

The South Asian Times

excellence in journalism

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NEW YEAR SPECIAL

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SANKARA
EYE FOUNDATION, USA

HAPPY
NEW
YEAR

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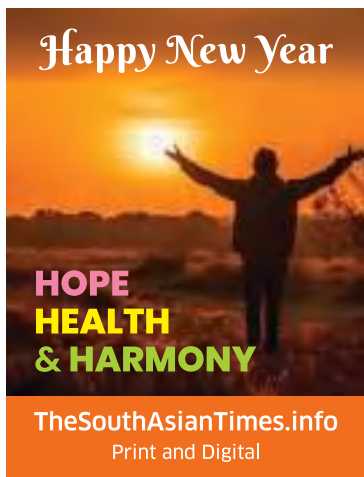


From left: **Divyogi Patel** (COO); **Murali Krishnamurthy** (Founder & Executive Chairman); **Dr R.V. Ramani** (Founder & Managing Trustee, Sankara Eye Foundation, India); **Radhakrishnan Sundar** (Board Member); and **Sridharan Krishnamurthy** (Founder & President)

MAKING THE WORLD BRIGHTER, TOGETHER

The non-profit Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA was set up in 1998 with the mission to help eliminate curable blindness in India. Over the last 25 years, it has grown from supporting one eye hospital to today, supporting 26 eye hospitals in 15 states in India - making SEF, USA the largest free eye care provider in the world!

SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' goal is to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.



Presenting Organization of the Year 2023

Letter from the Publisher



Kamlesh C. Mehta
Chairman & Publisher

highly reputed charity as Organization of the Year 2023. With a mission to eliminate needless blindness in India, Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA has supported, for over 25 years, millions of free eye surgeries through the 12 hospitals run by Sankara Eye Foundation, India as well as their 14 Partner Hospitals,

covering most states in India. Now with their ambitious Vision 2030, SEF is targeting One Million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

SEF, USA has inspired thousands to associate with Sankara to support its philanthropic and humanitarian activities. The Indian American communities and thousands of people outside America, especially in India, are proud of Sankara's services and leadership role in eliminating blindness. We wholeheartedly applaud and support their continued efforts in bringing the Light to millions of Sights, and proudly present them as "The South Asian Times-Organization of the Year 2023".

We appreciate the SEF, USA team for their cooperation in bringing out this special feature. We thank our Founding Editor, Mr. Parveen Chopra, who has handled all our Person of the Year specials since 2008, and has again beautifully created the Organization of the Year 2023 feature, even though he is overwhelmed with his own passion-project, ALotusInTheMud.com.

Our New Year & Person of the

Year special issues, print & digital, have been read by well over half a million people in America and all over the world, and they are proudly displayed by many families on their coffee tables and kept in their collectibles. Please contact us if you wish to have a hard copy, we will gladly mail it you with our compliments.

Since its inception, The South Asian Times has earned an immaculate reputation for its consistency for excellence in journalism, value-based content, clean display, and qualitative advertising. Our unique vision has continuously set new trends and standards in the South Asian media fraternity of America, both in print and online.

We the team @ The South Asian Times sincerely thank all our supporters and readers who have been integral partners in our gracious presence and success. Hope you will enjoy the New Year Special issue. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome.

Kamlesh C. Mehta
Chairman@
TheSouthAsianTimes.Info

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings for a joyous, healthy and prosperous New Year.

Trust you, and your loved ones are well.

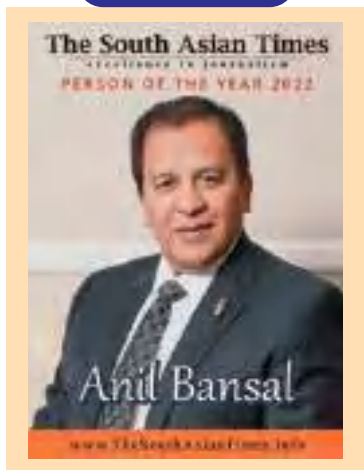
While welcoming the year 2024, looking back on 2023, it was a year of wonderful achievements.

While the Russia-Ukraine war was raging, the Israel-Gaza war erupted, which shocked the entire Western and Middle Eastern world. This war-mongering is endangering the world peace. We hope for greater peace and harmony for all in the times ahead.

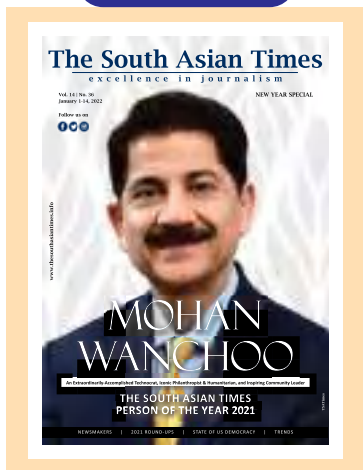
India had much to rejoice last year. The world watched and applauded the successful hosting of the G-20 summit in New Delhi. ISRO successfully landing Chandrayan-3 on the South Pole

Cover pages of our last 10 New Year & Person of the Year Special Issues

2023



2022



2021



2020



2019



2018



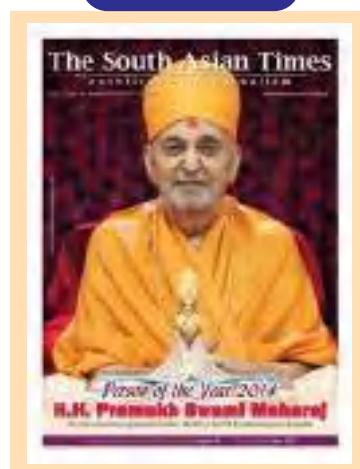
2017



2016



2015



2014





PROUDLY SUPPORTS THE



SANKARA
EYE FOUNDATION, USA

Marking 25 years of visionary impact!



MARCH TO A MILLION

Sankara Eye Foundation,
USA is marching towards a
million free eye surgeries
every year starting from
2030.

Please join the Sankara Eye
Foundation movement to
eliminate curable blindness
in India.

www.giftofvision.org



OUR IMPACT

26 Hospitals in India

15 States covered in India

356,000 Free Eye Surgeries in FY '23

444 Million + Population covered

Happy New Year

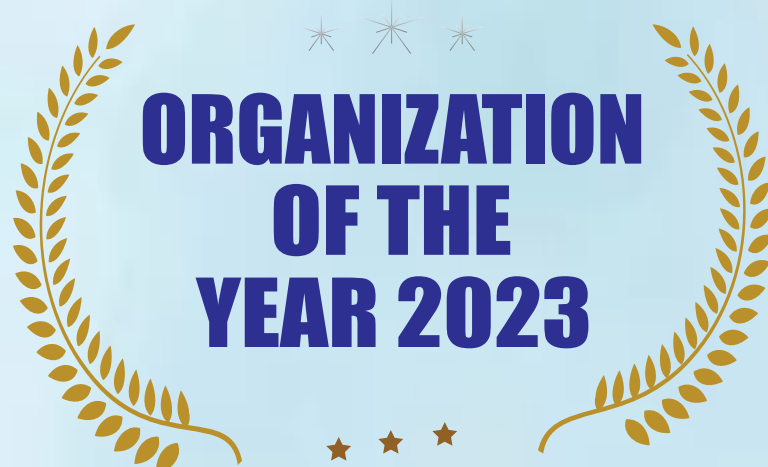
Heartiest Congratulations to

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On being Honored as

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MAKING THE WORLD BRIGHTER, TOGETHER

The non-profit Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA was set up in 1998 to help eliminate curable blindness in India. Over the last 25 years, it has grown from supporting one eye hospital to today, supporting 26 eye hospitals in 15 states in India – making SEF, USA the largest free eye care provider in the world! SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' goal is to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

By **Parveen Chopra**

Founding Editor

The South Asian Times

Founder, ALotusInTheMud.com

It is a well-known fact that one-fourth of the world's blind are in India, and it is largely the poor who suffer from the loss of sight due to untreated cataracts. To alleviate the humongous problem of curable blindness in India, the Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), India established the Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, in 1986, offering free eye surgeries to the poor.

In 1998, SEF, USA was launched to support the Coimbatore hospital and since then SEF, USA has contributed to a big and bold vision to eliminate curable blindness in India. SEF, USA became fully committed to raising resources to replicate the Coimbatore Hospital model throughout India.

SEF, USA (www.giftofvision.org) was started in the San Francisco Bay Area by Murali Krishnamurthy and his brother K. Sridharan in 1998. They were motivated by their uncle, P. Balasubramaniam, to support the good work of his friend Dr R.V. Ramani, founder of the Sankara Eye Foundation, India. Little did the two brothers, working in the tech industry, know at that time that this was going to flower into a beautiful movement and brighten up the lives of millions back home in India as well as motivate SEF volunteers and donors in the USA.

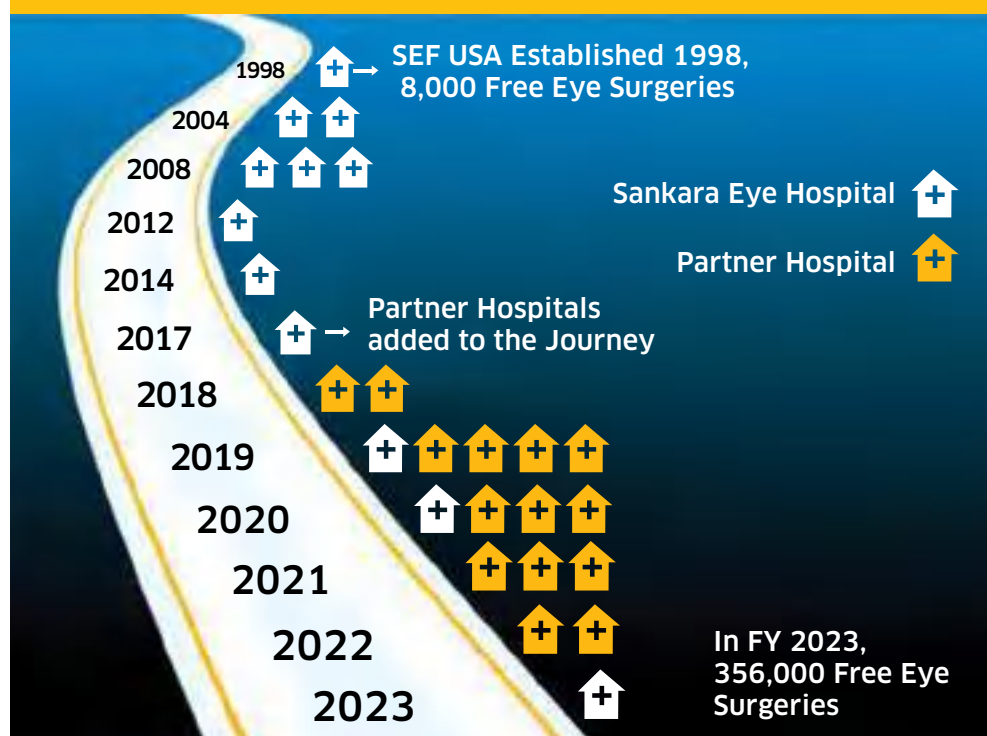
SEF, USA celebrated its Silver Jubilee last year and has now become the leader in community eye care as the largest free eye care provider in the world.

Starting from 8,000 free eye surgeries at the Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore in 1998, SEF, USA has helped perform 560,000 free surgeries in 2023 at its network of 26 eye hospitals (12 Sankara Eye Hospitals and 14 Partner Eye Hospitals) in 15 Indian

Sankara Eye Hospitals Spread in India



SEF USA's Journey



states. They have built a capacity for over 600,000 free eye surgeries and over 444 million people are covered by this movement.

SEF, USA is a grassroots organization supported by

- 60,000+ donors and 1,000+ volunteers across USA
- 1,000+ staff and doctors at the network of 12 Sankara Eye Hospitals
- 1,000+ staff and doctors at the network of 14 Partner Eye Hospitals.

Talking to the SEF leaders in the USA or India, you hear a palpable excitement as together, they are marching to a new, ambitious goal.

Their Vision 2030 - March to a Million is aiming to:

- Build a capacity of one million free eye surgeries by 2028
- Scale up free eye surgeries to one million a year by 2030
- Make the entire system self-sufficient by 2035-36.

Their self-sufficiency model mandates 80% or at least 70% of eye surgeries at

each hospital to be conducted free for the rural poor, paid for by the paid surgeries. The model enables the hospital to not need additional funding to meet operational costs within 5-7 years. Sankara has a Rural Outreach Program to screen rural populations to identify those needing eye surgeries or suffering from other diseases of the eye.

The Vision 2030 march, no doubt, requires SEF, USA to scale up its fundraising efforts. They have calculated that they will need \$100 million till 2028 with \$50 million for capital projects and \$50 million for free eye surgeries. No child's play! But Murali is confident that \$100 million can be raised when broken down into 10,000 donors donating \$2,000 annually for five years.

The donors can rest assured their money is put to good use. Charity Navigator has given SEF, USA top four-star rating for nine consecutive years for commitment to transparency, accountability, governance, and for keeping the overheads low.

The Inspiration

SEF, USA is inspired by the example of Dr. Ramani and his wife Dr. Radha Ramani. The couple had a flourishing medical practice when they were encouraged by the Kanchi Sankaracharyas to do charitable work. They started providing free general health care in the late 1970s but soon realized that eye care needed special attention. They established the first Sankara Eye Hospital (named after Sankaracharya) in Coimbatore in 1985 for community eye care.

Sankara's slogan is: 'World class eye care with a social impact.' The social impact is immediate and lasts a lifetime for every patient who has vision restored. Patients quickly return to becoming productive members of society and providers for the family. The elderly achieve independence, adding to their self-esteem.

Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore started organizing eye camps in and around the city, brought patients to the hospital, provided them with high-quality eye surgery, took them back, and followed up to make sure that the patients were taking care of their eyes well. This resulted in a high success rate of over 98%. They also established an eye bank for eye donations needed for Corneal Transplants.

Here in the USA, SEF volunteers were motivated and started raising funds in earnest. They set up booths at various events to raise awareness for the noble cause. In 1999, SEF organized a light music concert by the Bay Area group, Pallavi, co-founded by Murali, a singer himself. It was their first show and raised \$18,000.

Donations from SEF, USA motivated the Coimbatore Hospital to start performing more and more free eye surgeries. Certificates were sent to every donor with the name of the patient and other details. It is a practice they continue diligently. A cataract surgery costs under \$30, which is easy to solicit in the USA. This prompted them



SEF, USA board members visited Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore in 2016

to request donors to 'Open an Eye a Month' for \$360 a year or 'Open an Eye a Week' for \$1,500.

Murali recalls, "Right from the beginning we were aware of the importance of marketing, and we started advertising on TV, promoting our program of free eye surgeries supported by a donation of just \$30 for each patient. We also came up with a phone number 1-866-SANKARA and were quickly able to respond to queries."

Growth Journey

A quantum leap in the partnership between SEF in the USA and India was waiting to happen. Rajeev Chamraj, an MIT graduate and MBA, noticed their TV ads and pushed SEF, USA team to embrace a big vision of building Coimbatore-style eye hospitals all over India to substantially address the problem of blindness in India.

There were no takers, understandably, remembers Murali, as they were all volunteers and were raising less than \$100,000 a year. The response from Dr Ramani and his team was not encouraging either. The logjam was broken when Kanchi Sankaracharyas (the Ramanis are their devotees) were approached and gave their blessings and support. One of the devotees of the Kan-

chi pontiffs donated land in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh for the hospital, which became the second Sankara hospital after Coimbatore. This set the ball rolling towards Vision 20/20, to raise 20 hospitals by 2020. SEF, USA volunteers moved forward with a lot of energy and enthusiasm.

For the frenetic expansion that followed, Dr Ramani gives full credit to SEF, USA's motivation, and financial support.

Sankara India Board Chairman Dr S.V. Balasubramaniam compliments them as being "masters in raising funds for our hospitals through donations big and small."

The cost of building an eye hospital at that time was between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. The SEF, USA team was concerned about this big jump in their fundraising ability. But the big target can be broken down into one thousand donors donating

SEF, USA - SALIENT POINTS

Proven Impact: Over 25 years of dedicated service, delivering high-quality eye care and transforming lives through sight restoration.

Sustainability Model: A unique 70:30 model where 30% of paying patients fund 70% of free surgeries, making each hospital self-sustainable within five years.

Scalable Vision: Building on the success of over 25 hospitals, with plans to scale up to a million free surgeries annually and sustainably by 2030.

Legacy of Giving: Donors' contribution goes beyond immediate impact, creating a legacy that continues to give the gift of vision in perpetuity.

Transparency: A commitment to accountability, consistently recognized with the highest ratings from charity oversight organizations. (4-star rating from Charity Navigator)

Direct Effect: Every donation directly contributes to life-changing surgeries, with clear and measurable outcomes.

Community Empowerment: Free eye care services empower not just individuals but the entire communities, enhancing quality of life and economic opportunities.

Global Recognition: SEF, USA is known as the world's largest free eye surgery program, with a reputation for excellence and efficiency.



SEF, USA volunteers from various parts of the country at the 2017 Annual Volunteer Meeting at the Yosemite National Park



\$1,000 each - or only \$500 with matching funds from corporations or other generous donors. Further, \$1,000 donors can have their name or that of a loved one on the hospital Wall of Founders.

The small team of volunteers at the time came up with another brilliant idea to help build new eye hospitals. They sought and secured the support of community organizations associated with the state where the hospital was being built. Executive Council member Hema Chamraj and her team developed a template for such tie-ups. Any organization raising \$100,000 (now \$125,000) from its members becomes a Partner-in-Service of the hospital, duly recognized on a prominent plaque at the entrance to the Hospital. Narayana Kala, an energetic volunteer, brought his friends to SEF, USA. They, including Venkat Maddipati (now on the Board), played a key role in raising funds for the Guntur Project. The idea of Founding Donors and Partners-in-Service continues to deliver dividends.

SEF, USA worked with the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA) and the Telugu Association of North America (TANA), and the magic of light entered Guntur, Andhra Pradesh in 2004. At BATA and TANA, their leaders Jayaram Komati and Vijaya Aasuri helped.

As SEF was growing rapidly, Murali Krishnamurthy left the IT industry and became full-time Executive Chairman in 2009.

US Chapters

From the Bay Area, where the early volunteers were based, SEF, USA spread out. They have now many active chapters in the country, particularly in San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Southern California, Austin, Dallas, Houston, New Jersey, and more. The chapters are all volunteer-driven. They organize



Dr R.V. Ramani was conferred Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2019 for his dedicated work in the field of medical services



Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand, Gujarat, in 2008 when he was Chief Minister of the state

events big and small. Dandia is their signature event and a money-spinner. The SF Bay Area annual Dandia is one of the biggest in California, attracting over 6,000 people.

SEF, USA Board member Divyogi Patel, who has a background in organizing events, raised the game by organizing big Bollywood shows with artists like Shreya Ghoshal. They continued with marquee names like Sonu Nigam, Kumar Sanu, Alka Yagnik, Hariharan, Sunidhi Chauhan, Ali Zafar, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, and Udit Narayan. This raised awareness about Sankara's mission and brought in many new donors.

Murali fondly remembers a donor (who would like to remain anonymous) who single-handedly gave \$9.5 million cumulatively from 2008 to 2014. He started by giving \$750K to complete the Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand and after that every other year he donated more.

There are at least five donors who have given one million or more.

Partner Eye Hospitals

Around 2015-16, SEF, USA started partnering with like-minded eye hospitals in India to expand the Sankara footprint to the Northern and Eastern states and to give some breathing time to SEF, India to consoli-

date and further develop Training and R&D.

SEF, USA board member Sundar Radhakrishnan who lives both in India and the USA, built a small team to support the Partner Initiative and do financial and operational due diligence of the Partners.

Sundar gives an overview of the Partners Initiative: "We start supporting the new Partner Eye Hospitals in a small way like providing for additional free eye surgeries and later for facilities like operation theaters, community wards, to support more patients. We support minor and major expansions and if there is a good scope then we help them build a new hospital."

Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital in Bihar is the most prominent of Partners. Founded and headed by a firebrand Mritunjay Tiwary, they were already focused on doing free eye surgeries. They specifically located themselves in the rural area of Mastichak to be where the beneficiaries are.

How untreated cataract leads to blindness

- India is home to one-fourth of the world's blind population.
- 80% of blindness is either preventable or curable.
- A major cause of blindness is cataract.

What is a cataract?

Dr R.V. Ramani explains that the Latin word 'cataract' means waterfalls. When you stand behind a sheet of water falling, you can't see anything in front. Our eye lens takes the light rays and focuses onto the retina, which is the screen. The eye lens is a crystalline clear at birth. As age advances, just like the greying of the hair, there are protein changes in the lens. And at some stage, the lens becomes opaque. When it becomes progressively more and more opaque, it stops transmitting the light inside. The person is blind. If you leave the cataract for years, the retina loses the capacity to perceive light. It becomes an advanced cataract, which is a challenge to operate.

Cataract removal surgery just costs less than \$30. That is why Sankara mission is to eliminate needless blindness by providing free surgeries for those who cannot afford it or do not have access to it.

In all, SEF, USA supports 14 Partner Eye Hospitals run by 11 Partner organizations in the states of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra.

In 2023, SEF, USA completed four hospital projects:

- Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad (new)
- Netaji Eye Hospital, Purulia, West Bengal (refurbishment and minor expansion)
- Akhand Jyoti Center of Excellence, Mastichak, Bihar (new), a 500-bed hospital
- H.V. Desai Eye Hospital, Pune (major expansion)

The following hospitals are coming up in 2024:

- R. Jhunjhunwala Sankara Eye Hospital, Varanasi
- Kalyanam Karoti, Mathura
- Shankarseth Sable Eye Hospital, Solapur
- Major expansion of Sankara Eye Hospital, Guntur, AP

In 2025, they hope to complete the following projects:

- Major expansion of Sankara Eye Hospital, Kanpur, UP
- Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospitals in Patna (new), Ballia (expansion), Samastipur (expansion) and Purnia (expansion), all in Bihar.

To achieve Vision 2030, SEF, USA plans to add more Partner Hospitals. Towards their goal of one million free eye surgeries by 2030, the network of Sankara Eye Hospitals will deliver 430,000 free eye surgeries annually and all Partner Hospitals together will deliver 570,000 free eye surgeries.

Covid relief

When Covid hit, like everyone else, the eye hospitals supported by SEF, USA were also struggling to run as they were not getting any paid patients to sustain free eye care, and even free patients were coming in small numbers. Thanks to their donors, SEF, USA put in place a Paycheck Payment Protection Program for all the hospitals to save the day. In turn, they won the confidence of the Partner Hospitals, some of which are now more willing to increase their surgery capacity.

A big donor and supporter of SEF, USA, Ram Reddy organized a Virtual SEF-Envision-2020 event in December 2020. This was the first of a kind and many well-known entrepreneurs like Anand Mahindra participated. The event raised a lot of awareness about Sankara's mission.

With Covid behind them, Vision 2030 beckons SEF, USA.

You can join SEF, USA's 'Vision 2030: March to a Million' Journey to provide one million free eye surgeries annually by 2030.

Headquartered in Milpitas, CA, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA is a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization. All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

**Donate @ www.giftofvision.org
Contact for more information
info@giftofvision.org; or 1-866-726-5272**

(All photos courtesy: SEF, USA)

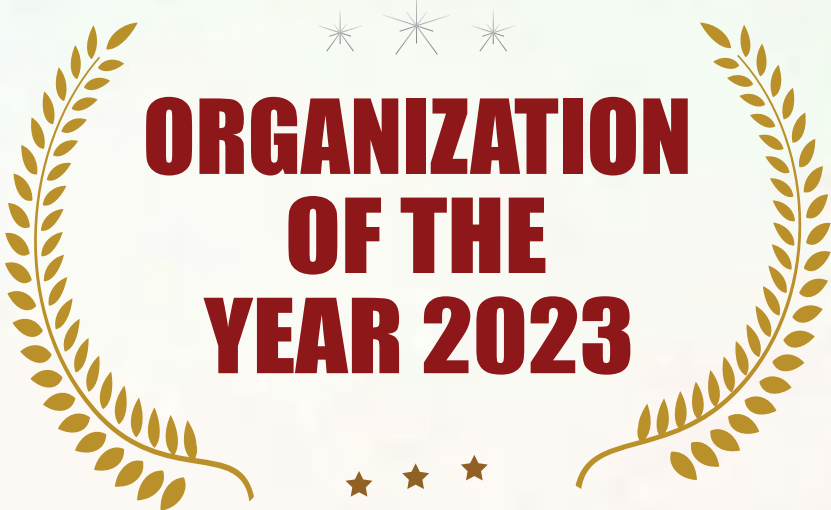


Parveen Chopra feels blessed compiling this Organization of the Year cover feature and thanks SEF, USA team for their help. He has started his own non-profit, *ALotusInTheMud.com*, a web magazine focused on wellness and spiritual content for all.

WISHING YOU ALL A
VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR

Very warm and heartiest congratulations to
Sankara Eye Foundation, USA

On being Honored as
The South Asian Times
excellence in journalism



May this well-deserved recognition inspire and motivate every member of the **Sankara Eye Foundation, USA** to continue their incredible work, bringing light and hope to countless lives.

With Best Compliments & Warmest Wishes for an Amazing 2024
Nimmi & Kamlesh C. Mehta

TheSATimes



SANKARA SHOWCASE

The eye hospitals supported by Sankara Eye Foundation, USA are in India, so their activities span both countries.



Dr R.V. Ramani set up the Coimbatore Eye Hospital in 1985 for community eye care



SEF, USA involved BATA (Bay Area Telugu Association) when building their eye hospital in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh



Board members R. Sundar and Divyogi Patel at a summit in Mumbai in 2022 with representatives of Partner Hospitals to brief them about Vision 2030



Famous singer Falguni Pathak (middle) at SEF, USA Dandia



Murali Krishnamurthy escorting Shreya Ghoshal, who did a few concerts for SEF, USA



Playback singer Shankar Mahadevan visiting Sankara Eye Hospital in Bangalore



SEF iWalk Walkathons raise funds while promoting health

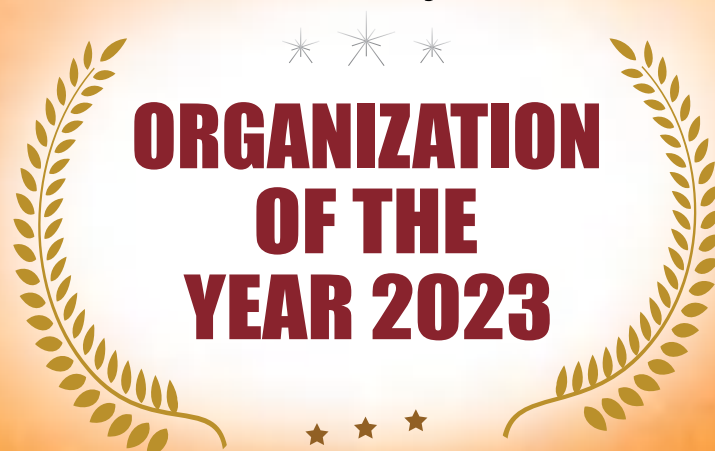


SEF, USA chapters organizing successful Dandia - often with Preetysa & Sameer

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Wishing you all the best for Vision 2030



Mohan Wanchoo (on the mike), philanthropist and entrepreneur, as well as The South Asian Times Person of the Year 2021, was Co-Chair of the gala of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA at Cipriani in New York

With Best Compliments From

Kavita & Mohan Wanchoo

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Dr R.V. Ramani

Founder and Managing Trustee,
Sankara Eye Foundation, India



Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani founded the Sankara Eye Foundation, India in 1977

Q How satisfied are you with the phenomenal growth of Sankara?

A What we achieved over these 47 years for the mission that we had set up has boosted our morale. It encourages me and my colleagues to do better and see that we reach out to more and more needy patients. Sankara India so far has touched about 10 million lives, both outpatient and inpatient. Over six million patients have been examined. And over 2.4 million free eye surgeries have been performed.

Q What has been the contribution of your partner, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in this growth?

A I clearly remember, it took five years for my friend P. Balasubramaniam to convince his nephews, Sridharan and Murali, to support a good cause like ours from the USA. When they saw what we were doing at the Coimbatore Eye Hospital, they were overwhelmed. They said, "Doctor, you should spread your wings and share your experience and expertise for the benefit of the rest of the country!"

But the logistics of healthcare are complex, unlike in other fields like manufacturing; here we are dealing with human beings. It also needs big investments. We were content with the Coimbatore Hospital, so the credit for the expansion goes to SEF, USA. And now we have instituted a lot of systems and processes to run this pan-India movement effectively.

During Covid, donors from Sankara, USA, Indian donors, and our committed team all helped to keep the operations running.

Q SEF, USA is a volunteer-run organization. How about Sankara, India?

A I am a volunteer too. In these 47 years, I have not taken a single rupee. Not that I'm a millionaire, but I'm content with what I have. Initially, me and my wife, Dr Radha Ramani, had our flourishing medical practice. We gave that up and now both of us are fully involved in Sankara. Those on our Board and the Steering Council are also volunteers.

But all our doctors and staff have paid jobs.

Q Will Vision 2030 of one million free eye surgeries a year be achieved?

A Definitely. Given the right opportunities, we might even exceed the target. But we are keeping in mind not just the numbers; quality of care is paramount for us. For that single individual getting cataract surgery, it is his pair of eyes, his vision, and his future.

Q Sankara's mission is to serve the rural population. But your hospitals are in cities.

A We set up hospitals in cities to get quality manpower and modern infrastructure. Secondly, the paying patients come from the cities. Our Gift of Vision model is such that the rural people can be examined and screened at their doorsteps. Then they are taken on buses to the base hospital, where they get the best treatment.

We have our field workers and software called SERVIS (Sankara Electronic Remote Vision Information System) to make the rural outreach program run smoothly.

Now we are even making the local children volunteer as sight ambassadors. We give them a card and tell them, "Go and ask your grandfather or grandmother to read that from a meter away. If they can't, please ask them to come to us." It is selective publicity in the rural slums. The idea is to ensure the economically weaker sections avail our services.

We have chosen a need-based cause as almost one-fourth of the world's population of blind are in India. They live in darkness due to various reasons: non-affordability, non-availability, and inaccessibility.

Q Why are one-fourth of the world's blind in India?

A Multiple factors. One, our population is huge. In 80% of cases, blindness is caused by unoperated cataracts. Genetically too, Indians are predisposed to cataract formation. Lately, we are also seeing diabetic retinopathy. Lack of nutrition used to be a factor, but not anymore because of nutrition programs for children in many states. Yet, in some rural interiors and tribal hamlets, malnutrition persists.

Q You say that the spark to start Sankara came from the Kanchi Sankaracharya.

A Yes, His Holiness Sri Jayendra Saraswati was visiting Coimbatore in 1977 when the Kamakshi temple was being built here. He implored doctors to devote at least two hours a week to the poor. He also wanted a clinic for the poor in the temple. I came to know about that and ended up offering primary healthcare – examining the patient, and giving them medicine for 50 paise.

Later when our Coimbatore hospital was ready, I went to seek the blessings of the Paramacharya, Chandrashekarendra Saraswati, in Kanchipuram. He christened it Sankara. And it is his blessing taking us forward to this day.

Q How has Dr Radha Ramani contributed to Sankara's success?

A She has been my friend, philosopher, and guide. She is equally passionate about the cause. At every stage, she has

“For Vision 2030, we are keeping in mind not just the numbers, but also quality of care. For that single individual getting cataract surgery, it is his pair of eyes, his vision, and his future”

guided us, suggesting course corrections when required. She has brought in the compassion factor, arguing, "These poor people are coming to us, and we need to show them that extra dose of compassion."

Dr Radha says that we must treat even the staff as family. They need to be taken care of. Their children should have a good future too. The motivation to do good also comes from my father, Dr A. Ramanathan, who was one of the three doctors serving the poor during a plague in the area.

Q How does your program of empowerment of rural women work?

A Almost 80 per cent of our workforce is women. Empowerment of rural women is very close to my wife's heart and Dr. Radha runs that program. We identify secondary pass girls from poor rural families. Then they are enrolled in the Vision Care Technicians program; everything is paid for. Subsequently, they can specialize in roles like optometrists that we need in eye hospitals.

Q You were honored with Padma Shri by the Indian government in 2019. How did you feel? Does Sankara get along well with the powers that be?

A This national recognition boosts our morale, but the Pama Shri was for the entire Sankara family. We have good relations with the government of India and state governments as well. Ultimately, all understand that our service reaches the poorest of the poor. And we are apolitical. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated our hospital in Anand in 2008 when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Q Your favorite quote is: 'Life is a sojourn on this planet. Service is the rent we pay.' Please elaborate.

A When we start in life, first we want to have a comfortable living for ourselves and our family. Once we have achieved that to a certain level, we start looking around: can I do something for others? Indeed, we owe it to them. Only when everyone is happy, the community is happy, the country will flourish.

I also love to quote Emerson: "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."



Brief Bio

Dr. R.V. Ramani received his medical degree from Kasturba Medical College, Manipal/Mangalore. Along with his wife Dr. Radha Ramani, he established a clinic in Coimbatore in 1972 in memory of his late father, Dr A. Ramanathan. Realizing the need for voluntary initiatives in health care, he established the Sankara movement 47 years ago with the blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharya. Sankara has emerged as a 'world-class eye care institution with a social impact.'

Dr Ramani is a Major Donor and a Past President of Rotary Coimbatore Central – the World's first 100% Paul Harris Fellow Club.

'Gift of Vision' rural outreach eye care program initiated in the year 1990 as a Health Hunger Humanity Program of Rotary International and Rotary Coimbatore Central has been serving the rural population in 164 districts across 10 states in India.



Right man for the right job

In between making calls to potential donors to meet his target as the year was ending, Murali Krishnamurthy spoke to Parveen Chopra from his office in Milpitas, CA.



Murali Krishnamurthy Co-Founder & Executive Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA

by Swami Vivekananda that we became the largest eye care provider in the world. And I do fire up people.

I was shy in the beginning; other people pushed me onto the big stage. And it was our board member Divyogi Patel, another spiritual person, who persuaded me to take the role of Executive Chairman.

Q How did Swami Vivekananda inspire you?

A In my youth, I happened to read his 'Karma Yoga' book. My perspective about life changed because of his big thinking, and his love for India. He cared about the masses and women. Anything I do is God's work, I'm not the doer. I'm fortunate to be able to do it. Swami Vivekananda says, "Don't stand on a pedestal and throw money at beggars. Instead, bow down and give with humility because you are the beneficiary." That thought always keeps me on the ground.

Q Dr R.V. Ramani, SEF, India Founder, credits SEF, USA for the growth of the Sankara movement.

A Rajiv Chamraj, an MBA from MIT, who came to know about us in 2000, proposed to me the big Vision 20/20. I was not ready at the outset. Then I remembered Swami Vivekananda's teaching, "You are Divine. Think big." So, yes, the mission of 20 eye hospitals in India by the year 2020 gripped me. Sankara alone is racing to 17 hospitals now.

But when we approached the Sankara people in India with our plan to replicate their work throughout the country, they asked, "What do you know about building and running a hospital?" I said, "You have already done it." Then the question of funds came up.

The turning point came in 2002 when the Kanchi Sankaracharyas blessed our plan to build Sankara Eye Hospitals outside Coimbatore. So, his devotees bought land in Guntur, then in Shimoga, for the hospitals. Then, the Sankaracharya appealed to the chief ministers in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and we got prime land for our hospitals much below the market value. So, our work kept accelerating.

Q The other turning point must have been the strategy to seek Partner Hospitals.

A Yes, Sundar played a big role in that. I used to always say, why can't we go outside Sankara to grow fast? Around 2016, Sankara doctors told us, "You're growing too fast, and we are lagging in training, etc. We need to use AI, we need to use telemedicine." We said we cannot slow down as thousands of our volunteers and our 60,000+ donors are all looking forward to us delivering the big vision. So that's when Sundar said, "I can build a Partners Network in India." The second phase of our growth started from there.

Now we are focusing on the number of surgeries going forward. From the one million we want to reach by 2030, Partner Hospitals are committing to deliver 570,000.

Inspired by us, other eye foundations are coming up now and they want to copy us.

Q What has been your brother Sridhar's contribution to Sankara?

A He is the one who first visited the Coimbatore Hospital and returned home impressed. He is the one who brought in Ahmad Khushnood Qazi, a CPA, to do the paperwork for starting SEF, USA. Sridhar takes care of all paperwork; he ran Marketing and initially prepared all collaterals. Many of his IIT Madras batchmates are big donors. Sridhar was also very committed to his work at Intel. I, however, was able to devote a lot of time to Sankara even before I became Executive Chairman in 2008. So, Sridhar has been a more behind-the-scenes kind of person at Sankara, strategizing and pushing us to work hard to execute our plans. We want to see him fully active in Sankara.

Q What has been your wife's role in your work?

A Her name is Kala. Initially, when volunteers met at our house, she'd feed them. Then, one day our office manager quit, and she was assigned that job. She is always there to help if any volunteer asks.

She is low profile, but without her, it will be difficult for me to run Sankara.

"Muraliji always downplays his wife's role, but at Sankara, Kala is known as the BOSS. All the backend work is handled by her and her team. She is a perfectionist; as they say, when things work well, no one knows, and you only realize the work done when problems arise. In Kala's case, she has quietly propelled SEF to where we are today."

- An admiring Board Member

Q You always play up the role of volunteers.

A Yes, they are an equally important part of a charity. They are giving their time or their money. They are doing service. So, we must think of their progress, and their happiness. We have seen their children growing up. Now they are taking charge of many of our events.

Q In terms of fundraising, how much are you doing now and what are the targets going forward?

A As we speak, we are at \$9.6 million and the target for 2023 was \$12 million. By 2028 to build a capacity of one million surgeries, we have determined that we will need \$50 million for surgeries and another \$50 million for capital funding. 10,000 people donating \$2,000 every year for five years makes it \$100 million.

Q What can donors expect in return?

A We have evolved a detailed system. Anybody who gives a thousand dollars, their name goes on the hospital Wall of Founders. With \$5,000 you become a Golden Founding Donor. The Platinum Wall of Donors is \$10,000. With higher donations, people can have their names displayed in the consulting room, pharmacy, operation theater or the cafeteria. An entire ward can also be named after you. We have 60,000+ donors supporting us, and they support Capital projects and/or free eye surgeries. Those donating for surgeries get a report on who got the surgery on which day.



Brief Bio

Murali Krishnamurthy is Co-Founder and Executive Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA.

An IIT Trichy graduate, he earned a master's in Computer Science from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. He worked in the IT industry before taking up the SEF, USA position in 2009.

His God-given traits of friendship for all, organizing cycle tours, inspiring friends, multilingualism, and singing found the best fit at SEF. Pallavi, the music group he co-founded, performed at a fundraiser for SEF, USA.

Murali received the 'Distinguished Alumnus' award from NIT Trichy presented to him by India's ex-President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 2014.

Personable, passionate, affectionate... Many epithets come to mind when talking of Murali Krishnamurthy, who is at the helm of SEF, USA which he founded with his brother, K. Sridharan.

In Sridharan's words: "Murali has grown nicely as the face of the organization. One of his key qualities is how he motivates volunteers, treating them as family, listening to their problems, helping them, and sharing in their joy and celebrations. The culture of the organization has been built by Murali and his family. Murali has a rare ability to touch donors' hearts and has the unrelenting drive to accomplish the goals set for the organization."

Yes, his love is sprinkled with disarming candor and humor. He is wont to sing a stanza or two for you of a devotional or Bollywood song. That is his formula to win friends and influence people and meet the fundraising targets, which go up by a million or two every year.

Murali has this line about himself: "Initially I used to think that I am playing a major role in eliminating curable blindness, now it is very clear to me that I am the biggest beneficiary, and it is surely helping me grow spiritually." He now wants to help the volunteers and others benefit from this work and grow in their personal lives.

Q How satisfied are you with the growth of Sankara?

A It is like the water level slowly rising. You don't realize that you're going up and up and up. Now we are even more excited as we work on Vision 2030, which is very achievable by SEF, USA and Partner Hospitals. It gives me extreme satisfaction and inner joy. This profound journey has brought us spiritual progress. I'm calmer now. Earlier, when we inaugurated a new hospital, I would say, "Yay!" Now I say, "What next?"

It is a steady journey towards Vision 2030 now. So, we are executing whatever is needed.

Q Mr SV Balasubramaniam, SEF, India Chairman, says that you repeat one million eye surgeries, one million... like a mantra.

A Yes, I do that, but inside there is peace. Yet, I push every volunteer, so we reach our targets. I'm motivated myself and must keep motivating volunteers.

Q How much credit do you give yourself for Sankara's success?

A I have been very steadfast and stubborn about our big vision from the beginning and to leave a mark on the world. I learned from Swami Vivekananda: "Think big. You are Divinity." When we started from one hospital, nobody thought that we could grow so much. It has been my inner faith motivated

“Anything I do is God's work, I'm not the doer. I'm fortunate to be able to do it. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Don't stand on a pedestal and throw money at people. Instead, bow down and give with humility because you are the beneficiary’”



SEF, USA are masters in raising funds for our hospitals through donations big and small

S.V. Balasubramaniam, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Sankara Eye Foundation, India, spoke to **Parveen Chopra** via zoom from Coimbatore. Excerpts from the interview:

Q How did your association with the Sankara Eye Foundation start?

A I've been associated with Sankara from the very beginning. I was appreciative of the work being done by Dr. R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani. They are brilliant doctors and could have put up big private hospitals and created wealth. But they turned to social work and started a small clinic. Then, noticing that eye disease in India is most problematic, they decided to start an eye hospital as a service to society. When they started Sankara Eye Hospital in 1985 in Coimbatore under a trust, Dr Ramani suggested I take over its chairmanship. It is 40 years now, and it has been a rewarding journey we have undertaken together.

Q Have you donated to the Sankara Foundation?

A Yeah, to start with I did, for the building for the first eye hospital; it is named after my father. After that, we have been contributing as and when the need arises. Sankara is our project.

Q How do you manage so many roles, chairman of Sankara, India as well as of Bannari Amman Group, which must be a big responsibility?

A We do not do routine work. We have professionals and associates. In particular, Sankara is run by a group of people. Dr Ramani is the managing trustee. Under him are capable professionals like Dr Kaushik Murali (head of Medical Administration, Quality & Training) and Bharath Balasubramaniam (head of Operations and Administration). They are guided by the steering committee of senior personnel who have been with bigger companies.

Q What has been your role and contribution to Sankara's success?

A A big institution needs to set up policies and processes. I am associated with the total policy management of Sankara, India. We have a steering committee that meets once every three months. We discuss the future of the organization, both expansion and quality assurance. We look at many parameters such as: how many people are getting screened and how many of them get treated. We look up to and follow the highest standard available internationally.

Q What has been your vision for Sankara? How do you see it achieve Vision 2030?

A You have seen 40 years of Sankara's track record. Ten million lives have been impacted so far. Over 6 million rural people have been screened and 2.5 million free surgeries have been performed. 500,000 students have been examined for eye defects. They are all not just numbers. They are whose lives have been brightened for the rest of their lives.

Sankara will soon touch every region in India, directly through our hospitals or through Partner Hospitals. We are very clear about our mission, that no one should be needlessly blind in India.

Q To achieve Vision 2030 how many more hospitals will have to be built?

A Sankara is likely to build another 4-5 hospitals and we already have 14 partner hospitals. One million free surgeries annually by 2030 has always been a mantra for Mr Murali (Executive Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA). I do not doubt that we will reach that landmark with the quality of work being done by Sankara as well as the partner institutions, and the dedication and selfless work of Murali and other trustees of SEF, USA.



S.V. Balasubramaniam
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Sankara Eye Foundation, India

Q The expansion of Sankara's work in India was inspired by SEF, USA. What do you think of their role?

A SEF, USA is our partner. We applaud their role in raising funds. More so because we who are in India can see Sankara's work on the ground, and how it is benefiting so many patients, but people in America raising funds and donating to a faraway hospital is exceptionally motivating.

Indians should be grateful for the service of trustees and volunteers of the Sankara Foundation in America. It is their passion and motivation to donors that made us start hospital after hospital.

Yet, we have to look at quality, that's why we cannot expand Sankara to all the places in India. So, partner institutions have been evolved by the Sankara Foundation, USA, and it's working out very well.

Q Murali Krishnamurthi is not just the Executive Chairman of SEF, USA, he has also become Sankara's face in America.

A It was Mr P. Balasubramaniam, an associate of Sankara, India who insisted Murali and his brother Sridharan come to India, see the Sankara Hospital in Coimbatore, and look to funding further hospitals from the USA. SEF, USA was formed, and they were able to raise funds for the Guntur hos-

“Sankara will soon touch every region in India, directly through our hospitals or through Partner Hospitals. We are very clear about our mission, that no one should be needlessly blind in India”

pital first. We never looked back after that. About Murali's involvement, I can tell you that his only mantra, whether night or day, is one million, one million free eye surgeries.

Q Any initiative, innovation, or policy change at Sankara that you pushed for and implemented?

A We plan well in a united way. For all these hospitals, even finding the correct location is very important. Now we know that the hospital location must be suitable for the people to come and even for the doctors to live and work. Then, the plan for each hospital has to be different from others. At the same time, the quality of work that we render is equal to whichever Sankara hospital you go to in India. So, planning and streamlining processes is what I have been doing along with Dr Ramani.

Q Have you visited the USA to check out the great work SEF, USA is doing there?

A Initially when Sankara started in the USA, I used to come along with Dr Ramani to attend meetings. Now many of the trustees of SEF, USA have been visiting India, particularly when we inaugurate new hospitals – and we have 13 operational hospitals. We get a chance to have joint meetings with them. Therefore, there is no need for me to come often to the US.

Q A huge part of money raised for Sankara hospitals comes from America. Why not start a similar operation in India?

A We do get funds from people and institutions here, such as the Infosys Foundation, Bajaj Foundation, and Jhunjhunwala Foundation. In fact, for our hospital coming up in Varanasi, 50% is being contributed by Jhunjhunwala Foundation. Some big corporations, as part of their CSR activity, give us funding in a big way.

Yet, we cannot compare with SEF, USA, who have been masters in retail marketing, in getting small donations, which we have not been able to do in India and still have to learn from them. So, a big salute to SEF, USA.

Q In the modern, materialistic world, why should people support charities like Sankara?

A It is not for the benefit of a single person. It is for eradicating curable blindness. Look at how it helps the person. You give them not only sight but also enable them to earn money for the family. So, in essence, we are working for the improvement of society as a whole. Besides, giving gives you great joy and happiness.

We have to see that the whole society around us is happy. Then only we can be completely happy. Even before CSR was mandated by the government, many of the Indian corporations as well as individuals have been donating quite a lot -- putting up hospitals, schools, colleges, and so on. Everybody should think of helping others. That could be the aim of life. Society owes a lot to our less fortunate fellow beings.



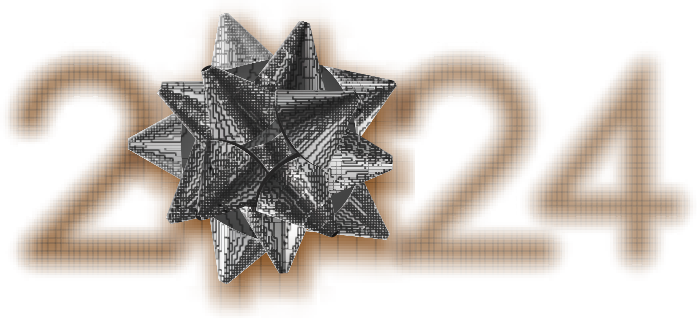
Brief Bio

Chairman of Sankara Eye Foundation, India, S.V. Balasubramaniam is the founder and Chairman of Bannari Amman Sugars Ltd based in Coimbatore with five sugar factories. The group also runs distilleries, granite units, and other businesses.

SVB also chairs the Bannari Amman Institute of Technology and is the former Chairman Board of Trustees of Arulmighu Dhandayuthapani Swami Thirukkoil (Abode of Lord Muruga) in Palani, Tamil Nadu, as well as chair of the Vethathiri Maharishi spiritual foundation. He was bestowed an Honorary Degree of 'Doctor of Science' by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

SVB is an Associate Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India as well as of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India.

Happy New Year!



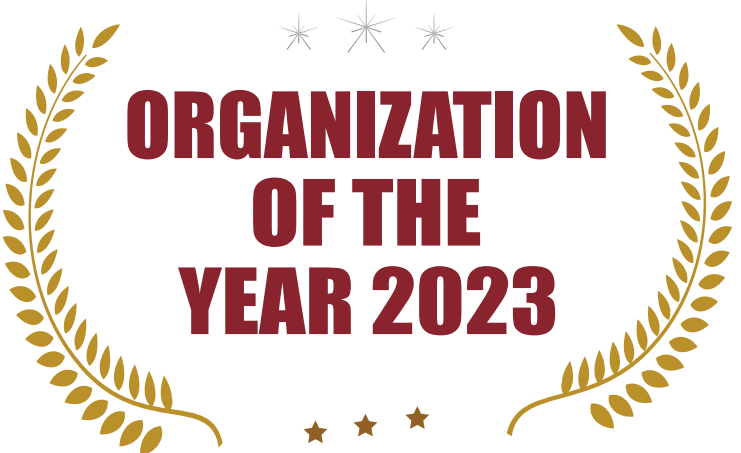
Heartiest Congratulations to

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DR. J. GANESH BHAT
FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL

DR. NIRMAL K. MATTOO
FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL



12 Sankara Eye Hospitals serving the poor in rural India

Since its inception in 1977, the hospitals of Sankara Eye Foundation, India have performed over 2.5 million free eye surgeries in 10 states that are covered by Sankara's Rural Outreach Program, the Gift of Vision. Operating on a self-sustainability model, each Sankara hospital in India provides a full range of eye care services. A typical Sankara hospital is a 225-bed state-of-the-art facility with 200 beds for patients receiving free service and 25 beds for paid patients. In 2024, a new community eye hospital is planned to be opened in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and major expansions of existing hospitals in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, and Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh are underway.



Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore

Sankara Eye Hospital on Sathy Road in Coimbatore is the mother institution. It was here that the legacy of affordable eye care for all was born.

- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 2,157,555
- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 839,718

- No. of Outpatients: 1,413,077. Paid Surgeries: 113,613
- No. of Beds: 500 (450/50)

Partners in Service

- Sri. G.V. Eswar & Family
- Sri. S.V. Balasubramaniam & Brothers
- Sri. N. Natraj & Family
- Sankara Eye Foundation- USA
- Sri. Dasi Budhrani & Family
- Tulsi Chanrai Family
- Rotary Coimbatore Central
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Mrs Hersha & Mr Hasu Shah
- Kikanis Charities
- Mr P M Narasimhan & Mrs Rajalakshmi N & Family
- Mrs Tehnaz & Mr Darius Bahadurji

Sankara Eye Hospital, Guntur

Established in 2004 with the divine blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharyas, a magnanimous donation of land from Janachaitanya Family and monetary support from TANA USA, this hospital in Guntur has become a premier eye care institution in Andhra Pradesh sought after by all sections of the society.

- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 840,769
- Free eye surgeries performed: 432,215
- Outpatients: 1,291,557; No. of Paid Surgeries: 146,375
- No. of Beds: 250 (200/50)

Partners in Service

- Jana Chaitanya Family
- Telugu Association of North America & TANA Foundation
- Dr. Raja Veeraiah Kodali & Mrs. Saila Kodali
- Sri. Jayaram Komati
- Dr. Nageswara Rao Mandava & Dr. Ramamohana Rao Kancherla
- Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA), California
- Tulsi Chanrai family
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Cloupia & Pari Networks

Sankara Eye Hospital, Bengaluru

This well-planned eye care hospital in India's Silicon Valley, built with the support of the Infosys Foundation and other donors, caters to the needs of Cosmopolitan Bengaluru as well as rural Karnataka. It received an NABH accreditation last year. It is equipped with superior technology to perform simple procedures like Refractions as well as advanced Lasik procedures.

- Free eye surgeries performed: 268,947
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 639,574
- No. of Outpatients: 1,164,661; No. of Paid Surgeries: 91,981
- No. of Beds: 250 (200/50)

Partners in Service

- Dr. P. J. Bagilthaya
- Sri. V. Venkata Reddy
- Sri. P. Dayananda Pai and Sri. P. Sathish Pai
- Infosys Foundation
- Association of Kannada Kootas of America
- Nandalal Mohanlal Jairani Charitable Trust
- Sri. BV Jagadeesh & Anuradha Jagadeesh Family Foundation
- Salarpuria Foundation
- ARM India
- Mission for Vision Trust - Jaslok Family

Sankara Eye Hospital, Shimoga

Located in Malnad, in central Karnataka, this is the only super specialty eye care facility in the region providing all services under one roof. Built on the banks of the Tunga River, this Hospital serves Central and Northern Karnataka.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 248,195
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 623,141
- Outpatients: 721,028; Paid Surgeries: 61,867
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Vision 2030: March to a Million

© 12 Sankara Hospitals

(As of September 2023)





Partners in Service

- Dr. Ashok Sonni & Dr. Rajeshwari Seetharamaiah Sonni
- Mr. M. K. Chanrai & Mr. N. G. Chanrai (Jaslok)
- Sri. P. Dayanada Pai & Sri. P. Satish Pai
- Association of Kannada Kootas of America
- Kannada Koota Northern California Katte
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Sight Savers International, UK

Sankara Eye Hospital, Krishnan Kovil (TN)

Opened in 2003 with the magnanimous support from Dr Vivekananda Raja and Family, Sankara Eye Hospital, Krishnan Kovil in Virudhunagar district is a tertiary eye care facility providing high-quality eye care for the 7 southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 458,195
- Free eye surgeries performed: 197,168
- No. of Outpatients: 605,094; Paid Surgeries: 22,964
- No. of Beds: 220 (200/20)

Partners in Service

- Sri. Dasi Budhrani & Family
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Dr. Vivekananda Raja & Brothers

Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand

Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand was started in 2008. A Super Specialty Eye Care Hospital, it is a cornerstone of eye healthcare in Gujarat. It has set a new benchmark in quality standards in eye care that include prevention, treatment, and eye health education for patients and their families.

- Free eye surgeries performed: 183,854
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 435,744
- No. of Outpatients: 240,078; Paid Surgeries: 20,975
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Partners in Service

- Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA)
- Charotar Leua Patidar Samaj of Bay Area, California
- Harshad & Nayna Uka
- Nilaxi & Ajit Patel
- Ravi & Shima Lal
- Babubhai & Sahraddben

Sankara Eye Hospital, Ludhiana

Sankara's Super Specialty eye care facility on the outskirts of Ludhiana was set up in 2012. This semi-urban set-up covers 16 districts of Punjab providing maximum coverage and is actively involved in engaging local communities and social organizations.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 78,914
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 478,779
- Outpatients: 175,375; No. of Paid Surgeries: 11,741
- No. of Beds: 120 (100/20)

Partners in Service

- Dr. Amarjit S. Marwah and Smt. Kuljit K. Marwah
- Sri. Amit Lal and Smt. Ruchika Lal
- Late. Gauri Lal and Bimla Lal
- Jaslok Community Eye Care
- Sri. Jessie Singh and Smt. Surinder Kaur
- Mission for Vision Trust
- Vascon Engineers Ltd
- Vipul Ltd

Sankara Eye Hospital, Kanpur

Sankara's state-of-the-art facility in Kanpur is one of a kind in terms of infrastructure and facilities offered. Located on the outskirts of the city, this is the only super-specialty eye hospital in the area with all facilities under one roof.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 93,258
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 248,050
- Outpatients: 140,790; No. of Paid Surgeries: 6,754
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Partners in Service

- Ms Tania Lal

Sankara Eye Hospital, Jaipur

Sankara's state-of-the-art facility in Jaipur had its foundation laid in 2016 -2017. This was the 10th Sankara Eye Hospital. This hospital in Pink City, Jaipur, Rajasthan is a 225-bed exclusive facility, wherein 200 beds are for Non-paying free patients and 25 beds for paying patients.

Data update since inception till Nov. 2023

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed : 39,420
- No. of Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 110,216
- No. of Outpatients: 221,439 / No. of Paid Surgeries: 10,208
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Partners in Service

- Purvi & Santosh Janardhan In memory of K P Janardanan
- Rajasthan Association of North America (RANA), New York, USA
- Dr. Dhanpat C Mohnot, M.D., Jodhpur, In Recognition of Smt. Sardar Devi Mohnot, Jodhpur
- Shri Kamal Nayan Bajaj Trust
- Smt. Indu & Sri. Jyoti Kumar Maheshwari
- Enpee Group

Sankara Eye Hospital, Indore

Indore, the cleanest city in India, saw the launch of Sankara Eye Hospital in 2020. This 225-bed Super Specialty Eye Hospital will serve 7 districts of Madhya Pradesh. Adi Sankara Bhagavatpadha met his Guru at Omkareshwar near Indore. The hospital serves the people of the state irrespective

of their socio-economic status.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 16,296
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 49,179
- No. of Outpatients: 27,537; Paid Surgeries: 3,780
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Partners in Service

- Agarwal Group – Balaji Sewarth Vinod Agarwal Foundation
- Gopesh Kumar and Prerna Gupta Family
- Sri Shanti Agrawal - Chabcharia
- Shuthibai Shardadevi P & D Trust
- Sri Yekollu Mohan Rama Reddy & Smt Yekollu Sakuntala
- Mr Yeturu Venkara Satyasena Reddi & Mrs Yeturu Saroja Reddi

Sankara Eye Hospital, Panvel

Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, who is commonly referred to as India's Warren Buffett, was keen to give back to society by constructing a free eye-care hospital. He joined hands with Dr. R.V. Ramani and the Sankara Eye Foundation along with other like-minded people to form The R Jhunjhunwala Sankara Eye Hospital (TRJSEH) Trust to serve the people of Maharashtra, rural and urban, and established a not-for-profit super specialty eye hospital in Panvel.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 13,379
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 49,423
- No. of Outpatients: 13,811; Paid Surgeries: 1,002
- No. of Beds: 100

Partners in Service

- With The Blessing of Guru Ramdass Ji, Sardar Jagjit Singh Chadha & Sardarni Tripet Kaur Chadha
- In Memory of Prof. KC Mathew and in Honor Of Mrs Annamma Mathew Of Chennai
- Wen Giving Foundation
- Naraindas Morbai Budhrani Trust
- Usha & Radhakrishnan Sundar
- Rameshchandra Gulabchand Kacholia, Lata Rameshchandra Kacholia & Jagdish Gulabchand Kacholia
- Mission for Vision

Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad

Inaugurated in April 2023, with the blessings of Kanchi Sankaracharyas, this is the 13th Sankara hospital chain that has emerged as a pan-India movement providing high-quality, high-volume eye care to everyone irrespective of their socio-economic status.

- No. of Free eye surgeries performed: 1,128
- Free eye screening done in Outreach Camps: 5,054
- No. of Outpatients: 9,018; Paid Surgeries: 404
- No. of Beds: 225 (200/25)

Partners in Service

- In loving memory of Dr. M.V. Jagannadha Row Superintendent, Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital, 1976 & Mrs. M. Padmavati
- Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA), California
- Ramya & Harsha Pamulaparthi

Block Donors

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- » In loving memory of Mr T P Jhunjhunwala

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Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad

- » Phoenix Foundation

- Ram & Indira Reddy Kalakoti
- In memory of Shri C. Shyam Mohan & Shrimati C. Indira Mohan
- In honor of Shri Karempudi Krishna Reddy & Shrimati Karempudi Swarnakumari
- Chirag and DNF
- In memory of Late Smt.Vedavathi Chintamaneni and Late Sri. Krishna Rao Chintamaneni
- In memory of Dr YR Reddy
- In memory of G Sudhakar Reddy IFS

Sankara City Hospital, Coimbatore

Sankara's City Center located in R.S. Puram established in 2011, is an affordable Super Specialty Eye Care Hospital. It is ideally located to cater to the city's residents and serves as a Referral Centre for the main Sankara Eye Hospital at Sathy Road.

- No. of Outpatients: 249,412
- No. of Paid Surgeries: 12,453
- No. of Beds: 11



Regaining her sight and livelihood

Shanthi, SEF, USA's millionth surgery patient, was then 35 and tended to a family of six. That may not seem extraordinary until you learn that she was the second wife of Anbumani, a physically challenged, unemployed man. She raised four children - two of her own and two of Anbumani's first wife. She is illiterate and works at the loom, weaving her livelihood day by day. Her entire family lived off her meager income.

Five months before her surgery, Shanthi attended a Sankara camp at Ponnammappettai, a suburb of Coimbatore, and was diagnosed with a cataract in the right eye. She was operated at the Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore. She returned to her daily chores and all seemed to be going well until her left eye also developed a cataract.



Shanthi, a weaver tending to a family of 6, was Sankara's one millionth free eye surgery patient.

She quickly came to Sankara's camp, and her left eye was operated on in March 2013.

"When one finds it hard to find care and love amongst family and friends, Sankara has given me all that and much more, in fact, a

bright future for me and my entire family", Shanthi said. Her resilience was obvious to anyone who spoke to her. After the successful surgery, Shanthi was able to go back to work and provide for her family.

A Father's Unconditional Love

Shanker is the proud father of Chhoti Kumari, a 13-year-old who loves biking and acing her math exams in school. But all this became a distant reality when, in

2022, her eyesight started diminishing. The writing on the blackboard had become blurry.

One day, she fell off her bicycle and had to be rushed to hospital.

After a quick eye exam, the local doctor asked her parents to take her to the city for a proper eye check-up. Several trips to Patna and about Rs 80,000 later, there was still no solution to the problem.

The neighbors were discouraging, "Why waste so much money on a girl child?"

But Shanker was determined as he did not differentiate between his son and daughter. Though a small farmer, he was ready to spend whatever he could to help his daughter regain her vision. A social worker asked him to try out Akhand Jyoti Hospital, 45 km from Patna. Chhoti Kumari was diagnosed with cataracts in both her eyes.

Today, after the surgery, she has more than 50% of her vision back. And soon, the rest will be restored! She is raring to return to school to ace her math exams again.



Chhoti Kumari, seen with her parents, had two cataracts removed at Akhand Jyoti Hospital, SEF's partner hospital in Bihar.

Maaji Dekh Sakhte Ho?

Twenty minutes' walk to the eye camp, and 45 km away to the eye hospital. Could a 74-year-old woman make it?

For someone who had thought she had gone permanently blind, Sabra Khatun, from one of the most impoverished villages in remote Bihar, was surprised when she made her first journey to the eye camp organized by the local politician and social worker named Jeetendra Kumar.

"Maaji, you can get your eyesight back. It's just a matter of a small operation."

Sabra Khatun walked back down the

dirt road to her little bamboo hut, led by her granddaughter Neeta, all the while thinking whether this was even worth it.

Neeta coaxed her to go for it.

"Dadi, think about it! You can do your gardening again!"

Her whole family of sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and her husband rallied behind her.

"Daai, you can stitch me a frock again."

"Maa, you can cook my



Ageing Sabra Khatun had to be coaxed by her family to get her eyes operated on.

favorite litti-chokha."

The distance to be covered was 45 km, and 3 days away from her family.

But the longer distance was to overcome her fear. Patel and his helpers came to pick Sabra Khatun in Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital's camp bus.

And three days later, Sabra Khatun had her vision and life back!

As the optometrist at the next checkup asked, "Maaji, dekh saktey ho?" Sabra Khatun shyly replied, "Sab kuch!"

Poignant Patient Stories

Sight-restoring cataract surgery makes patients self-confident, self-dependent, and productive members of society again.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Pinky, 23 years old, sat crying at the Government Community Service Centre, Mahadaleshwar (Madhya Pradesh) as she awaited the Sankara optometrist to give further instructions.

Daughter of doting parents, Pinky had gradually lost vision in both her eyes three years ago.

While she loved cooking and keeping house, she was now feeling handicapped and sat around the house listlessly, awaiting some ray of hope to enter her life.

Her parents were equally worried as Pinky was now of marriageable age, and finding a suitable groom for a blind girl was next to impossible.

The optometrist called out to Pinky for another vision test.

She wiped her tears and listened carefully to him.

He assured her that they would be able to operate on one of her eyes where a mature cataract was detected and was easily curable.

Pinky burst into fresh tears, scared of the word "operation".

The nursing staff and her father



Pinky was operated at SEF's Indore hospital.

er pacified her and spoke to her about her vision being back in just two days.

Still a bit shaken, Pinky got into the Sankara bus headed for the Indore Eye Hospital.

Within the next 16 hours, the surgery was done, and Pinky with a bandaged eye was wheeled out of the OT for post-op recovery.

The operation was a success. By the next morning, the bandage was off, black glasses were on and a tearful Pinky bid us goodbye.

Only, this time, the tears were those of happiness!

Nirmala - dependent no more!

Alone at 70, Nirmala Mahatme lives in a small cottage near the village of Banoti Gaon in Maharashtra.



Nirmala had her vision restored at SEF's Panvel hospital.

For the last couple of years, she was unable to see clearly.

She was losing her vision.

It affected her work, her farming, and even her daily activities.

Her children, now grown up with their own families, live far away in the cities, themselves trying to make a decent living.

All alone, Nirmala did not know who to turn to for help.

When Sankara's eye check-up camp was announced in her village, Nirmala's neighbor came up to her and asked her to enroll.

At the camp, Nirmala was told she had a cataract and would require surgery at Sankara's Eye Hospital in Panvel.

She did not have money to travel to Panvel, nor did her eyesight permit her to undertake such a journey.

Sankara volunteers explained to her that a van was ready at the camp site to transport all cataract patients to Panvel Hospital. They also explained that the travel, surgery, and hospital stay with food would be completely free.

Nirmala required no more convincing. After all, her eyesight was her means to survival. She quickly packed up a couple of belongings and happily boarded the van.

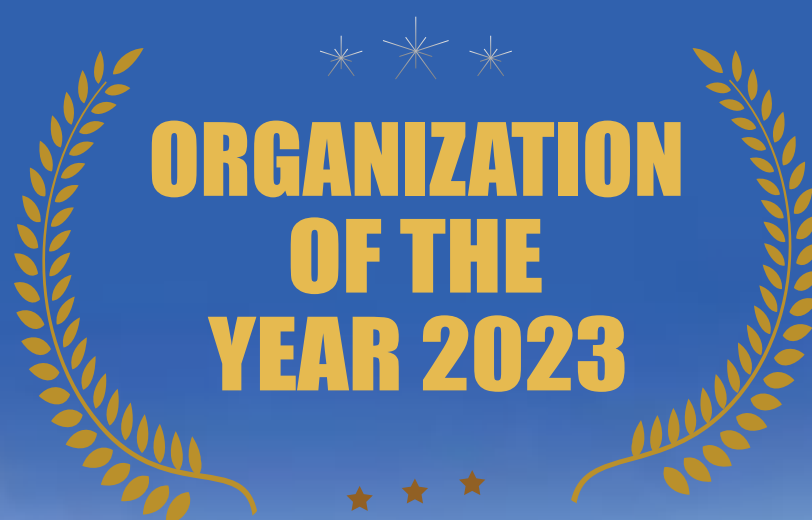
Today, she can see well, has got her job back, and recommends the eye check-up to all her friends in the village!

Happy New Year!

*May each day of the New Year be filled with
warmth, peace, and cherished moments...*

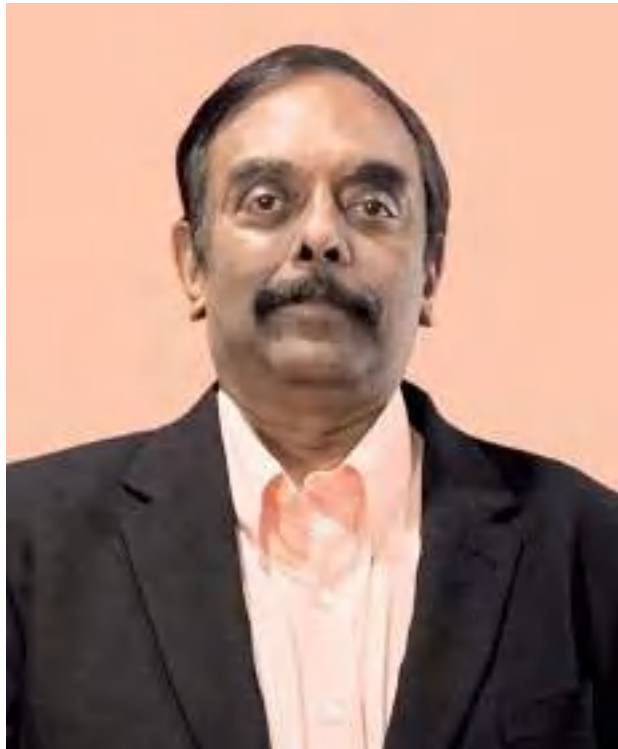
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FALGUNI & CHINTU PATEL



**Sridharan
Krishnamurthy**
Co-Founder and President
SEF, USA

Q How did you get involved with Sankara?

A I had never heard about Sankara before my uncle, the late Mr P. Balasubramaniam, told me about it. He knew Dr R.V. Ramani, a fellow Rotarian, and greatly inspired by his work, began volunteering at the Coimbatore Eye Hospital. But every month he saw them struggle to meet the expenses, so he came after myself and my brother to raise funds in the US to help the Sankara Hospital. I was very busy at the time at Intel where I had a huge team. And Murali was busy with his light music and other activities.

Our lives changed when I went to India in 1997 for an Intel Conference in Bangalore. Uncle Balasubramaniam pulled me to Coimbatore where Dr Ramani took me around the hospital. Listening to the patients, and looking at how the staff treated them, was very touching. The patients thought I was one of the doctors and started blessing me in Tamil.

I was impressed for another reason. My daughter was born in a fancy hospital named El Camino in Mountain View, CA. I thought a charity hospital would be of a low standard but the Coimbatore Hospital was cleaner than El Camino! The equipment too was as good or even better. I asked the paramedics how they kept the hospital so clean while catering to poor patients. They said the patients are educated on the importance of cleanliness and taken care of like family.

I asked Dr Ramani, "What made you give up your successful career to do this volunteer work full-time? What keeps you going?" He replied, "With a 10-minute surgery, we can change a person's life completely. What more do you need to get satisfaction in life?"

Indeed, a dependent becomes independent. A child's life will change forever for the rest of their years. A person can become a breadwinner again when eyesight comes back.

I was convinced. I had found a purpose in life. I came back and talked to Murali, my elder brother. He said, "If you are convinced, then let us start."

To do the paperwork, I spoke to my neighbor, Mr. Ahmad Khushnood, a CPA from Pakistan. Securing the 501-c-3 approval, we officially launched the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in 1998.

Diviyogi Patel, a Board member, suggested that Murali take up Sankara work as a full-time job. Murali was not completely sure, since the family members were concerned about charity pay and loss of benefits. But Murali wanted to do it and worked on convincing everyone. In the end, he accepted and became Executive Chairman, and resigned from the SEF board to keep things clean. I am still a volunteer and am the Board President.

I was from the corporate background at Intel and wanted someone on the board with start-up and corporate experience. We may be a charity, but we wanted corporate-style governance, with compliance and processes. So, we invited Sundar Radhakrishnan, a friend and Murali's classmate from his engineering college, with a background in startups. Sundar gave his consent only after visiting the Sankara Hospital in Coimbatore. He donated a bus right away under the name of SEF, USA, not his name.

“My goal is to do full-time volunteer work for Sankara. I am giving myself one or two more years to stabilize the startup I founded. Then I will devote myself fully to Sankara because it gives me soul satisfaction”

Q SEF, USA started raising funds by doing small events. How did you hit the big time?

A Our volunteers' hard work and dedication paid off with Dandia events like the one we did at the Santa Clara Convention Center. We initially feared that many other organizations also do similar events in the Bay Area, and we may not attract the crowd. But we succeeded because we know how to organize events, and how to take care of the donors or the attendees. For example, at our first light music event, the theater was on top of a hill, so we had our volunteers stationed at the parking lot taking people up in cars. We are also disciplined, always starting on time.

Around this time, Diviyogi Bhai said, "Why don't we bring up a big Bollywood music event now?" And that was it. From the Bay Area, we first expanded to Seattle where volunteers used to do small events like bridge tournaments. Once we started bringing big artists, we would take them to multiple cities. Our other chapters in Austin, Dallas, SoCal, New Jersey, Houston, etc., are also very good at organizing successful events.

Even though local volunteers in each city take charge of the event, we support them from the California base with marketing, and the major logistics. One of us would go to each city for the event.

Q How do you manage to get so many volunteers to work for Sankara?

A The events have been a conduit to get volunteers. Events also energize volunteers that they have something

to do together. Incidentally, Padma Parthasarathy, who's our board member and CFO, attended our concert, was impressed with our story, and started volunteering. Initially, meetings to plan an event used to happen at my house or Murali's house in San Jose. All our volunteers' families would get involved like ours. My daughter, Sowmya, went to India to volunteer at a Sankara hospital.

Q What do you look forward to at Sankara?

A My goal is to become a full-time volunteer for Sankara. I am giving myself one or two more years at Zan Compute, the startup I co-founded, to stabilize it. I want to devote myself fully to Sankara because it gives me soul satisfaction.

Q You contend that you want to grow SEF as one of the top organizations working to eradicate blindness. Isn't it one already?

A It is, but the job is not done yet. Because there are so many more people, so many more places where we have to go. Vision 2030 is an immediate goal to do one million free, sustainable eye surgeries every year. That is a good goal because at least one million new cases are added every year.

With other organizations joining us, I believe we can eliminate the backlog and have enough facilities to take care of new cases. Then we can say, we have eliminated curable blindness. That's the level to which we want to get India.

But, as an institution, I don't think SEF should stop with India. It needs to grow outside also because the problem of blindness is worldwide.

We are also on the lookout for a second level of leadership. In India, at the Sankara hospitals, they already have a second line in place. They also employ a strategic initiative called Balance Scorecard. It looks at customers, internal finance, marketing, etc, as a whole and tells you how you are doing. All Sankara hospitals are evaluated at year-end, and whoever scores the best gets an across-the-board bonus.

In terms of processes and systems, Sankara India is well set up. We are trying to do the same with our partner hospitals as well.

Q SEF, USA has only one office in the Bay Area. How about opening one on the East Coast?

A In good time, sure. First, we need to grow all the other chapters to be as strong as the one in California.

The spirit of Sankara and the success of Sankara is due to the dedication and determination of our volunteers and a single-minded focus on what difference it makes to people in India.

We tell people here, "When you travel to India, please go visit one of the Sankara hospitals or one of our Partner Hospitals. Then you will know the impact your work has?"



Brief Bio

Sridharan Krishnamurthy is the co-founder and President of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and focuses on marketing and governance for it. For his work at SEF, he was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, and the Global Leadership Award by the PAN-IIT organization.

Sridharan did civil engineering at IIT Madras and earned a double master's in chemical engineering and computer science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He also got an executive MBA from Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA.

He worked at Intel in System Software for over 26 years, where his team developed many software products. He received the Intel Achievement Award for his work and has many issued patents. He is a partner and chief product officer at Zan Compute, an Internet of Things startup in Silicon Valley.

Wishing you a year filled with prosperity and financial growth...

Happy New Year!

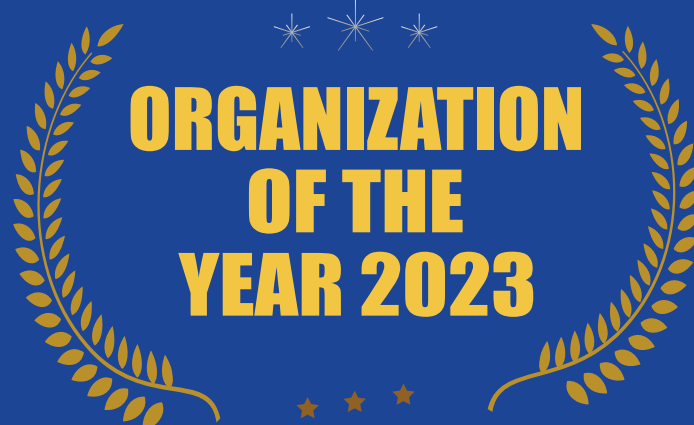
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Financial self-sufficiency model is the building block of Sankara's expansion

Radhakrishnan Sundar has been active in SEF, both in the US and India. He spearheaded the Partner Hospitals initiative to build capacity, which he details in this interview he gave from Mumbai.

Q You enjoy a unique vantage point having been active in SEF, both in the US and India. What has been your unique contribution?

A I have contributed significantly to its fundamentals and strategy. I was in the US when Sankara's initial meetings took place at my office.

We have been clear about Sankara's financial self-sufficiency as a building block for its expansion. I expressed it first when we formulated our Vision 20/20 in 2003-4. It is doable, I said, to build 20 eye hospitals in 20 years. But then you cannot keep funding their operations indefinitely.

I'd take credit for driving home that point for SEF, India and implemented the self-sufficiency clause. I am part of the Steering Council of SEF, India, and have had the opportunity to shape some of their decisions, making self-sufficiency a cornerstone, which became an integral part of the planning of all our hospitals. Our able team in SEF, India has successfully executed this strategy.

It's not easy to scale from one eye hospital to twelve hospitals. Neither was it easy in the US to scale up and raise money for such expansion. But both Sankara India and Sankara US did a great job in tandem, each working to their strength.

For donations, Sankara India was a little hesitant to approach the big banner names. I was able to do that job because I was based out of Mumbai then. I used my connections and my efforts to bring that dimension into the organization.

Q How did you happen to spearhead the Partner Hospitals plan?

A We have driven this initiative from India since its conception in 2015 and today, we are working with 14 Partner Hospitals.

What happened was that SEF, India was fully stretched running 12 hospitals all over India and we had underestimated the effort needed for one institution to run so many hospitals. Our Vision 20/20 to raise 20 eye hospitals by 2020 was in jeopardy.

So, we told the India team, "We have two choices, either say that we have done well, but we will not get to 20 hospitals or we continue with outside Partners." I offered to spearhead the effort and find the right Partners as I was based in India at the time. I was lucky that we got some good Partners, got some good breaks, and were able to build a team and put up all the necessary processes.

Partner Hospitals was kind of a startup we got rolling quickly and focused on the states where Sankara did not have a presence. We follow a step-by-step model with initially giving funds to perform free surgeries for 8-9 months. We make our fundamentals clear to them, that they have to be operationally self-sufficient and follow the quality model of Sankara. Once we feel comfortable with their quality of work, we partner with them.

Out of many, we selected a few to fund and signed up Partners in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and Assam. After they come on board, we continue to monitor them, through monthly and quarterly reviews. Once established, we ask them if they wanted to expand for which we would help fundraise. It's a progression; some were happy with just getting surgery money and some went for expansion.

Covid was a blessing in disguise. We had about nine Partners at the time and all of them, even Sankara hospitals, were panicking as no free surgeries were performed because they could not go to the villages nor did they have any paid patients. With zero revenue and zero work, what do we do with all our staff, they asked. But thanks to our US donors, we created a payroll protection program for them.



Radhakrishnan Sundar
Board member,
Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA
Member, Steering Council of SEF, India

“To eliminate blindness in India, SEF, USA has taken on a tremendous goal to do a million eye surgeries in a year. Our Vision 2030 strategy also aims to inspire our Partner Hospitals and other Eye Care Institutions to step up their game”

The founders of these hospitals were very grateful, saying, "You are an all-weather Partner to us." and that helped us to gain their confidence.

In 2021, we launched our next phase, and at a summit in Mumbai, we put a challenge to our Partners. From performing 200,000 free surgeries we need to get to 1 million free surgeries a year. The combined capacity of all Sankara and Partner Hospitals at the time was 400,000. At the second summit, we started getting expansion proposals. The fact that Partners started marching to the million goal excited Sankara to start marching too. Our Vision 2030 plan now is for Sankara to perform 425,000 and partners to perform 575,000 free surgeries a year by 2030.

With the 2030 plan in place, we still need to raise big money. So, I tell some of the high-net-worth individuals I'm connected with, that today if you write me a check for \$10 million, I know how to use it. If you write me a hundred million check, I know how to use that too. I am confident we will succeed because no good movement ever fails for lack of money.

Q Do the Partner Hospitals follow the 80:20 model of Sankara - 20% paid surgeries funding the 80% free surgeries?

A 80:20 is a guide, not mandatory. Even at Sankara hospitals, it is 70:30, or close. For the Partner Hospitals, the mandate is that they must be operationally self-sufficient. If you are in a rural area, you may achieve 67:33. What we will not accept is 50:50 because that changes the culture of the organization. We want the charity part to be significantly larger than the paid part.

Q How much of the funds supporting Sankara and Partner Eye Hospitals come from the Sankara Foundation in the US?

A I would say, 60-70% comes from the US.

Q Why not start a fundraising operation in India?

A I'm not saying money is not available in India but people who are good at running hospitals are not good at fundraising. Someone else has to do the job for them. I have done my bit, but I don't live in India all the time. Setting up a fundraising arm of Sankara in India will involve much legal rigmarole.

Q You have donated money to Sankara...

A Yes, I'd say I am one of the donors who have given good sums. I have given both to the Sankara Foundation in the US and in India. I continue to give because they do good work. I also support other charities. Now there is the Hi 5 Youth Foundation, which I've started with my wife, Usha, to teach basketball to underprivileged children in India to empower them.

Q How do you view Sankara's Vision 2030?

A This incredible March to a Million, aiming to get to one million free eye surgeries a year by 2030, has become a big motivator for me. Starting to work with our Partner Hospitals opened my eyes. Whether it is Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, or West Bengal, the problem of blindness is huge. Some people are blind in both eyes, which is criminal because all you need to do is two cataract surgeries. Each surgery takes about 15 minutes, costs under \$30, and has a 99% success rate. There is no reason even one person needs to be blind.

What moves me is the blindness problem is huge and the existing resources fall short. Even we, at Sankara, have to build more hospitals to double the capacity to be able to reach one million. The need is to do six million free surgeries a year to eliminate blindness in India. Vision 2030 aims to inspire our Partner Hospitals to do more, and other Eye Care Institutions also to step up their game.



Brief Bio

R. Sundar serves on the board of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and sits on the Steering Council of Sankara Eye Foundation, India. He works extensively both in the USA and India, driving Vision 2030.

Sundar and his wife Usha are founders of Hi 5 Youth Foundation – a unique sports NGO, running a basketball excellence program, training over 4000+ underprivileged/tribal boys and girls in 40+ centers, in eight states of India.

Sundar is co-founder of Mastek Ltd. (a public company in India), one of the early global IT services companies in India, and Majesco – an insurance platform company.

He has spent equal time between India and Silicon Valley over the last 30 years – and is engaged extensively with technology startups as well as the social sector in both countries.

Sundar has an MBA from IIM, Ahmedabad, and Electrical and Computer Engineering degree from REC (Regional Engineering College), Trichy in Tamil Nadu.



There is no better gift you can give than the gift of vision

Divyogi Patel, COO and board member of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, shares his inspiring odyssey of vision, compassion, and transformation.



Divyogi Patel with his wife, Bina Patel

Mr. Divyogi Patel has been an indispensable figure in the Sankara Eye Foundation (SEF), USA, since its inception. He shares his extraordinary journey of dedication, collaboration, compassion, and tireless efforts to bring the gift of vision to the rural poor in India.

Divyogi's association with SEF, USA commenced serendipitously when Kala Murali, Sankara's long-standing office manager, volunteer, and the wife of its founder, Murali, visited his store while seeking promotional items for SEF's inaugural event in 1999. "I remember being deeply moved and tearing up after watching Sankara's first video and hearing that 'there is no better gift you can give than the gift of vision,'" recalls Divyogi. "I decided, on the spot, not to charge the organization for the work, considering it my donation. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a truly transformative journey, with no turning back."

Shortly after their initial encounter, Muraliji insisted that Mr. Divyogi join the SEF, USA Board of Trustees, which at the time consisted of only two other members, Sridharan and Sundar. Together, they bore witness to remarkable growth, with nearly six-figure donations within the first year. Soon, they embarked on a trajectory of doubling donations year after year.

Around 2002-03, fueled by the fundraising momentum and the overwhelming support from donors and volunteers, SEF, USA were inspired to replicate Sankara's Coimbatore eye hospital model across India. Driven by a grand vision, they aimed to expand the incredible work of Dr. R.V. Ramani and Dr. Radha Ramani. One of their

devoted volunteers, Rajiv Chamraj, proposed the goal of achieving "Vision 20/20 by the year 2020." Consequently, they embraced the broader mission to eliminate needless blindness in India. By 2015-16, Sankara had established 11 hospitals throughout India.

Raising millions is no small feat, especially in a country like India, with its bureaucratic hurdles and infrastructural challenges. What sets SEF apart is its self-sustaining financial model, designed to reduce reliance on philanthropy in the long run. This model allocates 20% of resources from paid patients to cross-subsidize eye care for the 80% of rural patients who receive it for free, ultimately rendering each hospital self-sufficient within five to seven years.

Now, SEF is actively working toward its

next ambitious vision – "Vision 2030: March to a Million." This audacious goal aims to perform one million free eye surgeries annually by 2030. Recognizing the need for additional partners to successfully expand across India and extend coverage to northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, SEF's visionary board member, Sundar, and his team in Bombay embarked on a quest to identify partners and understand their unique requirements.

Today, thanks to the boundless love and generosity of donors and volunteers, SEF has evolved into the world's largest free eye care provider, operating 26 hospitals in 15 states, serving a staggering 444 million people, and performing over 350,000 free surgeries in 2023.

Sankara DNA: Bollywood Events

SEF, USA's fundraising efforts have become synonymous with hosting grand Bollywood-style musical events and galas. Divyogi spearheaded these endeavors and further capitalized on their potential by organizing high-profile Bollywood events. These star-studded gatherings, featuring renowned artists such as Shreya Ghoshal, Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, and Sonu Nigam drew large audiences, providing SEF with a plat-

form to showcase its charitable work. Notably, SEF's existing donors often brought their star power to Sankara galas. For instance, at last year's New York gala, the keynote speaker was Jay Chaudhry, Chairman of Zscaler and the richest Indian American. The resounding success of these events significantly bolstered SEF's visibility and fundraising efforts.

More recently, Divyogi assumed the official role of Chief Operating Officer (COO) to help guide SEF through its rapid expansion, with the ambitious goal of raising \$100 million by 2030. Despite never having worked for anyone else in his life, he shifted his entire focus to Sankara, dedicating himself wholeheartedly to the cause. He states, "I accepted the role of COO purely because Sankara is experiencing tremendous growth, and Murali needed assistance."

As a devout follower of Sathya Sai Baba, Divyogi truly embodies Baba's core message: 'Love all, Serve all.' He also embodies the spirit of SEF and its unwavering commitment to eradicating needless blindness in India.



Brief Bio

Divyogi Patel has been a leading member of SEF, USA's Board since 1999 and assumed the role of COO last year, underscoring his deep commitment to philanthropy and to SEF. He has played a pivotal role in orchestrating SEF's mega events and spearheaded the foundation of Sankara Eye Hospital in Anand, Gujarat.

Born in Uganda, Divyogi spent his formative years in India. A graduate of Lancaster University in England, he moved to the SF Bay Area in 1994 and established several small businesses. He is a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and is on the Board of Sai Global Mission which supports activities relating to health, education, and nutrition in India.

Former Board members reflect on Sankara's impact

Girish Muckai

Former SEF, USA Board member



I was fortunate to be a volunteer for over a decade at Sankara Eye Foundation, USA - first as booth coordinator, then as event coordinator, and finally on the board. Our collective ability to dream big, set an achievable and impactful vision, fundraise effectively, and motivate and support the incredible team in India is unparalleled and enviable.

Four things stand out about SEF:

1. A bold vision and the mission to eradicate curable blindness.
2. A growing number of donors support every initiative due to their confidence in SEF's ability to march forward.
3. The ability of the SEF team in India to execute impeccably.
4. An amazing group of highly dedicated, motivated, talented, and able volunteers.

Having the ability to see is one of the basic human rights and SEF is on a mission to bring this to each and everyone.

Anil Lal

Former SEF, USA Board member



Anil and Suman Lal

blindness in India as possible.

Though I have worked with a multitude of NGOs in both mainstream as well as the Indian diaspora, I have not encountered any other organization or group of leaders like SEF. Never in any meeting, anyone tries to exert pressure on a decision by using their position on the Board. Each leader treats all members as well as volunteers with due respect.

My involvement with SEF, USA started simply with a contribution in 2002 and blossomed into getting inducted to their Board in 2011.

I have always been impressed with the laser focus of our mission: Helping to cure as much curable

C.N. Srivatsan

Steering Council member of SEF, India



I have been involved with the SEF, USA for two decades. What strikes me most about it, apart from the noble mission of eradicating curable blindness in India, is the passion and fervor with

which the office bearers and volunteers work for the cause. All of them have their jobs, families, and responsibilities. Yet, they find time to volunteer. I feel the noble cause draws them together.

The target of one million free eye surgeries in India every year by SEF together with Partner Hospitals in India is a humongous task for both sides - SEF, USA, and the hospitals in India. But looking at their track record, I am sure it will happen.



Board of Trustees steers Sankara's mission and its execution

The Board of Trustees of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA holds the crucial responsibility of overseeing the foundation's overarching direction, steering its high-level navigation, and devising comprehensive strategies for their effective implementation.

Four members of the Board delve into their motivation and passion for the Sankara cause and the roles they have been playing in achieving its objectives through strategic planning and decision-making.



Anju Desai
Board Member

At SEF, USA it's all about volunteers. Their dedication and passion for the Sankara are admirable. We are not just an organization but a close-knit family working towards a common mission.

My involvement, from being a volunteer to serving as a board member, reflects a deep commitment to the cause of providing vision care to those in need.

The emphasis on transparency and accountability, especially in financial matters, is crucial for any charitable organization. It's heartening to see that SEF, USA not only recognizes the trust placed in it by donors but also actively works to honor that trust through responsible and efficient use of funds.

The success story of Sankara Eye Hospital, Anand in Gujarat, and my involvement in overcoming challenges during its completion showcases the organization's resilience and determination. The collaborative effort, involving not just the Gujarati community but also people from diverse backgrounds, speaks to the universality of SEF's mission and its ability to unite people for a common cause.

Passing the baton to the new generation and encouraging them to take charge is a forward-looking approach for me and SEF. It ensures the continuity and evolution of SEF's mission, bringing in fresh perspectives and ideas to address new challenges.

The strategic decision to take responsible risks, such as partnering with like-minded organizations, reflects an adaptive and innovative approach to scaling impact. It's encouraging to see SEF exploring avenues to reach its ambitious goal of one million free sustainable surgeries by 2030 and, ultimately, a mission to eradicate curable blindness.

The SEF story and my involvement with SEF are not just about building hospitals or conducting surgeries, it is also about building a community, creating a legacy, and impacting the lives of those less fortunate. I invite all of you to join SEF MOVEMENT and wish SEF continued success in our endeavors to bring the gift of vision to those in need.

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Padma Parthasarathy
CFO and Board Member

I have been associated with the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA for 24 years, almost since its inception.

In 1999, my husband and I attended a flute concert event hosted by SEF, USA. We were very impressed by the cause and signed up as volunteers for one of their initial drives to raise funds for 2,000 eye surgeries. It has been a humbling experience to see the organization grow into what it is today.

I started taking care of the accounts and working with external auditors in 2000 and that made me grow into the role of CFO (Chief Financial Officer). Even though I am an engineer by profession, it has been a great learning experience for me to take up the challenge of doing the financials of the organization.

Besides financials, I have also been involved with strategy, planning, and growth of the organization. I am driven by the vision of the organization and the energy of the volunteers to achieve 1 million surgeries annually by 2030. We have had the fortune of visiting several Sankara and Partner hospitals in India. Every visit reinforces our belief that we are a part of a game-changing movement, energizing us.

Personally, Sankara has been an integral part of our family, and it has helped us learn the importance of selfless service.

Personally, Sankara has been an integral part of our family, and it has helped us learn the importance of selfless service.



Sumanth Rajagopalan
Board Member

I joined Sankara Eye Foundation, USA in 2000. In Namaste America there used to be TV ads from Sankara and that is how we learned about the organization. I looked them up and met Muraliji. There were four of five of us at the time. I started with manning the Sankara booth at the events and then looked after the technical aspects of the SEF website, maintaining it for a decade or so.

In those days, Sankara was like a start-up and a lot of the systems and processes were being set up. I was also involved with setting up our first Network For Good donation page around 2002-2003.

I suggested having various donation tiers given various categories of expenses – such as cataract surgeries or food for patients. I thought that there were people who would donate \$30, but others might want to donate much higher amounts. So, we introduced \$90 for 3 surgeries and \$360 for one surgery every month for a year, and so on. That's how the online donation platform was set up. I also introduced a program for people to donate used cars. That is still a donation option today.

I currently look after many of the technical needs of the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, be it Salesforce, Classy integration, or backend support for online ticketing for events like the Dandias where there can be more than 6000 people. We help wherever there is a need.

My wife Anu also gets involved with events and banquets. My children were born after we became involved with the Sankara organization and its activities, so they also grew up with its ethos.

Our motivation behind getting involved in the Sankara activities and planning for them is the huge need in India to eradicate needless blindness, which gets reinforced every time we go to India as a family and visit the Sankara eye hospitals.

Particularly when we go to our native places - the towns that I and my wife are from - to visit our family, and someone from there will say, "Hey, the Sankara bus came here, and we know the people who got back their vision."

Thus, we get to hear firsthand how people benefited from Sankara's service, and it is very gratifying and fulfilling.

Thus, we get to hear firsthand how people benefited from Sankara's service, and it is very gratifying and fulfilling.



Venkat Maddipati
Board Member

I got involved with Sankara, along with my wife Visala, in the year 2000, and from 2003 began actively spearheading the fundraising for the Guntur hospital project along with the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA).

When the first replication of Coimbatore eye hospital began at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh, we worked closely with BATA and the Telugu Association of North America (TANA). Together we did multiple fundraising events for the project and its subsequent expansions. This strategy set the blueprint for our future hospitals in other states such as Karnataka and Gujarat.

Visala coordinated Sankara Booths in the Bay Area. Our son Siddhartha also actively volunteered for Sankara and grew up with the Sankara family.

In Sankara, I mainly focused on setting up teams for various hospital projects, guiding them to raise funds for the respective hospitals. I talk to donors, reach out to new donors, keep them updated about Sankara's expansion plans, and seek their continued support. Visala and I have traveled to many national conferences and events to promote Sankara. What keeps us motivated are the many people we encounter at the hospitals, elderly people, some of whose own kids have abandoned them, but the care and kindness they receive from the Sankara team is life-changing for them. Such stories warm our hearts and keep us motivated.

Further, our children start to understand the value of giving. The families of Sankara board members and volunteers are involved with the fundraising events in one way or another. So, it's always a family gathering here! There is no other joy I look forward to!

Further, our children start to understand the value of giving. The families of Sankara board members and volunteers are involved with the fundraising events in one way or another. So, it's always a family gathering here! There is no other joy I look forward to!

Heartiest Congratulations to
Sankara Eye Foundation, USA

FOR BEING RECOGNIZED AND HONORED AS

The South Asian Times
excellence in journalism

**ORGANIZATION
OF THE
YEAR 2023**

With Best Compliments of

SEF USA Network of 26 Eye Hospitals

Proud to be a part of March to a Million,
1 Million free eye surgeries every year from 2030



I like Sankara Team's conviction, passion, and dedication

Jay Chaudhry, one of the richest Indian Americans, has donated handsomely to SEF, USA, and was the Keynote Speaker at their 'Be the Light Gala' in New York last October. He spoke to Parveen Chopra from Reno, Nevada where he is based.



Q What did you like about SEF, USA to start supporting them?

A I came to know Sankara well in the past couple of years and thought they were serving a very noble cause. Their dedication over the past 25 years fascinated me. Lots of nonprofits come and go. SEF, USA's staying power and commitment are very special.

I met Murali and his team and was impressed by their conviction, passion, dedication, and the work they have been doing. So, I said, let's try to help.

What appealed to me was that SEF, USA is not run as a big, hierarchical organization, where very little reaches the beneficiaries. In contrast, SEF people are on the ground.

Q Did you visit any of the eye hospitals they support in India?



Jay Chaudhry
CEO, Chairman and Founder, Zscaler

A I have not, but hopefully, during the next trip I'll get a chance to do so. I do go to India because 40% of my company Zscaler's 7,000 employees are in India. Offering good opportunities to people in India who are bright, sharp, and ambitious is my way of giving back. In fact, we opened Zscaler's

India office in Bangalore before the Bay Area office.

Q Do you intend to support SEF, USA in the future?

A Yes, I plan to support them, though I haven't thought about the numbers. SEF people are not pushy; they are mindful and

respectful and they execute a good plan to build eye hospitals. Ideas are a dime a dozen. I look at startups all the time. But SEF has a burning desire to get to a million eye surgeries every year. And if you have conviction, a burning desire, you go make things happen.

Q Indian Americans are doing well here and many give to good causes. Do you think they should do more?

A I think it's always better to give more because there are lots of needy people. I think the causes that make an impact are more important than the donation amounts. Look at Sankara, they don't raise tons of money, but what they get goes to a very noble cause. I think education is also important. To be able to help in that field, I have also been involved in the American India Foundation (AIF). I got involved when Covid happened. Many of Zscaler employees in India were calling for help, for example, not finding a hospital bed with oxygen for a loved one. We made calls and rushed a bunch of

things. So, yes, we all can do more than what we do.

I believe happiness is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with money. Perhaps it's my upbringing. My parents were small-scale farmers in Himachal Pradesh. I learned honesty, integrity, and hard work from them.



Brief Bio

Jay Chaudhry has founded a series of successful companies, including AirDefense, CipherTrust, CoreHarbor, SecureIT, and Zscaler, which became a public company in 2018. He has a history of introducing innovations that address the demand for securely enabling emerging technology trends.

Jay has received many accolades for his accomplishments including Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of The Year twice.

He earned an MBA in Marketing, an MS in Computer Engineering, and an MS in Industrial Engineering – all from the University of Cincinnati, Ohio. He also completed the Executive Management Program from Harvard Business School.

In India, he studied Electronics Engineering at IIT BHU Varanasi.

Million Dollar Donors

Giving generously for a noble cause served by a disciplined and passionate team

Shri Hasubhai and Smt. Hershaben Shah

Philanthropist Shri Hasubhai P Shah is the Chairman Emeritus of the Hersha Hospitality Trust.

He began in the hospitality industry with the purchase of a single hotel in Harrisburg, PA, in 1984 and over the last 36 years, expanded his chain to include management of over 110 hotels across many states in the US.

In 2002, Hasubhai Shah was introduced to Sankara by Dr. R.V. Ramani of SEF, India. Inspired by his spiritual guru



Shri Krishna Shankar Shastri "to serve the community in the area of healthcare", he began by sponsoring eye surgeries for Sankara.

"When I met people from SEF, USA, I was extremely impressed with how they were running the organization. It is a great cause that Sankara is serving by going to the villages and giving eyesight to the poor and needy. We can change the lives of so many people, especially in the poor districts," he said.

"The other thing that motivates me to support Sankara is the people behind the organization and how selflessly they are serving the cause. Their dedication is very impressive."

Dr. Yeturu Aahlad and Dr. Subha Aahlad



Dr. Yeturu Aahlad is a successful entrepreneur and a distinguished computer scientist in Silicon Valley. His wife, Dr. Subha Aahlad, is a pediatrician. They have been looking to pay it forward and give back to the community. During one of the off-site IIT Madras alumni events, Aahlad connected with his classmate, K. Sridharan, Founder and President of SEF, USA, and learned about bringing vision to the needy.

Aahlad and Subha had four criteria for deciding on the organizations they would support: nobility of the cause, personal connection, passion of the organization

team, and commitment from its team and leaders. The couple did their due diligence on SEF, USA and the personal connection to Sridharan made it easier for them to decide to support SEF, USA.

Aahlad said that they were impressed with the way SEF, USA, and its volunteers met his criteria. They also felt that the steady growth in the number of free eye surgeries for the rural blind every year and the consistent top rating from Charity Navigator for fiscal discipline were testaments to the fact that SEF, USA is a well-run charity.

So, Aahlad and Subha made a major contribution in 2017, helping SEF, USA meet its fundraising goals for the year.

Manoj Shekar Owner, TCS Industries, Rochester, NY



Manoj Shekar is a long-time donor to SEF, USA, who made a major contribution in 2022 for the expansion of the Sankara Eye Hospital in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.



Partners-in-Service

Inspirational messages from prominent people who made significant voluntary contributions to specific Sankara hospital projects in addition to making large donations.

Shri Harshadbhai and Smt. Nainaben Patel



ly, a charity needs funds for maintenance; they can grow big but they still need money to maintain it. But Sankara found a solution to that problem and they went about it systematically. So that was fascinating to me."

That motivated Harshadbhai and Nainaben to support Sankara's Anand hospital in Gujarat, and they went on to become the single largest donor for the Anand hospital.

Over the years, Harshadbhai and Nainaben offered matching donations for several Sankara fundraisers which encouraged more people to donate. They also got other family members and relatives become big supporters of Sankara.

Harshadbhai also started Sankara's Southern California chapter in Los Angeles and brought in artists like Sonu Nigam, Hariharan, Shreya Ghoshal, and Nitin Mukesh to perform at big fundraiser events which were quite successful, creating a big pool of donors for Sankara.

Harshadbhai and Nainaben Patel's association with Sankara Eye Foundation, USA goes back to the mid-2000s when their friend Ram Dutt, a volunteer with Sankara introduced them to Divyogi Patel and Murali Krishnamurthy.

On visiting the Coimbatore hospital, Harshadbhai and Nainaben met Dr. Ramani a couple of times and were very impressed with the operations there. "One of the things that fascinated me", says Harshadbhai, "was that Sankara was running the organization not like a charity but like a business. They had a business plan, they had a self-sufficiency plan, which is very unusual for a charity. Usual-

Dr. Ramamohana R. Kancherla

Dr. Kancherla is an eminent Oncologist based in Poughkeepsie, NY, who hails from Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. He was introduced to SEF, USA by a family friend soon after Guntur Hospital project started. Having visited the Coimbatore hospital and impressed with the Sankara work, he decided to get involved with the first hospital Sankara built outside Tamil Nadu, a project close to his heart.

He says, "The Guntur hospital serves the neighboring districts including Vijayawada. What especially impressed me was that Sankara serves the villages. My grandparents and relatives hailed from the villages, and I know what the facilities there are like. The farm workers and the poor rural people have very little access to healthcare and affording it. Often they think this is natural (vision loss) and they live



with it. Sankara's end-to-end program, taking people from the villages, treating them and bringing them back, is very impressive to me.

"I met Dr. Ramani and was impressed with his work and then met Murali and the others. I donated to Sankara and then began fundraising for them. I would gather some friends and we would be hosting booths, distributing literature, getting people together, and supporting the organiza-

tion in any way we could." Over the years, Dr. Kancherla has been a big donor to many of Sankara's hospital projects and has also rallied other donors to the cause. Notable contributions have been a 25-bed ward in the name of his parents and, an eye bank in the name of his father-in-law, to the Guntur project.

As chairman of the alumni committee at the medical college he studied in Guntur, Dr. Kancherla also facilitated the participation of Sankara in alumni reunions with over 1,000 doctors in attendance in Dallas and California. "It is all about the cause, the people we serve. The people in SEF are wonderful. They can motivate hundreds of people to volunteer, which is amazing. I will continue to support Sankara in any way I can in the future as well," he says.

"On the 25th milestone anniversary of Sankara, I wish them all the best and hope they can fulfill Vision 2030."

Shri Jayaram Komati



Prominent community leader and philanthropist Jayaram Komati Garu has been a big supporter of SEF, USA. He rallied the Telugu community to support the Guntur hospital project generously. As convenor of the Telugu Association of North America (TANA) convention in 2003 in San Jose, CA, he opened the convention for the promotion of the Guntur project, which helped raise awareness and significant funds for the project.

In the same year, he also suggested a 'Wall of Founders' banquet dinner which became a template for Sankara's annual banquet ever since.

For all his support and gener-

ous donations, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA recognizes Jayaram Garu as a Partner-in-Service for the Guntur hospital in Andhra Pradesh. He also donated generously and helped significantly with the kick-off fundraising event for Sankara hospital project in Hyderabad.

Smt. Vijaya Asuri of BATA



unteers across the USA, Vijaya opines. "It is a model organization that has demonstrated to its donor base and supporters that great things can be achieved when you work relentlessly toward a cause. It is always a pleasure to work together and promote a cause with SEF, USA."

BATA, she points out, has been an integral part of the fundraising efforts for the Guntur hospital since it was planned in 2002. "We supported the project through fundraiser events and annual cricket tournaments. We also worked with Sankara to organize a kick-off fundraiser for SEF Hyderabad Hospital and are proud to be Partners in Service in both hospitals.

"The results of the BATA team and SEF team working together seamlessly are evident in the successful operation of SEF Guntur and Hyderabad Hospitals."

Hearty congratulations to Sankara Eye Foundation, USA on being honored as Organization of the Year, says Vijaya Aasuri. "SEF and Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA) have been working together for over two decades in raising funds and awareness of Sankara's Guntur hospital and more recently for the Hyderabad hospital as well.

SEF, USA continues to achieve its vision due to the hard work and dedication of the selfless vol-

Shri B.V. Jagadeesh and Smt. Anuradha Jagadeesh

Shri B.V. Jagadeesh is a Silicon Valley-based tech entrepreneur with several technology startups to his credit. His wife, Smt. Anuradha Jagadeesh, has also held leadership positions in technology companies in the Bay Area besides being a leader of India Community Center's Sevathon.

Their journey with Sankara Eye Foundation, USA began in the early 2000s when they sponsored a fundraising musical jugalbandi event for the organization, saying, "The cause and the message are all truly inspiring."

There has been no looking back for the couple. Jagadeesh describes it as "a very pleasant jour-

ney, a fun relationship" being associated with Sankara and its leaders - Murali Krishnamurthy, K. Sridharan, R. Sundar and Dr. Ramani - "all outstanding people, very sincere, hardworking, committed. It's very hard to find that in non-profits."

In 2004-2005, Jagadeesh made a keynote speech at a Sankara event in San Jose, where he presented the problem of curable blindness in a different way - by looking at the economics behind it. "A simple thing like a cataract makes people unable to see because they cannot afford the surgery, and because of that they are dependent on someone else for everything in life. So, two people -

the sufferer and the caregiver - are unable to work and contribute to the family economy. Given the sheer scale of the problem and the number of patients Sankara is serving, even if 50% get their eyesight back and go back to work, it would make a huge impact on the family economy and a difference of a few billion dollars to the GDP."

The Jagadeesh family whose roots are in Bangalore also contributed in a big way to the establishment of the Bangalore hospital and training center project for nurses and optometrists by galvanizing the Kannada Koota of Northern California (KKNC) and Association of Kannada Kootas of



America (AKKA) to get involved in the fundraising and by setting up a matching fund of \$100,000 to encourage donors, raising a total of over \$200,000. He inspires and promotes SEF wherever he goes.

"I have been an evangelist

for Sankara over the years and right now Sankara has tremendous momentum. The machinery is extremely well operating, we are happy to spread the message about their work. We believe in this cause," says Jagadeesh.



Ram Reddy

Bay Area entrepreneur



Congratulations and Commendations

Welcoming the nomination of Sankara Eye Foundation, USA as the Organization of the Year 2023 by The South Asian Times, a few messages from the supporters of the charity that enjoys a pristine reputation.

What resonates most for me is how the Sankara Eye Foundation operates. Their hospitals follow an amazingly well-run 80/20 framework that provides the same quality service to 80% free and 20% paid patients. They have it down to a fine science with such granularity and perfection that it is replicated across all their hospitals with ease and precision.

And SEF's massive volunteer network and tens of thousands of annual donors add impetus to this grassroots movement. I'm proud to have been a supporter for over 15 years. Their social impact is immediate and lasts a lifetime for every patient who has

vision restored. Patients quickly return to becoming productive members of society and providers for the family. The elderly achieve independence, adding to their self-esteem.

SEF receives advocacy, support, and endorsements from many corners of the world. To name a few - Amitabh Kant, Sherpa, G20 India, Anand Mahindra - Chairman, Mahindra, Mallika Chopra of Chopra Foundation, late Rakesh Jhunjwala - India's business icon, Jay Chaudhry - Chairman, Zscaler, Amit Walia - CEO, Informatica, Chandar Pattabhiram - ex-CMO Marketo and Coupa, and Aruna Ravichandran - CMO, WebEx.

Achyuth Reddy

Civil Engineer, Hyderabad



It is no surprise to learn that the Sankara Eye Foundation, USA has been nominated as the Organization of the Year by The South Asian Times. Over the past 25 years, the passion and dedication of its founders, together with an army of enthusiastic volunteers, have had a huge positive impact on community eye care across India. That SEF can do this with such a consistently high level of professionalism, integrity, and transparency is remarkable.

As SEF embarks on the audacious 'March to a Million' goal of performing one million free eye surgeries a year by 2030, I wish them continued success.

Mohan Wanchoo

Chairman, ECIMW Holding Co, Inc, NY
Philanthropist

It is my great pleasure to say a few words of appreciation about Sankara Eye Foundation, USA, and its Founder and Executive Chairman, Mr. Murali Krishnamurthy.

India is home to the largest number of blind people in the world, where nearly 40 million people are blind or visually impaired. Fortunately, nearly 80% of them can easily be cured if they can receive proper, timely treatment. Every year 1 million new visually impaired people get added to the already huge number of visually challenged people in India. The rate at which Sankara is performing eye surgeries currently is not adequate to meet the



demands. Therefore, Sankara has crafted Vision 2030, which is to perform 1 million free eye surgeries annually by the year 2030.

I have known Murali for over 10 years. He is the backbone of the Sankara Eye Foundation. He had a nice, comfortable job in the IT industry, but had a calling for charitable work. So, he quit his job and started Sankara Eye Foundation, USA along with his brother. How many would do such a daring thing?

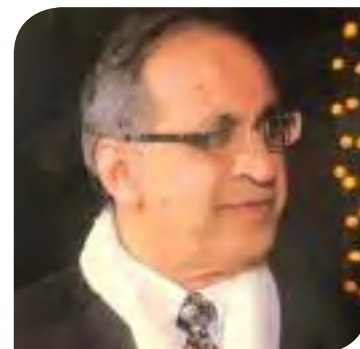
Murali's passion for Sankara is also motivated by his rare eye disorder for which he had an operation last year. He could have received the best eye treatment in California where he lives, yet so deep is his trust in Sankara that he traveled to India and got his operation done in the Sankara hospital in Coimbatore, where he underwent a corneal transplant. This shows how he truly believes in the organization he supports. As they say, he puts his money where his mouth is.

Sankara is forging ahead under Murali's dynamic and able leadership. They are proudly running 12 of their own eye hospitals and 14 more eye hospitals in partnership with other organizations that share Sankara's vision with a passion.

I am very fortunate to be associated with Sankara and Murali and wish them the very best in the future.

Dr Rajendra Modi

Ophthalmologist,
Community leader, NY



Sankara Eye Foundation, USA is the biggest and most reputed charitable organization in India for eye diseases. It has the highest rating (4/4) on Charity Navigator.

I met Murali Krishnamurthy and Sundar Radhakrishnan about five years ago. I also met Dr. R.V. Ramani, founder of Sankara Eye

Foundation, India. He is a noble and simple man. At the time Sankara was planning to open a hospital in Jodhpur but finally settled for Jaipur. We collected funds for this hospital through RANA (Rajasthan Association of North America). Together, we organized many fundraisers for the noble cause.

I have visited many Sankara eye hospitals in India. All of them are run efficiently. Their 80-20 system ensures each hospital is self-sufficient.

Anybody who comes to Sankara camps is treated free and with dignity for cataract surgery. We have been holding successful eye camps every month in my hometown, Neem Ka Thana in Rajasthan, for the last five years. All the patients and their families return home happy.

Sankara's ambitious goal of doing 1 million free surgeries by 2030 is reachable because of their founders and leaders like Sundar ji and Murali ji. I wish them godspeed.

SEF Executive Chairman's Thank You Note

By Murali Krishnamurthy

It has been a long and rewarding journey. Initially, when we started to support free eye surgeries at Sankara's hospital in Coimbatore around the year 2020, we could raise only about \$100,000 a year. Last year, we targeted \$2 M!

There are too many supporters and donors to thank, but I will mention a few from our early days and a few key players who made possible our newest hospital in Hyderabad.

Vijaya Aasuri has been a leader at the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA). The entire BATA Team and the SEF Bay Area Volunteers have been



Narayana Kala brought many of his friends to SEF

working together for the past 20+ years. We used to set up booths at all their events.

When we embarked on our

first replication of the Coimbatore eye hospital in Guntur, AP, my colleague at Remedy Corp., **Narayana Kala**, brought many of his friends (many from AP) to SEF.

In 2003, the Telugu Association of North America (TANA)'s Convention took place in the Bay Area. It worked out very well for building our Guntur hospital. Narayana Kala's friends including our board member **Venkat Maddipati** and many others worked hard for the success of the convention and TANA opened the event to promote SEF and our Guntur project.

Jayaram Komati was TANA convener and he appealed to all the participants to go all out for SEF. We had a prominent booth and placed our promotional

material in Convention Registration bags. Vijaya Aasuri organized a Light Music event and auctioned songs to benefit the Guntur hospital. This association helped launch our journey in India.

Hema Chamraj and a small group of volunteers came up with a template for such partnerships and we applied that to all our capital projects including Karnataka, Gujarat, and Punjab.

Ram Reddy has been our supporter for a long time. He played a critical role in SEF entering Telangana by introducing us to the then Minister KT Rama Rao Garu who was instrumental in offering us leased land at a nominal cost to build our Hyderabad eye hospital. It was inaugurated last year.

Ram is a Bay Area entrepreneur and former TiE President. He organized an online event called SEF-Envision-2020 and brought in several distinguished leaders from India and the USA. He is also a \$100K+ donor.

Achyuth Reddy is a classmate of my brother Sridharan from IIT Madras. A civil engineer, he played a key role in raising the Hyderabad hospital by bringing several \$100K donors, planning the inauguration, interacting with the officials, and helping us meet building codes including fire safety.

Dr. R.V. Ramani, Ram Reddy, Achyuth Reddy and Venkat Maddipati used to have at least one meeting every fortnight to plan the entire project. I used to join occasionally.

Thank you, all.

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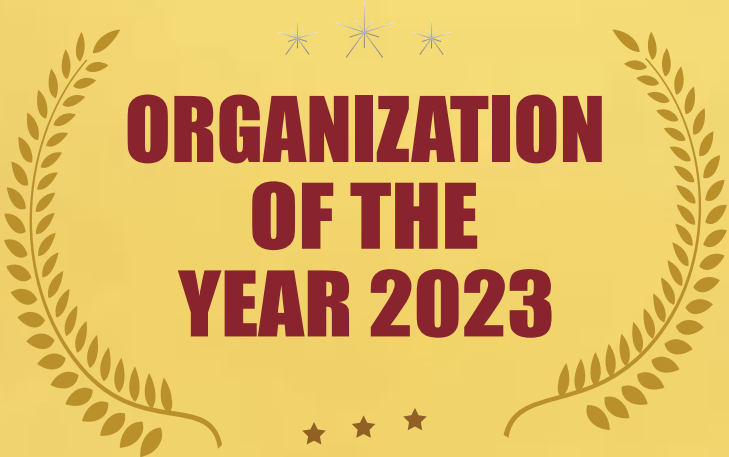
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Sankara carries on the legacy of founders Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani to ensure world-class eye care to all

What causes blindness? Can it be cured? Dr Kaushik Murali, President, Medical Administration at Sankara Eye Foundation India, is the best person to ask such questions.

While conceding that complete vision loss cannot be restored at present, he says that blindness can be prevented, which is the mission of Sankara. "As the population ages and systemic diseases develop, vision impairment will continue to emerge. We can only reduce the burden and ensure there is no backlog."

Sankara's mission, Dr Kasu-hik elaborates, is ensuring curable blindness is treated and where possible preventable causes are addressed. "Our Gift of Vision, rural outreach eyecare program, is very structured and has been active since 1990. This model eliminates the barriers of availability, access, and affordability. We also run 'Rainbow' preventive eye care program for children and diabetic retinopathy screening program."

Blindness can be caused by a variety of conditions and at different stages of a person's life, explains Dr Kaushik. Genetic conditions could cause cataracts, structural changes in parts of the eye that result in blindness. Preterm

children with certain contributing factors can develop conditions of the retina resulting at times in blindness. As the child grows, refractive errors (needing spectacle correction) can develop. Amblyopia or 'lazy eye' also causes vision impairment. With age, diabetes, hypertension, and other autoimmune diseases can cause eye problems. Cataract and retinal degeneration develop. Glaucoma, corneal blindness, and ocular tumors are other eye conditions of concern.

Dr Kaushik says that he was exposed to Sankara as a student at a school that held eye screening camps. He earned his post graduation in Ophthalmology at Sankara Eye Hospital in Coimbatore in 2000. In 2008, when Sankara Eye Hospital opened in Bangalore, he returned to the city he grew up in.

As President, Medical Administration since 2014, his role encompasses:

- Implement processes to effectively manage clinical policies implemented uniformly across the Sankara group.
- Work with the medical team to develop and implement efficient standards, protocols, processes, decision support systems, reporting and benchmarks that support ongoing improvements of clinical operations, and promote quality eye care.



Dr Kaushik Murali

President, Medical Administration,

Sankara Eye Foundation, India

- Utilize business intelligence information through management information systems to plan deployment and resource allocation.
- Develop Sankara Academy of Vision into a center of excellence in eye care training, research, and consultancy.
- Act as a thought leader in ophthalmology, providing the organization with information to retain relevance and identify opportunities.
- Enable rollout of new centers in

keeping with the organizational Vision 2030.

- Accountable for ensuring compliance with accreditation and regulatory requirements for all healthcare services.
- Adherence to faculty requirements, curriculum, and regulatory needs for all courses.

His role is confined to Sankara's 13 hospitals, but some of the partner institutions pay them visits to understand their successful process and systems.

Sankara Eye Hospitals, he says, "carry on the legacy of our founders Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani to ensure world-class eye care to all irrespective of where you stay. We continue to proactively provide access through our hospitals, vision centers, or our outreach eye care camps."

Taking a senior leadership course at Insead in France helped Dr Kaushik evolve as a leader, understand the best industry practices, and bring that learning into operations at Sankara. "During COVID we were able to ensure safety and keep our operations running, often being ahead of the wave in preparedness."

The strategic management program he did at Harvard brought together nonprofits from across the world. One of them was the Orpheus Symphony, which follows

a model of distributed leadership sans the orchestra conductor. Says Dr Kaushik, "At our newer units we do not announce the leader. Doctors step in for specific tasks to take leadership roles in areas they are particularly trained in or have a natural flair. Over time we can identify leadership. This model reaffirmed the strong governance system we have in India and see mirrored in SEF USA."

To realize Vision 2030, Dr Kaushik sees Sankara's hospitals ramping up their free eye surgery capacity to 425,000 a year by then. "Ensuring that every surgery is performed adhering to the norms and enabling optimum recovery would be our focus. After all, each beneficiary is a human being, not a number."



Brief Bio

Dr Kaushik Murali has an MBBS from Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, a DNB from Sankara Eye Hospital, Coimbatore, and Pediatric Ophthalmology at Sankara Netralaya. He also took management programs at Insead, France, and Harvard Business School. He has collaborated with institutions such as the Harvard School of Public Health, University of Bonn, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Health on public health research projects. He was part of the Core Committee organizing the G20 Young Entrepreneur Alliance meet in India in 2023.

Systems and processes have contributed to the success of Sankara

Bharath Balasubramaniam's biggest contribution to Sankara's mission of preventing needless blindness is SERVIS (Sankara Electronic Remote Vision Information System) app. He developed it as an offline mobile-based application that is used to collect eye health data during household surveys:

- To focus on improving the efficiency of eye care intervention projects.
- To increase the data accuracy for reporting and decision-making.
- To predict the prevalence of eye-related disease.

At the micro level, Bharat explains, the fieldworker enters the patient details into the app. That information gets saved and synced to the central server through the internet. The on-the-spot QR code generated helps to track the patient at all stages. The database can then



Bharath Balasubramaniam

President, Operations & Administration, Sankara Eye Foundation, India

be analyzed at the organizational level to understand the field processes and community response.

SERVIS app, Bharat says proudly, "has helped focus on strategiz-

ing community eye care intervention at Sankara and in improving the efficiency of the Gift of Vision program of SEF USA."

Bharath has been associated with Sankara since 1994, first as a volunteer in the Sankara Youth Wing. In 2006, he took up the role of Administrator. Since 2014 he has been working as President, Operations & Administration. Sankara Eye Foundation has a roster of 2,800 employees, among them 400 are doctors.

Says he, "I am responsible for ensuring the success of the Community Outreach Program of Sankara and making it into a self-sustaining model. We monitor and support the performance of various units across India. Our role is to improve productivity at eye camps and minimize dropouts in the post-operative reviews."

The operations and admin head is also responsible for the exe-

cution of new projects as well as technology implementation and upgrades. He has to engage the donors at various stages through communication on fund allocation and utilization to meet objectives and targets achieved at the unit level and corporate level.

The department under Bharath focuses on the 13 Sankara hospitals. Says he, "Technology has enabled us to scale to multiple locations across the country. All data, voice, and video between the units is seamless and real-time. A patient registered in one Sankara can visit any other Sankara Eye Hospital without carrying any paper because the medical records are available through the Cloud. Our OPD is predominantly paperless with electronic medical records capturing and reporting patient information."

Bharat believes that the systems and processes they have put in place at Sankara have ensured

that the passion of the founders and the purpose of the organization is converted to results. "Clear job description, key performance indicators, constant review, and monitoring have been important for our growth."

He sees Sankara India well poised to contribute 425,000+ free eye surgeries towards SEF-USA's Vision 2030.



Brief Bio

Bharath Balasubramaniam has developed the award-winning app SERVIS and is focused on automating every step of eye care outreach. He was recognized as an Eye Health Leader by the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness in 2014. In 2018, he was honored for Social Impact by the British Council Alumni Awards.

Besides a master's in Computer Applications, Bharath has a master's in Hospital Administration from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and an MSc in Community Eye Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

He is part of the board of SDMH, a 500-bed multi-specialty hospital in Jaipur, and NGOs including Round Table India that works to construct classrooms in government schools and provide artificial limbs.



SEF USA's Partner Hospitals add free eye surgery capacity

Partner Hospitals constitute the growth engine for Sankara Eye Foundation, USA's Vision 2030: March to a Million.

From supporting one eye hospital in Coimbatore Sankara Eye Foundation, USA has become the world's largest free eye-care and eye-surgery initiative! The strategy of partnering with existing like-minded eye hospitals is paying dividends.

SEF, USA has supported a total of 528,000 free cataract surgeries in nine hospitals (navratna) since 2017-18 when the Partner Program began. The program serves the most needy states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Odisha.

OpEx Partners

The hospitals to which SEF, USA provides operational costs have a combined free cataract surgery capacity of 70,000 annually. They are:

1. MGM Eye Institute (Raipur, Chhattisgarh) - annual free cataract surgery capacity: 10,000
2. RKM Vivekananda Netralaya (Dehradun, Uttarakhand) - free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
3. Siliguri Greater Lions Eye Hospital (Siliguri, West Bengal) - free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
4. Nanritam Lokeshwarananda Eye Hospital (Purulia, West Bengal) - free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000
5. Vision India Foundation, Trilochan Netralaya (Sambalpur, Odisha) free cataract surgery capacity: 15,000

CapEx Partners

The hospitals to which SEF, USA has been providing Capital Expenditure (CapEx) have a combined free cataract surgery capacity of 380,000 annually. They are:

1. AJEH Center of Excellence (Mastichak, Bihar) - free cataract surgery capacity: 210,000. (Profiled on page 31)
2. PBMA (Pune and Solapur, Maharashtra) - free cataract surgery capacity: 75,000
3. KKM (Mathura, UP): free cataract surgery capacity: 60,000
4. NEH (Purulia, West Bengal) - free cataract surgery capacity: 35,000

PBMA's HV Desai Eye Hospital, Pune

The Poona Blind Men's Association was established in 1952 by



T.S. Bamankar, who was visually impaired. Niranjan Pandya joined PBMA in 1966 and spearheaded many projects with other nonprof-

its. PBMA's 95-bed H.V. Desai Eye Hospital came up in Pune in 2000. It is NABH accredited and has received acclaim nationally and internationally. Their Kantaxmi Shah Eye Hospital in Nandurbar followed in 2007 and the Shankarseth Sabale Eye Hospital in Solapur is in progress.

Association with SEF USA

SEF USA onboarded PBMA as a partner hospital in 2021-22 and has funded 8,000 free cataract surgeries. It has provided/committed CapEx funding of Rs 26 crore for the Pune and Solapur projects. That would increase the free cataract surgery capacity at the two locations to 75,000 annually.

The HV Desai Eye Hospital is adding wards for free cataract patients to double the free patient capacity from 25,000 to 55,000 annually. Of the CapEx layout of

about Rs 20 crore, SEF USA contributed Rs 10 crore.

PBMA's eye care vertical has a flourishing paid surgery practice making it operationally self-sufficient.

Services offered: Cataract, glaucoma, retina, oculoplasty, cornea, and related procedures like squint.

Leadership: Parvez Billimoria is the Executive Director of HV Desai Eye Hospital. Nitin Desai is the Chairman of the hospital and PBMA.

Kalyanam Karoti, Mathura (KKM)

KKM is a charitable organization focused on improving the quality of life for the disabled and marginalized community in India through affordable and accessible treatment, education, surgery, and rehabilitation.

KKM started its eye hospital named **Shree Jee Baba Chikitsa Sansthan** in 1996. Their operations include an orthopedic and prosthetics center and a school

for those with learning disabilities and hearing impairment.

KKM has been providing free eye surgeries to the indigent with a 90:10 ratio of free: paid cataract surgeries. After the growing realization of their inability to rely on external donations, they are moving to a more balanced approach. For outreach, they organize 20+ monthly camps at predetermined locations.

Association with SEF USA

SEF USA onboarded KKM as a partner hospital in 2019-20 with an initial funding tranche for 5,000 surgeries. Realizing that KKM had a database of patients needing surgeries, had capacity and manpower, but lacked funding. SEF USA has funded a total of 23,000 free cataract surgeries over the years.

KKM has embarked on an ambitious hospital project in the Mathura area, which will become the new tertiary eye hospital. It will have an annual free surgery capacity of 60,000 in its 1st phase, to be further increased in the 2nd

phase. Of its CapEx outlay of Rs 45 crore, SEF USA committed Rs 30 crore.

KKM plans to continue developing its paid surgery practice to achieve self-sufficiency over five years. In the interim, they will focus on expanding their donor base to help with ongoing operating expenses.

Services offered: Cataract, glaucoma, cornea and related procedures like squint.

Leadership: Sunil Kumar Sharma is the Chairman.

Netaji Eye Hospital (NEH), Purulia

Netaji Eye Hospital traces its roots to 1938 when Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, during the freedom struggle, implored his comrade Annada Prasad Chakraborty (the pre-sanyas name of Swami Asimananda) to address the problem of blindness among the destitute population of Purulia district in West Bengal.

From early camp-based treatment in 1953 to a 10-bed eye hospital in 1954 to its current 100-bed facility in Ramchandrapur village, NEH has a rich history of providing quality eye care and surgeries in areas of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar under the aegis of Sri Sri Bijoykrishna Ashram Relief Society.

Association with SEF USA

NEH has recently completed a major renovation project at its base hospital in Ramchandrapur, increasing the free surgery capacity from 12,000 annually to 34,000. The Capital Expenditure outlay was Rs 6.4 crore, of which SEF USA contributed Rs 5.2 crore. Plans are to provide family accommodation in Asansol for doctors. From the outlay of Rs 2 crore, SEF USA is expected to contribute Rs 1.5 crore.

SEF USA onboarded NEH in 2019-20 and has supported a total of 40,000 free surgeries. An initial pilot funding tranche of Rs 40 lakh during 2019-20 was used by NEH for purchasing 2 buses for transporting camp patients to the hospital for free surgeries.

Services offered: Cataract & IOL, glaucoma, cornea, vitreo-retinal, comprehensive eye check-up and pediatric eye care, ocular microbiology, in-house medicine center, and optical dispensing.

Leadership Team: Himadri Sekhar Chakraborty is General Secretary & CEO Netaji Eye Hospitals.



Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary

Founder, Project Head & Executive Trustee
Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital (AJEH)



Q Tell us about the beginnings of your journey.

A My involvement with rural eye care started about 20 years back when I came to the village of Mastichak, near Patna in Bihar, and met Pandit Ramesh Ji (also known as Shukla Baba), one of the first disciples of Acharya Shriram Sharma, the founder of Gayatri Pariwar. He inspired me to think about giving back to the poorest sections of society. Being in Mastichak at the time, I decided to start the hospital there. We began with 10 beds in the local temple premises.

Q Why choose blindness as your cause?

A On one of my earlier visits to Bihar, I met a blind farmer along with his 10-year-old daughter. He was turned away from a local district hospital because there was no eye surgeon there. In India, a farmer retires when he dies or is incapacitated, and the biggest cause of incapacitation is blindness. So, this person lost his eyesight and his livelihood, but more importantly, his daughter was also pulled out of school to take care of him. That made me realize that restoring eyesight is important for restoring livelihoods.



AJEH's 'Football to Eyeball' talent creation initiative aims to tackle the problem of child marriage and gender inequality in Bihar by providing equal opportunities and employment to girls from rural areas.

SEF, USA has helped AJEH 1.0 reinvent as AJEH 2.0

Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary, founder of AJEH, has the challenge of delivering 200,000 free eye surgeries annually to their partner, Sankara Eye Foundation, USA. But he is confident of success. He spoke to The South Asian Times about his motivation and mission.

Q How has your relationship with SEF, USA helped AJEH?

A In 2017 we became partners of SEF, USA. With Sankara, we learned how to bring in professionalism and dynamism into the project while keeping the spiritual foundation strongly intact. Our first project together was building the Akhand Jyoti Center of Excellence (AJCOE), which was inaugurated in October 2023 - a 500-bed state-of-the-art facility. The strong backing of SEF, USA has helped AJEH 1.0 reinvent as AJEH 2.0. The key element is that they bought into our philosophy, understood our model, and supported us.

Q What is the Football to Eyeball program?

A It is the flagship program of AJEH. Poverty and blindness have a cause-and-effect relationship. But when both are present together, women are also marginalized. So to uplift rural women, we started this program for their education, employment, and reformation. Our first pillar of focus is eye health - we know it well, know the implementation, and we've not even scratched the surface as far as the scale of the problem is concerned.

Our second pillar is commitment to low-income geographies. All our hospitals are in villages, among paddy fields.

Third, women will be at the core of everything we do. Hence, the Football to Eyeball program. I used to be a professional footballer and one day at a local school, I saw three girls in salwar suits kicking around a roll of paper. I asked them what they were doing and they said, "We are playing football." They used to see the boys play in the football field, but they could not go and play.

I thought then that we could use football as an icebreaker to draw out girls from their houses and help them train. But it took almost six months for the first girl to come in, because there was so much taboo.

We had to offer an incentive. We said, "If you allow your girl to play football and send her to a hostel, we will sponsor the cost of her education and help her become an optometrist," which here they think is a junior doctor. We also made the condition that the girls would not be married off before the age of 21. It was then the girls slowly started coming. Today about 50 to 60 girls play at state levels. With the optometry course as a backbone of the program, the girls can earn for themselves once they become optometrists.

Q What are your expansion plans at AJEH?

A Every year we screen and give primary care to more than 500,000 people. This year we aim to do 100,000 surgeries out

Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital



AJEH main hospital in Mastichak village in Bihar is among the top five charitable eye care hospitals in India

Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital is owned and run by the Yugrishi Shriram Sharma Acharya Charitable Trust. Performing over 70,000 surgeries annually, of which 80% are free to the poor, it is the largest eye hospital in Eastern India. Driven by a compassionate and experienced team of doctors and clinical staff, Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital has been working for the last 17+ years, towards eliminating curable blindness from Bihar by providing comprehensive, accessible, high-quality eye care services to people in low-income areas.

The hospital was started in December 2006 at the village Mastichak, 60 km from Patna, Bihar. This year, AJEH inaugurated its 'Centre of Excellence', a 500-bed facility in Mastichak. Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital focuses on restoring the vision of blind patients due to cataracts with the belief that restoring vision also restores the dignity, hope and livelihood of the person.

Today its mission is to spearhead in Bihar the elimination of curable blindness by 2026 and lay the foundations of financial sustainability of operations post 2026.

of which about 80% are free. We have five surgical centers of varying sizes, the largest being the AJCOE.

Following the lead of Sankara, we have also developed our own Vision 2030. Between 2022 and 2030, we aspire to do a cumulative 2 million eye surgeries, of which 1.6 million will be free. So this decade, we plan to do at least 200,000 free surgeries annually. We also aim to be self-sufficient by 2030.

Our mission has always been to make Bihar blindness free. Bihar has the third largest population in India, so there is a huge cluster of blindness and visual impairment. It is also the poorest state, so the combined problem is immense.

You may have the noblest of causes, but only when you have a partner who supports you in every manner can you achieve something on a big scale. With Sankara as our partner, we can scale up. More importantly, we want to serve patients irrespective of their capacity to pay. That is the legacy we hope to create.



Brief Bio

Mritunjay Kumar Tiwary is the founder and Head of Projects at the Akhand Jyoti Eye Hospital (AJEH), Mastichak, Bihar. He started AJEH with a strong belief that eye health delivered innovatively can alleviate poverty, improve gender parity, and enhance social capital in the low-income states of India. AJEH, one of the top 5 charitable eye hospitals in India today, offers world-class eye care services, including all sub-specialties, and performs over 65,000 surgeries annually, 80% of which are free, and impacts the lives of one million people every year.

Their 'Football to Eyeball' talent creation initiative aims to tackle the problem of child marriage and gender inequality in Bihar by providing equal opportunities and employment to girls from rural areas. 140 girls have so far been trained under this program and 30 are being added to the scheme every year. Mritunjay was given the Reliance - CNN IBN Real Heroes Award in 2010 for this initiative.



Executive Council is the action arm of Sankara, USA

The Executive Committee functions as the driving force to translate the directives and strategies outlined by the Sankara Board into actions and results. EC acts as a bridge between the strategic decisions made at the higher level and their execution to achieve organizational goals.

Four volunteer members of the Executive Council talk about their motivation in working for Sankara and how they identify with its mission and vision.



Hema Chamraj
EC Member

I was introduced to SEF, USA, and motivated to join the cause by my husband, Rajiv Chamraj, who was collaborating with SEF, USA leaders on developing a bold vision to eradicate curable blindness.

Since I was fluent in multiple languages including Telugu, I volunteered to lead the Guntur project in Andhra Pradesh with Shri Narayana Kala. To make headway, we needed to bring the Telugu community on board and ensure they felt aligned with the cause. We formed a team of like-minded people from the Telugu community along with other SEF, USA

volunteers and created a focus group called 'Focus AP - 750K' to collaborate and raise \$750,000 for the Guntur project.

We approached leading Telugu associations like Telugu Association of North America (TANA), the American Telugu Association (ATA), and the Bay Area Telugu Association (BATA). We identified community champions like Shri Jayaram Komati to provide a fundraising platform. Together we found creative ways to raise funds, meet HNI (high net worth) donors, and motivate the community. We exceeded our targets and raised more than \$1 million for the Guntur project.

Leveraging community support became a template for fundraising for all future hospitals where we enabled the community to own the cause and raise funds.

I continued to drive hospital fundraising for SEF's Bangalore and Shimoga hospitals using the same best practices. As an EC member, I wanted to be involved in strategy, operations, and marketing. I moved towards driving the marketing activities, developing content, and disseminating it through multiple channels like web, social media, print and TV.

I will continue to collaborate with the team to drive Vision2030 towards success.



Smita Patel
EC Member

In 2006, Divyogi Patel, a close family friend from our days in Africa, was working on expanding SEF to Anand, Gujarat, and invited me to the first Focus Gujarat meeting at his house. It was inspirational to know that our efforts could make a huge difference in the people suffering needlessly from blindness. After that, there was no turning back.

I was blown away by the amazing work done by the dedicated volunteers in the US and the staff in India. Just the thought that a simple surgery costing only \$30 could give someone a new

lease on life was very empowering.

For the first few years, we worked on raising awareness and funds to build the Sankara Hospital in Anand by traveling all over the country, attending conventions by the American Asian Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), AAPI, New York's India Independence Day Parade, etc and everywhere we developed great relationships for SEF and collected donations for the Anand Hospital.

Coming from a Biochemistry background, volunteering for SEF has given me opportunities to learn new skills in marketing, computing, graphic design and by putting my scientific detail-oriented training to use. I love coming up with innovative ways to help things move for the team. After the Anand Hospital opened in 2008, I have continued to help with managing SEF marketing, collateral, and events for all our US chapters.

SEF is a wonderful second family for me and it is an honor to be working with dedicated volunteers who put their heart and soul into this noble organization and make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of underprivileged folks who need our help.



Sonal Solanki
EC Member

There is a saying that when you are down, lift someone up. That is how

my volunteering with Sankara began – after a personal tragedy.

In 2004, I lost my father in a car accident. Devastated by grief I knew I had to find a meaningful way to deal with the loss.

My mother suggested volunteering with Sankara. So, in 2005, I reached out to SEF, USA's founder, Murali Krishnamurthy, and his wife, Kala Murali. During that long conversation with both about Sankara's work, I found my cause.

Muraliji and Kalaji were very passionate about Sankara. At that time the Sankara Eye Hospital project in Anand, Gujarat, was in the works. I met a lot of volunteers and was amazed by their enthusiasm and dedication.

The rest, as they say, is history. I initial-

ly started volunteering thinking that I would be able to make people's lives better. Little did I know then that this work would enrich my own life and bring so much happiness to me. What I have received from Sankara is way more than what I might have given back!

As an accounting professional, I was also greatly impressed by Sankara's transparency, accountability, and feedback process. My belief in Sankara's cause and credibility also inspired friends and family to become donors and supporters.

As an EC member, I lead social media marketing strategies for all channels to spread awareness about the cause.

At Sankara, we interact with people right

from eight-year-old children to 80-year-old seniors. They can be students, professionals, or CEOs. We have to be respectful and get the organization's needs met while managing projects. I don't think any B-school in the world can teach what my volunteering experience taught me. The opportunity to help is precious because it gave me a purpose to work for.

For my volunteer work at Sankara, I was given the President's Volunteer Service Award signed by President George W. Bush in 2008.

My father believed in living a life of service and making each day count. I am just trying to walk in his footsteps.

Raj Panchapakesan
EC Member

In Tamil, there is a saying: "Thanathil sirandadu Kan daanam". It means that the highest form of giving is donating your eyes. This quote has always resonated with me.

I first learned about SEF, USA from Namaste America programs two decades ago. Around 1999-2000, I met Kala Murali at the Chinmaya Mission, and I found the opportunity to volunteer with the best organization working for a

noble cause.

My father had cataract surgery on both eyes and suffered from complications. I could see how it affected his confidence. That moved me to become more actively involved with SEF, USA.

In 2004-05 when we launched iWalk to raise funds for Sankara, I introduced the idea of bringing in sponsorships. To this day, I help manage sponsorships for events.



I also coordinated for the Sankara Hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab. It was an incredible experience that taught me valuable lessons about project management, fundraising, as well as working with the government system.

My motivation to volunteer comes from the selfless leadership of Dr R.V. Ramani and Dr Radha Ramani in India, and Murali Krishnamurthy and Kala Murali in the US, as well as the loving team

of volunteers. I would love to contribute to the Vision 2030 strategy. I am grateful to be part of a selfless family/organization where God has given me a chance to give back to the community. In a way, SEF, USA has given me a purpose in life.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ramani for initiating this movement, and to Murali and Sridhar for bringing it to the USA. I am deeply grateful to them for allowing us to be a part of this selfless movement and providing us with an eye-opening experience both figuratively and literally. We are now ready to move forward towards Vision 2030.



SEF, USA chapters across the country are writing its growth story

All the chapters are run by volunteers. They host large-scale Navratri dandia, music concerts, and community events in collaboration with SEF, USA headquartered in San Jose, CA, to raise funds for Sankara's cause of eliminating curable blindness in rural India.



Bay Area Volunteer Team at the Be the Vision Gala in December 2023

San Francisco Bay Area

The Bay Area chapter was founded in 1998 in Milpitas, CA. It serves as the headquarters for SEF, USA from which the Board Members and veteran volunteers guide all other chapters. A modest team of

three started this journey, which has now flourished into a powerful movement of 200+ volunteers. The SF Bay Area chapter caters to all the functional needs of the organization including donor

care, marketing, fundraising, and accounting.

Fundraiser events have played a key role in the growth of SEF, USA. The biggest events are the Navratri Dandias which draw large crowds of over 6,000 people. Bollywood music

concerts featuring singers like Sonu Nigam and Shreya Ghoshal have been big draws in the past. They also host donor banquets, weekly booths, corporate giving, and individual fundraising campaigns.

These volunteer-led efforts

provide a continuous flow of funds, which are directed to eliminate curable blindness in India. Given the scale of operations and the aggressive goals set by the Vision 2030 program, they are constantly in need of more volunteers.



Austin Chapter

The Austin chapter of SEF, USA was started in 2014 with a small but enthusiastic team of volunteers. They have now grown to about 95 volunteers, including a youth component.

Since its inception, this chapter has regularly organized community fundraising events such as Holi celebrations, banquets, walkathons, and mobile eye clinics. Thinking big, they have done Bol-

lywood music concerts with Shreya Ghoshal and Shankar Ehsaan Loy, and a classical music show featuring Tarun Bhattacharya.

Last year, the chapter participated in the Parade of India celebration in Austin. Their Dandia is a much-anticipated calendar event, which has grown from 500 participants in 2016 to attracting 3,000 in 2023.

Houston

The Houston chapter was started almost a decade ago by dedicated volunteers experienced in non-profit management. Their signature event is the Annual Donor Appreciation Dinner every November which garners funds from generous donors and patrons for the Sankara cause of eradicating curable blindness in rural India. The chapter also provides volunteer team-building and leadership opportunities. It hopes to organize more events such as an annual Holi event, Bollywood shows, and other outreach efforts, all of which require more volunteers.





Dallas

Active in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, this chapter began in 2000 and has seen exponential growth with over 150 youth and adult volunteers today. To raise funds, they have organized successful musical concerts, featuring singers such as Hariharan and Shankar Ehsaan Loy.

Since 2017, the Dallas team has been hosting the popular 5K Walkathon every year. From 2018, they added an annual Bollywood Dandia event. Both have consistently produced a high return on investment, created brand awareness, and energized the volunteers.

The Dallas chapter is proud to report that since 2017, they have contributed to more than 10,000 free eye surgeries in India.

Detroit

The Detroit chapter organized its first successful fundraiser, a musical concert, in 2008. It was followed by Sangam - a trigulbandi of Hindustani, Carnatic music, and Odissi dance featuring leading artists from India. The chapter now rais-

es funds by partnering with major regional associations through "Giving back to Community" musical events.

In recent years, their activities have included setting up booths at India's Independence Day celebrations, as well as at religious and cultural events.

Southern California

The Los Angeles chapter's dedicated team organizes various events throughout the year to garner funds and spread awareness about Sankara's mission. Some successful fundraisers hosted by them have included Bollywood musical concerts featuring singers like Sonu Nigam and Shreya Ghoshal, the Falguni Pathak Dandia and Holi events.

The Southern California chapters have many volunteers who are spread across Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, and Riverside counties. They host events catering to these areas and welcome new, enthusiastic volunteers.



New York Tri-state

The New York, New Jersey, and the Tri-State area chapters are driven by committed volunteers who actively engage in creating mission awareness and mobilizing funds for Sankara Eye Foundation, India. Young and old, the volunteers bring in a range of ideas and experiences to fulfill their mission. In the summers, they host information booths at fairs, expos and parades to bring awareness

about SEF, USA's role as the largest provider of free eye care in India. Their diverse fundraisers include cultural concerts, 5K walks, art shows, donor appreciation evenings, and fundraising galas.

The Tri-State teams also hold meetings with small groups of donors to update them about Sankara Eye Foundation's projects in India. Dandia events, hugely successful for some other chapters, are also envisaged.

Seattle

The Seattle chapter is led by enthusiastic volunteers. The Microsoft Giving Campaign has been a leading source of grants by matching employee donations. Much of this is a result of the awareness campaigns led by the Seattle chapter. They have also organized cricket tournaments, Dandiya events, and poker tournaments for fundraising for Sankara.

Phoenix

Started in 2003, this chapter focused initially on spreading awareness about Sankara's mission by setting up booths at Indian community events. In 2006, the volunteers' team organized a successful fundraising concert featuring renowned vocalist Dr Balamurali Krishna, in association with the Arizona Telugu Association, followed by another concert by Hariharan.

Simi Valley

The Simi Valley chapter in California has a group of dedicated volunteers who come together to organize several fundraising events throughout the year to garner funds and spread awareness about Sankara Eye Foundation's mission. This chapter also has an active Youth wing. They organ-

ize annual events such as Walk for Vision, Dandia, the Youth Entrepreneur Workshop. The Penny for an Eye drive is youth volunteers' responsibility. Their volunteers are spread across Orange County, Los Angeles County, and Ventura County.

Washington DC

A group of dedicated volunteers got together from Maryland and Virginia to start this chapter in the capital city.

They support Sankara Eye through various local activities. An internship program is being developed to help students volunteer for the Sankara cause and learn critical life skills.



The Gift of Vision Outreach Program



SANKARA
EYE FOUNDATION, USA



Gift of Vision program is a flagship initiative of SEF, India. Started in 1990 to provide free eye care service to the rural community through a network of field workers, doctors and paramedics.

During the village camp, patients identified with vision problems are transported to the base hospital and provided 2-3 days' stay with complete treatment at no cost and then returned back to their villages. Follow-up visit by field doctors happens after a month to ensure the Gift of Vision is completely successful.

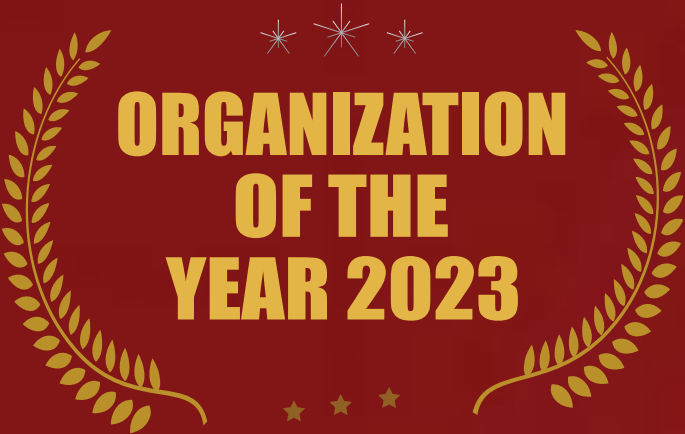
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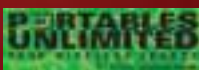


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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024

Wishing you a vibrant New Year filled with colorful moments and unforgettable stories



Heartiest Congratulations to

Sankara Eye Foundation, USA

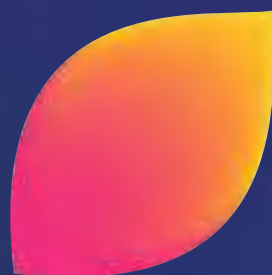
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