

PINK CONNECTION

UBF

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**'I have learnt
not to be afraid to
lean on my family,
friends and
my doctors'**

Cancer Conqueror
Noor Sandhu

**The Gudi
Sambaralu
Festival**

Taking dance
back to public spaces

My View:

Who needs
genetic testing?



BEHIND The Scenes

Exercise and diet are often discussed as key components of wellness today. Once upon a time, a two-kilometer walk was enough to keep us healthy! Until, we were told that young people who spend a lot of time in the gym and sports grounds, were neglecting their diets. You can exercise as much as you want but if you are going to glug down a can of Coke even those marked 'diet' or keep tucking into burgers and desserts—you are not going to stay healthy.

In fact, now the theory is that diet plays a greater role in wellness than exercise. I am open to criticism on this view, of course. But, eating healthy, staying away from carbs and sugars with enough helpings of vegetables and fruits will help us to stay fit.

There is a third component to health that is not taken seriously—sleep. Probably, we associate it with sloth and we think it is alright to stay up late to work, study or party. We don't seem to mind that it is cutting into our resting time, which should be for eight hours at least.

How well we sleep is an indication too of our mental and physical health. Few are blessed with this gift. That's why I loved our cancer conqueror Noor Sandhu's statement that she sleeps when she needs to and for however long she has to! During recovery, we need to sleep so that the cells heal.

If only the young, who stay up late into the night watching videos or playing games on their mobiles, recognize the value and benefits of sleep.

Ratna Rao Shekar



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Explore, dream and discover!

Her life changed when she moved to work with the inspiring Sonam Wangchuk, who was immortalised by Aamir Khan in the movie *3 Idiots*. **Mallik Thatipalli** in conversation with Gitanjali JB, who has worked with Wangchuk to set up a unique educational institute, the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives in Ladakh

It was a WhatsApp message in 2017 that prompted Chennai-based Gitanjali JB to move to Ladakh to work alongside Sonam Wangchuk, immortalised by Aamir Khan in the movie *3 Idiots*. Wangchuk, a social activist and entrepreneur has set up a university in the Phyang village of Ladakh called the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives (HIAL) to cater to local educational needs. Partnering him in this endeavour is Gitanjali, an educator and entrepreneur.

Reminiscing about her first meeting with Wangchuk, Gitanjali says, "It was a WhatsApp video 'the next learning revolution' forwarded by a friend that introduced me to Sonam Wangchuk's idea of a university that he was envisioning."

She got in touch with him. A meeting that was supposed to be for an hour extended to the next day and she shares, "There was a lot of alignment in our thoughts about education like

practical learning, the importance of relevant curriculum, etc. We were actually finishing each other's sentences!"

Gitanjali visited Ladakh to see the project and immediately fell in love with the concept of HIAL. Located at an altitude of 12,000 feet with less oxygen, she describes Ladakh as a desert where six out of 12 months the temperatures are below normal. She felt that if the right kind of education can be brought to such a difficult place it would prove that it can be done anywhere in the country and the world!

An entrepreneur and book publisher, this trained Odissi and Russian Bolshoi ballet dancer didn't hesitate to swap the city for the mountains. She recalls, "I felt saturated with city life and longed for an opportunity to live closely with nature, breathe fresh air, eat organic food and live sustainably...I was looking for meaning in work, something that can impact the world and future generations."

To her, education was that space. She feels that in India the focus is less on understanding and even less on application but more on rote-learning. As the founding CEO, Gitanjali takes care of all the aspects of launching a start-up: raising funds, designing curriculum, supervising the design and construction of the buildings and setting up live labs or enterprises where students work and learn.

HIAL is an experiment that has the potential to change the way higher education is happening not only in India but the whole world. It is the world's first doer's university that follows the pedagogy of learning by doing and immersive learning practices. It will be the first Mountain University in the world that will focus on all the issues faced by the mountain world such as climate change, which is melting glaciers at an alarming rate, flashfloods, challenge of greening valleys in the high-altitude desert terrain of Ladakh, the problem of urban migration of youth and the menace of waste generated through irresponsible tourism, to name a few.

The uniqueness of the Institute lies in the fact that students work not on staged projects but on real-time concerns and work towards solutions as a part of their courses and learning. For this, HIAL sets up live labs that generate resources to run the university, while the students get free education. Students here pay their fees with their hard work, sweat and creativity.

It is interesting to work with Wangchuk because he believes that anything is possible, says Gitanjali. "I have learnt several things from him: living sustainably with light footprints on earth and nature, responding to situations strategically rather than reacting to them and to be patient when one is working towards bringing a social change," she shares.

"Working in the social impact space is like being *Neelakantha*, where one needs to take in a lot of negativities and misunderstandings, remain calm and continue to work for the betterment of others despite criticism," she adds.

This educationist has had a varied and interesting career. She has even run a publishing house called Helios once. "I am a start-up person. I thrive in chaos. I love a blank canvas to paint some vision on it. When these projects grow to a size that systems work and are in place, I like to hand it over to competent people and move on to the next chaos," she explains.

Moving to Ladakh from Chennai resulted in a lot of adjustment issues for Gitanjali. For a person who found Chennai winters cold, adjusting to Ladakhi temperatures was the biggest challenge. But she overcame it in less than a year and now feels quite at home in the mountains.

Connectivity was another issue as both phone and internet connectivity were very poor in 2017 (there was no 4G), and she had to drive a few kilometres to Leh to send and receive mails or download WhatsApp messages. Now

I have learnt several things from him: living sustainably with light footprints on earth and nature, responding to situations strategically rather than reacting to them

—Gitanjali on Sonam Wangchuk



Treading lightly on the earth: Gitanjali in Ladakh



A social entrepreneur looking for meaning in her work

that they have 4G connectivity, she watches movies on Netflix since there are no cinema halls in Ladakh!

Gitanjali smiles as she lists all the challenges she has encountered. "Amazon does deliver selected items. But the most difficult thing, especially for a vegetarian like me, are the winters. Roads to Manali and Srinagar close by end of October and only reopen in mid-March or April. For these six months, no trucks ply and hence there are no green vegetables. All through winters people survive on cold-stored potatoes, carrots and some sun-dried vegetables for a couple of months, after that people survive on meat," she says.

While HIAL is her focus area for the next 10-15 years, she is adding new skills that will help her work, including learning the Ladakhi language. Currently writing a book, *Education for Tomorrow: An Integral Approach*, she plans to have it published by next year. Another initiative close to her heart is her recently launched project, 'Peaceful Warriors', where she hopes to make every girl in India a black belt.

Gitanjali calls her journey in the publishing, engineering and now educational sphere, interesting and enriching. "The fact

that I can effortlessly move across disciplines and initiatives is what gives me the biggest sense of accomplishment. I love to create new things, bring new and progressive ideas to life, grow as a person through lifelong learning."

Is it tougher for a woman to follow her passion? She ponders for a minute before responding, "I see people as humans. We have men who have lived the most unimaginative of lives and several women who have reached for the stars and landed on the moon. It is person specific without anything to do with one's gender."

She lists out the qualities needed to follow one's heart: courage of convictions, belief in oneself, perseverance to take it to its logical conclusion and to never give up. She smiles, "These qualities need to be inculcated from childhood through the right kind of education and upbringing!"

Gitanjali wants to build students on whom society can rely on. She puts her philosophy for life in a nutshell when she says, "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do than by those you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, dream and discover!" ■

Taking Dance

back to Temples

Gudi Sambaralu is a dance festival in Telangana and Andhra, which aims to revive traditional art and dance forms in temple precincts. The founders of the festival talk to **Mallik Thatipalli** about their initiative – Paramparaa

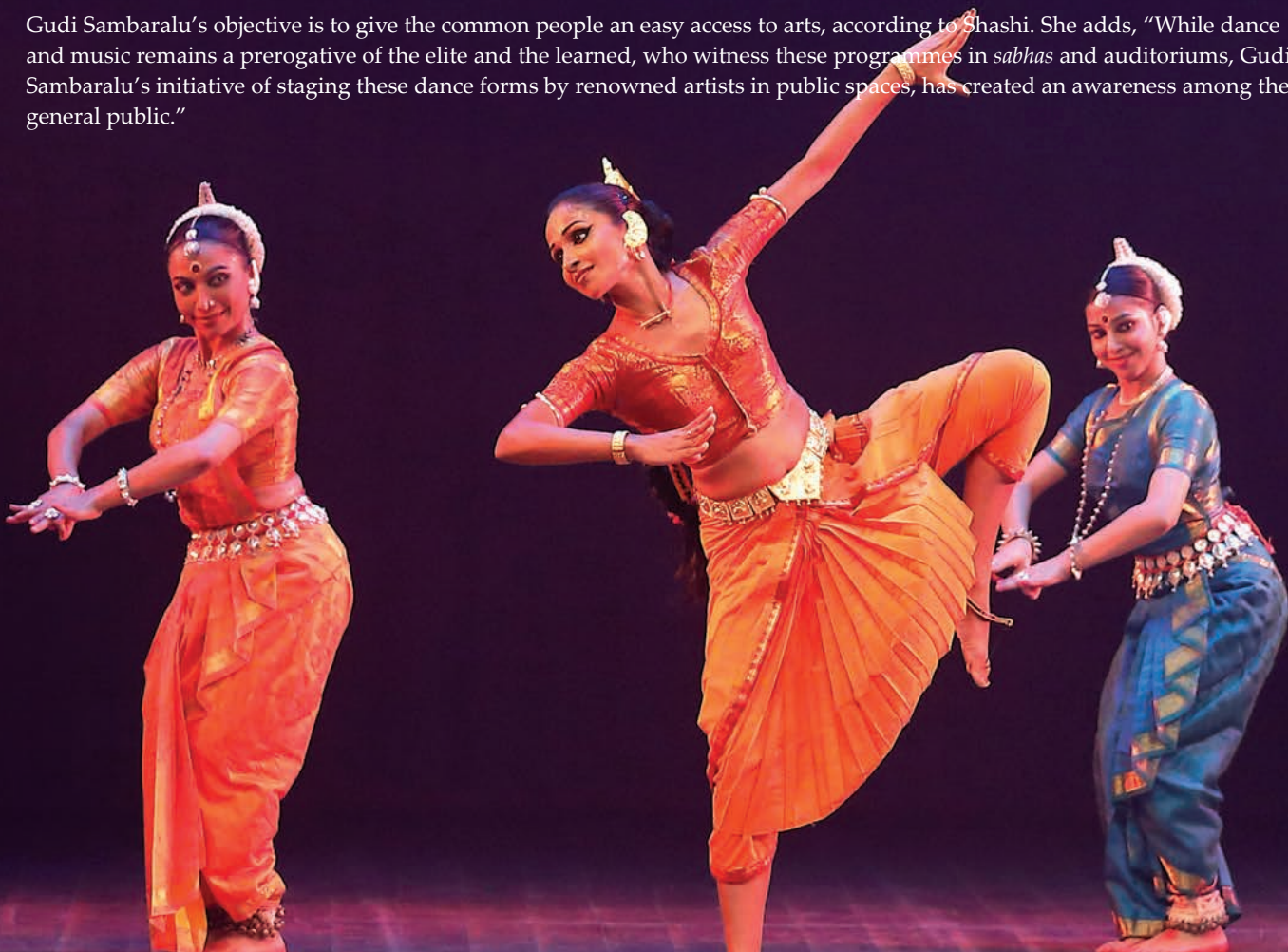
When Shashi Reddy attended Gudiya Sambhrama, the temple festival in Karnataka, she was struck by the fact that while most of the southern states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala give a lot of importance to local art and dance forms, the Telugu speaking states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana did not.

She explains, “It struck me then that while most southern states treasure their language and culture, it isn’t the same in the Telugu states. And, I thought, what better way to bring back art than through temples, where they were initially staged as a form of worship.”

After discussing the idea with her friend of two decades, Srinagi Rao, the duo started Paramparaa, a not-for-profit organisation. Thus, in 2015, the festival of Gudi Sambaralu (temple celebrations) was born with the goal of trying to revive traditional art forms, with the temple as the focal point. While Shashi runs an NGO Roshni in Hyderabad, Srinagi is a Hyderabad-based doctor from the Medwin Hospitals group.

Srinagi has learnt Hindustani vocal and Kathak, so she was excited when she got the chance to be a part of a temple dance festival. “The whole idea is to ensure that dance and divinity come together. A great draw, of course, are the amazing temples. Many people tell us that they have never even heard of the temples, most of which are many centuries old and located very near the city,” she says.

Gudi Sambaralu’s objective is to give the common people an easy access to arts, according to Shashi. She adds, “While dance and music remains a prerogative of the elite and the learned, who witness these programmes in *sabhas* and auditoriums, Gudi Sambaralu’s initiative of staging these dance forms by renowned artists in public spaces, has created an awareness among the general public.”





The founders of Paramparaa: Shashi Reddy and Srinagi Rao

The festival, which is free for the public, happens mostly during Sankranti and Shivratri to take advantage of the cool evenings. The dance programmes are conducted in courtyards, *kalyana mandapas* and temple stepwells.

Srinagi believes that the festival pays homage to the long romance India has had with drama, dance and music. "The origin of these performing arts can be traced back to the time when

people congregated in village squares and temples to learn and appreciate art forms," she says. "Since dance and music have been an important part of temple rituals, every temple has the *natya mandap*, a distinct space to help encourage the aesthetic value of the performing arts," she adds.

The whole idea is to ensure that dance and divinity come together. A great draw, of course, are the amazing temples.

—Srinagi Rao

Starting from the temples in and around Hyderabad, Gudi Sambaralu has spread its wings to take the festival across the remote temples of Telangana. The temples add atmosphere to the festival. Shashi says, "The old heritage temple spaces have an energy of their own. The architecture, the power and energy that are present in these ancient temples and their latent aesthetic beauty contribute immensely to the success of our *sabha*. In a sense, we want to take back art to where it has originated."

The temples are chosen with great care. They look for family-owned temples (like the Pittie temple in the old city or the Domakonda fort), historic spaces like the Srisailam or the Shiva temple in Nizamabad. The duo only ensure that these places have to accommodate 400-500 people and be easily accessible. Be it the 1,000 pillar temple in Warangal to the 180-year-old Sitarambagh Temple near Hyderabad, venues are chosen carefully.

Srinagi talks of bringing back the times when temples were the mainstay of society and functioned not only as religious but also as social hubs. She states nostalgically, "Even till the 1950s and 60s, temples were the places for the entire village to gather and discuss family/social issues. It was the centre of activity. I hope, we succeed in getting back at least a slice of that period through our festival."

Deepika Reddy, a Kuchipudi dancer who has performed at their festivals, calls it a spiritual experience. "To be part of a festival, which is conducted inside the temple premises is amazing. In my view, my performance is a *chiru kanuka* (small offering) to the Lord."

The dance forms are varied and diverse: from the traditional art forms like Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam,





Kathak and Odissi to reviving forgotten forms like *Vilasini natyam*, it focuses on bringing eclectic styles and performers together. The performances are interspersed with other traditional ones like Vedic chanting, local art forms or performances by theatre groups.

Reddy explains, "We want to expose people in villages to the best performers of the country. Our festival brings art lovers together. It is their chance to see Mallika Sarabhai or Leela Samson in action. It opens new avenues."

Ananda Shankar Jayant, who performed a Bharatanatyam ballet, *Sri Rama Namam-Entha Ruchira Ra* which retells the story of Ramadasu, to a spellbound crowd of 2,000 people at the 800-year-old Amapalle Temple near Hyderabad in 2017, recalls it as a surreal experience. "The environs of the temple, the stepwell and the audience resulted in an extraordinary experience. To take art back where it belongs and to bring *bhakti* to everyone is sorely needed today," he says.

Zeroing in on the venue is of prime importance for the duo, who are always looking for unique destinations. They scout for erstwhile



We want to expose people in villages to the best performers of the country. It is their chance to see Mallika Sarabhai or Leela Samson in action

—Shashi Reddy

zamindari *samsthams* in Telangana or look for places renowned for their beauty like the 2,000-year-old Kulpakji Jain temple near Hyderabad.

This year, popular pilgrimage spots in Andhra Pradesh like Srikalahasthi and Simhachalam were identified to ensure that the festival reaches out to

more people. The current edition also identifies public spaces in Hyderabad including parks so that young people can be exposed to traditional art forms.

The festival is slowly but surely gaining ground. Shashi recalls a time when a well-known Telugu theatre group Surabhi enacted their popular shows *Maya Bazaar* and *Pataalabhairavi* in a remote village (Gadwal) in Telangana to a packed crowd.

The duo is hopeful that every stakeholder in their effort – the temples, performers and the art form benefit from their festival. They plan to take their festival to all the districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. With one goal in mind: to take dance back to the temple. ■

Angelina Jolie Effect

creates a scare

Dr P Raghu Ram advises people against rushing to get their genetic tests for breast cancer done after celebrity Angelina Jolie went public about her double mastectomy



As a doctor, one must remember an important component of the Hippocratic Oath—"primum non nocere"—a latin phrase which means 'first do no harm'. Celebrity Angelina Jolie's brave decision to go public about her 'double mastectomy' to prevent breast cancer received world-wide media coverage in 2013. This has helped raise awareness about genetic testing for breast cancer. However, there is a fine line between advocacy and creating a scare. The 'media effect' has increased anxiety among the vast majority of 'worried well', who are NOT at a risk for genetically induced breast cancer.

Over the past six years, many friends and patients are asking me if it is a good idea to get the genetic test done 'just in case'. If a number of women with an average risk (i.e. one family member affected with breast cancer over the age of 40) get genetic testing done, this is unnecessary. This group of women in the 'average risk' category is most misguided and get the genetic testing done in India, without adequate genetic counseling. Most enquiries are from this group, who are ironically at a risk of developing breast cancer as much as the rest of the population.

Only 5–10 per cent of breast cancers are likely to carry the faulty gene/s (BRCA1 and BRCA2.). If you have these faulty genes, you have a significant lifetime risk of getting breast cancer. Not everyone who has BRCA positivity gets breast cancer. The test should be considered when there is a significant family history of breast cancer for this high-risk group:

- When one or more close relatives who have had breast cancer before the 40
- Two or more close relatives who have had breast cancer at any age
- Close relatives who have had breast cancer and others who have had ovarian cancer
- One close relative who has had breast cancer in both breasts (bilateral) or who has had breast and ovarian cancer
- Male relative who has had breast cancer

The genetic test is a simple blood test (costs around Rs. 20, 000). If the blood test is positive, the lifetime risk of developing breast cancer (50–85 per cent) and ovarian cancer are very high (15–45 per cent).

Although surgery, by way of removal of both breasts (bilateral mastectomy) and ovaries plus fallopian tubes (bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy) before the natural menopause, reduces the risk of both breast and ovarian cancer, there are other well-established non-surgical options. If surgery is offered, there must be expertise to perform oncoplastic breast reconstruction during the same sitting (immediate breast reconstruction).

The two non-surgical options include:

1. Taking a drug, tamoxifen (has been used to treat hormone receptor positive breast cancer) for five years
2. Close monitoring

In India, since breast cancer genetic clinics and centres undertaking risk-reducing surgeries are few, 'close monitoring' is perhaps a pragmatic option. It is done through a combination of MRI of the breasts and bilateral mammograms, alternating every six months from the age of 25 or 10 years earlier than the age at which the cancer was diagnosed in the youngest family member.

In light of the 'Angelina effect', the 'emotional drive' to get the test done 'just in case' should be resisted. Whatever the risk, a healthy diet and regular exercise minimises the chance of developing breast cancer. As breast cancer cannot be prevented, it would be prudent to be 'breast aware' to ensure early detection.

Here is the Breast Awareness 5-Point Code:

1. Know what is normal for you.
2. Know what changes to look for.
3. Look and feel.
4. Tell your doctor about any changes immediately.
5. Have a screening mammogram annually if you are 40 and over.

UBF Diary

November 2019

THE HIGHEST HONOUR

Dr P Raghu Ram inducted as the 82nd President of the Association of Surgeons of India for 2020



Dr P Raghu Ram being installed as President ASI for 2020 by outgoing President, Prof Arvind Kumar



Some 5000 plus ASI members at 79th Annual Conference of ASI held in Bhubaneswar, December 2019

The year 2020 opened with additional responsibilities for Padma Shri awardee Dr P Raghu Ram, who is also a Dr B C Roy national awardee. He has been instated as the President of the Association of Surgeons of India (ASI), becoming one of the youngest members to be elected to this pivotal position.

All About ASI : Asia Pacific's largest and the world's second largest surgical association

ASI was established in 1938 to realise a long-standing wish among the surgeons in India to join hands to share each other's experiences and enhance their surgical skills. Starting from a humble

Creative leadership and accountable governance shall be my mantra. I wish to be remembered as a 'People's President'

– Dr P Raghu Ram

beginning with 112 members in 1938, the ASI is the world's second largest surgical organisation after The American College of Surgeons (which is the world's largest surgical body).

Widely considered to be the 'voice of surgery' in the country, ASI promotes the art/science of surgery and strives to promote the latest surgical techniques to the remotest parts of the country, in an effort to improve people's lives all over India.

ASI's vast network is reflected in the strong presence of its state chapters and city branches, in 29 states and union territories across India. Additionally, it has 12



specialty sections, comprising of specialist surgeons practising the art and science of breast surgery, onco-surgery, gastrointestinal surgery, laparoscopic/minimal access surgery, endocrine surgery, genito-urinary surgery, paediatric surgery, plastic surgery, thoracic/ cardiovascular

surgery, trauma/critical care surgery. It also has sections representing rural surgeons and surgeons in the armed forces.

ASI's new President creates a mandate:

Three major priorities as President ASI 2020:

- To focus on providing education and training courses for surgical trainees and practising surgeons to make them better surgeons with a humane touch. In this regard, several courses are being rolled out across the country, in collaboration with world-renowned surgical organisations, for the first time in ASI's history.
- "Hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray" — Focus on community service by ASI state chapters and city branches across the country adopting villages. We all know that India is in its villages. It is my wish therefore that every state chapter/city branch of ASI adopt a village and undertake initiatives that are village-centric for the greater good of the community.
- Establish rapport with the government of India to ensure ASI is actively involved in policy-making matters pertaining to surgery and surgical training.

Message on becoming one of ASI's youngest President:

"I am blessed to have been given this 'once in a life time' rare opportunity. My mission in the upcoming 12 months shall be strategic implementation of my goals to significantly improve surgical care delivery in India.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the members for giving me the biggest ever mandate in ASI's history. I promise to ensure creative leadership and accountable governance in the Association. At the end of my term, I wish to be recognised and remembered as a People's President."

Guest of Honour



Dr P Raghu Ram was guest of honour at the annual conference of the Association of Minimal Access Surgeons of India (AMASI), held in Nagpur on November 7, 2019. He is seen here along with Mr Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister and Dr Prakash Amte, social activist.



**Happiness is a choice,
with or without cancer.**

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