

PINK CONNECTION

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UBF



**'I will not allow
cancer to overpower
me!'**

Cancer Conqueror Nafisa Ali

Ashavali:
A Disappearing
Heritage Weave

**PV Sindhu launches
Augmented Reality
app for UBF**

BEHIND The Scenes

Society fills women's heads with all sorts of fears. When women are younger they fear not having a child, as they are led to believe their primary goal is motherhood. And, that they have to choose motherhood above everything else they want to do in life. What is worse, is that they are made to feel incomplete if they don't bear children.

If motherhood is one thing, the other is the myth of beauty. Women are coerced psychologically into believing they must stay beautiful and desirable. Of course, 'beauty' is defined by the cosmetic industry and their slick advertisements, which psyche women into wanting to be fair with perfect eyebrows, cheekbones and lips. Many young girls whose features have still not developed go in for surgeries to make their lips or breasts fuller.

In India, we have the overpowering desire for young girls to look fair that has brought forth new creams, which are harmful for the skin. Sania Mirza, India's ace tennis player recently confided how girls hesitate to take up sports because they would have to be outdoors, which would make them dark!

Finally, women want to drink from that fountain of youth to make them look young and desirable. The fiery feminist Germanine Greer wrote, "The terror of growing old is worse than it ever was". She said the cosmetic industry exploits women's anxieties of growing old and hands them creams and serums as if they were miracles from heaven.

This is why, I have long admired Nafisa Ali Sodhi, considered among the most beautiful woman in India when she was young. However, she was the first to accept ageing saying that the wrinkles and greys were the result of her life's journey, and she wouldn't trade it for anything from her youth. And, recently after being diagnosed with cancer, she was open about it, putting it out there on social media to get her message across of fighting cancer.

We are privileged to feature her in this issue of *Pink*. We need more women like her to define what 'beauty' is.

Ratna Rao Shekar



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Nafisa Ali Sodhi

“How can the cancer get the better of me?”

Cancer can get the better of most people, even those who are usually upbeat and positive. But, as it happens many times, the person finally finds the strength within themselves to fight back; and more often than not, wins.

Nafisa Ali Sodhi, a former model and actress, was diagnosed with peritoneal cancer stage 3 last year. She shares her amazing story on fighting back with **Minal Khona**

A former Miss India and actor Nafisa Ali Sodhi, who first made her mark with the late Shashi Kapoor’s film *Junoon*, has had a blessed life. Married to Colonel R S (Pickles) Sodhi, an Arjuna awardee for polo and equestrian sports, she has three children—Armana, Pia and Ajit Ahmed Sodhi. Having modelled and acted in several films, she is no stranger to the camera and poses like a professional during the shoot. Never having been sick, it therefore came as a shock to her when she was diagnosed with peritoneal cancer stage 3 at the age of 61.

In a conversation with *Pink* in the lobby of The Park Hotel in Hyderabad, before her talk at the Algebra event, Nafisa Ali tells her story. It started with a stomach pain last year.

She narrates, “It was in September 2018. Initially, when I complained of stomach pain, I consulted a family friend who was a gastroenterologist. It was misdiagnosed as a stomach infection and I was given deworming tablets and antibiotics.” The pain didn’t subside, so she consulted another doctor with her reports. The ultrasound and CT scans did not show any abnormality; so, the doctor presumed that the fat in her abdomen, which was pushing against the organs was perhaps causing pain.

Nafisa Ali narrates, “I went back to my family physician after two months and I started crying, insisting there was something wrong with me. He sent me to another gastroenterologist, who realised there was something wrong. More tests followed. She continues, “They planned a dye injected CT scan and insisted I don’t neglect the problem, as I was running a low-grade fever. I was asked to wait for a week but on the fifth day, the pain was in the appendix region. I was so ashamed for some reason thinking it could just be appendicitis. The lady doctor who did the ultrasound of the abdomen

noticed some worrying abnormalities in the lower abdomen.”

They did her CA 125 (cancer marker test), which showed a high reading of 6,500—the normal is meant to be below 30! It was later diagnosed that the omentum—a sheet of fatty tissue

When I came out of surgery, I had all these staples on me. Nowadays, they have staples instead of stitches and I looked like Frankenstein

that stretches over the abdomen and connects the visceral organs like the spleen and the stomach—was affected with cancer. I had never even heard of the word before, and didn’t know there was something called an ‘omentum’ inside the body.”

Nafisa then took all her test reports and went to meet oncologists at a hospital in Delhi. They immediately did a PET scan with special markers and the attending doctor found the

presence of cancer. She was diagnosed with peritoneal cancer, stage 3, an aggressive and rare form of cancer; and it had spread all across her abdominal region.

“I was shocked; all the hot spots showed where the cancer cells were. Then a laparoscopy and a biopsy were done by the surgical oncologist. I am not a hypochondriac by nature, and so I asked him, what now? I just wanted him to find a way to stop my pain,” she recalls.

Nafisa then decided to get a second opinion from an oncologist in London, who was recommended by a friend. She was advised three rounds of chemotherapy before major abdominal surgery.

After the surgery, Nafisa had to undergo three more rounds of chemotherapy. She shows me the scar on her stomach—an angry vertical red line—18 inches long that runs from her pelvis all the way up to her torso.

Nafisa, who was 61 years old at that time, doesn’t recall the exact dates of the diagnosis and the many tests,



Baby Ayaan—the youngest grandchild with Nafisa, her husband Col Sodhi, her daughters Pia and Armana and son Ajit

which happened last year. “I don’t want to remember. I have blocked it out because I don’t like to talk about it either. I even told the doctors I don’t want to know what you do when you invade my abdomen. I just don’t want any pain. And, they were good enough to do the surgery in a manner that I have no recollection of the pain. But, when I came out of surgery, I had all these staples on me. Nowadays, they have staples instead of stitches and I looked like Frankenstein,” she jokes about her surgery.

What Nafisa does remember and what

I could not show any fear or be depressed myself. It would make my family feel low too. I convinced them that I would recover completely; after all, the mother is the pillar of the family

is indicative of her fighting spirit is her anger. She points out, “All I can recall is being really angry. My attitude was —how can the cancer get the better of me? I will not allow it to overpower me. I shifted my energy to cure myself; I wanted a miracle. I was positive all the time; and so was my family and the doctors; it helped me fight the disease.”

Nafisa went through the rounds of chemo like a champ, though she did experience all the terrible side effects that chemotherapy brings in its wake. “I only knew I wanted to be well enough to celebrate my children’s birthday and prepare for the birth of my third grandchild,” she says.

However, the entire ordeal was extremely traumatic for her 75-year-old husband and her entire family. Though she makes light of it, Nafisa admits that her family was traumatised when they heard about her cancer. “I could not show any



Nani needs a haircut—Nafisa with her grandchildren Aamair and Ariaana

fear or be depressed myself. It would make them feel low too. I convinced them that I would recover completely; after all, the mother is the pillar of the family. In fact, my daughter Armana went through my test reports; did so much research on Dr Google and told me, ‘Mum, you probably have peritoneal cancer.’ This was even before the diagnosis confirmed it,” she reveals.

Her positivity permeated all the aspects of her battle. When her hair started falling on the 12th day after the first chemo session, she got her grandchildren to come and shave it all off—making what can be an extremely traumatic experience into a happy memory with her grandkids. She recalls, “I called my grandson Aamair and granddaughter Ariaana over and said Naani wants a haircut. They were very excited; and they shaved it off for me. Only, the next day Ariaana called me up and said, ‘Naani, I don’t like your haircut.’ She was five years at that time.”

Nafisa luckily however did not have the usual after-effects of chemo like throwing up or mouth ulcers. The

chemotherapy instead left her with pigmented skin in the area below her neck; and the mouthwash she was given at the hospital discoloured her teeth.

Nafisa, who is and has always been beautiful, strangely is not one who constantly checks her appearance in a mirror. Still, she started to see that she looked funny and quickly realised why. She noticed that during the chemo, her eyelashes and eyebrow hair had fallen off. “I looked like an alien,” she reminisces.

Another aspect of Nafisa’s battle with cancer was the fact that she did not keep it a secret. Instead, she announced it on social media and posted it on Instagram. “I want people to be aware of the dangers of a misdiagnosis and the importance of cancer markers like CA 125. If my cancer had been diagnosed in time, it would not have progressed to stage 3. But God has been kind; once I put the news out there, I had strangers from all over the world writing to me and praying for me,” she recounts.

In fact, when Mrs Sonia Gandhi, her good friend, heard of her cancer,



Nafisa Ali, with good friend Sonia Gandhi, after she was diagnosed with the cancer

Mrs Gandhi is one of the most sensitive people I know. I went to meet her and she was very concerned. She is a very caring person and reassured me that I would be fine

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she insisted they meet. Says Nafisa about one of India's most famous personalities, "Mrs Gandhi is one of the most sensitive people I know. I went to meet her and she was very concerned. She is a very caring person and reassured me that I would be fine."

Besides the prescribed medicines, Nafisa admits to using hemp oil after being advised to do so by other cancer survivors. "Before my surgery, I took crushed medical grade hemp oil in a syringe as an enema three times a day, which was advised by cancer experts who had cured themselves. Even if you crush the leaves and have them it can help in pain management," she says.

Nafisa didn't change her diet drastically during the treatment. "I turned vegetarian for a month at that time and lost a kilo a day. I couldn't be losing so much weight, so I went

back to being non-vegetarian. As a supplement, I only take very good quality *haldi* with garlic and vitamins," she reveals.

She advises other people fighting cancer to be strong and to continue doing what their bodies are used to, unless advised otherwise by doctors. "The only thing I gave up completely was sugar—the white, processed variety. That was a real downer as I love chocolate and desserts," she reveals.

Nafisa's last chemo was in February this year, and the PET scan in May 2019 showed that she has been clear of cancer. She believes in living life to the fullest, and calls herself the "eternal traveller" as she loves to travel and help people in any which way she can. Her *joie de vivre* and ready smile are embellishments to the fine fighting spirit that lies within this beautiful woman. ■

It's all about putting up a fight!

When Rahul Yadav was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, he fought it like a soldier. More importantly Rahul became an 'inspiration' to cancer patients around the country when he started a networking forum to support cancer patients like him in their most difficult times.

Nivedita Choudhuri meets his wife Rashi Mandla Yadav to talk about the genesis of the award-winning support forum 'Yoddhas-Indians Fighting Cancer' and her late husband's tragic battle with cancer. She runs the NGO for not only the patients but for all those involved with fighting cancer—doctors, caregivers and others—in memory of Rahul, who never lost his fighting spirit till the bitter end



They support the fighters, stand by the survivors, honour the taken and always encourage cancer patients to never ever give up hope. That is what the NGO networking forum, 'Yoddhas-Indians Fighting Against Cancer' do – they ensure that cancer patients never feel alone in their war against the disease.

It was Rahul Yadav, diagnosed with Plasma Cell Leukemia (PCL) at the age of 28, who had wanted to create a support group for fellow patients. Though he passed away at just 32 years in 2017, his legacy is being kept alive by his wife, Rashi Mandla Yadav, who is motivating the 15,000 forum members and cancer patients to hang in there and stay strong.

Rahul and Rashi met as school students and got married in 2011. Life was looking up for the young couple. An alumnus of Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan, Delhi, Rahul was working as a business analyst for HCL Technologies in 2013, when his life fell apart.

The couple had just moved into a beautiful house in Bengaluru in August. Suddenly, Rahul developed a rather persistent stomach pain, a cold and cough that wouldn't disappear even with antibiotics. Dengue was suspected, but after a battery of tests came the dreaded news. Rahul had PCL, a rare type of cancer.

Also known as Plasma Cell Myeloma, PCL affects the plasma cells that are normally found in the bone marrow and form part of the immune system. In PCL, the plasma cells become abnormal and multiply out of control, and the cancer requires very intensive monitoring and treatment.

"It's rare for a 28-year-old to be diagnosed with PCL. Some physicians said Rahul was the youngest patient they had ever seen," observes Rashi, narrating her tragic story. She is currently working as a manager at an Indian multinational IT service and consulting company.

Rahul's parents, Major General Satya N Yadav and Krishna Yadav, as well as Rashi's parents, Ravi and Renu Mandla, rallied around them immediately. "We are from army families and our background had taught us to be tough in the face of hardship and pain," she points out.

The couple soon shifted to Delhi to be closer to their families once Rahul started his chemotherapy. Rahul had an autologous

transplant, which involves collecting the patient's own blood-forming stem cells and treating the patient with high doses of chemotherapy.

"However, Rahul's condition relapsed within 70 days. His doctors attempted to find a bone marrow donor for him, but no match was found," recounts Rashi.

There is nothing more important to Rashi than keeping Rahul's memories—and Yoddhas—alive. Rahul wanted to make fighting cancer look "cool" and Rashi is doing her bit to keep his dreams alive



The late Rahul Yadav with his parents



Rahul's father Major General S N Yadav at a seminar

A haploidentical or haplo transplant, which uses healthy, blood-forming cells from a half-matched donor to replace the unhealthy ones, was conducted.

For the next nine months, Rahul seemed well. In January 2014, he founded Yoddhas—a forum and support group for thousands of cancer sufferers like him. As he had always maintained, “He had cancer, but cancer would never have him.” He had trawled the Internet and most of the information he found online gave him only two years to live. He was determined to beat the odds.

Rahul forged several friendships during his time in hospitals, while braving 15 painful chemotherapy sessions and several surgeries, including gall bladder removal and two transplants. Beyond family, he received little support during this crucial phase in his life. He turned to websites and groups abroad for information.

This brave cancer survivor also exchanged ideas and solutions with other patients to make chemotherapy less debilitating. These discussions led to the formation of support groups on WhatsApp and Facebook and finally to a forum, which Rahul named Yoddhas.

Explaining the name, Rashi says, “Yoddhas means fighters. The fight against cancer is no less than a battle. Patients battle the disease, not thinking of the outcome.”

Yoddhas (www.yoddhas.com) became a platform for doctors, patients and caregivers to connect and help each other. Forum members would explore and deliberate on the best ways to tackle their problems and they also promoted awareness about stem cell donorship. College students were recruited to

work as volunteers. In lieu of pay, they would get certificates recognising their contributions.

The NGO tried to raise awareness about cancer through social media campaigns and *nukkad nataks* (street plays). It collaborated with renowned institutes such as IIM Indore, SIMS and Delhi University to spread information. Special drives were organised during events such as Pinkathon and Raahgiri Day, an initiative in Delhi to promote walking and sustainable mobility options. Rahul also tried crowdfunding as a means to generate income for his campaigns.

Around 300 patients from all over India joined the group within a few months. Despite ill-health, Rahul travelled to schools and clubs to talk about PCL and raise awareness about it. He spoke to college students, urging them to ditch junk food and cigarettes because “that’s when it starts”. Another aim was to encourage students to donate bone marrow as the best donors are those aged between 16 and 30 years.

Rahul decided to enter the 2014 Youth Citizen Entrepreneurship Competition, a global programme and online platform organised by UNESCO to mobilise youth-led innovations. The competition invites entrepreneurs from around the world aged between 15 and 35 to submit their ideas and projects, which have an impact on society and which champion and implement one or more of the 17 SDGs (UN Sustainable Development Goals).

Yoddhas won the People’s Choice Award and the second prize in the Best Projects Category. The young couple travelled to Berlin in October to receive the award. After returning to India, Rahul got busy helping patients. Though Yoddhas is an online forum, he would get numerous calls seeking advice on diet and medicines. Some patients just wanted to share their personal experiences, request for psychological support and counselling.

Rahul’s condition, however, started to deteriorate in 2016. He suffered another relapse and was back on chemotherapy. Rashi’s sister got married in November that year when Rahul’s condition was critical. “Rahul’s platelet count dropped and his body was becoming resistant to chemotherapy. The disease had affected his heart and he was in and out of ICU. In all, he spent around two months in hospital. I never left his side. The doctors allowed Rahul to leave the hospital for two hours and



Rahul and Rashi Yadav with her family in happier times



Rashi with members of the Yoddhas team

so, we were able to attend my sister's wedding," reminisces Rashi sadly.

Rahul was discharged from hospital early on in 2017, but it was becoming apparent that cancer had taken over his life. He had begun to suffer from neuropathy, which typically damages the nerves in the hands, feet and arms. He had lost strength and needed support to get up and walk. Gastric problems meant he could not eat properly and he lost around 20 kg in weight. Previously overweight, he joked that something good had come out of his illness.

**Yoddhas means fighters.
The fight against cancer
is no less than a battle.
Patients battle the
disease, not thinking of
the outcome**

Rahul's father retired from the army to be with his son. However, through his endless turmoil, Rahul remained positive planning upcoming events for Yoddhas and educating people. The needles, wires and medicines could not distract him from his passion and mission.

Rashi, meanwhile, tried to crowdfund to meet the high costs of her husband's treatment. Chemotherapy was no longer viable and foreign drugs were an option, but they would cost lakhs of rupees per cycle and multiple cycles were required for Rahul to get well. On June 11, 2017, Rahul was readmitted to hospital. His blood pressure was dropping and he suffered

a cardiac arrest and stroke. Two days later, he passed away. Rashi was devastated, but she came to accept her husband's death eventually with support from her parents and her in-laws. Her father-in-law, who she describes "as a gem of a person like Rahul", sadly passed away in April this year in a car accident.

Rashi's life changed after Rahul's diagnosis and she fought a silent battle along with her husband for four years. Asked about being a partner in sickness and in health, she recalled how on Valentine's Day in 2017, Rahul wrote her a poem during his stay in hospital because they couldn't go out.

When he was in severe pain, the couple would look at old photographs and reflect on happier times. Rahul made a list of places he wanted to visit with Rashi because he wanted to remain optimistic till the end.

As of now, there is nothing more important for Rashi than keeping Rahul's memories—and Yoddhas—alive. Rahul wanted to make fighting cancer look "cool", and Rashi is doing her bit to keep his dreams alive. In the words of American cyclist Lance Armstrong, himself a cancer survivor, Rahul had two options: give up or fight like hell. And, fight like hell he did. ■

The Basics of Breast Cancer

A woman succumbs to breast cancer every ten minutes in India. **Dr P Raghu Ram** throws light on some essential questions surrounding breast cancer diagnoses and treatment



How is breast cancer best diagnosed?

Breast cancer is diagnosed after a Triple Assessment, which includes clinical breast examination, breast imaging (mammogram, i.e. an X-ray of the breasts and breast ultrasound scan) and ultrasound guided core needle biopsy of the lump.

Is Triple Assessment essential in the evaluation of every breast lump?

Yes, definitely. Triple Assessment (clinical breast examination, breast imaging and ideally, ultrasound guided core needle biopsy) accurately excludes or confirms breast cancer in most circumstances, thus sparing the need for a woman to have open surgery to obtain a diagnosis.

Do specialist breast centres improve breast cancer care?

Improved outcomes for breast cancer can be achieved, if specialists with a declared interest and training in breast diseases manage these patients in dedicated comprehensive breast centres.

What is the aim of treating breast cancer?

1. To remove the cancerous area from the breast and any affected lymph nodes in the armpit
2. Destroy any cancerous cells that might have already spread from the breast into the body through blood stream or the lymphatic system

Where can the breast cancer spread to?

Depending on the size, grade and lymph node, staging tests are done to assess if cancer has spread. Cancer can potentially spread to four areas—i.e. liver, lungs, brain and bones. Staging tests can assess if the cancer has spread to the areas mentioned above.

The modalities available for treating breast cancer?

Surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone therapy. The treatment plan is individualised and is best determined by a multi-disciplinary team comprising of the surgeon, radiologist, pathologist, medical and radiation oncologist.

Why is counselling important in breast cancer treatment?

Counselling is an important component of breast cancer care because patients and their relatives are better informed,

better prepared and they feel more in control at every stage of their treatment.

Counselling involves discussion about the diagnosis and various treatment options by the specialist in a supportive environment. Equally, adequate emotional support is given during the counselling sessions to patients and their families.

What are the key questions that a cancer patient might want to ask the specialist?

Why is this, the best treatment for me? Are there any options? What are the possible side effects? Are there any short-term and long-term complications? How will these treatments impact on everyday life?

Can breast cancer be prevented?

No. Women and indeed men must be 'breast aware' and should report any new changes in the breast, to the specialist without delay. Truly, early detection ensures excellent prognosis and long-term survival.

Is breast self-examination the same as breast awareness?

Breast Self-Examination (BSE), is a monthly self-examination of the breast performed by a woman at the same time each month to a set method. BSE has not proven to be beneficial.

Breast awareness meanwhile is a concept that encourages women to know how their breasts look and feel normally, so that they can notice changes, which might help detect breast cancer early. Breast awareness is gaining increasing acceptance the world over.

One needs to be aware of:

- Painless lump or thickening that feels different from the rest of the breast
- Change in size—it may be that one breast has become noticeably larger or noticeably lower
- Recent retraction of the nipple
- Rash on or around the nipple
- Blood stained spontaneous discharge from one or both nipples
- Puckering or dimpling of the skin overlying the breast
- A swelling under the armpit or around the collarbone (where the lymph nodes are)
- Constant pain in one part of the breast or armpit ■

Ashavali – The Brocades of Ahmedabad

One of India's oldest Kinkhab brocade traditions, the Ashavali textiles originated in Ahmedabad, and was in fact the precursor of the Benaras brocades. After a fire these weavers from Ashaval, as Ahmedabad was called before the 12th century, migrated to Benares.

Radhika Lalbhai, a revivalist and the last of the Ashavali weaver family members talk to **Anil Mulchandani** about the uniqueness of this tradition

Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

When Ahmedabad was called Ashaval (named after a chieftain named Asha), and later became Karnavati under the Solanki King Karna in the 12th century, it was famous for a weaving tradition called Ashavali. After a fire in Ahmedabad in 1300, many weavers migrated to Varanasi, and to north and south India. The brocade weaving traditions of Varanasi are said to have been influenced by Ashavali, making this one of India's most historical tradition.

In fact, Duarte Barbosa, a 16th century Portuguese writer and officer, books such as the *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* refers to Ahmedabad as a centre for Kinkabh and silk sarees. In a conversation with *Pink*, Radhika Lalbhai, a textile revivalist specialising in the Ashavali says, "During medieval times, there were 500-600 looms in Ahmedabad, which employed a number of master weavers, with the Shahpur locality being one of the main hubs." Ashavali textiles were really the precursors of the Benaras brocade.

Expounding on the Ashavali textiles, Radhika explains that it was woven by two communities, the Kanbi Patels, who were farmers and the artisans, the Khatri. They used the jala pit looms – the jala is a kind of frame on which the design is first created using threads. Twill weave is an integral part of making the Ashavali fabric, she says.

"Ashavali was worn as sarees, *jamias* and *patkas* or used for canopies, and as decorations for camels and elephants by ruling and wealthy families," Radhika adds.

According to her, the Ashavali sarees are distinguished by the enamelled look of the border with multiple colours. "If you see the back of the border you can see the intricate interlocked weaves. The weavers also used these techniques to develop canopies, floor spreads, hangings, yardages, saddlecloths, bags and fans – the thicker ones were called Panch Padh, while the fabric was known as Tran Padh," reveals Radhika.

Unlike the Mughal influenced geometric motifs of the brocades of

north India, the Ashavali had figures like birds, horses, peacocks, parakeets, human forms and floral patterns. However, the *chand sitare* (moon and star) and other motifs showed the influence of Sultans and Mughals. "It even had a stylized Swastik and floral motifs, which were popular during auspicious occasions like weddings," points out Radhika.



Paresh Patel of Royal Brocades

During the British times, an exhibition on textiles was held in which Ahmedabad's weavers like Gopalal Bhagat actually wove a portrait of King George V on the loom and presented it to him. "It was a fine example of the mastery of the Ashavali saree weavers. In fact, one of the weavers from Ahmedabad was awarded at the Delhi exhibition," says this Ashavali connoisseur.



Ashavali was worn as sarees, *jamias* and *patkas* or used for canopies, and as decorations for camels and elephants by ruling and wealthy families



The Last of the Ashavali Workshops

Today, one of the last remaining Ashavali saree workshops, managed by the 35-year-old Paresch Patel is in Ridrol village near Ahmedabad.

The rich Kinkhab brocade tradition of Ahmedabad had a setback in the 1700s, when the city was the subject of dispute between the British and the Marathas, following the decline of the Mughal Empire.

Patel explains, "The Ashavali continued to be in demand for its *pallus* and borders, which were used to adorn sarees and *odhanis*. It was popular among affluent merchants. In the pols of Ahmedabad city, various processes of brocade making were adopted. In the fields too, farmers would weave brocades in their spare time. Thus, Ashavali was not just the hereditary tradition of Hindu and Muslim artisans like the Khatri but it was practised by other communities as well. With the emergence of the textile mill boom in Ahmedabad,

weavers and handloom weaving techniques moved to villages like Ridrol, Nardipur, Upera, Gajhariaya and Charda."

One of these weavers was Somabhai Patel, who set up looms at home in the first half of the 20th century. His son, Vishnu Patel has continued the Ashavali tradition in their village of Ridrol, near Mansa.

In the last few decades, many weavers found it unviable to continue making the Ashavali. Vishnu explains, "It is a very labour intensive process, and weavers would outsource the punching of the cards, dyeing and other processes to other artisans. The rising labour costs made the Ashavali prohibitive. My father, in the 1980s ensured that the entire process was done in-house. We are among the few Ashavali manufacturers who have survived. Most of our weavers, who are from places like Varanasi, have been with us for three or four decades."

He adds, "These weavers have the skills to realise my vision for Ashavali. Thanks to my father's efforts the Ridrol cluster of Ashavali weaving is thriving."

Meanwhile, Paresch Patel admits that he joined the Ashavali business started by his grandfather out of passion.

"I was studying for my B Com, but textiles fascinated me. I joined my father to produce and promote Ashavali weaving," says Paresch.

"What I enjoy most doing is researching and learning more about these textiles from historical

works, antique books, catalogues and museums. I have revived many old weaving styles and motifs from historical times, and I am also experimenting with new designs. Silk and metallic threads are traditionally used for these brocades, but I have also created new designs by adding wool and other fibres. I have introduced the ikat process of dyeing yarn in the Ashavali and created fabrics with indigo dye as well. Thanks to all this, my clientele is diverse – they are affluent business families of Ahmedabad and textile connoisseurs from overseas. Tourists who visit my unit in Ridrol are fascinated by the fact that I am still using the traditional pit looms and vegetable dyes."

Paresch is working to revive historical motifs. He says, "In the past, the brocades of Ahmedabad called Ashavali fabrics were exported to many countries of the world. Sarongs were woven in Ahmedabad for export to Thailand, Indonesia and other south-east Asian countries back in the 1800s and 1900s. I have made a new brocade using Thai motifs with the weaves used in those times."

The revivalist Radhika's collection too is an excellent resource for those keen to know more about the Ashavali. "I would like to set up a museum for people to know more about the Ashavali," she says wistfully, adding that she wishes the jala looms rather than the jacquard would be revived. ■



Weaving of Ashavali sarees and brocades

UBF Diary

October 2019

Walking For Cancer

12th edition of the Pink Ribbon Walk flagged off in Hyderabad by Noor Sandhu, breast cancer conqueror and S K Joshi, chief secretary, Telangana government

The slogan 'Does your heart beat for the early detection of breast cancer?' resonated with Hyderabadis, who extended unprecedented support to a signature annual event—the 12th edition of the 2K Pink Ribbon Walk, organised by Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation and KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases on Sunday, October 6, 2019.

It was held in partnership with The Social Welfare Council of The Association of Surgeons of India at KBR Park, Hyderabad. State Bank of India was the principal partner, while Amazon and Prasads Imax were associate partners.

The successful event was flagged off by Noor Sandhu, a young breast cancer conqueror. K Padmanabhaiah, chairman, ASCI; S K Joshi, chief secretary; Anjani Kumar, police commissioner; Jayesh Ranjan, principal secretary, Information & Technology, Telangana government and chief advisor, UBF; O P Mishra, chief general manager, SBI (principal partner); Suman from Amazon

"As a breast cancer survivor, I am here to spread the message of hope and courage in the fight against breast cancer"

– Noor Sandhu



"During this festive season, gift a screening mammogram to the women in your wife"

- Andrew Fleming and Dr Jwala Srikala

associate partner), Dr Jwala Srikala, head of Breast Imaging, KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases; Andrew Fleming, British deputy high commissioner and Ramesh Prasad, chairman, LV Prasad group also participated in the Walk.

Some 3,000 people from all walks of life—breast cancer conquerors and their families in addition to a huge contingent of students, army personnel, diplomats and others participated, expressing solidarity with the Pink Ribbon campaign. The aim of the Walk being to create awareness about breast cancer; salute survivors and spread the message of hope and courage.

First-time Ever, an AR App to Raise Breast Cancer Awareness

P V Sindhu launches the world's first life-size augmented reality app for breast cancer awareness



For the first time in the world, life-size Augmented Reality (AR) will be utilised for creating awareness on the importance of 'early detection of breast cancer'. Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation (UBF), will be taking the message of early detection into people's homes. This innovative initiative was launched by P V Sindhu on October 7, 2019.

With the help of life-size augmented reality technology, a star and a doctor, can visit your home, without being actually physically present and interact with you! All you need to do is download the app (ABC of Breast Health), which is freely available on both Google and Apple store.

Once you open the app, by placing your phone in a corner space in your room, you can see a life-size image of the star or the doctor talking to you through AR technology. You would see your own surroundings in the phone, giving you an impression that the celebrity is right in front of you. The whole idea is to have a one-on-one interaction, without actually being there. You can even take a selfie with the celebrity or the doctor in your own surroundings!

Addressing the media, P V Sindhu, Padma Shri awardee and World Badminton Champion said, "I commend UBF and its founder, Dr P Raghu Ram for championing this unique initiative. Dr Raghu Ram and I were conferred the Padma Shri on the same day in 2015 and over the past several years, I have been actively associated with the Pink Ribbon campaign that he has been championing in India. I sincerely hope that many lives can be saved through the awareness with this remarkable technology. If my celebrity status can help achieve this goal, I would consider it my good fortune to have been associated with this noble campaign."

Speaking on this occasion, Dr Raghu Ram, Padma Shri awardee and founder, CEO and director of UBF said, "Over the past 12 years, the Foundation has been working with a missionary zeal through a number of unique initiatives to transform breast cancer from a taboo issue to an openly discussed topic. My focus is to take life-size augmented reality technology to rural India where 70 per cent of our population reside. Starting with my adopted village, Ibrahimpur, located in the remotest part of Medak district in Telangana, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation would be using this revolutionary technology, to empower people in the villages. I have no words to express my gratitude to P V Sindhu for standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Foundation in this landmark initiative."

**THE WORLD'S FIRST LIFE SIZE AUGMENTED REALITY
FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS**
(Powered by Avantari)

Chief Guest:

A photograph of P V Sindhu, the Chief Guest, wearing a green and white jacket with the number 1 on it. She is surrounded by a decorative border featuring the UBF logo and her signature 'PVSindhu'.

PVSindhu
Padma Shri awardee & World Badminton Champion
She features in this landmark initiative



Happiness is a choice, with or without cancer.

Karvy salutes the survivors and a million other battling with breast cancer.