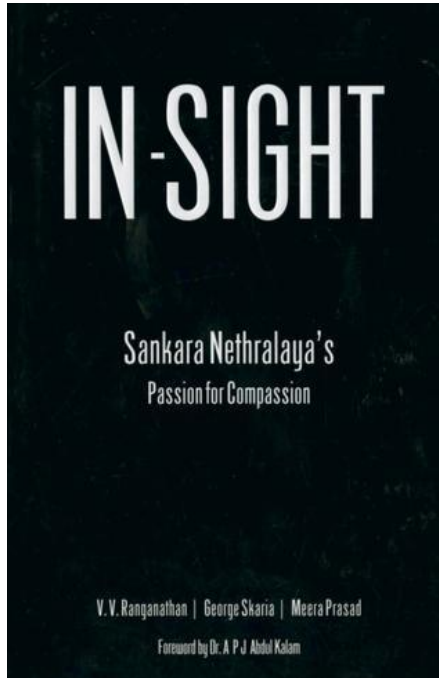


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In the service of sight

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IN-SIGHT – Sankara Nethralaya's Passion for Compassion: V. V. Ranganathan; George Skaria, Meera Prasad; Pub. by Lone Tree Books, Noida-201301.

Usually any institution's success story makes absorbing reading. How the initial struggle and challenges give way to solutions and excellence and how fore vision and commitment binds the core set of founders and later holds together the ever expanding team of dedicated workers can be gripping for entrepreneurial minds. Even if the basic format appears similar in many of these publications chronicling the developments of and within an institution, what sets one apart from another are the indigenous and innovative move-ahead methods adopted by these institutions and their self-propelling determination to thrive.

Documentation of such history is both crucial and beneficial. Such books satisfy the curiosity of anyone who wants to know what makes a particular institution tick.

A rewind

“In-Sight”, penned by three authors, falls in the same genre covering the past 33 years in the history of Sankara Nethralaya in Chennai. It is an affectionate rewind of the hospital's birth and growth, its changes in clinical services and research, evolving management, finance and infrastructure and most importantly, its influence in many ophthalmologists' training and practice.

The book would surely appeal to all those who have experienced Sankara Nethralaya directly, whether as a member of the medical, nursing, paramedical, clerical, or administrative staff or touched as a patient. Those interested in ophthalmic history will also find this book useful.

For readers who have not been inside Sankara Nethralaya, the text may seem introspective and at times self-congratulatory. But that is bound to happen in such compilations. Though Dr. S.S. Badrinath, the ophthalmic surgeon who built the world class, self-governing humanitarian institution, states it clear in his message that he was very particular that in the writing of the Nethralaya's story, there shouldn't be a detailed biography of him at all.

In that sense, the writers have presented a fair account in a positive and upbeat style describing some of the faults and difficulties that beset the institution. There were always inbuilt and ingrained inefficiencies and problems with important personalities who sought appointments only with the founder. But the authors have wisely stuck to the facts and quotes collected from 62 interviewees across the country comprising internal and external stakeholders like past and present doctors, rich and poor patients, big and small donors and the staff.

The authors need to be credited for structuring the book differently. The driving essence of course is Nethralaya's journey of progress but it is woven through topics of contemporary interest as this is a period when social enterprises are playing a greater role in alleviating the sufferings of humanity.

The book is further enriched with contributions from distinguished thinkers like Gopalkrishna Gandhi, Rahul Bajaj, Mallika Srinivasan, Dr Prathap C.Reddy to name a few. These luminaries have expressed their independent views on a range of general themes not necessarily related to ophthalmology. For instance, there is a chapter on peculiarities of the taxing regime by Amitabh Singh which talks about simplifying and liberalising tax laws governing the not-for-profit organisations.


Former President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's foreword crowns the book where he says the Nethralaya, which he has visited several times and returned impressed by the facility and experience of the service, is an inspiration for those trying to pursue a goal.

Crusade

Sankara Nethralaya may have been the calling and passion of one man, Dr. Badrinath, but it was his team of dedicated associates who took forward his crusade against blindness. From a humble beginning in 1978, it has grown into a state-of-the-art eye care centre today aided by a phenomenal team spirit of both insiders and outsiders, the philanthropists, like-minded friends and well-wishers. This included the late N.A. Palkhivala, the celebrated lawyer, who was not treated at Sankara Nethralaya but as a visitor was so impressed by the eye care delivery system that he made substantial contributions to upscale the institution's operations.

The book gives several such insights about individuals and incidents that underline that SN is not the typical eye clinic set up as a commercial venture. It started with a “service” motive and continues to be governed by its founding principles. The chapters on compassionate entrepreneurship, patient relations offer an intimate picture of life at SN encompassing the role of the poorest of patient to the high-profile donor, from the ordinary worker to the highly qualified researcher — all of whom have collectively been at the cutting edge of eye care under this umbrella organisation.

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