



A 'synthetic' eye for an eye

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Padmaja Kulkarni is a changed person and you can see it in her eyes, her right eye to be precise. Where once was a permanently damaged eyeball, getting even more diseased by the day, now sits an artificial eye that looks as authentic as her healthy eye. For Padmaja, a 17-year-old college student, the look of it means everything.

From a lonely teenager whose smiles were fading as she grew older, Padmaja has blossomed into a confident girl with a growing circle of friends. Much of the credit for this transformation goes to a cosmetic procedure whereby doctors replaced Padmaja's failed eye with a customised synthetic eye made of acrylic material, and inserted through a new technique of eye surgery.

Padmaja's problem with her left eye began soon after she was born, when it developed a cataract condition. Her eye gradually deteriorated and she eventually lost all vision in it. Over time, pressure built up around the eye because it was not being used and it began to bulge.

"It also used to hurt a lot, especially in the sunlight," recalls Padmaja.

Worse than the physical pain was the emotional discomfort. Her protruding eye made Padmaja self-conscious, a feeling intensified by people's reactions. "No one would talk to me," she says.

Then, early last year, Padmaja's father, DB Kulkarni, brought her to **Aditya Jyot Hospital in Wadala and met Dr Debraj Shome, an ophthalmic and facial plastic surgeon. Dr Shome** recommended that Padmaja's useless eye be removed and replaced with an implant.

The traditional technique of surgery involves surgically joining muscles around the eye to one another to hold the implant in place. In the new technique, termed myoconjunctival enucleation, the muscles are sutured to the arches on the side of the eye.

"This technique offers much higher mobility," says **Dr Shome**. "When the muscle moves, the implant moves with it; the eye looks real." In the second leg of the procedure that Padmaja underwent, her eye is fitted with a prosthesis that resembles a real eye.

Not all patients need the ball-like implants, which are only required when an eyeball cannot be saved. There are two kinds of artificial eyeball implants: silicone ones, which cost as little as Rs100, and porous polyethylene implants, which are priced at around Rs16,000.

Getting a lifelike eye restores the confidence of patients, if not their eyesight. Just ask Padmaja.