PINK
CONNEXION

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Aajibaichi Shala
India's first school for grandmoms!

Samantha Reddy
'We all have a hero inside us'

A Priceless Weave:
The legacy of Patan's Patola

BEHIND The Scenes

Universal primary school education is a mandate and a goal of the UN. However, many African countries, and Asian countries, are nowhere near achieving this goal. In India too, despite the Mera Bharat Mahan slogans, school literacy has been dismal. While our higher education is among the world's best, as we churn out brilliant doctors and engineers, our elementary and primary school education is below par. There are government schools in villages and small towns but the quality is so bad that a study found these children failed miserably in languages and mathematical learning. It seems state governments run schools just so that an absent teacher can draw his salary.

I see a thirst for education however among the less privileged masses in the country. They hope that somehow a good education will liberate their children, which indeed it does. How often have we read in newspapers about the son of a poor widow selling idlis on pavements clearing the IIM entrance with flying colours or how the children of our own household help get an engineering degree?

All these inspirational success stories through learning and education are no doubt touching. But, what moved me immensely is Satyaki Ghosh's story of elderly women, grandmothers in fact, wanting to read and write so that they can sign their name instead of fixing a blurred thumb impression, before they die. And their uniform? It is the Maharashtrian sari, except that it is in pink, which is the only colour widows, which some of the granny students are, can wear in this region!

This is a small beginning. But, I hope more women who had no access to basic education when they were children, can now attend school as age is not a bar to learning. And to think, that the genesis of this school sprung from the simple fact that these women, in the twilight of their life, really wanted to do, was to read the life of Chatrapathi Shivaji!

Ratna Rao Shekar

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Samantha Reddy

"I count my blessings everyday"

When cancer struck Samantha Reddy at 25, she decided to fight back. Though doctors had given up hope, she bravely tried new drug protocols to beat the disease. It was this sheer grit and resilience that has helped her recover from Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia not once but twice! It is true when they say fortune favours the bold. Today, this cancer survivor lives a normal life and cherishes each moment bent on counting her blessings rather than rant about life being unfair to her

Text: **Minal Khona** Photographs: **Lakshmi Prabhala**

And then a hero comes along
With the strength to carry on
And you cast your fears aside
And you know you can survive
So when you feel like hope is gone
Look inside you and be strong
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you

These lyrics from Mariah Carey's song *Hero* succinctly captures Samantha Reddy's tryst with leukaemia. Truly, she 'cast aside her fears' and looked inside her to tap into a "hero" or one might say a hidden strength to fight cancer when it struck. It also helped that she received the unstinted support of her family.

Samantha was 25, and just a few weeks into her second pregnancy, when a routine blood test revealed her white blood cell count as an alarming 300,000, while the ultrasound showed an enlarged spleen. After a visit to the oncologist, the verdict was out: she had Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML).

It was July 1995. Samantha recounts her first reaction: “I was shocked and scared. There was no family history, and I attributed my tiredness and loss of weight and appetite to my pregnancy. I remember walking out of the doctor’s cabin at the hospital and seeing my husband sitting outside with tears in his eyes. It is one of the few memories I have of that time.” Her daughter Harshini was a mere three-year-old, and the cancer happened just a few weeks short of her fifth wedding anniversary.

Her mother and her husband Srinivas were her support systems. Meanwhile, doctors advised her to have an abortion. It was the toughest decision of her life. Though, she wanted to postpone her cancer treatment till the baby was born, the chances of the cancer spreading were so high that she was left with no choice.

Yet, that was just the beginning of her ordeal. In CML, the tests to assess the status of the disease involved inserting a special needle into the pelvic bone to remove a small bone marrow sample. For some reason, the anaesthesia failed to work, and Samantha was in excruciating pain during the procedure. She was also given oral chemotherapy and the drug Interferon via injection.

Samantha was in denial for a long time in the initial months. She recounts, “I had a nurse who used to administer the daily chemo treatment through an injection. My whole day would revolve around her visit, so I learnt to inject myself. The first time I woke up with a bunch of hair on my pillow and terrible nausea ... I knew that the cancer had started to take its toll. That’s when it truly sunk in.”

To recover, Samantha required a bone marrow transplant, and the closest match was her daughter Harshini, who could not be a donor till she was seven. So, she headed to the USA for treatment, which she did in September 1995. At Los Angeles, their family friend Dr Rama Nemani helped coordinate her care. She recalls, “Rama Nemani was a warm and loving woman and their house in Northridge, CA was like a home away from home.”

After 18 months of treatment, which involved flying to the USA every six months, the doctors gave up hope. Then, in February 1997, Dr Nemani came across, in the New England Journal, a new treatment protocol developed by Dr Hagop Kantarjian at the MD Anderson Cancer Research Centre in Texas.

Dr Kantarjian put her on the new protocol. Her treatment involved taking two injections a day for nearly four years. For the first time, her body responded to the treatment. She also took Tylenol every four hours to counter the severe side effects of the treatment. “My crutch was God and my family. I would spend time poring over Swami Vivekananda’s books, the Bhagavatham etc. After the City of Hope Hospital said it was incurable, there was this constant dread in my heart. Since my father-in-law wanted to make the house fully vastu compliant, I moved to my parents’ place. In hind-sight, it was a blessing in disguise, as my mother would pump me with every kind of juice – beetroot, apple and pomegranate. Slowly, I started getting better. When I travelled, my daughter was with my mother-in-law, and if my husband came with me, she would be with my mother. She had enough people to give her love and attention. Once, I remember I felt so guilty I could not drop her to school, when the driver did not show up, because I felt too weak. I felt miserable I couldn’t even do this for her.”

“People have audacious goals and wishes but few would actually make a change and move continents to realise their dreams and fulfill their mission. A case in point is Dr Raghu Ram, who has achieved what he set out to do”

After four years of treatment in Houston, Samantha enrolled for the STI571 clinical trial being conducted by the Stanford Medical Centre. She had to fill up a sheet about her symptoms and other details and fax it to Stanford every week. Slowly, her spirited nature resurfaced and she wanted to return to mainstream life. She says, “By November 1998, I was sick and tired of staying at home. I moved back into a 100 per cent vastu compliant home and started going to my husband’s office for a few hours a day.”

Life has a way of tilting the wheels of fortune in your favour after a downswing. After years of agony, painful treatments and hospitals, the universe presented her with an opportunity of a lifetime. In December 1999, Samantha was at a millennium party in Las Vegas, when a family friend wanted her to set up an IT firm. “Srinivas encouraged me to say yes, to divert my mind. I had no IT background, I was offered the job because of the way I fought cancer. I took up the challenge and B2B Software Technologies was incorporated in January 2000. In the 11 years I managed the company, we introduced two products, Plum Soft and Genius Doc and built an ERP business with 100 plus clients from scratch.” She left in December 2010 after she was accepted into the Sloan Fellow Programme at the London Business School. She points out, “A year away from my home and family gave me a different perspective to life, made me more self-aware, and happier being me! I was offered a senior role with Infosys in 2012 after I graduated.”

Samantha went into remission in mid-2000. Remissions in CML occur at three levels, at the haematological blood level, the cytogenetic or cellular level and the molecular level. Then, in January 2005, the cancer returned. It was New Year’s Eve when she got the news and she admits she had been careless. “Nine years into the disease had made me complacent; I was irregular about taking the medicines. I had a relapse,” she says.

At that time, an American oncologist Dr Brian Druker discovered a

Samantha Reddy believes God has led her to work with children suffering from cancer

breakthrough drug for CML patients. Developed by a leading pharma company, patients in the USA were using the drug. As part of a programme for developing nations, this drug called Gleevec, known as GIPAP in India, was being tested here. Samantha enrolled for the programme by chance. “I had gone to the Cancer Centre to help other cancer patients. My oncologist enrolled me for this programme and it helped me get the medicine free of cost. In November 2008, I finally achieved molecular remission,” reminisces the plucky Samantha.

With all the frequent trips to the USA, the chemo, its side effects and the battle with the disease, what was the impact on her daughter? Harshini must have seen her mother go through it all. “She used to write melancholic poetry, and published two books of her poems called *Enigma* and *23* when she was 17,” reveals Samantha with sadness.

Today, though cancer free, Samantha takes daily medication. She insists that the cancer taught her how to live and appreciate each day. “If I can wake up without a headache (a side-effect of the medication) and feel normal, I think it is a good day. Your expectations from life and your threshold of happiness are extremely low, as you’ve seen the worst. I also drew up a bucket list when I got cancer the first time.”

She shares a few details about the list. “When faced with mortality, I prepared my bucket list from which I have successfully ticked off many items over the past decade. One void I could never fill was the loss of my second child. I could never understand why God would hurt an unborn soul without even giving it a chance to enter this world.”

> **“If I can wake up without a headache (a side-effect of the medication) and feel normal, I think it is a good day. Your expectations from life and your threshold of happiness are extremely low as you’ve seen the worst”**

Samantha also tries to help other cancer patients. “While driving past the Indo American Cancer Hospital in Hyderabad to my workplace, I would see poor patients who hail from rural areas lying on the sidewalks, sometimes with little kids suffering from cancer huddled between their parents. Many were succumbing to infections. I wanted to make a difference to the lives of these families and children. St Jude India Childcare Centre was providentially introduced to my life in early 2013. I could finally connect the dots. This is probably what God wanted me to do, help under-privileged kids suffering from cancer, who travel from distant rural areas for treatment. The goal is to provide them with physical and emotional necessities which will help give them a better chance of beating the cancer.”

Samantha continues to work with her husband, pursuing her hobbies – baking, playing the piano, painting and reading. Despite all she has been through, she strongly holds on to this belief: all of us are truly blessed and have so much to be grateful for. ■

The Grandmother's School:

Women in Pink

Grandmothers live on the fringes, especially in our society. Old people become invisible somehow, probably because they cease to be productive in our materialistic world. The one-year-old Aajibaichi Shala (Grandmother's School), the first ever school for elderly women, however stands out for chalking out a different path. The school provides these grey-haired pupils a last shot at learning to read, write and most importantly, sign their names. **Satyaki Ghosh** travels to Phangane, a remote village in Thane outside Mumbai, to catch up with these student grannies, who are attending school for the first time in their lives!

Pink is linked to breast cancer awareness. But, to a group of elderly women, in the age group of 60-90 years in Phangane, a remote village in Thane district in Maharashtra, pink seems to be the colour of empowerment. It is the colour of the uniform they wear to their school – the Aajibaichi Shala (Grandmother's School) – a unique endeavour, opened last year in their village on International Women's Day. There's also a more practical reason why pink came to be the official uniform of the "students" of this school. It is because the widows in this region are allowed to wear only pink saris and not the more common white. Pink, it seems, also symbolises tenderness, and is a universal colour of love and encouragement. Going to school in their uniform – the pink sari – makes these women comfortable and helps them to believe they can still chase a life-long dream to learn despite dimming eyesight and fading hearing.

> Some granny students walk to the school on their own, with the school bag strapped to their back, while others are brought to the school by their grandchildren in a rare reversal of roles

The Grandmother's School is the brain-child of Yogendra Shantaram Bangar, the 41-year-old teacher of Phangane's Zilla Parishad school. He was inspired to start this school, after watching the old women in the village struggling to read the life of Shivaji during the annual Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti festival in the village. "All the women of our village used to read about the life of Shivaji as part of the festival. However, some of the illiterate grandmothers/old women of our village, once confessed to me that if only they had gone to school when they were young, they could read the life of Shivaji today," Bangar narrates. The old women had sorely regretted the fact that they had never attended school, either because they were married off early or were too poor. "At that moment, I got the idea that these grandmothers should be given the opportunity denied to them all their life – an education," recounts Bangar.

Bangar sold the idea of a grandmother's school to Dilip Bhai Dalal, the Founder of the Motiram Ganpat Dalal Charitable Trust, and he promised to extend all his support to this school. They also decided to significantly inaugurate the school on International Women's Day. "It is believed women have to be respected on Women's Day. So, we thought that it is a good day to start showering respect on elderly women and our grandmothers," Bangar points out.

The age group of the 28 students in Aajibaichi Shala range from 60 to 90 years. The youngest student here is 60-years-old. Talking to the "students", you come to realise that they are "excited and happy" about attending school since they always harboured a dream to study. There is nothing incongruous about starting a journey to the literate world at 90!

Says 87-year-old student Ramabai Ganpat Chandelle,"I am like a ripe fruit that might fall off the branch anytime. I couldn't go to school as a child and remained illiterate all my life. But I don't want to die illiterate. Now, I am happy that I would be able to carry a few words with me to the other world."

The founder of Aajibaichi Shala, Yogendra Shantaram Bangar, with the smiling, happy 'students' of the school


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RAJA SLATE

The Grandmother's School provides a last chance for these granny students to learn to read a sacred work and to sign their name instead of fixing a blurred thumb impression

Another "student" Kantabhai More was always ashamed that she could not sign her name in the bank. "People used to laugh at us because we used our thumb impressions. I feel I should be able to sign my name at least," says More, who was not sent to school because her father was too poor to educate his daughters. He had money only to send his son to school.

> Says 87-year-old student Ramabai Ganpat Chandelle, ”I am like a ripe fruit that might fall off the branch anytime. I couldn't go to school as a child and remained illiterate all my life. But I don't want to die illiterate. Now, I am happy that I would be able to carry a few words with me to the other world”

The school functions only in the afternoon between 2 pm to 4 pm, after the grandmothers have completed their chores at home. Some granny students walk to the school on their own, with the school bag strapped to their back, while others are brought to the school by their grandchildren in a rare reversal of roles. When these grandmothers enter the school they forget their age and sing with their friends. After a 10-minute assembly and roll calling, the class begins. Alphabet practice makes the core of the session with every student writing the alphabet on their slates and showing it to their teacher.

The teacher of this school is 25-years-old, and one of her students is her mother-in-law! The grandmothers go home and learn the alphabets along with their grandchildren and bond with them as they do their homework together.

Phangane is a remote place in Thane district, 125 km away from Mumbai. It has no proper public transport or healthcare facilities. But, they have created history by opening this school and have put the village on the national map.

The credit should go to Dilip Bhai Dalal, who donated the saris and all the educational material among other things; to Prakashji More for donating the space in a natural environment and of course, to Yogendra Bangar, the founder of India's first school for unlettered grannies. The kind of support and encouragement the school has received from the village has been overwhelming, says Bangar.

Bangar claims that everybody in the village encouraged them and assured them of their support. He adds," Knowledge has great importance in life. We started this school to bring happiness to the lives of these elderly women and make the village 100 per cent literate." Bangar also has plans to train the women to make hand-woven quilts and paper bags.

The basic premise behind the grandmother's school is a noble one. It is to convey the message that elderly people are extremely important in our society and need to be loved and respected. And, for these grandmothers, who would otherwise have been languishing in a corner chanting mantras, it is their last chance to learn to read the life of Shivaji or be able to proudly sign their name instead of fixing a blurred thumb impression!! ■

UBF Diary

February 2017

Fifty Lakhs Pledged by Dr Raghu Ram and his Family to their Adopted Village, Ibrahimpur

Children enjoying their lunch in the newly-built school dining room

Minister Harish Rao and Dr Raghu Ram launching the digital classroom in the village school

Minister Harish Rao felicitating Dr Raghu Ram

Residents of one of the 26 homes fitted with a home solar system

Dr Raghu Ram, his parents – Drs Chalapathi Rao and Ushalakshmi – and his wife, Dr Vyjayanthi had adopted Ibrahimpur, the remotest village in Medak district in Telangana, with a population of around 1,000. They have pledged Rs 50 lakhs to the village. The first phase of funding has already witnessed the completion of two projects within two months. They are:

The school dining room and digital study room were inaugurated by the Telangana Minister for Irrigation, Harish Rao on February 11. Through this project, the students will finally get a clean space for dining and the digital study room will expose them to latest technology in the digital world.

The second project involves the provision of 100 per cent solar generated electricity for 26 homes in the village, thus helping the residents to save on electricity bills and contribute to an eco-friendly environment.

March 2017

World's First Mobile App on Breast Health in 12 Languages

Amitabh Bachchan, one of India's icons launched the world's FIRST mobile app on the 'ABC of Breast Health', conceived, designed and created by Ushalakshmi Breast Cancer Foundation, at the JW Marriott Hotel in Juhu on March 15, 2017.

Both iOS and Android versions of the app are available for a free download. The app, which aims to empower the nation about every aspect of breast cancer and on benign non-cancer breast health issues, is available in 12 languages (English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya and Assamese).

Within two weeks of launching the app, more than 8,500 people have downloaded the app, which speaks volumes of the impact created by this unique initiative.

Dr Raghu Ram with IT Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, Amitabh Bachchan and K Padmanabhaiah

Further, the legendary actor has also graciously agreed to lend his face and voice to the ongoing campaign to promote this mobile application all over India. 'ABC OF BREAST HEALTH' can be downloaded by clicking on the links below:

iphone users: https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware?id=1208874460&mt=8
Android phone users: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=devatech.kims

A Rare Distinction – The Dr B C Roy National Award

Dr P Raghu Ram achieved the rare distinction of becoming the youngest surgeon in the history of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, to have been conferred the prestigious Dr B C Roy national award - the highest honour for a doctor in India. The award was bestowed by Pranab Mukherjee, Hon'ble President of India at a glittering ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan on March 28, 2017. The award is a recognition of Dr Raghu Ram's sizable body of work towards improving breast healthcare in India, and for serving the community.

The award was instituted in 1976 and is given annually to select few doctors, who have excelled in their chosen field in memory of the legendary physician and surgeon, Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy who was the chief minister of West Bengal and the first president of the Medical Council of India.

Dr Raghu Ram on the Award:

"To be conferred two very prestigious national awards i.e. the Padma Shri award, which is one of the highest civilian awards of the land and the Dr BC Roy national award, which is the highest honour for a doctor in India, within a two year period (2015 and 2017) from the President of India has well and truly been a humbling experience."

"I dedicate this godsent prestigious award to my mother, Dr Ushalakshmi and to all those who have bravely fought breast cancer with courage and determination. I also take this opportunity to rededicate myself to work with even greater determination alongside colleagues, NGOs and the government to further improve the delivery of breast healthcare in my motherland."

The Priceless Double Ikats of Patan

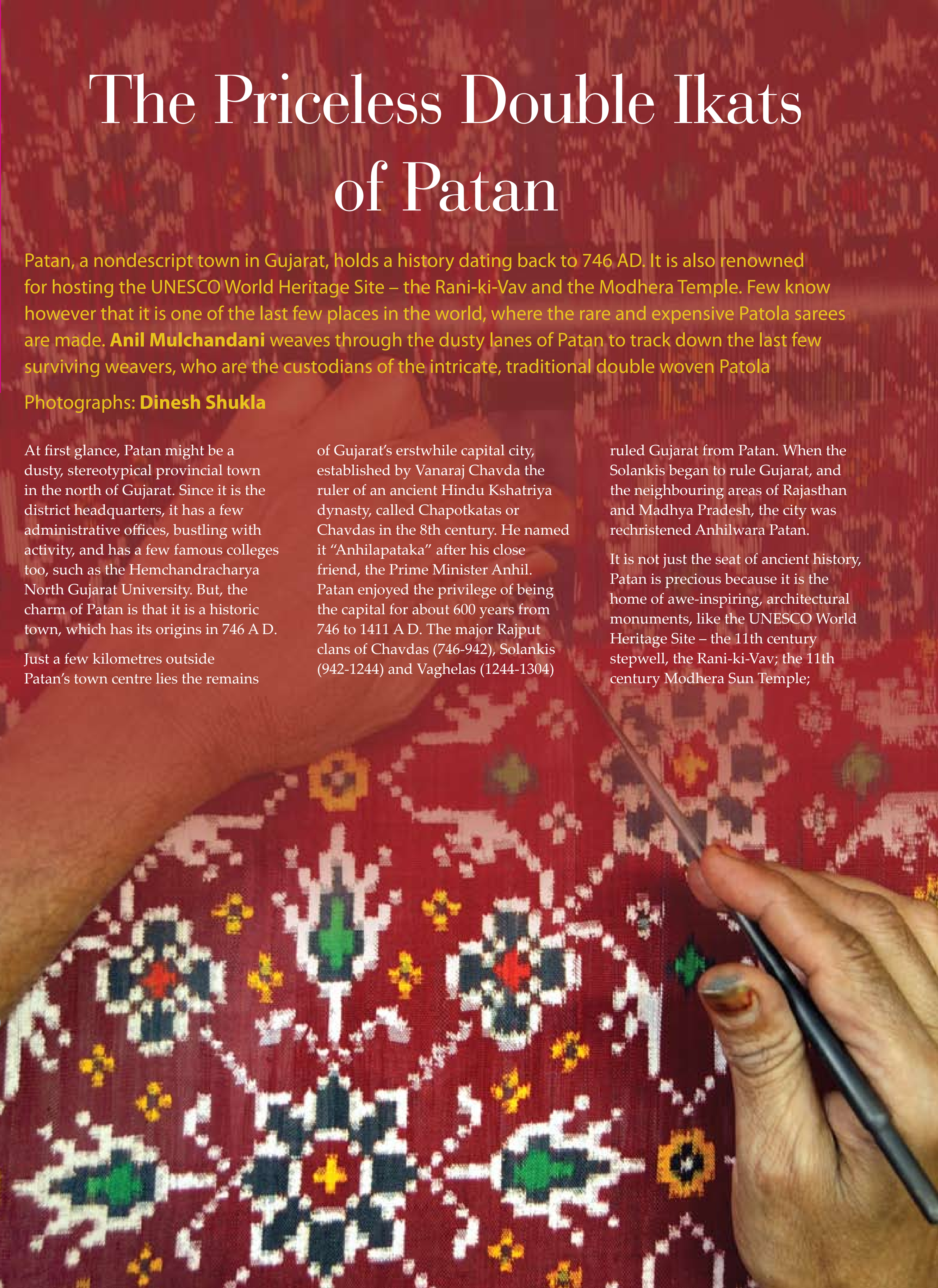
Patan, a nondescript town in Gujarat, holds a history dating back to 746 AD. It is also renowned for hosting the UNESCO World Heritage Site – the Rani-ki-Vav and the Modhera Temple. Few know however that it is one of the last few places in the world, where the rare and expensive Patola sarees are made. **Anil Mulchandani** weaves through the dusty lanes of Patan to track down the last few surviving weavers, who are the custodians of the intricate, traditional double woven Patola

Photographs: **Dinesh Shukla**

At first glance, Patan might be a dusty, stereotypical provincial town in the north of Gujarat. Since it is the district headquarters, it has a few administrative offices, bustling with activity, and has a few famous colleges too, such as the Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University. But, the charm of Patan is that it is a historic town, which has its origins in 746 A D.

Just a few kilometres outside Patan's town centre lies the remains of Gujarat's erstwhile capital city, established by Vanaraj Chavda the ruler of an ancient Hindu Kshatriya dynasty, called Chapotkatas or Chavdas in the 8th century. He named it "Anhilapataka" after his close friend, the Prime Minister Anhil. Patan enjoyed the privilege of being the capital for about 600 years from 746 to 1411 A D. The major Rajput clans of Chavdas (746-942), Solankis (942-1244) and Vaghelas (1244-1304) ruled Gujarat from Patan. When the Solankis began to rule Gujarat, and the neighbouring areas of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the city was rechristened Anhilwara Patan.

It is not just the seat of ancient history, Patan is precious because it is the home of awe-inspiring, architectural monuments, like the UNESCO World Heritage Site – the 11th century stepwell, the Rani-ki-Vav; the 11th century Modhera Sun Temple;



the gateways of Vadnagar; the Jain temples of Taranga, Kumbhariya and Mount Abu, and the majestic fort of Dabhoi – and above all, the exquisite double ikat woven Patola saree and the mixed fabric called Mashru.

"The history of Patan's Patola dates back to the Solanki period," says the 37-year-old Ujwal Salvi, one of the youngest custodians of this legacy, when I track him down to his workshop, strategically located near the tourist spot, Rani-ki-Vav. It was a prominent Solanki Rajput ruler, Kumarpal, influenced by the Jain scholar Hemchandra, who started to follow Jainism and promoted Patola, considered auspicious for Jains, he continues. Back then, Patola was woven by Salvi's ancestors at Jalna, in present day Aurangabad division, and other areas of the Deccan. The king invaded Jalna, and brought back 700 members of his community to present day Patan. The Salvis have lived here since then, with the King and the ruling family making the Patola popular by wearing a different one each day, says Salvi.

> This demanding double ikat technique, requiring much skill, dexterity, patience and concentration at every stage, is practised in parts of Japan and Indonesia, besides Patan in India. And, in Patan too, it is just a handful of families who make the Patola

In medievel times, the Vaishnav, Jain and Muslim mercantile families prospered from the textile trade in Patan. The Mashru was sought-after for men's clothing in Turkey and the Middle East, because it was woven in such a way that the silk yarns adorned the outer side, while the cotton yarns formed the inner fabric that was soft enough to be worn close to the body. Not only that, at one time Muslim men were prohibited by a Hadith from wearing silk on their bodies.

The Patolas were exported to Indonesia and other Asian countries, where double ikat silks have spiritual significance even today. The patterns in the sarongs and other robes exported to Indonesia were geometric, tiger and elephant motifs, and were worn by the royalty in the 17th and 18th centuries. Typically, elephants, parrots, and human figures were the popular motifs. In his workshop, Ujwal proudly shows historical visuals of Indonesian royalty wearing Patola.

"The Bohra women wear Patolas with floral and geometric patterns. While, a Patola saree with figures of dancing women, elephants or parrots, is traditionally presented to pregnant women during the ritual in the seventh month of pregnancy. It is a prestigious garment to give Jain brides too. The red Patola is worn during weddings as a stole or a saree," he explains.

The Patola weavers say that Java, Japan and other East Asian lands were the major markets for the fabric until the World Wars. After the World Wars, there was a decline in the export of Patolas and the weaving tradition was in danger of dying, since just a few wealthy mercantile families like the Bhatiyas and the Vohra Jains in India were patronising this craft.

Says Ujwal, "Many Salvis switched to other professions, even leaving Patan for Mumbai. However, some enterprising weavers convinced industrialists and other affluent families in Gujarat and nearby states to start buying the Patola. And, this is how the Patola survived. Today, three families in Patan and one that has migrated to Vadodara weave the Patola." His family belongs to the family of a master craftsman Sevantilal Patolawala, and the company, Patola of Patan Pvt Ltd, is headed by four of them. Since a Patola saree can cost anywhere from Rs 1 lakh to over Rs 5 lakhs, depending on the intricacy of the pattern, the Salvis have introduced handkerchiefs, stoles, wall pieces, purses, etc. making it affordable for tourists. The three surviving Patola workshops are located near Rani-ki-Vav, to make the most of the tourist population flocking to Patan.

The workshops are surprisingly rudimentary. I visit the home of two weavers, brothers Shantilal and Paresh Salvi, whose workshop is situated on the first floor of their residence. One room is dedicated to the selective dyeing of the warp and weft threads to suit the pattern in the Patola. The silk threads are tied with the cotton thread, and then dipped in colour so

The last few surviving weavers of the Patola in Patan

This complicated double ikat weave requires skill, patience and concentration

that only the open threads may absorb the dye. The coloured areas are tied and covered with resist, so that when immersed again in a dye bath, just the untied areas get the second colour. The process is repeated depending upon the pattern and number of colours desired on the final fabric.

More than two-and-half months are spent just on colouring the warp and weft threads, both of which carry the pattern. The shuttle looms are slanted, with bamboo poles to hold up the warp beams, a wooden sword or beater to hold the threads, and porcupine quill-like needles.

"Two weavers are required to operate the loom, to ensure that the weft and warp meet precisely at the same place, though as children, I have seen master weavers like my father, do it alone,'' claims Shantilal. Ten inches of cloth can be woven in a day, while a six yard saree can take 25 days or even a few months depending on the intricacy of the pattern, he points out. This demanding double ikat technique, requiring much skill, dexterity, patience and concentration at each stage, is only practised in parts of Japan and Indonesia, besides Pochampally in Telangana and Patan in India.

"It is believed the colours never fade even after the garment is worn for a considerable period of time since vegetable dyes are used to make the Patola. A Patola can have a life of 80 or 100 years, and more if preserved well," explains Shantilal, adding that the Naggar Brahmins, who held important administrative positions in princely states and the British government, have been among their big patrons. Fashion entrepreneurs like Gaurang Shah and Bela Sanghvi have also helped popularise Patola. Some of India's powerful politicians like the Gandhi family and the current PM are often spotted wearing Patolas, giving a much-needed boost to their business.

> It is believed the colours never fade even after the garment is worn for a considerable period of time since vegetable dyes are used to make the Patola. A Patola can have a life of 80 or 100 years, and more if preserved well

Patan Patola Heritage is a museum created by the Salvi family to showcase their hereditary art. The exhibits are impressive, showcasing Patola's history, the techniques and its importance as a trade textile. A popular tourist stop, it also displays ikats from other lands.

In Gujarat's Saurashtra region, in Rajkot, Somasar and Sayla to be precise, a less expensive Patola is created using the single ikat process. The weavers here might have been taught by the experts of Patan on the behest of Mahatma Gandhi. Manish, a national award winning Patola weaver from Sayla says his patrons today include Bollywood celebrities.

These families, who are keeping this rare and beautiful art alive, feel the efforts to promote the original double ikat Patola, are not enough. In fact, Shantilal ends on a gloomy note, "Cheaper imitations are made in other states, they use double ikat techniques but with less expensive silk threads and chemical colours. The younger generation of Salvis seem to prefer other professions which are easier or more lucrative than the intricate Patola, and it is increasingly becoming difficult to keep up the legacy going for long." ■

A Benign Breast Lump
called Fibroadenoma

In his quarterly column, Dr P Raghu Ram focuses on benign breast lumps known as fibroadenoma, which are formed by the growth of tissue over a lobule in the breast

A 28-year-old woman noticed a mobile lump in her right breast…

What is a fibroadenoma?

The breasts are made up of ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple) and lobules (milk-producing glands), which are surrounded by fatty and supportive tissue. Sometimes, the tissue will grow over a lobule like a ball, forming a solid lump. This is known as fibroadenoma and is one of the most common benign (non-cancerous lumps) in the breast.

What causes fibroadenoma?

It is believed to occur because of increased sensitivity to the female hormone oestrogen.

What are the types of fibroadenoma?

Simple fibroadenoma: Most fibroadenomas are about 1-3 cm in size and are called simple fibroadenomas. Simple fibroadenomas do not increase the risk of developing breast cancer in the future.

Complex fibroadenoma: Some fibroadenomas are called complex fibroadenomas. Having a complex fibroadenoma can slightly increase the risk of developing breast cancer in the future.

Giant or juvenile fibroadenoma: Occasionally, a fibroadenoma can grow to more than 5cm and may be called a giant fibroadenoma. In teenage girls, they are referred to as juvenile fibroadenomas.

Are fibroadenomas benign (non-malignant)?

The vast majority of fibroadenomas are benign (non-cancerous) and do not increase the risk of developing breast cancer. There is a small risk for complex fibroadenomas to turn malignant.

How does a fibroadenoma feel and at what age does it commonly occur?

A fibroadenoma usually has a rubbery texture, is smooth to the touch and moves easily under the skin. For this reason, it is sometimes called a 'breast mouse'. Fibroadenomas are usually painless.

These benign breast lumps are common and it is not unusual to have more than one. They often develop during puberty and so are mostly found in young women, although they can occur in women of any age.

Does a fibroadenoma grow if left untreated?

Most fibroadenomas remain the same size. A small number of fibroadenomas get bigger. Fibroadenomas can also get bigger during pregnancy and breastfeeding. This is quite normal and nothing to worry about.

How is a fibroadenoma diagnosed?

Fibroadenoma usually becomes noticeable as a lump in the breast. A specialist consultation is essential and it is important to undergo three different tests, often referred to as triple assessment, so that a definite diagnosis can be made. These tests involve clinical breast examination, a mammogram (breast x-ray) and ultrasound scan (which creates a picture of the breast using high-frequency sound waves) and a needle core biopsy of the lump under the guidance of an ultrasound.

How is a fibroadenoma managed?

If the triple assessment, including a core biopsy, has confirmed the presence of a fibroadenoma, one can be assured that the lump is not cancerous.

If the fibroadenoma is small, less than 2cms, it can be left alone and followed up with an ultrasound scan after a few months to make sure it has not got bigger. If the size has not changed, the patient could be reassured. Some women do not like to keep the lump, in which case the lump can be excised.

Surgery is advisable if the lump gets over 3 cms and is painful or if it proves to be a complex fibroadenoma on core needle biopsy. The operation is done under a general anaesthetic, and the patient needs to be in hospital for the day or overnight.

With advances in surgical techniques (oncoplastic breast surgery), this operation can be done through an incision at the edge of the areoa (circumareolar incision) to give a good cosmetic result with a scar that is least visible and would fade in time. There should not be any defect in the breast after the surgery ensuring a good aesthetic outcome.

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Happiness is a choice, with or without cancer.

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