



مبادرة جيسى لخدمة الإنسانية
ISA AWARD FOR SERVICE TO HUMANITY

DR. SANDUK RUIT

SIGHT'S MESSENGER



LOSING ONE'S SIGHT IS EQUIVALENT TO LOSING ONE'S LIFE

Thuli Maya Thing, a fifty-year-old Nepalese lady living in poverty, gets up before dawn to start her day of chores. She nearly burned to death while doing housework, which included gathering firewood, cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry.

The thought of losing her sight and never again seeing her children worried Thuli Maya more than the hardships of daily life: the tedium of washing, the dangers of tripping and falling, and the inescapable burning of a fire.

Thuli Maya, anxious and fearful, realised her best chance lay with a doctor she heard about in a hilly neighbourhood of Kathmandu called Hetauda near Tilganga. She'd heard a lot about the doctor who made it his mission to give sight back to hundreds of underprivileged people who'd been living in the dark. Thuli Maya waited for hours outside the hospital before being taken into the operating room, where she met Dr Ruit, who injected local anaesthetic into her eyes and began removing cataracts and replacing damaged lenses with artificial ones using a simple scope. The entire process took less than five minutes and cost less than \$25.



Thuli Maya was overcome with excitement when she realised Dr Ruit had the ability to heal her sight, and change her life, as well as the lives of thousands of other patients in need.

Dr Ruit has performed thousands of surgeries, yet each time he is filled with joy at the thought of returning sight to a needy patient.





Dr Ruit recounts doing surgery on a Nepalese mother of two who had been blind for nine years due to a blockage in her eyes' lenses. The 24-year-old woman arrived at the hospital with injured feet after travelling for seven days from her hometown.

“It was a tremendously emotional moment that I will never forget after we removed the bandages from her eyes,” Dr Ruit remembers. She held her child and examined his features for the first time.

The Nepalese call this doctor the “sight’s messenger,” but how did he come to achieve such significant medical breakthroughs? How did he come up with this lightning-fast and low-cost method of repairing cataracts, which enabled him to restore sight to over 100,000 previously blind people? No other doctor in history is believed to have performed such a feat.





THE COMPANION OF GRIEF, LOSS, AND SUFFERING

Sanduk Ruit was born on September 4, 1954, in the remote mountain village of Wolang Chung Gola, which is about 11,000 feet above sea level and is in the east of Nepal; one of the world's most inaccessible locations, with no power, schools, healthcare facilities, or modern means of communication, and a population that does not exceed two hundred people due to six to nine months of snow cover and a lack of basic utilities.

The Sanduk Ruit family, who made their living from farming and raising livestock, prioritised providing education for their children, even if they had to walk long distances to reach St. Robert's School in Darjeeling.

The second of his parents' four children, Sanduk, saw them all die. His older brother passed away at the age of three from acute diarrhoea, which was sweeping the village at the time, and his sister Chundak died of hyperthermia when she was eight years old.

Yangla, Ruit's younger sister, died of tuberculosis at the age of fifteen. She had been his best friend since infancy and the one closest to his heart. She had a great singing voice and would sing love songs she had learned from the radio.

Yangla, like Sanduk, aspired to be a teacher, but she got sick with tuberculosis, which complicated things.

Yangla's family was heartbroken that they couldn't provide her with health care because the cost of the treatment and medicines she needed was so high.

According to Sanduk, things grew much worse when her doctor labelled her condition fatal and requested that she die at home.

During her final moments, Dr Sanduk recalls, she held his hand and gazed into his eyes, saying, "Maybe I won't be able to see you again, my brother; try to devote your life to achieving great things."

After hearing those words, Sanduk's youngest sister passed away from a sickness that might have been prevented and cured, just as his older brother and sister's deaths could have been spared.

Sanduk Ruit used to say in several interviews that his sister's death left him with unfathomable agony and pain, but that it also inspired him to become a doctor and to devote his life to helping the poor who lack access to quality healthcare.



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THE PURSUIT OF A DREAM

Dr Ruit obtained a scholarship to study medicine and surgery at King George Medical College in Lucknow from 1972 to 1976 after graduating from Siddhartha Vanasthali School in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1969. In 1984, he moved to Delhi, which is the capital of India, to study at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences to become an ophthalmologist.

From 1987 to 1988, Ruit worked under the tutelage of renowned Australian ophthalmologist Fred Hollows as part of a 14-month residency programme at Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital. Hollows was impressed by how smart and professional he was, so he offered him a lot of help and motivation to keep getting better.

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Since then, Ruit has come to view Hollows as more than just an instructor; he regards him as a close friend and someone who has dedicated his life to aiding the less fortunate.

Ruit realised that one of the most prevalent health issues in his country, Nepal, is visual impairments, particularly blindness as a result of cataracts, with a 62.2% incidence rate among patients over the age of fifty, and that seven youngsters lose their sight every day. In Nepal, refractive abnormalities are frequent eye illnesses that cause blindness in youngsters, and every year, thousands of individuals go blind as a result of cataracts.

“

MY ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE IS
TO ELIMINATE PREVENTABLE
BLINDNESS IN THIS PART OF
THE WORLD

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The World Health Organization estimates that 90% of the world's blind population comes from low-income households. There are over 460,000 people in need of eye health care services, and many of them have to travel long distances, often through bad weather, to get the care they need.

Therefore, Ruit and his friend Dr Fred Hollows imagined a world where people in impoverished nations might get top-notch eye treatment.

In his search for an alternative method of treating cataracts, Ruit teamed up with Dr Fred Hollows to develop a novel intraocular lens that could be mass-produced at a much-reduced cost. With this inexpensive lens, he was able to treat a patient's cataract in just five minutes. Phacoemulsification is

used to surgically remove cataracts without sutures and eye lenses are replaced with low-cost artificial ones.

Realising that producing the lenses locally would significantly reduce the cost of treatment, the two surgeons quickly began developing plans to build a factory to produce the eye lenses necessary for cataract surgery.

Upon his return to Nepal, Ruit participated in the development of the Nepal Eye Programme and contributed to a comprehensive epidemiological study of blindness in the country. In Nepal, he pioneered the use of intraocular lens implants for cataract surgery.





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“

I FEEL VERY BLESSED TO BE
ABLE TO IMPROVE THE LIVES
OF SO MANY INDIVIDUALS

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Traditional practitioners and the majority of old physicians organised an anti-abortion campaign for his project, alleging his surgical approach presented threats to patients' eyes, but he persisted and was able to persuade his critics of his innovative method of treatment until he gained their faith.

A young eye nurse he met was willing to assist him. As a result of the love and support they shared through those difficult moments, they eventually got married in 1987. In collaboration with his wife, Nanda Ruit, and a team of young Nepali ophthalmologists, he established the Tilganga Eye Centre, which is supported by the Nepalese programme for eye health care and the Fred Hollows Foundation.

The plant opened in June 1995, one year after his mentor and friend, Dr Fred Hollows, died. Ruit was appointed medical director of Nepal's Tilganga Ophthalmological Institute. The institute is a key partner of the Fred Hollows Foundation, and it is now a global medical institution led by doctor Sanduk Ruit, who has provided free care to over 120,000 people with treatable blindness.





Because of his preference for doing surgery barefoot, Dr Ruit earned the nicknames “the saviour of sight” and “the barefoot surgeon” from the locals. Over the course of his career, he restored the sight of over a hundred thousand individuals and provided free care to the blind in Nepal. On a regular basis, he deployed a mobile eye clinic into Nepal’s remote mountain regions, where he performed free surgeries on people in need.

Dr. Ruit’s work stands out because of the innovative human and medical components it incorporates. He invented a cheap lens that serves the same function as the lens used for the same use throughout the world, and he also developed a novel surgical technique that minimises adverse effects, shortens recovery time, and cuts down on the expense of both labour and materials, in addition to the manufacturing of





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350,000 lenses a year at a low cost thanks to the development of processes and procedures over the course of more than three decades. These lenses are of comparable quality to their counterparts in the developed world, according to scientific studies.

With the objective of providing free surgery to the poor and needy of Nepal, Dr Ruit has set up more than 200 eye camps in the country's remote areas, frequently making do with makeshift facilities like tents, schools, and even cleaned and sanitised horse stables.

Dr Ruit's novel surgical approach has helped cut in half the rate of treatable blindness in Nepal over the past three decades. He has also trained over 650 doctors from all over the world to follow in his footsteps and share his knowledge in the fight against preventable blindness around the world; as a result, the number of successful eye surgeries performed worldwide has now surpassed 35 million.

Dr Ruit's centre presently includes about 30 in-house doctors who provide ophthalmology services to patients in two hospitals and 16 outpatient clinics

throughout Nepal. There are medical professionals taking part from many different parts of the world, including the United States, Africa, and many Asian countries.

About six thousand operations are performed successfully each year at the institute. Mobile hospitals were so effective that their success was shared with countries including Bhutan, Thailand, Myanmar, Mongolia, Pakistan, North Korea, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, China, and India.

The Institute's work is sustainable because of its three-tiered patient support system: free care for the poor and the needy; partial help for those with limited income based on income level; and full support for those who can afford it. The institute's expenditures are fully covered, as are the salaries of a huge number of assistants and employees.

Dr Sanduk Ruit has set a target of screening 1 million people and treating 300,000–500,000 patients with curable blindness by 2030.

This is the inspiring true story of how a young boy from a rural area with limited access to formal education rose to become one of the most famous and respected eye doctors in the world. This is a story of a man's determination and persistence.

Despite being reserved and unwilling to talk about his work, he accepted the responsibility of restoring sight to the millions of people whose eyes had been ruined by darkness, to serve as an inspiration to others, and to uphold the title of the Messenger of Sight bestowed upon him by the people of Nepal.

“
GIVING PEOPLE THEIR
SIGHT BACK IS AN
INVALUABLE DEED
”





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AWARDS AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Dr Sanduk Ruit's work has been featured in dozens of documentaries, news stories, and articles published by some of the world's most prestigious newspapers and magazines, including the New York Times, the Daily Telegraph, and National Geographic Documentary.

- In 2011, the Italian director Stefano Levi made the film *Out of the Darkness*, which documents Ruit's work in remote northern Nepal.
- In 1995, he was awarded an honorary fellowship by the Australian College of Ophthalmology.
- He got the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace and International Understanding, which is the Asian Nobel Prize. This was because he "put Nepal at the forefront of developing safe, effective, and affordable procedures for cataract surgery," which helped blind people in even the poorest countries get their sight back.
- In 2007, he was made an honorary officer of the Order of Australia.
- In 2015, he was conferred with the National Order of Merit of Bhutan.
- In 2018, the Government of India awarded him the Padma Shri, its fourth highest civilian award, for his efforts in cataract surgery and innovation that led to a 90 percent reduction in the cost of cataract eye surgery, provided low-cost cataract surgery lenses to over thirty countries.
- Asteroid 83362 Sandukruit, discovered by Bill Yeung in 2001, was named in his honour. The





official naming citation was published by the Minor Planet Centre on 30 March 2010.

- In 2007, he was named Reader's Digest's Asian Man of the Year.
- In 2014, the US-based Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship honoured him with the "Social Entrepreneurs of the Year 2014" award for his initiatives taken as part of the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (TIO), a part of the Nepal Eye Programme.

- In 2017, he was named by the Albert Einstein Foundation as one of the century's 100 most influential figures.
- In 2018, Ruit's biography, *The Barefoot Surgeon*, by Australian writer Ali Grippner, was published.
- 2019, A Nepali translation of Ruit's biography was published in 2019.



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د. ساندوك رويت : رسول الزميل

