

PINK CONNECTION

UBF



Issue 38: Aug - Oct '24

SPECIAL ISSUE

Ten Years of Pink Connexion



MEETING OF MINDS

Dr Raghu Ram
with PM Modi

TRIBUTES

to India's only Breast
Cancer magazine

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<https://www.youtube.com/c/UshalakshmiBreastCancerFoundation>



Behind the Scenes

Among the many newsletters and magazines that I have launched, *Pink Connexion* is one that comes out every quarter, regularly no matter what, and this has gone on for the last 10 years. A large part is due to Dr Raghu Ram's belief that a newsletter such as this would give him a forum to showcase his work, and raise awareness about breast cancer, and reach an audience not just in Hyderabad where he works, but across the country! In fact, as our readers will see, it has even reached the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who appreciated the newsletter and the doctor's efforts. We do take it as a pat on our back for our efforts.

In the 10 years of its publication, we have featured so many cancer conquerors, and whether they are celebrities or simple middle-class women, each one has been a story of grit. And each time we are overcome by the individual's will to fight and conquer the disease, and in almost all the cases, they have spoken about the support of a strong family and physician. In featuring their stories, we hope more women will be aware of health check-ups and find the courage to fight health problems, whatever they may be.

I take this opportunity to applaud Dr Raghu Ram's efforts towards creating awareness for cancer, leaving no stone unturned, whether he is addressing international conferences or impressing governments. And our patron Dr Ushalakshmi *garu*, who has stood by this newsletter like a guiding angel.

It would not be inappropriate to thank my team here: Malvika Mehra for setting the template for the newsletter 10 years ago and doing it issue after issue; Minal Nirmal Khona, for doing many interviews with cancer survivors; Nivedita Chaudhuri, who writes from London but will get to know about good work being done in some remote corner of India. Of course, Kavitha Shanmugam who tweaks every word that goes into this newsletter.

I do hope the newsletter and the vision with which we started it, continue for a few decades more!

Ratna Rao Shekar



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The Prime Minister autographs the editorial page of the very first quarterly issue of Pink Connexion



Narendra Modi ✓
@narendramodi

In Hyderabad, I met Dr. Raghu Ram Pillarisetti Ji and Dr. S. Vyjayanthi Ji. Dr. Raghu Ram is a Padma awardee and has done pioneering work in curing breast cancer. We discussed aspects relating to healthcare infrastructure in India. He also appreciated our Government's efforts in this regard.

@RRPillarisetti



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ANNIVERSARY

Behind the Scenes

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Ratna Rao Shekar



Dr Raghu Ram meets the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi

PM Modi later tweets about the meeting paying rich tributes to Dr Raghu Ram and his contribution towards improving breast cancer care in the country

It was a momentous event. Dr P Raghu Ram, and his wife, Dr Vyjayanthi got the opportunity to meet Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on May 7, 2024 at Raj Bhavan in Hyderabad. Dr Raghu Ram felicitated the Prime Minister with a specially made 'vastram' that the Linga Bhairavi temple in Coimbatore had gifted him.

During the felicitation, Dr Raghu Ram told PM Narendra Modi, "The principal source of your strength and power emanates from your late Amma's blessings. It is my prayer and wish that the 'vastram' gifted to me from Maa Bhairavi Temple gives you even more energy through the divine Devi Shakthi, in your selfless service to the nation."

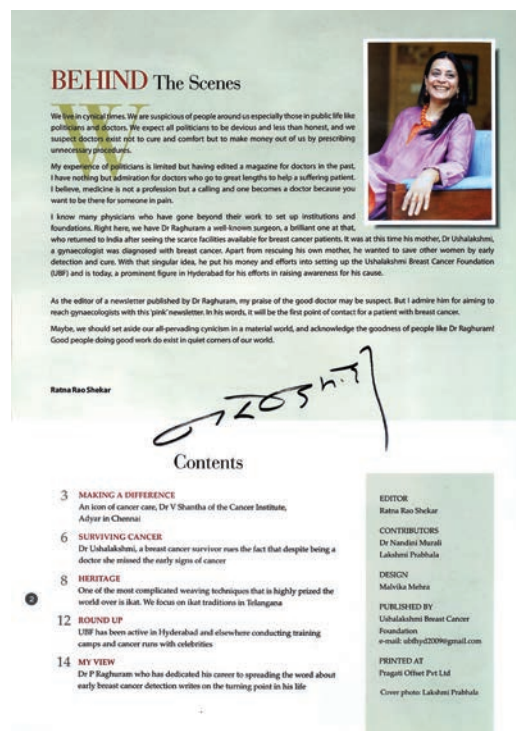
Prime Minister Modi was touched by these remarks and commented, "You're a doctor and you are spiritual too."

Dr Raghu Ram explained to the Prime Minister about his views on the strength of spirituality and meditation and that he spends two hours in the prayer room every day. The Prime Minister was pleasantly surprised to hear this and admired the spiritual aspects of Dr Raghu Ram's life.

Dr Raghu Ram complimented the Prime Minister for having taken the landmark decision to extend the Ayushman Bharat facilities to senior citizens, which promises to be a 'game changer' in terms of providing the much-needed financial assistance to the growing elderly population in the country.

As breast cancer is the commonest cancer affecting women in India, the Prime Minister and Dr Raghu Ram, who is also a Padma Shri and a Dr BC Roy awardee, discussed ways in which breast cancer care and cancer care in general can be improved in the country.

At the meeting, they talked about how the population-based breast cancer screening programme that is being implemented under the auspices of the National Health Mission (NHM) can be made more robust; how cancer registries can be put to best use, particularly in rural areas and the urgent need for cancer to be classified as a 'Notifiable Disease'.



Prime Minister autographs the Editorial page of the very first quarterly issue of 'Pink Connexion'

The Prime Minister also autographed the editorial page of the very first quarterly issue of *Pink Connexion*, a publication on breast cancer, which was started ten years ago, in 2014. An innovative initiative by the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation and KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases, *Pink Connexion* is celebrating 10 positively eventful years (2014–2024) and is South Asia's first and one-of-its-kind breast health magazine.

After the meeting, notably, the Prime Minister tweeted about his meeting with Dr Raghu Ram, acknowledging the doctor for his "pioneering work in breast cancer". Further, the Prime Minister also paid rich tributes to Dr Raghu Ram for his stellar role towards improving breast cancer care in the country.

This tweet went viral and generated more than 1.1 million views, 31,000 likes and 4,200 reposts. What's more, the Prime Minister has started to follow Dr Raghu Ram on X (formerly Twitter), the social media platform.



Dr Raghu Ram's journey: Disrupting breast cancer care in India

On the occasion of Pink's 10th anniversary, Dr Raghu Ram, founding director, KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases in Hyderabad, marks another key milestone in his career. The doctor is celebrating 17 eventful years of being at the forefront of breast cancer care in India.

The story of his journey from 2007, when he turned his back on a lucrative career in the UK to return to India to bring about revolutionary changes in how people view breast cancer, and his innovative initiatives towards testing and care of this commonest cancer among women, is a compelling one.

Here, Dr Raghu Ram writes about some significant moments in his career

In 2002, my mother, Dr Kotha Ushalakshmi, a renowned obstetrician and gynaecologist from Hyderabad, was diagnosed with breast cancer. This unexpected diagnosis connected to a person so very close to me, coupled with the huge disparity in breast cancer care across Bharat, became the major defining turning point in my life.

Despite rewarding career opportunities in the UK, my wife, Dr Vyjayanthi, and I relocated to Bharat in 2007 to take care of my mother and serve my country. By grace of the divine force, over the past 17 years, I have been working with missionary zeal alongside like-minded colleagues, friends and the government in an earnest endeavour to improve breast healthcare in my country, through a number of innovative initiatives.

Transforming Dreams into Reality (2007 – 2024)

The KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases

One of the first initiatives we flagged off was South Asia's

first free-standing, purpose-built and comprehensive Breast Health Centre in Hyderabad in 2007.

The KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases (www.breastcancerindia.org) was established under the auspices of KIMS Hospital, which is one of the largest private

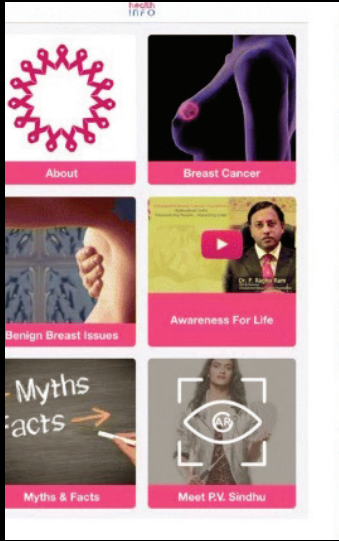


hospital groups in south India. The breast centre has incorporated best aspects of the Royal Marsden, Cardiff and Nottingham Breast Centres in the UK and Van

Nuy's Breast Centre in the USA.

Women with both benign breast disease and breast cancer are managed under one roof by specialists with a declared interest in managing breast disease. Over the years, KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases has made significant and meaningful difference to many lives, in





addition to bringing about a revolutionary change in the way 'Breast Health Centre' is understood in the Indian subcontinent.

Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation

Breast cancer is the commonest cancer affecting women in this country. Due to lack of awareness, absence of a robust nationwide population-based breast cancer screening programme and inequitable cancer care, the vast majority present in advanced stages with poor survival.



In many parts of the country, it is still a 'closet' issue that is not talked about. With a vision to make breast cancer an openly discussed issue, and empower women about the importance of early detection of breast cancer in addition to spreading the message of hope, survival and courage to those who have fought breast cancer, I founded Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, as a 'not-

for-profit' charity in 2007 (www.ubf.org.in).

To honour my mother's struggle and applaud her strength in the fight against breast cancer, both the Breast Centre and the Foundation bears her name. The landmark breast cancer advocacy initiatives such as the Pink Ribbon Campaign, implemented by the 'not-for-profit' breast cancer charity, has quite simply transformed breast cancer from a 'taboo' issue to a much commonly discussed one. This has paved the path for "early detection" of this disease and saved scores of lives in the region.

Inspired by the innovative Pink Ribbon Campaign undertaken by the Foundation, it is very gratifying to see that many NGOs and hospitals have embarked upon conducting similar programmes not only for breast cancer awareness, but for other illnesses as well, which also desperately need urgent attention.

This speaks volumes of the "Pink Ribbon Campaign" that has enthused individuals, organisations and institutions in Bharat to take up and spearhead impactful awareness activities.

Screening initiative

Under the auspices of the Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation in partnership with the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, I have overseen the implementation of a large-scale Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) based breast cancer screening programme in rural Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which have very limited access to mammography services.

Between 2012–2016, 200,000 under-privileged women between the ages of 35 years and 65 years, spread across 4,000 villages in the region, have been screened for early signs of breast cancer by way of CBE, performed by 3,750

trained healthcare workers, employed with the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Breast cancers detected through this initiative have been treated free of charge through the state government-funded Aarogyasri scheme.

This milestone project made national impact in 2016 and a high-powered Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) set up by the government of India's Union ministry of health, of which I was a member, approved the proposal to implement CBE-based breast cancer screening programme all over Bharat.

This initiative is currently being rolled out nationwide under the auspices of government of India's National Health Mission.



Breast Surgical Society

Inspired by the American Society of Breast Surgeons and Association of Breast Surgery in the UK, I played a pivotal role in the genesis of The Association of Breast Surgeons of India (ABSI), South Asia's first and the only

surgical organisation that represents surgeons practising the art and science of breast surgery.

Established in 2011, over the past 13 years, ABSI is the "Voice for Breast Surgery in Bharat" and the Association has been working relentlessly towards standardising breast healthcare in the country.

Dr Raghu Ram Pillarisetti OBE

MS, FRCS (Eng), FRCS (Edin), FRCS (Glasg), FRCS (Irel), FACS (USA), Hon. FRCS (Eng), Hon. FRCS (Thailand), Hon. FCSSL (Sri Lanka), Hon. FCCS (China) Hon. Fellow (The Association of Surgeons of Great Britain & Ireland) Hon. Fellow (American Surgical Association)

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Published in 2022.

LINK: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12262-021-03099-0#citeas>



A glimpse into the eventful life of Dr Kotha Ushalakshmi, who is the guiding light behind a Foundation dedicated to breast cancer



Dr Kotha Ushalakshmi turned 91 on July 21, 2024. She has successfully completed 91 positively eventful years with utmost commitment to her family, extraordinary dedication to her profession and has served as a major inspiration to a one-of-its-kind breast cancer advocacy campaign in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh spearheaded by a Foundation, which bears her name.

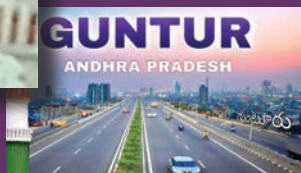
The eventful journey of this well-known gynaecologist in the Telugu states, is chronicled in a short film, *The Indomitable Dr Kotha Ushalakshmi@90*. Her tryst with breast cancer transformed her son, Dr Raghu Ram's life, who has committed himself for a lifetime to improve the delivery of breast healthcare in India.

Truly, the greatest legacy that anyone can leave behind is to positively impact the lives of others. Her glorious life well and truly epitomises this statement.

A glimpse into her journey thus far can be found on this YouTube link given below:

 <https://youtu.be/oW8QgSP7Zx0>

Born 1933



MBBS and MD, DGO



**Andhra Medical
College,
Visakhapatnam**





Defied parent's wishes and married her senior in Medical College



Served as Professor of Obstetrics & Gynaecology in undivided Andhra Pradesh for over a decade...

One of the most sought-after gynaecologists of her generation...

2002 - Everyone has a Story



Her 'big' story began when she was diagnosed with Breast Cancer

She fought the disease with courage & determination



2007



Son and daughter-in-law leave lucrative career opportunities in the UK to relocate to Bharat to take care of Amma



2007 - 2024



Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, Hyderabad, India

**Creating awareness
Reaching out to the Community
Supporting breast cancer 'Conquerors'**

**Empowering Women...
Impacting Lives...**



KIMS Hospitals has honoured Dr Ushalakshmi

**South Asia's first purpose built comprehensive Breast Centre
Bringing about a revolutionary change in the way 'Breast Health Centre' is understood in the Indian subcontinent**

The Association of Breast Surgeons of India (ABSI), the 'voice' that represents surgeons practising breast surgery in India has instituted an annual Dr Ushalakshmi Oration to honour her extraordinary contribution to breast cancer advocacy