

# Acid test for doctors to bring her smile back

Sonali Mukherjee is undergoing treatment bravely after she was attacked by three men 10 years back

**POULOMI BANERJEE**

**NEW DELHI:** The 17-year-old Sonali Mukherjee was beautiful and vivacious. She was a National Cadet Corps cadet and college student who dreamt of working in the education department some day. Ten years and numerous surgeries later, Mukherjee, a victim of acid attack that brought her life to a standstill, just dreams of returning to a normal life.

Mukherjee is undergoing a series of reconstructive surgeries at B L K Super Speciality Hospital, the first of which was conducted on 27 August. She will undergo six to seven more surgeries, spread over 12 months. The complete treatment is

expected to cost Rs 28 to 30 lakh, but while the doctors have waived off their fee, an NGO Beti and Radiant Life Care are handling the remaining expenditure.

Three youths had entered the Mukherjee residence in Dhanbad in Jharkhand and thrown acid on a sleeping Sonali. She had complained against three attackers for street harassment earlier. The acid attack case is still pending in court.

Mukherjee had lost both eyes due to deep cornea burns and her right ear. She was suffering from near total deafness bilaterally, her ear drums were destroyed. She couldn't close her eyes because the lids were damaged. She couldn't talk prop-



erly or even eat normally, said a doctor. 'Sonali was so badly injured that she left us shaken,' said Sanjeev Bagai, one of the doctors treating her. But, Bagai and others at the hospital were very impressed by her spirit. 'She is so reasonable. She told us that we should first concen-

**She told us that we should first concentrate on restoring the use of her eyes and ears before trying cosmetic improvements**

— DR SANJEEV BAGAI

trate on restoring the use of her eyes and ears and the proper functioning of her body, before trying cosmetic improvements,' Bagai added.

Though chemical attacks and case of burns are unfortunately common in India, for the doctors, Mukherjee's case is unique in some

respects. For one, her wounds are many years old. The over 20 surgeries that followed also left her physically weaker. 'She was tissue bankrupt when she came to us. Which means that because of the previous surgeries she had very little healthy tissues left which could be used for reconstructing the damaged parts,' explained Bagai.

The incident changed life for the Mukherjees. The family moved from Dhanbad to Bokaro. 'Sonali was the brightest of my three children. Her mother is often depressed,' said Chandi Das Mukherjee, Sonali's father. 'Well-wishers call her from all over. She doesn't let anyone else do her work for her,' says Chandi Das.