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# NEWSLETTER

This is a monthly diary giving updates on activities at Graceful Living and providing information on ageing 'gracefully' to help elders live a life with maximum ease



GRACEFUL LIVING

LOVE LIFE LIBERTY

## POTATOES & PILLS: FEEDING THE BODY WHEN FEELING FRAIL

*Abhijit Banerjee, a Nobel prize-winning economist, writes about the changing scenario for the elderly today. Excerpts from his article which appeared in the Times Special/On Sunday dated August 4, 2024*



I met my grandfather when I was 4 and he was 64. I remember thinking he was the oldest person I had ever met. I am now almost the same age as he was then. My grandfather was bipolar: he would be joyous and energetic and then his mood would turn. When I first met him, he was on the downswing, his shoulders slumped, his smile dropping off before it reached his eyes.

His career as headmaster of one of Kolkata's most prestigious schools — a government school as it happened — was over when I met him. Was it that? It scares me, now that a lot of my contemporaries are retiring (happily it seems).

I have a full plan to resist retirement, but in the long run, it is not just the will to keep going. Our bodies take decisions for us. I can still vividly see the day when my father could no longer manage the (complicated) manoeuvre of getting the *machh-bhat* from the *thali* to his mouth that we do unthinkingly every day. My mother had to take over feeding him, he, who so loved being in control. Or that day when I had dinner with the once-famous raconteur,



then in the cruel clutches of Alzheimer's, who kept repeating the same story every five minutes, still perfectly narrated with all its dramatic pauses, but frightening exactly for that reason...

The gradual loss of control over our bodies is, of course, as old as humanity itself (though it used to happen at a much earlier age).

Perhaps as a recompense, most societies accorded a special place of influence for 'elders'. They were the wise, the respected, the powerful. Increased influence within the family (and sometimes within the entire community) seemingly in compensation for their private frailty. The biggest beneficiaries were, unsurprisingly, older men of wealth or high social status. But in a lot of the households that I grew up with, the mother-in-law also wielded enormous power, at least as long as her husband was alive...

In the 1960s and '70s, which is when my memories of mother-in-law power date from, most people I knew, mostly Bengali and middle-class, lived in joint families. Housing was scarce, decent jobs were few and far between, so it made sense for all the brothers and unmarried/widowed sisters to crowd into the old family house with their wives and children, sharing whatever little income there was. But living together meant conflicts and choices. Someone had to make decisions — this was often the source of power for the more senior members.



Towards the end of the '70s, the joint family started to splinter. More and more flats got built, making it easier for the better off to move out of the family residence. This was helped by an improving job situation, at least for the well-educated. Sometimes the parents moved with one child and the family house was sold, sometimes they remained with the rump family. Either way, their role in managing the many fissiparous forces was diminished, and often even the house they stayed in was no longer theirs. The senior couple was losing its central role in the family.

This was accentuated by demographic change. Families were having fewer and fewer children. That meant that joint families were less joint, especially since it also became more common for middle-class children to move for employment. An increasing fraction of families had one or more children working in Bangalore, Bahrain, or Boston. Many parents suddenly found themselves living mostly alone, as my mother did for so many years.



Machher jhol

The same transition was also happening among less well-off families, if at a somewhat slower pace. The number of children was dropping everywhere — the average fertility rate dropped from above 4 in the 1970s to about 2 in recent years nationwide. Rural-urban migration, though still low in comparison to other developing countries, was speeding up. As a result, the all-India proportion of elderly not living with children doubled between 2000 and 2010 and has surely gone up a lot since...



Today's elderly, who endured the heavy hand of their parents and big brothers when they were young, are now less important in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

Despite our narrative about family-oriented India being entirely unlike the individualistic United States, the fraction of elderly who, in surveys, say that they are lonely, is similar in both countries, about 15%. And in Tamil Nadu, which had an earlier and sharper fertility decline rate than North India, and is more urbanised, loneliness is much higher, closer to 30%.

Those who say they are lonely are much more likely to be clinically depressed based on their responses to the standard set of diagnostic questions — depression rates among the elderly go from less than 20% among those who say they are not lonely to more than 80% among those who say that they are. Cause and effect are less clear — loneliness, especially if you were brought to expect a full family life in your old age, surely depresses people. But depressed people are also difficult to care for, especially if their health is also failing, and even their nearest and dearest may find it difficult to spend time with them.

As the rest of India undergoes the same social transformation as Tamil Nadu, we will need policies to address the fast-rising tide of depression. While richer people are less depressed in general, a cash transfer to the elderly poor in Tamil Nadu had no durable

effect on depression levels based on our randomised controlled trial, though maybe the amount of cash was too small. Nor were there any detectable benefits from therapy. Perhaps they need more ongoing engagements with people like them. It may be worth experimenting with regular events when they have tea with other lonely people of similar age. Maybe even a pot-luck meal, where they each contribute something? And while men may not know how to cook: anyone can learn. Why not simple potato dishes for a start?



Note: Most of the article is intact with few deletions for want of space.

Courtesy: Sunday Times of India

## NANA NANI PARK – MY INSPIRATION

*Khushi ki Pathshala was founded in 2022 by Ashwini Shah. This group has the elderly as its members who come together for various activities*

It all started when I would take my father Sevantilal Shah who is 87, to the Nana-Nani park at Girgaon/Chowpatty park, where old people would walk/stroll around. The elderly would go there and spend time together. His (my father's) influence and wisdom impacted my need to serve the elderly. I soon realised that it was important to do so and created activities for them so that it wasn't just a get-together, it would become an 'action and fun gathering' place for them. Initially, there were 1200 seniors but now



it has touched a figure of 3000 (the numbers are fast growing) of the elderly people becoming part of its programs. There is no physical office but the elderly are on Whatsapp and since then I have been conducting programs to serve senior citizens.

The activities are on a roll with much success. These include medical camps, games, dance and music *masti*, yoga, talent shows, sports and much more. I want seniors to live a life of ease and fun. I want to cater to their diverse needs. Events include get-togethers for lunches, picnics and movies. All to keep them on the go. Most of the programs are held at the Nana-Nani Park, Chowpatty, at Machikan Ground, Anant Bhavan, Babulnath Mandir and at Gita Mandir, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

As told by Ashwini Shah

For free enrollment you can contact Ashwini on : 9324557717

## GRACEFUL LIVING - RECENT ACTIVITIES

### Online Legal Advice Session for Senior Citizens

On 10th August 2024, Graceful Living organized an online session with Adv. Paromita Basu, focusing on the importance of knowing basic legal rights of senior citizens. Twenty participants engaged actively, asking questions about making a Will and other essential rights, which were explained clearly by Adv. Basu to support their well-being in old age.

### 'Cure Your Knee Pain' Session for Women

On 13th August 2024, in celebration of the Mangalagauri festival, Graceful Living, in collaboration with their physiotherapy partner, PRAJ, conducted a 'Cure Your Knee Pain' session for the women of Parel Bhagini Mandal. The session highlighted the importance of staying physically active in all stages of life, with 40 women participating and finding the session very apt.



## GUEST LECTURE

Mr. Javed Sheikh, CEO, Dignity Foundation and a leading expert in the field of Dementia research and care, was GL's guest speaker on 18 August, 2024. As one committed to the cause of Dementia, he has made significant contribution to understanding this condition and explained it all in simple terms. In this Zoom talk attended by nearly 60 people, he spoke about the prevalence of Dementia in India and care-giving challenges. His practical advice for care-givers and strategic ways to build a more informed and supportive community was well communicated to the audience. This was followed by a Q/A session.

“ Feel what you need to feel  
Then let it go.  
Do not let it consume you







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## THOUGHTS OF PEOPLE PAST 70... GOING TOWARDS 80

*I asked a friend who has crossed 70 & is heading towards 80 about the sort of changes he is feeling within himself...*

He sent me the following:

1. After loving my parents, siblings, my children and my friends, I have now started loving myself.
2. I have realized that I am not an ATLAS. The world does not rest on my shoulders.
3. I have stopped bargaining with vegetable and fruit vendors. A few pennies more is not going to break me, but it might help the poor fellow save for his daughter's school fees.
4. I leave my waitress a big tip. The extra money might bring a smile to her face. She is toiling much harder for a living than I am.
5. I stopped telling the elderly that they've already narrated that story many times. The story makes them walk down memory lane and relive their past.
6. I have learned not to correct people even when I know they are wrong. The onus of making everyone perfect is not on me. Peace is more precious than perfection.
7. I give compliments freely and generously. Compliments are mood enhancers not only for the recipient, but also for me. And a small tip for the recipient of the compliment... never, NEVER, turn it down. Just say 'thank you'.
8. I have learned not to bother about a crease or a spot on my shirt. Personality speaks louder than appearances.
9. I walk away from people who don't value me. They might not know my worth, but I do.
10. I remain cool when someone plays dirty to outrun me in the rat race. I am not a rat and neither am I in any race.
11. I am learning not to be embarrassed by my emotions. It's my emotions that make me human.
12. I have learned that it's better to drop the ego than break the relationship. My ego will keep me aloof, whereas with relationships, I will never be alone.
13. I have learned to live each day as if it's the last. After all, it might be the last.
14. I am doing what makes me happy. I am responsible for my happiness, and I owe it to myself. Happiness is a choice. You can be happy at any time, just choose to be.

Why do we have to be 60 or 70 or 80; we can practise this at any stage in life!

*Courtesy: Whatsapp Video doing the rounds*



## AGEING WITH ELEGANCE

*We do go through physical and psychological changes as we age. Our movements are slower, but at the end of the day, we are masters of our destinies*

Let's have a strategic plan and face facts...

1. We do slow down
2. No one person can shape the life of another. Your success and happiness depends on your 'own' self. Think for yourself and have a plan for yourself.
3. As we age we start feeling lonely, but we have to overcome this feeling by improving our physical and mental health. Exercise regularly (physically), plus keep your mind occupied by doing mental exercises.
4. Develop/create hobbies such as listening to music, reading, travelling in groups, meeting friends, calling old buddies regularly.
5. To take care of your health, take your medications and make it a point to get regular check-ups done.
6. Surround yourself with people who believe in you, support you, motivate you and appreciate you.
7. Understand yourself and continue to have a goal in life. Life is full of give and take. Show gratitude and take nothing for granted.
8. Don't look for someone who will solve all your problems; you and you alone are master of your situation.
9. Difficulties in life don't come to destroy you but to help you realise your potential.
10. Happy are those who take life one day at a time, complain very little and are thankful for the little things in life.
11. The secret of joy - maintaining good friendships.

- *Dr. Rajiv Shukla*



## AGEING WITH DIGNITY AND GRACE

**Tulsi Trust** was established by the Chanrai family in 1975 with an aim to fulfil basic needs of the poor and needy. At a deeper level, it's more than indulging in physical activities. Health care, skills development and education are top priorities. It envisages a fair world for all, working with partners to improve health care and opportunities for livelihood, & education. Add to this, the capacity to understand another's needs and do this with utmost integrity.

**Graceful Living (GL)** is an arm of Tulsi Trust which came out of a realization of a social need for elderly care. After three active years, GL is now a recognized organization for those in their twilight years and has created an awareness through its activities and talks for senior citizens. GL has a social presence viz. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

## ACTIVITIES OF GRACEFUL LIVING

### In Partnership...

- Intellectual companionship and special care programs – includes companionship, counselling and care-giving for Dementia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's when required. These services are provided through our partners:

**Echoing Healthy Agein**

- Physiotherapy sessions which help the elderly to improve their mobility and become more independent:

**PRAJ-The Rehab Sphere** with Dr Pratha Mehta & Dr Rajshri Lad

- Training candidates in 'elder care' in order to have professionals for the same:

**MMP Shah College** – elder companionship course for Sociology students

- Activities for the elderly :

**Mrs Manasi Golwalkar:** technology training

- Sensitization programs for school/college students to create an awareness of the needs and issues of the elderly.

### Direct Intervention by GL...

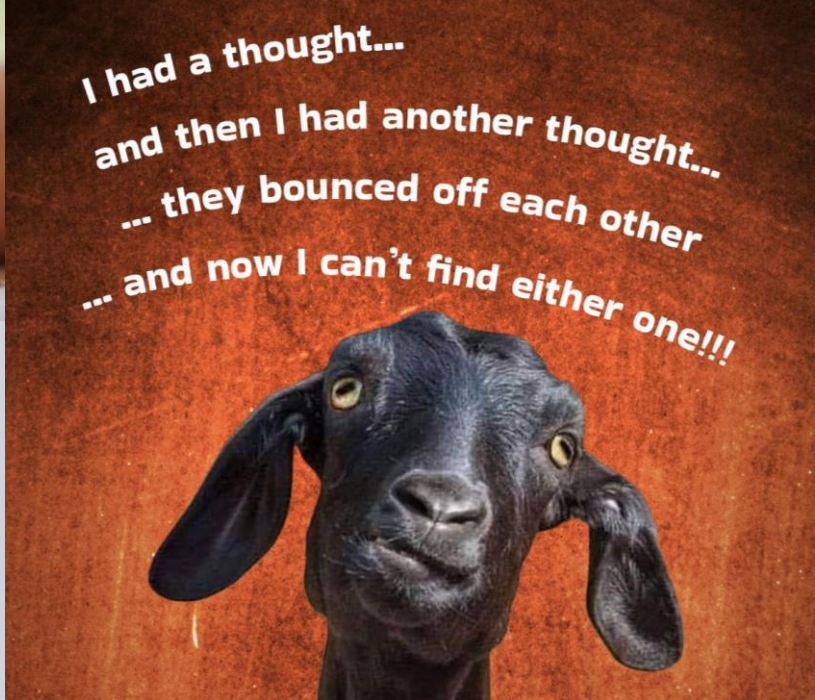
- Webinars – alternate month
- Guest Lectures by professionals/experts – mainly on Zoom
- Graceful Living Monthly Newsletter carrying important information for the elderly plus articles by known doctors and other professionals
- Co-ordination by GL to create platforms for senior citizen organizations in the city.



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## VIEWPOINT

Hey! It's September! Veering towards the end of the year already!

Let's first talk of the hot weather that awaits us. September/October and we are going to once again pine for the rains. We haven't had enough of the rains really. Though it has rained torrentially, yet the rainy season is good/comfortable.

Coming to our Newsletter, we have a very readable article on page 1 for seniors. Abhijit Banerjee, a Nobel prize-winning economist, writes about the changing scenario for the elderly today. The article first appeared in The Sunday Times and we have used most of it for our readers. Earlier, most societies accorded a special place of influence for 'elders'. They were the wise, the respected, the powerful. Today, the scenario has changed. Today's elderly, who endured the heavy hand of their parents and big brothers when they were young, are now less important in the lives of their children and grandchildren. And this is happening world over. Loneliness has crept in and we have to deal with the depression that ensues.

Khushi ki Pathshala which was founded in 2022 by Ashwini Shah, meets for various activities. This group has the elderly as its members who are entertained by getting involved in different activities. Graceful Living invited CEO, Dignity Foundation, Mr. Javed Sheikh who spoke on Zoom about the frailty and the prevalence of Dementia in India and the care-giving challenges to deal with Dementia. It was a well attended gathering, nearly 60 seniors in attendance with Mr. Javed clarifying the requisite queries asked. Page 3 carries a very thought-provoking message doing the rounds on Whatsapp, 'Thoughts of People past 70'. We also have tips on 'Ageing with Elegance' by Dr. Rajiv Shukla. That's GL's round-up for the month.

*My thoughts: My recent interest in understanding our ancient scriptures led me to hunting for a class which conducted the Bhagwad Gita classes on a regular basis. My search came to an end when I found out that this is happening at the Iskon temple in Girgaon, on a regular basis. I am happy with the knowledge I am gathering.*

**Asha Gurnani Vohra**  
Editor

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It would be appreciated if you could encourage the activities of GL including the Newsletter published every month by sending an annual donation of Rs 250/- through a bank transfer to: Tulsi Trust, A/c no SB416116287. IFSC Code: IDIB000N052, Indian Bank, Mittal Towers, Nariman Point OR send a cheque in the name of Tulsi Trust to 112-A Mittal Towers, Nariman Point. Or Scan the QR Code and donate through BHIM / UPI / PhonePe / GPay / IndSmart / PayTM / FreeCharge

