



Shatayu

Nearly a century of wisdom and wellbeing

 **HelpAge India**



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Most elderly people are like a moving library. Whenever such a person passes away, a library is burned or buried that day. But can we not learn from immense knowledge or memoryscape of elderly people and that too those who have lived nearly or over hundred years. In this book, we share snippets from the lives of centenarian grandmothers we had the privilege of meeting during shodhyatras-walk through villages every winter and summer, workshops in villages, scouting of innovation and traditional knowledge examples by students during their summer vacation. Sometimes students specially intern with SRISTI to learn from the lives of centenarians.

There are sweet and bitter experiences which these mothers have lived through quietly stoically.

One thing which has come out quite eloquently through these profiles is that most of these centenarians are not bitter about memories of a past full of struggle. None of them was blaming anyone for some of their pains. In fact, many lived alone by choice though their children had requested them to stay with them. This is one quality that

seems most distinctive among centenarians. They seemed headstrong and obstinate, shall we call, self-confident, assertive and fortitudinous.

We request readers to share their experiences with similar soulful lives well-lived. If through their inspiration, we can live longer and contribute something useful to society, then the book would have served its purpose. We also hope that grandmothers' tales would be preserved, their life histories are recorded and shared with future generations. Many of their practices for survival under stress are likely to help us to cope better with climate change impacts.

Let no library remain un-accessed, let the knowledge, values and institutional ethics of centenarians guide our lives. May the evening of their lives be more blissful, joyful and meaningful.

Preface



Prof. Anil K Gupta
Founder, SRISTI



Compiled by
SRISTI

Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies
and Institutions, 2015

SHATAYU...nearly a century of wisdom and wellbeing



Published by
SRISTI Innovations

P.B. No. : 15050 Ahmedabad - 380 015 Phone : 91-79-27913293, 27912792 Fax
: 91-79-26307341

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ISBN NUMBER : 81-87160-20-45

Compiling this book based on short glimpses into the lives of centenarians, mostly grandmothers became possible through voluntary contribution of many staff, students, interns and other members of the Honey Bee Network. Many of these stories came our way during shodhyatras.

We wish to thank all the friends, too many to be mentioned individually who have helped us in learning from the rich life experiences of centenarians. They have, of course, also gained from the blessing of these grandmothers.

I must particularly thank Chetan, Parshottam, Ramesh, Swati, Anamika, Vishesh, Kirtan Fadia and numerous other staff and students. Help of Unnikrishnan, Baskaran, Vipin khare, Alka, Pooja, Siddharth, Tejal, Sumitra, Bhoomi, Devsi, Hiranmay, Nirmal Sahay, Keyur and Sanket is also gratefully acknowledged.

I also thank all the collaborators of the Honey Bee Network who helped us in

organising Shodhyatras and discovering the healthy centenarian mostly grandmothers. Irony is that many of these women ate last, least, worked hard and lived longest.

We welcome submission of experiences of centenarian, which may be sent to info@sristi.org.

Mathew Cherian and his colleagues in Helpage foundation, Am-ita Joseph of BCF and numerous other colleagues deserve our deepest thanks for making this compilation possible.

A note of thanks



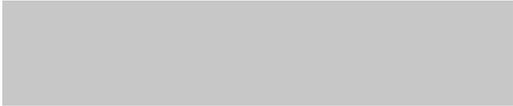
Mr. Ramesh Patel
Secretary, SRISTI



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Blessings of hundred years : learning from the centenarians

A life well lived...

We have a tradition of blessing people by saying “100 saal jiyo” (May you live for 100 years). Yet when they have lived for 100 years or nearly so, we are not willing to learn from them. But then learning from the lives lived meaningfully and long is not easy. Some have lost the ability to listen and talk but some have their faculties still very vibrant. In many parts of the world, average life expectancy is increasing. With the years, the wish to stay forever young seems to be replaced by the wish to grow old gracefully. How does a person live to be 100 years old? What is the secret behind a good and long life? Do we find satisfaction, equanimity or even happiness in a long life? What has been the strife that many of the centenarians have lived through due to famine, plague and other calamities at the turn of the last century? Can we find wisdom in foolishness when age approaches a century? And what can we learn from them about climate change, living frugally and coping with hardships and difficulties. SRISTI’s study of centenarians is a collection of profiles of people who have lived around 100 years and/or longer. We have asked them many questions and will ask many more. May they live long and teach us lessons about a

Centenarian







sustainable lifestyle.

Ranging from lifestyle tips to food habits and recipes to simple thoughts which help them to keep their heart and mind healthy, they have a lot to share with the society. They have seen the transitions of community, climate and culture over time. There are like living libraries with an access limited by time. SRISTI endeavours to document these experiences and draw lessons from them for the future generations who would not otherwise have access to this knowledge. They are repositories of health remedies for everyone, especially women and children. Their knowledge would help us learn patience, self-regulation, assertiveness and perhaps above all, an ability to deal with ambiguity, uncertainty and equanimity. The landscapes of love have engulfed the lives of these centenarians. May you too love the walk through such landscapes.

One of the most interesting finding of this ongoing study of the centenarian, mostly women is that generally the grandmothers who have lived long, have been very assertive, fortitudinous and independent minded. May be, if young people who want to live long, apart from following a healthy lifestyle, may also consider that blending one's autonomy and agency adds to the years. Autonomy is ability to take independent decisions. Agency is the ability to take decisions. When we do both, we take responsibility for our actions, we don't blame others for our inadequacies, more the flow of positive energy makes years lighter to carry.





Independent, even at 90

Laxmiben Shivrambhai Panchal
90 years

Even at the age of 90 years, Laxmiben can independently do all her chores. She underwent cataract surgery three years ago and can see quite clearly.

“I do not like to mingle with evil-minded people and like the company of only the good-natured,” says Laxmiben, whose leg has been hurt as of now but she is quite fit otherwise.

Childhood

Born in Udaipur, Laxmiben spent her childhood in Kherva village of Mehsana district after her parents shifted here when she was six-months-old. The family was visiting her maternal grandparents' house when Laxmiben's father passed away. Later, her mother remarried and she was raised by her maternal uncle.

Laxmiben studied till Class II and then worked on the farm, rearing cattle. She would perform tasks like sharpening the tool for cutting grass (dantarda). As a child, she would play Goroma, Gilli-dan-

da and santa kukdi (hide and seek) with her friends in her village.

Life after marriage

Laxmiben was married to Shivrambhai at the age of 17 years. They became parents to two daughters and one son. Laxmiben did not have to work in the field after her marriage.

Laxmiben recalls that during the drought, apart from major scarcity of food, people suffered tumors in the throat. Her maternal aunt lost her daughter due to a disease during the drought period. Laxmiben too, endured a lot of hardship during the drought, and ate from the farm.

Customs and rituals

Among the marriage customs, it was a custom to tie ambli (tamarind) on the teeth. Leaves of Pothi (valvet leaf) were used for colouring hands to get the same colour as henna.

Laxmiben followed customs like covering

her head with a dupatta after marriage. “In the olden days, we were not allowed to mingle or talk with elders. Nobody follows those customs anymore. I also believed and followed rules of untouchability. People of backward classes were not allowed to enter the house at all, back then,” she shares.

Home remedies

For home remedies, Laxmiben remembers use of tulsi (holy basil), kasundro and phudedo (type of grass) to cure many ailments. “Every household used home remedies in those days. Ardusi (vasaka) and tulsi were used the most for their

For treatment of boil, leaves of neem tree were tied at the infected place with bandage. For treatment of fever, galo (tinospora) was ground to a paste and given to the person, says Laxmiben, who is an expert when it comes to an infection on the hand. She applies hathlo to cure the infection.

For storing grains, leaves of neem tree were used. Women used to powder match sticks and sprinkle over the grains so that they did not get spoilt.

Food and diet...When it comes to food, Laxmiben says that traditional recipes that are not so popular now are muthias

...urine of frog was also used for Instant relief from the ailment.

healing properties,” she said.

Traditional remedies for animals, too, were widely practiced. “When a buffalo came in heat, ramchi (red soil) was applied to cool it down. For increasing the yield of milk, the cattle was fed suva (dill seeds), gol (jaggery) and methi (fenugreek),” Laxmiben said.

To heal a person’s wound, guvar (cluster beans) leaves was applied on the wound. For treatment of a boil on a person’s body, hathlo was applied. For bobli (tumour in armpit), boiled ambli (tamarind) was given to the person.

“For bobli, the urine of frog was also used for instant relief from the ailment.

made of poi and phang (rivea). Even bha-jiyas (deep fried fritters) were made from poi and phang.

Other details...

Laxmiben says that in the olden times, roosters would crow sharp at 4.30 am. She also finds peacocks to have reduced in numbers these days.

“Among my unfulfilled wishes is the hope to see the marriage of my grandson,” sighs Laxmiben.

[Scout: Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati
Gozariya village, Mehsana taluka, Mehsana]





She knows, times have changed

Rajiben Mangjibhai Chaudhary
106 years

Rajiben knows that times have changed and people live lives completely different from how she lived back when she was young. There are things she finds amusing, annoying and even surprising about the young people today, but that does not make her think any less of the current generation.

“Those were really different times. Things have changed so much. The way people eat, talk to elders, dress and live is very different from how we used to live,” the 106-year-old says, as a matter-of-fact.

Childhood

Rajiben was born in Bapupura village of Mansa taluka in Gandhinagar district to Jeetiben and Dalsangbhai. She has a sister and three brothers. Rajiben never went to school and had been engaged in farm related chores like taking care of the cattle, collecting fodder since she was a child.

Rajiben is not very fond of travelling but

dearly misses and loves to visit her father’s native.

Life after marriage

Rajiben was married at the age of 10 years to Mangjibhai of Fatehpura village. Rajiben has 5 daughters and 3 sons. She informs that in those days there were no dairies and they would churn and prepare their own buttermilk and ghee from butter. She says their dairy was established after their children got married.

Traditional practices

Rajiben says she has used home remedies and traditional medicines throughout her life. For any ailment, she prepared tea or extracts obtained after boiling herbs. Women earlier used arduasi (vasaka), tulsi (holy basil), arni (wind killer) and goli (ivy gourd/coccina indica) leaves. She informs that if a child fell ill (galu padyu), ash was applied on his/her entire body for treatment.

“When anyone was hurt by a datarda (grass cutting tool), the bruise or wound would be bandaged after applying arni leaves. Goli was applied on any person’s infected toe. When buffaloes would fail to come in heat, they would be fed sava and gol (dill seeds and jaggery).” says Rajiben, willingly sharing tips with us. She laments that in olden days buffaloes never fell sick as people took good care and healthy unadulterated fodder was available. According to her, these days buffaloes fall sick due to toxic wastes.

Rajiben informs that for preserving food grains in olden days, the method used was to sieve grains with ash or by storing them

says Rajiben.

During the days of drought, there was no rainfall and there were no underground borewells, so people dug up wells for water.

Customs and rituals

According to Rajiben, the customs of untouchability were followed strictly. “If we had to go out with people of a lower caste, we had to purify ourselves by sprinkling water on ourselves before entering the house. People of upper caste never mingled with the lower caste, a rule which is not followed these days,” she says. In those days, parents fixed the match for

**“Things have
changed so much.
The way people
eat, talk to elders,
dress and live is very
different...”**

with a mixture of neem leaves.

Life’s struggles

Rajiben informs that they faced financial constraints in earlier days. She has done farming, labour work and cattle-rearing her whole life. There were no machines to grind the food grains to make flour, she adds.

“The household income was limited in earlier days so we sold pulses to earn extra income. We sold bajra (pearl millet) at Rs 12 a quintal. The days of struggle were such that we did not have enough money to pay fees for the children’s education and fees would be delayed every month,”

their children and got them married at an early age. “The husband and wife could see each other only after marriage, a custom which is not followed any more. These days, children approve the prospective bridegroom and only then the marriage is arranged,” a slightly miffed Rajiben says. She says that she never sat with or talked directly with the elders, be it at her father’s house or after marriage.

“Women always covered their face with a dupatta in presence of elders, a custom that I have followed all my life,” says Rajiben, who is popular in the village and is part of a bhajan mandali.



Food and diet

Be it then or now, Rajiben's diet has always been simple curry and rotlas (chapatti). She consumes ample amount of ghee and milk. She informs that in earlier days they consumed a lot of buttermilk and more of milk products.

In those days, tandalja (Amaranth leaves) and phang (Rivea) bhajiya (deep fried fritters) as well as muthiyas (kind of steamed rolls) were popular snack items.

Other details

Among the things she misses, are watching birds like peacock and sparrow, which are rarely seen these days.

"I miss my friends, with whom I used to discuss life's ups and downs as well as matters related to farming and cattle-rearing," she adds.

Among Rajiben's unfulfilled wishes is to witness the marriage of her grandchildren. Rajiben is completely independent and carries out all her domestic chores without much difficulty. She can move around with ease, hear and see clearly, after a cataract operation.

[Scout: Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati
Gozariya village, Mehsana taluka,
Mehsana district]

**... from how we
used to live?."**



Epitome of longevity and liveliness

Samuben Badarji Thakur, 105 years

“Paushtik Aahar thi Dirghayu Thavay chhe, Nahi ke Dawaon thi” (Nutritious diet leads to long life, not medicines) “How life respects you when you respect your living” is what anyone would crave to understand when they meet Samuben. This remarkable old lady with high ethical principles has seen 105 years of her life. She has seen the shifts in agriculture, climate, food and culture for more than 100 years now.

Samuben Thakur is a native of Sangarhpur, a small village in the district of Mehsana (Gujarat). Born and raised in the village Nugar, which for long had been linked to the outside world only by a rutted dirt track, she got married at a very early age. Samuben is fortunate to see 10 children, 33 grandchildren, 46 great-grandchildren, and six great-great-grandchildren and is also the child of extraordinarily long-lived parents.

Prima facie, her robust health appeared

difficult for us to reconcile with her longevity. She wakes up at 6 am to milk her buffalo even now. She tidies her surroundings and feeds cattle. And she is off to bed at 9 pm, sharp! Her eyes have turned dim, and her hearing is slightly affected otherwise she is healthy; eats, drinks and sleeps well, repeats her inculcations to her grandchildren and bears only little signs of great age. She loves to eat apples.

Diet may be the most telling factor in Samuben’s long life. On being questioned upon the underpinnings of her longevity, she predicates, “I am not a woman of moderate appetites.” Each day she consumes, by her own admission; cookies, tea, rotlo (pancake) of millets complemented with a glass of buttermilk, millet flatbread with curry for lunch and ends the day with khichdi, ghee and milk for dinner.

Reviving her early days, she tells us that

she faced very grueling test of time in her childhood. They lived in primitive dirt-floored huts. Her father practiced farming and didn't earn sufficiently, leading the family to face the financial crisis. Being eldest among the five children, she not only raised her siblings and performed household chores but also helped her father financially by carrying heavy basket of fruits to sell door to door. "Often there was little food to eat, but we were happy and content," she sighs deeply.

She has always been known for her benevolent nature and humanitarian causes among the villagers. She recalls an incident during the Gujarat riots when

sleeps under an almond tree in the fields, feeds the birds before even taking her meals and dotes on her buffaloes. She has an organic lifestyle enriched with peace, generosity and compassion. Her determination to serve the poor and needy have fetched her numerous well-wishers over the years. The suffering she saw outside the walls of her home made such a deep impression on her that she devoted herself to working for the needy in the nearby area.

Chelaji, her eldest son shares how genuinely she gave food and money to poor who came to her door. Her good work has, thus, been recognized and

“Nutritious diet, not medicines, leads to long life.”

a Muslim was coming to meet Samuben and a few Hindus surrounded him. Before they could have attacked him, he howled, "I am a close acquaintance of Samuben, I am just going to meet her, please leave me." It was all because of the stature of Samuben that the Hindu mob left him alone.

In the course of knowing Samuben, we noticed the way she veiled her forehead complying with the Indian customs, while she was being photographed. At a time, when traditions and customs are perceived as compulsion, this woman on the last leg of her life still adheres to them. She is affectionate towards nature. She

acclaimed throughout the society.

There is a great rejoicing in her humble voice, when she delightedly told us about her religious devotion, "I have been to many pilgrimages namely Dwarka, Chotila, Ambaji, Abu, Satadhar, Sayla, Girnar, Dakor..." and she keeps on recollecting for more. Her passion towards Garba (a form of dance in Gujarat), rhymes and several other recreational and social activities of the village reflected her great cultural and traditional endeavor. In the middle of the conversation she offered us tea.

Her liveliness is quite conspicuous by the way she responds to our queries. When we ask if she is tired of life, she replies,

“Not likely”. “I don’t want to leave yet. I want to go after seeing my youngest great grandson’s marriage and when the end comes, I would like to get cremated at Shirpur for beatification.”

Despite the struggles and the arduous phases, she did not let the load of responsibilities shatter her. She might have not got the opportunity to study but she was aware enough to make her sons educated. When asked about the teachings she has given to her children she replied, “No backbiting; no thieving, at least not of the salt.”

Emphasizing upon the nourishment of youngsters, she quotes, “Nutritious diet, not medicines, leads to long life.” She cites her regular physical activity, healthy diet and stress-free nature as the keys to longevity.

[Scout: Shelly Singh and Vishesh Sharma.
Special thanks to Chelaji Badarji Thakur and
Shaileshbhai Badarji Thakur]

**“Not likely. I don’t
want to leave yet.”**





100 years of struggle...

Jeevatben Revaji Chauhan, 100 years

Jeevatben Revaji Chauhan, born in Dhanpura, has reached the milestone of 100 years of age. Despite her slow and fragile appearance, she is still young at heart. “She is not able to walk without support and hunches too”, says her granddaughter, adding that she can’t do her regular work on her own and suffers old age complaints.

Constantly roaming the lush greenery of hills, valleys and into the forest, Jeevatben grew up in Amirgarh, with a deep love of nature and her wonder at its beauty has never waned.

She has had a very active childhood. “I played and danced a lot when I was a child,” she says, recalling her childhood days. Farming was the way her father earned a living. She would work for long hours and her work was as arduous as that of men. “I would cut grass, put it in the bullock cart and drive all the way through muddy roads to home,” says

Jeevatben in her soft trembling voice. “She even drove the tractor at times and would perform the task of two or three people alone”, adds her nephew.

Jeevatben was fourth among nine children and married at the tender age of 15 years. Over the years, she became the proud mother of a daughter and a son. Within a span of almost 10 years, she was bereaved after her family’s demise. Grief stricken Jeevatben, shortly thereafter, returned to the family home where she continued living with her brother and busied herself with household chores.

When it comes to sharing the reasons for her long and healthy life, she emphasizes, “We should eat a healthy diet, slash adulterated food and consume high amounts of fruits and green vegetables”, she adds, “In order to avoid contamination, we never bought millet or wheat flour from outside but would make it ourselves by Chakki (traditional stone

grinder).” Nowadays, weak digestion has confined her to light meals of Khichdi, rice and banti.

Jeevatben has quite a few pet recipes up her sleeve and knows what herbs to prescribe for some particular ailments. “We rarely needed a doctor,” says Jeevatben, “We mostly cured ourselves with herbs and local remedies. For instance, the glue of Khakhra heals the wounds,” she recalls faintly. “Castor oil and leaf relieve swollen tonsils and the rubbed in roots of Tobad (prevalent amongst the Aravali ranges) aid in healing a bone fracture, says Jeevatben.

The lion-hearted Jeevatben has even

“It’s not been pain but struggle...”

struggled with wild animals, which she encountered on her way to fetching fuel woods from the nearby jungle. “She would use stones and twigs of trees to frighten wild animals but never preferred killing them,” shares her nephew proudly. To our surprise, he further adds, “She has even struggled with lions, coming out of their den in many instances.”

[Scouts : Shelly Singh and Vishesh Sharma,
Kota, Rajasthan]





Her spirit shines through even at 95

Doliben Vanaji, 95years

“Older doesn’t mean sicker,” says Doliben Vanaji, a native of Rajkot, when asked about health problems she encounters at the age of 95.

Watching her grandchildren running here and there to collect mangoes in her garden, she chuckles and says, “Koipan mara jetli Kerio nathi khai shakatu” (Nobody can eat as many mangoes as I can!)

Doliben looks healthy and has retained most of her teeth. “She would use ‘datun’ (twigs of the Neem tree) as toothbrush to promote hygiene of gums and teeth,” says her son. She can even walk properly without using any walking stick.

Doliben raised four sons and four daughters. Presently, she lives with her sons in Dhanpura village. “I am just wallowing in having my sons and grandchildren around,” says a content Doliben.

She has led a very tranquil and serene life. Her father was a farmer who reared

six children, Doliben being third among them. She used to work in the farms in her childhood as a support to her father. At the age of 16, she started her married life in Dhanpur (Amirgarh). Since there were no roads and conveyance, she would travel kilometers on foot.

“I had to go through the jungles to reach Rajkot. As darkness set in, I used to climb a tree with the smallest kid tied tightly to my back and spent whole night above waiting for the sun to rise and start the journey again the next morning,” she recalls.

Seeing Doliben, many would reckon that part of living to 100 requires having the right personality. She has had no habit of worrying excessively on matters and lives free of stress. She harbours no regrets and expresses contentment with the life she has led. Her life has been an impressive show of strong adjustment and coping skills. In spite of family’s financial predicament, she

toiled hard to earn every penny.

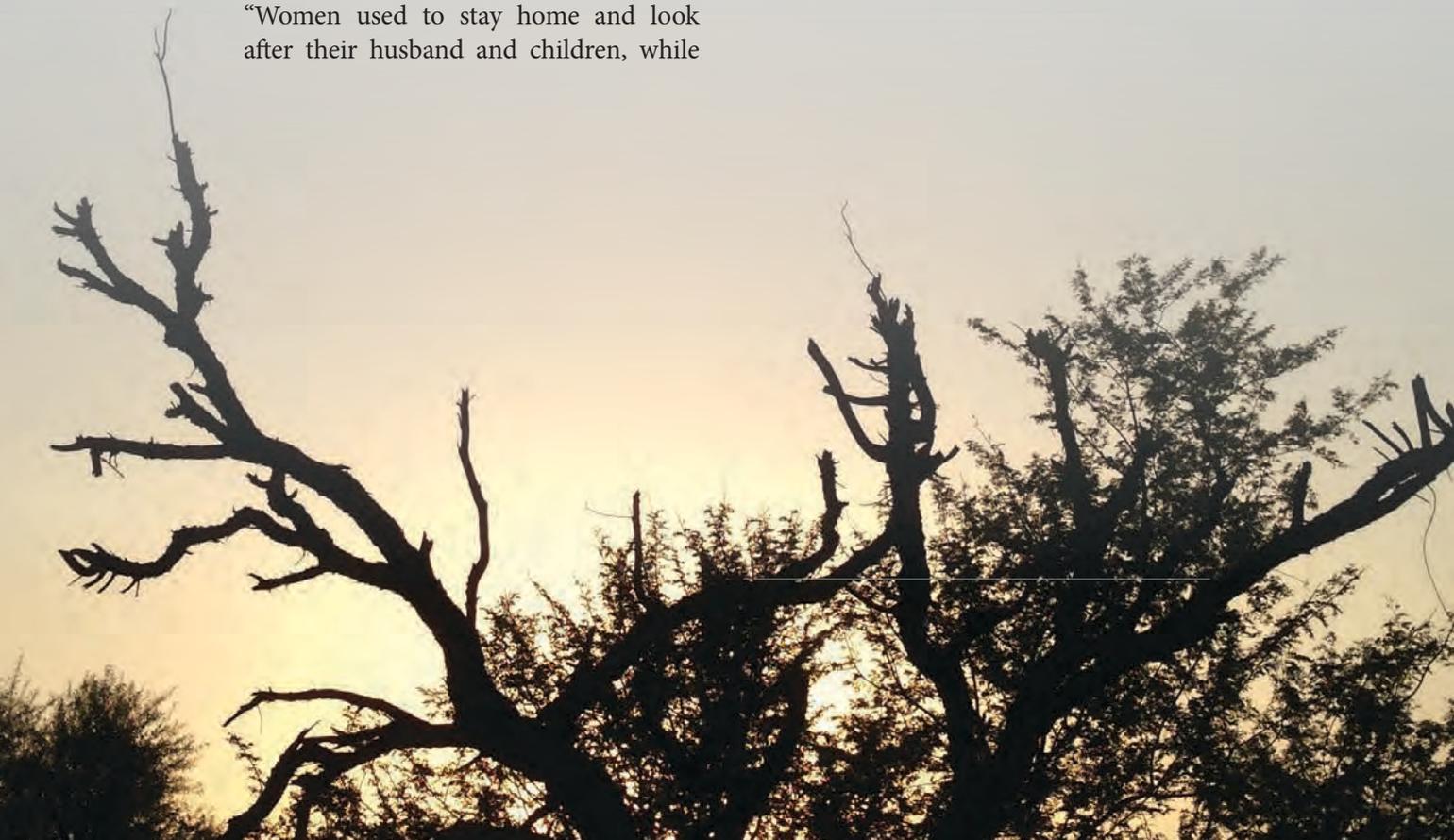
“Though she is hard of hearing and has fading eye sight and memory, her spirit still shines through”, Doliben’s son says. It would have been a “fairly hard life” for his mother and her family as they grazed cattle on paddocks where hundreds of rows of houses now stand.

Once crop failure resulted in widespread famine, due to which Doliben’s 50 cows and buffaloes lost their lives. “We got stunned seeing the loss of livestock and affliction of villagers”, says Doliben grievously, “but we didn’t give up and faced the hardship courageously.” The other time, punishing rains lashed their village. Doliben’s house couldn’t withstand the nature’s fury. “Many trees and muddy houses were swept away. What remained were just some remnants of our houses,” says Doliben in her trembling voice.

When asked about the difference she sees between previous times and today, she asserts, “While morals have declined now compared to when I was growing up, some things have changed for the better. I think young people today have easier lives. They don’t have the restrictions we had. We were never left on our own.”

“Women used to stay home and look after their husband and children, while

**She lives
Freely without
worrying much...**



today they seem to be off everywhere,” she says. Out of her fondness for singing, she couldn’t resist on sharing her displeasure about the commencement of music systems. “Earlier, we were the ones who ourselves would sing and play the instruments on any occasion, but now tapes (music systems) have dominated over the jubilant trend,” she complains.

Living a healthy lifestyle, she has nicely secured herself off diseases and has never been to any doctor. Doliben has always relied upon the nutritious diet that consisted of green vegetables, pulses, Vanti and Kadhi being her favourite and millet flatbread, complemented with buttermilk

**“I say my prayers
every day and ask
God to make me
a good and kind
person.”**

and fruits.

On being asked if she still asks God for anything she replies, “I say my prayers every day and ask God to make me a good and kind person.” Her secret to longevity is simple: Simple living, working hard, keeping fit and avoiding a fuss.”

[SCOUTS : Shelly Singh and Vishesh Sharma,
Kota, Rajasthan]



Many ailments, one source of cure

Jeeviben Chaudhary, 95 years

This is a socially relevant song shared with us by 95-year-old Jeeviben Chaudhary when we meet her. Jeeviben is a well-known and popular member of the bhajan mandli (prayer group) in her village in Mehsana.

“There were so many rituals and customs that were followed back in the old times. These days, people hardly follow those rituals,” laments Jeeviben, adding that the younger generation does not heed her advice.

Childhood

Born to Motibha and Nathiba in Saulaya village of Mehsana taluka, Jeeviben is the fourth child among six children—Velabhai, Ganeshbhai, Jatanben, Revabhai and Karsanbhai. The family was financially stable.

Jeeviben did not get an opportunity to pursue education and worked in the fields,

harvesting wheat crop and taking care of cattle.

Among memories of her childhood are the games she played, including kho-kho and santa kukdi (hide and seek).

“I remember a tragic incident that I had gone through as a child when my cousin, who was all of 20 years, died,” she shares.

Life after marriage

Jeeviben feels proud that when she married, she passed on all the culture, experiences and knowledge procured at her father’s house to her husband’s house.

Traditional medicines and methods

Be it cattle or human, Jeeviben’s family turned to plants and herbs for treating any ailment. “For pain in the ears, we used oil which was heated with twigs of neem tree and laving (clove). Leaves of tandaljo (Amaranth), neem, gaalo (Tinospora), baarmaasi (periwinkle) were commonly

used for most ailments. We used to cut four leaves of arni (wind killer) for bruises that occurred due to datarda (grass-cutting tool). For insect bite, dharo (a kind of grass) and rice was ground to a paste and applied,” shares Jeeviben.

For cattle suffering from constipation, traditional treatment was to feed it with the extract of sitaphal (custard apple) leaves. If a cow suffered from bloating, a quick treatment was to sprinkle a mixture of hing (asafetida) and kerosene. If the cow had dysentery, applying or feeding dhatura (thorn apple) leaves and ghee cured the ailment.

A foodie, Jeeviben loves to taste variety of foods.

“In those days, there was no electricity so we had to do all agricultural work like threshing, harvesting, among other things manually, using paseli (a kind of cloth used for the purpose) which involved a lot of hardwork. During drought, people in our village chopped down all kinds of trees and using the leaves as cattle fodder,” she says.

Struggles of life

Jeeviben recalls that life was a struggle for a widow back in the old days. Describing the customs for widows, Jeeviben says, “In

“Dada ho dikri, Vadhiyar ni ramon na dahej ho sai, Vadhiyar ni Vadhiyari sasudi,...

“For storing food grains, earthenware and neem leaves should be used. The grains never get spoilt by using this method. For storing pulses, the storage unit should be treated with soil/mud. The grains or wheat should be soaked in cow urine overnight and sowed on the next day to avoid the problem of termites in the fields,” shares Jeeviben.

Among the vegetation which is rarely used now, Jeeviben mentions the use of mahua (madhuca indica) leaves for preparing a sweet dish called lapsi. Sharing the recipe, she says, “Mahua leaves are boiled and the wheat flour is added for natural sweetness.”

those days, after rainfall, sowing was done in the widow’s fields first and only then in others’ fields. No one provided milk to a widow and it was very tough for such a lady to raise her children,” she shares.

Customs and rituals

Like most people in those days, Jeeviben believed in and followed the custom of untouchability. “If a person from Harijan community touched me, I would sprinkle water to purify myself. Harijans were not allowed to enter homes of people belonging to higher castes,” she says.

According to earlier customs, throughout the year, marriages took place only

during one month— the Hindu month of Vaishakh (April-May). All the festivities took place at night and premarital rituals were conducted only after midnight. The marriage rituals were conducted in the morning at about 8 am, after dowry was duly given to the groom's family. During marriage functions, meals included sweets like sheera in the night and laddos in the afternoon.

“People are coming up with new rituals every year and prepare too many varieties of delicacies for marriage functions,” she says.

For childbirth, women depended on midwives. “If a child suffered from mouth ulcers, then it would be given goat's milk— not by milking it but by pulling her tail so she gives milk. This milk is poured into the child's mouth to treat mouth ulcers,” she says.

Those were the days

“There is lack of water resources today. Among the vegetation which is not found in big numbers, are umaro (cluster fig) and gul mohar (delonix regia).

Secret to longevity

Sharing her secret to a long and healthy life, Jeeviben says that she is fit and healthy

**...Dada doyeli
dada,**

**Diye hadave mane
rataldi kantave,
Dada ho dikri.”**

today as she has had nutritious and unadulterated food throughout her life. “In order to have a long and good life, one should avoid mental stress and not worry too much about anything,” says Jeeviben.

[Scout: Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati
Gozariya village, Mehsana taluka,
Mehsana district, Mobile: 8905837390]



Practise made me perfect

Badiben Badaji Kathviya, 105 years

Consumption of organic food has a huge role to play in keeping diseases at bay. This is the message that 105-year-old Badiben Kathviya would like to give to the present generation.

“Today’s generation consumes food including vegetables that has been treated with different types of chemicals. Food grains are ground using electricity and not manually and food is cooked using gas instead of natural fuel on the stove. I feel that these are basic mistakes committed by people these days, because of which they invite diseases like cancer, ear pain, among other diseases,” says Badiben, who belongs to Vasai village in Vijaynagar taluka of Sabarkantha.

Childhood

Badiben recalls living a good life with her parents. She would work with them in the fields for harvesting during monsoon and bringing fodder for the cattle. Badiben does not remember any untoward incident

of her childhood and says that everyone would live in unity and peace during her childhood.

“I used to make dolls with my friends Kavli, Manki, Dinvi and Amari using leaves from khakhra (*butea monosperma*) tree. We also played santa kukdi (hide and seek), kankti and made dhul ni dhagli (making sand dunes). We would gather under the ambli (tamarind) tree and near the khakhrawali dungli (the hill where there were many khakhra trees) to play,” Badiben recalls.

Whenever they visited any fairs, Badiben remembers buying mamari (snack) and sweets like khaja and jalebi. Badiben says everyone in her family lived peacefully and she does not miss anyone.

Life after marriage

When Badiben got married, she brought two different kinds of paddy—lal dangar and ganga dangar, to her husband’s house. “I used to share work at my father’s house

so it was easy for me to adjust to the chores at my husband's house," says Badiben.

She gave birth to five sons, the eldest being 75-year-old Nathabhai Badaji Kathviya and the youngest being 54-year-old Amraji. Both these sons have three children while the others—Ranchchodbhai (71), Khumaji (63) and Babubhai (56) have two sons each.

All her sons are educated at different levels— from primary to higher secondary levels. While Nathabhai has served in the police force, Ranchchodbhai was in the Indian Army. Khumaji and Amraji are engaged in agriculture, cattle rearing and labour work. At present, Badiben lives with Babubhai, who does agricultural labour for a living.

Her grandson Kaavo (Babubhai's son) is dear to her as he helps her in all her work and guides, even holding her finger when she wants to relieve herself in the fields or visit other sons.

Customs

It would be customary to sing bhajan (devotional songs) every other day in those days. "Today's generation does not follow these rituals," says Badiben.

"There was no means of transport to carry sick people to hospitals, so we used to tie a large cloth around wooden sticks of 8 to

**“Steer away from
mental stress and
worries.”**



10 feet length to carry a sick person to the hospital or to the doctor's clinic," shares Badiben, adding that children were taken to a temple instead of a hospital if they suffered from measles or chicken pox.

She adds that in those days, there were negligible diseases in crops and hence there was no need for pesticides.

During festivals, most of the men in Badiben's family would get together and celebrate by consuming meat and alcohol, creating a nuisance. "At a very young age, I decided that I would never allow my children to indulge in such bad habits," shares Badiben.

Food and diet...Back in the old days,

food grains cultivated using cow dung as manure. The present generation should know and understand the vegetations and their advantages before using them," she says.

Badiben says that cattle breeds like Kankrej cow, desi (local breed) buffaloes and Sirohi bakri (goat) are not found any more.

Traditional practices

For any ailment, Badiben's grandma would resort to home remedies. "Grandma would crush varad na beej (seeds of varad) with a stone to cure dysentery. For nausea, children were given one spoon of extract obtained from rubbing a mango

“Drink water stored in clay pots, brush the teeth using neem sticks, avoid alcohol and food cooked on...

people would cook curries from green vegetables like povar (sickle pod), gundi (grey leaved saucerberry), bobata (a kind of vegetation) andkankoda (spine gourd) leaves.

"Consuming such vegetables helped us keep good health and prevent diseases. Women of today's generation are lazy and not interested in cooking these things," she says.

Milk would never be bought from a dairy but came from people's own cattle. "People would store milk in clay pots, prepare buttermilk from milk collected over five to seven days and consume ghee prepared from this milk. People would eat

seed on the stone. Whenever children suffered from fever, they were given about a teaspoon of extract from crushed mamejevo (Enikostema, Litorel) leaves.

Struggles in life

Badiben has always been a hard worker, and she feels that she would be unhappy if she was unable to do any work, especially when it came to working for her community.

When her children were young, Badiben would fetch fruits like bor (jajube fruit) and timru (Diospyros melanoxylon) from the jungle for them. During monsoon when it rained incessantly and there were no food

grains, she would store mahuda (Madhuca Indica) fruits. She would roast these stored mahuda fruits to feed her children when there was lack of food grains.

“During the Taniyo Kaal (era of drought), the fields dried up due to lack of rains. We bought corn for sowing and a vegetation called mukho from a businessman. I would remove the skin of this fruit, dry it and then pound it to make flour, which was then used to make rotlas (bread),” Badiben recalls.

Secret to longevity

“Steer away from mental stress and worries,” says Badiben, adding, “Drink water stored in clay pots, brush the teeth using neem sticks, avoid alcohol and food cooked on the cooking stove. Use money and time judiciously and be ready to do any kind of work that is offered,” Badiben parts.

[SCOUTS : Bharat K. Parmar, Isari village, Meghraj taluka, Sabarkantha]

**...the cooking stove
Use money and
time judiciously
and be ready to do
any kind of work
that is offered.”**





Eat well, avoid stress!

Arkhiben Mithabhai Vankar, 103 years

Arkhiben Vankar, like most other centenarians, is the epitome of traditional knowledge. A native of Sabarkantha in Gujarat, Arkhiben has gained recognition for her vast knowledge of organic cures to protect plants and cattle from diseases.

A piece of advice from this 103-year-old centenarian for a long and healthy life—eat well and avoid stress!

Childhood

Arkhiben recalls having a happy childhood. “I used to help my father in the field. All my brothers and sisters worked together on tasks like extracting water from the well or weeding out the fields. I have done the same kind of work in my husband’s house too,” says Arkhiben, who remembers visiting Shyamalaji temple with her family on every full moon.

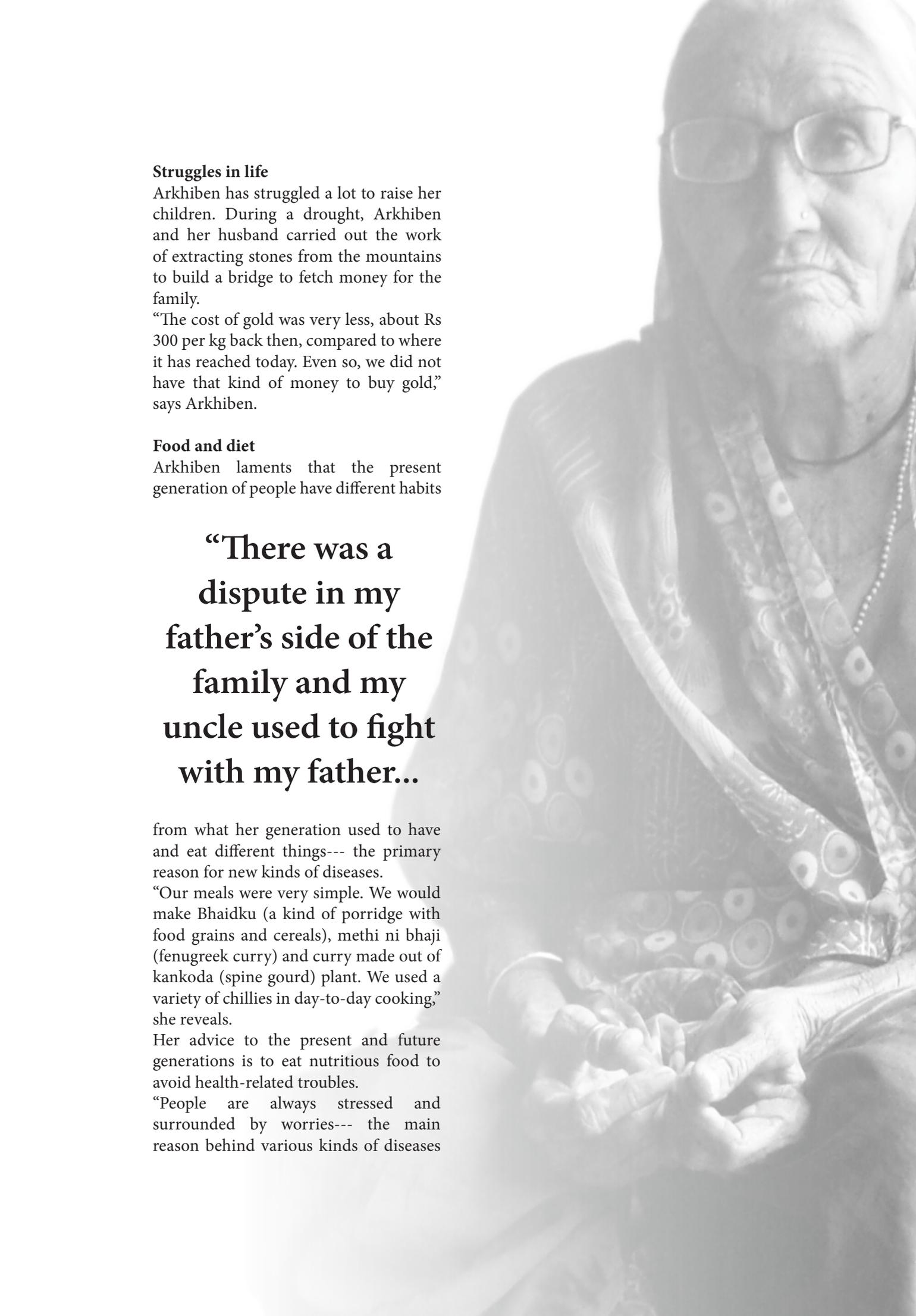
She would play with wooden dolls with

her friends Gangaben and Motiben under the neem tree while they took the goats out to graze in the fields.

“There was a dispute in my father’s side of the family and my uncle used to fight with my father over land issues. I used to wonder that if there were no land, what would they fight over?” Arkhiben recalls. The family used to follow all customs showed a lot of respect towards elders.

Life after marriage

Arkhiben gave birth to five children—three daughters and two sons. Her elder son, Dhanabhai Vankar is no more while the eldest daughter, Nathiben is now 70-years-old and illiterate. One of her daughters, Shardaben (50) is mentally ill while another daughter, Gangaben (53) has studies till class 5. Gangaben has a son and a daughter while her youngest son, Ramanbhai (48) has studied Bachelor of Rural Studies and has three sons.



Struggles in life

Arkhiben has struggled a lot to raise her children. During a drought, Arkhiben and her husband carried out the work of extracting stones from the mountains to build a bridge to fetch money for the family.

“The cost of gold was very less, about Rs 300 per kg back then, compared to where it has reached today. Even so, we did not have that kind of money to buy gold,” says Arkhiben.

Food and diet

Arkhiben laments that the present generation of people have different habits

**“There was a
dispute in my
father’s side of the
family and my
uncle used to fight
with my father...”**

from what her generation used to have and eat different things--- the primary reason for new kinds of diseases.

“Our meals were very simple. We would make Bhaidku (a kind of porridge with food grains and cereals), methi ni bhaji (fenugreek curry) and curry made out of kankoda (spine gourd) plant. We used a variety of chillies in day-to-day cooking,” she reveals.

Her advice to the present and future generations is to eat nutritious food to avoid health-related troubles.

“People are always stressed and surrounded by worries--- the main reason behind various kinds of diseases

these days. These days, people try to add new twists to traditional recipes. My advice for good health would be to drink water stored in clay pots, cook food in clay vessels and avoid eating food that is cooked using gas, if possible,” shares Arkhiben.

There were no dairy parlours in those days and people would consume milk obtained from their own cattle. “Ghee, buttermilk and curd were freely available and were made out of one’s own cattle. Only organic vegetables and fruits were available as cow dung was the only fertilizer used by the villagers,” Arkhiben reminisces.

variety of cows and other breeds of buffaloes are rarely found these days,” says Arkhiben.

Home remedies

Arkhiben’s mother turned to home remedies to cure any ailment.

“If we had stomach pain, our mother would put snuff on the belly button. For dysentery, she would rub burnt mango seed on the stone and give us one or two spoonful of the extract, which would control dysentery. If we had fever, we would bathe in water soaked with neem leaves,” shares Arkhiben.

If someone in the village fell sick, the

**...over land issues.
I used to wonder
that if there were no
land, what would
they fight over?”**

Traditional practices...A few years ago, Arkhiben reported a herbal pesticide to control heliothis in chickpea (*Cicer arietinum*) with seeds and leaves of thornapple (*Datura metel*) and yellow-berried nightshade (*Solanum xanthocarpum*). The organic pesticide helps keep aphids, white flies and mealy bugs away. She has also found good results using Shikario --a local, seasonal herb in Sabarkantha—as a vermicide to treat maggot-infested sores in cattle.

“Back in the old days, there were no pests or diseases in the crops and we would use only natural fertilisers like cow dung in fields. Some local breeds like ‘kankrej’

villagers would take the patient to a clinic outside the village in a makeshift stretcher, made using cloth.

[SCOUTS : Bharat K. Parmar, Isari village, Meghraj taluka, Sabarkantha district]



Hundred years of sweet and sour memories

Menaben Bulakidas Patel, 95 years

Menaben Patel may be of 95 years in age. But her heart is still young. An active member and leader of the bhajan mandal at her village in Mehsana, Menaben makes friends easily and loves to socialize. She is fond of good food and clothes and has no complaints with the present generation.

“I just hope and pray that my good habits and culture are preserved by my children,” says Menaben, who is very particular about cleanliness and hygiene.

Even at a ripe age, she can walk comfortably and cleans her surroundings herself as she detests dirt and filth.

Childhood

Menaben was born in Kansa to Ishwarbhai and Jyotiba. Since childhood Menaben, has been engaged in agricultural labour work like collecting fodder apart from household chores like decorating and cleaning the house. Her father

worked at a mill in Ahmedabad.

Meenaben made friends easily and she made many friends while working in the fields, as a young girl.

“My father’s village, Molasan, is dear to me and I miss it immensely,” says Menaben.

Life after marriage

Financially Menaben belonged to a middle class family both from the father’s and husband’s side. Her life has been devoid of any difficulties even after marriage.

Rituals and customs...Menaben says that the customs of earlier times are different from those of the present age. “Youngsters were made to marry at an earlier age. The ritual of tonsuring heads of boys, which is still followed, was practiced religiously. Girls were not allowed to get educated but were trained in domestic chores, instead,” explains Menaben.

Traditional practices...As cattle were an integral part of the villagers' life, it was fed ajmo (carom seeds), gol (jaggery) and suva (dill seeds) to increase milk yield.

If a child is suffering from dysentery, applying the ash obtained from cooking fuel wood on the back of the neck was a popular home remedy.

Struggles of life

The days of drought and famine were particularly testing times. During the drought, people used to stay on the outskirts of the fields. Men and cattle, both, did not have enough food to sustain themselves. Neem tree leaves were given

**“I just hope and
pray that my good
habits and culture
is preserved by my
children.”**

for cattle as fodder.

Menaben has also done a lot of hardwork as a labourer to educate as well as help her children settle down.

Food and diet

Menaben's diet includes corn rotlas (bread), milk, ghee, gol (jaggery) and green leafy vegetables. She prefers and has always had a healthy and nutritious diet.

[SCOUTS : Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati
Gozariya village, Mehsana taluka,
Mehsana district]





Challenges encouraged her to strive hard for survival

Babiben Ramchandraj Thakur, 98 years

Babiben lives with her family in the same house where she raised her children. She cooks her own meals and does most of her housekeeping on her own. “Amidst all hardships, she is an amazing cook too,” says her son, “She loves to eat Maalpua and safarjan (apple).” She had an operation on her left eye, that has set in, but other than that, she only has minor health issues,” he shares.

Babiben’s bold attitude of tackling hard times reconciles with her shy and tranquil nature. When she tells us that as per customs in her days, women veil their faces in front of their sons-in-law, her elder son cites an interesting event, “Out of her shyness and innocence, Babiben veils her forehead each time she attends the calls of her son-in-law.”

Childhood

Born in Varan village near Dhanera of Deesa taluka, Babiben was fourth of five daughters of her parents. “I never thought

I would live to be 98 as my parents both died young,” says Babiben. She adds, long life span doesn’t run in her family. After the demise of her parents, she, despite being young, emerged as bread earner for the family. “Though I was younger to my sisters, I somehow managed to look after all of them,” says Babiben and adds, “I used to work on farms for hours and earn living.” This way, she emerged as the financial and moral support for the family. At the tender age of nearly 15, she and all her siblings got married. Babiben got blessed with 2 sons and 5 daughters.

Cherishing motherhood and earning
Recalling some of her fondest moments Babiben shares how she managed to work on farms with small kids. “She used to dig holes in the sand, bury the kids beneath the surface with their heads outside” says her eldest son. “Seized kids are not able to disturb anymore and mothers are free to work properly thereafter,” says Babiben.

Changing times ...World, then and now,

has undergone paradigm shift for her. She says, “When I was born, there was no radio or TV. We spent our childhood playing games outside, something that kids of today refuse to do. They are indeed missing out on a lot of fun.” She further adds, “The world has changed so much, and not much for the better. Presently they have medical treatments but at the same time, so much jealousy and hatred is there amongst people. This was not the case during yesteryears.”

Secret to long life

On being asked about her secret to long life, she attributes her longevity to eating

Her bold attitude of tackling hard times reconciles with her shy, tranquil nature

a healthy diet and getting enough sleep. “Work hard, eat well, and sleep calmly, what else one needs to do to live longer!” says Babiben. She further elaborates, “The tiredness of working in fields and accomplishing household duties the whole day would vanish the moment I ate with my husband and kids after returning in evening.”

She signs off by saying, “ Never do wrong to anyone. Always keep on doing well and be a good person. God will bless you.”

[Scouts : Shelly Singh and Vishesh Sharma
Kota, Rajasthan]





100 year old counts & writes numbers...

Dhudiben Shivrambhai Modi
100 years

“The happiest people don’t necessarily have the best of everything but still find reasons to be happy”. This saying narrows down the long life of Dhudiben in a few words.

Dhudiben Shivrambhai Modi, was born in Kausha (near Patan, Gujarat) and is fortunate enough to have seen the variance and unfolding of life for 100 years now. Even at such an advanced age, she looks hale and hearty. She has a merry, blithesome nature. Her calm, smiling countenance was very captivating for us. Her nutritious diet includes breakfast of Rotlo (pancake) and cha (tea). Lunch is almost always wheat flatbread, onion, potatoes and whatever seasonal vegetables their farm produces. Dinner is millet flatbread with goat’s milk.

Recalling her early days, she says the financial condition of her family was awful. “I would also lend a helping hand to my father in farming. I got married

at a very early age of just 12 years and struggled a lot to earn every penny,” she says.

Five of her sons died soon after birth, adding to her woes and miseries but she didn’t break down and stood firmly against all the odds. Of her four daughters, she presently lives with the youngest one and a nephew.

Out of her extremely sharp memory, she revives the jovial moments of her youth that encompassed playing Dhal Pachhedo, rhyming and traditional dancing, tattooing and knitting. She even cherished singing a Gujarati song for us. On being asked if she would like to share anything more about her, she suddenly asks for a twig and starts counting and writing numbers in the sand.

She lost her faith on doctors when years back a doctor injected her with contaminated needle and she got her left leg infected.

She also has good knowledge of home-based remedies and formula for several health issues. She uses the juice extracted from leaf of Guar beans or cluster bean (*Cyamopsistetragonoloba*) as a remedy for healing cuts. She also told us that Chikni (snuff) of tobacco is used to treat dog bite wounds and sounth (dried ginger) powder fights headache.

Later during the conversation, she compared the past days with the present ones, saying, "Times have changed. In our time, people used to be on good terms with each other and respected each other. But now nobody cares for the other."

She expresses her resentment about new

that lasted for four days. Immediately after that, I was taken to a temple at my in-laws' village and according to the rituals, I returned back to my father's place the very next day." She moved to her husband's house after six years of her marriage, as per custom.

When asked if she wants to share any of her learning with the youth, she admonishingly cautions, saying, "You will get a bride only if you study well."

Interrupting the echo of laughter that erupts all around, she adds, "Nowadays, nobody worries for the school fees, all that matters is the education."

Without complaining to God for all

“The happiest people don’t necessarily have the best of everything but still find reasons to be happy.”

technology harming the unity of family. "Television has substantially reduced the interaction between the family members and has taken children far away from nature," she says.

She also recollects the arduous time when drought struck her village and the very first well of the village was dug. "Earlier it was better as the prices were not high. A kg of jaggery cost only six paisa. One tola (10 grams) gold would cost rupees 16 and one kilo grams of silver could be bought at Rs 10," she says.

On asking about her wedding, she briskly replies, "The wedding procession came in bullock carts to attend the ceremony

hardships and blue days of her life, she still retains faith in the Almighty. "I have never had a lot of money but if God gives any now, I will donate that all."

[Scouts: Vishesh Sharma and Shelly Singh
Kota, Rajasthan]





A life full of hardwork and determination

Manguben Nathabhai Patel, 95 years

Manguben has seen several hardships in her long life. But she saw through her struggles with hardwork and determination and has become an inspiration for future generations.

Childhood

Manguben was born to Bhajibhai and Shababen in Bavla, near Ahmedabad. She has a sister, elder to her, named Roopaben. Manguben belongs to the Patel community, which did not encourage schooling for the girl child in those days. Hence, Manguben is illiterate and supported her parents in their work since a very young age. Her father drew water from the canal or well with the help of bather bucket called 'kosh' and Manguben channeled the water to crops. Her mother Shababen brought lunch, which they used to eat together, as a family in the field. Work continued post lunch.

"My mother would collect fodder for our two bullocks and a buffalo. Two-three bales

of grass were required every day. As a child, I used to play games like house-keeping, catch and run, among others. My sister and I were dressed in fronted cotton skirts, blouse, long skirts with large circumference," she recalls. Their food comprised of 'cheel' vegetable, onion and sometimes pods of Khijda (proppopis cineraria) along with leaves of millet.

She helped her parents up to the age of 15 years, after which she was married off.

Life after marriage

Manguben was married to Nathabhai of Metal village. They lived with her mother-in-law, Sivaben, husband's elder brother and his wife in a joint family.

Metal had a population of about 2000 people earlier and now has grown to 5000-odd. The population involves people from Potter, Patel, Bharwad, Chamar and Harijan communities. The village has a common ground called 'chera', located at the centre,

where meetings are held. Festivals such as Navratri are celebrated, skits and Bhavai vesh are also played out here. A huge lake called Motsar is at a very short distance from this village. Up to the age of 80 years, Manguben walked up to the lake to fetch water for drinking, washing and bathing purposes. This village is situated in Terai hillock spread over 900 bigha.

There is a Mahakali temple on the hillock. A fair is held for two days following Akhatrij. The hillock gets covered with greenery during monsoon. The cooing of peacocks and their dances on the green hillock presents a picturesque scene during monsoon.

lot of pain and sufferings to bring them up, because taking care of four children along with agricultural work was difficult. She had to take her children all along to the field when she went to work for her husband. Life became miserable after the death of her husband. She used to work as a labourer and was paid a meager amount of 24 paise/day. When she could not get any labour work in monsoon or winter, she used to dig out the bulbous roots from lake or canal and sold them in village as well as used them herself. Manguben would get up at 4 am and go to work after preparing food. Some days, she went on an empty stomach when there was no grain in the house.

My mother-in-law and I toiled hard and constructed two new, separate houses for us

When Manguben first came to this village, there was acute shortage of potable water and the issue continued for many years. “We used to bring water collected from shallow pits dug in the river bed or lake. My house was a mud house and I wanted to make it a pucca house. My mother-in-law and I toiled hard and constructed two new, separate houses for us. It was a difficult job because the earth and mud required for construction was to be brought in site in buckets and water had to be brought from a distance of close to two kilometers,” she says.

Four years passed. She then had her first son, Valabhai followed by Hedabhai and Lalabhai and a daughter. She had to face a

“A load of four pieces’

Manguben’s husband left behind a lot of liabilities. She had to bring up little children, whom she took to the fields with her. Manguben divided whatever little food she had among her children.

In spite of all her difficulties, Manguben managed to get all her children married. She pledged six out of 10 bighas of land to arrange money for the weddings.

Soon, her three sons separated from the joint family and Manguben started living with her youngest son’s family. Her youngest son, Lalabhai’s wife Marghaben passed away, leaving a son and a daughter, whom Manguben raised. The younger daughter

now manages household work.

Food

She used to bring back weeds like 'chees', 'badlo' and 'dunglo' to make curry, which was eaten with loaves of millet or 'banti'. Apart from this, she used to bring yellow fruits of cactus, known as 'Gavadaka of tho' and prepared curry from it.

Leaves of 'Kubi' plant are boiled, and fried in little oil, with salt, chilly and turmeric powder to prepare curry. Spinage or pot-vegetable can be prepared in the same way.

Manguben shares another recipe using millet flour, in which salt, chilly powder and green chilli is kneaded and waves are prepared on earthen baking pan. These leaves are sweet in taste.

Manguben had a huge grinding wheel called 'Gadaghanti', which she still possesses. She used it to also grind green grams, black grams, math, parley, maize, wheat, red jowar and other grains.

During famine, weeds of 'dodi', 'phand', 'dhanā' dry satodo, leaves of holy-pipal, castor plant leaves, khijada leaves, neem leaves, pods of babod etc were used as fodder.

Traditional practices

Manguben shares a few traditional practices

**She used to work
as a labourer and
was paid a meager
amount of 24
paise/day**

used in her times.

For wind in cattle, 500 gms of a sweet called Motiya ladva, were to be given to the cattle. For constipation in bullock, seeds of a herb locally called Lambodi can be given.

To cure boils in humans, ash obtained by burning fish scales and filtered through is mixed with castor oil and applied on boils,



One who lives a life like a pearl

Motaben Bharwad, 101 years

One can spot Motaben early in the morning, sitting on a cot at the Dholka Court Road as she observes all the passersby with her keen eyes.

Motaben covers her head with a Pachedo (dupatta) and has gleaming eyes like a lioness. Even a slight acquaintance that passes by receives an acknowledgment of recognition with an innocent, child-like smile from her.

Childhood

Motaben was born in Sangani village of Chotila taluka of Ahmedabad district. Her father's name was Bijalbhai, fondly known as 'Aapa'. Her mother, Jahuben named her 'Motaben' as she was beautiful, like a 'moti' (pearl). Her family members affectionately called her "Motadi".

Motaben had seven siblings--- Mandabhai, Sodabhai, Maaviben, Dhuliben, Motaben, Ratanben, Tidiben and Maaliben.

Motaben remembers her mother Jahuben as a kind and loving woman who was proficient in domestic chores as well as agriculture-related work. She also reared

cattle and took care of them. Bijalbhai was kind but strict and hardworking. He was skilled in agricultural work and had acquired knowledge regarding cattle from his parents. He was a nature and animal lover too.

After the death of Jahuben, her sister Ratanben took care of all the eight children so affectionately that they never missed their own mother.

Life after marriage

Motaben was married when she was about 10-12 years old to Nathubhai Rukhadbhai Bharwad of Khandasar village of Chotila taluka. Motaben's mother-in-law, Hima ma, was extremely authoritarian and never missed a chance to reprimand her on committing the slightest mistake. Hima ma had the last word and the final decision in every matter, which could not be contested by anyone. Motaben's father-in-law, on the other hand, was a simpleton and a straightforward person.

Once, her mother-in-law hit Motaben for spilling ghee, in an accident involving a

donkey. She remembers another incident when her husband had scolded her when she spilled milk.

Motaben had six children--- three sons Merabhai, Makhabhai and Ranabhai and three daughters--- Raiyaben, Devuben and Vaaliben. Compared to their mother, all of Motaben's children look so old that her grandson almost seems to be like her youngest son.

Struggles in life

Motaben has faced a lot of struggles in her lifetime to take care and bring up her children.

Motaben's struggle and greatest tragedy

family's responsibility single-handedly. She began collecting cow-dung from the entire village, dried them to make cow-dung cakes and sold them in the village. Motaben also took up agricultural labour work and raised her children with a lot of struggle.

During this period, Motaben also took up the responsibility of a close relative's children, who had become orphans due to unfortunate circumstances. She brought up Mayabhai, Sindhabhai as well as Raghubhai and Bhurabhai just like her own children and helped them settle down as well as get married.

Around 60 years ago, Motaben lived near

**“I sincerely want all
the children to get
educated.”**

in life occurred at the tender age of eight years when she lost her mother due to an illness. Even at this age she distinctly remembers this unfortunate incident as if it had occurred only yesterday.

Motaben lost her husband Nathubhai to malarial fever when her eldest son Merabhai was 12-years-old. After her husband's death, Motaben faced a lot of difficulties and lived a poverty-stricken life. Motaben was left even more devastated as she lost all her livestock to a disease that struck in that era.

However, the strong lady that she was, Motaben put up a brave front to fight against all odds and took up the entire

a rundown field. The farm and house belonged to Mehmood chacha (uncle) of Garash haveli. Motaben, who was a widow, lived all alone with her children in that farm, managing problems like mosquitoes, snakes and scorpions. Seeing her difficulties, Mohammad chacha offered a small room to Motaben and her family, inside his mansion-like house. He also gave her food and water, apart from some financial help. After going to Mohammad chacha's house, Motaben felt a huge relief.

“Having seen a lot of hardships in life, I do not remember any joyous moments of my life. All I remember is doing labour work

for a meager amount of Rs 1.50,” she says.

Food and diet

For breakfast, Motaben has tea and half a chapatti. She does not eat anything throughout the day as she is not able to digest any food owing to weakness and inactivity. She only has one rotla (bajra bread) with milk at night.

Motaben has never eaten fried snacks available in the market. She has everything prepared at home without finding any faults. At night she rubs snuff on her teeth. Motaben informs that in those days there were no milk dairies. Milk, curd and buttermilk were available freely.

has, however, been to Dwarka, Dakor, Pavagadh, Girnar, Gediya Thakur na Duvara (which is called Kaaliyo Thakar).

“Of all these places, Dwarka is the dearest to me. I have travelled by foot from Dholka to Dwarka every year for 25 years and it takes about 20 days to reach Dwarka from Dholka. I feel sad that I am not able to visit Dwarka anymore, owing to old age. But I have immense faith in the deity Kaaliyo Thakar,” she says.

Motaben’s husband was a bhuva (a person who distributes things related to superstition), so she, too, keenly follows all the superstitious beliefs.

She mentions a custom of sprinkling

Motaben is extremely skilled at sewing blankets and decorating them with cloth flowers

She mentions that in those days they would make bread of jowar (sorghum), bajra (pearl millet) and bavto (finger millet). She adds that grains like rice and wheat were the luxury, only afforded by rich people which she could never buy or eat.

“I would prepare a huge rotla (bread) from a mixture of jowar, bajra and bavta flour under the moonlight. The rotla would be so huge that it would be difficult for a single person to consume,” she smiles.

Customs and rituals

Motaben never goes to the temple or takes part in any religious rituals. She

oneself with water if one touches any person belonging to lower caste.

Dress and jewellery

Motaben is extremely skilled at sewing blankets and decorating them with cloth flowers.

“In the olden days, women would get chundana (a tattoo) on their hands, legs, chin and neck. Among the jewellery, silver vedla and lolla (for ears) and golden paatipaaro (a kind of necklace), silver kadla (thick anklets) for the legs, silver rings for the toes and fingers and ivory bangles called baloya for the hands were worn by women of our community,”

shares Motaben.

Other details

A firm follower of gender equality, Motaben has never discriminated between her sons and daughters. She says that she had always heard that Gandhi Bapu ruled the country but never got the chance to meet him in person.

She is a little disappointed that youngsters do not heed her wisdom and advice. “If we say anything to today’s children, they do not listen and shout back at us. Even the daughters-in-law of today’s generation are all same, they behave as if bitten by a dog,” Motaben remarks, eliciting laughter from

any reason. Though there is a TV in the house, Motaben has never watched TV in her life. She says, “TV spoils your eyes. If we keep watching TV, when will we work or do our job?” asks Motaben who retires to bed at 8 pm every night.

Motaben has been prescribed spectacles but she does not like to wear it. She has not undergone cataract operation but is able to see clearly. Motaben is slightly hard of hearing and one has to talk loudly to be audible. Her memory is intact but she uses a walking stick for support to walk.

Her family says that Motaben has been fiercely independent all her life and has lived her life bravely and with dignity.

“I have immense faith in the deity Kaaliyo Thakar.”

her daughters-in-law Puriben, Meenaben and Mooliben.

Talking about the quality of life in those days, Motaben says that things were better and cheaper. She mentions that one quintal of jowar (sorghum) was available for Rs 5 and 1 kg ghee cost just Rs 10. “Back then, I could manage with provisions worth Rs 5 to Rs 10 for 4 to 5 days,” she says.

Even at this age, Motaben wakes up at 5.00 am, sits for sometime after waking up and then wakes up the women of the house. She later cleans her mouth with babool tree twigs followed by a cup of tea accompanied by half a chapatti.

Motaben never talks to anyone without

Her family comes first for her under any circumstances. She is extremely affectionate towards her grandchildren and does not spare her daughters-in-law if they reprimand them.

Motaben’s only expectation from her family members is ---live together with unity and love. “I sincerely want all the children to get educated,” says Motaben.

[Scout: Mehboob. A. Saiyyed, Mohamaddi School, Dholka taluka, Ahmedabad district, Pin code: 382125 Mobile no: 9725400494]





A shining example of keeping the family together

Jenab Bibi Panara, 100 years

Even at the grand old age of 100 years, Jenab bibi Panara has very high standards of cleanliness and hygiene. “I cannot tolerate hair served in food and I dispose off food if I find it unhygienic,” says the gritty, lean lady, whose teeth are all intact even at this age.

Although her hearing is a little weak, she can recognize voices very easily and has a clear eyesight without undergoing cataract.

Her family members say that although she seems sharp and hot-tempered, Jenab bibi is actually highly sentimental and soft-hearted. “If she hears anyone’s troubles or anguish, she too starts crying. She always enquires about well-being of each person passing by and takes care of all her family members; children are especially very dear to her,” says her family, which holds Jenab bibi in very high regard.

Jenab bibi’s son says that his mother

is precious to them and the family members never take any major decision without consulting her.

Childhood

Jenab bibi was born in the Zandiya kuva area of Dholka taluka, situated around 30 kms from Ahmedabad. Her mother’s name was Halima bibi while her father was Ibrahim bhai. Jenab bibi was one among six siblings— Noormohammad bhai, Gulabnabi, Laalu bhai, Rehmat bibi, Mariam bibi and Biban bibi.

Halima bibi was a simple and humble woman. She never indulged in any confrontations or quarrels with anyone in the neighbourhood or in the family. Two-year-old Jenab bibi was still in the cradle when she lost her father Ibrahim bhai. She does not have any childhood memories of her relation with her father and all her images of her father are just imaginary.

“In those days, education was not at all preferred for girls in the Muslim community. Skills related to domestic chores and cooking were given more importance. I have never been to a school till date but have trained in all household chores since the age of five,” she shares.

Life after marriage

Jenab bibi was married to Noor mohammad Panara of Dholka at the age of 18 years. Her father-in-law Gulamhussain was a nice person while her mother-in-law had passed away before Jenab bibi’s marriage.

According to Jenab bibi, Noor

biscuits and ganthia (a Gujarati snack made with gramflour) for breakfast. After breakfast, she has Malabar paan (a mouth freshener). She has at least three such paans throughout the day. For lunch, she has chapatti and curry. Dinner is usually light, consisting of khichdi (savory porridge) with milk.

During summers, she does not prefer to have spicy food. Jenab bibi does not have too many preferences in food but likes to have meat and fish as well as loves to have milk cake as dessert.

Jenab bibi’s eldest son informs us that she was an expert cook and could prepare a bajri rotla (pearl millet bread) that was

The sons saved each penny of their hard-earned money and sent their mother on a Haj pilgrimage to Mecca-Medina.

mohammad had a very religious and valiant personality. He would show his physical training skills in the Muharram procession of the village every year. Noor mohammad had once even pulled an ox-cart with his hair. “He was also very helpful and would do all the work for neighbours and people in the neighborhood whenever he visited the market,” Jenab bibi gleams with pride.

The couple have six children—Abdul Kadar, Gulam Ali, Allahrakha, Noor bibi, Hussaina bibi and Jubeida bibi.

Food and diet

Jenab bibi consumes tea, chapatti,

perfectly round without any crack. “No one makes such rotla anymore and even the daughters-in-law or daughters are not able to make such quality of rotla now,” he laments.

Customs and rituals

The entire family is engaged in back-breaking labour work to earn their daily bread. The sons saved each penny of their hard-earned money and sent their mother on a Haj pilgrimage to Mecca-Medina. “This was the most joyous, memorable moment of my life. I am yet to experience such a happy moment again,” says Jenab bibi, who also likes to

go Ajmer Khwaja Dargah.

Jenab bibi has complete faith in the Almighty and also believes in superstitions. She says that people deeply followed the rules of untouchability in the old days.

Struggles of her life

The biggest tragedy of Jenab bibi's life was when her husband Noor mohammad passed away prematurely. The second blow for her came when their mud house was washed away due to floods. She had to rent a house and work hard to take care of her children.

"I would go to the nearby villages to sell

matter of great fortune for Jenab bibi to have such a loving family.

Right now Jenab bibi has suffered from paralysis and is bed-ridden. In the morning her daughter-in-law helps her wash and clean. She wakes up in the morning at 5.00 am and retires for bed at 8.00 pm.

"I expect nothing more from my family except that they take care of my daily chores such as cleaning, bathing and feeding me," she says.

Other details

Her message for the current generation is, "People will behave with us the way we

**“I am yet to
experience such
a happy moment
again.”**

vegetables carrying a load on my head. Whenever required, I also did labour work to bring up my children," says Jenab bibi.

Family life

Jenab bibi has mastered the art of living life while keeping the entire family together and strengthened with the bond of love. Today Jenab bibi's entire family stands by her firmly. Every young and old member of the family takes her consent before taking any trivial or significant decision. Even today at least one family member dutifully assists her in all her daily chores. It is rare and a

treat them. If we are good to them, they will be good to us. If we behave sourly with them, they will treat us badly, too."

Jenab bibi believes in being helpful to others, giving good advice to children all the time and avoiding any confrontations or quarrels under any circumstances. "I am completely content with life and advise my sons and daughters-in-law to behave in the same way," she signs off.

[Scout: Mehboob A. Saiyyed Mohamaddi School, Dholka taluka, Ahmedabad district]



A life full of hardwork

Kankuben Surmabhai Asaari, 102 years

When Kankuben Asaari thinks of the old days, it is the delicious food prepared in clay vessels over a traditional chulha (cooking stove) that she misses the most.

“The taste of food from the old days should be brought back in today’s kitchens. The food today is devoid of a certain kind of taste and natural sweetness that was common in those days,” says the 102-year-old, blaming the different kind of vessels and cooking gas used today resulting in diseases.

Blurb: Kankuben asserts that the kind of taste and sweetness of food in olden days is missing in today’s cooking and food. She says, “I feel that taste of olden days’ food should be brought back in today’s kitchens.”

Childhood

Kankuben remembers living a life full of work at her father’s house.

“In monsoon, the entire family would go to the fields for sowing and harvesting crops. I did the same kind of work even in my husband’s house,” she says.

On the second Sunday of the Bhadarwa month (Hindu month that falls in August or September), Kankuben would attend the Jeeva Bavji fair. She recalls buying and eating snacks like mamri, savalu, boondi and sweets like khaja at the fair.

“We used to play with wooden dolls under the Khakra (Butea Monosperma) tree with my friends Paniben and Devibai. We would take our goats and buffaloes for grazing near the Khakra tree and around the hillock near the banyan tree and would play hide and seek while the cattle grazed,” she shares while her eyes gleam.

As a child, Kankuben had seen her uncles and other male members of the family indulge in preparing and drinking alcohol. “I was very young but I decided during that time that I will not allow my

children to ruin their lives with alcohol,” she says.

Life after marriage

Kankuben had five children—four sons and two daughters, of which the eldest son is no more.

While the sons have passed different levels of schooling, her daughters never went to school.

Food and diet

“Women these days are stressed and sometimes cook in anger, creating a lot of noise with vessels,” she says, adding that food like curries from povar (sickle pod) leaves, gundi (grey leaved saucerberry) leaves, bobata (a kind of vegetation) leaves, kukarvada leaves (five-leaved yam) and bhaidku (porridge of various food grains or cereals) helped prevent diseases during old times.

During droughts, Kankuben’s family would eat boiled wheat grains with roasted Mahuda (*Madhuca Indica*) leaves.

Customs and rituals

In those days, people would be engaged in prayer meetings and sing devotional songs every other day, which is rare these days.

Traditional practices ...In the olden days,

“Today, people are always surrounded by worries. They should keep their mind light and free of stress to lead a better life.”



pests and diseases very rarely affected crops and plants never needed pesticides. About cattle, Kankuben says that Kankrej variety of cows, local breeds of buffaloes, goats and hens are not seen these days. “I have driven away wild animals like wild boar, jackals and deer when they damaged the fields and the crops,” she says.

Home remedies

In those days, when anyone would fall sick, eight to 10 people would pick the cot on which the patient lay and took him/her to Lusadiya village where there was an old dispensary.

Sharing some traditional cures, Kankuben says, “Most of the ailments were cured with home remedies. For instance, if we had conjunctivitis or eye infection, my mother would make a ball from Handera leaves and tie it on the eyes. For fever, two spoons of juice extracted from Navli leaves were given, for cold, the person would simply chew tulsi (holy basil) leaves. When a person suffers from dysentery, extract of Bavji leaves (Esculantfiacurtia/ Psoralea fruit/ malaya tea) was given for relief.”

Other details

Kankuben informs that the prices of gold

“Most of the ailments were cured with home remedies.”

and silver were very low in those days. “However, we could barely manage to gather two square meals a day, so there was no question of buying gold and silver,” she says.

Secret of longevity

Avoid stress—that’s the mantra that Kankuben would like to share with the modern generation. “Today, people are always surrounded by worries. They should keep their mind light and free of stress to lead a better life,” she says.

[SCOUTS : Bharat K. Parmar, Isari village, Meghraj taluka, Sabarkantha district]



The tree of life never fades away

Beniben Rupabhai Tarad, 102 Years

Beniben belongs to a village called Panibar in Sabarkantha.

Sharing the legend behind the village, Haribhai Kadvabhai Pagi, a retired school teacher of the village, says, “Many years ago, Brahmins, Baniyas and Kshatriya castes resided in the village. The village was very prosperous and people lived happily. One year there was no rain and a drought was declared in the village. Also, during that year bandits attacked the village. A lady named Paniben fought fiercely with the bandits. The bandits had to leave the village empty handed. Paniben lost her life in the fight and hence the village was named ‘Paniba’ in her memory. As time passed, the villagers started calling it Panibar. Also, the Brahmins and Bania castes emigrated from the village in search of employment. The village today has people from the Thakardi caste which is included in backward classes.”

The population of the village is

approximately 200 households. The village has a primary school, which teaches from class I to VII, and another school, which teaches from class I to IV. It also has a secondary school from class VIII to X. The village also has various government institutions and co-operatives like the post office, ration shop, co-operative society, anganwadi (nursery school) and milk co-operative.

People from Parmar caste in the village are migrants from Rola village in the Meghraj taluka and those from the Pagi caste are migrants from Mota Kantharia village in Bhiloda taluka.

Geographically the villagers reside in and around the area surrounding a lake that was built during the Chappaniya drought. The village is surrounded by the Arravali mountain range. This village is the last village of the Meghraj taluka. The next villages in line are from Shamdaji taluka and Bhiloda taluka. The border of

neighbouring Rajasthan is just 15 kms from the village and is known as the Ratanpur naka.

Monsoon crops of the village are maize, pigeon pea (*Cajanus indicus*), sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) and paddy. Crops like wheat and mustard are grown in winter and Pearl millet (bajari) and groundnut are grown in summer.

For irrigation, water is provided by the means of a tube-well. Forty per cent of the total farming is done by irrigated water and the rest is non-irrigated and dependent on the rain. The depth of the bore by which the water is provided is about 150-200 feet.

people— her parents, two sisters and three brothers. Beniben was the eldest, followed by her two deceased brothers, Nathubhai and Meghabhai. Rasibhen was fourth followed by a brother Shankabhai. Late Lalbhai followed Shankabhai and Chanchalbhen was the last on the list. She was married to a person from the same village.

Life after marriage

Beniben was married to Rupadada. They have one daughter Gangaben, who is 75-years-old at present. Rupadada passed away at the age of seventy, 15 years ago. Gangaben was married to Motibhai Goda

Beniben was married to Rupadada. They have one daughter, Gangaben, 75 yrs old.

In the hillocks and the forests surrounding the village one can find trees like marunda, timru (*Diopsyros melanoxylon*) and eucalyptus. Marunda and timru collection is one of the major occupations of the villagers during the season in which these trees are found in abundance. The labour charge in the village is forty rupees a day. The labour charge increases to fifty rupees a day during the monsoon season when there is lack of labour and also for heavy work like house construction.

Beniben's childhood

Beniben's maternal home is in Dehgamda village. The family consisted of eight

and they have six daughters and three sons. After Rupadada's death, Beniben was called by her daughter, Gangaben, and son-in-law to stay with them as she had no son.

Gangaben has six daughters and three sons. Her eldest daughter Mangubehn has six daughters and two sons. Manguben's eldest daughter Bhagavatiben has two sons. One of the sons studies in the second standard. Beniben's family consists of one daughter and her daughter's family is as follows..Beniben is surviving at 102 years, with a family of 58 people from one daughter alone.

Health...Beniben had a strong eye sight

until a couple of years ago and is short of hearing. She cannot walk on her own and until six months ago, she used to do all her work herself. She had a fever two years back, other than which, she has never encountered any kind of sickness. Beniben says that she never forgets to pray to God daily.

Clothing

She says that in her maternal home, children were not dressed in any kind of clothing, up to the age of 10.

“Due to poor financial condition, no family dressed their child up to the age of eight or 10. Sometimes, when children

stitched by sewing together various pieces of clothes that were cut according to the shape and size of the kaapdu.

Ornaments

In those days, most of the ornaments were made of silver. Except the nathani (nose-ring), all the ornaments were made of silver. The reason behind purchase of silver ornaments was the lack of banks in remote villages. The banks were in big cities far from the village. Moreover, due to lack of education the villagers were unaware of bank procedures. For all these reasons the rich people and other farmers who had saved money by working hard purchased

**“Due to poor
financial condition,
no family dressed
their child up to the
age of eight or 10.”**

were taken out of town or they had to attend a wedding, they were dressed in a ghaghra choli (kind of skirt and a top) or shirt that was stitched by the local tailor. After the age of 10, I used to get dressed in an ordinary ghaghra choli made of cotton and a chundari (half-length drape) to go with it,” shares Beniben.

After marriage, Beniben started wearing ghaghra (skirt) and backless choli (top) with threads which she stitched on her own. On the ghaghra choli, she draped a cotton sari. The ghaghra had a border on it but there was no frill and the circumference of the ghaghra was large and flowy. The choli or kapdu was

silver ornaments from the goldsmith at market rate. They wore these ornaments at various occasions like marriages, festivals and fairs. Whenever there was a crisis in the family— like sickness, lack of food grains or when there was a drought or a marriage in the family —these ornaments were mortgaged to the goldsmith from whom they were originally purchased. The goldsmith gave 70-80% of the actual price during mortgage. The owner of the ornaments could later take the ornaments back by repaying the debt with interest. In case the owner was unable to repay the money, the goldsmith kept the ornaments. Beniben shares that various kinds of

beautiful ornaments were worn back then. “Ornaments like silver vansdi (necklace), silver oogniya on tip of the ear, silver earrings, nose rings made of gold and silver, silver kadu (wristlet) worn around the wrist or at the elbow, silver bangles and ambariya were worn by women.

Drought

In those days droughts were prevalent and created a lot of crisis. According to Beniben, there were two types of droughts— Chariyo drought and Undariyo drought.

Beniben explains that the number of rats in the village increased drastically

villagers were given certain amount if they collected at least a dozen rat tails. The tribal community and the poor people earned their living by selling rat tails during the drought as there was no other means of employment. This scheme also helped in decreasing the number of rats in the village,” Beniben explains.

Drought Food

To fight drought, villagers collected a plant named samo (*Panicum frumentaceum*) from the forest. This was cleaned and ground to prepare flour, which was used to make thick pancakes.

The villagers also collected the fruits of

Aritha (*Sapindus laurifolius*) was used to wash hair and clothes.

in undariyo kind of drought. “These rats used to bite the legs of the villagers at night and their number increased so much that the rats began to fall from the attics of the houses. They also ate up most of the grains and also contaminated the water. Moreover as the number of rats increased, the death rate of the rats also increased. A particular kind of flea known as chachad began to feed on the dead rats. Slowly this flea began to grow in number and affected the other live rats. These fleas spread a disease, known as the plague, in the villagers as well. To combat this disease the government came up with a scheme. According to this scheme the

a tree named timru from the forest. The fruits they collected were in the raw form. A special procedure was followed to ripen the fruits. Villagers dug two small pits and put the fruits in one pit and filled the other pit with dry cow dung. A small tunnel was dug connecting the two pits. The pit with the dung was then set on a low flame. A pot of water was kept on top of the burning pit. The pit containing the fruits was covered with fresh cow dung. The pit filled with cow dung was burnt once at night and twice or thrice during the day. The fruits ripened after two to three days. Beniben remembers eating these fruits with her family members.

During the undariyo drought, her family members used to boil a pulse name zalar and drink the water in which the pulse was boiled.

They also ate the fruits of a tree named mahuda (*Madhuca indica*; syn *Bassia latifolia*) after barbecuing them.

Vegetables

A green, leafy vegetable known as puvand was eaten during those times. The vegetable was sautéed with oil and sesame and then buttermilk was added to it. This was simmered for some time and then eaten with rotlo (bread).

Apart from puvand other green, leafy

predicted monsoon.

“If a koyal sings in its usual pattern then it is predicted that it will rain in next three days. When the frogs come out of hibernation and called, then it was believed that rain is possible in the next couple of days. If new tender stems are seen of trees like pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) and vad (banyan tree, *Ficus bengalensis*) then rains were predicted in few days. When the fruits of neem (*Azadirachta indica*) ripened and start falling to the ground, it could rain. The growth of a green leafy vegetable known as thathudi showed the possibility of rain in near future,” shares Beniben.

Vadi mana kukda jaje tara ghare Iyana bayo ghare ne ghare Hala.. hala.. hala..

vegetables like chil, kalli, bokandaji, thamedani etc. were also cooked with buttermilk and eaten. These leafy vegetables were also eaten without cooking with buttermilk. The oil used for cooking these vegetables was extracted from the stems of mahuda tree.

Animal feed was also changed during the drought period. The animals were fed with different forest products like the leaves of timru, sadad, rayan, sour tamarind and fruits of rayan were given as oil cakes. Small pieces of green bamboo were crushed and then fed to the animals.

Monsoon Prediction... Beniben shares interesting trivia about how villagers

According to her, deep water retention is normally found near the land planted with trees like baheda (*Terminalia bellerica*) and kahakra (*Butea monosperma*). Hence these sites can be used for digging a well or a bore.

Agricultural Crops (Local varieties)...

Among the commonly grown crops were yellow and white maize, varieties of paddy like white, kalag, kalu pathariu, sutri etc., local varieties of corn like kodra, banti, kuri kang and pulses like adad (*Vigna radiata*), gram, moong, math, pigeon pea (*Cajanus indicus*).

Choosing the seeds for sowing... The

whole ears of corn, along with the seeds, were stored to obtain its seeds for sowing the next year. Just before sowing, seeds were removed from the ear. Mud and ash were mixed with the seeds to store them. The seeds were stored in earthen pots and neem leaves were put along with the seeds to protect them from pests. The pots for storing the grains were made from mud mixed with the chaff of wheat or kodara (kind of cheap coarse grain). The chaff was used to strengthen the pots.

A mixture of mud and donkey's face was also made to make the pots. The mixture was properly pounded and then layers were made in order to make big pots for

math(moth beans), paddy, sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) etc. and other crops like wheat, were harvested early morning while the dew was present. She explained that the tender crops dried soon because of heat and withered and this resulted in a lot of loss to the farmers; hence they harvested the crops early morning.

The seeds of crops like sesame were thrashed in a sari after harvesting.

Utensils for Daily Use

Clay utensils were used for both cooking and storing. Kundi (bowl shaped vessel) was used to cook vegetables. Lodhi (flat dish like vessel) was used to cook

A 100-year-old old tamarind tree saved our belongings from bandits

storage.

Seeds were stored after mixing them with a mixture of neem leaves, ash, road sand etc. in equal amounts.

Farming techniques

Unlike today, when sowing is done in furrows and by keeping specific distances, sowing was done randomly in those days. Bull and he-buffalo were used for ploughing and other purposes. Beniben says that she had one bull and one he-buffalo at her house. They were used for purposes like ploughing inter-sowing and carrying heavy load.

Pulses like moong(green gram),

pancakes. Tobli (glass) made of clay was used for drinking water. Pots were used to store dairy products like milk, buttermilk, curd etc. For storing clarified butter tavdi made from black clay was used. Black clay was used to store clarified butter for longer.

Other details

Beniben shares that Aritha (*Sapindus laurifolius*) was used to wash hair and clothes.

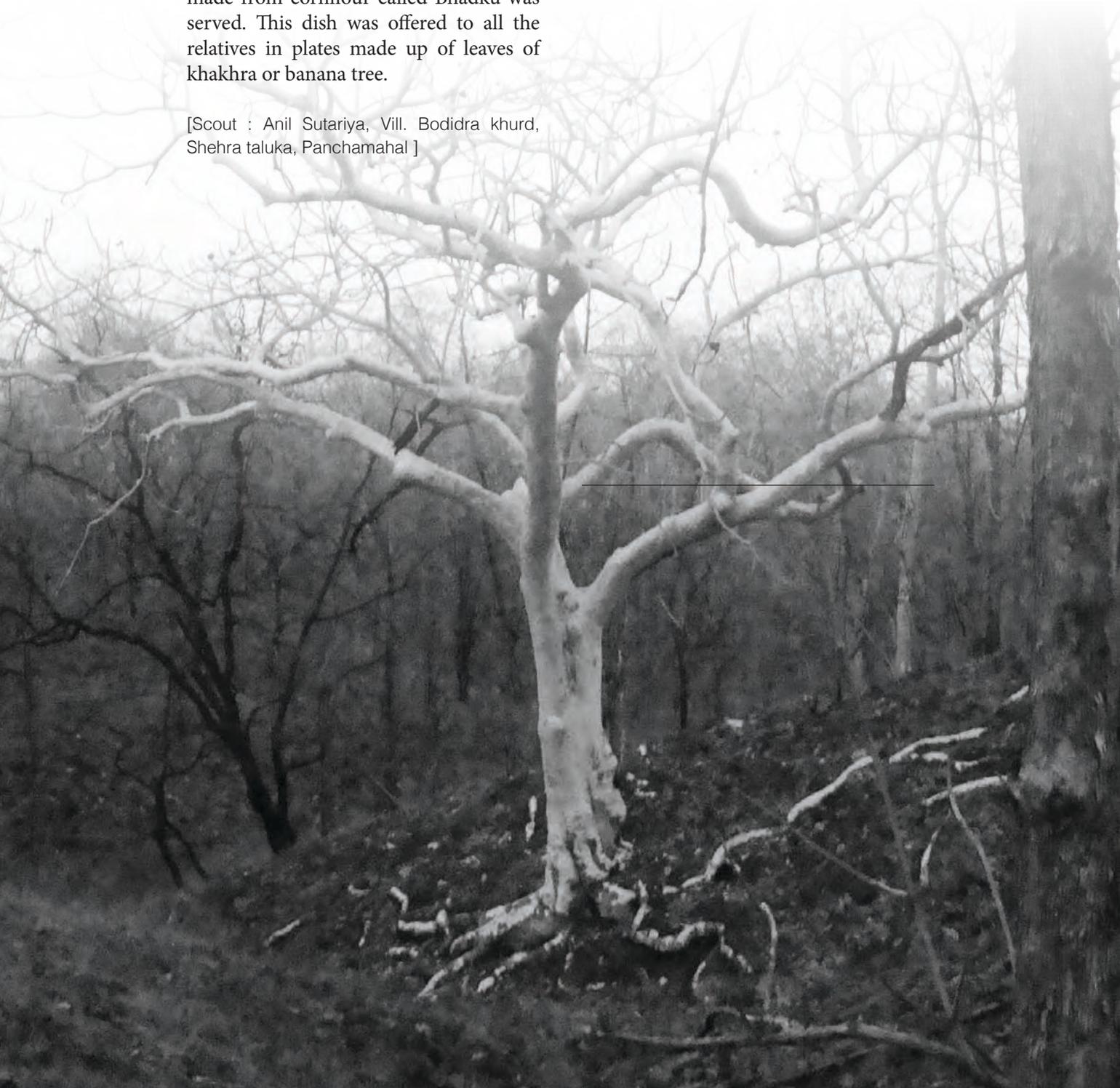
“There is a 100-year-old old tamarind tree near my house. In olden times when bandits attacked our village, my family and relatives used to gather all the ornaments,

cash and other expensive items and climb on to this tree. The tree was branched heavily and so the bandits were unable to see us. We used to climb down the tree only when we were sure that the bandits had gone. This way the tree has helped us a number of times to save our belongings from the bandits and it is still standing tall,” Beniben says fondly.

Food

During marriage ceremony, a special dish made from cornflour called Bhadku was served. This dish was offered to all the relatives in plates made up of leaves of khakhra or banana tree.

[Scout : Anil Sutariya, Vill. Bodidra khurd, Shehra taluka, Panchamahar]





Love Hard work and Hope

Tai Bai, 93 years

How could a carefree girl behave like a mature woman after marrying in childhood? What kind of inner strength enabled her to work hard for her children despite belonging to a prosperous family? What is the secret of her long life full of sacrifices?

These were some of the questions that troubled us after interacting with 93-year-old Tai Bai Waman Rao Imon from Wardha in Maharashtra.

Conventionally, Wardha is known for two reasons. First, for being the worst drought-prone area of Maharashtra. And secondly, for Sevagram, a village that Mahatma Gandhi had made his home after the Dandi march in this district. Gandhiji came to Wardha in 1934. Tai Bai Waman Rao Imon was a bubbly, 13-year-old girl when Gandhi Ashram was getting shaped 25 km from her village, which lies to the west of Wardha. Although, she does not have any mem-

ory of Gandhiji and the life of farmers, nothing much has changed in the village even after 100 years.

Childhood

Tai Bai lived a good life at her father's home and had all the facilities in her home. She never did any work until her marriage. Most of the time, she played with her siblings and friends. Her father Ganpat Rao was a diwan (accountant). He was very sincere and honest. One day, he resigned after fierce argument over accounts with his employer. Tai Bai often remembers and misses her father.

Marriage

Tai Bai was married at the age of 14 years to Waman Rao, a farmer from Dahegaon taluka, Wardha district. Waman Rao was a poor farmer, who owned three acres of land. The family cultivated millet and wheat without irrigation facili-

ty, depending completely on rains. Tai became a mother at the age of 17 years. Their family consisted of three sons and five daughters, hence life was not easy for her.

Life's struggles

Poverty forced Tai Bai to work hard for her family. Her husband Waman Rao died early in life due to an asthma attack. She ground food grains to flour on stone mills at others' home in the village to fend for her family. Tai Bai worked hard till the age of 65 years until she met with an accident. She fell on the road, which damaged her backbone permanently.

use jawas oil (flaxseed oil), which is costly but very nutritious. She recommends new mothers to consume two kgs jawas oil, two kgs coarse flour and two kgs of jaggery within 12 days of child-birth.

According to Tai Bai, the new mother will be able to resume normal life soon, if she consumes such food. She also advises that breastfeeding should be done for two years. She warns against eating banana and milk together because it creates phlegm in body.

Other details

Tai Bai is spiritual in nature and observes fast regularly. Tai has very warm rela-

New mothers are advised to breast feed for atleast two years

Food and diet

In the olden days, Tai Bai recollects that they would cultivate various kinds of millets in the farm. Their favourite millets were Vani, Motitura and Bajri (pearl millet). She prepared curries from vegetables like Ambadi (Hibiscus cannabinus), Kunjad, Tarota in Jawas (Flaxseed, binomial name *Linum usitatissimum*) seed oil.

She has always been a strict vegetarian and does not eat vegetables like drumstick and jackfruit, as they resemble flesh.

tionship with her grandchild, Gajanan, son of Gulabrao. She tells 'yadi pota uski dekhbhal nahi karta to wah abtak zinda nahi rahti. (She is alive today only because her grandchild has taken good care of her)'.

[Scout: Ramkrishna Sameriya]

Traditional practice..Tai's advice is to





Work hard, irrespective of the size or task

Shantaben Lavjibhai Chaudhary
90 years

Sharing this beautiful verse from a bhajan, Shantaben explains the importance of good habits and preserving the culture. Ninety-year-old Shantaben, who lives in Gozariya village of Mehsana, says that a person should always work hard, irrespective of the size and importance of the task.

Childhood

Born to Anarben and Manabhai Chaudhary in Balva village of Mansa Taluka of Gandhinagar, Shantaben had six brothers, of which one passed away in an accident involving electric shock.

As a child, Shantaben did a lot of hard labour. She also reared cattle, fetched water with koha (a tool for fetching water) and worked in the field to help the family earn their daily bread.

Married life

At the young age of 10 years, Shantaben

was married to Lavjibhai from Fatehpura village of Vijapur taluka of Mehsana district.

Remembering the marriage ritual, Shantaben mentions how the girl had to sit on a low table (locally called bajot). “The bride had to bathe and without combing, tie the hair up using a nadachadi (red thread used for religious rituals) before marriage customs started,” she shares.

They had a happy married life, three two sons and three daughter of which one daughter is no more. The death of her daughter was a huge shock for Shantaben. Shantaba’s family is financially well-off. “I once sold food grains for Rs 80 and bought one tola (around 11 grams) of gold for that amount. I feel that kind of gold would fetch a lot more money today,” she says.

Customs of the old era

Shantaben remembers wearing long

skirts called ghaghra in her childhood. However, after marriage she wore kosli (a kind of blouse) and ghaghra. After marriage, she had to wear the same dress even when she went to visit her parents.

Food habits and diet

Diet in olden days included bajra rotlas (pearl millet chapattis). In olden days they had pure ghee made from buffalo milk. Once, she got so much ghee out of milk, that it fed 27 members of her community.

Traditional practices

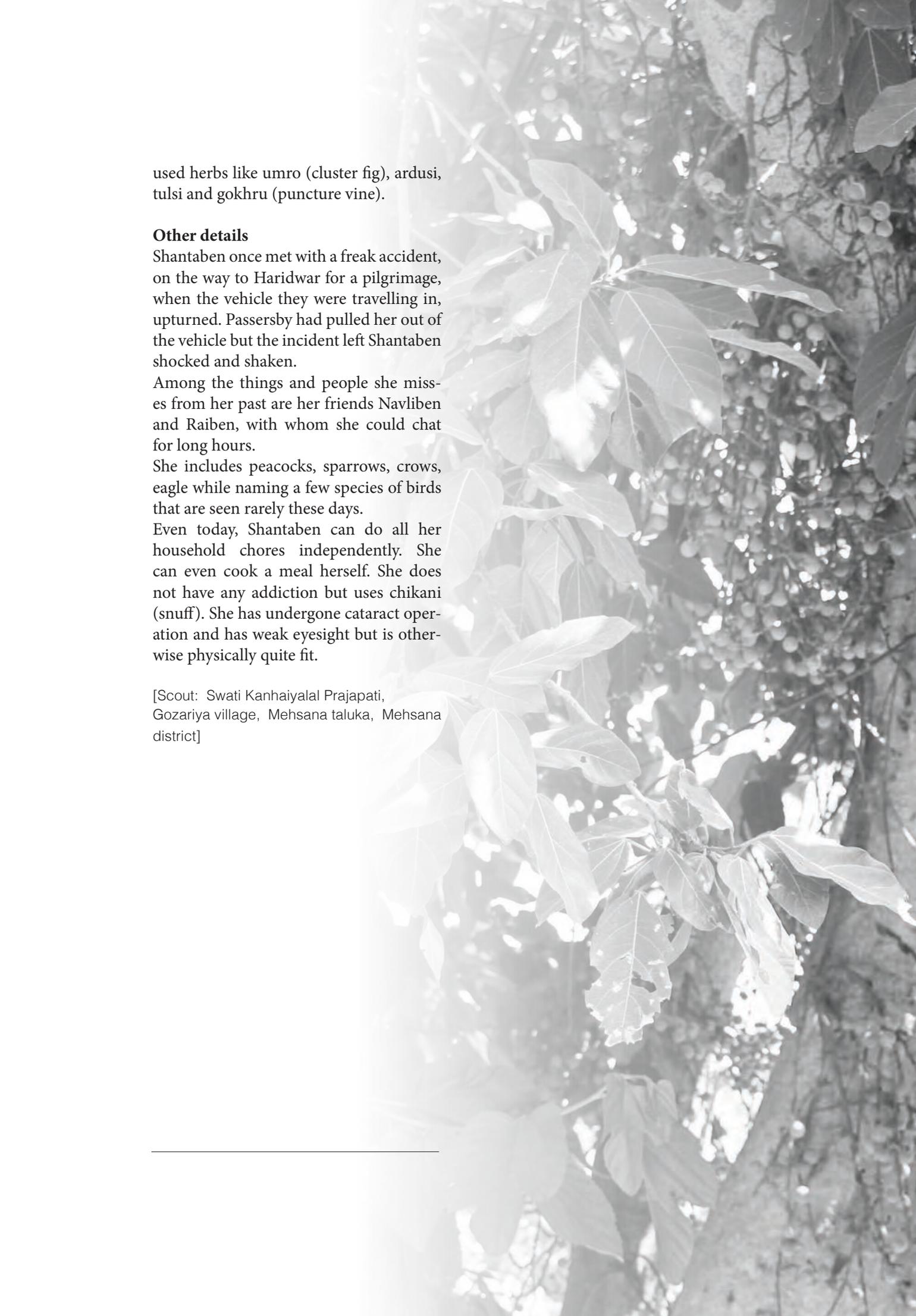
“We have always used a lot of herbs for medicine,” says Shantaben. She mentioned names of garboto, tulsi (holy basil), Ardusi (malabar nut), goti, Arni (*Clerodendrum phlomidis* commonly called wind killer), galo (*tinospora*) that were used for various treatments.

“The cattle did not have so many diseases in the olden era so we just gave them good fodder,” asserts Shantaben. We fed leaves of Mehndi (henna) and Gundi (Grey leaved saucerberry) when cattle suffered from dysentery. She remembers that in days of famine, they used to feed the cattle leaves of neem tree and leaves of Mahua (*Madhuca indica*).

**“We have always
used a lot of herbs
for medicine.”**

For storing food grains, the procedure was to clean and sieve the grains. Thereafter they spread out the grains and mixed ash and stored in large containers/barrels. She also informs that before sowing grains like wheat, bajra (pearl millet), jeeru (cumin), varyali (fennel), they first used ash and Gemaxin powder in the field.

Shantaben has so much knowledge about many ailments in children that people come to her for expert advice on problems like dysentery, flatulence, etc. “If a child suffered from dysentery, we fed the extract of kareli (bitter gourd),” says Shantaben, adding that women of that era



used herbs like umro (cluster fig), arduasi, tulsi and gokhru (puncture vine).

Other details

Shantaben once met with a freak accident, on the way to Haridwar for a pilgrimage, when the vehicle they were travelling in, upturned. Passersby had pulled her out of the vehicle but the incident left Shantaben shocked and shaken.

Among the things and people she misses from her past are her friends Navliben and Raiben, with whom she could chat for long hours.

She includes peacocks, sparrows, crows, eagle while naming a few species of birds that are seen rarely these days.

Even today, Shantaben can do all her household chores independently. She can even cook a meal herself. She does not have any addiction but uses chikani (snuff). She has undergone cataract operation and has weak eyesight but is otherwise physically quite fit.

[Scout: Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati,
Gozariya village, Mehsana taluka, Mehsana district]



A witness to various shades of life

Reshamben Valaji Thakor, 102 years

This is a puzzle shared by Reshamben, whose advice to people, out of her experience, has been: Do not talk much. There are all kinds of people in the world. You will meet good as well as evil people in your life.

Childhood

Born to Manchi ben and Mohanji bhai in Kodram village, Reshamben did not have the opportunity of pursuing education due to lack of schools in her village back then.

Her father was engaged in farming and owned around eight bigha land. She reminisces doing chores like grinding food grains, taking cattle for grazing, collecting fodder for animals, among other things. She recollects making vessels using mud and playing around them as well as climbing on trees. Their house was also a mud house with storage space for grains. At the farm, they sowed crops like

onions, wheat, green and red chillies. “We used to get 100 quintals of onion from 1 bigha of land. We would irrigate through a well which was made of bricks,” she says. She had seven friends, of whom only one is alive today. But Reshamben gets distressed on seeing her friend Rajuben, who is bed-ridden due to some illness now.

Life after marriage

When she was 16, Reshamben was married to Valaji of Malekpur. This village is situated about eight kms from Kheralu taluka of Mehsana district. The village has a major population of Thakor community apart from communities like Chaudhary, Vaghari and Rabari. The village has a lake which is filled with water in the monsoon. The cattle of the village like buffaloes, cows and other animals bathe and drink water from this lake. Whichever field does not get enough water, is provided water through irrigation from the lake. In

winters and summers the source of water for the village is the canal. This village has facility of borewell and tubewell. People of this village use this as drinking water. The major crops grown in this village include bajri (pearl millet), math(kidney beans), tuver (pignon peas), jowar (sorghum) etc. The village has a school till class VIII and a gram panchayat. On the outskirts of the village is a water tank, which was used for water by people and animals.

Customs and rituals

The marriage customs were such that when a girl was engaged, the women from

one as she was constantly harassed by her husband. She was shattered when her husband brought a second wife home.

“My husband gave my silver jewellery weighing 1 kg to his second wife after their marriage. He also gave away my Rs 540-worth anklet to his second wife, who belonged to Dabhad village,” she says.

Reshamben returned to her father’s house with her children and lived there for 20 years.

She lost her daughter to a disease, locally called bhudan (tumour in the head which also causes hair loss). There were no doctors for help during the olden times and home remedies did not help.

Don’t talk much. There are good and evil people in the world

the bridegroom’s family would come and drape a dupatta over the bride’s head. Reshamben remembers getting engaged on the auspicious day of Janmashtami (the day Lord Krishna was born).

She informs that in those days, the daughter-in-law would not face even the mother-in-law as a mark of respect and kept her head and face covered with a dupatta at all times.

As part of the custom, she brought seeds of custard apple from her father’s house and sowed it at her husband’s house.

Life after marriage

Reshamben’s marriage was not a happy

Reshamben now has four sons, of which two are educated. She has struggled to get her two sons educated as they had to study hard under trying circumstances and poverty.

Religious beliefs

Reshamben believes in Goddess Shitala mata. She remembers an incident when a villager saw the Goddess in the well. “The villager said the Goddess was drawing water from the well. In another incident, a villager claimed that the same Goddess had given him kanku (vermilion) and instructed him to distribute it in the entire village. The villager did as he was told but

the kanku did not fall short,” she says. Reshamben used to fast for Goddess Shitala and Janmashtami (a festival that celebrates Lord Krishna’s birth). She mentions that in the olden days people used to believe in a lot of superstitions. “There was an incident, whereby a trader who stopped people from sacrificing a goat at a temple of Kaal Bhairav (Lord Shiva) was found dead the very next day,” she says. Among other superstitions, she believes that one should never get separated or divorce the spouse under the shade of a tree. “Once, a couple got separated from each other under a mango tree. All its

pleated ghaghra (skirts)—mostly white, polku (blouse) and chundadi (stole). Regular jewellery consisted of kankudiya (ear-rings), lagadiya (bracelets), nose rings apart from chains, necklaces and sero (anklets).

Life’s struggles

Reshamben has seen many personal tragedies and struggles in her life. Among them was the most unfortunate incident when her brother passed away in an accident.

Her niece’s (brother’s daughter) husband also passed away due to an accident while driving a vehicle.

a song... Vaat Meli ne bot na kehje, Man evo aapyo che ke aavshe, Fari-fari nahi aave

flowers had fallen and the tree just dried up quickly,” she says. She also informs about a procession of Goddess Joganiya Maa on a rath (war vehicle) which was pulled by a Brahmin called Moti Parade followed by people from the Thakor community. This procession saw participation of the entire village in the olden times, she added. “Havan (Hindu ritual) and chanting prayers were given a lot of importance in those days, which is not the case now. I had once held a puja at her house for the Goddess and invited and fed girls from the entire village,” shares Reshamben. **Attire...**In those days, women wore

Food and diet

She mentions that in olden days people made a curry of dodi (Leptadenia reticulata) and onions apart from curries of tandalja (amaranth leaves) and methi (fenugreek) leaves. They also prepared rotlas (bread) from jowar (sorghum) and bajra (pearl millet) as well as wheat chapattis (bread). She likes sheera (sweet dish) made from pure ghee and kolhapuri gol (jaggery)-- made out of sugarcane juice. She adds that sugarcane juice would be extracted by a tool which worked using an ox. She also likes to drink sugarcane juice. Among other sweets, they prepared malpuas.

Reshamben was allergic to groundnuts as she always had a headache after consuming them. She used to eat dried rayan (a variety of dates).

Among the new recipes, she says that she does not enjoy eating anything and insists that delicacies of olden days were better in taste.

Traditional practices

“There were no doctors to help in child-birth so midwives helped in the process. When people suffered from simple illness like cold cough and fever, they would buy local medication from traders,” she shares.

hair.

Among the traditional practices shared by her are a concoction of suva(dill seeds), gol(jaggery), mari(pepper) and water for cough, cold as well as fever.

“Bhudan (tumour in the head which causes loss of hair) can be treated by washing with water obtained by heating it with bavaliya (babul tree) plant, kasundra (Cassia occidentalis commonly called Negro Coffee Plant) leaves. Kasundra leaves are heated and tied on the eyes to cure eye infection as well as to improve eyesight. For ear pain, kasundra leaves are crushed between palms and its extract is dropped into the ears. For rhematic pain

Bhoyra ma mukya che sona rupa na bajotiya, Vahu mara sona

In the olden days, diseases in crops were due to worms for which there was no treatment and unfortunately all the crop would be lost. She informs that in those days pesticides in powder form were not used.

She remarks that people used to have a better life in the olden days and crops too had better yield as only cow dung was used for manure. She informs that in those days they used buttermilk for treating aphids in plants.

“Once, I had kept a bottle of coconut to heat on the stove which burst and injured me,” says Reshamben, who used to apply buttermilk to improve the quality of her

in the legs, dhatura (thorn apple) leaves are applied along with oil and tied with bandage. For chicken-pox or measles, ash is applied on the body to cure it within nine days. For children we used to make a mixture of ghee, (gol) jaggery and (soonth) dry ginger,” she shares.

Among other remedies, Reshamben shares that new mothers were given a decoction of suva (dill seed), apart from a good amount of sheera (sweet dish) too and edible gum a week after child-birth.

For treating injury due to datarda (grass cutting tool), they applied ash of burnt cotton cloth.

The tender leaves of kanji plant is applied

for skin infections like ringworms. They would collect the salt deposits in buckets and wash their clothes using this salt.

She asserts that consuming snuff is not safe for health and informs that her friend who consumed snuff is suffering from lot of health issues now.

Other details

Reshamben used to take the buffaloes for grazing in the pastures in the outskirts of the neighbouring Pilucha village. When there were floods the entire village including humans and cattle were affected. In olden times, Machir no melo (fair) was held near their village's river and she lost her bag in the river.

In the olden days things like coconut shells cost Rs 2 and 500 grams groundnut cost 2 paisa. She adds that people used to give and take grains, jewellery etc. She recollects that value of silver was Rs 40 / kg and gold was Rs 80/kg.

She remembers that her neighbour with whom she had brotherly affection gifted her 2 kgs of silver and some relative had gifted her ghee and wheat after her first child was born.

Among the flora and fauna that have disappeared these days she includes species like sparrows, kabar (mena) and an ani-

mal called sagara which used to hop and had long horns.

She mentions that in the olden days people used clay vessels, brass and wooden baskets, copper utensils and stored water in clay pots or brass pitchers. The cooking stoves were made of brass and they used to have oil lamps for light.

[Scout: Priyanka Talaji Thakor, Soondhiya village, Vadnagar taluka, Mehsana district, Pin code: 384335]

**rupa na bajotiya,
Thase taro moti tu
thaje mare hosh,
Maari veret
kalaren**





Love and affection for one and all

Vaaliben Nemaji Thakor, 98 years

Ghar ma sou ni Vaali (the apple of everyone's eye in her family), Vaaliben Thakor has lived a content life. Even at the age of 98, her green-grey eyes, white hair, stern voice and slim body exude a tough demeanor. She lives in Dholka with her large family—comprising sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren—who say that she may be strict at times but is very affectionate.

Immensely fond of jewellery, Vaaliben never removes her silver armlets, velada (an earring worn on the upper earlobe), thick silver anklets and bangles. She never allows anyone to touch her beautiful possessions.

Childhood

Bhaniben and Jodhaji's happiness knew no bounds when Vaaliben was born to them after five sons in Thara village of Radhanpur taluka.

While Bhaniben was a skilled homemaker, Jodhaji was a simpleton with religious inclination. With a keen interest in

agriculture, Jodhaji spent his entire life being an agricultural labourer.

As the only sister among five brothers, Vaaliben was pampered and received loving affection of the entire family, especially her elder brothers Shankarji, Rupaji, Dhulaji, Havshiji and Bhalaji.

Vaaliben recalls spending her childhood roaming in the fields and playing in the front yard of her father's house. In those days education, especially for girls, was banned in the Thakor community.

Among her childhood memories are the days of the Chhappaniya kaal (the great famine). "Once there was an earthquake and it shook the entire village, but as majority of the houses were made of mud in those days, the earthquake did not affect life and property much," she recalls.

Married life... Vaaliben was married happily at the age of 20 years to Nemaji Kunwarji Thakor. She shared ideas about

agriculture with her husband Nemaji who was employed in farming. Her mother-in-law Jamaben and father-in-law Kunwarji were caring and treated her well. Nemaji had acquired the traits of honesty and hardwork from his parents.

Vaaliben's husband would start working in the field at 4 am and would not rest until noon. Her husband would wear a white *saafu* (a traditional headgear made by winding a long piece of cloth), white shirt and white dhoti. "He would never step out without his *saafu*. We did not have a house or farm of our own but life was bearable. In those days, there used to be an unspoken rule that 'the land belongs to the one who farms it and

misses her daughter with whom she shared all her intimate feelings. Her absence has affected Vaaliben's personality and behaviour immensely.

Customs and rituals

Vaaliben does not believe in black magic or superstitions, but has immense faith in the family deities like Chamunda Mata, Veer Vaachda Bapuji and Goga Khetarpaal. She still follows the custom of untouchability. "Back then, if one touches a person like a sweeper or a cobbler or anybody else belonging to a lower caste, one had to immediately sprinkle water and cleanse the body. If any furniture was touched, then it

If she ever feels the need to freshen up, she takes one round of her street...

the house belongs to the one who stays in it. My husband farmed on a land owned by a man called Chalbal Seth for 49 years but he never thought of usurping it as he was extremely honest," Vaaliben says with pride gleaming in her light-coloured eyes. She has undergone a cataract operation.

Vaaliben and Nemaji became parents of eight children--- Ajurji, Babuji, Kantaben, Vaghaji, Velaji, Bhuraji, Ramanji and Jayantiji. Of these, Ajurji and Kantaben—the only daughter and the dearest to Vaaliben—are no more.

Till she passed away at a young age, Kantaben lived in Sanand and would visit her mother every two-three months. Vaaliben dearly

had to be washed too," shares Vaaliben.

Food and diet

After a bath in the morning, Vaaliben eats one chapatti for breakfast. Occasionally, she likes to eat *fafda* or *bhajiya* (deep fried fritters) with tea. Her lunch comprises chapatti with curry and dinner consists of *khichdi* with milk. Vaaliben is extremely fond of eating goat meat and insists on consuming it once every 10 days. Her family shared that if she is not given meat, she brings the house down. Among vegetables, she is extremely fond of *kankoda* (spine gourd) and does not even touch the costliest delicacy if the menu comprises *kankoda* curry.

Lifestyle

Every morning, Vaaliben wakes up early without an alarm and is peeved that the other family members do not wake up early. She cleans her dentures and mouth with neem sticks in the morning. Vaaliben has the habit of bathing twice--once in the morning and evening, daily.

Earlier, Vaaliben was addicted to inhaling manually powdered snuff but has quit it now. She never listens to the radio or watches TV. "Watching TV causes blindness and I prevent my family members from watching TV for long duration. When I was a child, I used to watch live performances like Ram leela and Akhyan (Geeta recitals)," says Vaaliben, who is fiercely independent.

If she ever feels the need to freshen up, she takes one round of her street with support of a small, thin walking stick and it perks her up instantly.

Vaaliben had hit her head a couple of times, which makes her suffer from mild amnesia at times.

Vaaliben's daughters-in-law remark that after their marriage to her sons, she treated them well with love and affection just as their own mother would. They insist that due to old age her personality now seems to have become stern and strict but she has

**with support of a
small, thin walking
stick and it perks
her up instantly**

been quite loving otherwise.

"All my children and daughters-in-law treat me well and take good care of me. My children respect me so much that they put their income in my hand every month. What more could I expect from them?" asks Vaaliben.

Her second son Babuji remembers the delightful aroma that would fill up the entire neighbourhood when his mother would cook curries. "My mother used to be an expert in culinary arts and the food was so good that anybody invited for a meal would not stop appreciating her skills," informs her second eldest son, Babuji.

"She would sew the blankets and bed cover.

Back in our village, my father would stay in the fields for the entire day to do agricultural labour and my mother used to carry food for him. On the way back home, mother would collect wood for fuel and carry a large bundle of grass on her head”, recollects Babuji.

Babuji was eight-years-old when the entire family had shifted to Dholka and faced a lot of poverty due to which none of the children could get educated. “I had to work in a hotel to add to the family income. At that time, I was paid Rs 18 and we could buy a milk can of 15 litres for Rs 1.25. One kg ghee cost just Rs 1.25. My marriage expenditure came up to only

**Even at the age of
98, her green-grey
eyes, white hair,
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demeanor**

Rs 400, in spite of being celebrated in a decently elaborate way,” shares Babuji.

Secret to longevity

“One should eat at the right time, eat nutritious food and exercise regularly,” says the centenarian, who advises her family to stay together peacefully.

[Scout: Mehboob A. Saiyyed, Mohammadi School, Dholka, Ahmedabad]





The importance of Swachh surroundings

Nathiba Chaudhary, 106 years

Nathiba Chaudhary never went to school. But she is as smart and clever as any highly educated person since she was a child. At the ripe age of 106, Nathiba still does all her chores independently. She urges the current generation to do chores on their own instead of depending on anybody.

Childhood

Born to Puriben and Vagabhai in Indrapura of Mansa taluka in Gandhinagar, Nathiba's family was quite well off and never faced any financial difficulties.

Life after marriage

When she was 10-years-old, her family decided to get her married to Motibhai. However, as per customs, Nathiba was sent to her husband's house only after she became older. Her married life was very prosperous. They welcomed one son and four daughters. Nathiba did all the

household chores herself and even did some labour work outside.

Nathiba took care of the house, her children as well as her husband's four sisters, as her husband was the only son.

"I have never faced any difficulty in my entire life and have always experienced satisfactory financial conditions," shares Nathiba, adding proudly that her grandson (son's son) is in the US.

Health and home remedies

Even after crossing 100 years of age, Nathiba never needed or used any medicine ever in her life. Till she was about 85-years-old, Nathiba even worked in the fields. Nathiba has vast knowledge about the medicinal uses of Arduci (commonly called Vasaka and botanical name *Adhatoda Vasica*), Tulsi (holy basil) and Umra (cluster fig).

"In olden times, there were no dispensaries so everyone did their own treatment for all kinds of sickness. For example, if a person

suffered from fever, he was fed ghens (a preparation of rice and buttermilk) with jeera (cumin seeds). The person would be cured of fever by using this simple medication. Applying heated leaves of onion and mango plant/tree would also get people rid of fever,” she shares.

She says that she knows only use of ash and buttermilk for crops as in the olden times there were not many diseases or other medicines for crops.

Religious beliefs and customs

Nathiba’s family is a follower of the Swaminarayan sect and visits the temple regularly. They do not consume onions or

(bracelet), especially worn by people of the Swaminarayan faith.

Food habits and diet

Nathiba says she could consume a bowl full of ghee whenever she was required to do labour work in the field. She relished soonth (dried ginger) and ghee. Her favourite meal is kadhi (buttermilk and gram flour mixture) and rotla (bread).

They used to own a buffalo, which ensured plenty of ghee in the house. “I could consume almost 1.5 kg of sheera (sweet delicacy) made of ghee all by myself. I can still chew and digest all kinds of food. At present, my diet consists of wheat chappatis and bajri na rotla (bread made

**“I do not let even
my daughter-in-law
do my work as
I like to do my
own chores.”**

garlic. Nathiba was a member of bhajan mandali (prayer groups) and went for bhajans (prayers) in and around the village. Nathiba practiced and believed in untouchability as per the customs of those days. “Earlier, I would never allow people of the backward castes even to enter my house. My family was very rigid in their beliefs and did not allow even shadow of a widow to fall on them,” she says.

The women of the Chaudhary caste wore a lot of jewellery like kalla and ogli. Women adorned bright-coloured garments like red ghaghra (long skirt) and pomta (a blouse fastened with strings at the back).

The Chaudharys also wear a kadi

of pearl millet).

Those were the days...Nathiba worked hard in the fields and did all work including sowing, ploughing and harvesting. She would talk to her friends regarding their work. Nathiba is fond of eating and going out. Among the varieties of crops, which are getting extinct are includes dodi and umalo, she says.

Other details..Although a little hard of hearing, Nathiba can easily insert a thread in a needle and neatly stitch up a button, even after her cataract surgery some years ago. “I like to keep myself and my surroundings clean. I do not let even my

daughter-in-law do my work as I like to do my own chores. Today's generation should understand the importance of cleanliness and do their chores themselves," she suggests.

[Scout: Swati Kanhaiyalal Prajapati,
Gozariya village, Mehsana]





Tuning into a century old melody

Valiben Laxmanbhai Rabari, 108 years

Birds in Malekpur village of Mehsana would wait for Valiben to wake up at 5 am everyday and feed them. At 108 years of age, Valiben walks with the support of a stick but does not move around the house much. She likes to talk to everyone and is healthy but experiences weakness most of the times.

“Back in the old days, the entire month’s provisions cost Rs 5 only. We would make our own house by using mud,” says Valiben, who has lost her teeth and is hard of hearing.

Childhood

The daughter of Jaliben and Kalyanbhai, Valiben’s father’s house was built of mud. Her parents loved her a lot and never made her work. She would play with dolls and games like saat taali with her friend, Hariben.

Even her brother and his wife took good care of her. Their father owned 15 bigha of land where they cultivated crops like

bajra (pearl millet), wheat, moong (green grams), math (moth beans), tal (sesame) and variyali (fennel).

“Once, my father had sent me to another village with a basket of mangoes but I forgot to bring it back,” reminisces Valiben.

She studied till class III and can recite numbers till 30.

Life after marriage

As per child marriage customs of those days, Valiben was married as an infant of six months but sent to her husband’s house only after she grew older. She informs that in those days the bridegroom’s marriage retinue would travel by foot to the bride’s house and stay over for five days before returning with the bride. Girls, who were part of the marriage retinue, would not be made to walk but were made to sit in the cart while travelling.

Valiben gave birth to six sons and three daughters. She presently stays with

her youngest son Hemrajbhai, who is unmarried. Another son of hers manages to pay for her expenditures. Hemrajbhai is engaged in trading of cattle. Among her sons, Velabhai is very dear to her. For some reason, she dislikes the concept of education and hence none of her children are literate. Her sons are engaged in cattle rearing and take care of cows and goats. Her sons take the cattle for grazing in others' fields. Her husband's family does not own any land.

Her husband's house was also made of mud but now they have a pucca house.

Customs and rituals... Women in

(pleated long skirt), blouse and dupatta during and after marriage. The bride would be made to sit on a bajot (low table) and her face would be completely covered with the dupatta," she shares.

In those days if the girl's father does not have enough income to get the daughter married, her uncles would help the father. "We would not mingle much or exchange goods with people belonging to other community or castes," she says.

Life's struggles

Valiben has always faced water scarcity problems, which resulted in scarcity of food grains. "We had to pull out water

**“Ubho rahe rahi
laada ubho taaro,
Desh na jaanu
laada ubho re,
Pochi man laadi,..**

Valiben's community wore jewellery like dayana, phool dayana, chudiya (bangles), kadu (bracelet), nose rings and studs for the nose. She used to wear ivory bangles, called balaiya. There were other jewellery, too, like gold set (necklace, earrings, bangles etc), paiya, sutari sar, golden dokyu, sajan butti (earrings), lockets, anklets, finger rings, silver satchok kado (bracelet) etc.

Valiben used to do embroidery on her ghaghra (pleated long skirts). The cloth for the ghaghra was woven using the rentio.

"Brides and married women in those days would wear embroidered ghaghra

from the wells," she says.

During the chappaniyo kal (famine), there was severe scarcity of foods. She recollects that there were no food grains for the family during those trying times.

"I used to eat ghee, gol (jaggery) and milk in my father's house while at my husband's house, these things were not available as we were not financially well-off. On the very seventh day of every month, we would have to go and ask others for things. I was happy in my father's house but did not see much happiness once I got married," laments Valiben.

Valiben has been through some tragedies in her life. Her son Velabhai died due to

a heart attack, which was her life's most tragic moment. Her daughter is blind and that has been a cause of great sadness. She also misses her brother a lot.

Traditional practices and rituals

Valiben is a treasure-house of traditional practices.

She informs that child-birth would take place at home and people did not use chemical medicines for any kind of pain for the new mother or child.

“We used to feed raw edible gum to the mother immediately after child-birth. The young mother would be given sheera (sweet delicacy) made of ghee, edible gum, dry coconut, jaggery and dry ginger which aids in breast-feeding. We would also boil sava (dill seed) in water and feed the water to the mother to help her in better breast-feeding. An infant would be given galtutthi (made from jaggery, ghee and water). Breast milk and kajal would be applied on eyes if they are infected,” she says, sharing her knowledge.

According to Valiben, for any wound applying turmeric was the only treatment and for giddiness sugar as well as turmeric was given to the person. A concoction of water, fenugreek and jaggery was given to a person having any kind of aches

**...mar pochiman,
Maaro desh
Gujarat laadi
pochiman,
laadi pochiman”**

(rheumatism).

They used to observe Goddess Dasha Maa vrat (fast) and make statues of the deity from clay and mud.

Food and diet

“We used to grind the flour using a wheeled flour grinding machine. In the olden days, we used to get grains. I used to go to the neighbouring village of Balaad for fetching milk,” shares Valiben, who used to enjoy visiting various fairs.

In earlier days, families used to collect cream to make buttermilk and butter at home. They prepared ghee from the butter and went to neighbouring villages

bajra rotlas. We would also drink bowls full of camel milk,” she smiles, while remembering the good old times.

The diet depended on the weather. “For instance, during the cold winter months, we would consume almonds, crystal sugar, edible gum, dry coconut with ghee and jaggery for energy. For the summer months the diet would comprise more of carrots, gunda (caper berry) and onions. A simple diet ensures that you live a healthy life,” says Valiben, asserting that in those days grains tasted better and yield was also better due to use of cow dung as manure.

Other details...A bird lover, Valiben says

**“Everyone should
help the elderly
people in the society
whenever they are
in need of help.”**

to sell the buttermilk.

“I still like to eat butter, jaggery, ghee and bajri (pearl millet) rotlas (bread). Now a days, I like rotla with ghee and khichdi with ghee,” she says.

In those days delicacies like khaja (sweet dish), khichdi as well as dal-rice would be served during marriage functions.

Valiben mentions that in the olden days, they prepared curry in clay pots, adding that in those days most cooking was done using vessels made of clay and brass.

“Vessels called Dadoliya were made from paper and fenugreek powder and we used these plates for eating. We used to consume more of jowar (sorghum) and

that birds like pigeon, dove, sparrow and mena are rarely seen these days. Among the animals, she mentions that certain varieties of camel, cow, buffalo, roz (an animal resembling a mule) and neel gay (blue bull) are not found any more.

[Scout: Priyanka Talaji Thakor, Soondhiya village, Vadnagar taluka, Mehsana]





Grit, grain and granny

Late Meyben Chedera
more than 120 years

“Jivan me svavlamban hona chahiye, doosron ke upar aadhar rakhna nahi chahiye. Aisi jindagi jiyo ki logo ko prerna mile. Mare mare se jina koi jindagi nahi hai. Jivan main aagey badhney ka dhyey rakho, use pura karne ki koshish karo. Jivan ko sahay saral tarike se jio.”

(Self respect and self reliance are important in life. One's deeds should set examples for others to emulate. We must always strive to aim higher and move ahead. Live a life of simplicity and spontaneity.) – words of wisdom from Late Meyben

A gritty lady who had lived for more than 120 years with lots of ups and downs is what Meyben's story is all about. Her fifth generation still recalls her with fond memories. Her life is a living library and a great 'institution'.

Early days

Late Meyben Devanandbhai Ram got married to Late Kalabhai Chedera, when

she was 16. She moved with her in-laws to Morvad when she turned 21. Meyben was blessed with four children; two boys and two girls. All of them practised farming and cattle rearing. Meyben had a happy, fulfilled married life.

The big drought and the survival

About a hundred years ago, there was a severe drought in the region. Her family would go without food for several days. They would somehow manage to feed their children and put them to sleep. Many people died without food or water during the drought. Barely had they finished cremating one person, there would be

another dead body. When we talked to Meyben, she recalled that when people died and there was not much wood to burn them they would pile up the dead bodies against a wall and bury them with the earthen wall debris. Incidents of arson, loot and rape had become

common during that period.

Good times come back again

Over a period of time, the government came out with several employment schemes. Along with other villagers, Meyben and her family availed them. She would also take her kid along, whom she placed under the shade of a brick pile while she completed the work. Meyben proudly admits that she never gave any medicine to her children, all through their childhood except the juice from Neem tree's roots.

After the onset of the monsoon, people restarted working in their fields. The

seeds to animals increased their milk production.

Healing the sick

When people fell sick, they would use a commonly available creeper called 'Kukadvela' (*Luffa echinata* Roxb.). The herb was ground and mixed with cow dung and water in a 'deg' (a special vessel for boiling water). The mixture was then boiled and the steam was inhaled. This cured the fever immediately. Drinking the juice of aavan/ aaval (*Cassia auriculata* L.) tree bark, every morning could cure stomach aches.

Fever could also be cured by drinking the

The main reason behind my long life is my inner strength and self-confidence

earth had been revived after fallowing and therefore became very fertile. Meyben recalls that the yield was much more than before. They had enough milk and ghee as the cattle got enough to eat and thus grew in numbers, just like in the earlier days.

Granny talks of grains

The grains (kang, corn, bajri, etc.) were stored safely in 'kotlas'. People earlier were healthier as organic agriculture was practised and food was cooked in earthen vessels. Kodaya variety of cotton was grown, which was disease resistant. Moreover, feeding its

juice prepared from neem roots. Meyben had told the HB team, "If I had fever, I would drink some buttermilk and the fever would be cured."

Secret to longevity

"The secret to my long life is traditional food and food habits. We used to eat handmade rotlo (pancakes) of bajro (pearl millet) and millets. In those times, we did not have palmolein oil. Instead we would use sesame or groundnut oil," Meyben had shared when we interviewed her.

Ghee and milk were also used extensively. "But mind you, I would also work as

much as I ate. But the main reason behind my long life is my inner strength and self-confidence. I had learnt to survive in any condition. Even today, at this age, I have no trouble in walking though my eyesight is a little weak,” she had said, adding in Hindi “ab meri kaya nahi chalti, mai ne jindagi me bahut kam kiya, ab aap logo ko kam karne ka mehnat karne ka samay aa gaya hai. Agar kam nahi karoge to bhukhe maroge. Khub mehnat karo aur khao pio khush raho.”

Her advice to this generation was to work hard like she did, else face starvation. One could metaphorically compare

**“Even today, at
this age, I have no
trouble in walking
though my eyesight
is a little weak.”**

starvation with spiritual or intellectual deprivation.

Others around her still fondly remember Meyben and say, “Apna kam sahi tarike se, samay par karna agar kisiko sikhna hai to vo Meyben se sikhe”. (If someone needs to know how to do things right and on time there is no better role model than Meyben.)

[SCOUT : Parmar Bhavesh, B.P.S College
Shardagram (Mangrol)]



Age is the issue of mind over matter, indeed

Maya Devi, 91 years

In the 91 years of her life, Maya Devi has witnessed what most of us have had the pleasure of only reading in history books. Hers is a family of four generations, all living under one roof, in Bhucho, which is about 200-odd kilometres from Bathinda in Punjab. An enthusiastic little boy introduces us to Maya Devi-- who is dressed in a white salwar kameez with a floral print-- only to be interrupted by the centenarian with, "It's only Maya. Devi is so outdated."

Childhood

Maya Devi originally belongs to a well-to-do family from Shirin Wala in Punjab. "It was a very peaceful place. In spite of the British rule back then, Britishers had gifted us a large piece of land and were the friends of my father, who was in the Army. Our village was characterized by exemplary social, economic and political setup. We had both Hindus and

Muslims living in same village but the psychological differences prevailed as Muslims were not allowed to draw water from same well as Hindus. But both communities lived together in the most acceptable manner," she says, adding, "Old Punjab was beautiful."

As water was scarce, there was massive plantation of Babool trees. Among the prevalent crops were wheat, chickpea, bajra, corn, groundnut and vegetables like zucchini, thin beans, gourds, potatoes, muskmelons and onions.

Muskmelons and thin beans grew in the wild but were relished by villagers. "Paddy touched the Punjab soil just a few years ago due to availability of water, which was scarce earlier. Punjab now boasts of a number of vegetables but the thin beans, which grew abundantly on their own earlier, are nowhere to be found," she says.

At end of the harvest season, Maya Devi's family always had some surplus grain, which would be taken to the bhatti (a place where grains are roasted). Villagers took crops like corn, chickpea, wheat and bajra roasted to the bhatti, which also used to be a place to meet and talk for villagers.

"The bhatti used to be an interesting place, where the old came to gossip while the young came to fuel their flourishing love. The busy would hire someone to get their grains roasted," explains Maya Devi. As a child, Maya Devi used to play games with roasted grains. "The roasted chickpea would be spread on a table

of medical facilities and the incomplete knowledge of the village Hakim, the villagers turned to nature to cure minor ailments. "When anybody had a bad stomach, he was given a mixture of aniseed, asafoetida, bay leaf, black pepper and cardamom. Thymol seed also helped in case of bad stomach. "We had this great technique to control blood pressure (BP). Mud from the pond was rubbed under the feet to cure high BP," she says.

Life after marriage

At the age of 20, Maya Devi was married to a man from a large family that stayed together a few kilometers away from her

Mud from the pond was rubbed under the feet to cure high blood pressure

and whoever ate the maximum number, picked only with the tip of the tongue, would win five handfuls of roasted chickpea as prize. The games in those days were simple but vigorous and enjoyable. We also used to make balls of mud and throw them using all the force. There was only one rule: louder the sound, more the fun. We also used to play picho, stepo and hide and seek -- the legacy of this game is and would be extant. Seldom while playing we used to mumble or speak several dialogues in Punjabi language," she shares.

Traditional remedies and practice...Lack

own village. She could meet her husband only after 10 days of marriage. "I was soon burdened by many household duties as the family was large. Nevertheless, I loved to serve my husband and his family. My husband was a great man," she says, adding that it was not tough for her to adjust to a new place as the weather was no different from that of her own village. This was also the time when Mahatma Gandhi began the Khadi movement, an idea that Indians could be self-reliant on cotton and be free from high priced goods and clothes sold by the British. "We used to make Khadi at home. This movement was followed by India's independence,

which was surprisingly not a happy moment for us as it also brought along blood and death due to partition of India and Pakistan. Our relatives were mercilessly slaughtered in Pakistan and we kept waiting for them at refugee camps but they never arrived. The road to the national border was covered with dead bodies on both sides. Muslims gathered in mosque and committed suicide by jumping into a well, as they considered it a graceful death. This is how Swaraaj happened to us,” she says, recalling the horrifying days.

Life returned to normalcy soon after and the villagers returned to their content,

**“Earlier, during
summer, we would
sit under a tree
and would get
tremendous respite
from the heat.”**

rural routines. “Water, as usual, was scarce, and was available for only five hours a day. When farmers watered their fields, it was like a festival—they would sing songs and enjoy the process,” says Maya Devi, who was blessed with a beautiful son after a year of her marriage. She now has four sons and three daughters, and all are in good health.

In those days, there were very few schools in Punjab. Maya Devi wanted all her children to be educated but her mother-in-law would not hear of sending the daughters of the house to school. “My sons used to walk about 15 miles to reach school. My mother-in-law believed that

if I sent my daughters to school, they would end up staying unmarried. This left a huge mark on my conscience and when I became a member of the municipal committee of Bhucho, I ensured that the village got a girls' college built," says Maya Devi, who was one among five women to be selected as a member of the municipal corporation.

On being asked about climate change and its effects, Maya Devi says one has to depend on technology to survive the changing climates these days. "Earlier, during summer, we would sit under a tree and would get tremendous respite from the heat. We used to wear the

become 'advanced', the quantity of food may have increased but the quality of crops and food, overall, has deteriorated," she says.

Attire

In the olden days, women in Maya Devi's village used to wear ornaments like choti phul (a round boss worn on the hair over the forehead), Mauli (a long chain made of rows of pearls), Sir mang (a pendant worn on the head by Hindus). Men used to wear Kaintha (a gold chain worn around neck which consisted of beads and a big round pendent). Maya Devi says that she gifted some of her old jewellery

**“These activities
were a source of
enjoyment for us.
We were a group of
five or six girls, who
would sit with**

same Khadi clothes during every season. During nights, we used to sleep on the roof, where the breeze would be plenty. However, the climate gets extreme these days, be it summer or winter. I admit that I cannot survive without an air conditioner during summer now," she says.

Food and diet

In those days, people used to cook on a stove using cow dung cakes and wood from Babool tree. Cow dung used was also used as manure for crops and vegetables unlike the carbonic fertilizers used extensively today. "Now that we have

to her daughters and daughters-in-law.

Secret to longevity

"Once, a sage visited the street we lived and told me, 'You will live for 95 years.' Look at me! I am 91 and I think I would hit a century easily," she says, as her family erupts into cheer.

Mark Twain's quote, 'Age is the issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter, is apt here.

Game dialogues in ancient Punjab as told by Maya Devi

Source: Mera Nanka Pind by Dr. Vanjara Bedi
Once they turned adolescents, Maya Devi and her friends shied away from

playing any game and were directed by their parents towards domestic activities like using charkha, making phulkari and embroidery. “These activities were a source of enjoyment for us. We were a group of five or six girls, who would sit with charkha in a group, weave cloth and talk about boys, India’s independence, among other things,” she says.

Charka kattna

Maya Devi and her friends loved to have lassi (a refreshing yoghurt based drink) and milk. Her family, like most well-off families of Punjab in those days, owned a mare, apart from a camel, three goats, two buffaloes and a cow.

“One of the goats named ‘Labho’ was my favorite. We were both very close until I got married and moved to Bhucho. In those days, people loved and cared a lot for biodiversity. In fact we also had several conversations, poems and songs dedicated to them” she says.

1. Conversation between a girl and fish
 2. Poems on birds and crow
- (As told by Maya Devi)

[Scout: Reetika Gupta]

**charkha in a
group, weave
cloth and talk
about boys, India’s
independence,
among
other things.”**

ਕੁੜੀਆਂ ਦਾਇਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਘੁੰਮਦੀਆਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ
ਕੁੜੀਆਂ : ਹਰਾ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ, ਗੋਪੀ ਚੰਦਰ, ਬੀ
ਮੋਡਲੀ : ਡਿੱਟੇ ਡਿੱਟੇ ਪਾਣੀ।
ਕੁੜੀਆਂ : ਹਰਾ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ...
ਕੋਠੇ ਕੋਠੇ ਪਾਣੀ।
ਕੁੜੀਆਂ : ਹਰਾ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ...
ਕੋਠੇ ਕੋਠੇ ਪਾਣੀ।

ਦਵਾਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਯਾਤਨ
ਪਾ ਕੇ, ਕਲਮ ਨੂੰ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ
ਕਾਵਾਂ। ਕਾਵਾਂ। ਕਾਵਾਂ।
ਕਿਹਿਓ। ਕਿਹਿਓ। ਕਿਹਿਓ।
ਕਿਹਿਓ। ਕਿਹਿਓ। ਕਿਹਿਓ।
ਟੋਕੇ ਦੀ ਮਝਾਈ ਸਿਆਹੀ।
ਔਧੀ ਡੇਰੀ ਔਧੀ ਮੋਰੀ।
ਜੇ ਤੂੰ ਮਰ ਗਈ ਸਾਰੀ ਮੋਰੀ।
ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਸਿਆਹੀ ਨੂੰ ਫੂਕਾ ਕਰਦੇ। ਜੇ
ਕਹਿਓ :-
ਆਲੇ 'ਚ ਕੁੜੀ
ਮੋਰੀ ਸਿਆਹੀ ਕਾਹੀ।



She could have been a dentist!

Damyanti Bai, 89 years

In spite of never going to a school, leave alone attending a dental school, 89-year-old Damyanti Bai knows safe procedures to cure dental problems.

As a young girl, Damyanti Bai learned the art of dental extraction without using any instrument, from her mother. As she grew up, she became well known in her village and surrounding areas for dental procedures. She used to practise dental extractions using her nimble fingers and cure a variety of illnesses including alleviated pain and associated chronic tooth infection. Damyanti Bai has passed on this art to her youngest son.

Childhood

Damyanti Bai wanted to become a dentist but was denied the opportunity as she had to tend to her sick mother and perform household chores. She had two brothers, Ramadhar and Ramavatar, who went to school while she Damyanti

Bai walked many miles to fetch water for daily use.

Born to a farmer, Devkaran Patware and a homemaker, Dhanai Bai in Choukadi village of Harda district in Madhya Pradesh, Damyanti Bai sacrificed her dreams of a career in dentistry to fulfill her domestic responsibilities. Damyanti Bai was close to her mother and worked all the time, helping from kitchen to farm.

Once, Damyanti Bai had to be taken to the doctor to treat a wound. The doctor prescribed a minor surgery, at which Damyanti Bai directed the doctor to use a fresh needle. “The doctor smiled and said, ‘you are more intelligent than me,’” she recalls.

Life after marriage

Damyanti Bai was married to her neighbour Bhagirath Patware at the age of 16 years. Her mother-in-law and

sister-in-law passed away due to cholera. Her father-in-law donated his land in her name after marriage. Damyanti gave birth to four sons and a daughter. Today, she has 10 grand sons and three grand daughters, whom she loves equally.

Food and diet

Damyanti Bai has been witness to nature's fury twice. She has been through famine once when when she was 11-years-old and once after marriage. At such times, her family used to eat vegetables like chirota and karonda with roti (bread) made of maize and pulses. "We used to sell wheat at the rate of three paai (one paai was about one kilo) for one rupee and ghee at Rs 4 per kg.

Damyanti Bau is fond of pure, home made ghee but prefers her food light, otherwise.

Even at this age, Damyanti Bai is strictly punctual about her daily routine. She wakes up before 4 am every day and performs religious rituals. She goes to bed sharp at 10 pm.

Traditional practices

Damyanti Bai has many medicines and home remedies for ailments. She recommends a mixture of milk and

“The doctor smiled and said, ‘you are more intelligent than me.’”

wheat flour for treating conjunctivitis. “Mix a small amount of milk in baked wheat flour and cook it well. Dip a clean piece of cotton and dab on the affected areas on the eye,” she says. For typhoid, Damyanti Bai says, “Grate ghisora, hayada, beda, sweet lakdi, saunth and kadwa chorato on a flat stone. Drink one teaspoon of this extract twice a day.





A century well-lived

Ramkali Devi, 100 years

*Bade Nirmohi sainya,
Radhi kee tyagdini,
Kuvaji se het kaar lini,
Chaitra maas fuli van raiya baisakhe
phool aaye,
jeth maas tape angava, ashaade ghanghor,
Bade Nirmohi sainya,
Radhi kee tyagdini*

This song, related to the Hindu months, has been shared by Ramkali Devi, a fiesty lady who has not stopped working even at the age of 100 years. The zest and enthusiasm of her youthful days have not faded away, at all. When she is not working, she prefers to listen patiently to all their problems that people willingly share with her. Ramkali Devi believes that the principles of culture, society and environment are very important in life.

Childhood...Born to Soma Devi in 1904

at Sisaiya village, Ramkali Devi's father Hariprasad Singh was financially well-off. The family enjoyed the riches and lived happily until her mother passed away when she was barely two or three years old. "My childhood was devoid of a mother's precious love but my father loved me dearly and did not make me feel the absence of my mother," says Ramkali Devi, adding that she does not remember her mother at all.

Her father owned a large number of cattle, which included 30 cows, 30 buffaloes, eight bulls and about 25 calves. "We would never cultivate fodder for our cattle. We always took them out to the forest for grazing. The cattle was kept in two large cow sheds and we had a servant to take care of them," she says.

Ramkali Devi helped her father in farming and cattle rearing, which helped her acquire knowledge regarding trees and plants. She laments that the green

cover was much larger in those days and the number of trees and plants has dropped significantly since then.

She informs that in those days trees like local babool (Indian gum or *Acacia Arabica*), seval, neem (*Azadirachta indica*), cheed (palm) and jamun (black plum or *Eugenia jambolana*) were more in number. She remembers fox, deer, rabbits, eagle, kites, crows, parrots and peacocks as commonly seen animals and birds in those days.

“Back then, there were no taps, so we had to draw water from the wells for household purposes like cooking and washing clothes,” she says.

All the family members took care of the cattle and took them to the jungle for grazing by turns. Ramkali Devi was very fond of her pet parrot.

Describing her routine when she was young, Ramkali Devi says, “We would wake up in the Brahma muhurta (between 3 and 4 am) and start cleaning and washing. After this, we used to pound paddy with a wooden deki (tool used to pound grains) and make wheat flour using the manual flour-mill.”

The family owned almost an acre of mango orchard.

However, she was struck with personal

“Through education a person becomes more refined and cultured

Although she belonged to a rich family and could afford going to school, she never pursued education as it was not given much importance in those days. She was always busy with household chores.

Life after marriage

Ramkali Devi was married at the age of 10 years to Bhavani Singh Rana of Sunkhari village. Her husband’s family was also well-off and the family members treated her very well.

Her husband’s family, too, was engaged in cattle rearing. They owned 25 cows, 25 buffaloes, six bulls and 15-20 calves.

tragedies when three of her children died one after the other. After suffering a great deal of misfortune for almost seven years, Ramkali Devi gave birth to a son, Harcharan in 1929 followed by another son, Pratap Singh, in 1932.

Life during the good old days

Talking about the simple life in those days, Ramkali Devi says, “We mostly lived in mud houses, with roofs made of hay. We used cutlery made of bamboo as well as copper pots apart from kadai (wok) made of iron. We never used stainless steel vessels as they were considered ‘Muslim’ vessels.”

In those days, people used mainphal fruits instead of detergent soap to wash clothes. They would clean their hair with soil from the river bed and maintain oral hygiene using neem sticks or ash.

While some vegetables were acquired from the jungle, some were cultivated at home. Vegetables like lakura, pidhara, khakhsa, among others were plucked from the jungle while potatoes, arbi (*Colocasia esculenta*), brinjal (egg plant), ladies finger (okra), bottle gourd and chacheda grew in the backyard of most houses.

Ramkali Devi was extremely talented in embroidery work. She would make

Education enables him to understand and communicate with the world easily.”

colourful daliya (baskets), different clay kuthiya (vessles), clay chulha (earthen stove which used wood as fuel for cooking.) and chattai (floor mats) made with gondi (a kind of grass). She would also stitch clothes with needles and thread as sewing machines were not available in those days.

In the olden days, women wore ghaghra (long pleated skirts), angiya (blouse), futai, odhni (dupatta), kurtis, jhula (worn during winters). They wore a variety of ornaments like pahunchi, parichan, khadua, bara, bazuband (arm-band) etc for the hands; nalphool and nathani (worn during festival of teej) for

the nose, arputia, baari, zivziv for ears and paida, musadiya, bankda for the feet and hansuli, harba, kuthla, dulari, sakri on the neck.

Food and diet

In those days, crops were cultivated according to seasons. At Ramkali Devi's husband's house, paddy crop varieties like Mulli, Anjana, Hansraj, Rajbhog and Rainmukhi were cultivated as there would be adequate rainfall in those days. Also crops like local wheat variety, maize, chana (gam), urad (black gram), arhar (pegiion pea) and masoor (red lentil) were cultivated. They never used

Traditional practices

As there were very few doctors, people mostly depended on home remedies and locally grown herbs for any medication. For common cold and coughing, leaves of turmeric plant would be smeared with bitter oil and would be kept on the person's head for some time to cure cold. Pigeon droppings would be applied and a cloth tied on it to cure cold among children.

Neem extract would be given to the patient to cure him of fever. Roots of wild kanja and madrecha (local vegetations) would be mixed and given to the person to bring down the fever. To cure wounds

**When she is not
working, she prefers
to listen patiently to
all their problems
that people willingly
share with her.**

any other fertilisers except cow dung and the crops were never affected with any diseases.

“We always consumed the best quality, Hansraj variety, of rice,” she says.

Religious beliefs

Ramkali Devi has deep faith in and prays to Budhe babu (local deity) daily every day. She presents him with prasad comprising puris and kachoris especially during the month of Ashaad (Hindu name of month). She holds the Satyanarayan puja every couple of months and also donates food grains like wheat to the Brahmin, who conducts holy rituals.

and boils, Kotdhanatt leaves would be ground to a paste and applied on the affected area. A decoction of babool bark would be acquired by boiling it with water and people would gargle with this water to cure toothache. To relieve a person from stomach ache occurring due to worms, ginger leaves would be ground to paste and filtered through a muslin cloth to get a smooth paste.

Several ailments among cattle was cured using home remedies. Ramkali Devi shares that to cure Anuria in cattle, paste of Kakaiya (local vegetation) seeds was given. Cattle would be tied in the mud to kill the pests of foot and mouth disease.

For pests in cattle's tail, boiling bitter oil would be poured on it. A decoction of red chillies was given to the cattle for curing bloat. For curing fracture in limbs, paste of harjudi leaves and tied with chakra (a tool made with two bamboo sticks) on the affected part. Pain in the eyes would be cured by washing eyes with salt water. A fire would be lit at the entrance or inside the cow-shed to get rid of mosquitoes.

Words of wisdom from the centenarian

Having lived a remarkable life herself, Ramkali Devi's message to the world is to eliminate poverty through literacy. "Through education a person becomes more refined and cultured. Education enables him to understand and communicate with the world easily," she says.

[Scout : Sonia Suryavanshi, Uttaranchal]



Leading by Example

Binand Devi, 94 years

Binand Devi's financial struggles turned the fortune of her entire village in Ranchi, Jharkhand. Binand Devi used to slog hard, taking up small physical labour jobs here and there but could not earn sufficient money to feed her family. She decided to buy a cow for Rs 10, with her savings.

Within five years, she owned a fairly large number of cattle. Seeing her progress, the villagers were inspired and turned to cattle rearing as a source of their livelihood. Gradually, almost the entire village followed suit and began cattle rearing. Their village being close to Ranchi city, the market for milk and milk products was easily accessible and lucrative.

Today, Binand Devi's family has seven cows and her family runs on the income generated from the cattle. They now earn around Rs 12,000-15,000 per month from this occupation.

Childhood...Born in Dochar village of

Kanke Block in Ranchi district, Binand Devi was married at the tender age of nine. As the distance between her husband's house and her village was a mere 30 kilometres, there was no major difference in lifestyle. While she helped her family in small chores at her father's house, her gentle shoulders were burdened with many responsibilities as soon as she got married.

"I did not know how to cook. While other children would study and play, I was made to do house work. I realized the difference between a mother and mother-in-law only after marriage," says Binand Devi, who, along with her husband, soon moved out of the family home to live separately.

However, to make ends meet, the couple had to do some back-breaking labour and later bought a cow to enhance their livelihood.

Before getting married, Binand Devi recalls playing in a garden called Semar

Garden, near her house. Her favourite games were ball and kitkit (game played with marbles). She recalls that she would come home only when she would get tired from playing.

“I used to go around the fields to collect cow dung with my friend Butan. I enjoyed his company and even though he is alive today, I am unable to meet him as I do not visit my father’s house anymore,” she says.

Binand Devi recalls a horrifying incident of violence involving her family, remarking that in those days small quarrels always turned gravely violent. Narrating the incident, she says that

impact on Binand Devi that she always taught her children to keep away from any arguments or fights. She takes pride in telling us that her kids have learnt a lesson from her and never indulge in any fights amongst themselves or with others. She informs that she has always taken care that little tiffs or arguments are settled immediately without snowballing into anything serious.

Life after marriage

Binand Devi’s husband is no more. She has two sons and a daughter as well as eight grandsons and six grand-daughters and some great grandchildren, too. She

People should get proper treatment from a hospital instead of turning to black magic

her father had once taken a kada (male buffalo) for grazing and had an argument with a young lad from Yadav community. The argument made the Yadav lad hostile and hit her father’s head violently. Hearing all the commotion Binand Devi’s uncle (father’s brother) rushed with a sambel (iron rod) and her grandpa carried a Badula (farm tool) to avenge the attack. Ultimately, the Yadav lad was badly beaten by Binand Devi’s entire family but was saved by the other villagers. Later Binand Devi’s father was attacked again and his nose was chopped as a result of which he had to be hospitalized for a few days. This incident had such a grave

says that her second son’s eldest daughter named Guddu is very dear to her as she named her.

Binand Devi says that her eldest child is her daughter and she is also very dear to her. She says that she still gives her daughter money as blessings whenever her daughter visits her. “My daughters-in-law do not like that I hand over money to my daughter,” she says.

Binand Devi mentions that she ensures that her children never fight or argue with each other and she takes extreme pride in this discipline cultivated by her in her children. She has divided all her fortune among her children and stays

with her younger son.

Struggles in life

Binand Devi recalls the most tragic incident in her life being her husband's death. She mentions that on that day her husband did not go to sell milk at Ranchi and she had to go to sell milk. Binand Devi was very angry with her husband and had decided to fight with him over the incident. However, once she returned from Ranchi, she found him dead after a sudden illness and was gripped with profound shock and grief. "I still regret that I had decided to fight with my husband, whom I never got to

the nuns there gave them lemon juice. "I regret the fact that I was compelled to take help from my children to help run the house and could not educate them properly in the process," she says.

Customs and rituals

In the olden days, Binand Devi had seen a lot of villagers resorting to black magic, losing a lot of money and some even losing the lives of their dear ones.

"People indulging in black magic may have powers but the use it to cheat people. My opinion is that if people fall sick, they should get proper treatment from a hospital instead of turning to

**“I did not know how
to cook. While other
children would
study and play,
I was made to do
house work.”**

meet again," she says.

Binand Devi recalls with grief about the death of her daughter's husband too. She says that he was addicted to alcohol, which was the root cause of his death. She informs that she had even tried to get him to stay at her house and gave him work but he could not get rid of the bad habit, which ultimately caused his death. With money earned from cattle rearing, Binand Devi sent her children to school. While her eldest son has studied till class IX, the rest of managed to study only up till class III or IV and later helped her earn daily bread. She recalls that the children went to a missionary school and

black magic, which may lead them to the path of destruction," she says.

Binand Devi informs that in those days women would cover their heads and faces with saree or dupatta. The sarees were handwoven and would tear easily. The sarees were measured in hand span as five hands, seven hands or nine hands. "These days women wear tight fitting clothes, which is not good for their modesty or health. At least married women should stay away from such clothing," she suggests.

Food and diet

Binand Devi informs that she used to

cook rice in a pot whereas roti (chappati) and Tiyan (curries) were cooked in clay vessels. She recalls that the quality and taste of food cooked in this way was much superior to what is cooked these days. She would boil paddy in clay vessels for obtaining rice.

She says that earlier people used mustard and wood from other trees as fuel, adding that use of cooking gas changes the quality and taste of food. She says, "People use too much of spices and oil in their food these days which causes digestive problems." She believes that people become more religious by consuming Satvik food (here she meant

called 'Leto', popular among villagers.

Traditional practices

Binand Devi has not been associated with farming much as her father or husband never owned any land. She is hence mostly ignorant about the farming methods or traditional practices in farming but shares a solution for getting rid of small insects (pillu) that affect the potato crop. She mentions that when potatoes are affected by pillu, they should be spread out and allowed to dry.

To increase the milk yield in cows, Binand Devi shares that she used to feed cattle with Satavari (Asparagus Rasimossa).

“People use too much of spices and oil in their food these days which causes digestive problems.”

food consumed during fast), which also produces pure thoughts.

On being asked to share recipes of the old era, Binand Devi says that they lived in so much poverty that there was no means of cooking any delicacy. She however shares a recipe of vadi, which she used to prepare using a mixture of urad dal (black gram), golar mirchi (a kind of chilly), salt, coriander and turmeric. She informs that this vadi was eaten instead of curry, when vegetables were costly or unavailable.

She also shares an old recipe of mahua roti (Madhuca Indica bread) along with rice cooked with Mahua flour's mixture

“The Satavari plant is washed, chopped in small pieces and fed to the cow. The Satavari plant gets fruit after 4-5 shoots. It is chopped finely (about 300 gms), mixed with fodder and fed to the cow for 4 to 5 days so that the cow starts yielding milk normally,” she says.

She adds that if it is difficult to find Satavari in summer, 700-800 grams sarson ka tel (mustard oil) is given to the cattle.

Earlier the plants of launki (bottle gourd), bhindi (okra or ladies finger) and kohla (pumpkin) would be affected with yellow coloured round pest. Though this pest is not seen now, it would eat the leaves of

the plant and thereby destroy it. This pest was destroyed by sprinkling ash from cow dung.

When children suffered from an stomach upset accompanied by nausea, a mixture of 50 grams crushed neem leaves (*Azadirachta indica*), 50 grams ghee, 1 egg and 200 grams of milk was fed to the child for relief. To cure cold, luke warm Sarson (*Brassica juncea*) oil was applied on the nose and ears. A child suffering from body pain was made to lick ghee made from cow's milk while mahuda (*Madhuca longifolia*) oil was massaged for relief in sprain.

Memories... Binand Devi informs that in those days people believed a lot in savings. She adds that people would work hard but could not escape from the clutches of the money-lenders and always needed to borrow money for some or the other reason.

"I now pray to God, expressing my desire to leave this world as soon as possible," she says.

Secret to longevity... According to her, the secret to longevity is food devoid of spices and excess oil. "It is necessary to work hard and follow the rules of good health and hygiene. Only on following these rules one can have a long and

“Only on following these rules one can have a long and healthy life.”

healthy life," she insists, advising youth to eat hot and fresh food only.

Binand Devi says that if people live and behave according to traditional customs there would be no clashes within the family.

[Scout : Rajeev, Social Upliftment Trust, Hazaribaug, Jharkhand.]



Eyes that do not age

Bhimabai Narayanrao Pushatkar

The only time Bhimabai has visited a hospital in her entire life was when she was in labour with her first child. Even at this age, Bhimabai does not wear spectacles and can see clearly. “I have done whatever good I could do and now, God can take me away peacefully,” she says.

Bhimabai is mother to four sons and two daughters. She worked with her husband under a Patil (the principal official of a village) for daily wages. The family used to own two buffaloes.

Recollecting the food that they used to have in those days, Bhimabai says, “Moh, ambadi, mathachibhaji, kukdikibhaaji, jowar andsoji were the common items cooked in most houses in those days,” she says.

Bhimabai has visited many pilgrim destinations such as Pandharpur, Kashi, Bodhgaya, Gangasagar and JaggannathPuri in her lifetime. On our insistence, she sang two songs for us—

one that was sung in her village during the haldi (turmeric paste ceremony) during marriages and another one, a devotional song for Lord Mahadev.

**I have done
whatever good I
could do**



No place like home!

Anak Lepcha, 94 yrs

Anak Lepcha is married to Linjim Lepcha, who is three years younger than her. The couple has 12 children---seven sons and five daughters, grandsons and granddaughters. They are basically farmers, and have led their life in a simple way in Panthong village, which is the last village in Dzongu area. The Panthong village is now connected to the city unlike 25 years ago, when there was no connectivity. In those days, villagers used to depend only on agriculture as a means of livelihood. They used to cultivate rice and corn and sourced some vegetables and fruits from the forest. The couple lives in a wooden house and likes their life in the village, unadulterated by the stress that comes of being associated with life in the city.

In spite of their old age, the couple has never had to be hospitalised for any serious illness. They like to eat only home cooked food and have never visited

any fair or market. The duo consumes nutritious edible roots from the forest and also uses several wild herbs for medicinal purposes. The villagers use a plant called Shishnu to bring high blood pressure back to normal.

While Anak is active, she has confined herself to household work due to old age. Linjim, on the other hand, is an expert in bamboo crafts and continues to practice it. Their youngest son is 45-years-old and eldest daughter is 75-years-old.

The couple worships Mount Kanchenjunga and has a deep relation with nature. They use the red variety of rice for worshipping. In spite of having faced natural calamities like earthquakes, heavy rainfall and landslides, the couple says that there is no place like their village.



A century of experience

Jagiro Devi, 114 years

*Mere Beer nu, chhatri nu,
Tang chad gaya!!
Sheshi teri bhais Mamja,
Nyara hi jaa, aur rukhi bhai si khaana
khaane
Kekauna ayega pure tera!!*

The India-Pakistan partition post-Independence had shattered Jagiro Devi's life. The whole event had a huge impact on her family, emotionally and financially. After a devastating partition, she started her life from scratch and has lived to till now to share a century of experience.

Childhood

Jagiro Devi was born in Baknor village in Ambala.

Life after marriage

She was married to Prasram Singh, a labourer from Damla village in Yamunanagar. She gave birth to four sons and three daughters, with the eldest

son now 70-years-old. Today, she lives with her large family of six generations. The main occupation of her family is animal husbandry.

Jagiro Devi shares that in those days, villagers used to eat moongdaal, bajri roti, uraddaal, kangaji vegetable, masimbal, corn, black bamboo, bujolakheer and a paste made from wheat flour and milk.

In case of fever, leaves of Goma plant were boiled and given.

**After a devastating
partition, she
started her life
from scratch**



The interaction with centenarians and those nearly so, has taught us many lessons. The societies which don't learn from the wisdom of elders can't aspire for a sustainable future. The ability to live longer with lesser material resources is one of the hallmark of their lives. Frugality, humility and fortitude have helped most of the elderly to live longer. As mentioned earlier, majority of them were also headstrong. Despite all the strains in life, majority did not have a complaint or ingratitude

What can we learn from their lives :

A) when our elderly live long, we should draw lessons from their life experiences and pass these on to the younger generation

B) we should consider them as moving libraries and special oral history project should be launched to document their insights in multimedia format

C) special centenarian clubs should be created among youth for visiting such centenarians regularly to make them feel

wanted, music and dance club of colleges should perform for them; health clubs should get them checked

D) the health experts can of course study the bio-medical aspects of those who live long so that lessons can be learned for guiding young generation

Finally, we would like to say that all of us involved in the study consider ourselves specially blessed for having got the privilege of learning at the feet of our elders.

May the centenarians live long

Journey ahead

May the path of sustainable lifestyle shown by them be the pointer for modifying our own lives.

SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions), which means creation, was born in 1993, essentially to support the activities of the Honey Bee Network to recognize, respect and reward creativity at the grassroots. The objectives were: systematic documentation, dissemination of, and value addition in grassroots green innovations, providing them intellectual property rights protection and risk capital support besides helping in the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of local biodiversity and associated knowledge system. SRISTI is devoted to empowering the knowledge rich but economically poor people by adding value in their contemporary creativity as well as traditional knowledge. Linking formal and informal science was one of the major objectives. It has helped to establish GIAN, NIF, MVIF and AASTIIK in support of innovators and their innovations. SRISTI created the Honey Bee database of innovations, and supports the publication of the Network's newsletter in nine languages. These are: Honey Bee (English), Gujarati (Loksarvani), Hindi (Sujh-Bujh, Aas Paas Ki), Tamil (Nam Vazhi Velanmai), Kannada (Hittalagida), Telugu (Palle Srujana), Malayalam (Ini Karshakan Sam-

sarikkatte), Oriya (Aama Akha Pakha) and Marathi (Mrudgandh).

SRISTI is now focusing in more concerted ways on hitherto neglected domains like women's knowledge systems, value addition through a Sadbhav-Sristi-Sanshodhan, a natural product laboratory, and innovations in education, culture and institutions. However, ethical fulcrum of its activities can be captured by eight E's (Ethics, Empathy, Equity, Efficiency, Excellence, Environment, Education and Entrepreneurship) –the values that are central

SRISTI

to the existence of Honey Bee Network. SRISTI organises Shodhyatra (Journey of Exploration) twice a year, Traditional food festival, Recipe competition, Biodiversity competition and maintains the database of Innovations and Traditional Knowledge. SRISTI has been advocating for the last twenty five years protecting knowledge right of creative communities and individuals. SRISTI had organised several consultative sessions with the private sector, scientists, activists and development workers for discussing various issues relat-

ed to the access to bio-diversity and associated knowledge rights. It has also organised worldwide contest for scouting and rewarding innovations at Grassroots with IFAD, Rome. Techpedia, another initiative of SRISTI, aims at putting the problems of micro, small and medium enterprises, informal sector, grassroots innovators and other social sectors on the agenda of the young technology students across the country. SRISTI is providing a platform for the industry and academic institutions to collaborate, co-create and foster distributed innovations and promote horizontal learning and sharing. SRISTI has signed MoU with BIRAC under which has sponsored BIRAC-SRISTI GYTI Award 2015 worth Rs 15 Lakhs each to five selected innovations to enable them to be taken to the next stage. SRISTI has also signed MoU with IMTech, Chandigarh in 2014 to perform collaborative research on microbes that are present in soil samples collected from Shodhyatras. This will help find out the beneficiary properties of microbes which can be given back to the local communities of the concerned microbial resource regions. Under SRISTI Unicef MoU four projects have been conducted, these includes Children Creativity

workshop, Summer School for designing technological innovation, Prototyping the ideas that are developed from Summer school and Children workshop and awards for innovations for/by children during IGNITE, 2015. National Innovation Foundation (NIF) formed in 2000, an autonomous body of Department of Science and Technology is a major effort in institutionalising the Honey Bee Network approach in the national policy.

To promote a culture of innovation among the young minds of the country, SRISTI has established three categories of national awards for innovative student/ faculty projects in engineering, pharmacy, biotechnology, basic science and other applied technologies in the form of Gandhian Young Technological Innovation Award (GYTI) since 2012. SRISTI Samman is given periodically to outstanding social change agents. SRISTI is trying to build an online Sanctuary of social, technological and institutional Innovations through blend of open innovation, collaborative design, crowd-funding, incubation, e-commerce and challenge awards. Volunteers and collaborators are invited.



 **HelpAge India** | Fighting isolation,
poverty, neglect