

PINK CONNECTION

UBF

Vol 8 Issue 3: Feb- April '22



**Cancer, you
picked the
wrong girl,**

says spunky
Shormistha Mukherjee

Zinda Tilismath

Hyderabad's iconic
indigenous brand

Vicky Roy

The inspiring story of a
street boy who became
a world-famous
photographer

BEHIND The Scenes

Undeniably, we Indians take our heritage lightly. The Charminar, which stands as a sentinel to so much of Hyderabad's history, has paan stains on its chipped walls. Elsewhere in the world, heritage structures are sacrosanct, and in England, you can't even alter the façade of a building over 100 years.

It has especially been a sad day in Hyderabad when the over 100-year-old Secunderabad Club was literally razed to the ground due to an accidental fire. Not only was it a heritage structure but so many of our memories of growing up in Hyderabad are embedded in this club: the bakes, the lasagna, watery custard, as much as the swimming pool and the library.

At the *Pink Connexion*, our past as much as the future matter to us. What does a magazine on breast cancer and its survivors have to do with heritage one may ask, but I believe our histories are part of our well-being: If our environment stays healthy it nourishes us as humans.

As always, we carry a heritage piece, though this time it's a brand rather than a historical structure. We write about the iconic Zinda Tillismath, which is a part of a Hyderabadi's psyche, as is its Irani chai.

We also feature tales of grit like the one on Vicky Roy who grew up in Kolkata slums but never let a dream of making it big as a photographer die; or our cover girl, Shormishta who deals with her breast cancer with humour, and authored a book on the ups (few) and downs (mostly) of having cancer.

Moving forward, we at *Pink Connexion* hope all of you have an interesting year ahead, riding the wave of a waxing and waning virus...

Ratna Rao Shekar



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PUBLISHED BY
Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer
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PRINTED AT
Kala Jyothi Process Pvt. Ltd.
1-1-60/5, RTC Cross Roads
Musheerabad
Hyderabad - 500 020

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‘Cancer probably saved my life’

Cancer can end up saving a person’s life. It did for Shormistha Mukherjee, a busy working professional, whose brush with breast cancer at the age of 45 taught her to slow down, achieve a work-life balance and make time for what truly mattered.

She tells her story in her riveting book *Cancer: You picked the wrong girl*, which is a gritty, no-holds barred chronicle of her bout with cancer. This emotional roller coaster ride is captured with a lot of humour. Her book is not just for those who have survived cancer, it is a wake-up call for those who live life in the fast lane, says **Minal Khona**

The last ten years had been a blur for Shormistha Mukherjee, the co-founder of The Flying Cursor, a digital agency. Living in Mumbai with her husband Anirban Mukherjee, a brand consultant, she vividly describes the last decade of her life in her book: ‘The last ten years of my life have been like that. Especially the last seven. It’s been hectic, mad, and yes, a lot of fun. But towards the end of it, I could feel myself beginning to mentally and physically burn out. The last six months, I would come home at 9 pm, answer calls and check mails till 11 pm. Somehow stuff my face with dinner, without even caring what I was eating. Drop off to sleep in front of the TV. Get up in the middle of the night to drink water or pee, and check my mail again... And this was just the tip of the iceberg’.



Shormistha is the only child of her parents and breaking the news to them that she had breast cancer was hard

'On the surface I had everything. Yet, there were things that gnawed at me. Maybe it was a midlife crisis, maybe I didn't know where I was headed. I wanted to work, I didn't want to work, I loved having my own company, I hated having my own company, I was happily married, I was unhappily married, I was fine, I was not fine. I didn't know which one I was. And I was running away from it all. By throwing myself into my work with reckless abandon. It got to a point where I hated it, and also hated myself, but I just couldn't stop'.

'A couple of months before I got diagnosed, I was driving back home, and a thought popped into my head. What if I fell ill? What if something major happened to me? That would be the perfect way to stop this crazy roller coaster I was on'.

4 And, in December 2017, she discovered a lump in her left breast but she ignored it. In March, on a rare free afternoon, she suddenly decided to get the lump checked out. On March 11, 2018, Shormistha went to meet her gynaecologist who examined her and referred her for a mammogram. Shormistha explains that she took this lightly because she had been getting benign cysts in her breasts since she was 18.

She writes in her book, 'It's difficult to describe what it felt like. I think it was an out-of-body experience. One day you are grinning and making plans, and the next day you are sitting in

a room filled with posters on breast cancer. How is your brain supposed to process that? And you have no symptoms, you eat right, you exercise, you love what you do. You have no reason to ever imagine you would be sitting here'.

'Ten days back I was crying because I got diagnosed with breast cancer. And tonight, I'm drinking wine and crying and celebrating because I only have breast cancer'

'I'm a person who loves to talk things out. I don't do silence. If you're ill or mad at me or anything at all, I'll badger you to talk to me. That's how bad I like to fix things. But that day I couldn't talk...All the thoughts running through my head... But I couldn't utter anything'.

Sure enough, the tests, the MRI, the PET scan—all of which she describes with humour in the book—though reading about them also reveal how harrowing they can be—announce the



Shormistha with her closest friends Ziba and Oinx, who were a great support

presence of breast cancer. Support from her closest friends Oindrilla (who she refers to as Oinx) and Ziba; the single-minded devotion of her husband and her own grit helped her make the journey from denial to acceptance to facing the cancer with courage.

There was also the matter of informing her parents in Delhi that their only child had cancer. She kept the news from her in-laws who lived in the flat on a floor above them, as long as she could with the help of her sister-in-law Koeli, who also stood by her like a rock.

What is interesting about the book is how Shormistha's perspective changes with each stage of her cancer. First she is shocked when she hears about her diagnosis of breast cancer and then she switches to being relieved that it is restricted to the breast. Perhaps, the most insightful lines in the book are: 'To know that you've been diagnosed with breast cancer is one thing. To do a test that'll tell you if the cancer cells have leaked into other parts of your body is something else. You wonder how much strength you have'.

She writes, 'It's strange how your life and the circumstances change. Ten days back I was crying because I got diagnosed with breast cancer. And tonight, I'm drinking wine and crying and celebrating because I only have breast cancer'.

Speaking of celebrations, Shormistha candidly admits that she went out with her friends for dinner before the surgery. And when the restaurant wasn't able to give her a reservation, she used the 'I have breast cancer surgery scheduled for next week' card to get one!

This kind of serious and humorous interplay of her outlook and reaction to the disease are what make the book an eminently readable one. The language used is also real. A lot of the Mumbai slang, along with cuss words which is so typical of our generation make the reader relate to her experience.

Shormistha's surgery to remove her lump and lymph nodes took place on April 4. The protocol for her treatment with the medical oncologist, included 16 rounds of chemotherapy; four rounds with a 21-day gap between them; and then 12 rounds of weekly chemo, followed by 20 rounds of radiation. Her chemo sessions started on April 22 and finished on October 1. The details of the chemotherapy, losing her hair even though she had chopped off her long tresses and donated them for wigs for cancer patients, and the horrid side-effects are experiences all cancer survivors would be familiar with.

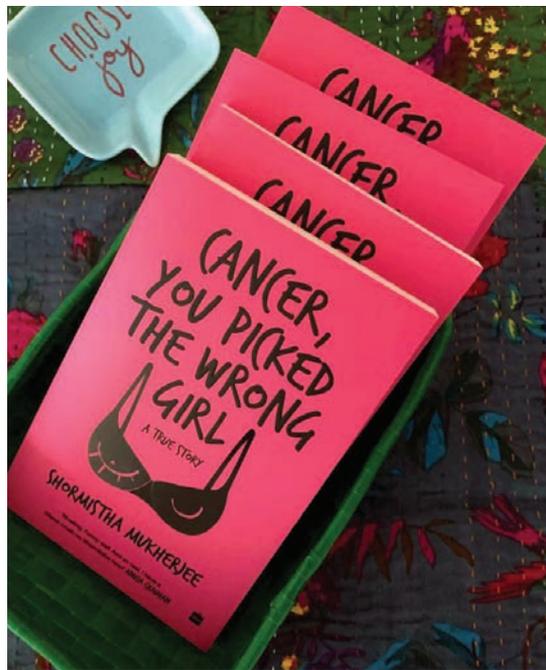
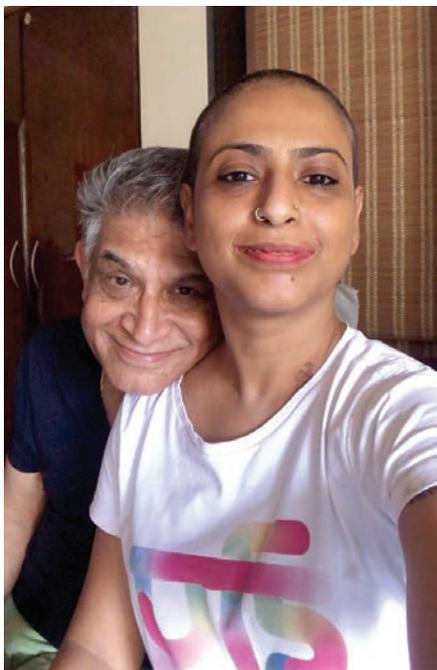
In the book, Shormistha doesn't sugarcoat the facts. From the bodily smells and the diarrhoea, the despair and the loss of dignity, she painfully shares it all. And as is the case with most women, there is the trauma of going bald. 'I think no one really understood why losing my hair was so traumatic to me. For a long time, even I didn't even understand why. But then I realised that it was a physical marker of the fact that I had cancer, and I had to see that marker every time I looked in the mirror, and that is something only I had to deal with. And understand'.

With the help of her family and friends, Shormistha emerged on the other side. Her husband was her primary caregiver. She says, "Our marriage has a deep friendship and a bond. Over time, as it is with every relationship you do different things. But, when there is a calamity like cancer, you realise that this bond means so much to you. And recovering from the disease makes you remember and recognise it with gratitude every day."

She describes how he took care of her. 'My heart is filled with love and gratitude for Anirban. I don't know how he did



With her husband Anirban, who was her primary caregiver



L to R: Shormistha with her dad after a chemo session; the copy of her book; with her sister-in-law who stood by her like a rock

everything. Take care of me, manage my parents, go to work. It's just incredible. I owe him my life. I spent more time with Anirban. It was like a blank slate; we were starting all over again. He saw me at my most vulnerable. And I saw him as the person who, instinctively, I trusted and needed the most. Only he could change my dressing, only he could bathe me, only he could hold me every single time I thought I couldn't do it. And he did it with such grace and ease. He never gave me platitudes; he never questioned my madcap ways. And the days I cried, he just held me, and I felt his tears on my face. I think we were crying that this is what it took for us to realise that we were meant to be together'.

Shormistha has been prescribed 20 mg of tamoxifen for ten years as an oestrogen inhibitor. It was the excess production of oestrogen that had fed the cancer cells.

When publishers approached her to write her book, she took it on but she decided to do it only after she recovered completely. Her focus was on getting better. She says she wrote about her experience in a journal earlier because

I spend time with Anirban and my parents. When you have a brush with your mortality, you realise how fragile you are. Now, if I am tired, I don't push myself to work out. I am nicer to myself too'

she wanted to put her thoughts down. 'There is only so much you can express and the rest of it you are scared to voice. When you have cancer, your life can change every second day. Mine changed in the space of ten days. You don't know what the PET scan or biopsy will bring; or how your body will react to the chemotherapy. Writing helped me get that perspective', she says in her book.

Today, Shormistha admits she has changed. 'I haven't made any lifestyle changes because I used to exercise and eat healthy earlier too. What I have done is be easier on myself. I used to be a perfectionist and a control freak. Everyone needs my help and only I can do it right. Now, I have lowered my standards, and I let people do their thing at work. If it is not perfect, I don't try to fix it. I let go and let them learn. I make time for my hobbies; I spend time with Anirban and my parents. When you have a brush with your mortality, you realise how fragile you are. Now, if I am tired, I don't push myself to work out. I am nicer to myself too'.

As she says in the book, 'The cancer probably saved my life.' Not many people would look at it that way but in her case, it seems to be true. ■

Raghu Ram Pillarisetti OBE @RRPillarisetti
Insightful... very eloquently & boldly expressed... will go a long way in creating awareness & breaking the 'taboo' associated with the most common cancer affecting women in India. Good health & More power to you 🙏

Shormistha Mukherjee @a... · 20/12/21
Replying to @RRPillarisetti and @HarperCollinsIN
Thank you for saying this. I'm hoping it'll help us shatter the silence around breast cancer. The more we talk, the better equipped we are. Thank you again.



Street Dreams:

Everyone is Good at Something

Sometime in 1999, a 11-year-old boy, who had run away from his home in Purulia in West Bengal, found himself at the New Delhi railway station. Scenes of pandemonium and bedlam surrounded him. He must have felt so petrified as he stood alone amid a sea of unknown commuters. But, fate works in mysterious ways.

At that time, the little boy would not have known that fame and fortune, and a successful career as an internationally-acclaimed photographer, awaited him.

Vicky Roy was born in Purulia, West Bengal 33 years ago. His father, a tailor, earned not more than Rs 15 daily. He found it virtually impossible to clothe and feed his seven children. However, he dreamt of getting at least one child educated till class X. Roy's maternal grandparents were slightly better off than his parents. So, the little boy was sent off to live with them and get an education.

Unfortunately, even there things were not much better. The daily drudgeries of life bogged him down. "I loved watching films as a child. I naively thought if I moved to a big city, I would become a rich and famous personality. These rosy visions made me determined to run away from home. I stole money from a relative, got on a train and landed at New Delhi railway station though my desired destination was Bombay," Roy recalls.

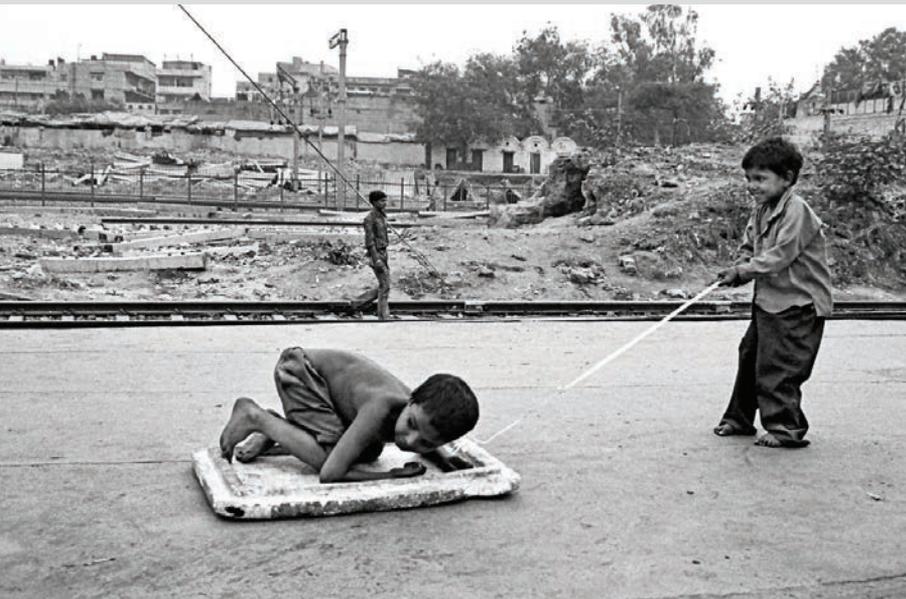
The enormity of the situation hit him once he was on terra firma. "I started sobbing and panicking. The strange sights and smells unnerved me. Some children who were rummaging through refuse saw me and came over to talk to me. They asked me to join them. I started collecting empty bottles, cleaning them, filling them with water and selling them for Rs 5 per bottle in trains,"

What are the chances that a kid who lived off the streets would go on to become an internationally renowned photographer? But fairy tale stories do come true, and **Nivedita Choudhuri** gives us the inspirational and heart-warming story of Vicky Roy, an impoverished child from Bengal, who ran away from home, joined the Salaam Balak Trust and later went on to become a celebrity lensman!

Photographs by **Vicky Roy**



The ladies from *Sheroes Hangout*, a cafe and community in Agra run by acid attack victims. This photo is part of *Everyone is Good at Something* campaign



Children at Sadar Bazar railway station, Delhi. This photo is part of the "Street Dreams" series



A ragpicker at New Delhi railway station. This photo is part of the "Street Dreams" series

recounts Roy. The young runaway soon discovered that life on platforms was precarious and full of uncertainties. When passengers lost their belongings, theft charges were levelled at them and the cops often beat them up, he says.

"It was an unsafe environment for kids. The ragpickers also fought among themselves and even slashed each other with blades. Sometimes, people were kind and gave us leftover food from the pantry cars of trains. I slept in night shelters where I could get a blanket for Re 1," reminisces Roy.

He decided to leave and got a job washing dishes and making rotis in a dhaba at Ajmeri Gate. "I had to wake up at the crack of dawn to chop vegetables. Life was so tough and challenging that I often cried myself to sleep. In any case, I never got enough sleep," Roy says.

But, the dark clouds on Roy's horizon evidently had silver linings. "One day, a customer called Sanjay Srivastav came to the dhaba where I worked. He told me I should be studying, not working. He sent me to an organisation called Salaam Baalak Trust," says Roy.

Salaam Baalak Trust, an NGO, provides support to street children in Delhi. It was set up in 1988 with the proceeds from the film *Salaam Bombay!*—a feature film directed by filmmaker Mira Nair on the lives of street kids.

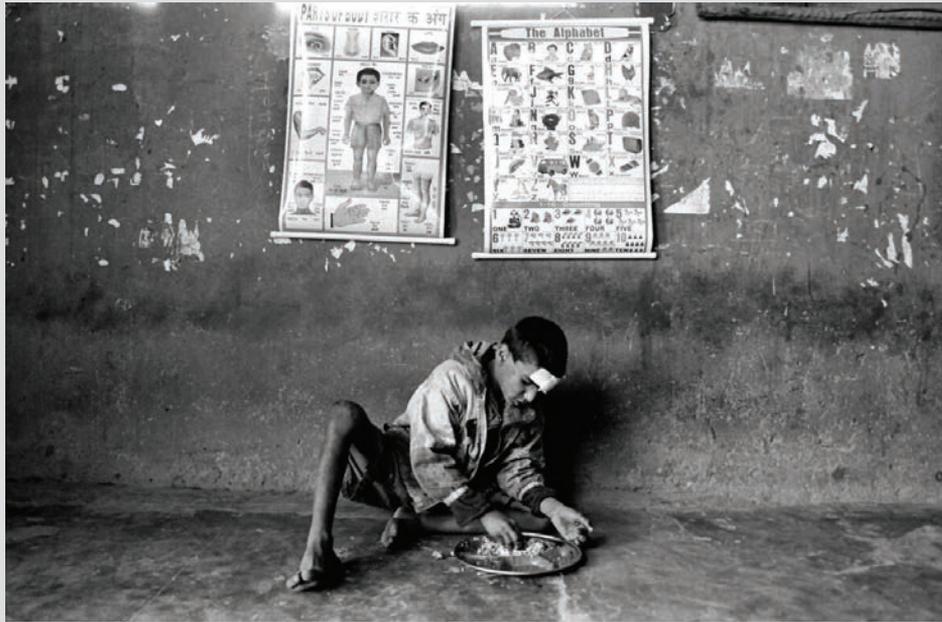
He was surprised when he arrived at the Trust's shelter home, Apna Ghar. He was given new clothes, shoes and food and he also got his own plate, glass and locker. "Finally, I had some possessions of my own," Roy points out.

He started attending a school in Paharganj and during the summer holidays, he

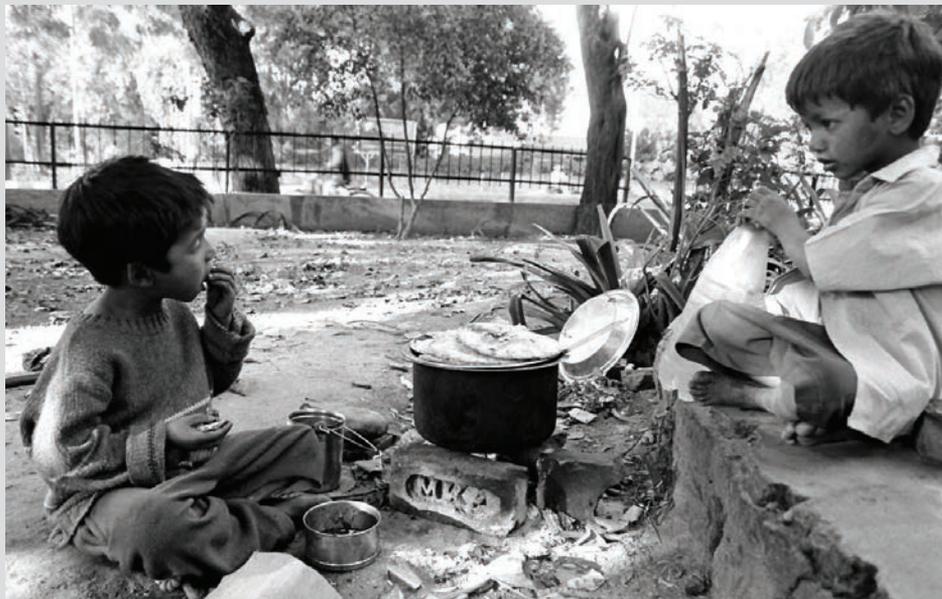
Hoping to give back something to the profession that had allowed him to stand tall, he also started the Rang Open Library and stocked it with books on photography. He did this venture along with his friend, Chandan Gomes



Children play Holi at Aashra Shelter Home. This photo is part of "Home Street Home" series



A child at the Salaam Baalak Trust contact point at New Delhi railway station. This photo is part of the "Street Dreams" series



Delhi street children

participated in theatre and even did a workshop. In 2004, he finished his class X exams and decided to return home to meet his family. "I had promised myself that I would not meet them till I had proven myself. My mother started weeping when I arrived home. They had all given up on me," recalls Roy.

Continuing his narration, he recounts, "I decided not to study after class X. Academics did not interest me. I was advised to take up some sort of vocational training—maybe train to be a TV mechanic or a chef. I zeroed in on photography. I had attended a workshop earlier and was fascinated by the fact that I would be able to travel far and wide if I chose this profession," he says.

He was given a Kodak KB-10 camera worth Rs 499 by the Trust and started to take photos of his friends. He used to charge them Rs 5 per photo. Roy however left the Trust at the age of 17 in 2005.

"I would have to leave at 18 years anyway," he points out. The organisation then helped him to find a job as an assistant to Delhi-based portrait photographer Anay Mann. He agreed to let him work for him for 8-10 days a month and pay him a salary of Rs 3,000.

A few months later, a determined and enthusiastic Roy took a loan from Salaam Baalak Trust and purchased a Nikon F80 camera. He took on extra jobs at marriage halls in his spare time to supplement his income and visited libraries to read up on books on photography, he says.

Roy's first exhibition, entitled 'Street Dreams' was well-received. Sponsored by the British High Commission and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), it was held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi in 2007. "I'd shot pictures of street children in Delhi. I tried to portray the daily battles these kids waged in order to survive, their misfortunes, hardships and miseries. These photographs were displayed at the exhibition and all were sold out," Roy remembers.

In 2008, Roy took part in a worldwide photography competition organised by the US-based Maybach Foundation. He was selected along with three others to record the redevelopment of the new World



Both photographs from the World Trade Center series

Trade Center tower in New York. The young shutterbugs were mentored by world-renowned photographers and the project concluded with an exhibition of their photographs in New York. On his return to India, Roy won the Gold Award conferred by the Salaam Baalak Trust and this award led to a luncheon with Prince Edward at Buckingham Palace in 2009.

Hoping to give back something to the profession that had allowed him to stand tall, he also started the Rang Open Library and stocked it with books on photography. He did this venture along with his friend, Chandan Gomes.

“Books on photography are pricey and beyond the reach of most people. My friend and I approached eminent photographers and asked them to donate their books. Soon, the library had a collection of around 500 books. We invited photographers to come and give talks twice a month,” shares Roy.

Roy’s first monograph—‘Home Street Home’—was published by Nazar Foundation and released at the second edition of the Delhi Photo Festival in 2013. Subsequently, he was awarded the MIT Media fellowship in 2014 and was invited to Harvard University, the White House, the Pentagon, World Bank and the headquarters of Facebook and Google for motivational lectures. He was included by *Forbes Asia* in their ‘30 under 30’ feature in 2016 and by *Vogue* in their 40 under 40 list.

Cut to the present day and our undefined existence in these Covid times. Roy had an online exhibition of his black-and-white photographs at Vadehra Art Gallery in New Delhi last year. The exhibition—Bachpan—was a collection of candid photographs that examined the principles and psychology of childhood games performed by disadvantaged children in Indian cities.

Subsequently, he was awarded the MIT Media fellowship in 2014 and was invited to Harvard University, the White House, the Pentagon, World Bank, headquarters of Facebook and Google for motivational lectures. He was included by Forbes Asia in their ‘30 under 30’ feature in 2016 and by Vogue in their 40 under 40 list

Roy has been busy this year travelling across India—Covid permitting—photographing people with disabilities. His work is part of a project—Everyone is Good at Something—launched by India Inclusion Foundation. The project hopes to publish stories that will “focus on the person and not the disability; show the disabled not as objects of pity but as ordinary human beings pursuing their simple dreams”, according to Roy.

In pursuit of his subjects, Roy has been to Agra to meet the five women who run the Sheroes Hangout, a community centre and café for acid-attack survivors. At Chandigarh, Roy photographed Major Devender Pal Singh whose leg was amputated following a bomb attack in the Kargil war. Major Singh has founded The Challenging Ones, an organisation that has encouraged nearly 1,500 amputees across India to take up sports.

Has Roy been able to change lives through his profession? “Once, I took a picture of a family near Jama Masjid and posted it on social media. A friend of mine saw the photo and told me she wants to help this family. I conveyed my friend’s message to the family, who said they were originally from Dholpur in Rajasthan and requested if we could help them set up a shop in their hometown. My friend gave Rs 50,000 and I pooled in Rs 15,000. The family went back to Dholpur and opened a shop there with the money we had donated,” Roy reveals.

Roy made his mum proud when he gifted her a three-bedroom house on Mother’s Day in 2016—the result of his tenacity, fortitude and hard work. He may be super awesome, but his mum is probably the lucky one for she got to be his mother. ■

Zinda Tilismath:

A 101-year-old legacy that lives on



Is heritage only monuments and practices or does it involve those icons of popular culture that have become a part of cultural consciousness? We decode the history and lore behind Zinda Tilismath, which is the magic potion every true Hyderabadi swears by!

Text and photos: **Mallik Thatipalli**

Just as Kolkata swears by Boroline antiseptic cream and Mysore is identified by the understated fragrance of its sandal soap, is anything as quintessentially Hyderabadi as Zinda Tilismath?

Generations of Hyderabadis have grown up on this 101-year-old brand believing it is a panacea for everything

from toothache to common cold and cough. What is amazing is that it still reigns supreme even after all this time.

The bottle with its trademark burnt orange packing has common ingredients used in traditional medicines—eucalyptus, camphor, menthol, thymol and alkanet root (also known as ratanjyoth, which lends

the medicine its dark brown colour). All the ingredients have medicinal properties in curing common ailments.

For over a century now, the brand is viewed as a patented home cure both in Hyderabad and the US (which has a large diaspora of Telugu expats), where it is even stocked in Indian stores as an essential. A heritage



Inside the plant

brand, which has long been a staple of millions of households (including mine), it has not lost its sheen even after the onslaught of modern medicines.

A rich history

The first World War and the epidemic of the Spanish flu brought renewed focus on traditional medicines. While Unani medicines were popular in the Deccan, the British occupation ensured that allopathic cures were becoming increasingly popular.

It was at this time that Hakim Mohammed Moizuddin Farooqui was gaining popularity for a brew he had concocted, which was touted as an all-weather cure. Trained in Unani medicine, (which owes its origin in Byzantine Greece) he was one among the many hakims in the city but thanks to the magic potion he developed, he soon became Hyderabad's sought-after medical practitioner.

Founded in 1920, Zinda Tilismath literally meant 'living magic' and was initially famous as an immunity

booster. With some smart marketing moves, Hakim Mohammed Farooqui made it an essential home remedy.

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Anant Mariganti, director of Hyderabad Urban Lab calls him the first marketing whiz who used a combination of innovation and opportunity to great effect. "There were no bottles for distribution

of medicines in small quantities," observes Mariganti.

Until Zinda Tilismath arrived in the market packed in a glass bottle with a cork, points out Mariganti. It was not sold in clinics and in effect, it was the first over-the-counter medicine in the Deccan, at least.

It was the first time that the medicine was separated from the doctor and was a resounding success. Farooqui further showcased his entrepreneurial abilities when he bought a blown glass factory to keep up with the demand. Hyderabad folklore teems with examples of his marketing genius: he painted adverts for Zinda Tilismath on boulders near railway lines so that people would notice it, while entering the city. Besides, he was famous for distributing kites free of cost to locals, with the brand name printed!

What cemented the cult status of the medicine were two things: adoption of the Nizam's *dastar* (cap) as the logo, and using the image of an Abyssinian warrior on its package. These warriors (also called *Habshis*) were the personal bodyguards of the Nizam of Hyderabad and were known for their muscular power and vitality. By incorporating these two elements, Farooqui aligned himself with the optics that proclaimed Zinda Tilismath as a panacea.

Using the Nizam's cap is equivalent to today's celebrity endorsement, says Mariganti. "It is a symbol that the product has the approval of the ruler himself which is a surefire method of taking it to the masses. Integrating images from the local lexicon made it very relatable," he notes.

Becoming a part of the local language

Over the years, unbelievable stories were spun around Zinda Tilismath. The most popular one being that a dead animal sprung back to life after sprinkling a few drops of the medicine. While an exaggeration, it added to the lore and lure of the brand. Zinda Tilismath became a local legend.



Zinda Tilismath's instructional manual comes in six languages



(L) A portrait of the last Nizam of Hyderabad in the factory and (R) the photograph of the founder of Zinda Tilismath

Hyderabadi folklore teems with examples of his marketing genius: he painted adverts for Zinda Tilismath on boulders near railway lines so that people will notice it while entering the city. Besides, he was famous for distributing kites with the brand name printed to kids free of cost!

Imad Farooqui, currently a managing partner at the company, Karkhana Zinda Tilismath, credits his grandfather's business acumen and the quality of the medicine for its longevity. "The loyal clientele helped us achieve cult status. Over the years, even the smallest of changes (like the shape of the bottle) have been monitored closely. It is a quintessential Hyderabad product, hence people have a strong affinity towards it."

It is also the only product which has an instruction manual in six languages: English, Telugu, Hindi, Urdu, Kannada and Marathi, a proof of its widespread use in Deccan. Another fact in its favour is that it can be used both internally and externally and even for newborn babies, with no side effects, enlarging its scope of usage exponentially.

Hyderabad-based historian Sajjad Shahid points out that a bottle can be found in every Hyderabadi home. "It initially gained popularity as a cure for influenza and cholera, but people found it effective for numerous other ailments. I use it for sore throat/cough by applying a few drops in a sada paan," he says.

Running a business successfully for 100 years is no mean feat and Mariganti calls its appeal, timeless.

He says, "Few family businesses last beyond three generations and this model of running an enterprise for over a century must be studied."

Staying true to its roots is at the heart of its success: its packaging and typography have been the same and while glass bottles have given way to plastic, everything else remains true to its humble origins. Even today, a portrait of the last Nizam of Hyderabad finds pride of place inside the factory. The location of its manufacturing unit has remained the same since its inception; a lovely art deco heritage building on the banks of the Musi river which is also a century old.

While the company has forayed into other products: pain balm, lozenges and tooth powder, the flagship product remains Zinda Tilismath. It was, and is, an integral part of Covid homecare kits in the city even now.

As it hits a century, the magic is poised to last longer because even the younger generation swears by it. Its resonance with the average Hyderabadi remains intact. My local medical store owner puts its appeal in a nutshell when he says, 'Medicine main jaan hain saab, isiliye chalti.'



Breast Cancer

ABCs of Early Detection

February 4 is World Cancer Day. This day offers a powerful opportunity to speak out, to call for action, to listen to cancer patients and their families, and to give them a voice. **Dr Raghu Ram** marks this day by focusing on the importance of effective breast screening for early detection of breast cancer, by detailing the different kinds of mammograms, including 3D mammography



- World Cancer Day, led by the International Union against Cancer (UICC)—a global consortium of 350 cancer-fighting organisations in over 90 countries, is observed to raise cancer awareness and to encourage its prevention, detection, and treatment.
- Moreover, this day is used to target the public through global communications and encourage policy makers/UICC member organisations to make cancer a political priority.
- In India, every year, around 12 lakh new cases of cancer are diagnosed and 8 lakh people succumb to the disease. Since 2020, breast cancer has overtaken lung cancer to become the commonest cancer worldwide. Every year, 1 lakh 65 thousand new breast cancers are diagnosed and some 90,000 succumb to the disease in India.
- Due to lack of awareness and a marked absence of a robust organised nation-wide breast cancer screening programme, more than 60 per cent of breast cancers present in advanced stages in India.
- One out of two women diagnosed with breast cancer succumb to the disease. Every eight minutes, a woman succumbs to breast cancer in India.
- Anyone living with a history of cancer, from the moment of diagnosis through the remainder of their life, is a cancer survivor (I would strongly advocate to use the word “conqueror”). There are several million Indians living with and beyond a diagnosis of cancer. It is estimated that there are nearly 2.25 million cancer survivors at any given point of time in the country.

In my opinion, there are only two ways to fight cancer—awareness and early detection. So, here are a few answers to common questions about mammograms, which will help women detect cancer early:

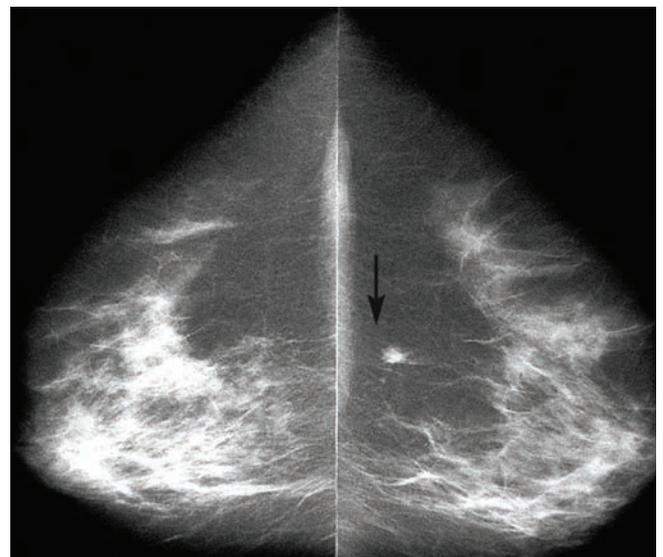
What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast

What is a diagnostic mammogram?

A mammogram that is done when there are new changes in the breast, such as:

- A 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



Mammogram showing a small impalpable left breast cancer detected on screening

- 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

What is a surveillance mammogram?

It is an annual mammogram to detect recurrence in the other breast, after mastectomy (removal of a breast) for breast cancer. If a woman underwent breast preserving surgery (wide local excision/lumpectomy), annual surveillance mammogram also helps evaluate the operated breast as well for any abnormalities.

To the question, 'Doctor...I cannot feel any abnormality in my breast. Why should I have a screening mammogram?'

A screening mammogram is done to detect breast cancer in the impalpable stage when neither the lady nor the doctor can feel a lump in the breast. It is advisable to have an annual screening mammogram from the age of 40.

Breast screening by way of mammography is an effective, proven way of detecting breast cancer many years before it shows up. Early detection of breast cancer offers the best chance of a successful treatment, which translates to significantly improved survival.

Is breast cancer screening effective in all age groups?

Whilst it is important for women of all ages to be 'breast aware', breast screening is effective only in women over the age of 40 years. Routine breast screening for women under 40 years and without symptoms has not yet been proven to be effective.



The latest generation 3D mammography unit

Is it safe to have a mammogram? Does it cause radiation hazard?

It is indeed safe to have a mammogram. Mammography involves a very tiny dose of radiation (0.4 mSv) – the risk to health from this is insignificant and the benefits far outweigh any risks.

Is mammography painful?

Mammography may cause some momentary discomfort but it should not be painful if a properly trained radiographer does it. With digital/3D mammography, the discomfort is even less.

Is digital mammography the same as 3D mammography?

In Full Field Digital mammography (FFDM), the traditional conventional X-ray film is replaced by electronics that convert X-rays into digital pictures of the breast. This is similar to pictures captured on digital cameras. The advantages are better quality pictures/images, much lower radiation dose and significantly less discomfort.

3D mammography, also referred to as Digital Breast Tomosynthesis (DBT), is the most recent revolutionary advance since the introduction of digital mammography. As the name implies, 3-D Mammography Unit creates three dimensional multiple images of the breast from different angles. It is similar to computed tomography (CT) imaging, in which a series of thin "slices" are assembled together to create a 3-D reconstruction of the body. With the availability of telemedicine facilities, digital images can be stored long term, and indeed, can be sent anywhere across the world for a second opinion.

Key advantages of 3D mammography include:

- Earlier detection of small breast cancers that may not be visible on a conventional/digital mammogram
- Greater likelihood of detecting multiple breast cancers, which would not be picked up on conventional/ digital mammogram
- Much clearer images of abnormalities, particularly in younger women with dense breast tissue. This has particular relevance to India as majority of breast cancers are detected between the ages of 40 – 50 years
- Greater accuracy in pinpointing the size, shape and location of breast abnormalities
- Fewer unnecessary biopsies or additional tests/'call-backs' (instances where women are called back from screening for additional testing because of a potentially abnormal finding). ■

UBF Diary

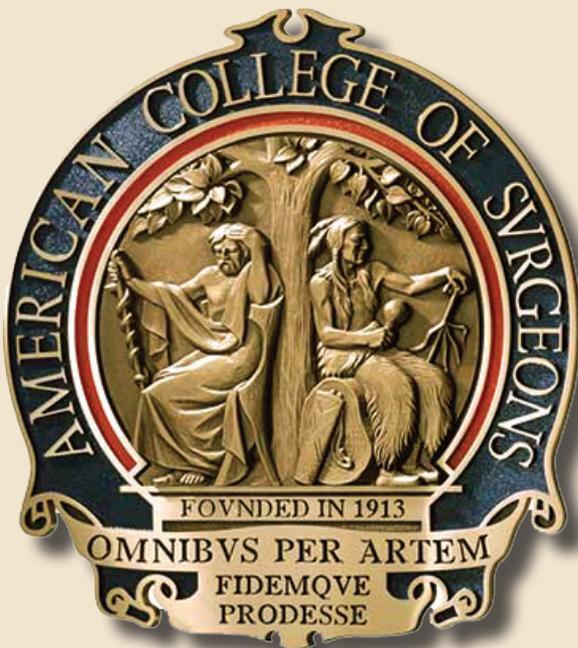
Disrupting Breast Healthcare in India

A Rare Distinction—Dr Raghu Ram becomes the only surgeon outside the USA, handpicked to deliver one of the 11 ‘Named Lectures’ alongside Dr Anthony Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the President of the United States and nine other world-renowned surgeons from the USA at the 107th Annual Congress held from October 23-27, 2021. This event was organised by the world’s largest and prestigious organisation, the American College of Surgeons

Dr Raghu Ram, OBE, director, KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases became the first surgeon from south Asia to have delivered the ‘Distinguished Lecture’ of the United States Chapter of International Society of Surgery at the 107th annual Congress of the American College of Surgeons (ACS). The title of his 55-minute talk was “Disrupting Breast Healthcare in India”.

Medical Advisor to the President of the United States and nine other world-renowned surgeons from the USA to deliver the prestigious “Named Lecture” at the annual scientific Congress this year, which was held on a virtual platform over five days from October 23-27, 2021.

In his keynote address, Dr Raghu Ram shared the revolutionary changes he has brought to the field of breast healthcare in India.



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF SURGERY (ISS/SIC)

The Distinguished Lecture of the International Society of Surgery was established in 1990 and endowed by the US Chapter of the International Society of Surgery to recognise the Society’s worthwhile activities by honouring reputed international surgeons.

Dr Raghu Ram happens to be the only surgeon from outside USA to be handpicked alongside Dr Anthony Fauci, Chief

The ACS 2021 Congress theme was “Resilience in the Pursuit of Excellence” and his presentation brought to the fore his resilience in the face of enormous challenges and in the relentless pursuit of excellence to improve breast cancer care in India through a number of unique and innovative initiatives.

Over the past 14 years since he relocated to India after he discovered his mother had breast cancer, Dr Raghu

Relocated to India to fulfil my Dreams (2007)

1. Establish Breast Cancer Foundation – *create awareness*
2. Introduce “Breast Centre” concept – *standardise care*
3. Implement a population based Screening Programme – *early detection*
4. Develop Breast surgery as a Subspecialty in India - *improve outcomes*

Dreams before relocating to India

Ram has been serving as a ‘living bridge’ between the UK and India. He has been committed to replicate the best of British practices in an earnest endeavour to improve the delivery of breast healthcare in the country he was born in and raised. He expressed hope that with time, the disruptive, innovative, and unique strategies coupled with a vision to find ‘Indian solutions’ that he outlined in his keynote address, would pave the path towards saving many lives and serve as a benchmark to improve the delivery of breast healthcare in south Asia.

As someone whose “heart beats for early detection of breast cancer,” Dr Raghu Ram said his inspiration can be summed up by a passage from a speech given by former Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam: “Ask what we can do for India and do what has to be done to make India what America and other western countries are today.”

The American College of Surgeons summarised in a feature story Dr Raghu Ram’s extensive contribution in augmenting breast healthcare in India, including his address at the 2021 ACS Congress. Click on the link to read the feature:

LINK

<https://www.acscnews.org/iss-lecturer-has-dedicated-his-career-to-breast-health-innovation-and-awareness-in-india/>

In his address, Dr Raghu Ram highlighted the four visionary achievements accomplished over the past 14 years:

- Establishing KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases (2007) - south Asia’s first free standing comprehensive breast centre in Hyderabad. This landmark initiative has paved the path for a revolutionary change in the way a “Breast Health Centre” is understood in India
- Founding Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation (2007), a not-for-profit Breast Cancer Charity based out of Hyderabad, which has been working with missionary zeal towards breaking the ‘taboo’ around the word ‘breast cancer’ and creating the much-needed awareness about the importance of ‘early detection’ through a number of innovative initiatives which has attracted national and international appreciation
- Spearheading south Asia’s largest population-based breast cancer screening programme (2012 – 2016) and reaching out to over 200,000 under-privileged women spread across 4,000 villages in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. This programme is being currently expanded into a nationwide initiative by India’s National Health Mission Programme
- Recognising the need for standardising breast healthcare in the country and playing a pivotal role in the formation of The Association of Breast Surgeons of India (ABSI)—south Asia’s first organisation that has brought together general surgeons, surgical oncologists and plastic surgeons treating patients with breast disease (2011). Over the past ten years, ABSI has evolved to become the ‘voice for breast surgery’ in the country

Founded in 1913, with over 84,000 members from the USA and 140 countries worldwide, The American College of Surgeons is the single strongest voice for surgeons across all surgical specialties across the globe.

In addition to featuring hundreds of scientific presentations highlighting research in progress in all surgical specialties and 105 panel discussions on relevant and timely topics, the annual 2021 ACS Congress offered ‘11 Named Lectures’ on a variety of surgical and medical topics given by renowned experts.

Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation is celebrating
15 positively eventful years (2007 - 2022)

Follow us on  <https://www.facebook.com/ubfoundation>  https://twitter.com/UBF_India
 <https://www.youtube.com/c/UshalakshmiBreastCancerFoundation>

The genius of 3D just became clearer.

Introducing the fastest,
highest resolution
3D Mammography
system available.



Clarity HD high-resolution
3D™ imaging



SmartCurve™ breast
stabilisation system



Enhanced workflow

3Dimensions™
Mammography System



3Dimensions™

3dimensionssystem.com

CELEBRATING 15 POSITIVELY EVENTFUL YEARS (2007-2022)

2007...



KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases at KIMS Hospitals was the first centre in south India and the second unit in the country to have acquired the Full Field Digital Mammography system...

And then...

15 years later...

The BEST just got BETTER

2022...



KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases at KIMS Hospitals is the first centre in Telangana/Andhra Pradesh and the second unit in the country to have acquired the most advanced – latest, fastest and highest resolution version of 3D Mammography system...