

# millennium

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## Acid attack victim rises in hope while

Sonali Mukherjee is bitter about the incident but her resolve to see through scor

**POULOMI BANERJEE**

**NEW DELHI:** 'I require multiple surgeries. I have had just the first one in the series of six to seven reconstructive surgeries that will be carried out over a period of 12 months at the BLK Super Speciality Hospital. The improvements right now are too subtle for me to explain, but I am hopeful, very hopeful, that once all the surgeries are done I will be much better,' says Sonali Mukherjee, an acid attack victim from Jharkhand.

Mukherjee's confidence seems super human for someone who has suffered a decade of pain and 22 surgeries, after the fateful night when a group of three youth entered her

house and poured acid on her while she was asleep. She was 17 then. Her only crime was that she had dared to protest against the boys for harassing her. 'It was not a one-off incident. They used to harass me everyday. One day, I decided that it was enough and I couldn't take it lying down anymore,' says the gritty young woman. She was a college student and an NCC cadet when the acid attack took place.

In the 10 years that followed, Mukherjee became a familiar symbol of victimisation that the society didn't know what to do about. 'Accompanied by my father [Chandi Das Mukherjee], I went to government offices and met representatives of the National Commission



A file photo of Sonali Mukherjee in NCC uniform

for Women. Everyone sympathised with me, but nothing concrete was done about my case,' she says. Her family had spent lakhs of rupees, but they weren't helping.

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, facial tissues deeply scarred, many muscles damaged and she had burns on her back, breasts and upper arms. She couldn't close her eyes, because the lids were dam-