

Recipient Speaks



Preeti Unhale
Heart Transplant Recipient
(received transplant in
2001)

Twenty-four years after undergoing a heart transplant, I fulfilled a lifelong dream-trekking 11,755 feet to the sacred Kedarnath temple. Standing amidst thousands of pilgrims, I experienced a profound sense of gratitude, strength, and divine grace.

My early life was active and joyful, defined by academics, sports, and a deep enthusiasm for badminton. In 1994, after what seemed like a routine viral illness, I began experiencing chest discomfort. Initial medical consultations suggested rest, and I appeared to recover. Life resumed its pace—I completed my M.Sc. in Environmental Chemistry, got married, and looked forward to the future.

In 1999, during my first pregnancy, my cardiac symptoms worsened significantly. Medical evaluation revealed that continuing the pregnancy would endanger my life. Terminating it was an emotionally devastating but life-saving decision. My health continued to decline, and at AIIMS Delhi, after two months of investigations, I was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy. At the age of 26, I was informed that a heart transplant was my only chance of survival.

On January 23, 2001, I received the call that changed my life—a suitable donor heart had become available. The surgery at

Corresponding Author: Dr. Sunil Shroff,
MOHAN Foundation, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
Email: shroff@mohanfoundation.org

AIIMS Delhi was successful. Upon awakening, I immediately sensed the difference—the ability to breathe deeply and freely was nothing short of miraculous. Post-transplant life required discipline: lifelong immunosuppression, regular follow-ups, and vigilance against rejection. In 2004, I experienced my first episode of acute rejection, followed by seven more between 2004 and 2015. Each episode was physically and emotionally taxing, but timely medical intervention ensured recovery. I also faced complications such as avascular necrosis due to long-term steroid use, cytomegalovirus infection, hepatitis E, Bell's palsy, and two episodes of COVID-19. Each challenge reinforced my resilience and faith in medical care.

Over the years, I gradually regained mobility, strength, and independence. I resumed travelling, including a long-cherished trip to Switzerland, and in 2023, I won a **gold medal in badminton at the Transplant Games in Kochi**. In 2025, I represented India at the **World Transplant Games in Dresden, Germany**, celebrating not only physical endurance but also the gift of renewed life through organ donation.

The heartbeat sustaining me belongs to a 14-year-old donor whose family remains in my prayers. To honour their gift, I work with **ORBO (Organ Retrieval Banking Organization)** at AIIMS, supporting both donor families and transplant recipients.

वो भी एक समय था,
जब हर साँस में एक संघर्ष था,
हर दिन का जैसे कोई मतलब ना था,
सपने जो लगता था सपने ही रह जायेंगे,
नये पंख पा अब उनको भी उड़ते पाया था
धड़कने तब भी थीं, धड़कने अब भी हैं,
लेकिन बदले इनके सुर हैं
बदली हृदय की ताल है
ये हार्ट ट्रांसप्लांट बेमिसाल है!

My journey underscores that survival after transplantation is not merely biological; it is a testament to willpower, adherence, and faith. If my experience inspires even one person to donate organs or one recipient to persevere, I will have truly honoured the life gifted to me.

To cite : Unhale P. Recipient Speaks. Indian Transplant Newsletter. 2025 July-Sep; 24(3):p12. DOI: 10.64384/ITN.2025.055

