not favours."

Not one to go to clubs or attend parties, Dr Sharma's day begins at 6 am and he is a regular practitioner of yoga and meditation. "I listen to the *Gita* and then it's all about work. My mother was a religious person. I am not into rituals but my wife is diligent about her daily prayers." Rituals may not appeal to the scientist but his spiritual leanings have taken him to many ashram retreats. "I went to the Ramakrishna Mission and then Swami Jaggi Vasudev's ashram in Coimbatore three times. I like the writings of Jiddu Krishnamurti."

For his part, Dr Sharma has authored 14 books and over 300 research papers. He has written two books in Hindi on malaria, dengue and chikungunya, and continues to write and edit articles for the *Journal of Parasitic Diseases* and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, India, Section B, Biological Sciences.* He is editor of both these journals. Although he has a simple routine, Dr Sharma does take time out to occasionally watch TV. "I would like to avoid the *saas-bahu* dramas but sometimes I am forced to watch with my wife!"

#### **MILESTONES**

- Worked on chemo and radio-sterilisation of mosquitoes and developed a technique of sex separation of mosquitoes that won him the National Inventions Award (1971)
- Awarded Padma Shri (1992); Gujar Mal Modi Award (2013); Padma Bhushan (2014)
- Distinguished Parasitologist by World Parasitologist Federation (2010)
- Darling Foundation Prize, World Health Organisation, Geneva (1999)
- Green Scientist Award (2001)
- Gold Medal Lifetime Achievement Award by Indian Academy of Environmental Sciences (2012)

## SPICE ROUTE

**Saritha Rao Rayachoti** takes time off from a modern monsoon wedding to discover the quaint charm of old Kochi that dates back to Portuguese and Dutch inhabitation

by the thought that it will be a challenge to snatch time between festivities and actually soak up the atmosphere of the place. Given that we're here for a wedding, how can we do justice to spending time with our extended family as well as cure the travel itch we are afflicted with? Are we obligated to accompany various relatives for sari shopping sprees or can we traipse off to do some exploring by ourselves? And how much in advance do we turn up for each function and help with the arrangements?

Our flight touches down at Kochi International Airport to grey skies and the prospect of an hour-long taxi ride into Ernakulam town. The ride is excruciatingly slow, thanks to roads ruined by extensive work on the Kochi Metro, and it is rather boring because of the surly taxi driver who switches on the car stereo right at the beginning of the ride to end all prospects of any conversation.

But that's where the dreariness ended. We check into our centrally located hotel off M G Road and discover that we are, in fact, expected to do nothing! We go on to realise





The narrow Jew Street lined with shops; sackful of spices waiting for buyers; (facing page) the backwaters of Kochi offer a smooth sail

that the arrangements have been made with a lot of insight by the families of the bride and groom so we could all just enjoy the wedding. Right from the caterer who would ensure white rice was served for those who preferred it over the rose *matta* to contracted buses for shuttling guests between hotel and wedding hall, they had thought through every little detail, including leaving us a set of phone numbers of their local friends, just in case we needed any help or information.

We are free to do pretty much what the heart desires—explore the region, shop for banana chips, catch up with relatives or simply unwind in our well-appointed room, provided, of course, that we turn up on time for the *sangeet* and the actual wedding the morning after. It would take us four days to do justice to seeing the region, but our time is limited, and we decide to make the most of the day and a half.

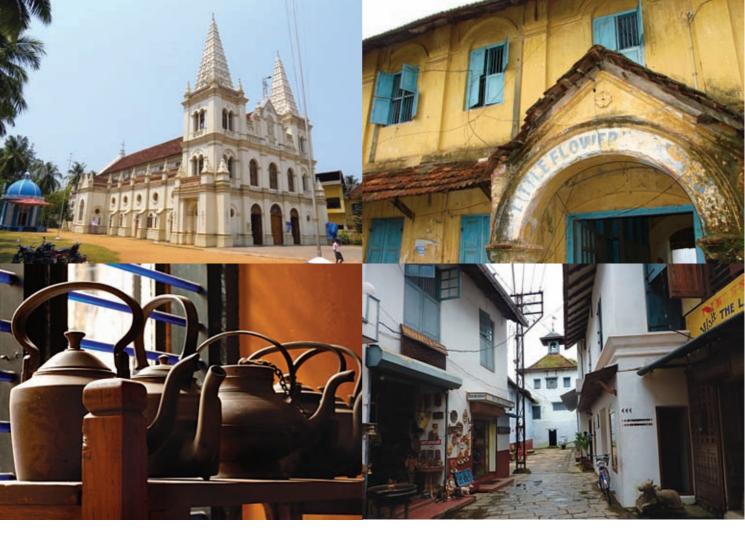
Ernakulam is regarded as the mainland and commercial capital of Kerala. It is a busy city in every sense of the word and M G Road is the primary artery of this city. As we were advised rather sternly by friends as averse to shopping as we are that 'there's nothing in Ernakulam except malls', we set out to discover the islands.

Running parallel to the bustling M G Road is a paved walkway along Kochi Lake, part of the larger river-fed Vembanad wetland that is itself barely separated from the Arabian Sea. A walk along this stretch is a rejuvenating experience provided, of course, one is armed with a sturdy umbrella to combat strong monsoon winds. (As a com-

plete aside, in case you do have a broken umbrella at hand, you can rest assured that there's bound to be an umbrella repairman in the vicinity.)

If you can pass up the temptation of a touristy backwater cruise, simply board a passenger ferry to any of the islands. The High Court Junction Jetty has passenger ferries and tourist ferries to Bolgatty Island and onward to Vypin. A little further down, the Ernakulam Boat Jetty has ferries to Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, Vypin and Willingdon Islands. We took a small ferry to Bolgatty just to enjoy the ride. This is where Kerala works its charm—the water is clean with no visible plastic debris that is a common sight in many water bodies elsewhere. There's a certain stability one experiences in a motorboat that allays deep-seated fears of drowning. We reach the Bolgatty Jetty, which is nothing more than a small abandoned building, and end up having a conversation with a bunch of young football players who express anxiety about the match between Germany and Argentina in the World Cup final that night.

The Island houses Bolgatty Palace, a Dutch colonial mansion with sloping red-tiled roofs and many-pillared verandas. Originally built by the Dutch in 1744, it is now a heritage hotel with sprawling lawns, a swimming pool and a nine-hole golf course. There is also an international marina, the only one in India with berthing facilities for 34 yachts that aspires to be a much-needed stopover for yachts between the Middle East and Singapore. We saw a few boats there, bobbing against the backdrop of Ernakulam's high-rises across the waters, but it will be a few years before the high-end tourists it seeks to attract will



(Clockwise from top left) The spectacular St Francis Church; a Portuguese colonial facade; an outer view of Paradesi Synagogue; quirky teapots find pride of place at a stall

begin to flock here. As we are looking for a more humble tea experience than what the hotel offers, we set out in search of a cup of *kattanchaya* or spiced black tea that we finally don't find despite scouring the island high and low.

Disappointed, we return to the High Court Junction Jetty, and stop by a shop making *kulukki sharbath*, a sort of onomatopoeic play on the act of shaking a drink. There is an array of flavours on offer and we finally settle on a green mango-chilli variant. Green mango slices are ground in a mixer and added to one of a set of tall steel glasses, along with a slit green chilli, sugar solution, ice and soda, and shaken till it becomes a glorious ode to the green mango. The feeble voice of reason in one's head that warned against consuming anything from unhygienic places, especially in the monsoon, was drowned by the raucousness of exulting taste buds.

Then comes the quandary of whether we have enough time to visit old Cochin comprising Mattancherry and Fort Kochi. The Jewish synagogue and Dutch Palace are in Mattancherry while Fort Kochi has numerous heritage properties from Portuguese and Dutch times along with some charming cafes and eateries. You require at least a few hours to visit both, and while they are equally accessible by ferry, the charm lies in a languid drive through the lovely lanes of the two localities. If you do take the ferry, there are auto drivers who could take you around the main sights for a fee.

A day later, we make the trip to Mattancherry in a hired car and park near an old temple. The rain comes down in sheets and we cross our fingers hoping it stops. We find that our hired car comes with a large umbrella and decide to brave the weather. After all, we are here in the monsoon and this is another way to experience the place.

We walk through the spice market, with its mounds of spices and heady aromas, and I realise suddenly that it wasn't Helen's beauty but the aroma of pepper from Malabar that perhaps launched the famed thousand ships. Over the centuries, Kerala has been at the forefront of the spice trade, with its famed ancient sea port of Muziris that archaeologists believe was in the area of Kodungallur. This was the very heart of the world's maritime spice trade of yore and it was perhaps Kerala's spices that drew the Portuguese and the Dutch to launch armadas and expeditions and trade their gold for precious spices like pepper.

# WE SIT AWHILE ON ONE OF THE BENCHES, AND ALLOW THE RESOUNDING SILENCE TO SEEP INTO OUR MARROWS WONDERING WHY WE RUSH TO SURROUND OURSELVES WITH SOUND EVERYDAY. WHAT OF SILENCE, WHERE ONE CAN BE ALONE YET NOT LONELY?

It is still early, and on our way to the synagogue, we notice homes with the Star of David—Judaism's six-pointed star made up of two triangles superimposed over each other—built into the grillwork of windows and balconies. We make a mental note to stop on our way back to knock on a door or two, hoping perhaps to find some fascinating story of a life spent in these by-lanes. We walk through winding paths with shops on either side and discover that shop-keepers, especially those dealing in antiques and Kashmiri handicrafts, also make an early start.

The path suddenly becomes cobbled as we near the Jewish synagogue where we are wooed by shopkeepers on either side of the narrow street, who promise a 'hassle-free' shopping experience, meaning that you can look all you want at the shop, and are not obligated to buy. It's difficult, even for someone like me who hates shopping, not to succumb to the charm of a cajoling voice asking you to look, 'just look' at the wares in the shop. But there's a synagogue to be seen and we want to see it before a tourist bus comes along with a large contingent of camera-toters.

We are the only visitors at the synagogue and enter through a door near a security booth. A slender young woman asks us to buy tickets and we begin our tour through a series of small rooms with painted panels that narrate the story of how the Jews arrived on the coast of Kerala and how this synagogue came to be built. I had hoped the young woman would talk us through the panels but the signboards are fairly explanatory and she is now deep in conversation in Malayalam with someone who seems to work there.

Beyond the panels and much after the visit, I read that many of the local White Jew population left for Israel when it was formed in 1948. Intermarriage between the Malabar Jews and White Jews is rare as they like to maintain their distinctive cultural identities, thereby making Yaheh Hallegua, the young woman who sold us the tickets, one of the few remaining members of the dwindling community of Paradesi Jews as the White Jews are also called. The word paradesi denotes being from a different land and the synagogue is also called Paradesi Synagogue. The room has a tall ceiling, with wooden windows letting in whatever little light can enter on an overcast July morning. The holy Torah scroll, comprising five books of Moses, is kept in an alcove covered with an elaborately worked curtain. The seating goes all around the periphery of the room. The joinery on the benches, especially the one that curves around the central brass pulpit, is of excellent craftsmanship. There is a profusion of lamps above the pulpit and going by the tarnish, some of them appear to be of silver. We look underfoot at the hundreds of hand-painted Chinese floor tiles, with blue strokes on white tile, no two tiles being alike, and play an impromptu game of 'spot the difference'.

We sit awhile on one of the benches, and allow the resounding silence to seep into our marrows wondering why, in our everyday life, we rush to surround ourselves with sound. Is it because we are lonely, that we need the sound of a television to stand in for the sound of presence? Then what of silence, where one can be alone yet not lonely, where the absence of sound reveals a palpable presence amidst us, inside our stilled minds, no matter what name we attribute to it?

Outside, the haranguing of the curio sellers gets too much to take, so we pass up the opportunity to look for the older members of the Jewish community and make our way to Mattancherry Palace. This modest palace was originally built by the Portuguese for the Raja of Cochin in 1557. It is called the Dutch Palace after the Dutch renovated it almost a century later. The Pazhaiyannur Bhagavathy Temple is on the ground floor and a well-maintained museum is on the first floor with elaborate information panels on the region and its royalty. We make our way through a room full of Kerala murals on the walls depicting scenes from the Ramayana and stories of Krishna rendered in a fiery profusion of orange tones. The floors are wood-panelled and every display room has at least one window with two wooden seats built into its alcove. I sit by one and look out at a yard next door with an abundance of wild greenery. A board, visible from the window, reads that it was the Sarpa Kavu, a sacred grove for snakes where nobody was allowed to enter. I think of how wonderfully preserved the ecology here must be, and how this preservation was not just a matter of public policy but the responsibility of every homeowner in these parts.

The museum has more than just the usual traditional costumes draped on mannequins that look of disconcertingly Caucasian build. There are panels that trace the history of Kerala and that of Cochin with the bulk of information being about the Rajas of Cochin. The naming tradition among the royal families is fascinating as is the aspect of inheritance from the maternal side of one's family. In India, only Kerala and Meghalaya have communities that follow



NEAR THE FORT KOCHI-VYPIN FERRY TERMINAL, WE COME ACROSS A ROW OF THE FAMED CHINESE FISHING NETS OR *CHINA VALLA* AS THEY ARE LOCALLY KNOWN. THESE FISHING NETS SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SUN HAVE EVOLVED INTO A STRIKING VISUAL IDENTITY FOR KOCHI

a matrilineal succession, a tradition that is to be lauded, celebrated and upheld in times like these with alarming instances of dowry deaths and female infanticide. Women enjoy a greater degree of freedom and there is emphasis on education, not just among the women in the royal family but extending to the entire community and, as literacy figures show, the entire state of Kerala.

There is a fantastic portrait gallery on the royalty of Cochin, housed in a room that itself has been lovingly restored to a semblance of its old self. Many of the Rajas were given posthumous titles, depending on the month or place of their demise. For instance, Kerala Varma IV or Veera Kerala Varma was also known as *Kashiyil Theepetta Thampuran* or the king who died in Kashi. Another interesting story to look up is the one about the Rajas of Cochin and their resolve not to wear a crown. The story goes that Lisbon had presented a golden crown to Veera

Kerala Varma for his coronation. However, as the temple where the traditional coronations took place fell under the territories of his enemy, the Zamorin, the Raja and his successors pledged that as long as the temple was under the Zamorin's rule, they would not wear the crown on their heads as a matter of principle.

I was astounded to hear about the kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore having their own feudatory postal service within the region, known as *Anchal*, as against adopting the Indian postal service during British times. The princely state of Cochin had its own stamps that sold for prices like 'two pies', 'four pies' and 'two annas and a quarter' and, between 1911 and 1950, commemorated the Cochin Rajas with a portrait series.

A longish drive later, we arrive at the Fort Kochi side of the island. We saunter into a pretty church that turns out to be the St Francis Church, one of the oldest European churches in India. Originally a wooden structure, the church today has a modest façade with graceful curves. Inside, sitting on the pews, one can't help but notice the hand-pulled *punkha* or fans from British colonial times. An interesting bit of trivia about this church is that, in 1524, Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer, was on his visit to Cochin when he contracted malaria and died. He was buried right here in St Francis Church and his remains were later moved to Lisbon. But the place of the explorer's original grave is demarcated.

Near the Fort Kochi-Vypin ferry terminal, we come across a row of the famed Chinese fishing nets or *china valla* as they are locally known. These fishing nets silhouetted against the sun have evolved into a striking visual identity for Kochi. This technique of fishing, using a 20 sq-m fishing net that works on the principle of cantilevers and counterweights to catch fish that swim close to the shore, is said to have been brought to the region all the way from the court of Kublai Khan. If you are into kingfish or prawns, just pick one up from a vendor nearby and get it cooked at one of the many stalls along the promenade.

We park nearby and after a short walk on roads lined with huge trees, we arrive at Princess Street with its numerous enterprises in little old buildings. There are cafes and eateries in the streets leading off it and the entire locality looks lovingly maintained. Many of these cafes are approached through a small door and, depending on how big and crowded the place is, you can opt for a table on the first floor, approached by a narrow rickety set of wooden stairs. The fare on offer ranges from *dosa*, sandwiches and salads to coffee and tea. I have a sudden longing for cake, maybe a subliminal craving to complete a colonial heritage experience, but the café we are in is yet to get their evening batch from the mainland.

Sitting by the window on the first floor of a cosy cafe filled with quirky teapots of different sizes and shapes, we decide to call it a day. We sip aromatic masala tea in the land of spices and take nibbles out of a dish called Indian rarebit, which is basically a three-layer sandwich with a masala egg filling that is dipped in chickpea dough and deep-fried. We watch the rain come down with great fury outside the window and it gives us an excuse to dwell a little longer. We make plans to return, and make a mental note to check out the quaint guesthouse down the lane next time.

For now, we have to return to the mainland for the wedding celebrations, where, at the *sangeet*, I discover that I actually love to dance to Bollywood songs. I also fall headlong in love with rose *matta* rice. But those are stories for another time and, as travel goes, some stories must be left unfinished and some places left unexplored, so we can revisit them on another rainy afternoon. \*\*



**By air:** Cochin International Airport in Nedumbassery, 32 km away, is well connected with direct flights from Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai.

**By rail:** The nearest railheads, Ernakulam Junction and Ernakulam Town, connect Kochi with all major towns of India

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

There is a profusion of hotels in the region. Some recommendations include:

- Bharat Tourist Home, Durbar Hall Road, Ernakulam: 0484-2353501
- Dream Hotel, Kadavanthra, Ernakulam: 0484 4129999

Also check out www.keralatourism.org/hotels/er-nakulam/dt2 and www.keralatourism.org/homestays/fort-kochi/ds422 for home stays in Fort Kochi.

#### WHERE TO EAT

#### In Ernakulam

- Vegetarian: Ambiswamy's and Gokulam on M G Road, Bharat Tourist Home on Durbar Hall Road
- Non-vegetarian: Pai Brothers just off M G Road and Grand Hotel on M G Road
- Both veg and non-veg: Dhe Puttu in Edapally

#### In Fort Kochi

Teapot Cafe, Loafer's Corner, David Hall, Cafe Jew Town, Ginger House, Dal Roti

## **TIPS**

- Use Kerala Tourism's walking guide of Fort Kochi available at www.keralatourism.org/destination/ destination.php?id=2132066030
- If you would like to know more about Muziris heritage, look for a tour of the Muziris Heritage Project at www.keralatourism.org/muziris/

# Etcetera

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## POLE STAR

t's not every day that you find a silver defying gravity, balancing his body on a rope, performing yoga postures suspended mid-air. For 61 year-old Uday Desphande from Mumbai, though, it's all part of a day's work. A veteran Mallakhamb artist, Deshpande was in Bengaluru last month for The Times of India

International Folk Festival before proceeding to Germany for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row to hold workshops

RT and initiate students into this ancient Indian sport of agility, swiftness and astounding acrobatics.

A Maharashtrian folk art, Mallakhamb derives from the terms *malla*, denoting a wrestler, and *khamba*,

a pole. Though the earliest recorded reference is found in pictorial depictions in Somesvara Chalukya's *Manasollasa*, dating 1135 AD, legend has it that Lord Hanuman appeared in the dreams of Balambhatdada Deodhar—who later became the fitness instructor of Maratha emperor Peshwa Baji Rao II—unveiling long-lost wrestling tricks on a wooden pole. This helped





Deodhar take on two renowned wrestlers, Ali and Gulab, from the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad successfully. Thereafter, Deodhar set up training centres in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, leading to the revival of Mallakhamb. Today, Mallakhamb has moved on from being a mere pole act

The sport garnered international attention in 1936, when a contingent of 35 from Amravati, Maharashtra, travelled to the Berlin Olympics. The intricate feats of death-defying

to incorporate innovations with rope,

cycle and bottles.

gymnastics atop the skinny, 8.5-ft pole thrilled Adolf Hitler so much that he presented each one of them with an honorary Olympic medal. Today, Mallakhamb is practiced in many parts of the world, with Germany, Singapore and New Mexico holding regular training sessions. "Globally, people are waking up to the physical and emotional benefits of Mallakhamb," says Deshpande, who is the general secretary of the International Mallakhamb Federation and has trained over 50,000 students. One of his earliest female students, Neeta Tatke (seen in picture) recalls



performing before then prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1981. The now 50 year-old vice-principal of D G Ruparel College in Mumbai, who has done research on enhanced cognitive and executive skills owing to Mallakhamb, points out, "Physical benefits apart, Mallakhamb also helps get a grip on your emotions."

Meanwhile, such is his passion that Deshpande, who retired from the department of Customs and Central Excise, still wakes up at the crack of dawn to head to Shivaji Park in Dadar, Mumbai, to plunge headlong into midair antics. "Though I may not be able to do the stunts I did when I was 40, Mallakhamb has certainly helped me keep diabetes and hypertension at bay, besides slowing down the ageing process," says Deshpande, who counts 84 year-old Shantilal Shanghvi (seen in picture) as his oldest disciple.

—Srirekha Pillai

## The spirit of monsoon

ABHA SHARMA EXPERIENCES THE COLOUR AND FERVOUR OF THE PINK CITY'S TRADITIONAL TEEJ FESTIVAL

Banna re bagan me jhula dalya...

Rangeelo sawan aayo, aayo aayo teej tyohar...

Draped in beautiful *lehariya* (striped, tie-and-dye saris), palms decorated with henna, women sing in chorus, enjoying high strides on the swing. The markets across Jaipur are filled with the aroma of freshly made *ghewar* (a traditional round and crisp sweet delicacy), indicating the arrival of Teej. It is widely believed that Teej—a **FESTIVAL** Hindu festival celebrated to herald the advent of the monsoon—opens up the season of festivals locked away during the sizzling summers of Rajasthan. In fact, it is considered auspicious if mild showers hit the city on the day; an indication of a bountiful monsoon.

The walled city has a long tradition of celebrating Teej with great pomp and gaiety by erstwhile rulers; today a Teej procession carrying the deity of Parvati brings back memories of traditional grandeur and fervour. This year on 30-31 July, the traditional Teej procession was taken out in all its regal pageantry. The procession started from the Zenani Dyodhi of the City Palace and passed through Tripolia Ba-

zar, Chhoti Chaupar, and Gangauri Bazaar, culminating at the Pondreek Park, which was specially lit up this year for the first time by Jaipur Municipal Corporation.

Bedecked camels, horse buggy, cannon carriage, decorated chariots and cultural performances like Kachchi Ghodi, Gair, Kalbaliya and Chakri provided a cultural treat for both locals and tourists. The beautifully adorned idol of the Teej deity—freshly painted before the festival—was carried by traditionally dressed men called Chobdar in red attire in the antique palanquin covered by a canopy and accompanied by dancers and

Teej is celebrated on the third day of the waning moon in the month of Shravan. Believed to be the commemoration of the union of goddess Parvati, after a hundred years of penance, with Lord Mahadeva, it is considered pious to seek the deity's blessings on the occasion. While married women abstain from food and water to seek Her blessings for conjugal bliss, unmarried women fast in anticipation of getting a good spouse. The two-day festival is considered extra special for newlywed girls who stay with their

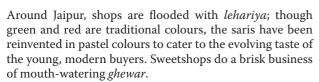






Clockwise from above: Procession carrying deity of Parvati; the traditional ride on a bedecked swing; a senior member of the brass band performs; (facing page) dancers add colour to the festival

parents for a month as part of the ritual. Teej marks their return to their marital homes. The Teej fast is broken at night after a *darshan* of the moon and sipping on water thereafter. The dinner consists of *puri*, *sabzi*, *raita* and the mandatory *ghewar* laced with *mava* and dry fruits. The eve of Teej is celebrated as Sinjara—perhaps an expression for *shringar* or adornment—when newlyweds and brides-to-be are gifted *lehariya*, bangles and henna by elders of the family.



Also known as the festival of swings, the older generation feels the swinging sessions are slowly losing their essence though. "Teej is incomplete without a ride on flower-decorated swings. In olden times, when the women assembled in gardens to enjoy swing rides, the most popular song used to be *Bol thara dhani ko naam kayin chha*, wherein married women would be asked to utter their husband's name. As wives never use to address husbands with their first names, they would utter it indirectly. However, on Teej, the rules were different; it was believed that if the



wife said her husband's name while taking a stride on the swing on that day, it would ensure his longevity," shares octogenarian Kamla Sharma. "These songs and rituals have lost their meaning now; young wives no longer hesitate to address their husbands by their first names."

In fact, Teej was earlier considered to be a time for family reunion. "Applying henna used to be an elaborate, fun-filled family affair; close relatives would assemble and apply henna on each other's palms," recalls sexagenarian Pushpa Kothari. But the changing face of the festival has time-starved, career-oriented girls preferring professional help. "Though ladies' clubs, tourist groups and colleges are attempting to preserve the culture through activities such as *lehariya* shows and henna competitions, Teej is not the same anymore."

## Lessons of life

We toast Teachers' Day with an extract from Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957), a comedy of academic manners that revels in the follies of the eponymous absentminded professor

The organs concerned in the production of English speech sounds are the larynx, the velum, the lips, the tongue (that punchinello in the troupe), and, last but not least, the lower jaw; mainly upon its overenergetic and somewhat ruminant motion did Pnin rely when translating in class passages in the Russian grammar or some poem by Pushkin. If his Russian was music, his English was murder. He had enormous difficulty ('dzeefeecooltsee' in Pninian English) with depalatization, never managing to remove the extra Russian moisture from ts and ds before the vowels he so quaintly softened. His explosive 'hat' ("I never go in a hat even in winter") differed from the common American pronunciation of 'hot' (typical of Waindell townspeople, for example) only by its briefer duration, and thus sounded very much like the German verb 'hat' (has).

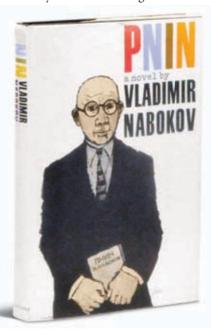
Long os with him inevitably became short ones: his 'no' sounded positively Italian, and this was accentuated by his trick of triplicating the simple negative, "May I give you a lift, Mr Pnin?"

"No-no-no, I have only two paces from here". He did not possess (nor was he aware of this lack) any long oo: all he could muster when called upon to utter 'noon' was the lax vowel of the German 'nun' ("I have no classes in afternun on Tuesday. Today is Tuesday.")

Tuesday—true; but what day of the month, we wonder. Pnin's birthday for instance fell on February 3, by the Julian calendar into which he had been born in St Petersburg in 1898. He never celebrated it nowadays, partly because, after his departure from Russia, it sidled by in a Gregorian

disguise (thirteen—no, twelve days late), and partly because during the academic year he existed mainly on a 'motuweth frisas' (abbreviation for the days of the week) basis.

On the chalk-clouded blackboard, which he wittily called the greyboard, he now wrote a date. In the crook of his arm he still felt the bulk of *Zol. Fond Lit.* The date he wrote had nothing to do with the day this was in Waindell: December, 26, 1829. He carefully drilled in a big white full



stop, and added underneath: 3.03 p.m. St Petersburg. Dutifully this was taken down by Frank Backman, Rose Balsamo, Frank Carroll, Irving D Herz, beautiful, intelligent Marilyn Hohn, John Mead, Jr, Peter Volkov, and Allan Bradbury Walsh.

Pnin, rippling with mute mirth, sat down again at his desk: he had a tale to tell. That line in the absurd Russian grammar, *Brozhu li* 

ya vdol ulits shumnih (Whether I wander along noisy streets), was really the opening of a famous poem. Although Pnin was supposed in this Elementary Russian class to stick to language exercises ('Mama, telefon! Brozhu li ya vdol' ulits shumnih. Ot Vladivostoka do Vashingtona 5,000 mil'.), he took every opportunity to guide his students on literary and historical tours.

In a set of eight tetrametric quatrains, Pushkin described the morbid habit he always had—wherever he was, whatever he was doing—of dwelling on thoughts of death and of closely inspecting every passing day as he strove to find in its cryptogram a certain 'future anniversary': the day and month that would appear, somewhere, sometime upon his tombstone.

"And where will fate send me", imperfective future, "death", declaimed inspired Pnin, throwing his head back and translating with brave literality, "in fight, in travel, or in waves? Or will the neighbouring dale"—dolina, 'valley' we would now say—"accept my refrigerated ashes", poussière, "cold dust" perhaps more correct. And though it is indifferent to the insensible body...."

Pnin went on to the end and then, dramatically pointing with the piece of chalk he still held, remarked how carefully Pushkin had noted the day and even the minute of writing down that poem.

"But," exclaimed Pnin in triumph, "he died on a quite, quite different day! He died...." The chair back against which Pnin was vigorously leaning emitted an ominous crack, and the class resolved a pardonable tension in loud young laughter.

## Understanding Kalidasa

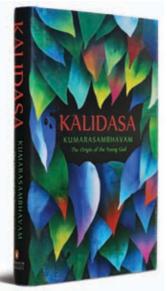
Kalidasa is unarquably the greatest and most celebrated Sanskrit poet known to us through preserved works, though Bhasa, Saumilla and Kaviputra strode the scene much before him. Believed to be one of the 'nine jewels' in the court of Chandragupta II, Kalidasa's oeuvre includes seven major works: three plays, two epic poems and two lyric poems. Though he remains the most translated Sanskrit poet, such is the interest his works generate that scholars never cease to reinterpret him for newer generations. Translations of MALAVIKAGNIMITRAM: THE DANCER AND THE KING (Penguin; ₹ 399; 165 pages) and KUMARASAMBHAVAM: THE ORIGIN OF THE YOUNG GOD (Penguin; ₹ 399; 216 pages) are attempts at recreating the past in a modern tongue, while reflecting on the sensibilities of an era gone by. Here,

voices of the past speak to us in a contemporary colloquial tongue. When Queen Dharini in **Srinivas Reddy**'s retelling of *Malavikagnimitram* says, "Ugh, my husband is shameless!", it sounds like a modern lament.

Believed to be Kalidasa's first work, and also the least refined, in *Malavikagnimitram*, Kalidasa's penchant for romance, art and natural beauty is evident at every delightful turn of the plot, which unfolds through comic interludes and court machinations. Unlike his other works that are woven around deities and celestial beings, all the characters in *Malavikagnimitram* are historical figures. The

eponymous hero of the drama, Agnimitra, was the second emperor of the Sunga dynasty, which ruled during the transition from the Mauryas to Guptas. Being his first work, Malavikagnimitram has more of the young enthusiastic writer's sense of fun and play than the spectacular imagery and poetic expressions displayed in his later works. Kalidasa was a court poet, and the play reveals his first grand experience of the intrigue, cunning, jealousy, love and valour that raged behind royal curtains. Much of the action here is driven by the humorous scheming Gautama, the vidusaka, whose character takes centre stage, tying together different elements in a single plot with his silly wit and charm.

*Kumarasambhavam*, a more evolved work, on the other hand, celebrates the love story



of Siva and Parvati. A fine example of erotic mysticism, the epic poem tells their tale in a sensuous syntax, viewing them both as lovers and as cosmic principles of purusha and prakriti. Composed in eight cantos or sarga, the sublime poetic expression of Kalidasa with its heady eroticism and sumptuous imagery is brought alive by award-winning translator Hank Heifetz. Though it's primarily the love saga of Uma and Siva, it also acts as a portal into the classical age, giving us a glimpse of the practices and rituals that defined them. It was a time when Brahma still enjoyed his exalted position as part of the Hindu triumvirate, and was considered the force 'Whose Self is within every life'. There's also reference to the practice of Sati in Rati's lament for Kama.

That Rati lived,
if only for a moment, without her Kama,
will last as a reproach
against me, husband, though I will follow you.

While the language of *Malavikagnimitram* is less polished, *Kumarasambhavam* is marked by a more refined poetic sensibility. However, the classical poet's predilection for similes is evident in both works.

A newly enthroned enemy, Not yet popular with his subjects,

Is easily rooted out,

Like a freshly planted sapling.

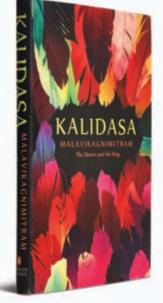
— Malavikagnimitram

While Siva, his steadiness a little diminished, Like the sea disturbed as the moon begins to rise

Kumarasambhayam

An enduring quality of Kalidasa's poetry is his ability to explore the depths of human psyche in every possible scenario. Even in the much lighter *Malavikagnimitram*, he manages to address the conflict between duty and desire in an unpretentious manner. Just like Shakespeare, Kalidasa, with his keen understanding of the ways of the human heart, stays relatable and relevant even today.

—Srirekha Pillai



## **Delhi diaries**

The Turkish and Arab invasion of India from 1206 to 1526 saw the aggressive imposition of Islam on India. Acclaimed author and historian **Abraham Eraly** discusses the political, social and cultural developments that transformed India as a result of these invasions in his latest book *The Age of Wrath: A History of the Delhi Sultanate* (Penguin; ₹ 699; 448 pages). "The Turkish invasion resulted in the superimposition of a wholly contradistinctive foreign civilisation over India," he says.

Eraly's earlier books—The Last Spring: The Lives and Times of the Great Mughals, Gem in the Lotus: The Seeding of Indian Civilization, and The First Spring: The Golden Age of India—have dealt with significant episodes in the history of India. With The Age of Wrath completing his four-volume study of the history of pre-modern India, the

Puducherry-based writer is working on a summation book, to link India's past with its present. In an interview to **Srirekha Pillai**, he speaks about the turbulence, violence and chaos that marked the Delhi Sultanate.

## You started out as a lecturer of history in Madras Christian College, but the stint didn't last long....

I was a student of MCC, like my grandfather and some of my uncles, and I loved the vast and heavily wooded suburban campus. So, when the college principal, Dr Devanesan, offered me the post of lecturer when I finished post-graduation, I was absolutely thrilled. After a few years, the principal sent me to the US to teach at a college there. I was there for a couple of years before returning to MCC. Meanwhile, I was getting increasingly bored

with my profession, delivering the same lectures year after year. So I moved from the college campus to Chennai, and set up a publishing house there, mainly producing house magazines and brochures for major companies in Chennai. I then resigned my job as a lecturer.

#### Can you tell us a bit about Aside, the magazine you ran?

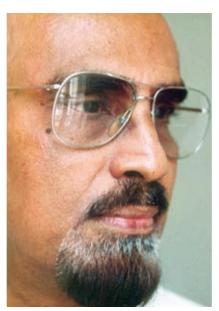
I had dreamt of publishing a city magazine like the ones I had seen in the US. I discussed this with several people, and they all discouraged me, warning that it would be an

absolute business disaster. But I went ahead with the project and set up *Aside*, which ran successfully for several years. Then I ran into some family problems that diverted my attention from business. Fortunately, I was able to sell majority shares of the company to one of the top Chennai business houses; we ran it together for a couple of years. But *Aside* was a totally independent magazine, which would not bend its features to please anyone, especially politicians. Because of this, the company funding of *Aside* ran into trouble with the state government. The MD of the company then told me we had to fold the magazine. And I readily agreed.

But here again, the gods favoured this unbeliever. One day when the MD was returning to Chennai from Delhi, on the plane next to him was the owner of a top Tamil publishing

house. When the MD told him about his plan to close down *Aside*, the publisher said that he would buy it. So there I was, a drowning man being pulled back to life. But the magazine continued only for a couple of years, as its ethos was entirely different from that of the Tamil publishing house. However, these misfortunes turned me to doing what I had dreamed of doing for many years, to write a readable and objective history of India. And I resolved that I would do that even if I had to live in a mud hut.

## **AUTHORSPEAK**



## Tell us about your family and formative years.

I come from an old Syrian Christian family of Kerala. The family claims, without any hard proof, that ours was one of the first Indian families converted by St Thomas—a disciple

of Jesus Christ—when he came to Kerala by ship in the first century AD. He came in the company of some Middle Eastern traders, who were in regular contact with planters and traders in Kerala, including my paternal family.

All this may or may not be true. But whatever the truth of this claim, mine was not a particularly religious family. The men of the family seldom went to church, though women usually did. The family seems to have been originally quite affluent, living in a large two-storey building, mostly built of wood. But gradually it lost most of its property, and

towards the end of my great-grandfather's life it had become virtually impoverished. Fortunately, my great-grandfather had, perhaps foreseeing the dismal future of the family, given his sons a good college education, so that most men of the family were able to salvage themselves as professionals, mainly as lawyers.

## Coming to *The Age of Wrath*, what set the Turks and Mughals apart from the previous invaders of India, like the Aryans for instance?

Most ancient invaders of India were fluid in their religious affiliations, and they easily merged into Hinduism. And Hinduism in turn, being a multisect religion with many gods, could absorb the foreign sects and their gods into its fold. But this could not be done with Islam, which is a rigidly monotheistic religion.

## What fascination did India hold for the invaders?

In ancient times, India was known for its fabulous wealth—agrarian as well as mineral—and this drew most invaders into India. Several also took refuge in India to escape the aggressors invading their homeland. This was, for instance, what drove Babur into India and led to the founding of the Mughal Empire.

## Why were Indians always the conquered and never a race of conquerors?

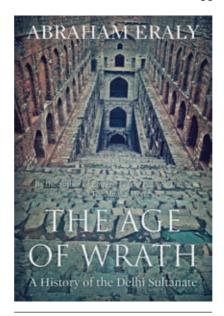
It was easy for foreigners to slide down the great mountains that bordered the subcontinent and invade India, but difficult for Indians to clamber up the mountains and invade foreign lands. Besides,

there were no survival compulsions for Indians to invade foreign lands, as the subcontinent was fabulously rich in material and agrarian resources, and it provided nearly all that pre-modern people needed. Moreover, the tropical climate of India was enervating and Indians, unlike the invaders, generally lacked the martial spirit and energy needed to successfully invade foreign countries, or even to successfully repel foreign invaders. There are only very few incidents of Indian armies routing invading armies.

#### What made the native kings defeatist in their attitude?

I think that the enervating climate of India was a major factor in this. Indians generally lacked the martial ferocity and stamina needed to rout the invaders.

Your book is replete with instances of barbaric suppression of rebellion by the Turks and Arabs. Did this kind of suppression have religious sanction?



There were no survival compulsions for Indians to invade foreign lands, as the subcontinent was rich in resources. Unlike the invaders, they lacked the martial spirit and energy needed to successfully invade foreign countries, or repel invaders

Islam was a martially aggressive religion, and its early medieval followers generally sought to convert the non-Muslim people they came across into Islam, or exterminate them. But this was not always possible, especially in a populous country like India. So they modified their attitude and became tolerant of people of other religions. As for the suppression of rebellions, it was necessarily barbaric even in the case of Hindu rulers. But Muslim invaders were more severe in this, for the practice of barbaric violence was a survival requirement for them, as they were a small minority in India.

## How did 'Sultan Raziya', the only woman to have ruled the Delhi Sultanate, manage to do so?

There was a physiological compulsion for the traditional discrimination against women playing any political role, for political power in pre-modern times was martial power, and that necessarily excluded women from that sphere of activity, as their primary function in life was to bear childree. Raziya was an exception in this, but it should be noted that she often dressed and acted like a man. But the political scene is radically changing in India. Physical prowess and martial aggressiveness are no longer compulsive requirements in rulers. So we will certainly see more women in power

in India in future.

## Some of the sultans were apparently bisexual or homosexual, as you observe in the book.

Traditional Hindu society was quite permissive in sexual matters but homosexuality was virtually unknown unlike in Muslim society, perhaps because of its normal permissiveness of heterosexual indulgence. Some of the sultans like Mubarak Khalji held court dressed as women, and wearing trinkets.

Do you think the story about Sultan Begarha of Gujarat, especially about his harem with 4,000 women and the daily swig of poison, was a myth built around him?

It is impossible to verify this. Politicians—indeed, all people—often pretend in public to be what they really are not.

As most recorded history of Turkish invasion comes from Turkish writers, won't it be designed to showcase Indians in an unfavourable light?

Turks inevitably looked down on Indians, as the Mu-

The political unity of

achievement of the

Mughals. The British

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was primarily a military

ghals and the British would do later. But why were not Indians presenting their views of the invaders? It has, I presume, something to do with the permissive value system of Indians.

## According to you, which is the best illustration of Muslim architecture in India?

The Taj Mahal, of course!

## What would you cite as significant contributions of the Delhi Sultanate vis-à-vis India's socio-cultural profile?

Except in architecture, and in a small measure in the dressing style of Hindu rajas and nobles, there were no major cultural changes among Hindus under the Sultanate influence. Indian civilisation in medieval times was in a comatose state.

## When did the concept of India as a nation emerge?

The political unity of the Indian subcontinent was primarily a military achievement of the Mughals. The British strengthened it further and made it more comprehensive when they came to power in India. But when they left, the subcontinent became fragmented once again. This led to the formation of Pakistan and Bangladesh, and would have quite probably led to the emergence of several other independent states in the subcontinent. But this contingency was prevented by the tough and phenomenally successful national integration policy of Vallabhai Patel, the first deputy prime minister of India. However, there are several powerful, divisive forces active in India even today.

What would you consider the Golden Age of India?

The classical age, of course. I have dealt with this in detail in my book, *The First Spring*.

## You claim to be an agnostic with a leaning towards Buddhism.

Buddhism was the most humane of all the religions of the world. In fact, it was not a religion in the conventional sense. It had no gods, no religious rituals. It was, in its original form, just a sensible and humane way of life. But as it spread among the people, it became a religion like other religions, with gods and rituals. It virtually disappeared from India during the medieval period, though it

had meanwhile spread extensively into other parts of Asia. Contemporaneous with Buddhism there were two other godless religions in India: Jainism and Ajivikas. Of these, Ajivikas, the most radical of these religions, did not survive for long. And Jainism, like Buddhism, became a common religion—though with high emphasis on virtues—and it shrank into a small area in the subcontinent.

You've also attempted fiction with Night of the Dark Trees and retold the legendary Itihyamala with Tales Once Told: Legends of Kerala. As someone who has authored both non-fiction and fiction, what are the sensibilities that demarcate them?

Researching for historical data and writing a volume of history takes many years of unremitting work, so by the time I finished writing *The Last Spring* and *Gem in The Lotus*, and began the research for *The First Spring*, I felt mentally rather exhausted, and needed to do something which would

be relaxing, and could be done in a few months. That is what led me to writing two non-history books. *Tales Once Told* is based on *Ithihyamala*, a multi-volume collection of Kerala legends in Malayalam, which I had read in my school days, and now enjoyed retelling in English. *Night of The Dark Trees* is quite loosely based on my personal experiences. While each of my history books took me several years to research and write, each of these two books took me only about a year to write. Writing them was quite relaxing, and I could energetically return to my work on Indian history.

#### What are you working on at present?

I am working on a portrait of contemporary India.





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#### Tale of a fable

**Swami Samarpanananda** on why fables have remained the most endearing form of storytelling through the ages

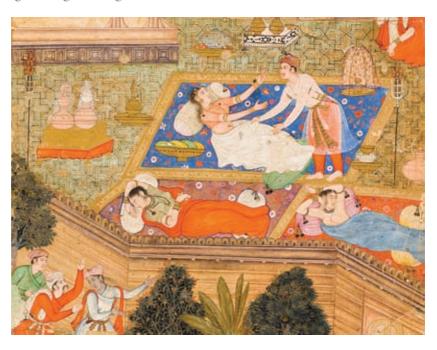
I often get asked where I get ideas for stories from and, more important, why I prefer to weave stories around birds and animals than humans.

To make stories is human. Everyone in this world has the ability to make stories. From the day a child learns to speak, he starts honing his skills at colouring facts to present his personality in a more acceptable manner. He breaks a toy, but tells mom that a monkey did it; commits mischief in class, but puts the blame on an innocent; and later on in life cheats on his spouse, but cooks up a plausible story; arrives late at office, but comes up with excuses.

Literature is created when this art of making up stories crosses its critical mass. The words, which were till then contained by a person within himself or within the confines of his near ones, now want to be heard by neutral ears. It is like a child who has grown up, and now wants to venture out into the big world outside.

However, what generally passes off as writing is a narration, with a little colouring, of what one has experienced in life directly or seen others go through. True creative writing happens when the writer catches hold of the essence of something, and then puts around it a persona.

A good example of this is Duryodhana's character in *The Mahabharata*. It is essentially the personality of a powerful but jealous person. Vyasa took power and jealousy in its raw form, and then weaved around it the persona, which must have been radically different from that of the historic Duryodhana. Vyasa, after all, was not a chronicler, but a poet.



Fables have the elements of idealism, realism, mythologies and folktales, and tend to go beyond the limits of time and space, and reach out to everyone

Of the various categories of story-telling, fables are truly unique and universal. They have the elements of idealism, realism, mythologies and folktales. And yet, fables are radically different from all of these. Fables tend to go beyond the limits of time and space, and reach out to everyone, irrespective of their age. Recently, when my book *Junglezen Sheru* came out, a reader mailed, "Three generations of my family, extending from my 11 year-old son to my 80-plus father are reading this book at the same time and loving it as much."

Similarly, former president Dr A P J Abdul Kalam called up to congratu-

late after reading *Tiya – A Parrot's Journey*. Since then, he has been recommending the book in his numerous talks. One would expect that if a book is praised by an eminent scholar like Dr Kalam, it must be for the intellectually gifted. But I also received letters from school students who loved its simple story and humour. Even CBSE put the book in its suggested reading list for senior students.

The book has by now been translated into Bhasa Indonesia, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and Kannada. In New York, plans are afoot to make an animation movie based on the book. All this shows how universal a fable can

#### Etcetera AT LARGE

turn out to be, even if it comes from a completely unknown author.

The spell of a truly universal story can never be underestimated. Recently, I met a gentleman from Switzerland, who took a look at my collection of books, among which was *Kathasaritsagara*, a famous 11<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit collection of Indian fairy tales and folk tales. So impressed was he with the book that he asked me if he could take it home. Gunadhya, the writer of the book, wouldn't even have known where Switzerland is, or for that matter that his book would be carried in a 'Pushpak Yaan' across the seas!

In India, most of us have grown up reading *Panchatantra* and *Jataka Tales*. One of my all-time favourite stories from *Panchatantra* is the trick

played by the lion on a camel. The camel is persuaded by the lion's ministers to offer its head. The foolish camel does so, and is immediately killed by the predator. I personally find this story so funny despite the gore involved. It has also taught me never to offer my head to superiors even if I am guilty! Indeed, fables act as a gentle reminder of our duty towards ourselves.

But what makes them truly universal is their ability to appeal to the basic wisdom in all of us through animal characters. I remember when I first read Tolstoy as a child, I loved the stories but neither could I bring myself to pronouncing the names nor could I identify with the situations described in them. Fables tide over these cultural and racial differences. They also manage to convey a mes-

sage in far fewer words, whereas novels and stories have to spend reams of print to build up characters. In *Junglezen Sheru* for instance, a lion cub is the main protagonist. As everyone knows that a lion stands for strength and manliness, one doesn't need to explain his personality. For ages, books like *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables* have driven home morals in a pithy and interesting manner. I always carry the pdf files of *Aesop's Fables* and *Jataka Tales* with me to read at random, for that much-needed reality check!

Indeed, every generation is saddled with new aspirations, limitations, and issues. This calls for the creation of new fables to address these issues and give meaning and purpose to modern living.

The writer's latest book Junglezen Sheru has been published by Pan Macmillan





## **Solely soul**

Every experience is an opportunity to let the soul shine through, says Gary Zukav

We, as a species, have been asking the questions, "Is there a God?", "Is there a Divine Intelligence?", and "Is there a purpose to life?" for as long as we have been able to articulate questions. The time has now come for us to expand into a frame of reference that allows these questions to be answered.

The larger frame of reference of the multisensory human allows an understanding of the experientially meaningful distinction between the personality and the soul. Your personality is that part of you that was born into, lives

within, and will die within time. To be a human and to have a personality are the same thing. Your personality, like your body, is the vehicle of your evolution.

The decisions that you make and the actions you take upon the Earth are the means by which you evolve. At each moment you choose the intentions that will shape your experiences and those things upon which you will focus your attention. These choices affect your evolutionary process. This is so for each person. If you choose

unconsciously, you evolve unconsciously. If you choose consciously, you evolve consciously.

The fearful and violent emotions that have come to characterise human existence can be experienced only by the personality. Only the personality can feel anger, fear, hatred, vengeance, sorrow, shame, regret, indifference, frustration, cynicism, and loneliness. Only the personality can judge, manipulate and exploit. The personality can also be loving, compassionate, and wise in its relations with others, but love, compassion, and wisdom do not come from the personality. They are experiences of the soul.

Your soul is that part of you that is immortal. Every person has a soul, but a personality that is limited in its perception to the five senses is not aware of its soul, and, therefore, cannot recognise the influences of its soul. As a personality becomes multisensory, its intuitions—its hunches and subtle feelings—become important to it. It senses things about itself, other people, and the situations in which it

finds itself that it cannot justify on the basis of the information that its five senses can provide. It comes to recognise intentions, and to respond to them rather than to the actions and the words that it encounters. It can recognise, for example, a warm heart beneath a harsh and angry manner, and a cold heart beneath polished and pleasing words.

When a multisensory personality looks inside itself, it finds a multitude of different currents. Through experience, it learns to distinguish between these currents and to identify the emotional, psychological, and physical effects of each.

It learns, for example, which currents produce anger, divisive thoughts, and destructive actions, and which currents produce love, healing thoughts, and constructive actions. In time, it learns to value and to identify with those currents that generate creativity, healing, and love, and to challenge and release those currents that create negativity, disharmony, and violence. In this way, a personality comes to experience the energy of its soul.

Your soul is not a passive or a theoretical entity that occupies a space in

the vicinity of your chest cavity. It is a positive, purposeful force at the core of your being. It is that part of you that understands the impersonal nature of the energy dynamics in which you are involved, that loves without restriction and accepts without judgment.

If you desire to know your soul, the first step is to recognise that you have a soul. The next step is to allow yourself to consider, "If I have a soul, what is my soul? What does my soul want? What is the relationship between my soul and me? How does my soul affect my life?"

When the energy of the soul is recognised, acknowledged, and valued, it begins to infuse the life of the personality. This is the goal of the evolutionary process in which we are involved and the reason for our being. Every circumstance and situation gives you the opportunity to choose this path, to allow your soul to shine through you, to bring into the physical world through you its unending and unfathomable reverence for and love of Life.

Excerpt from The Seat of the Soul: 25th Anniversary Edition. Zukav (born 17 October, 1942) is an American spiritual teacher and author

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Heading

Advt. No.

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### Fantasia!

The very name Disney conjures magic, fun and the power of imagination. Indeed, Walter Elias Disney has brought joy and laughter to hundreds of millions of people across cultures, time zones, and generations, and changed the language of entertainment. And though he's best known as the creator of Mickey Mouse and Disneyland, his impact goes beyond cartoons and theme parks. With one of the most fertile imaginations ever, Disney rose from his humble origins of being a newspaper delivery boy to becoming an entertainment mogul with a vast empire comprising movies, theme parks and merchandise. And he was saluted for his work in 1964 with the highest American civilian award: the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

A true visionary, Disney elevated animation from crudely drawn cartoons with outlandish gags into an art of narrating heart-warming tales that would connect with our emotions. It's believed that Mickey Mouse, the cornerstone and mascot of Walt Disney Studios, was inspired by an actual pet mouse. When the animated short *Steamboat* Willie, with Disney as the voice of Mickey, was launched in 1928, it became an instant hit. It also created history as the first animated cartoon to feature synchronised sound, launching spin-offs for supporting characters such as Donald Duck, Minnie Mouse, Goofy and Pluto. In yet another first, Disney launched colour animation in 1932 with Flower and Trees. In 1934, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs became the first full-length animated feature, kick-starting the Golden Age of Animation, with Pinocchio, Fantasia, Bambi, Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, Lady and the *Tramp* and *Wind in the Willows*. Disney also experimented with television as an entertainment medium with The Mickey Mouse Club and Zorro.

It was Disney's determination that helped him prosper through setbacks such as the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War. The title track of *The Three Little Pigs, Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?*, mirrored public sentiments during the Great Depression. Disney continued experimenting with animation, Technicolor and sound,



and ventured into live-action films like *The Parent Trap, Treasure Island, The Swiss Family Robinson* and *Mary Poppins*. He also created the first major theme park—Disneyland in California—where children and parents could explore, take rides and meet Disney characters. It was later recreated in Florida, Tokyo, Paris and Hong Kong, giving children around the world a chance to experience Disney magic. During his 43-year Hollywood career that spanned the development of the motion picture industry, Disney won 22 Academy Awards. Though the Disney Studios went into decline after Walt Disney's demise in 1966, it staged a comeback in the 1990s with *The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin* and *The Lion King.* Indeed, such is the legacy of this larger-than-life entertainer that it's difficult to imagine a world without Walt Disney!

#### THIS MONTH, THAT YEAR: SEPTEMBER 1964

- On 2 September, Hungry Generation poets Shakti Chattopadhyay, Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roychoudhury and Debi Roy were arrested in Kolkata on charges of conspiracy against the State and obscenity in literature.
- On 14 September, London-based newspaper *Daily Herald* ceased publication, and was replaced by *The Sun*.
- On 17 September, *Goldfinger*, starring Sean Connery as fictional MI6 agent James Bond, opened in UK cinemas.
- On 24 September, the Warren Commission presented a 889-page final report of its controversial investigation into the assassination of US president John F Kennedy to President Lyndon B Johnson.

#### PARASITE BUILDING

n. A small building or structure that has been added to an existing, larger building, particularly when the styles of the two structures are noticeably different.

**Example.** Small-scale densification: Alternatives such as tiny laneway houses and **parasite buildings** are popping up in lieu of big-box condos.

—Tamsin McMahon, "The (literal) rise of the anti-condo", Maclean's (Canada), 9 July 2014

#### canvas fingerprinting

*n*. A technique for tracking a user online that involves drawing a hidden element on the browser canvas to create a token that uniquely identifies the user's computer.

**Example.** First documented in a forthcoming paper by researchers at Princeton University and KU Leuven University in Belgium, this type of tracking, called **canvas fingerprinting**, works by instructing the visitor's Web browser to draw a hidden image. Because each computer draws the image slightly differently, the images can be used to assign each user's device a number that uniquely identifies it.

—Julia Angwin, "Meet the online tracking device that is virtually impossible to block", ProPublica, 21 July 2014

The love we have in our youth is superficial compared to the love an old man has for his old wife.

-Will Durant (1885-1981), American writer and philosopher

#### app poverty line

*n*. The minimum income level that a programmer requires to make an independent living developing apps.

**Example.** Though the app stores continue to fill up with ever more mobile applications, the reality is that most of these are not sustainable businesses. According to a new report out this morning, half (50 per cent) of iOS developers and even more (64 per cent) Android developers are operating below the **app poverty line** of \$ 500 per app per month.

—Sarah Perez, "The majority of today's app businesses are not sustainable", TechCrunch, 21 July 2014

#### solutionism

*n*. The belief that every problem has a solution, particularly one that utilises technology.

**Example.** As Silicon Valley keeps corrupting our language with its endless glorification of disruption and efficiency—concepts at odds with the vocabulary of democracy—our ability to question the 'how' of politics is weakened. Silicon Valley's default answer to the how of politics is what I call **solutionism**: problems are to be dealt with via apps, sensors, and feedback loops—all provided by start-ups.

—Evgeny Morozov, "The rise of data and the death of politics", The Observer, 20 July 2014

#### FAUXTOSHOF

ν. To fake a photo using Photoshop or similar image manipulation software. **Example.** Garnish with a cucumber wedge. I didn't have one on hand, so I cleverly **Fauxtoshopped** one in. It's seamless, so you probably didn't notice.

—Cupcakes & crowbars, "How to make the summer break survivor (drink)," Snapguide, 19 July 2014

#### **NOSE-TO-TAIL**

adj. Relating to a movement or philosophy that believes in consuming all edible parts of an animal.

**Example.** The **nose-to-tail** philosophy, which has been so heartily adopted over the past few years, has not been a conscious effort of education; it is for me a by-product of this search for pleasure.

—Fergus Henderson, "Feet, glands, shanks, tripe. That's what I like to eat", The Observer, 27 April 2014

## Some people are old at 18 and some are young at 90. Time is a concept that humans created.

—Yoko Ono, 81, Japanese multimedia artist and peace activist, wife of John Lennon



## In Tagore's FOOTSTEPS

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or not, old or young. Started
in 2010 by television actor
Kamalika Guha Thakurta, Srijon is
officially affiliated to Dakshinee,
the renowned music academy
based in Kolkata. Thakurta has
been trained in Rabindra Sangeet
and Rabindra-nrityo from the

academy and her aim is to promote this form of music beyond West Bengal, spreading Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy and Bengali culture across the city. The classes, following Dakshinee's curriculum, are held every weekend in the evenings in Andheri, Powai, Kandivali and Thane, and in the mornings in Nerul. If you're so inclined, you can also sit for diploma exams. Call Kamalika Guha on (0) 9820 285996 or email guhathakurta.kamalika@amail.com for more information.

#### POOR DOOR

*n*. A separate entrance for the lower-income residents of a mixed-income building.

**Example.** A *Guardian* investigation has discovered a growing trend in the capital's upmarket apartment blocks—which are required to include affordable homes in order to win planning permission—for the poorer residents to be forced to use alternative access, a phenomenon being dubbed **poor doors.** Even bicycle storage spaces, rubbish disposal facilities and postal deliveries are being separated.

—Hilary Osborne, "Poor doors: the segregation of London's inner-city flat dwellers", The Guardian, 25 July 2014

#### normcore

n. A fashion trend that features bland, mainstream styles and colours. **Example.** Any old trainers, a grey t-shirt, zip-up fleece. Just stuff. Shirts, chinos, jumpers—even if they come from Gap. Nondescript, loosish (but not baggy) blue jeans, deck shoes. If you wear any of these, then chances are you're **normcore**, and that, peculiarly enough, makes you both a fashion icon de nos jours and probably not remotely interested in fashion. Normcore has been called the Internet meme of 2014.

—Catherine Ostler, "Normcore, where being off-message is on-trend", Newsweek, 11 April 2014

#### "Knowledge is inconsequential unless it's shared"

Col KS Caveeshar, 81, Noida, teaches children in need



**▼**our young girls are practising dance steps for an upcoming cultural event in the verandah of Col K S Caveeshar's home in Sector 37, Noida, even as in an adjacent room, converted into a classroom with 12 benches, around 25 students of various ages are busy writing essays, solving sums, and doing homework. This Noida house transforms into a buzzing home school from 3 pm to 8 pm every evening. "I realised that though they were school-going, these children were not able to grasp what was being taught," says the 81 year-old retired colonel, who is not your run-of-the-mill teacher; armed with lesson plans and answer sheets, he can give new-age educators a run for their money. The focus, however, is not on education alone, but the overall development of the kids, towards which the colonel provides material and financial support. Having served in the Army and RAW before retiring in 1984 and heading to the US, where he was associated with the education department of Los Angeles Unified School District, he has been teaching English and math for almost 20 years. His engagement with home schooling, however, started in 2005, when on his return

to India the neighbourhood presswallah requested him to teach his six year-old daughter English. The little girl kept getting along her friends until there was no space in the living room. So the colonel rented a garage in the neighbourhood for a few months till he could make the necessary arrangements at home, complete with a whiteboard, maps, books, stationary and even storybooks. Help was at hand with wife Gifty and neighbour Abha Singhal contributing their mite. Today, Caveeshar also helps kids gain admission to good schools in Noida, sometimes even funding their education. "I do not like to seek help, though friends who have seen what we are doing have voluntarily offered financial aid," he says. "Recently, even the Lions Club stepped forward." Meanwhile, Gifty has roped in Icare Hospital in Noida for an annual free eye checkup. Occasionally, the kids are also treated to outings to amusement parks, and confectionery from a neighbourhood bakery. Glad to be of service to his motherland once again, the colonel says, "The love we get from these kids keeps Gifty and me going."

-Ambica Gulati

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