

The Forty-Ninth Summer and New Doors of Destiny

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Abstract

This reflective essay explores the intersection of spirituality, ageing, and self-transformation through the lived experience of a woman entering the forty-ninth summer of her life. Moving beyond conventional notions of spirituality as belief or ritual alone, the narrative emphasises how spiritual growth is practically embodied in confronting fears, cultivating discipline, and embracing lifelong learning. Set against the backdrop of shifting family roles, physical vulnerability, and the discovery of swimming later in life, the essay illustrates how new “doors of destiny” open when long-held limitations are consciously challenged. The journey underscores the significance of purpose, resilience, and supportive relationships in redefining meaning, vitality, and spiritual maturity in midlife.

Keywords: Spirituality, Midlife Transformation, Ageing and Fitness, Fear and Growth, Lifelong Learning

1.Introduction

At a practical level, spirituality is reflected not only in behaviour, emotional intelligence, or moral conduct, but also in how consciously we work on our shortcomings each day, what new skills we choose to acquire, and which fears we choose to overcome. Fate arranged a fortunate yet transformative turn in my life when, within a single year, both my children were married. Overnight, I became a mother from two to four. I found a son-in-law who was like a son, and a daughter-in-law who immediately filled the void created by my daughter's wedding. Along with this, a strange emptiness arose in my life, with fewer responsibilities.

For many years, my primary life purpose revolved around my children: ensuring their education and helping them find suitable life partners. But I never considered anything

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beyond that. It is said that a person should always have a purpose. Although I have many personal goals, such as writing, research, and constantly working on current and future projects for my organization, "Dharma for Life." Yet, I felt something that cannot be expressed in words. The feeling I'm trying to express will surely be relatable to women who have gone through this phase. My husband used to go to the office before, and he still stays away from home in the same way. But I chose to keep my office at home. Now I understand why and how women in the past would start nagging their daughters-in-law and daughters about having children as soon as they became mothers-in-law!

2. From Physical Limitation to Inner Expansion

A few years ago, due to a fatal experiment with my health, my knees seemed to be weak. Both my daughter and daughter-in-law, based on their own research, told me two things: first, knees do weaken with age, but by strengthening the muscles above, below, and around the knees through weight training (in which different types of weights are lifted) and regular exercise, we can not only prevent this weakness but also transform it into strength. Second, with age, due to menopause, etc., muscle loss in women starts happening very rapidly every year, and if not taken care of, the capacity of the knees as well as other parts of the body starts declining.

Both of them encouraged me to start weight training and exercise regularly. I took this seriously and convinced my husband, and together we started a gym, the one we had always had at home but had rarely used. Luckily, we found a good trainer. After about a month of gymming, one day the trainer said, "You have a pool at home. Exercising in water helps build

muscle strength." Well, then one day my husband and I got into the water to exercise. We didn't even realize how an hour passed.

I was still unaware that fate had another unexpected surprise in store for me this summer, one that would be realized through my efforts. The same thing happened as it has always happened with all our shared exercise programs. My husband, citing his busy schedule, refused to do any more exercise. I, who was enjoying exercise so much for the first time, was taken aback. Having company not only doubles the fun of exercise but also helps you progress more. So what? It was June 21st, International Yoga Day. My mother was visiting us for the weekend. She's well-known in her society for her dedication to regular exercise and her extremely positive attitude towards life. We both got into the pool together. She tried her limited swimming skills. I was splashing around in a corner, as usual, when the trainer suggested that you should learn swimming. My usual answer was, "I'm afraid of water." Trainer Balram gently and slowly prepared me, and I began a journey I hadn't expected, at least not in this lifetime.

3. Learning to Swim, Learning to Live

I accepted the challenge to enter the water three days a week. I took it with the intention that I would definitely not learn to swim. However, exercising in water would surely protect me from the heat and I would definitely learn something, at least. During this time, the way my dear daughter-in-law supported me cannot be described in words. She would also always enter the pool with me, not only to improve her swimming with the help of a trainer, but would also constantly encourage me. She would keep encouraging me with sentences like 'Mom, now you should consider that you have learnt swimming, just a little practice and you will be a champion', 'Mom, the amount of swimming you have learnt in one month, I learned that much in ten years'.

Exactly one month later, on July 21, 2025, I completed a full lap of the pool using freestyle swimming. Of course, there's still much room for improvement. By August 21, 2025, I had also learned the breaststroke, although I still have a lot of work to do on arm-leg coordination. During this time, not only did my confidence continue to grow, but my muscles also strengthened. Furthermore, my energy found a new, positive channel, guiding me to live a more fulfilling life. Some of the best lessons learned are:

- Water, once a source of fear, became a companion.
- A pool that once symbolised danger transformed into an invitation to exploration.
- Time once spent on mindless digital content was now devoted to learning quality swimming techniques.
- We often make fun of people who are afraid of drowning even in four feet of water (like me). But my trainer told me that drowning in even such deep water is a life-threatening situation. Therefore, instead of ridiculing someone's fear, we should consider its seriousness.



There are still some challenges, such as in freestyle swimming, where I cannot take a deep breath through my mouth, so I quickly get tired and have to stop mid-swim. Even my breaststroke is full of mistakes. But the excuses I've overcome are:

- *How can I swim with knee-length hair? My hair gets wet every day, so I have to spend the whole day managing it.* Now I say, "I don't care."
- *I don't know how to stand in the middle of water; I feel like I'll drown.* Now I say, "I've learned."
- *My skin darkens from tanning.* Now I say, "I don't care."

- *It's hard to find time from my busy schedule. Now I say, "This is my priority."*

Conclusion

As I reflect on this phase of life, I realise that the forty-ninth summer marked not a closure, but an opening, a threshold to new doors of destiny. The journey into water symbolised a deeper plunge into self-discovery, resilience, and spiritual maturity. Challenges remain, both in swimming technique and in life, yet the fear of beginning has dissolved. Today, I choose to dive, not because fear has vanished, but because purpose has emerged. During every swimming session, a couplet by Saint Kabir echoes within me:

जिन खोजां तिन पाइयां, गहरे पानी पैठ
मैं बपुरा बूडन डरा, रहा किनारे बैठ

Those who searched found, diving deep into the water.

*I, the poor fellow, was afraid of drowning and sat on the
shore.*

