

INDIA

Caregiver Name: Gita
Age at Implantation: 5

Child: Chayanika
Age Today: 12

This is the story of girl who was delivered full-term with no apparent medical issues, she seemed healthy. However, as months passed, her parents noticed delays in her developmental milestones. She began sitting near ten months and did not walk until she was over fifteen months old.

Her parents also grew concerned about her hearing, as she did not respond to sounds or voices in the way her elder sibling had at that age. At nine months, they took her for her first hearing test. The results indicated partial hearing loss, but subsequent visits to multiple doctors yielded inconsistent reports ranging from normal hearing to single-ear loss. Lacking concrete guidance, the family watched as the jolly child began communicating primarily through gestures. Meanwhile they tried various rituals, offerings and herbal treatments advised by relatives and acquaintances.



In 2015, when the girl was two and a half years old, the family travelled for a BERA test. The results confirmed severe to profound hearing loss. She was fitted with hearing aids and began speech therapy, but the device offered no observable benefit, and she rarely used it.

In 2016, when the child was three, her father suffered a stroke and his ability to work was restricted. **The family was forced to depend on a small pension, and amidst this medical and financial turmoil, the child's hearing treatment took a backseat.**

It was not until the end of 2017, when the girl was five, that they revisited an ENT specialist. He advised them to pursue cochlear implant surgery at a hospital which could provide funding assistance. The logistics of this decision were extremely difficult. Since the father could not travel due to his condition, **the mother had to take the child to alone. Unfamiliar with the city and not knowing the language, she had to hire guides to help her navigate. Before the surgery could take place; they had to make three to four separate trips for various tests and administrative processes.** Financial constraints and the need to care for the husband and elder daughter back home meant they could never stay for long periods. Finally, in 2018, at the age of five, the child underwent cochlear implant surgery.

Upon returning, their referring ENT doctor directed them to a newly established cochlear implant clinic in the region for auditory rehabilitation. The centre was far, requiring a travel time of up to 90 minutes each way, but provided them the much-needed support and

guidance. Slowly, the child began to listen, ask for her device, and imitate sounds. **The mother fondly recalls her daughter calling her "Ma" clearly and meaningfully for the first time in July 2018, two months after her implantation.** As a later implanted child, she needed added efforts for which her mother transformed her own habits, becoming constantly talkative to expose the child to language. She noted down every new word, mistake, and milestone.

Today, the girl is a chatty 12-year-old who attends a mainstream school and she's a graceful dancer. However, as she progresses to higher classes, she struggles with the advancing curriculum, particularly with multiple language courses and classroom instructions that are not always adequate for her needs. She currently relies on private tuition to keep up.



The parents live with underlying anxiety and fear of possibility of the implant failing someday. The financial burden of maintaining the external device and purchasing spare parts remain a tough struggle, sometimes forcing the family to compromise on the needs of other members. Even so, they are ever thankful to cochlear implants changing the course of their daughter's journey.