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A silver lining

TINA AMBANI, founder of Harmony for Silvers Foundation for senior citizens, tells SAUMIT SINGH that age is all in the mind

It's the unlikeliest batch of salsa students you'd ever find—there are 26 of them and the baby of the team is 55 years old. But even he's no match for a sprightly quartet of septuagenarian ladies—Sahasini Samant, Usha Nandanikar, Mangala Pathak and Shakuntala Mhatre. They are all practising under trainers from Sandip Soparrkar's dance academy for the annual Harmony for Silvers Foundation Awards ceremony next Tuesday.

Just then, Tina Ambani, the lady who'll be making all this happen walks into the room and they excitedly crowd around her as she inquires about how things are going. "Every new step will always start on the right, please remember," she advises. "Arre, Bharatiben, no gadbad," she winks at one of them and the rest erupt into a collective giggle.

It's been four years since she started her center for senior citizens—Silvers. But Tina is still convinced that old age homes are not the answer to the shadow that fills their twilight years.

"The biggest problem they face is loneliness and lack of communication.

They need a place to spend time with their peers where they can do things they enjoy. In Indian society, family ties are strong and packing off parents to old age homes is still taboo.



Pradheep Chandra/DNA

But it's also true that for seniors, even the bathroom isn't theirs to use when the younger ones are getting ready for work," she notes.

This year again, her foundation will be honouring 10 outstanding Silvers. The winners will be chosen by—Leila Seth, the first lady chief justice of a state high court, actors Om Puri and Victor Bannerjee, besides MP Priya Dutt and senior journalist Shekhar Gupta. But the guest Tina will be most proud to have that night is the legendary Dev Anand (as chief guest). "Devsaab is the most shining example of what Harmony for Silvers stands for, with his amazing zest for life," she beams about the man who launched her career in Bollywood years ago. "I still remember his first conversation with me. He used to call me Tini Mini. 'Hey Tini Mini, mere picture mein kaam karogi?' But I wanted to become a fashion designer. He pursued me and finally *Des Pardes* happened. The rest is history," she smiles.

That was in 1978. A lot has changed in both their lives over the last 30 years, but they remain 'constant friends'. There's another thing that has changed—she's become Silver herself. "I'm very happy to be a Silver. I've completed 50 years and hope to live another 50 with all the energy and zest I have today. Numbers are all in your

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head. How old you are doesn't matter, what matters is how well you've lived your life. I want to be able to make a difference in the lives of Silvers across the country," she says. Finally, given the fact that she's been a successful actress

and that her husband Anil Ambani has forayed into multi-million dollar deals with Hollywood, does she see a comeback for herself in some form in film? She smiles, "I'm not involved with the cinema part of Anil's business. I'm a forward looking person. I don't want to go back to what I have left, even though I loved every minute of it while it lasted. Then again, never say never..."

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