



Manjari Sankurathri Memorial Foundation

(A Registered Canadian Charity – BN 89002 4995 RR0001)

Spring Issue

MSMF Newsletter

April 2006

Greetings!



This picture of Manjari and her son Srikiran and daughter Sarada was taken a few days before their departure on Air India Flight 182 on June 23, 1985 from Montreal.

Twenty years later, documented by CBC's Terry Milewski, 'A Ray Of Light', which was seen by millions across North America, this picture has become an icon.

The School named after Sarada is educating over a hundred children every year from rural poor families. Please read Ellen Shifrin's article in page 2. The children at lunch time, disciplined, quiet, with reverence to the food they are about to eat, and reverence and thanks to the provider - in the words of Terry Milewski, "the monastic atmosphere", leaves a lasting imprint.

The Eye Institute named after Srikiran has been described by Mr. Milewski as "an oasis". It is a well-equipped eye hospital with highly qualified specialists, and specialist volunteers from North America providing professional development opportunities regularly. The article of Dr. Mootha on page 3 describes one such involvement. The financial support from organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency and Help the Aged Canada has been vital for the growth and performance of the Institute.

The awareness raised by the CBC's 'A Ray Of Light' is significant. We have had more visitors to the Foundation in Kakinada during this winter. The interest in volunteering at Srikiran and Sarada has increased as well as our donor base, including corporations. Sonia and Rajan Arora from G3Telecom organized a fundraising gala in Toronto. Their message is included in the next column.

In the immediate future, the challenges are substantial. There is a need for a Vocational Training Centre for unemployed youth. It is also time to develop strategies for financial stability and long-term growth of the School and the Eye Institute.

We look forward to your continuing support. Thank you.

www.msmf.ca



A Message to all at the Valentines Gala on Feb 11, 2006, in Toronto

Dear Friends and Supporters,

All of us living outside India of all races and cultures have the ability and are fortunate enough to have choices for our families such as education and health care. The children and the less fortunate that we are trying to raise funds for, do not have these choices.

Dr. Chandra lost his wife and two children, in the Air India crash in 1985 and his world changed forever. He chose to put meaning back into his life by devoting his time, money and efforts to help thousands and thousands of people in India. Dr. Chandra decided to set up a school and a hospital in Kakinada, India, in memory of his lost family.

Fifteen years later because of the path he chose over 1,000 children have been educated and can lead a better life. Over 100,000 people have had eye surgery and can see again and be productive to their families and society.

The funds from tonight's gala will go directly to the Primary School and Institute of Ophthalmology in Kakinada so the less fortunate can also have choices in their lives.

We made a choice tonight to help and support Dr. Chandra and his mission in India. We congratulate you and thank you for your participation.

We are able to make a difference with your support. Special thanks to all of our relatives and friends for supporting this event.

Anup Kaushal and Sonia Arora, www.g3telecom.com

Report on Visit to Sarada Vidyalayam and Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology

Monday, 27 February 2006: After an overnight journey, I arrived at Samalkot Junction station, Andhra Pradesh, and was met by two young men from the Institute. The vegetation was lush, temperature perfect, and I was eager to see in “real life” the amazing work of Dr. Chandra.

The CBC film, “A Ray of Light”, had deeply moved and inspired me, and I knew I wanted to see this work in action. As a teacher and worker for human rights, I saw Sarada Vidyalayam as a potential model that could bring education into other depressed communities.

First impressions: We turn into the gates of the Institute, and I see well-kept buildings, flowering gardens, and nicely dressed people going about their business. This is an oasis in the chaos of India! We pull up at Dr. Chandra’s home, and I’m met by Dr. Chandra, gracious and inviting. Over coffee we discuss the day, and after a bit of breakfast, we head to the school.

We walk through a garden, and in a minute arrive at the school. First I see a group of older children, seventh standard/grade, sitting in a large circle under a huge tree. They are well separated, which is unusual, and Dr. Chandra explains that they are doing practice exams in preparation for their exams the following week. We move on, and I see the other children sitting in their outdoor classrooms in the main sandy area outside the school building. It is obvious studying and learning is happening.

In response to my query about whether there are behaviour problems, Dr. Chandra points out that sometimes that happens. If a child persists in misbehaving, they are eventually asked to leave. In a few classes, one child sits alone, the consequence of poor behaviour. After a time they are permitted to rejoin the group.

I am all admiration. Here is a school full of children from really poor backgrounds, clean, neat, studying, interested. Quiet – ah! The quiet! Lunchtime is truly just like in the film—the children queue up, wash their hands, get their food, sit in the row, wait until everyone’s tumbler is perfectly aligned, say a prayer, and then eat—in silence!

The classes I visit—first standard language and second standard math—are impressive. Teachers demand high-level work, and do not give marks in the spirit of “social promotion.” The math is a much higher level than that of North America. The work on the board that I thought the children had been working on during the first period, turned out to

be for the second period; most of them finished it within ten minutes. Wow.

Second Impression: 3:30 p.m.: I return to see the Monday after-school programme. Alas for me, it is a “drill”; my mild interest soon turns to boredom; I find it difficult to stay with the position-taking, holding, soldierly nature of the exercise. As a movement and dance teacher, I find myself thinking that if only I could have a go with them. . . . But this is Monday, and the rest of the week is different.

Also, it is the end of the day. Surely the children have had enough, and just want to play? All day they have been quiet and good. When do they break free, running, shouting, leaping? In the evening the seventh standard children return to study for another three hours before returning home! My North American conditioning rebels.

Third Impression: I learn that upon leaving the school at the end of seventh standard, the children do extremely well in high school, rising to the top of their class. I also learn that the children are handpicked, passing a “test” to get into the school in the first place. Clearly these intelligent kids have an incredible opportunity to become leaders in their communities, pulling them out of the endless cycles of ignorance and poverty.

Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology

Impression: We walk through the main doors – “Reception” greets us, young women are at various posts in the orderly, spacious hall. Dr. Chandra’s tour includes the various components that make up this amazing Institute – a clinic where anyone can get their eyes checked, a small eye glass-making factory, the hospital from the film, the other area where paying patients go, operating theatres, dining halls for staff, non-paying patients, paying patients, and doctors. Dr. Chandra’s office is simple, with a video monitor showing him what is happening everywhere. All hums along—from the waiting rooms to the dormitories, from the opticians’ dispensaries to the STD booth, and from the dining halls to the trainees learning how to do various parts of the work. (Some of the children from the school eventually become a trainee here.) Nothing is out of place—a tribute, I believe, to the unwavering discipline of Dr. Chandra.

Admittedly I spent much more time at the school than at the Institute. But truly this place is a model for the west. We have to wait months to have a cataract removed. But here they can do three hundred in a day! Srikiran is even more inspiring in “real life”.

Ellen Shifrin, Toronto, ON. www.ellenshifrin.com.

A VISIT TO SRIKIRAN**V. Vinod Mootha, M. D.**

Associate Professor of Ophthalmology
Cornea, External Disease, Refractive and Cataract
Surgery

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I would like to summarize a recent medical missions trip that I made to the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology in Kakinada. On this trip, I was accompanied by a resident from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dr. Robert Witherspoon.

We left Dallas on January 14 and reached Kakinada on the morning of January 17. We spent one complete and busy week at the Institute. I continue to be impressed by the quality and volume of clinical and surgical care provided by the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology. I was able to interact with all the consultants, including Drs. Thulasi, Rao, Rajendra, and Teja. Dr. Thulasi continues the tradition of providing high volume, efficient, and high quality small-incision extracapsular cataract surgery. Despite some recent turnover in the administrative staff and senior consultant, clinical operations are operating smoothly and efficiently with high morale. This was the first opportunity that I had to tour the completed new facility. It is a beautiful, well-planned facility that adequately addresses the high volume needs of the institute. During my trip, I tried to immerse myself in the outpatient clinic and the operating room theater. I delivered some informal lectures with the consultants regarding penetrating keratoplasty basics, phacoemulsification basics, and the use and preparation of amniotic membrane. I performed five corneal transplant surgeries with the assistance of Dr. Thulasi. I spent two sessions with Dr. Rajendra to help him polish his phacoemulsification skills. Dr. Robert Witherspoon immersed himself in the clinic and operating room and performed nearly 20 cataract surgeries himself. He was also impressed by the Outreach Program and participated in a screening camp. I was fortunate enough to attend the function celebrating the 13th anniversary of the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology. On my last day, I organized and delivered a continuing medical education program to ophthalmologists in the nearby districts with a focus on ocular surface disease and new developments in corneal transplant surgery. I was able to take some supplies donated by the Alcon and Bausch & Lomb corporations.

It was a pleasure to have been a volunteer to the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology. Please feel free to contact me regarding any questions that you may

have about my experiences or observations at the Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology.

**My Visit to Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology
Dr. Usha Kappagantula, Ottawa, ON**

Dear Chandra,

I am writing to thank you for all the time you took from your busy schedule to give me a tour of the MSMF facilities and explain each component. I would like to thank your sister, Ms. Hema, for all of the hospitality and generosity that she showed to me during my time in Kakinada. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Thulasi at the Srikiran Eye Institute, who allowed me to observe the cataract surgeries, which were performed in the most skilled and efficient manner. I had the wonderful opportunity to observe the process of treating and preventing blindness, which starts with the outreach and screening of people in the community, and continues by bringing people to the facility for treatment. I was so impressed by the quality of care during the pre-operative, operative and post-operative stages. The care is enhanced by the professional yet informal tone, which is empathetic without being condescending or intimidating to patients. All of the services provided by different parts of the Foundation are characterized by a personal touch that is absolutely due to the sincerity and dedication of every person involved. It was heartwarming to feel the sense of teamwork and community involvement that pervades the Foundation.

The story of one young woman in particular touched me. Now a technician who administers the orbital block that precedes cataract surgery, she began her education in the literacy program at the time of the Foundation's inception. The keen eyes of those instructing her picked up on her potential abilities, offering her the chance to train to the extent where she has now mastered the skills of the orbital block. Based on the education and opportunities she received, she can now give back to the same community, many times over. At Sarada Vidyalayam, the teachers that I met were so proud of their pupils, and the children demonstrated a great enthusiasm for learning. Their eagerness to share what they had learned with others is exemplary of the spirit fostered by the school.

I wished that I could have spent more time with MSMF, been able to contribute to this wonderful cause, and further your mission. On behalf of my family, I send best wishes to all of you at MSMF.

PS. The image of your striking poinsettia plants is still in my mind.

News ...**Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology**

- In September 2005, Srikiran achieved a historic landmark of exceeding 100,000, surgeries mark since its inception in January 1993.

- Mr. Anil K. Singhal, District Collector, visited Srikiran, and launched the Rotary International Cataract Surgery Project.

- On World Sight Day (29 September 2005) organized by ORBIS Canada at Hospital For Sick Children in Toronto, Dr. Chandra Sankurathri, who was visiting from Kakinada, with Dr. Peter Kertes, Retina Specialist, Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre gave a presentation on Srikiran's Role In The Prevention of Avoidable Blindness in the region. Dr. Kertes has visited Srikiran twice and actively participates in its professional development.

- On his 14th visit in so many years, Dr. Kjell Dahlen, Ophthalmologist from Plattsburgh, New York, trained Srikiran consultants in Phacoemulsification Surgery.

- Dr. I. P. Bhagawat, Senior Program Manager, and Miss. Brinda Priyadarshini, Program Manager, visited Srikiran to monitor the Pediatric Eye Care Project funded by ORBIS.

- In December, the Pediatric Eyecare Program was reviewed by Ms. Shashi Priya and Dr. Sasikant Shetty, from Aravind Eye Hospitals, Madurai, India.

- In January 2006, Dr. Vinod Mootha, Associate Professor of Ophthalmology, and Senior Resident, Dr. Robert Weatherspoon, from University of Texas, spent a week at Srikiran. Dr. Mootha performed five keratoplasty surgeries, and organized one CME session on Corneal Disorders, which was attended by 32 ophthalmologists.

- In one eye camp held in January, in a very poor adjacent district, Khammam, out of the 1200 people screened, 452 were found with cataract – it was the largest camp in the history of Srikiran. All 452 surgeries included Intra Ocular Lens implants.

Sarada Vidyalayam

- Children's Day was celebrated on 14th November. Various competitions for all children were held.

- To sensitize the children and the public, Sarada Vidyalayam organized Drawing and Essay Writing competitions in three schools on the themes, "Prevention of Blindness in the Community", and "Protection of Eyesight".

- Mr. Hari Kiran Nistala, a postgraduate student from New Jersey, visited Sarada with the intent to publicize it for support in the USA.

- In January, students setup two exhibits in the science fair organized at a local school and won prizes for both exhibits.

- Dr. Mahesh Raju and his wife Dr. Shobha Raju, from New Brunswick, visited Sarada and the Foundation with particular interest on education and vocational training.

- In February, Sarada's students distributed their used uniforms to a local school for physically handicapped children.

- Sarada Vidyalayam celebrated its 14th anniversary function with cultural activities – music, dance, and mime shows. The rural Mandal Educational Officer was the chief guest, who was very appreciative and showered compliments on students for their talents and excellent academic achievements.

- Another visitor from the USA was Mr. Srinivas Kasturi from ASHA NY / NJ, a continuing supporter of Sarada.

- Ms. Ellen Shifrin, Public speaker, Amnesty International, Toronto, was another admirer of children from Sarada Vidyalayam in February.

More Visitors to the Foundation, Kakinada

Mrs. Jayashree Tatavarti Mr. Praveen Inuganti

Mr. Om Pahwa Dr. Ravi Dukkupati

Dr. Eswar Prasad

Mrs. Shashi Prasad & Mrs. Cathy Blackow

Mrs. Deena & Dr. Manu Ondhia

Mrs. Veni & Dr. V. R. Adduri

Mrs. Sudha & Dr. Rao Dukkupati

APPEAL ...

Sarada Vidyalayam Upper Primary School, established 14 years ago, has provided education to well over a 1,000 children from rural poor families. Now some of them are in colleges and many in high schools. Srikiran Institute of Ophthalmology, established 13 years ago, has performed over 100,000 surgeries to prevent blindness. The yearly average now is over 12,000 surgeries, which is about 50% of all surgeries done in the district of five million people. For a steady growth and sustainable operation of the two institutions, we are now considering creating corpus funds.

We urge you to support generously to the education, eye care and disaster relief programs. MSMF is a registered charity in Canada and donations to MSMF qualify for tax credits in Canada. Your donation makes all the difference.

Thank You.

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