



The hospital was established in 1946 at the northern foot of Cumballa Hill in the Breach Candy in South Mumbai. The large white hospital building was built in the colonial style by distinguished British Architect Claude Batley, who has several other prominent buildings in the city to his name, like the Bombay Gymkhana (1917), Bombay Central Station (1930), and the Bombay Club (1939) now the Nataraj Hotel (Claude Batley 1997). Initially, the hospital began functioning as a 25-bed nursing home, having just one or two floors. It is also known to have an association with eminent doctors such as Dr. Vithal Nagesh Shirodkar, whose practice was revolutionary in the field of medical sciences.

Rajyashree Kumari Bikaner, in her book *Place of Clouds* (2018), writes about the hospital and the atmosphere of the time. She says that the 1950s was a momentous decade. The streets of Westminster Abbey, filled with much pomp and grandeur, welcomed the young queen of the British Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II. At the time, none would have anticipated that she would become the longest reigning monarch in the history of the empire, having the Elizabethan Age commemorated as a period in history for the coming generations. Bikaner (2018) adds that, in the meantime, miles away here in India, the Breach Candy Hospital was known as the 'best and most fashionable hospital where the rich and famous went to deliver their babies'. It was a trusted hospital among the affluent families of Bombay.



In 1951, a global conference of renowned gynaecologists and obstetricians was held in Paris. There, a representative from India said that no woman should lose her precious baby because of cervical incompetence. He then disclosed a different and innovative approach. He described a cervical cerclage operation, and everyone, all over the world, accepted his technique. The operation was called Shirodkar Cerclage/Stitch, a procedure whereby women with a history of miscarriages could carry the baby to full term. This ingenious and dynamic personality was Dr. Vithal Nagesh Shirodkar, a pioneer in the field of gynaecology (Purandare, Patel and Balsarkar 2012). He worked 14 to 16 hours at his clinic in Cumballa Hill and was associated with the Breach Candy Hospital in the Outpatient Department (Powell 2008). When Former Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi was expecting her elder son, Rajiv, and asked for Dr. Shirodkar during her eighth month of pregnancy. He performed the delivery, and after an easy and short labour, a six-and-a-half-pound baby with a great shock of black hair, a boy, as Indira had predicted, was born at 08: 22 a.m. (Frank 2010, 195).



Another phenomenal person associated with the hospital as Senior Consultant for Oncology is Dr. Suresh Advani, a pioneer in bone marrow transplantation in India. Dr. Advani was the first oncologist in India to have completed a bone marrow transplant for a nine-year-old girl with myeloid leukaemia. At the Tata Memorial Hospital, he played a role in establishing the Doctorate of Medicine (DM) in Medical Oncology. The department of oncology, under his stewardship, developed modern medical and paediatric oncology services with laboratories for haematology, cytogenetics and molecular diagnostics, a daycare chemotherapy unit, and patient counselling services (Trust 2022). He is a recipient of Padma Shree, the highest civilian honour of the country, and he is currently the chief medical and paediatric oncologist and haemato-oncologist at Jaslok Hospital and works in the Outpatient Department at the Breach Candy Hospital (Advani 2012 - 2022).

The hospital has been the one to start with many of the firsts in the country, such as the MRI in 1998, one of the most significant medical advancements of all time (Trust, MRI 2017). The imaging department is the first in the country to introduce innovations in X-ray, like the green film, which reduces radiation exposure, computed Radiography and Digital Radiography (Trust, Digital X-Rays 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a reminder of the immense importance of having robust healthcare systems and infrastructure. In those difficult times, the Breach Candy Hospital, having a 1:1 nurse-to-patient ratio, managed to cope with the growing number of patients and successfully developed an emergency protocol regulation (Ankadala 2021). It had set a benchmark by providing the highest clinical care to COVID-19 patients, as was evident from the recovery rate of the patients (Parekh n.d.).

Undoubtedly, the hospital has sustained its growth with quality healthcare treatment and patient care. It has been relentless and committed, for which it has been the most preferred choice of some of the notable personalities who have been the patients of the Breach Candy Hospital. An embodiment of stardom, actor Amitabh Bachchan battled for his life at the Breach Candy Hospital in July of 1982 after sustaining injuries while shooting for the film Coolie. His poor health sent shockwaves throughout the country. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, visited the hospital, and Rajiv Gandhi cancelled his tour to the United States to be at his side.



One of the greatest actresses in the history of Indian cinema, Nargis Dutt, at fifty years of age, was diagnosed with obstructive jaundice as per the reports from Breach Candy Hospital. In no time, she was flown to Sloan Kettering Cancer Hospital in New York for treatment, where she developed pancreatic cancer. As a mother to three young children, Nargis had wanted to see her children settle and desired to be in India with them if death knocked at her doors. Aware of the fact that she wasn't completely alright, she returned to Bombay in March 1981, and within ten days of her return, the cancer relapsed. She was rushed to the Breach Candy Hospital, and after a month of intensive treatment, Nargis lost the painful battle with cancer and closed her eyes on 3rd May 1981. Within minutes of her death, the road leading to the hospital was filled with mourners (Guha 2012, 9-10).

On the brink of the 21st century, in October 2000, the Breach Candy Hospital got a fresh coat of paint, and with floors scrubbed thrice a day, it was ready to greet its VVIP Patients. With an elaborate security arrangement of over 500 police personnel and 100 elite SPG commandos, Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee underwent a replacement procedure (BBC 2000). An Indian Prime Minister undergoing surgery became a publicised event, and Vajpayee became India's beckon for advanced surgical intervention, which inspired several Indians to undergo the surgery. Vajpayee created a lot of awareness about the procedure in India, where over 70,000 persons undergo knee replacements annually (IANS 2013).

In July 2002, the nation collectively grieved the passing of Dhirubhai Ambani, the founder of the Reliance Group. He touched the lives of politicians, film stars, industrialists, and, most importantly, the common man. Thirteen days after suffering from a stroke, he breathed his last at Breach Candy Hospital (Dutta 2023).

From its small beginnings as a 25-bed nursing home, Breach Candy Hospital has transformed today into a multi-speciality hospital with over 220 beds, where the corridors echo with hope, and every heartbeat resonates with the joy of existence. Yet, as the clock ticks away, an unwavering reality casts its shadow, the bitter, inevitable companion, death. It is a profound undertone, the poignant counterpart to the gentle hum of healing.



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