

# Silver shades of life

Dr Kanwaljit Soin writes book on various aspects of ageing

**A**FTER writing a book about ageing, Dr Kanwaljit Soin has been thinking more about death.

"I probably thought a bit more about death also because my late mother, who had dementia, was living with me," says the 76-year-old first-time author. Her mother died last October at the age of 96.

"It was not in a negative way, more about thinking about death as part of living and how, while we're alive, we should not postpone thinking about it."

Dr Soin, an orthopaedic and hand surgeon, is Singapore's first female Nominated Member of Parliament. She is the founding president of Wings, a non-profit organisation that aims to help women embrace ageing, and one of the founding members of the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware).

Her book, *Silver Shades Of Grey: Memos For Successful Ageing In The 21st Century*, was launched last week. It discusses different aspects of ageing, such as physical, emotional and mental health, philosophies and proverbs about ageing, employment, finances, sexuality, death and ageism.

Married to a former High Court judge who now works as a consultant in a legal firm, Dr Soin has three sons, all in their 40s, and eight grandchildren.

Her widowed mother preferred to live on her own until she had dementia. Madam Satwant Kaur moved in with Dr Soin, who has three younger brothers, and was with her for the last three years of her life.

"My mother had a good death. I was next to her. It's something we should all hope for, though we can't



Now an author... Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Kanwaljit Soin with her book, *Silver Shades Of Grey: Memos For Successful Ageing In The 21st Century*. PHOTO: THE STRAITS TIMES

always plan for it," Dr Soin says.

Having a loved one with dementia can be difficult, but Dr Soin had some consolation as a caregiver.

"Towards the end, my mother thought I was her mother or sister. Initially, it was painful, but after a while, it didn't matter to me. She recognised me as someone who loved her," says Dr Soin, adding that she felt privileged to be able to care for her mother.

"Somebody asked me why I was so upset when she died, when she did not even recognise me. But I know that she's my mother. Although dementia may be distressing for relatives, maybe it's a way for individuals to slowly give up connections to the world and wanting to hang on to worldly possessions."

Her mother used to like her gold bangles, but when she had dementia, she no longer asked where her jewellery or best clothes were.

Dr Soin says: "She just wanted someone to love her. When you hugged her, she would smile. When you held her hand, she would kiss it."

There is only a brief mention of Dr Soin's mother's dementia in her book, but she is also interested in its wider implications. For instance, she cites research into a fondness for slapstick humour when one is older, shifting from a habitual liking for satirical humour, as this may be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease. She advocates policy changes such as doing away with a mandatory retirement age, with many seniors ageing more healthily these days.

A "linear life course", in which studying is followed by working life, then retirement, "doesn't allow you to make the most of your life", she adds.

A more "cyclical" conception would allow people to reinvent themselves by training for different careers as they grow older, as well as grant them the flexibility to, for example, have children early, before entering the workforce in their 30s.

Dr Soin has sought to bring an "Asian focus" to her book, for example, by discussing topics such as the impact of haze on older people, as well as how air pollution contributes to the risk of having a stroke.

— VENESSA LEE



The Singapore Sikh Community Celebrates

# Vaisakhi-2018

**Thu 12<sup>th</sup> April to Sat 14<sup>th</sup> April**



Date	Time	Program
Thu 12 <sup>th</sup> Apr	5:30 - 6:30pm	Sarab Rog Ka Aukhad Naam - @ Level 2 Darbar Sahib
	6:30 - 7:25pm	Kirtan Diwaan
	<b>7:25 - 8:00pm</b>	<b>Arambhata Sri Akhand Paath Sahib @ Level 2 Darbar Sahib</b>
Fri 13 <sup>th</sup> Apr	6:00 - 7:00pm	Turbaniser Booth @ Level 1 Langgar Hall
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup> Apr	1:30 - 3:30 pm	Talk "The Life and Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh" In English @ Level 4
	4:00 - 5:00pm	Nishaan Sahib Salaami - Flag Raising Ceremony
	4:00 - 7:00pm	Pioneer Generation Booth @ Level 1 Lobby
	<b>7:00 - 7:40pm</b>	<b>Bhog Sri Akhand Paath Sahib</b>
	7:40 - 9:40pm	Kirtan & Katha Diwaan



**At Central Sikh Temple**

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