

Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Sundaram Natarajan

Dr. Leela Panchakarla*

MBBS, MHA, Healthcare Executive, New York, USA

INTRODUCTION: A DYNASTY OF LIGHT

There are careers in medicine that are distinguished, and there are careers that are defining. The distinction lies not in volume of output alone, but in whether the practitioner reshapes the intellectual, institutional, and human landscape of their discipline in ways that outlast their own tenure. By this criterion, the career of Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Sundaram Natarajan belongs unambiguously to the second category.

Ophthalmology, for Dr. Natarajan, is not a profession, it is a patrimony claimed and then vastly enlarged. Both his grandfather, Dr. Nataraja Pillai, and his father, Prof. Dr. N. S. Sundaram, being highly regarded figures in their respective eras¹. Born on 4 September 1957 in Madurai, Dr. Natarajan spent his formative years within the residential quarters of the Government Ophthalmic Hospital, Chennai, where the daily spectacle of patients arriving in darkness and departing with restored vision became the defining moral experience of his childhood. This was an environment that did not merely inspire the study of ophthalmology; it made blindness personal, and its reversal urgent.

Dr. Natarajan received his early formal education at St. Antony's High School, Chennai, where academic discipline and structured thinking were emphasised, and subsequently at Madras Christian College Higher Secondary School. These institutions grounded him in the precision of thought that would later characterise both his surgery and his scientific journey.

Dr. Natarajan graduated with MBBS degree in 1980 from Madras Medical College, Chennai, one of India's oldest, most prestigious, and competitive medical institution. His postgraduate training in ophthalmology at the Government Ophthalmic Hospital, the very institution where his father and grandfather had trained carried an uncommon weight of continuity. He was simply not continuing a career; he was continuing a conversation across generations about what medicine was for - to this world.

The decisive formative experience of Dr. Natarajan's specialist career came at Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai,

where he trained under Padma Bhushan Dr. S. S. Badrinath, one of the founding figures of modern vitreoretinal surgery in India and himself, later, a Charter Inductee of the global Retina Hall of Fame. The guru-shishya relationship between Badrinath and Natarajan is one of Indian medicine's most consequential: both men now appear together on the Retina Hall of Fame's list of 100 greatest vitreoretinal surgeons worldwide, the only two Indians so honoured. Dr. Natarajan completed his Fellowship in Retina and Vitreous Surgery (FRVS) in 1985, having mastered advanced vitrectomy at a moment when the subspecialty was globally in its foundational decade. His subsequent credentials includes FAICO (2012), FRCS Glasgow (2018), FELAS (2019), and an honorary DSc, reflects a scholar who continued to formalise his expertise throughout his career.

CLINICAL MASTERY & INSTITUTION BUILDING

In 1988, Dr. Natarajan joined the Taparia Institute of Ophthalmology at Bombay Hospital, Mumbai, where he established the vitreoretinal department. By 1990, he had taken the decisive step of founding Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital Pvt. Ltd. - India's first institution exclusively dedicated to ophthalmology and vitreoretinal surgery and research. The name itself, meaning 'light of the eyes,' encoded the institution's purpose: not merely to treat disease, but to restore the fundamental human capacity for sight.

In 2004, the hospital expanded with the opening of its Wadala facility and the establishment of the Aditya Jyot Eye Bank, significantly enhancing access to corneal transplantation and tertiary ophthalmic care for Mumbai's

Address for correspondence: Dr. Leela Panchakarla,
MBBS, MHA, Healthcare Executive, New York, USA
E-mail: leelapanchakarla@outlook.com

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Portrait of the Dr. S. Nataraja Pillai Family (1937). Left to right: Mrs. Parvathi Natarajan, N.S. Sundaram (aged 10; father of Dr. S. Natarajan), Dr. S. Nataraja Pillai (grandfather of Dr. S. Natarajan), and Lakshmi. Seated: Padmavathy

population. Under Dr. Natarajan's leadership as Chairman and Managing Director, Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital was ranked the most trusted eye hospital in Mumbai by Reader's Digest successively in 2017, 2018, and 2019².

The institution encompasses the Aditya Jyot Institute of Vision Science and Research, and the Aditya Jyot Eye Research Institute dedicated research infrastructure committed to translational investigation in areas including regenerative medicine, stem cell therapy for retinal degenerative diseases, artificial retina, and ophthalmic genetics. The Aditya Jyot Genetic Clinic the first of its kind in Maharashtra and among the first three in India, was established in memory of Prof. Dr. N. S. Sundaram and committed to hereditary eye disease research³.

Over his career, Dr. Natarajan has performed more than 65,000 advanced vitreoretinal procedures, encompassing complex vitrectomy, retinal detachment repair, proliferative diabetic retinopathy surgery, epiretinal membrane and macular hole repair, and reconstruction of severely traumatised eyes. He is recognized in the Limca Book of Records for pioneering India's first entirely sutureless scleral buckling procedure and the initial sutureless 23-gauge vitrectomy, innovations that minimized surgical trauma, shortened recovery periods, and advanced the standard of minimally invasive vitreoretinal surgery in the country¹.

His 2018 paper in the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology describing the 'claw' forceps a novel instrument for intraocular foreign body removal, exemplified his impulse to convert operative experience into transferable technical innovation⁴. He has regularly performed live surgery demonstrations at national and international workshops, where his operative

precision has influenced a generation of vitreoretinal surgeons across 81 countries. He has delivered more than 1,517 invited guest lectures nationally and internationally. He holds professorial appointments at the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences, the National Board of Examinations (New Delhi), and visiting positions at Saveetha University (Chennai), Maimonides University (Argentina), and ESASO (European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology, Lugano). Through this seamless synthesis of surgical artistry, institutional building, and relentless technical innovation, Dr. Natarajan has not only redefined ophthalmic care but has established a visionary blueprint for the future of sight restoration.

RESEARCH WORK: A SCIENTIFIC LEGACY ACROSS FOUR DECADES

The measure of a scientist's impact is not tallied solely in publication counts or citation indices. It is found, more honestly, in whether the knowledge generated changes what practitioners do, whether it alters a clinical decision, redirects a national health programme, or places an instrument of diagnosis in the hands of a community health worker for a patient who could not otherwise afford a subspecialist. By this measure, the research career of Dr. Sundaram Natarajan - vitreoretinal surgeon, public health investigator, editorial statesman, and pioneer of technology-enabled eye care represents one of the most consequential scientific contributions in the history of Indian ophthalmology. His research does not cluster around a single theme or subspecialty convenience. It spans vitreoretinal surgery, diabetic retinopathy epidemiology, artificial intelligence-enabled screening, ocular trauma systems, retinal genetics, and ophthalmic education, a breadth that reflects not dilettantism, but an unyielding responsiveness to wherever the discipline's greatest unmet needs resided.

Dr. Natarajan's first peer-reviewed publications, emerging in the late 1980s from his formative years at Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai, were written at a moment when



Presentation of the All-Round Trophy (1980)
S. Natarajan, final-year MBBS student and Captain of the Athletic Team at Madras Medical College, receives the All-Round Trophy from the Chief Guest.

vitreoretinal surgery was itself still consolidating its theoretical and technical foundations globally. His early output was therefore not merely descriptive; it was constitutive of the subspecialty's Indian literature.

In 1987, he contributed to a landmark series of papers on complex vitreoretinal conditions that appeared in the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology. These included a systematic analysis of silicone oil tamponade in proliferative vitreoretinopathy documenting operative technique, post-operative management, advantages, and limitations at a time when PVR remained the most feared cause of surgical failure in retinal detachment repair⁵ as well as co-authored work on the management of giant retinal breaks⁶ and a study on the role of pars plana filtration in intractable glaucoma that bridged vitreoretinal and glaucoma surgery at the frontier of both disciplines⁷. His investigations in this period further encompassed pneumoretinopexy, acute retinal necrosis syndrome, and the surgical management of retinal detachment with macular holes, each representing a domain where evidence was sparse and clinical guidance was urgently needed. These works, published variously in the proceedings of the All India Ophthalmological Society conferences and institutional journals, provided the operational scaffold upon which a generation of Indian vitreoretinal surgeons built their practice.

By 1995, his collaborative contribution to the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology review on the diagnosis and



Athletic Achievement at Madras Medical College (1977)
S. Natarajan receiving medals for the 10,000-meter and 5,000-meter track events during the Madras Medical College Annual Sports Meet.



Dr. S. Natarajan pictured with his mentor, Padma Bhushan Dr. S.S. Badrinath, at the Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital in 2001.

management of postsurgical endophthalmitis - co-authored with Das, Dogra, Gopal, and others had established itself as an enduring clinical reference⁸.

The epidemiology of diabetic retinopathy in India presents a challenge of extraordinary complexity: a nation of 1.4 billion people, with heterogeneous socioeconomic geographies, a rapidly expanding burden of type 2 diabetes, and a specialist workforce that cannot hope to individually examine every at-risk individual. Dr. Natarajan recognised, earlier than most, that the response to this challenge required not only better surgery or better drugs, but better data and, ultimately, better systems. His research in diabetic retinopathy has accordingly operated simultaneously at the level of the individual patient, the urban slum, and the national policy framework.

The Aditya Jyot Diabetic Retinopathy in Urban Mumbai Slums Study conceived, designed, and conducted under his leadership was established with a specific and underserved focus: to quantify the burden of DR and its determinants in one of the world's densest and most socioeconomically marginalised urban populations. The study's foundational methodology paper, published in Ophthalmic Epidemiology in 2014, detailed a rigorous epidemiological architecture that would yield sustained, citable data across multiple reports⁹. The 2017 prevalence report confirmed high rates of DR in this vulnerable cohort, findings with direct relevance to public health planning and resource allocation¹⁰. A subsequent report, examining patterns of risk for DR in the Mumbai slums and published in PLOS Global Public Health in 2023, extended this longitudinal evidence base and identified modifiable risk determinants amenable to intervention¹¹. A further 2023 publication in the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology examined the impact of individual counselling on the knowledge and attitudes of type 2 diabetics regarding DR, a dimension of the study that acknowledged that clinical outcomes are inseparable from patient understanding¹².

At the national level, Dr. Natarajan's participation in the SMART India population-based cross-sectional study produced two of the most widely cited papers in Indian ophthalmic epidemiology. The 2022 Lancet Global Health

publication reporting DR prevalence in India stratified by known versus undiagnosed diabetes, urban versus rural location, and socioeconomic indices provided, for the first time, a nationally calibrated estimate that disaggregated the DR burden with methodological rigor sufficient to inform targeted policy¹³. The companion paper, published in the same journal in 2024, reported the national prevalence of vision impairment and blindness attributable to diabetes in adults aged 40 years and older, a landmark finding establishing the true scale of diabetes-related visual morbidity in the country and identifying subgroups at highest risk¹⁴. Publication in *The Lancet Global Health*, the world's foremost journal in global medicine placed this work in the highest tier of international visibility.

His engagement with the India Retinal Disease Study Group yielded a further significant publication in *Ophthalmic Research* in 2021, examining the need for vitreous surgery in proliferative diabetic retinopathy over a ten-year follow-up period, one of the few long-term surgical outcome datasets in this domain from the Indian subcontinent¹⁵. Complementing this, his 2020 contribution to a *Scientific Reports* paper on the prevalence and incidence of visual impairment in proliferative DR in India provided population-level evidence on a complication that, untreated, results in irreversible blindness¹⁶.

Ocular trauma remains among the most consequential and systematically under-researched causes of preventable visual morbidity worldwide, disproportionately afflicting young, working-age adults in resource-limited settings with lifelong clinical sequelae. Dr. Natarajan's contributions to this field are international in their collaborative scope and methodologically significant in their impact.

Ocular trauma remains among the most methodologically fragmented fields in ophthalmology. Dr. Natarajan has addressed both dimensions: the clinical and the scientific infrastructure, through sustained international collaboration. His contributions to the International Globe and Adnexal Trauma Epidemiology Study (IGATES), coordinated through the Asia-Pacific Ophthalmic Trauma Society, yielded two landmark papers in *Graefe's Archive for Clinical and*



Dr. S. Natarajan with legendary actor Rajinikanth (2009)

Experimental Ophthalmology (2021): one establishing multi-centre epidemiology and outcomes of open globe injuries¹⁷, the other advancing the methodology of ophthalmic trauma clinical registries¹⁸. In 2022, his inclusion as a named contributor to the *Globe and Adnexal Trauma Terminology Survey* in *JAMA Ophthalmology*, an international Delphi consensus establishing unified classification language, reflected his standing as a globally recognised authority in this domain¹⁹. His 2017 paper on vitrectomy timing in posterior segment trauma remains a standard surgical reference²⁰, his 2023 Springer chapter on intraocular foreign body management a definitive subspecialty text²¹, and his leadership of the AIOS writing group producing the 2020 COVID-19 ocular trauma guidelines a demonstration of research expertise translated into real-time national policy²².

Dr. Natarajan's scientific contributions extend from the epidemiological to the technical and methodological. His 2018 description of the 'claw' forceps, a novel instrument for intraocular foreign body retrieval, exemplified the surgeon-scientist's impulse to formalise operative experience into reproducible innovation²³. Through the *CORDS Study Group*, he co-authored two simultaneous 2021 papers in *JAMA Ophthalmology* that addressed a long-standing gap in vitreoretinal surgical research: a new classification system for complications in retinal detachment trials²⁴ and a systematic review of historical complication reporting using the *CONSORT extension for harms*²⁵, both now regarded as field-defining methodological contributions. His 2023 co-authorship on macular surgery classification in the *Journal of Ophthalmology*, alongside Forlini, Rizzo, Rejdak, and Avitabile, placed him within the international faculty shaping posterior segment surgical taxonomy²⁶. In ophthalmic genomics, his involvement with the *Keratoconus International Consortium (KIC)*²⁷ and the *Asian Eye Genetics Consortium (AEGC)*²⁸ broadened his collaborative scientific reach, while his 2024 *BMC Ophthalmology* paper on cognitive workload in three-dimensional versus conventional microscopy macular hole surgery represents his most recent contribution to surgical ergonomics evidence²⁹.

When COVID-19 transformed ophthalmic practice, Dr.



Dr. S. Natarajan with actor Hrithik Roshan during a public health campaign promoting eye donation awareness and pledging (2009).

Natarajan responded with scientific immediacy across multiple registers. He co-authored the AIOS, Indian Journal of Ophthalmology national consensus statement on preferred practices during the pandemic (May 2020)³⁰ and the companion consensus on post-COVID vitreoretinal and uveal management³¹. An early clinical report describing central retinal vein occlusion with COVID-19 as the presumptive etiology contributed timely evidence to the nascent literature on the disease's ocular vascular sequelae³². Subsequent contributions on choroidal microvascular alterations in Ocular Immunology and Inflammation³³ and on the retinal vascularity index in Ophthalmology and Therapy³⁴ demonstrated a sustained and methodical engagement with the ocular consequences of systemic viral disease long after the acute phase of the pandemic had passed.

Dr. Natarajan's 2019 JAMA Ophthalmology paper, his most globally cited publication demonstrated that an offline AI system on a consumer smartphone could detect referable diabetic retinopathy with accuracy comparable to trained graders, without internet connectivity, in a Mumbai community setting³⁴. The work progressed systematically: a 2021 Indian Journal of Ophthalmology study confirmed offline AI feasibility in community screening³⁵; a 2022 paper documented programme-level implementation through a city-wide teleophthalmology initiative³⁶; and a 2023 Telemedicine and e-Health publication established algorithmic reliability on ungradable images under real-time field conditions³⁷ collectively representing the most operationally grounded body of ophthalmic AI evidence from any single South Asian institution.

A dimension of Dr. Natarajan's scholarly legacy that resists easy quantification, no impact factor or no citation index is his decade as Editor-in-Chief of the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology (2011–2017). His editorials on predatory

journals³⁸, the ethics of salami publishing³⁹, the relevance of indexed publications⁴⁰, and the responsibilities of peer review⁴¹ constitute a coherent, prescient curriculum in scientific culture; one that shaped how an entire generation of Indian ophthalmologists understood their obligations to evidence and to the integrity of the published record. Influence of this kind is diffuse, cumulative, and impossible to measure; it is also, for precisely those reasons, among the most durable contributions a senior clinician-scientist can make to a developing academic discipline.

The research legacy of Dr. Sundaram Natarajan is, at its most fundamental, a story about what clinical science is for. It is for the patient in a Mumbai slum whose referable diabetic retinopathy is detected by an AI on a smartphone before the window for treatment closes. It is for the trauma surgeon in a resource-limited setting consulting an international guideline co-authored by a peer who understands identical constraints. It is for the resident who reads an editorial reminding them that scientific integrity is the foundation upon which all clinical progress rests. The publications enumerated here are the vessels of that purpose, but the purpose itself, pursued with uncommon consistency over four decades and across every dimension of a complete academic career, is the true measure of a living legend.

Few physicians in Indian medical history have converted clinical conviction into verifiable, globally witnessed proof the way Dr. Natarajan has - not once, but repeatedly, and across disciplines.

MARKED BY EXCELLENCE, HONOURED ACROSS CONTINENTS: ACHIEVEMENTS, RECORDS, AWARDS, AND LEADERSHIP

In February 2019, under the Aditya Jyot Foundation for Twinkling Little Eyes with support from Tata Trusts, Dr. Natarajan's team set a Guinness World Record by screening 649 patients with diabetes for diabetic retinopathy within eight hours in Dharavi, Mumbai, using a portable fundus camera. This initiative demonstrated the operational feasibility, clinical validity, and public health urgency of large-scale screening in underserved urban settings.

In 2017, Dr. Natarajan was inducted as a Charter Inductee into the Retina Hall of Fame, an international recognition of the 100 most influential contributors to vitreoretinal surgery. He is among a select group of Indian surgeons included in this distinction.

He is also listed in the Limca Book of Records for pioneering the first completely sutureless scleral buckling procedure and the first sutureless 23-gauge vitrectomy in India, reflecting early adoption and advancement of minimally invasive vitreoretinal techniques.

In response to the 2016 Kashmir civil unrest, Dr. Natarajan led a surgical team to Srinagar, where he performed 47 complex vitreoretinal procedures over 72 hours and contributed to the management of over 200 pellet-related ocular injuries. This effort earned him the State Award for



Conferment of the Padma Shri (2013)

Dr. S. Natarajan receiving the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian honour, from the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, at Rashtrapati Bhavan on April 20, 2013

Meritorious Public Service from the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The recognition accorded to Dr. Natarajan has come from governments, academies, and institutions across the world; a geography of honour that maps, precisely, the international reach of a career anchored in India.

Honours and Decorations

Year	Award	Detail
2005	Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines)	Excellence in Ophthalmology and Humanitarian Service
2006	Distinguished Service Award - APAO	Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology, Singapore & Busan
2006	Man of the Year	American Biographical Institute
2008	Outstanding Citizen of Maharashtra Award	Government of Maharashtra
2009	Achievement Award - AAO	American Academy of Ophthalmology
2012	Achievement Award - APAO	Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology
2013	Padma Shri	4th highest civilian honour, Government of India, awarded by President Pranab Mukherjee on 20 April 2013
2016	Limca Book of Records - National Record	First completely sutureless scleral buckling; first sutureless 23G vitrectomy in India
2017	Charter Inductee - Retina Hall of Fame	One of only two Indians listed; alongside Dr. S. S. Badrinath and global legends including Charles Schepens and Allvar Gullstrand
2018	SAO Excellence Award	SAARC Academy of Ophthalmology, Nepal
2018	Senior Achievement Award - AAO	American Academy of Ophthalmology
2018	FRCS Glasgow	Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons
2019	Guinness World Record	Most diabetic eye screenings in 8 hours (649 patients, Dharavi, Mumbai; supported by TATA Trusts)
2019	FELAS	Fellow of European Latino American Society of Ophthalmology
2020	Commemorative Postal Stamp	Honouring the Indian Journal of Ophthalmology during his tenure as Editor-in-Chief

Leadership within the All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS)

Dr. Natarajan's most structurally consequential institutional role has been his progressive, three-decade stewardship of the All India Ophthalmological Society (AIOS) - India's largest ophthalmological body with over 17,000 members. His trajectory within AIOS represents a complete ascent through every significant office, from committee membership to the

Presidency:

Period	Role / Position
1993–1999	Scientific Committee Member
2002–2008	Chairman, Scientific Committee (elected twice)
2008–2011	Chairman, Academic & Research Committee
2011–2017	Editor-in-Chief, Indian Journal of Ophthalmology
2017–2018	Vice President
2018–2019	President-Elect
2019–2020	President
2020–2021	Immediate Past President
2021–2022	Chairman, International Committee of Diabetic Retinopathy Screening
2023–2024	Advisory Role, AIOS National Diabetic Retinopathy Task Force

As AIOS President (2019–2020), he inaugurated STOP Diabetic Blindness, *Jyot se Jyot Jalao*: a nationwide initiative to screen every diabetic patient in India through teleophthalmology, converting a specialist-dependent examination into a community-deployable, AI-augmented service. In 2014, he launched the world's first vertical Amsler Garden, a public visual field education innovation and inaugurated 'Eye Screening on Wheels', a mobile diagnostic platform for underserved populations.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Dr. Natarajan simultaneously holds and has held leadership in the following international bodies:

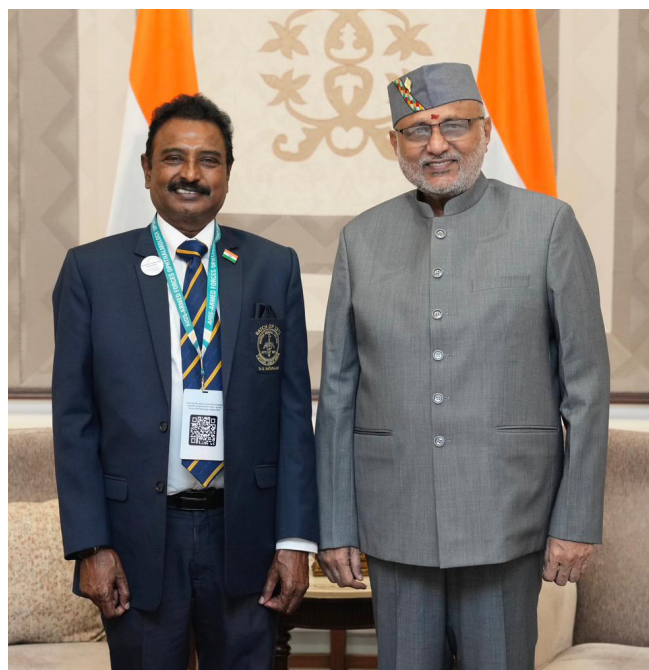
Position	Organisation
Board Member	International Society of Ocular Trauma
Immediate Past President	Asia-Pacific Ophthalmic Trauma Society
Past President	Ocular Trauma Society of India
President	Tele-Ophthalmology Society of India
Vice President and Treasurer	Global Eye Genetics Consortium
Member	The Retina Society (USA)
Past Regional Managing Editor	EyeWorld Asia Pacific (Indian edition), APACRS
Chief Patron	Sankara Nethralaya Alumni Association, Madras
Past President	Organised Medicine Academic Guild (OMAG)
Chair	Kamala Sundaram Foundation
Founder Chair	Sundaram Natarajan Blind-Free India Foundation

VISION FOR A BLIND-FREE INDIA

The next chapter of Dr. Natarajan's public career is not a diminuendo but an amplification. Having established clinical, research, and educational institutions of national significance, he has redirected the accumulated institutional force of his

Ophthalmic Innovations and Services Introduced for the First Time in India by Prof. Dr. Sundaram Natarajan²:

Innovation / Service	Description
First Exclusive Vitreoretinal Centre	Established India's first institution dedicated exclusively to vitreoretinal surgery (1990)
BIOM (Binocular Indirect Ophthalmoscopy)	First introduction of wide-angle observation system for vitreous surgery in India
Photodynamic Therapy (PDT)	First use of PDT for Central Serous Retinopathy (CSR) and Choroidal Neovascular Membrane (CNVM) in India
25G Vitrectomy	First Micro Incision Vitrectomy Surgery (MIVS) in India
27G Vitrectomy	First Micro Mini-Incision Vitrectomy Surgery in India
Perfluorocarbon Liquid (BIOM)	First introduction in vitreoretinal surgery in India
Injection Lucentis (Ranibizumab)	First anti-VEGF injection introduced in India
Injection Macugen	First anti-VEGF injection of its class introduced in India
Injection Vabysmo	First anti-VEGF injection of its class introduced in India
Natarajan Macuseal™	World's first desiccated amniotic membrane engineered specifically for retinal surgery; addresses macular hole closure, giant retinal tear (GRT) repair, and optic pit closure; GMP-certified, gamma sterile, available in sizes 500–1000 microns; developed in collaboration with Akriti Ophthalmic Pvt. Ltd.



Dr. S. Natarajan with the Vice President of India, C.P. Radhakrishnan, following the Vice President's formal pledge to donate his eyes. This collaboration serves as a national endorsement, encouraging the public to support eye donation initiatives (2026).

Source: Vitretinamaster.com. (n.d.). Prof. Dr. S. Natarajan — biography and foundation. <https://www.vitreinamaster.com/bio>

career toward a single, explicitly articulated national goal: a Blind-Free India.

The Kamala Sundaram Foundation and the Sundaram Natarajan Blind-Free India Foundation drive a nationwide programme encompassing free eye screening camps, diabetic retinopathy detection, mobile diagnostic units, surgical outreach, training and capacity-building centres, and public awareness campaigns across India's geographic breadth. These are not philanthropic adjuncts to a hospital enterprise;

they are a deliberate strategy to address avoidable blindness as a national health priority, operating at a scale that individual clinical institutions cannot achieve alone. The unifying objective remains clear: a Blind-Free India through early detection, equitable access, and sustainable clinical systems.

CONCLUSION: WITNESSING A LIVING LEGEND

Legends in medicine are often constructed retrospectively; their significance apparent only after the innovations have been validated by time and the institutions have outlasted their founders. What makes Dr. Sundaram Natarajan a living legend is that his significance is already fully apparent, his institutions are operational, his research is policy-forming, and his moral purpose has not diminished with professional achievement.

He is the surgeon who operated on pellet victims in Kashmir under curfew; the epidemiologist whose DR data appeared in *The Lancet*; the AI researcher whose smartphone trial appeared in *JAMA*; the editor who taught a generation what good science looks like; the institution-builder who created India's best vitreoretinal hospital; and the public health visionary who set his sights on nothing less than eliminating preventable blindness from a nation of 1.4 billion people.

For the readers of the *UP Journal of Ophthalmology* – practitioners, residents, researchers, and public health professionals across Uttar Pradesh and beyond, the career of Padma Shri Prof. Dr. Sundaram Natarajan is not merely an inspiration. It is an operational model: of what is possible when surgical excellence, scientific rigor, institutional commitment, and humanitarian purpose are pursued, simultaneously, without compromise, across an entire career.

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