Raksha Bandhan 2025: Celebrating Siblinghood, Best Gift – Second Chance at Life

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- Breaking away from tradition, siblings gift life through blood stem cells
- DKMS Foundation India spotlights two real-life stories where sibling donors gave young patients a second chance through blood stem cell transplantation

DKMS Foundation India, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the fight against blood cancer and other blood disorders such as thalassemia and aplastic anemia, celebrates siblinghood this marks Raksha Bandhan, with two unique brother-sister pair.

Papali Gaan with her stem cell donor and younger brother, Om Prakash, and Ayan Khan with his stem cell donor and sister, Al Shifa

Two young children, Ayan Khan and Papali Gaan were battling with a blood disorder called thalassemia major, but their siblings saved them by donating their blood stem cells.

India faces a pressing healthcare challenge: with over 10,000 new children born annually with thalassemia – a hereditary blood disorder leading to severe anaemia. These children often require lifelong blood transfusions, and without proper treatment, many do not survive beyond the age of 20. Blood stem cell transplantation offers the only curative option, but access remains limited due to financial and logistical barriers.

Through the Access to Transplantation Program DKMS India is addressing this gap by supporting families in need. This program ensures access to life-saving stem cell transplants for patients who face medical, financial, and infrastructural impediments. the DKMS Patient Funding Program India and the DKMS Thalassemia Program India.

Ayan Khan’s story

Ayan Khan, born on March 11, 2016, was diagnosed with a life-threatening blood disorder, Thalassemia Major. He required regular blood transfusions. His father, a construction labourer with limited finances, was running pillar to post in search of a permanent cure.

Ayan and his family found hope in an HLA-typing camp that took place in October 2022, organised by DKMS Foundation India along with Narayana Health City, Bengaluru. Ayans elder sister, Al Shifa, reported as a perfect HLA Match!!

On May 1, 2023, under the expert care of Dr. Sunil Bhat, Vice Chairman – Oncology Collegium, Narayana Health Group, and Director of Pediatric Haematology, Oncology, and Bone Marrow Transplantation, Ayan underwent a successful blood stem cell transplant. Two years after the transplant, Ayan is reported as completely disease-free, no longer dependent on blood transfusions. He is currently studying in second standard, and his sister Al Shifa is in seventh standard. Ayan and Al Shifa’s story becomes a testament to the courage and compassion of young siblings and stresses the importance of timely medical intervention.

Papali Gaan’s Story

Papali Gaan, born on March 15, 2015, suffered from Thalassemia Major. Her parents, despite their limited financial means, remained steadfast in their commitment to finding a cure. A breakthrough came in the form of an HLA typing camp jointly conducted by DKMS Foundation India and Narayana Health City in February 2022.

Om Prakash, Papali’s younger brother, emerged as a perfect match. At a young age, the lad donated his blood stem cells. On August 15, 2023, Papali received her life-saving transplant under the expert care of Dr. Sunil Bhat and his team.

Post her transplant, Papali is living her second chance at life without needing a blood transfusion. Both Papali and Om Prakash are living a healthy life, full of mischief and innocence. But the story doesnt end with recovery. Deeply moved by his daughter’s transformation, Papali’s father has now taken it upon himself to support other families dealing with Thalassemia. He actively guides and motivates others by spreading awareness about blood stem cell donation and sharing his journey, giving them hope.

Speaking about the two case studies, **Patrick Paul, Chairman, DKMS Foundation India**, said, “*Ayan, Papali, and their siblings remind us that Raksha Bandhan has become more than a ritual; it’s a celebration of siblinghood. Our role is to ensure that patients from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have access to the first step toward a potential cure-high-resolution HLA typing. While some patients may find a match within their family, the rest must rely on unrelated donors from global registries. However, due to India’s genetic diversity, finding a match is especially challenging. Only 0.09% of the Indian population of the relevant age is registered as a blood stem cell donor. This can leave many patients without viable options*. “

About DKMS Foundation India
DKMS Foundation India is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the fight against blood cancer and other blood disorders such as thalassemia and aplastic anemia. The foundation aims to improve the situation of patients in India and across the world by raising awareness about blood stem cell transplantation and registering potential blood stem cell donors.

For more information, please visit: www.dkms-India.org.