

# 'Political will, professional will, and peoples' will together can do anything'



Dr. V.K.Raju, Founder-President of the Eye Foundation of America

Dr. V.K. Raju is the Founder and president of the Eye Foundation of America and a clinical professor of ophthalmology at West Virginia University in Morgantown. He received his medical degree from Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, India. He completed both his ophthalmology residency and fellowship at the University of London. Dr. Raju is a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and the American College of Surgeons.

The Eye Foundation of America he founded has been rendering services since 1977 in India and 21 other developing countries. The mammoth work the EFA team has done could be the envy of any humanitarian organization. Close to 400,000 eye surgeries, 2.5 million + outpatients- it is a colossal work. It helped found 2 Eye Institutes - Goutami and Srikan in AP, India in 2005. These institutes have committed to provide innovative and compassionate care to the patients, by incorporating new technology and through patient education. His mission was to protect, preserve and restore the treasured gift of sight for improving quality of life by providing caring service, irrespective of the socio-economic status, with due emphasis on education and research.

Dr Raju has received numerous awards, including the Academy's Outstanding Humanitarian Award, the Melvin Jones Fellowship from the International Lions Foundation, the Paul Harris Fellow Award from Rotary International, the Distinguished Community Service Award from the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin and the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Achievement Award from West Virginia University. Dr. Raju has published over 300 presentations, articles and chapters. He has authored 2 books, and more are in the pipeline. Along with his clinical work, his interests include medical history, establishing lectureships to enhance teaching and the prevention of blindness in children through teaching, service and research.

**The Indian Panorama editor Prof. Indrajit S Saluja caught up with Dr. Raju who was in New York as a guest at the Diwali at Times Square,**

**and had a conversation with him on his favorite subject of prevention of blindness among children**

**TIP: What is your message to readers of The Indian Panorama?**

I was born in India but lived in West Virginia most of my life. People often say that I am working so hard for a long time. Actually 45 years now since this work began. When you like and do the work, it's not work anymore. I do believe in that. Today we are living in an incredible age with the advancement of medicine. But for children, I think it's not fair. I have worked in 30 countries but our main nucleus is India. As my mentor used to say in London 'there are three solutions for every problem involved - first is education, second is education, and third is education.' So, if you educate people, problems will be minimum. If we can give education and health to children, they will build the nation. I feel there is need for charities for them.

ultimately sending them to the hospitals to complete the procedure. But 30-40 years back there was a problem. After you finish the camp where will patients go for follow up? So, we started two institutions - and the latest one is Goutami. Giving continuous care is the main thing. Our priority is children, children, and children. We talk about education and 80% of our education is through vision and if the children miss that chance, it's not only problem to the child, it's a problem to the community, society, and to the country. In eyecare, if you catch them early, treat them early, problems can be resolved. Goutami has excellent telemedicine facility - biggest program in Andhra Pradesh. We screen every baby who is prematurely born - 8% to 10% of them need special attention. Fifteen to thirty minutes treatment can save them from blindness.

The Rotary Clubs helped us a lot in organizing the eye camps. Goutami does a camp a day. Anything can be done today but we have to do it together. If the will is there it can be done. Political will, professional will, and peoples' will together can do anything.



Dr. V.K. Raju examines children at Goutami Hospital in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh

**TIP: What is your vision and mission about Goutami?**

Our work starts with 'eye camp' which is a wonderful concept. The concept is: screening, seeing the patients outside the hospital. In rural areas people don't want to come to the hospitals because it's threatening. Even today, even in the United States, people are somehow concerned about coming to the hospitals. We treat people outside the hospital. Screen them, advise them and some of the treatments we give outside the hospital. In 1979 we started a temporary facility outside the hospital with screening, advising the patients and giving minor treatments which are quite safe outside the hospital. You have heard about health fairs where we set up all facilities by screening people and if needed

**TIP: Have you launched a project on eyecare in Rotary Club in Morgantown?**

Yes we did. In United States there is a problem with nutrition. What people eat in West Virginia is not good for health, and obesity is the major issue. We really try to educate parents and their children in the farmers market about what to eat properly. In ancient Ayurvedic system of India, it is not the medications. The principles of Ayurveda are - eat right, exercise right, fix your lifestyle and then if it's not enough then take medication. We are trying to make people conscious about that. Mindset is important. Forget what you have done. Think about what you have to do.