

# Matters of the heart: Doctors turn Samaritans

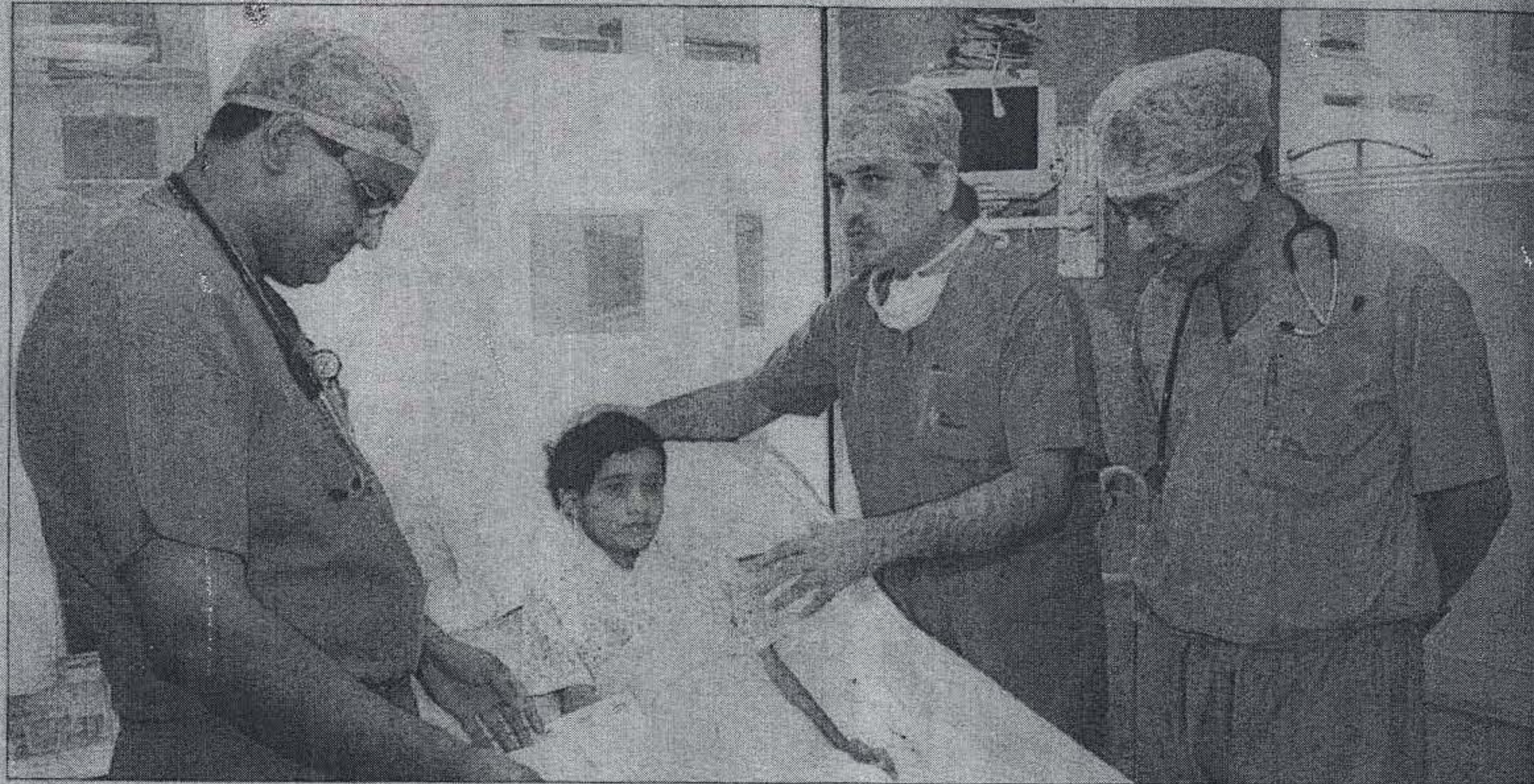
**SANCHITA Sharma**  
New Delhi, June 16

FEW PEOPLE believe in miracles, but Dharam Singh does. And frenetically so, each time he looks at his 10-year-old daughter Manisha smiling after undergoing a complex hole-in-the-heart surgery. The surgery, which is priced at Rs 2 lakh, cost the Dehradun farmer just Rs 30,000 at the Capital's posh Max Heart & Valvular Institute.

"I don't know how it happened but the doctors somehow raised money for the surgery. She is all right now and is ready to go home," says Singh, who had given up hope of seeing Manisha survive her teenage years.

Like Manisha, two-month-old Sucheta underwent a heart repair surgery that would cost Rs 3 lakh in a private hospital. Her father, who sells tea in East Delhi, paid only Rs 5,000 for the surgeries. The doctors raised the rest, as they did for 13-year-old Vijay Kumar from Rishikesh, who underwent a double valve replacement surgery free because his disabled father could not provide money for the Rs 1.9 lakh needed.

These children are among 69 others who underwent surgery free or at hugely subsidised costs over the past year at Max Heart & Valvular Institute in Saket. Apart from the team of Max doctors which does the surgery and holds heart-screening camps to detect disease in the remoter areas in Uttaranchal, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, the project is made possible through funding from the Devi Nathurmal Trust, individual donations from altruistic people, and by the hospital administration waiving charges for room, some disposables etc.



Doctors examine Manisha at Max Devki Devi Heart & Vascular Institute.

VIPIN KUMAR/HT

"Children's illnesses are often neglected because it is not possible for the poor to take out money from their meagre earnings for a child's surgery. They usually accept illness as fate and give up on the child. We wanted to give these children a chance to live and lead normal lives," says Dr Bhan, director of cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, Max Heart & Vascular Institute.

Bhan's team begins work by first iden-

tifying children with congenital heart disease and rheumatic heart disease through screening at camps or referrals from NGOs such as ADOPT, which works in Charba village in Uttaranchal. "We then arrange funds through donations, and whenever needed, have somehow managed to get the basic funds needed for surgery," says Dr Rajesh Sharma, paediatric interventionist in the unit.

"How much the child's family pays de-

pends on how much they can afford. The rest we raise and believe me, here's enough goodwill around to help people, especially children in need. Now we want to raise money for adults who need surgery and hopefully, should do it by next year," says Dr Viresh Mahajan, paediatric cardiologist, at Max Heart and Vascular Institute. Given their resolve and focus, it's likely to happen a lot sooner.