

PINK CONNECTION

UBF

Volume 7 Issue 3 Feb-April '21

Being Positive is Everything

Shalini Nayar on
fighting cancer

Reviving Traditional Board Games

Dr Ravi Kannan

Bringing Healthcare to a
Remote North-East Town



BEHIND The Scenes

Nothing in recent memory had sent the world scrambling, as the coronavirus outbreak did. However, we must admit that here in India, we have done reasonably well, with epidemiologists trying to analyse the mystery of India's low case count.

A recent article however, in both *New York Times* and *NPR*, has quoted sources to say that India had 100,000 cases a day in September and October last year, and was ready to overtake USA to become a country with the highest reported COVID-19 cases. But, India was now reporting less than 10,000 cases a day. And this, in a country of 1.4 billion people!

Some believe that India's humid, hot climate may have helped in containing the spread, while others believe that Indians, who've been exposed to infections like malaria, dengue, TB throughout their lives, may have had better immunity dealing with the dreaded virus.

Once again, the rate at which Indians are receiving the vaccine is impressive, while so many other countries are struggling to even get vaccine stocks. Of course, it helps that India, especially Hyderabad, is at the hub of vaccine production.

After this, let's not doubt, for a moment, that India is not ever capable of handling a health crisis even of this magnitude. Above all else, let's not forget to acknowledge the role of our frontline healthcare workers, and doctors, who wore stifling masks and PPE suits round the clock to be with the sick in the hospitals. And let's be grateful for that one nurse or doctor everywhere, who held a sick person's hand, when the family could not be with them.

Ratna Rao Shekar



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Spreading Light in Silchar



A surgical oncologist found his calling when he decided to give up his practice in Chennai and move to work at the Cachar Cancer Hospital in Silchar. Dr Ravi Kannan took up the challenge and found that he could impact the lives of deprived daily wage earners suffering from cancer in Assam. And, for all his hard work and efforts, he was awarded the Padma Shri.

Nivedita Choudhuri profiles the doctor, who has brought change in a backward, poverty-stricken area where healthcare is still inadequate

6

Dr Ravi Kannan's patients have truly seen one thing more relentless than cancer. The doctor himself. Not only does he give them courage but he also ensures that his patients—mostly poverty-ridden, from one of the most deprived areas in India—do not stop their treatment for fear of missing out on a day's work and their daily wage.

Dr Ravi Kannan, a surgical oncologist, who was awarded the Padma Shri last year for his work, is modest when it comes to accepting any praise though. He gives all the credit to the unstinting support of his entire team at Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre in Silchar, Assam.

Of course, since last year, the COVID pandemic has changed everything.

"We did not feel the full impact of the pandemic till around May, when the migrant labourers started returning home. So, we had time to prepare ourselves. Drills were carried out for the staff and we equipped ourselves with PPE, masks, aprons, sanitisers, etc. A ward for cancer patients who had contracted COVID-19 was created. Of course, it was difficult for the cancer patients who got the virus and they had to be isolated as a result. There was a patient who just had a tracheostomy done and two other cases of head and neck cancer in the isolation

ward. They were upset as they could not meet their families, but our nurses took good care of them,” said Dr Kannan.

“Around 85 cancer patients had the virus. All but one recovered though several had comorbidities such as diabetes. It was challenging because we had to reschedule radiation timetables for the patients. In the last few weeks, there have been no new cases,” he added.

The 56-year-old Dr Kannan was born in Chennai but travelled with his father, who was with the Indian Air Force, all over the country. He grew up in Shillong, New Delhi, Jamnagar, Benaras and Ambala and completed his MBBS degree at Kilpauk Medical College in Chennai, and his MS at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi. He specialised in oncology from the Adyar Cancer Institute in Chennai, where he spent a number of years, before he left in search of new challenges in December 2006.

It seemed God had heard his prayers for, out of the blue, he got a call from Dr Chinmoy Choudhury, chairperson at Cachar Cancer Hospital. He invited Dr Kannan to take charge of the centre. But first, Dr Kannan decided to visit Silchar to take stock of the situation.

However, his wife Seetha Lakshmi, a regional officer in the United States Educational Foundation in India (USEFI) in Chennai was apprehensive about the new job in Assam. She could only think of ‘insurgency and floods’. However, Dr Kannan managed to persuade her to visit Silchar for a weekend trip. Little did they realise that this trip will change the lives of their family and the under-privileged community in the remote Barak Valley of Assam forever.



Dr Ravi Kannan is modest when it comes to accepting praise for all his good work

Dr Kannan sees to it that his patients—mostly from one of the most deprived areas in India—do not forego their treatment because they may miss their daily wages by visiting the hospital

The fact that we live in a world of contrasts became clear to Dr Kannan as soon as he reached Silchar. His eyes took in the natural splendours of Barak Valley and its lush green forests and tea gardens. At the same time, he could not ignore the acute lack of infrastructure and the concentration of poverty in the area.

Cancer patients had to travel around 350 km to Guwahati for treatment. Most of the local people were daily-wage earners, who consumed a lot of tobacco, betel nut and alcohol. Instances of mouth cancer, head and neck cancer, oesophageal cancer, lung and gall bladder cancer were rampant. But, they lacked the funds required to travel to Guwahati and so disease and death went hand in hand.

Seetha Lakshmi, too, was deeply moved by the appalling conditions in which the local population lived. Most families lived in homes with leaking roofs and terrible sanitation. Dr Kannan recalls what she told him: “They need us. We must not disappoint them.”

They returned to Chennai and Seetha Lakshmi was given the difficult task of informing their families that they were planning to relocate to Assam. Dr Kannan’s colleagues in Chennai believed he was committing professional harakiri. But Assam beckoned and Dr Kannan had found his true calling.

From a world of relative comfort, Dr Kannan moved to a world of uncertain power supply and inadequate road connectivity. It was June 2007.

“When I started working here, Cachar Cancer Hospital had only 23 staff members. Established in 1996, the hospital was unable to cater to the needs of the local people. Firstly, there was insufficient staff—we just had six healthcare assistants who doubled as nurses and six cleaners, two technicians but only one doctor! I did not think much before I came here and certainly I did not do a SWOT analysis. And, I ended up spending a lot of time firefighting. My family, which included my daughter, had to do a fair bit of adjusting as well,” recounts the good doctor, who took over as director of Cachar Cancer Hospital.

There were plenty of problems in the beginning. The patients were too poor to pay for their treatment and it was difficult to pay the salaries of staff members. The local people were wary of joining the hospital because they knew they can command better salaries in bigger cities. Dr Kannan found that 60 per cent of the patients did not return for a second appointment! Less than 30 per cent of the patients completed their treatment at the hospital.

The doctor discovered the reason after some investigation of his own. Most of the patients—around 80 per cent—were daily-wage earners, either working in tea plantations or as agricultural workers. They could not afford to forego their earnings for even one day by visiting the hospital. A two-pronged strategy was adopted by the hospital to tackle the problem.

Firstly, every patient was sent home with a follow-up date. Secondly, it was decided that employment will be provided to the family members accompanying the patients. The hospital started paying the attendants for watering plants, cleaning the wards or doing other small tasks. Initially, they were paid Rs. 30 and food was also provided. Now, the attendants get food and an amount of Rs. 300.

The situation did not improve overnight. Another audit showed that 55 per cent of the patients had completed their treatment.

Dr Kannan points out, "It was encouraging and discouraging at the same time. While the compliance figures had gone up, I realised that Cachar Cancer Hospital was the last stop for treatment for all my patients, who simply could not afford to travel anywhere else. For instance, a cancer hospital in Mumbai may have patients from many states in India. People may come for a diagnosis or an opinion. But, my patients in Silchar have nowhere else to go. So, the 45 per cent of patients who are not returning to me are not getting any treatment at all."

Dr Kannan started home visits to solve this problem. Doctors started going to the villages and the patients were told they do not have to pay for home-based care. Satellite clinics were set up in remote areas and the medics started phone consultations as well. Reminders about future appointments were given to patients and the doctors stayed in touch with patients who had returned home with prescriptions.

Patients pay a one-time registration fee of Rs. 500 at the hospital and can avail treatment for a lifetime. This fee is charged to ensure that patients attend follow-up appointments. The few who come from far-off places are also provided accommodation and food.

"We have around 350 staff members, including 10 doctors. There are over 100 beds, which is a huge jump from the initial years when the cancer hospital had only 20 beds. We have around 4,000 new patients annually and another 20,000 come for follow-up appointments," Dr Kannan says.

Patients come from as far as Karimganj, Dima Hasao and Hailakandi (Assam), and from Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram. With all these effective measures in place, the compliance rate has gone up to 70 per cent, reveals the doctor.

Other plans include a department of nuclear medicine at Cachar, courtesy a CSR grant by the Airports Authority of India. Individual grants have also poured in. Seetha Lakshmi is also involved in the running of the hospital as a volunteer. She helps with the correspondence, coordinates programmes, compiles reports and communicates with individuals and organisations.

Dr Kannan's Padma Shri win sparked celebrations in both Assam and Tamil Nadu. Though, the doctor is touched by all the accolades, he is not about to be carried away and continues to soldier on. The phrase that springs to mind when you think of him is this: he cannot direct the wind, but he will direct the sails for as long as he can. ■

"Ravi is an amazing surgeon whose grit, fierce determination, extraordinary passion and tremendous body of work has transformed cancer care in one of the remotest regions in Assam. During my Presidential term at The Association of Surgeons of India (ASI), he was selected to deliver the Col. Pandalai Oration during ASICON 2021 - 81st annual Congress of the Association, to be held in December. This most prestigious Oration instituted in memory of the founder President of ASI, is the highest academic recognition that can be achieved by a surgeon practising in India. I truly believe that ASI has been honoured in honouring him. More power to Ravi."

Dr P Raghu Ram
President ASI (2020) & Col. Pandalai Orator
(2018)



Dr Kannan has the unstinting support of his entire team at the Cachar Cancer Hospital and Research Centre in Silchar, Assam

Indigenous Games:

More than a Nostalgic Spin!

Traditional Indian childhood games are a two-way street and can teach you important life-skills. And, that is the message Sangeeta Rajesh and Archana Reddy of Hyderabad, the founders of Good Old Games, hope to spread through their ethnic games. **Mallik Thatipalli** catches up with the resourceful duo from Hyderabad

The ethos of Good Old Games, which is focused on reviving ancient and indigenous games of India, is not just to evoke nostalgic feelings about a bygone era. Instead, this unique enterprise, established by the duo in Hyderabad—Sangeeta Rajesh and Archana Reddy—draws attention to the fact that the games of yore can actually help children learn life-skills to cope with the complex challenges of today.

Working with children, both the founders, Sangeeta Rajesh, a remedial therapist, and Archana Reddy, who runs a school in Hyderabad, were increasingly troubled by the issues facing children today. In an informal chat with *Pink*, Rajesh says, “We realised that children today were dealing with multiple issues such as obesity, eye-sight problems and discrepancies in learning and development. I remember, as a child we used to study with 50 other students and we did not receive quarter of the attention children get today. And, yet, we had none of these issues.”

After deliberating over the subject, they felt that the excessive use of smartphones and technology among younger children (ages 2 and above), is probably the cause of the problems. Rajesh and Reddy decided to infuse the “magic” of native games into the lives of children of today.

Co-founder Reddy points out, “Our childhood games were simple but they taught us ethics and importantly, enabled us to tackle challenges that life eventually throws at us. Unlike technology, which is a one-way street, these games teach us life lessons.”



After 18 months of painstaking research, Good Old Games, was opened in 2016, offering around 15 games, which have been played by generations of Indians. The games like Navakankari or Daadi, a board game are common in south India as the Kailasam or Paramapada Sopana Patam, a version of the proverbial Snakes and Ladders; and the chess game, Chadarangam.

There's Gaccha Kayalu too, known as the game of the five stones. Throwing them in the air, you have to deftly catch the stones in combinations allowing the rest to drop. The game is believed to build one's concentration, memory power and improve aiming skills. Bambaram (the traditional flick top); Pithoo (which involves a ball and a pile of stones); Pachisi and the Ashta Chamma (similar to the modern Ludo); Vamana Guntalu, (the popular wooden board game with 14 pits) and Puli Joodha (goat and tiger board game) are all part of their collection.

The games are aesthetically packed in cloth (silk, wool, velvet, embroidered weaves), wood (rubber and teak) and metal (brass, cast iron and copper) to make it appealing to the Instagram-friendly generation.

The research continues to be the most painstaking part of their journey. The

entrepreneurs visited the Madurai fair —Chithirai Thiruvizha Jatara—which is famous for showcasing a rich variety of indigenous games. At that fair, they sourced native rattles, spinning tops, catapults and spindles as well as raw materials like palm tree shells and leaves.

Our childhood games were simple but they taught us ethics and most importantly, enabled us to tackle challenges that life eventually throws at us. Unlike technology, which is a one-way street, these games teach us life lessons

At Karaikudi town in Tamil Nadu, they chanced upon vintage sets of the region's most popular game Pallanguzhi (called Ali Guli Mane in Kannada and Kuzhipara in Malayalam), which was mostly played by young girls. Fascinated by the intricate patterns and materials used such as marble, beads and fabric such old Kancheepuram saris, they came away inspired by the craftsmanship of yore. A visit to the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi gave them

insights on games played by the royal families of India.

Rajesh admits that their biggest source however has been the elderly people in their families. She says, "We made a list of all the games we knew and then turned to the elders to help us out. A little later, people started approaching us at our exhibitions to share inputs. Truly, it has been a collective effort."

After their research was completed, they worked with artisans from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, to make the games more visually appealing. Design is one of their biggest USP—from their Pallanguzhi sets shaped like a swan or a fish to chess sets fashioned as Jaipur chowkis and snakes and ladder boards in circular shapes or made from Kalamkari weaves—their games are eye-catching.

They picked up interesting stories during their research. For example, in Tamil Nadu, Pallanguzhi, known as Vada Galla Peeta in Telangana, was used to keep young girls home-bound after they reached puberty and to teach them simple and compound interest. "It was an integral part of every household even in Sri Lanka, so it's astonishing that so much has been lost in a short time," says Reddy.



Good Old Games offers a variety of board games from their Pallanguzhi sets shaped like a swan to their circular shaped snakes and ladders



The dynamic duo Sangeeta Rajesh and Archana Reddy



of handmade cloth pieces, they feature ancient designs from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Later, they were made from tortoise shell or ivory and decorated with pearls and precious metals.

Rajesh says, “If you played these cards in the morning, Rama was the king, while Krishna was the king after dusk.” The duo has also introduced Baahubali Chadarangam or chess sets which can easily fill a room.

“Nostalgia is a big draw. Many people purchase our products impulsively as they connect to the concept instantly. But, we don’t know if they use them a lot. However, we are hopeful because it is our true inheritance, after all,” says Rajesh, pointing out that our ancient texts are replete with images of Lord Shiva and Parvati playing the game of Pachisi, while *Mahabharata* has Karna and Duryodhana’s wife playing Ashta Chamma.

The COVID-year has brought in a lot of opportunities for Good Old Games, along with some challenges. Initially, the demand for their products shot up, as people were locked up in their homes and wanted to play indoor games. However, their stock was exhausted within months and the artisans couldn’t source materials easily, which led to demand with supply issues.

Now, however things have returned to normal. Rajesh shares that they are setting up a stall at the Crafts Council of Telangana’s building in Hyderabad and are also keen to expand their range of games.

With Good Old Games they hope to ensure kids today learn not only about Peppa, the pig but also about innovative games that can teach you a significant life-skill or two. ■

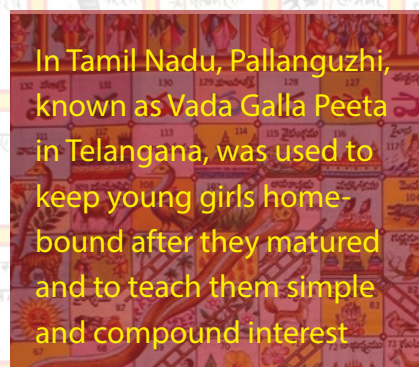
They also found out that Parama Pada Sopanam did not end at 100, as it does in the modern snakes and ladders version. The game was believed to be symbolic of a man’s attempt to reach heaven—the ladders represent virtues—while the snakes indicate vices. Snakes and Ladders also called Moksha Patam or Mokshapat, has been created by Sant Gyandev in the 13th century. It was introduced by spiritual leaders to teach good values to children.

The squares with ladders on the board depicted different virtues—square 12 was faith, 51 was reliability, 76 was knowledge, and so on. Similarly, the squares with snakes such as square 41 represented disobedience, square 49 was vulgarity, 84 was anger, etc. The hundredth square stood for moksha.

Interestingly, Reddy says the game didn’t end at 100. There were 21 more boxes, which had various *Dashavataras* and other images of gods and goddesses. “You can move ahead only if you roll a 6 or 12 on the dice. The game demonstrated that spiritual life isn’t easy. Once you crossed them, you had to roll 1 to win, which symbolises the last stage of the spiritual journey. In all, it had 140 places and takes hours to finish,” she explains.

They also stumbled upon the Bongaram (in Telugu) or the Bambaram (in Tamil) game, which

was played with spinning tops. These tops have either blunted edges or they are razor sharp. In the latter, which is popular in rural areas, the players deposit their Bambarams in a circle, while each player takes a turn and uses the sharp edges of his top to break the other tops. A big favourite during Pongal and Diwali in Tamil Nadu, it improves hand-eye coordination and concentration.



They have also revived the Puli Meka, another fun two player game. It consists of 16 goats, three tigers and one board. In this game, one player controls three tigers while the other controls 16 goats. Goats lack the inherent strength of the tiger but they have to vanquish them through sheer numbers and guile. This game teaches young people teamwork and to strategise.

Good Old Games is slowly expanding their oeuvre of games. A recent addition has been the ‘playing cards’ of ancient India—Krida-Patram. Made



COVID-19

Vaccination and Cancer

The COVID-19 vaccine is relatively safe for cancer patients, says **Dr P Raghu Ram**, who also sheds light on other aspects of the vaccination



We heaved a sigh of relief when a couple of vaccines was approved by the government to beat the COVID-19 pandemic. However, because of a lot of false news and rumours, there is confusion in the minds of people about whether they should take the vaccine or not. One such doubt relates to the COVID-19 vaccine and patients undergoing cancer treatment. The question that is often asked is whether cancer patients should get vaccinated? Or, whether the vaccine will be beneficial for cancer patients, as it is for the general public or will it worsen their situation? Here, I shall clear the doubts people have about the vaccine for cancer patients.

Is COVID-19 vaccine safe for cancer patients?

Yes, it is. The risk of the novel coronavirus infecting a healthy person and a cancer patient is the same. However, the chances of the infection getting worse are much higher in the latter, since they are likely to be immunocompromised (particularly so, if they are taking chemotherapy). And, since the COVID-19 vaccine builds immunity in the body to protect us against the virus, it is important for cancer patients to get themselves vaccinated.

Although, there is not much data available on the COVID-19 vaccine side effects in cancer patients, it is relatively safe for them to get vaccinated.



Vaccination before cancer treatment or after?

A multimodality approach in cancer care, involving surgery, chemotherapy radiotherapy and hormone therapy, is decided by a multidisciplinary team. Of these modalities, chemotherapy suppresses the body's immunity. Those patients requiring chemotherapy should ideally be given the vaccine, at least, a couple of weeks before commencing therapy to allow the vaccine related immunity to develop.

If vaccination has to be administered after commencing chemotherapy, it should be given between the cycles rather than during the chemotherapy session. To sum it up, patients undergoing cancer treatment and those who have been treated for cancer in the past should go ahead and get vaccinated when it becomes available.

An unprecedented global effort has been invested in controlling the 'unwelcome visitor' in our lives. The vaccine is our only hope against COVID-19 and it plays a crucial role in acting as a barrier, and breaking the chain of infection. Let us say a resounding "No" to vaccine hesitancy!

Is monitoring necessary after vaccination?

It is important to report to the doctor if there are any unusual changes. These usually occur within 48 hours after being vaccinated.

Is it required to take two doses of the vaccine?

Absolutely. The best level of protection is seen in those who take both doses. Even after taking the vaccine, it is vitally important to follow the basic principles of masking, hand hygiene and physical distancing, until the broad transmission in the community is under control.

UBF Diary

January 2021

Dr P Raghu Ram conferred the OBE— Officer of the Most Excellent Order of British Empire

- One of the youngest surgeons of Indian origin to get the prestigious award
- Given to those who have 'gone the extra mile' in their service and stand 'head and shoulders' above others in their distinction
- Governor of Telangana felicitates Dr Raghu Ram on being honoured by Queen Elizabeth II in the 2021 New Year's Honours list

Dr Tamlisai Soundararajan, governor of Telangana felicitated Dr P Raghu Ram at Raj Bhavan on January 9, for being honoured in the 2021 New Year's Honours list by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with the prestigious OBE—Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

The governor paid tributes to Dr Raghu Ram on becoming one of the youngest surgeons of Indian origin in over 100 years, to be conferred with UK's second highest ranking Order of the British Empire award (excluding a knighthood/damehood). It was given to Dr Raghu Ram in recognition of his outstanding services towards improving breast cancer care and surgical education in India and for UK-India relations.

The British Honours system aims to show gratitude publicly to those who have 'gone the extra mile' in their service and who stand 'head and shoulders' above others in their distinction.

Meanwhile, Dr Raghu Ram too expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Telangana government for giving him the opportunity and encouragement over the past 13 years, which has enabled him to implement several landmark initiatives, replicating the best of British practices in breast healthcare in Telangana and India.

"I feel immensely proud to be a 'living bridge' between the UK and India and I dedicate this incredible recognition to my family, and equally, to my patients who have given me the unique privilege to be involved in their care. I owe a deep sense of gratitude to the Board of Directors of KIMS Hospitals, who gave me a free hand to translate my vision into reality and to my colleagues at KIMS-USHALAKSHMI Centre for Breast Diseases & Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, for their extraordinary contribution to ensure the best possible care to my patients," he said.



Dr Smt Tamlisai Soundararajan, Hon'ble Governor of Telangana felicitating Dr Raghu Ram



Hyderabad Turns a Powerful Pink for 10th year in a Row



Established in 2007, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation (UBF), a not-for-profit breast cancer charity has completed 13 eventful years.

Through the Foundation's consistent innovative initiatives, breast cancer is no longer a 'closet issue' in this region—it is a commonly discussed topic now thus bringing about the much-needed awareness resulting in more lives being saved.

Hyderabad is the only city in Asia to have prominent buildings and historic monuments turn pink in one

night since 2010. Despite the ongoing pandemic, Charminar, the Buddha statue and KIMS Hospital were illuminated in pink on September 30 evening, for a record tenth consecutive year, to mark the beginning of International Breast Cancer Awareness month in October.

The idea was started by the Estee Lauder group of companies in 2000, when they illuminated their buildings around the world in pink, to mark the breast cancer month and this campaign caught on worldwide.

The UBF Oration: Saving Lives with Early Detection

The International Breast Cancer awareness month kicked off with the 2020 edition of Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Oration virtually delivered by K Sujatha Rao, former union health secretary on October 4, 2020.

'Gift your loved ones, who are 40 years or older, an annual mammography screening, instead of a sari or something else during Dasara and Diwali' – this was the heartfelt message by Dr Ushalakshmi, founder chairman of UBF and a gritty, breast cancer conqueror.

Raj Bhavan support

Speaking on the occasion, Telangana governor, Tamilisai Soundararajan, who was chief guest of the programme, said that she has been encouraged by UBF's inspiring Pink Ribbon campaign for over a decade. To strengthen the campaign in the state, Raj Bhavan would be illuminated in pink on the last day of October 2020, she added.



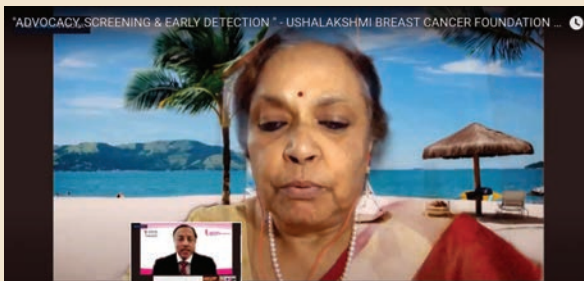
Chief Guest Dr Smt Tamilisai Soundararajan, Hon'ble Governor of Telangana



Dr K Ushalakshmi, Founder Chairman of UBF



Jayesh Ranjan, Chief Advisor, UBF



Sujatha Rao, Former Union Health Secretary, Govt. of India

In her oration, talking about 'Breast cancer advocacy, screening and early detection of breast cancer', K Sujatha Rao said breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in India.

"If diagnosed early and treated early, many lives can be saved. It is for this reason that the government is focusing on raising awareness, early screening and diagnosis among women," she said, adding that India needs to step up the number of oncologists and other allied specialities, and upskill physicians, and nurses working in district hospitals and primary health care centres.



Dr B Bhaskar Rao, Managing Director, KIMS Hospitals

December 2020

ASICON 2020

A Memorable Virtual Conference in Challenging Times

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the 80th annual Congress of the Association of Surgeons of India (ASICON 2020) was held as a virtual event. More than 6,000 surgeons from India and abroad participated in this three-day Congress held from December 16 to 19.

Delivering his presidential address, Dr P Raghu Ram said that it has been a god-given opportunity, a great honour and an incredible privilege to serve the esteemed association, which is Asia Pacific's largest and the world's second largest surgical organisation.

"Insight, integrity and inspiration have been the three pillars of reference in my leadership journey. Over the past 24 months, both in my role as vice-president and president ASI, I have been working to the best of my abilities to ensure creative leadership and accountable governance, which has been my "mantra". The expectations and views of "grassroot" members have been uppermost in my mind, all along. As I come to the end of my tenure, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the membership for electing me to this apex position, with an unprecedented victory margin, never before witnessed in ASI's 82-year-old history."



His Excellency Dr Lotay Tshering, Hon'ble PM of Bhutan

In the history of the association, this was the very first time that a prime minister of a country graced an important ASI ceremony as the chief guest. Dr Raghu Ram said that this speaks volumes about the enormous credibility, high regard and extraordinary impact that the association has earned for itself worldwide.

"The PM of Bhutan, Dr Lotay Tshering is an epitome of simplicity, who is transforming Bhutan and he would hopefully serve as an inspiration to the over 6,000 surgeons, who are participating in this scientific extravaganza," Dr Raghu Ram said.

Meanwhile, delivering his chief guest's address virtually during the convocation ceremony, Bhutan PM, Dr Lotay Tshering said, "It is important to be good human beings first and later good surgeons. It is important to adhere to the Hippocratic oath. Surgeons operate with a knife and I have the advantage of operating with the pen as a politician and with a knife as a surgeon. I am a surgeon first and forever. Politics is only a passing phase in my life."

Dr Lotay Tshering further spoke about the Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is a philosophy that has been the guiding force for Bhutan that aims for collective happiness and well-being of a population. As a doctor himself, he emphasised to the surgical fraternity the importance of serving selflessly for the greater good of humanity.

Justice G Raghuram, director, National Judicial Academy, who inaugurated the conference said in his address, "I compliment and commend Dr Raghu Ram for implementing a creative leadership and accountable governance in the association, during the most disastrous pandemic year and for raising over ₹1 crore towards procuring and delivering the much-needed PPEs and hand sanitisers to frontline healthcare workers across the nation."

"I am very happy to learn about the landmark online training initiatives spearheaded by the association over the past few months, which would certainly pave the path towards significantly improving surgical care in the country. I commend the surgical fraternity for the yeomen service in these challenging times, many times sacrificing their personal comfort, braving all odds of equipment



Justice G Raghuram, Director, National Judicial Academy

shortages, spending sleepless nights, and also putting their families at risk as well. There is a need to revisit and adhere to the nuanced ethical norms during these challenging times, and importantly adhere to the Hippocratic oath at all times," said Justice Raghuram.

(A bird's eye view of Dr Raghu Ram's visionary leadership journey as President ASI 2020 'The year that was' can be accessed by reading the Editorial, published in the December 2020 issue of the Indian Journal of Surgery, which is the 'voice for surgery' in India) Here is the link:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12262-020-02675-0>



**President, ASI in Conversation
with Sadhguru at ASICON 2020
Compassionate Knife**

Compassionate Knife - an Interaction with Sadhguru

Dr Raghu Ram interacted with Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of Isha Foundation in a programme titled "Compassionate Knife", in which Dr Raghu Ram posed a few questions related to the challenges and dilemmas faced by the medical fraternity and sought Sadhguru's answers to them. This interview was showcased during prime time at the conference and has so far been watched by over 83,000 people worldwide.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7GK4Ca_In4

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