

# PINK CONNECTION

UBF

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## Dr Manimala Rao

Early detection  
saves lives

## The Stork Crusaders

Dr Burman and  
her Hargila Army

## Goonj

Reaching out  
to the needy



# BEHIND The Scenes

A healthy lifestyle lays the foundation for our well-being. There is evidence now to prove this and it is something we have realised during the recent pandemic. If exercise or physical activity is one aspect, eating right is another essential. A healthy diet helps to stave off evils like obesity, diabetes and cancers.

By diet, I don't mean starvation regimes that people follow in an effort to look slim and beautiful but about eating right. Eating right includes a balance of eating different grains, vegetables and meats ideally sourced from farmers who grow them organically. Few of us realise a lot of the food we eat, the greens and carrots come laden with pesticides and chemicals that cause cancers. I was shocked when I heard my greens like the palak are grown on sewage sites!

Eating right also includes not eating junk food. After all, the addiction to jumbo-size burgers, crispy fried chicken and Diet Cokes in super big glasses, has caused obesity and its accompanying diseases among Americans.

I am just reading a report by researchers at Cornell Medicine, USA, who have found a link between sugar and cancers. The obesity epidemic in the Western world in the '70s had prompted director of Meyer Cancer Center to warn people about consuming sugars (to stop for two days at least), as they are worse than the opioid or nicotine addiction. It is an addiction that leads to obesity and diabetes.

Sugars feed cancers too, he says. One way of treating cancer, apart from chemo and radiation, is to tweak the cancer patient's diet, says the report. A healthy diet and the occasional fasting, as Indians traditionally used to do, can make a significant difference to a person's health.

Here's to everyone's good health!

*Ratna Rao Shekar*



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# Dr Manimala Rao

## 'I'm a positive person'

Dr Manimala Rao has a distinguished career in medicine spanning over five decades. At 67, she was diagnosed with breast cancer but the doctor did not buckle down, instead she handled it with positivity and pragmatism.

Dr Rao talks to **Minal Khona** about how she fought breast cancer and the importance of early detection

**I**n her distinguished career as an anaesthesiologist, Dr Manimala Rao has made a significant contribution towards building both critical care and emergency medicine in this country.

With a diploma in anaesthesia from London and a MD from AIIMS, New Delhi, she has held several positions, and was also the professor and head of department, anaesthesia and critical care and the dean at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS). She has also been director, critical care and dean of faculty at Yashoda Hospital.

Currently working at KIMS Hospitals in Secunderabad as the director of medical education and academics, Dr Rao is doing what she always wanted to do—to teach and interact with students from every branch of medicine.



A major milestone in her career has been to set up several protocols in anaesthesia, emergency medicine and critical care in the ICU in south India, which she considers as her contribution to the field of medicine.

Talking about her tryst with cancer, Dr Rao recalls how, around ten years ago, she discovered an abnormality in her left breast. "In 2010, by chance, I felt an elevation on my left breast, a little below the underarm. It was not there earlier and I mentioned it to my husband," she narrates.

Her spouse Dr Vyasnarayana Rao, who is an eminent urologist, suggested she meet Dr Raghu Ram at KIMS-Ushalakshmi Centre for Breast Diseases. He examined her carefully and said it looked like a cancer. All the tests were done at the Breast Centre—which included a mammogram, ultrasound and core needle biopsy, and it was confirmed that she had breast cancer.

Dr Rao relates, "My husband was initially taken aback, wondering how I could have got it, and was extremely worried. Dr Raghu Ram explained the results and told us that it was detected in the early stages. He also reassured us that

the cancer is eminently treatable and curable, which gave us a lot of confidence."

Dr Raghu Ram counselled her and her husband regarding the treatment options. He had told them that the lesion was small and suitable for breast conserving surgery (lumpectomy) with reshaping of the breast using oncoplastic techniques followed by radiotherapy to the breast.

Points out Dr Rao, "I had however opted for the complete removal of the breast (mastectomy) because I did not want radiation treatment. As I was 67, I did not opt for breast reconstruction after mastectomy. The expert care provided by Dr Raghu Ram and his team ensured that my surgery and recovery was very smooth."

Dr Rao was up and about within a few hours after the operation. In fact, her husband was surprised to see her sipping coffee when he came to see her. She went

home the day after the surgery and she was back to work within a month.

As the lymph nodes in the armpit were negative and the tumour was small, thankfully, she did not require chemotherapy. She was put on a tablet (hormone therapy) for five years.

**As a doctor, I do what I can to save a patient's life, but there is something beyond us that is at work. Sometimes, we see older people recover and younger ones succumb to the same disease. No one can say how a person will respond**



Dr Manimala Rao with her team in the ICU

On asked about her first reaction when she discovered she had breast cancer, she says, "I am a very positive person; I didn't think too much about it. As an anaesthesiologist, I have seen many cancers. The best way to counter cancer is early detection and surgery to remove it. That is mandatory. So, I took it in my stride and knew I had to take care of it."

Her daughter, Anupama Rao, who is a specialist in Internal Medicine in the US, was coming down to India on holiday at that time. She looked after her mother post-surgery.

Dr Rao recalls that they had not told her till she had arrived in India. "She has been my greatest support during the recovery and I am blessed that I had her with me. I believe that the support of a close female relative like a mother, daughter, sister, friend or an in-law is essential to provide the much-needed help during this period," she said. Supportive spouses are a big blessing too and her husband stood by her throughout the ordeal, she avers.

Her son Rajesh Duvvuri was in Australia at that time. "He had gone there a few months before I was diagnosed with the cancer and was quite upset that he could not be by my side. But, he was always there every day, talking to me on video. My brother Dr Mohan Das, the head of neurology at KIMS was also a great support along with his wife Anjana. The emotional impact was far less in my family as most of my close family members are doctors and so they understand the situation," she says.

Her lifestyle has not changed after her bout with cancer. "Luckily for me, it was caught in the early stages so the cancer never came back. I still walk and do my yoga everyday like I have been doing for the past 20 years. I have completed ten years since my treatment. I make sure I get my annual

surveillance mammograms and I promptly get a call from Dr Raghu Ram if I have delayed my follow up tests!"

Dr Rao goes on to emphasise the importance of regular breast screenings. "Breast cancer can be cured if it is detected very early. And therefore, women over the age of 40 years must gift themselves an annual screening mammogram, which has a potential to save scores of lives through early detection," she says.

A positive attitude always helps no matter what the stage of the disease is at, says Dr Rao. "As a doctor, I do what I can to save a patient's life, but there is something beyond us that is at work. Sometimes, we see older people recover and younger ones succumb to the same disease. No one can say how a person will respond. But keeping a positive attitude at all times helps," she adds.

Today, at 77, Dr Manimala Rao continues to work, though she is taking it easy due to the pandemic. Her mantra for coping with life's challenges is to stay positive and pragmatic, to eat healthy and maintain a disciplined life.

She has even written a poem in Telugu on how she felt about the mastectomy. "Early detection and appropriate treatment can certainly help one live longer with a good quality of life. When breast cancer detection gets delayed, it can spread to other parts of the body, which requires prolonged treatment with chemotherapy and significantly shortened survival," says this doctor.

As the saying goes, she says, "catch it young", then you can nip it in the bud and lead a healthy life. Women of all ages must be "breast aware" and should not be shy to see a doctor if there are any new changes in the breast, she concludes. ■

**The emotional impact was far less in my family as most of my close family members are doctors and so they understand the situation, Dr Rao says**

Dr Raghu Ram's parents are doctors. He is their only child & is very attached to them. When his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, much as he and his spouse (Dr Vyjayanthi) had lucrative career opportunities in the UK, they relocated to India to look after his mother. He is doing wonderful work in his field in addition to spreading awareness about breast cancer through the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation. He gets his patients to talk about it so that others too become aware and can catch it in time, which can even save many lives. I have offered to help in the counseling sessions being held by the Foundation to reach out those who have been diagnosed with cancer.

#### **Dr Manimala Rao**

Dr Manimala Rao and her husband, Dr Vyasnarayana Rao are renowned doctors in the country. Her daughter, Dr Anupama is a well-established doctor in the United States. They could have gone to any place in the world for treatment. I'm deeply honoured and humbled that they chose me. Dr Manimala Rao is not just a 'survivor', but a 'conqueror' and I am delighted that she is doing very well a decade after completing her treatment.

#### **Dr P Raghu Ram**

# Goonj

## Echoing the importance of human dignity



Charity chips away at the dignity of the receiver. Therefore, Anshu Gupta launched Goonj, an initiative, which gives away items of use such as clothes to villagers not for free but in exchange for developmental work they do in their villages or in disaster areas. Today, this NGO operates in more than 3,600 villages, and every year, more than 4,000 tons of unused urban material sourced by them makes their way to villages.

**Nivedita Choudhuri** talks to Goonj founder and Ramon Magsaysay awardee, Anshu Gupta about his novel method of bringing change in people's lives

6

Photos courtesy **Goonj**

Anshu Gupta found his true path one bitterly cold December night in Delhi. As a rookie reporter in the early 1990s, he wanted to write on obscure people who work quietly behind the scenes. In the course of his work, he met Habib bhai, an impoverished pavement dweller who performed the thankless task of handing over unclaimed dead bodies to the police in return for a measly payment of Rs. 20 per body. The dreary winter months kept him busy as more homeless people died in the intense Delhi cold. Gupta noticed to his dismay that the deceased barely had enough clothes to cover themselves.

His anguish deepened when he heard Habib's little daughter say that when she felt cold, she would "hug a dead body to sleep because it does not move and so it does not trouble me". These words left an impact on the young man's mind about the poor not having enough clothes to wear to keep away the cold.

A trip to Uttarkashi in 1991 to do relief work in the aftermath of an earthquake confirmed Gupta's belief that clothing as a basic human right was often overlooked. An old man looked right through the consignments of food and water and begged instead for clothes to cover him.

"We talk about the three basic needs of mankind—food, clothing and shelter. The clothing part, though, is mostly ignored. Only when disasters such as earthquakes strike do we think that people need clothes. But, so many people die in winters because of lack of clothing and these are all preventable deaths," Gupta says.

This fact was to become the foundation of Goonj ([www.goonj.org](http://www.goonj.org)), the non-profit organisation that the social entrepreneur launched with wife Meenakshi in 1999. Meenakshi had to "juggle two babies as daughter Urvi and Goonj were born around the same time". "I am a Kashmiri Pandit who grew up in Delhi. I met Anshu at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi where we studied advertising and public relations. Initially, I was at the back-end of the operations of the NGO since I was working for the BBC till 2005. Now, I look after communications and strategy," she adds.

Gupta perhaps inherited his zeal from his father, an upright man, who was with the Indian Army's Military Engineer Services. "I spent my childhood in the nondescript towns of Uttarakhand such as Chakrata and Banbasa. Life had its ups and downs but a close brush with death when I was a class XII student in 1987 changed me. I was involved in a road accident that left me bedridden for a year. I could not get the healthcare I wanted because my father refused to pay a bribe. We were told that I may not walk again," recalls Gupta.

"The incident made me compassionate towards others," he adds. Even today, he feels pain when he stands for prolonged

periods of time. But that has not deterred Gupta from walking several kilometres a day to villages in far-flung areas to implement the programmes of Goonj.

The main initiative of Goonj was the Cloth for Work (CFW) programme, which has now been rechristened as Dignity for Work. Rather than collect money to help people, they started to source and transfer unused material, mainly clothes and household items, lying idle in urban homes to out-of-the-way villages in India.

"I believe that charity slashes dignity. I didn't want to give clothes to people as an act of charity. This led to the concept of Cloth for Work. The premise is clear-cut and uncomplicated. A team from Goonj goes to a village and identifies what developmental work needs to be done after consulting the villagers. It could be building a school or a road. The villagers implement the task and the role of Goonj is to ensure that the people are compensated for their efforts in kind," says Gupta.

Voluntary labour and the barter economy have always thrived in India. "We tried to revive it by ensuring the villagers who complete their work are remunerated with items of daily use such as clothes. The twin goals of development at the grassroots level and rewarding communities for their labour, thus allowing them to preserve their dignity, are achieved," he points out.

The founders of Goonj have come a long way from the 67 garments they started with. Their operations are spread across 25 states at the moment, covering more than 3,600 villages. Every year, more than 4,000 tons of urban material make their way to the villages through Goonj's initiatives. Many items are cast-offs that are restored and made reusable at the NGO's sorting and cleaning facility. Contributors can courier their material to the Goonj office nearest to them or leave them in volunteer-run drop-in centres in their cities.

**I believe that charity slashes dignity. I didn't want to give clothes to people as an act of charity. This led to the concept of Cloth for Work**



People in remote villages are compensated with clothes for the work they do building a road or a school



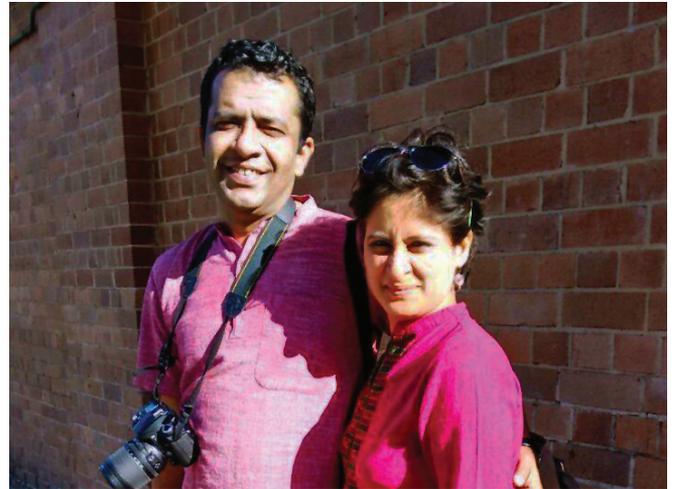
Relief distribution in villages



At the NGO's sorting facility

Annually, the NGO intervenes in 4,000 plus developmental works across the country. "With this blueprint, villagers have built a bridge across a river in Madhepura, Bihar. Earlier, in the absence of a bridge, children had to swim across the river to reach their school on the other side. Women from Kochuberia village near Kolkata don't have to walk miles to fetch water any more as the pond in their village has been cleaned. We also helped during disasters such as the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, cyclone Fani in Odisha in 2019 and cyclone Amphan in West Bengal in 2020," Gupta says.

Talk on disasters is incomplete without putting in a word on the mother of them all: COVID-19. Gupta, who contracted and beat the virus last year, has initiated many relief programmes in the wake of the pandemic such as supporting frontline workers with medicines and other essentials, focussing on the needs of the differently-abled during this crisis and sending



Anshu and Meenakshi Gupta

**Talk on disasters is incomplete without putting in a word on the mother of them all: COVID-19. Gupta, who contracted and beat the virus last year, has initiated many relief programmes in the wake of the pandemic such as supporting frontline workers with medicines and other essentials**

out ration kits to the most inaccessible areas in the country.

Gupta gives a modest reply when reminded of the numerous awards he has won over the years: the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award given by Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship in 2012 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2015 for instance. "The communities I work with feel good and the villagers distribute sweets when I win anything. But my happiness lies in the people I interact with and it warms my heart when they keep in touch with me. My inspiration has been the villagers and common citizens of India and I admire their honesty, perseverance, simplicity and fighting spirit," he says.

Meenakshi, too, is bowled over by "the huge amount of warmth and generosity

shown by the villagers I have come across and the middle-class in India who want to contribute to the world in an honest way but whose contributions are never talked about in the press".

One project that is close to Gupta's heart is Not Just A Piece of Cloth. It was started after the tsunami of 2004 when the NGO's Chennai centre was flooded with old but reusable clothes during the relief phase. These clothes were recycled into sanitary pads and given to thousands of impoverished women.

Aarohi, (not her real name) a 19-year-old from UP burst into tears when she got her first MyPad. "No one has ever spoken to me on this subject. My mother used to buy old clothes from the market for all my sisters to use during menses, which meant that she had to cut down on other household expenses. Things will change now," she points out. Thanks to the changemakers at Goonj, thousands of women like her are now clothed in strength and dignity. ■



Anshu supervising the work at the NGO

# Dr Purnima Burman

## Saving Hargila from extinction



Hargilas or the Greater Adjutant Stork were once considered bad omens, disease-carrying creature and villagers in Assam would destroy the chicks. It took one passionate conservationist, Dr Purnima Devi Barman to change all this, writes **Nivedita Choudhuri**.

She talks to this award-winning conservationist from Guwahati about how she enlisted the help of local women to conserve the hargila and completely changed the way locals see this stork.

Photos courtesy **Carla Rhodes**

A group of women huddle together, dressed in red and white gamosas. They sing traditional songs in happy voices. One woman has donned a stork headdress. Others prepare *ladoos* made out of rice powder, coconut and sugar. There is a rather scrumptious pink and green buttercream flower cake on a small table which says “Happy hatching hargila”. Baby showers are special milestones for any mum-to-be and no such celebration should be without a cake. But, who is the mum-to-be here?

A quick glance around the room does not reveal any pregnant woman. The cake is now being cut as the women laugh and talk. It’s a celebration rooted in tradition, but the new arrivals will not be human babies. Instead, the women are rejoicing over the

imminent arrival of baby birds since it is the nesting season of the Greater Adjutant Stork in Kamrup in Assam.

Known locally as hargila, or bone swallower, the Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*) was despised and reviled not long ago. The bird is incredibly tall—adults can reach a height of 150 cm—and has an enormous wingspan. It consumes carcasses and is frequently seen at landfills and garbage sites nibbling on shoes and dead animals. It’s mostly bald-headed with a few straggly hairs on its head, and it has eerily pale eyes, large bill and a prominent neck pouch. And, it has been described by a writer as a “prodigy of ugliness”.

In *The Second Jungle Book*, a sequel to *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, a Greater Adjutant Stork, along with

a crocodile and a jackal, are shown as three of the most obnoxious characters. Clearly, the stork failed to endear itself to most people.

Dr Purnima Devi Barman was, fortunately, not deterred by these unsightly birds. She gives credit to her paternal grandmother, Podumi Devi, for instilling in her a love for nature and wildlife. Dr Barman’s father was with the Indian army and his frequent transfers meant he had to leave his oldest daughter behind with his mother so that her education could continue uninterrupted. She stayed with her grandmother in Pub Mazir Gaon, a village on the banks of the Brahmaputra River in Kamrup district for six years.

At first, Dr Barman—now 40 years old—was lonely and upset at the

thought of staying so far away from her parents and siblings. With no telephone or Internet connection and only occasional letters from her parents to look forward to, she was forlorn. To cheer her up, her grandmother took her to the verdant paddy fields surrounding their home and told her the names of the trees and birds that they saw. Slowly, the little girl started taking an interest in her surroundings. It was at this time that she first saw the Greater Adjutant Stork. She noticed how much the bird was detested because people felt it was a “bad omen” and a “disease-carrying, unhygienic creature”.

Dr Barman’s interest in nature and the environment continued as she chose to study zoology at the post-graduate level at Gauhati University with specialisation in ecology and wildlife biology. She decided to study and do research on the Greater Adjutant Storks for her PhD. She went to a nearby village to research on her feathered friends, but an incident that happened in 2007 completely changed her life.

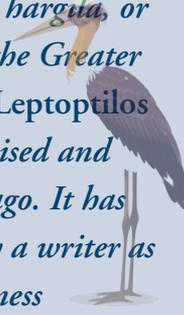
She was walking around the village when she spotted a man cutting

down a tree with some nests. Some baby hatchlings fell out of the nests and died before her eyes. The other fledglings were badly injured.

“I was stunned. I could not control myself and asked the man the reason for committing such a cruel and barbaric act. The man reacted furiously and started to abuse me.

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*Known locally as hargila, or bone swallower, the Greater Adjutant Stork (Leptoptilos dubius) was despised and reviled not long ago. It has been described by a writer as a prodigy of ugliness*



He said the Greater Adjutant Stork was a bad omen. He mocked me by saying that he would employ me as a maid in his house to clean the bird poop. I tried to rescue some of the injured chicks, but passers-by came forward and teased me, asking if I eat hargila meat. To annoy me further, they started to toy with the wings of the injured birds,” recalled Dr Barman.

“I went back home that day but my mind was made up. I decided to do my PhD later. For now, I would have to act fast to save these birds. Once widespread across south and southeast Asia, the storks were now endangered and their numbers had

dwindled immensely,” added Dr Barman. In 2007, only a few hundred of these birds were found in the Indian states of Assam and Bihar and in Cambodia. Most birds had been displaced or killed when trees were cut down.

Dr Barman decided to involve the local women in her conservation efforts. As a mother of twin daughters Sanskriti and Sampriti, who were around two years old at that time, she was determined to protect the planet for future generations. She had an ally in her husband, Dr Rathin Barman, who is also a wildlife biologist and currently Joint Director of Wildlife Trust of India.

The biologist befriended women of the villages of Dadara, Pacharia and Singimari on the outskirts of Guwahati. These villages are surrounded by nesting storks. Dr Barman believed women needed to be actively involved in the conservation process to improve both the environmental and social outcomes. Women have knowledge, ideas and experiences that differ vastly from men and their exclusion can hamper the success of certain initiatives. Dr Barman was determined to empower the local women through her initiative to save the Greater Adjutant Stork.

The Hargila Army—an all-female, grassroots volunteer conservation effort—was thus born. “At first, it was difficult to find volunteers. The women I approached avoided me saying saving hargilas was not their





The stork didi, Dr Purnima Barman



Dr Barman also visits local schools to spread awareness about their conservation efforts

priority. They had children to tend to and homes to look after. I had to think of something to attract them to the cause,” said Dr Barman.

“I started to organise cookery competitions. Slowly, the women started to show up. We bonded over pithas and narus. Then we started meeting in temples. I organised folk song competitions. I spoke to the women about biodiversity and I told them we could not let the hargilas become extinct. I told them in western countries a visit from the stork signifies the birth of a baby and hence a stork cannot be a bad omen. Slowly, attitudes changed. I can proudly say that today we have 10,000 members.



Guests at local weddings now sport hargila-themed henna on their hands

Around 400 women are active members,” she added.

This award-winning conservationist also started arranging baby showers for the hargilas. Now, guests at local

*In 2007, only a few hundred of these birds were found in the Indian states of Assam and Bihar and in Cambodia. Most birds had been displaced or killed when trees were cut down*



weddings sport hargila-themed henna on their hands. Effigies of the bird adorn the entrances at marriage halls. Women of the Hargila Army also weave hargila motifs into traditional clothes such as gamosas or stoles.

“I combined my passion for the birds with the livelihood of the women. I also visit local schools to inform students about our conservation efforts,” stated Dr Barman.

Pratima Rajbongshi is a member who is at the forefront of the Hargila Army. Her husband’s tent business collapsed

during the pandemic, but she took care of her family by selling face masks, bags and towels through the Hargila Army’s contacts. Dr Barman’s dream of empowering the local women seems to have been achieved.

It’s been more than a decade since Dr Barman encountered the fallen storks. Locals now think twice before cutting trees where the storks are nesting. They call her when hatchlings fall out of their nests. This would have been unthinkable 15 years ago. The stork population in Assam has more than doubled from 400 a decade ago to nearly a thousand.

Dr Barman—also known as Hargila *baido* or ‘stork sister’ among the village women—managed to complete her PhD in 2018. Now, she divides her time between the Guwahati-based NGO Aaranyak and the Hargila Army. Along the way, she has collected a clutch of awards—the Whitley Award and the Nari Shakti Puraskar being two of them. But, she is most at home on top of her 70-foot-tall bamboo tower from where she quietly observes the behaviour of the hargilas in their nests. ■

# What you need to know about 'breast cysts'

**Dr P Raghu Ram** explains what breast cysts are, how they occur and how you can handle them, in his quarterly column

Photos courtesy **KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases**



*Preethi (name changed), a 40-year-old woman suddenly noticed a lump in her left breast overnight*

## What is a breast cyst? How does it occur and at what age is it common?

The breasts are made up of ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple) and lobules (milk-producing glands), which are surrounded by fatty tissue and supportive tissue. Sometimes fluid-filled sacs develop in the breast tissue – these are breast cysts. It is one of the commonest benign (non-cancerous lumps) in the breast.

It's believed that they develop naturally as the breast ages and changes. Although, one can develop breast cysts at any age, they are most common in women over 35, who haven't yet reached the menopause. They occur more frequently as women approach menopause and usually stop or are not as frequent after it. However, women who are taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause may also develop cysts.

Cysts can feel soft if they're near the surface of the skin, or like a hard lump if they're deeper in the breast tissue.

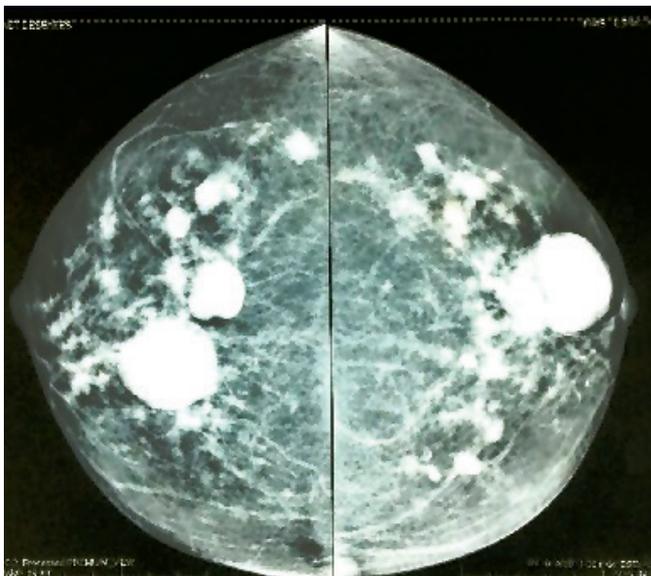
They can develop anywhere in the breast, but are more commonly found in the upper half. For some women cysts can feel uncomfortable and even painful, and before a period the cyst may become larger and feel sore and tender. It's quite common to develop one or more cysts – either in one breast or both breasts – and this is nothing to worry about. There are also many women who have cysts without knowing about them.

## How are they found?

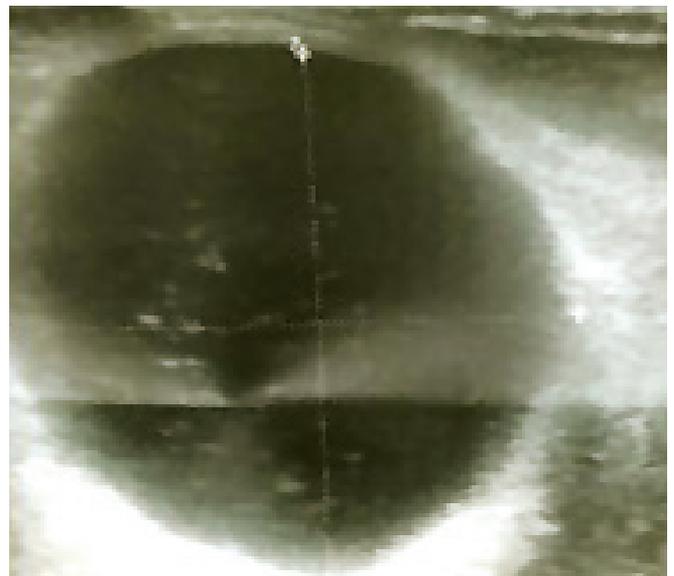
Typically, a woman would notice a lump in her breast overnight. Cysts usually become noticeable as a lump in the breast, or are sometimes found by chance when having a breast examination or routine breast screening. A specialist consultation is essential and it is important to undergo Triple Assessment, so that a definite diagnosis can be made.

## Triple Assessment includes

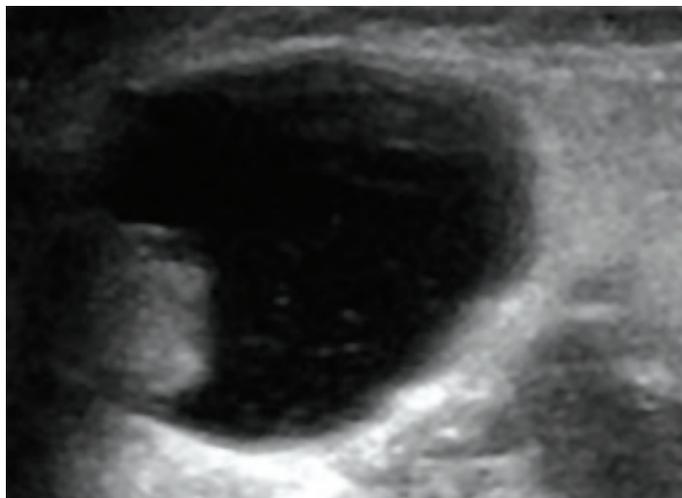
1. Clinical breast examination by a specialist
2. Bilateral mammogram (breast x-ray) and
3. Ultrasound scan of the breast, and if necessary,



Multiple cysts - Mammogram,



Cyst - Ultrasound



*Intracystic breast cancer*

an ultrasound guided aspiration of the cyst fluid. The fluid may be sent to the laboratory for testing particularly if it is bloodstained, as bloody fluid in the aspirate indicates a very small risk that this may be a sign of breast cancer.

### **Is a cyst always considered to be benign (non-malignant) and is there a risk of developing cancer?**

Most cysts are benign (non-cancerous) and there is no additional risk of developing breast cancer. However, rarely, some cysts can harbour a cancer (intracystic cancer). Blood stained aspirate from the cyst must be carefully assessed to make sure there is nothing sinister.

### **How are breast cysts managed?**

If the Triple Assessment has confirmed the presence of a simple cyst, the woman can be reassured that the lump is not a cancer and that it will not lead to a cancer. Many cysts go away by themselves and are nothing to worry about.

Majority of breast cysts need not be aspirated. If the cyst is however, large and causing discomfort, the fluid can be drained using a fine needle and syringe with ultrasound guidance. Once the fluid has been drawn out, the cyst usually disappears. The fluid drawn from the cyst can vary in appearance, from clear to very dark.

There is no role for surgery to remove cysts, the only rare exception being when there is a suspicion of intracystic cancer.

If the breast ultrasound reveals an intracystic growth, the cyst fluid must be aspirated and sent for cytology, in addition to undertaking a core needle biopsy of the intracystic growth to rule out the presence of intracystic cancer.

However, it must be remembered that intracystic cancers are rare and the vast majority of women with cysts need to be only reassured.

### **Can the cyst come back after aspiration?**

Cysts can come back, or one may develop new cysts. It is important not to presume that it is a recurrent cyst. A specialist consultation is essential for assessment and confirmation. The treatment for cysts is the same each time.

### **Is a follow up required after diagnosis of cysts?**

If the cyst has been drained, it is important for the specialist to see the patient in a few weeks to check if it has refilled. A breast ultrasound scan should be done during the follow up visit.

### **Can cysts be prevented?**

No. ■

## **PINK CONNEXION completes seven positively eventful years (August 2014 – August 2021)**



For well over a decade, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation has impacted scores of lives, transforming breast cancer from a 'taboo' issue to a much commonly discussed one, thus creating the much-needed awareness regarding the most common cancer affecting women in India.

*Pink Connexion* is one of the many innovative initiatives of the Foundation, which has been empowering people and engaging with them, emphasising the importance of "Early Detection", all along.

All the previous issues of *Pink Connexion* (2014 – to date) can be accessed from the link below

<http://www.ubf.org.in/home/Pinkconnctions/>

*First issue of Pink Connexion (August 2014) features the indomitable Dr Ushalakshmi, a well-known gynecologist and breast cancer 'conqueror' who inspired the genesis of Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation*

# UBF Diary

May 2021

## Dr Raghu Ram 'Living Bridge' experiences in IJS

Dr P Raghu Ram was invited to write an editorial, which was published in the 'Indian Journal of Surgery', which is the voice for surgery in India. Titled "United Kingdom to India –a 'Living Bridge': Celebrating 25 Positively Eventful Years (1996-2021)", Dr Raghu Ram wrote about his own personal journey, the major turning point in his life when his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. He also reflected upon how he has become a "living bridge" between UK and India for the past 25 years, the experiences around it and replicating the best of British practices in India so that the delivery of breast healthcare improves in the country.

Here's a link to the editorial:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12262-021-02806-1>



## Guest Lecture: Challenges of delivering breast healthcare in resource limited settings

Dr P Raghu Ram delivered a guest lecture at the centenary annual Congress of the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain & Ireland (ASGBI) held virtually from May 4-8, 2021. Over 1,000 surgeons from all over UK & Ireland participated in the four-day scientific Congress, which is the largest congregation of the surgical fraternity in the British Isles.

His talk titled "Delivery of care in resource limited setting" highlighted the innovative initiatives he has championed over the past 14 years, to ensure the quality of the delivery of breast healthcare is enhanced in India.

He was also invited to deliver the prestigious "Overseas Chairman's Lecture" at the 121st Annual Congress of the Japan Surgical Society. This was held on a virtual platform from April 8 – 10, 2021, where he spoke about the impact of breast cancer advocacy and screening, spearheaded by the UBF in rural Telangana and AP.

Incidentally, Dr Raghu Ram happens to be the only surgeon from south Asia to be invited to deliver guest lectures at the ASGBI Centenary Congress, UK and at the 121st Annual Congress of Japan Surgical Society.



## How to stay safe during the pandemic?

### Well-known actor Shriya Saran interviews Dr Raghu Ram

Dr Raghu Ram was interviewed by the actor Shriya Saran on May 15, 2021 on the various myths surrounding COVID-19. Keen to dispel misinformation on the pandemic, the doctor clearly spelt out the real facts about the infection and the do's and don'ts people should follow to stay safe.

The interview has had more than 387, 000 views thus far...

To know more, click on the link given below:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CO5N34LIWGN/?hl=en>



### Dr Raghu Ram's tweet of gratitude and respect to NHS on its 73rd anniversary

Indian doctors and nurses in the UK, who are the largest non-British group of staff with over 30,000 healthcare professionals, are a hugely valued part of the National Health Service (NHS).

Having had the opportunity to exemplify the best of British practices in India, Dr Raghu Ram expressed profound gratitude and respect to one of the most trusted and renowned public health services in the world through a tweet that was featured on the official twitter handle of British High Commission India on the 73rd anniversary of NHS.



### Yoga for the body, mind and soul

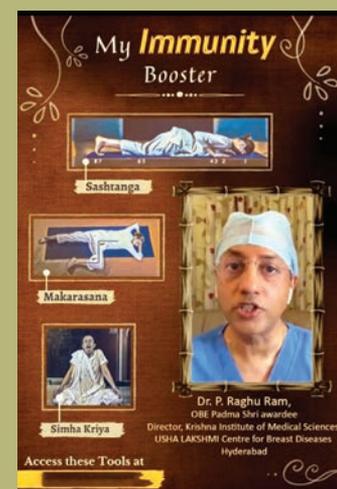
During these challenging times, fear, anxiety and stress have invaded our lives. A robust immunity and respiratory system are paramount to ensure people remain healthy and safe during this global pandemic. There is ample scientific evidence that yoga and meditation play a huge role in reducing stress, especially, in increasing lung capacity and boosting the immune system.

Dr Raghu Ram has advocated the benefits of Simha Kriya—a simple yet powerful yogic practice—to ensure physical, mental and emotional well-being, particularly during these troubled times. The doctor's message was featured on the official twitter handle of Isha Foundation on May 9, 2021.

Here are the links:

<https://twitter.com/RRPillariseti/status/1392683880088440838/video/1>

<https://twitter.com/Illuminati50333/status/1391326516839997440/video/1>



## A unique 'Pink Ribbon Mask' campaign in rural Telangana

Three-fold purpose: To stem the alarming rise in COVID infections, to save lives and to create awareness about early detection of breast cancer

To address the rapidly rising infections and deaths associated with COVID-19 in rural India, the UBF & KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases in Hyderabad embarked on a landmark and innovative 'COVID-19 Pink Ribbon Mask Campaign' in Telangana.

The aim of this unique initiative is to ensure protection from COVID-19 in rural Telangana, and equally, to create awareness about the importance of early detection of breast cancer through the use of pink coloured cloth masks (a colour that represents breast cancer awareness).



20,000 masks have been distributed to residents in all the ten villages in Narayanraopet Mandal – Narayanraopet, Ibrahimpur, Banjerpalli, Kodhandaraopalli, Laxmidevipalli, Malyala, Gurralongondhi, Jakkapur, Gopulapur, Matindla.



Launching this initiative, Harish Rao, the minister of finance, Telangana, said, "I applaud Dr Raghu Ram for his relentless and significant contribution to his adopted village, Ibrahimpur over the past six years. His noble goal through this campaign is to protect women from COVID-19 and create awareness about early detection of breast cancer. This is the first-of-its-kind initiative being undertaken in our state and perhaps the country."

"The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) Self Help Group (SHG) from Nandigama Mandal in Ranga Reddy District have made these masks that were commissioned by the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, which has also provided the much-needed additional income to at least 100 SHG members from SERP," he added.





Dr P Raghu Ram, Director, UBF & KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases, who has been championing several life-transforming initiatives in his adopted village, Ibrahimpur since 2015 said, "With COVID infections and deaths rising at an alarming rate in rural India and due to limited healthcare infrastructure in rural regions where more than 70 per cent of the population reside, I sincerely hope this unique preventive campaign will provide the much-needed protection from COVID-19 infection. Equally, I actively encourage people from rural areas of Telangana to wear a mask, which is one of the fundamental pillars of protection against COVID-19."

"The COVID pandemic has taken a huge toll on cancer treatment in the country. Breast cancer is the commonest cancer-affecting women in India. Due to COVID 19 crisis, there has been a steep fall in the number of women presenting to their doctors for initial assessment. With more than 60 per cent already presenting in advanced stages

with poor survival, this percentage will increase manifold with the current unfortunate scenario in the country. We hope that in addition to saving lives, the PINK colour masks remind the women not to neglect their health and raise awareness about importance of early detection of breast cancer."

While Yella Reddy, Ibrahimpur village's sarpanch said, "There is enormous fear amongst the people in villages about COVID-19. On behalf of Ibrahimpur village residents, I am deeply grateful to Dr Raghu Ram for this yet another timely initiative in his adopted village. Prevention is better than cure, as people in villages cannot afford expensive treatment. 20,000 masks will be hand delivered today and tomorrow in every home to all the residents in 10 villages in Narayanraopet Mandal. This campaign will certainly save many lives in addition to raising awareness about the importance wearing a mask in other rural regions of Telangana as well."



**Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation**  
Hyderabad, India

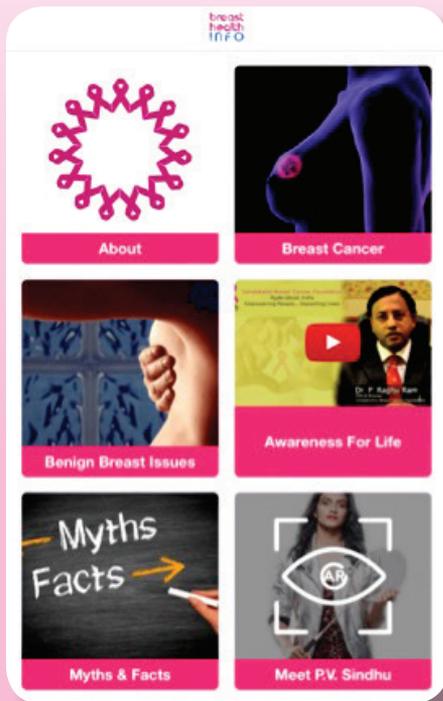
*Empowering people...impacting lives*

[www.ubf.org.in](http://www.ubf.org.in)

**World's first mobile app on breast health in 12 languages**

(English, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Oriya & Assamese).

## 'ABCs OF BREAST HEALTH'



Launched by Mr Amitabh Bachchan (2017)

**An initiative of the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation**

### LINKS FOR FREE DOWNLOAD

**App store**

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/abcs-of-breast-health/id1482487468>

**Google play store**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=devatech.kims.avantari>

