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A sight for sore eyes

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Eye for an eye(Left top) A file photo of Baby Swetcha Gora and D. Jaganmohan Reddy and his family along with Saraswathi Gora.

Issue Let's not reduce the annual eye donation campaign to mere statistics. Let's all try and keep alive the 'spirit to bequeath'

It was pure innocence of a seven-year-old girl who was overjoyed for being allowed to pledge her eyes. Taking cue from elders in the family who discussed about collective pledging of their eyes to donate them after their death, as part of an on-going eye donation campaign in 1989, seven-year-old Swetcha Gora insisted that she should be permitted to donate her eyes.

The girl was too young to understand the noble cause behind the concept but she went around telling people that she wanted to be the first in her family to donate eyes. "Right enough, Swetcha suddenly left us all. She had filled the form to pledge her eyes in July 1989 and she died in September due to health complications that followed viral fever," recalls Swetcha's mother Keerthy.

Coming close on the heels of a fatal accident of her husband a couple of years ago, Swetcha's untimely death came as a rude shock to Keerthy. Swetcha's corneal tissues were removed within half-an-hour of her death and transplanted to two different persons who were congenitally blind.

Devarapalli Jagan Mohan Reddy, one of the two recipients, frequently visits the Goras' home at Benz Circle. The sight of Jagan Mohan Reddy evokes mixed feelings in Keerthy. "It's a gush of emotions... of pain and pride. Pain because it reminds me of the vacuum Swetcha's departure has caused in life and a sense of pride because she has gifted sight to others," says Keerthy with a wry smile even as her voice chokes.

Six years later, in September 1995, the Gora family established Swetcha Gora Eye Bank which then became a life member of the Eye Bank Association of India.

"Sight without vision is dangerous because it has no hope. Eyes are the light of the body and mirror of the soul. Those who have this 'light' should always count their blessings for there are as many as two million Indians who suffer from corneal blindness. Every year, another 30,000 are added to this figure," says G. Samanaram, former president of Indian Medical Association and Executive Director of Swetcha Gora Eye Bank.

In concurrence with the annual fortnight-long eye donation campaign organised by the Eye Bank Association of India,

the Swetcha Gora Eye Bank has been observing this 15-day-long period in the right earnest by kicking off aggressive campaigns year after year.

Today is the concluding day of the annual drive (August 24 to September 6). Embracing a multi-pronged approach to reach out the critical message of eye donation to the general public, the eye bank has embarked on a mission to educate general public about preventing blindness caused due to corneal disorders and wherever cure is required, facilitate availability of cornea in the shortest possible time.

One of the top 10 eye banks in India, Swetcha Gora Eye Bank has helped 850 blind persons by restoring their sight, a feat that has won Dr. Samaram a place in the India Book of Records.

In its fortnight-long drive, the eye bank has involved students, corporate hospitals, voluntary organisations and others to send home its message through activities like drawing and painting, essay writing, slogan writing, singing contests, quiz, group activities, pamphlet distribution, and awareness rallies.

A strong visual appeal for the cause of eye donation/pledge has been made to a cross section of people. Against the annual demand for 100,000 corneas, only 16,000 are available, simply because we have not pledged our eyes. It is therefore, in our hands to give someone the gift of light. Your foresight can restore someone's sight. Tarry not and at once decide. Donate your eyes, you won't need them after you are gone.

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I am able to see the world today through an eye donated by a seven-year-old angel called Swetcha

Jaganmohan Reddy

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