

Learning to Smile Again



Sita Venna following cataract surgery.

Sita has been plagued by one misfortune after another

by Sireesha Bobbili, Help the Aged Youth Intern

Sita Venna is a 70 year old widow who lost her husband over ten years ago. Her husband, Balaraju, worked as a taxi driver and generated all of the income while she brought up their five children. Sita's vision problems began six years ago as cataracts began to develop in both of her eyes. They matured to a point where she could no longer see in front of her.

Unfortunately Sita's family has been plagued with one misfortune after another. After her husband's death, one of Sita's two sons passed away due to injuries sustained from an epileptic seizure. One daughter died due to a throat infection and another expired due to complications during childbirth. Her surviving daughter is a tailor who is able to earn 10 to 20 rupees a day (about 60 cents) stitching sari blouses and skirts for neighbours, but she is unable to offer much help. Her controlling and abusive alcoholic husband does not approve of giving a portion of their limited income to Sita, his mother-in-law. Sita currently lives with her surviving son who is employed as an agricultural

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62,000 surgeries sponsored by Help the Aged since 1989

**A total \$37
is all that
is required for
each cataract
surgery**



**All donations
are tripled
by matching
government
grants**

Ophthalmologists in India complete an average of sixty cataract surgeries a day.

“Thank you Canada. I think heaven has sent you to help poor people like me”

by Sireesha Bobbili, *Help the Aged Youth Intern*

At the age of 65, Nagamma Panaganti never fathomed that she would have problems with her vision. However a cataract had been developing in her left eye for the past five years. It had matured to a point where Nagamma could not see objects any more and could only detect shadows. As a result, she was almost completely blind in her left eye, and totally helpless after sunset. One evening, Nagamma had attempted to go to a neighbour's house for dinner, however due to her cataract, she could not see the pathway and fell into a drainage ditch at the side of the road. Although she was not badly injured, she was afraid to go out after dusk on her own.

Nagamma's husband Pampulu, was the only one who generated an income. However, since an accident with his rickshaw, he had trouble walking and was no longer able to work. Although Pampulu receives a government pension of three rupees per day, this works out to only 10 cents in Canadian currency. Nagamma's two sons who are employed as tailors are unable to offer much help. They have financial problems of their own and find it difficult



Nagamma Panaganti

to support their own families. Therefore, when Nagamma was told by a neighbour that her condition could be remedied with a simple operation, she knew they could not afford the surgery.

With donations from Help the Aged (Canada), the Srikiran Institute is able to diagnose and perform cataract surgeries for thousands of poverty-stricken people free of charge.

Sita ... (continued from page 1)

labourer. While he generates a modest income, much of it goes to support his drinking habit. He refuses to provide funds for Sita to visit a hospital.

Sita felt that she had been blessed upon hearing an advertisement that a free vision screening camp would be conducted in her home town. The Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology, sponsored by Help the Aged, provides free vision consultations and surgery for those living in poverty. Sita's eldest granddaughter agreed to escort her to the camp to have her vision checked free of charge. Out of 400 poor people screened for vision problems, only 100 required cataract surgeries. Sita was one of them and intraocular lenses were implanted into both of her eyes. **“I can now see my grandchildren's faces”** exclaimed Sita a few weeks after the procedure. She has since become more much active at home. Her eldest granddaughter now has more time to study since Sita is able to care for herself and perform daily chores that were once her granddaughter's responsibility.

Nagamma thought that she would have to live the rest of her life with limited eyesight until her landlord told her that the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology would be conducting free vision screening tests in her village. With donations from Help the Aged (Canada), the Srikiran Institute is able to diagnose and perform cataract surgeries for thousands of poverty-stricken people free of charge. Nagamma was one of the fortunate few to have her cataract removed and an intraocular lens implanted into her eye. This lens prevents the need for eyeglasses which can be easily lost or scratched. Funds from Help the Aged also provided meals and medications for Nagamma during her stay at the hospital. She has now regained sight in her left eye is very grateful that Help the Aged has a genuine interest in serving the elderly in need. “I think heaven has sent you to help poor people like me, thank you Canada” remarked Nagamma joyfully at a post-operative check-up.

The ABC's of Cataract Surgeries

A

Help the Aged has been sponsoring cataract surgeries in India and other developing countries since the late 1970s. During the last nine years we have worked in collaboration with our Canadian 'partner' organization MSMF (Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation) and with our partner organization in India, the Srikanan Institute of Ophthalmology in Kakinada, to provide cataract surgeries to over 3,600 destitute elderly people every year in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Patients are screened and selected at 'eye camps' in various villages and towns. At that time, tests are done for cataracts, glaucoma and trachoma (painful scratching of the eye surface) as well as diabetes and high blood pressure. Patients who are selected for surgery are told that the hospital bus will pick them up on a specific date to transport them to the eye hospital where they will stay overnight.



Screening patients for cataracts, trachoma and glaucoma.

B

When they arrive at the hospital, other tests are completed to calculate the power of the permanent intraocular lenses which will be fitted by the surgeon after the cataract is removed. This will eliminate the need for eyeglasses which are easily lost or scratched.

C

Each surgery takes about 15 minutes after a local anaesthetic is used and eye drops given to prevent blinking during surgery. Following surgery, each patient receives antibiotic eye drops which will be needed for four weeks. Food and water are provided to each patient during the hospital stay.



This is the size and shape of an average cataract.

D

The following morning, each patient is examined for signs of infection, swelling or bleeding and released following a training session concerning the use of eye drops, importance of a dust free environment during the next few days, etc. All patients are returned to their towns or villages during the afternoon. A hospital nurse will return to their towns or villages in one week to examine each patient to ensure there are no complications.



Antibiotic eye drops

E

The cycle starts all over again in other cities, towns and villages. Every year, more than 15,000 people are screened for Help the Aged sponsored surgery and at least 3,600 people, like the patients profiled in this pamphlet, are able to see again. All of the surgeries are offered at no charge to each patient as a direct result of your generosity and matching funds from CIDA and the Alberta Wild Rose Foundation.

Seniors waiting to be examined at a local 'eye camp'.



“I feel like I have been given a second life.”

For the past 37 years, Venkata Ramana Pentapati has used the skills taught to him by his father to make a living as a tailor. Since the age of 18, he has worked diligently to perfect this art and has built a good reputation for himself in the village of Gollaprolu. Tailoring work is very sporadic and seems to coincide with Indian festivals when new clothes are worn. Venkata can earn up to 200 rupees (\$5.00 Canadian) per day around the holidays, however there is not a lot of work at other times during the year. With this modest income, Venkata was able to support his wife and raise two sons by saving and being prudent with his spending. Now that his sons are trained as tailors and married, they have since moved out and started businesses in order to support their own growing families.

Venkata had few financial problems providing for himself and his wife after his children were established. However after the age of 50, his eyesight began to deteriorate. He used his savings to consult a local doctor and purchased eyeglasses in attempts to correct his vision. Since cataracts were developing



Venkata Ramana Pentapati

in both of his eyes, the glasses were of no use. Without proper vision, Venkata could no longer see the fine threads and needles that he used for sewing. By the age of 55, he was forced to give up his only means of income and exhausted his savings to pay for daily meals as well as a monthly rent of 200 rupees. His sons could offer no assistance since they were struggling to support their own children.

Venkata knew that his eyesight could be improved with a simple operation. However, since he was no longer able to work, he could not afford the surgery. Therefore, upon hearing an advertisement that the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology would be coming to his town, Venkata became ecstatic. Venkata was one of these fortunate few to have cataracts removed and intraocular lenses implanted into both of his eyes free of charge. He was also given eyeglasses to ensure that he could see fine stitching while using his sewing machine. “Both of my eyes are very fine now. I can work again so I am happy!” exclaimed Venkata at his post-operative check up. “I feel like I have been given a second life! Thank you!”

“Compassion should be our ultimate goal”

The photo at right of the Dalai Lama in India with Help the Aged volunteers Diane and Rudy Machel was taken five years ago when Diane and Rudy were preparing reports for our Adopt-A-Gran sponsors. Diane and Rudy are back in India again this year to prepare new reports to sponsors. Rudy also volunteers as a handyman to complete plumbing, electrical and other repairs, which are always required.

The Dalai Lama recently spoke about our responsibilities towards the less fortunate during a the recent ABC news report entitled “Heaven” hosted by Barbara Walters. He mentioned during the program that compassion towards the poor leading to direct service to help them is viewed as the ultimate goal in Buddhist philosophy.

Persons of all faiths reflect this philosophy through their support of projects such as this one.



Thanks for being so compassionate!