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## PROFILE

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# Renu Raju

## Dialogue With an Adventist Ophthalmologist in India

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**W**hen you meet Renu Raju, the first thing that strikes you is her smile, perpetual and pleasing, almost unerasable. If you know her long

enough, you'll discover that the smile reflects her philosophy of life: No problem is too great and no person is too small for her. A tenacity of purpose, a quiet confidence in Jesus, and an absolute devotion to people in need mark Renu's activities.

Renu was born in a Christian tradition that traces back its origin to the Apostle Thomas' mission to India. Her father left a lucrative medical practice to accept the call of Dr. Ida Scudder to serve the Christian Medical College, Vellore, India. Six years after the move, Renu was born, and she grew up in a community of professionals, scholars, and ministers of compassion. Her childhood was surrounded with the image of medical missionary work. And when she came to the time to choose her life career, she had no

hesitation. In 1975 she graduated from the University of Madras with the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. In 1984 she completed a Master of Surgery degree in ophthalmology.

Renu is married to Dr. Jonathan Raju, a college mate. Together the Rajus served Seventh-day Adventist Hospitals in India for five years. They have two daughters, Priya, 14; and Nithya, 8. After their postgraduate training, the Rajus were invited in 1984 to join the faculty of Christian Medical College, where Renu is one of the sought-after ophthalmologists. As an associate professor, she not only teaches in the department of ophthalmology, but also brings healing and hope to those who suffer from many afflictions of the eye.

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**I**ndia is a developing country with a rich history and tradition, and yet it has certain cultural restrictions. As a woman, do you find these restrictions inhibiting the pursuit of your profession?

Hardly. In the past there may have been some difficulties in providing work and professional opportunities to women, but not anymore. Women are involved in every aspect of work life in the country—from nursing to nuclear engineering, from a village classroom to the highest level of political leadership.

**The college where you studied and where you now work was started to meet the special needs of Indian women, was it not?**

The story of Christian Medical College, Vellore, is the story of undimmed vision and unselfish service. Around the turn of the century Dr. Ida Scudder, an American missionary, came to Vellore, and found that women were not getting

any medical attention. What's more, women won't go to men doctors. Dr. Scudder decided to set up an exclusive medical training center for women. So began Christian Medical College in 1900—as a one bed hospital; today it is a multi-specialty, modern, 1300-bed healing and teaching institution.

**When did your association with CMC begin?**

Since my birth, I should say. My father was called to join the faculty here in 1947, the year when male students were admitted for the first time. That's the year India got its independence from Britain, and people from all walks of life, including professionals, felt the call of national service. My father left his practice and joined the Christian Medical College, and served there for 20 years, later to become its principal. Thus I was brought up in an environment of poor patients, doctors, and nurses. It was an atmosphere where Christian values of compassion and service were

held high. We lived, worked, and worshiped together, upholding the motto of CMC, "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

**How did you become an Adventist?**

Not because of any fantastic experience. One of my college mates was an Adventist. We played tennis together, and took part in college sports. Friendship developed into something more, and when marriage came on the horizon, I became a Seventh-day Adventist.

**In the practice of your profession, do you find your Christian experience helpful?**

After the completion of medical studies, my primary objective was to become a skilled professional so that I can offer the best medical care to those in need irrespective of class, caste, color, or religion. I wanted to practice my Lord's command, "In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brothers, you have done it unto me." Each day I am challenged to

keep this objective in view. My faith in God helps me to have faith in those I come in contact with every day, and that faith upholds my ministry. That faith is a great plus for me.

**You are a very busy person. How do you cope with professional demands and family needs?**

With difficulty, but it has to be done. My work keeps me very busy, particularly when I go out on rural camps. And my husband, Jonathan, is a busy person too. He is an internist and teaches at the medical college. And yet we have worked out our profession and lifestyle in such a way that we can spend quality time with each other and with our family. I take time to be with our two girls, help in their homework, play with them, listen to them, pray and worship with them. Professional demands cannot be allowed to hurt family priorities.

**Do you find ophthalmology a fertile field for fulfilling your calling?**

Very much so. India has some 12 million blind persons. Of this, at least 50 percent suffer from cataracts that can be treated with good results. Seventy-five percent of the Indian population live in villages and are engaged in agricultural work, exposed to hazards to the eye while harvesting grain, cutting wood, and working in the blistering sun. Corneal ulcer is one of the most common work-related injuries. I see an enormous opportunity of service in this area.

**I was speaking to one of your patients the other day—an elderly woman. She said, “God answered my prayers through Doctor Amma [a respectful term, meaning mother]. I got my sight back.”**

It's nothing. It was only a cataract surgery. Our people are simple folks, but very loving. Some of the older patients are almost paternal in their affection. That's their way of expressing ap-

preciation. That kind of trusting, bonding relationship helps in the healing process. Most patients that come to us look at our work with great faith and anticipate that it is God who works through us. We do our part. God brings about health and healing.

**How many patients do you see a day?**

On an average, I see 25 to 30 persons in the outpatient clinic, and take care of an equal number in the hospital. Each person is different. Some need little attention, others very detailed care, but all need that personal interest and assurance. Surgery is a totally different experience. When that bandage is removed, when a smile etches the patient's face, we all rejoice. Restoration of sight is a gift of God, and that's my greatest joy.

**What about people who can't come to your hospital?**

We go to them. We conduct two to three mobile clinics a week. We take our team in a van and go to rural areas. Our team consists of trained technicians, optometrists, nurses and doctors. We leave in the morning, carry our food and water, and return when our last patient has been seen. We screen for glaucoma, strabismus, corneal ulcerations, eyelid problems, and cataracts. We care for the patients as much as possible on the spot.

**Even surgeries?**

In one such camp in Karmatar, a village in north-eastern India, we performed 111 cataract surgeries in two days. We converted a room from one of the houses where we were staying as the operating room. We cleaned and disinfected the room for two days. When electricity failed, we used

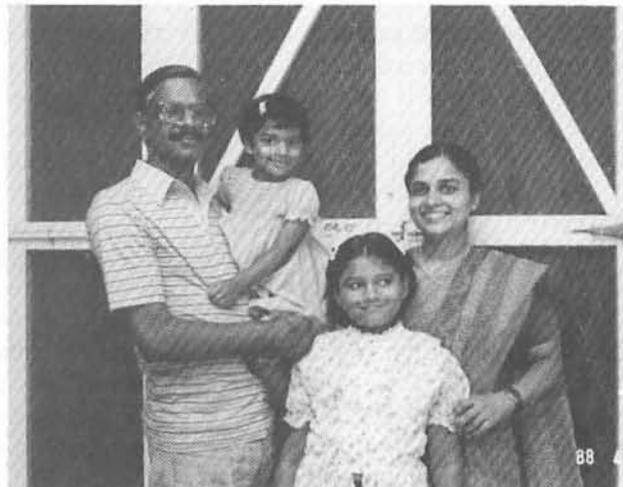
flashlights or a diesel generator. We stayed in that village for two weeks. We removed cataracts, provided daily dressings, treated infections, dispensed eye shields, and gave out spectacles. The procedures were all free to the villagers, courtesy of the nearby Adventist Hospital and Teach International, a Washington-based organization that runs a school for the blind in the village. My husband and I spent our annual vacation that way.

**Some vacation.**

But it was one of the most rewarding experiences we have ever had, professionally and spiritually speaking. The external conditions of the camp were not pleasant or comfortable or easy, but these pale away when you see those eyes once again sparkle with vision. At once I am brought back to one basic reality: Healing comes from the Great Physician; we are but only humble instruments in His hands. And I hope that my life, faith, and work will reflect that truth every day.

**John M. Fowler**

*John M. Fowler (Ed.D., Andrews University) is associate editor of Ministry and the author of many articles. Previously he served as college professor, editor and educational administrator in his homeland, India.*



**Drs. Jonathan and Renu Raju and their daughters.**