



Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation

Hyderabad, India

Empowering women...impacting Life

Genesis and its impact (2007 – 2021)

After completing my Basic Surgical Training in India, I went to the United Kingdom in 1997 and obtained structured Higher Surgical Training and sub-specialty training in Breast Surgery at some of the world renowned Centres of excellence.

But in 2002 came a defining moment: my mother, Dr Ushalakshmi, a renowned Obstetrician & Gynaecologist from Hyderabad, was diagnosed with breast cancer. The unexpected diagnosis of someone close to me, coupled with huge disparity in breast cancer care across India, became the turning point in my life. Despite rewarding career opportunities in the United Kingdom, my spouse, Dr Vyjayanthi and I relocated to India in 2007 to take care of my ageing parents, and equally, work with missionary zeal alongside colleagues, friends and the Government in an earnest endeavor towards improving the delivery of breast health care in my motherland.

The genesis of the Foundation & contribution to breast cancer advocacy

Breast cancer is the commonest cancer affecting women in India. 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 one, 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 & applaud her strength in the fight against breast cancer, the Foundation bears her name.

Under the auspices of the Foundation, I had launched The "**Pink Ribbon Campaign**", which is a one of its kind large-scale breast cancer awareness drive across the southern Indian states of Telangana & Andhra Pradesh. For well over a decade (2007 – 2021), this impactful campaign spearheaded through a number of unique & innovative initiatives championed by the Foundation made a huge impact, creating the much needed awareness about importance of early detection.

No stone was left unturned in accomplishing this goal. Several celebrity breast cancer 'conquerors' & celebrities from all walks of life from India and abroad lent their support to this worthy cause. Over the past 14 years, the campaign has addressed more than 2,000 organisations across India and has been regularly featured prominently in print & electronic media.

Pink Ribbon Walk

In order to take this campaign into the community, since 2008, the Foundation has been organising the 2 km Pink Ribbon Walk, which is held on the first Sunday of October to mark the beginning of international breast cancer awareness month. People from all walks of life, including breast cancer ‘conquerors’ and their families have been participating in these walks – the number of enthusiastic participants has been significantly increasing year on year, starting from a few hundreds in 2008 to several thousands in 2019. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the Walk was not held in 2020. A special effort is always made to involve women from a conservative background living in the old city. Over the years, this initiative has become a “benchmark annual calendar event” during the international breast cancer awareness month in Hyderabad and other cities and towns in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

After the Foundation introduced the innovative Pink Ribbon Walk in 2008, it is very gratifying that many NGOs and Hospitals in the region 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 to take up & spearhead impactful awareness activities.

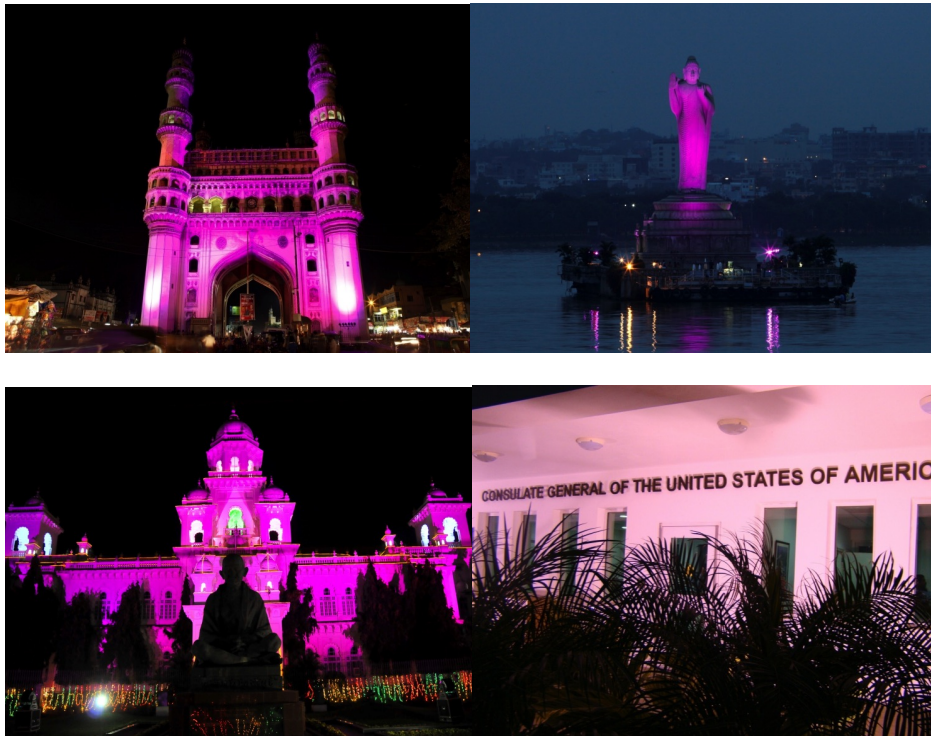


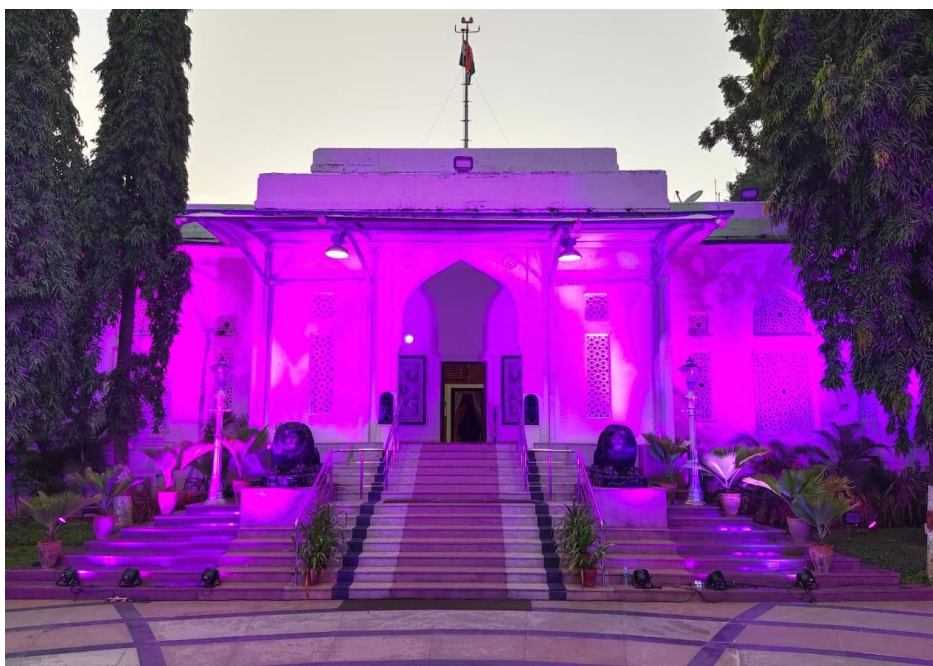
Glimpses from Pink Ribbon Walks held in Hyderabad, Warangal, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam in October (International Breast cancer awareness month) – major cities and towns in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh (2008 - 2019)

Paint the city Pink

“Paint the City Pink” campaign was launched in 2010, in which the historic monuments and prominent buildings in Hyderabad are illuminated in pink to reinforce the message of early detection during international breast cancer awareness month. Over the past 10 years, the iconic 400-year-old Charminar, the majestic Buddha statue in the lake by the city centre, the IMAX theatre, US consulate building, Ravindra Bharathi (the state auditorium for public events), the 115-year-old Legislative Assembly (the seat of State legislature in Telangana) and Rajiv Gandhi International Hyderabad Airport (one of the largest airports in the country) turned pink in October.

Inspired by this impactful decade long campaign, the Hon’ble Governor of Telangana gave permission to the Foundation to illuminate Raj Bhavan in Pink on the last day of October 2020. Hyderabad is the only city in Asia pacific region where several monuments and historic buildings have been lit up in pink annually, consistently for ten consecutive years.





'Paint the City Pink Campaign' (October) - Charminar, Buddha statue, Legislative Assembly, United States of America Consulate, Raj Bhavan & many other prominent buildings in Hyderabad illuminated in PINK during International Breast cancer awareness month (2010 – 2020)

Pink Ribbon Evening (2008 – 2020)

Several celebrities & breast cancer 'conquerors' from all walks of life featured in annual editions of innovative 'Pink ribbon Evenings' organised by the Foundation during the month of October (International Breast Cancer awareness month), which attracted attention of the community to the cause of 'early detection'.

Marcia Barrett – breast cancer 'conqueror' & the celebrated lead singer of Boney M mesmerizes audience at Pink Ribbon Evening



Kamal Hassan & Gautami Tadimalla (Breast cancer 'conqueror') Invited guests at Pink Ribbon Evening



Pamela Chopra, breast cancer 'conqueror', spouse of the legendary late Yash Chopra & Patron, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation with Dr. Ushalakshmi at Pink Ribbon Evening

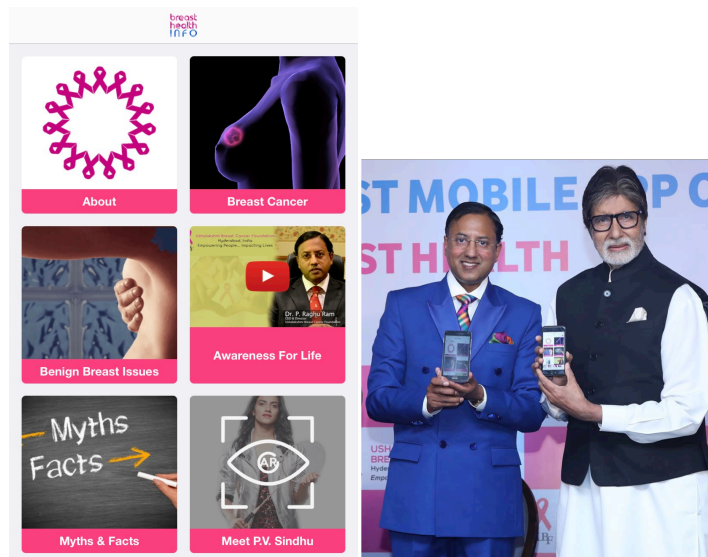


Asha Bhosle – the most well known female playback singer in India enthralls 10,000 “Hyderabadis” at Pink Ribbon Evening



World's first mobile app on Breast Health in 12 languages

Inspired by Prime Minister of India's dream of Digital India, the Foundation developed the **World's first mobile app on breast health** in English & 11 commonly spoken Indian languages (*Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Oriya & Assamese*). The mobile application, **“ABCs OF BREAST HEALTH”**, which is freely downloadable in both Apple and Google play store provides information about every aspect of breast cancer and benign non cancer breast health issues explained in simple easy to understand format. The aim of this landmark initiative, which was launched in 2017 is to counsel, guide & educate people across the nation about various aspects of Breast health so that they are well informed & better prepared, thus filling a huge void in breast health care in South Asia.



World's first mobile app on Breast health launched by Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, one of India's icons (2017)

Links for free download



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



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

World's first life size augmented reality for breast cancer awareness

As an adjunct to the landmark mobile app launched in 2017, in an initiative for the first time in the world, life size augmented reality technology has been integrated in the mobile app to spread the message of early detection of breast cancer to a large section of people.

This futuristic technology has a potential for the 'celebrity and doctor' to enter into people's homes and create awareness, without actually physically being present. Launched by P.V. Sindhu, a world renowned Badminton Star in 2019, the Foundation has been conducting breast cancer awareness sessions in rural India (where more than 70% of the population reside) through this creative effort.

Pink Connexion

In yet another innovative initiative to spread the message of hope, courage and survival against breast cancer, and equally, to empower people about various breast health issues, the Foundation launched '**PINK CONNEXION**' – **South Asia's first quarterly Breast health newsletter**. Since August 2014, the Foundation has been reaching out to the nation through this innovative publication, both in print and online.

Every issue focuses mainly upon:

- *A breast cancer "conqueror's" story*
- *An article on Breast Health*
- *An inspiring feature*
- *'Something else that might interest readership from all walks of life*
- *A round up of the Foundation's quarterly activities*



The First 'Pink Connexion' cover image featuring Dr Ushalakshmi, a breast cancer 'conqueror' who have given an inspiring account of her fight against cancer (2014)

Other issues can be accessed from the website:

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

Screening

There is robust evidence to suggest that Screening Mammography ensures early detection of early breast cancer with statistically significant reduction in mortality. Over the past decade, the impactful Pink Ribbon campaign has raised awareness about the importance of early detection in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and consequently, the number of women presenting for Screening mammography has significantly increased in the region.

Whilst opportunistic screening (where women over the age of 40 present themselves for Screening Mammogram) must be actively encouraged, population based Screening mammography is not a viable option for India.

Reasons are - enormous costs, early age at diagnosis (<50 years), huge variation in mammographic reporting and quality assurance issues. Breast Self Examination (BSE) is not a useful Screening tool as it cannot be standardized. There is considerable evidence to suggest that Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) performed by trained Healthcare Workers is a valuable alternative Screening method. CBE downsizes tumour size, and equally, provides an excellent opportunity to create awareness about importance of early detection.

Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation in partnership with the Governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has implemented **South Asia's largest** Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) based Breast Cancer Screening Programme in rural Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which has very limited access to Mammography services.

Underprivileged women in rural India are innately shy of doctors and reluctant to discuss anything as intimate as breast care. Therefore, the Governments of the two States were approached with a request to utilise the expertise of existing healthcare workers. Both the State Governments readily agreed to the proposal. Core trainers in both the states were identified and trained to perform CBE under the auspices of the Foundation. These core trainers further trained all other healthcare workers across the region. Specifically prepared audio visual aids in English & Regional language (Telugu) were used to empower Healthcare workers before imparting 'hands on' training.

Link to training film (English version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjwcvePhROo>

Between 2012 – 2016, **200,000 underprivileged women** between the ages of 35 and 65, 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. 392 breast cancers detected through this initiative have been **treated free of charge** through the State Government-funded Aarogyasri scheme.

Typically, an awareness film is played out by Healthcare Workers to women assembled at the Village Community Centre in Regional language (Telugu) prior to undertaking CBE based Screening. The film, in simple language, explains the risk factors, symptoms, preventive aspects, basics of treatment & inspiring messages from breast cancer 'conquerors' and Healthcare workers.

Link to 'awareness film' (English version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHlamm6SHz8&feature=youtu.be>



Launch of the screening programme in Telangana by the Health Secretary, Government of Telangana (2012)



Launch of the screening programme in Andhra Pradesh by the Chief Minister, Government of Andhra Pradesh (2012)



Healthcare workers training & women being educated in the Village Community Centre

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 he was a member, approved the proposal to implement CBE based Breast cancer Screening Programme all over India. This initiative is currently being rolled out nationwide.

COVID 19 Response

In May 2021, to address the rapidly rising infections and deaths associated with COVID 19 in Rural India, the Foundation embarked upon the “**COVID-19 Pink Ribbon Mask Campaign**” in Telangana. The aim of this initiative is to ensure the much-needed protection from COVID 19 in rural regions of the State of Telangana, and equally, create awareness about importance of early detection of breast cancer through the ‘pink’ coloured cloth masks (a colour that represents breast cancer awareness). **20, 000 masks have been distributed to residents in all the ten villages in Narayanraopet Mandal (Siddipet) in Telangana.**

Dr.P. Raghu Ram

Founder, CEO & Director, Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, Hyderabad

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