

02 mid-day our city

saturday, december 6, 2014, mumbai, web www.mid-day.com, twitter @mid_day

Did you know? A cataract is a clouding of the lens inside the eye, which leads to a decrease in vision. It is the most common cause of blindness

'I saw a rainbow for the first time, it is the most beautiful thing'

Eight-year-old Chhaya Kalapad also loves to look at herself in the phone camera now, and take selfies

SADAGURU PANDIT
mailto:sp@mid-day.com

IT'S DIFFICULT to imagine all the things we take for granted, like being able to see the words that make up this report, as sources of wonder and amazement. For eight-year-old Chhaya Kalapad, however, that's exactly what they are.

"I saw a rainbow for the first time a few months ago. It is the most beautiful thing. And the kittens, just look how cute they are", Chhaya exclaimed when this reporter went to meet her yesterday.

Teachers at her Dadar school said Chhaya has been bounding about, looking every bit as joyful as the kittens she admires, ever since she has been able to see things. Her latest craze: clicking selfies.

Born in the small village of Washim in Satara district, Chhaya was given up for blind, and that's what she remained for all of her time on Earth till November last year, when a cataract operation changed her life. Thanks to her new gift, Chhaya will be able to step out of her blind school in Dadar



THE VEIL LIFTS: When mid-day met her yesterday, Chhaya couldn't stop giggling after clicking and looking at selfies she clicked on a cellphone. (Left) She counts fingers at her school in Dadar.

and attend one for the sighted from next year.

Early life

When she was born in 2006 and they realised she couldn't see, Chhaya's parents, Manish and Minakshi Kalapad, couldn't do much but accept her vision impairment because Manish's meagre earnings wouldn't allow otherwise.

Given the lack of facilities for visually impaired kids in their village, the Kalapads had to enrol Chhaya in the Kamla Mehta School for Blind Girls in Dadar in 2012, even though that meant living without their daughter, who was six at the time. Chhaya began to be

taught in Braille with other blind children and, considering her family background, the school also took care of her medical and other expenses.

Let there be light

Chhaya's world began to change in November last year, when Dr Nitin Dedhia, an ophthalmologist who runs Ojas Eye Care hospital in Bandra, held a free eye check-up camp at the school and realised that Chhaya wasn't blind. She was rushed to a hospital in Dedhia's for further check-ups and reports revealed that her vision could be restored through cataract extraction followed by implantation of intraocular lenses.

"After check-ups, we realised that Chhaya wasn't blind but had a cataract issue. We performed the first operation, on her right eye, on November 25, 2013. The very next day, she started counting her fingers and responded spectacularly to moving objects," said Dr Dedhia. Encouraged, Dr Dedhia and his team performed a surgery on her left eye within a month.

More than a year and several monitoring sessions later, Chhaya can now easily recognise shapes, colors, faces and even count fingers from a 10-foot distance.

Chhaya's vision acuity is 20/60 as of now (normal vision

is 20/20), which is expected to improve significantly in the coming months.

"Due to non-movement of the eye for over six years, her vision isn't developed. She suffers from the lazy eye syndrome right now. But she is able to read the first line on the vision chart as of now and her vision will improve significantly over time", added Dr Dedhia, who didn't charge a single penny from the family for the entire treatment — which costs over ₹50,000 — because of their economic condition.

New beginning

Though Chhaya can understand shapes and characters, she still can't read since she has been learning in Braille. Her parents have, however, decided to shift her to a school for the sighted in their village as soon as they get a go-ahead from Dr Dedhia and Suparna Aijaonkar, couldn't ask for anything else," said Menakshi.

school for Blind Girls.

"We were worried about her all the time. Despite her vision problem, we had to keep her away from us since we couldn't afford to treat her here or shift to Mumbai ourselves. But now, the entire village is thrilled after knowing that she can see. Her final monitoring session is on Saturday (today) and we are excited to know if we can take her back and enrol her in our local village school," said Chhaya's father Manish.

"It's only a matter of time before the last report by Dr Dedhia is out. In 2015, Chhaya will be enrolled in a school for the sighted with other kids," said Aijaonkar.

Chhaya's mother told mid-day that over the course of the last year, she has been given more than she could have possibly asked for. "My daughter can see, she will be staying with me again. I and Suparna Aijaonkar, couldn't ask for anything else," said Menakshi.

"We were worried about her all the time. Despite her vision problem, we had to keep her away from us since we couldn't afford to treat her here or shift to Mumbai ourselves — Chhaya's father Manish"

Shaadi, Utsav ya Tyohar... Lijjat Papad Ho Harbar...

Karram Kurram Kurram Kurram

Lijjat PAPAN

Product of Lijjat Family
Available in seven delicious varieties.
Ustad Ustad Special Masoomi Masoomi Special
Garlic Chilies Punjabi Special

SHRI MAHILA GRIHA UDYOG LIJLAT PAPAN
(Incorporated by Ministry of Village Industries Commission)