

# Eye opener

The Nethrodaya  
Newsletter

October 2004



It is a busy day as usual at the suburban railway station. A train rolls in, triggering almost a stampede as people rush to get a place, eager to reach their destination.

For one person, the train itself is the destination. Jostled and roughed up, he manages to swagger in with a heavy load of products in his hands...and a heavier load in his heart. He clears his throat, as well as his depressive thoughts, as he prepares to begin the day.

"Seeekret... Seeekret... time pass kadley..." his deep throated voice resounds throughout each compartment. After a few trips up and down the entire train, his burden is a little lighter and his pockets jingling happily.



Ramalingam - a vendor at the Guindy Railway Station. If you happen to see him, spare a few moments for him. Maybe a cup of tea too. He will never forget you.

Then the sound of heavily booted footsteps send a shiver down his spine. As the footsteps come to a halt before him, his heart almost stops. Strong, powerful hands grab him and whisk him away to a corner. The intimidating voice of authority makes him cover with fear. (We leave to your imagination the events that would have followed.)

A while later, the man is back selling his wares. But this time all life has been drained out of his voice...and his pockets. And like the carrion that follow a kill, a little wimp creeps up behind him, stretches his arm, grabs a handful of whatever he could get and scoots. He screams for help...groping around in desperation. But the thief is long gone, leaving the blind man shattered and heart broken.

This is not an unusual incident. We see it happen almost every day, yet we walk away totally unconcerned. Ironically, it took another visually impaired person to step in and make a difference.

## The Nethrodaya Story

C. Govindakrishnan is a person with vision. Though the eye specialists would have us believe otherwise. He may not be able to see the world as we see it. But the world he sees is beyond our vision. A world where every blind person is able to live just as normally and freely as everybody else. Where the blind don't have to beg for their survival. Nor live off the generosity of a few good people. He knows that the blind people only need to be given a little space and some encouragement. And they can show the world the incredible capacity of the human spirit. To achieve the impossible, against all odds. Gopi, as he is fondly addressed by all, himself is a living proof of this.

Being declared to have been born with an incurable, deteriorating visual impairment, Gopi fought with fate all his life. His struggles in school and college made him realise the problems that other blind people have been facing for ages. During his post graduate studies in Social Entrepreneurship at the Centre for Social Initiatives and Management (CSIM), he got an opportunity that would reveal his destiny to him.

As a part of his project, he made a study on the blind people who were trying to make a living on the trains of Chennai. He travelled for 30 days with them and what he discovered opened his eyes. Of the 119 blind who were begging, 82 were graduates! The blind vendors too were forced to resign to begging due to insurmountable hurdles they had to face.

It was at this point that Gopi resolved to do something. To bring light to a society shrouded in the darkness of apathy.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 2002, with the image of Gandhiji in his mind and his resolve in his heart, Gopi created Nethrodaya with a vision to serve the visionless.

- Niranjan  
(Creative Consultant)



Gopi - the guiding light behind Nethrodaya.

# Nethrodaya



An organization that started with a mere 72 Rupees and the courage of conviction, Nethrodaya has come a long way today. And its growth has indeed been phenomenal. Each step, each initiative was carefully debated upon and meticulously executed, which is why today Nethrodaya has evolved from simply being an NGO for the blind to a multi dimensional organization that acts as an immense source of hope and faith to anyone who knocks on its doors.

From blood donation camps to sports activities for the blind and entrepreneurial support for the visually impaired, Nethrodaya has touched every aspect of the lives of the visually impaired. Today it represents a comprehensive support structure for the blind.

**"Little drops of water..."**

Mythrei, a 9<sup>th</sup> std student of DAV Girls High School, saved five rupee coins worth Rs 1,200/- and donated it to Nethrodaya.

**"...Little grains of sand..."**

Mr. Ponraj, a vegetable wholesaler, is delivering fresh vegetables every day right at our doorstep.

**"...Make a mighty ocean..."**

Mr. Kulandaivelu, a resident of Nethrodaya, after securing a job sponsored a meal for the residents out of his first salary.

**"...And a pleasant land..."**

Issac, the ill 3 year old of a blind couple who were being fed at Nethrodaya, grabbed a handful of chappatis and wobbled his way to put them in his father's plate!

**"...Little deeds of kindness, little words of love make our earth an Eden like the heaven above"**

A plumber who had planned a pleasant Sunday evening with his family, postponed his plans and rushed to Nethrodaya to repair the motor which had stopped functioning.



## An NGO with a difference

What makes Nethrodaya special is the fact that it does not offer endless support to the blind in the form of shelter, food, education and basic amenities. Instead it is an organisation driven by one goal; to make every member self sufficient and independent in a manner that they integrate themselves into mainstream careers and lives.

While they are in the process of doing so, Nethrodaya offers them intermediate facilities till the time they are ready to provide for themselves.

-Shikha Balakrishnan  
Copywriter

## A SHELTER OF LIGHT

The visually impaired may not be able to see light, but they are certainly capable of experiencing the light. 'Jyotirbhavan', Nethrodaya's home for visually impaired students aims to be a shelter of light for its residents. This residential care centre is probably the first of its kind in Tamilnadu. It aims to be a nurturing environment where deserving college students can fulfil their academic as well as their professional aspirations.

Jyotirbhavan had its genesis in the need for a specialised home, which addressed the unique needs of the visually impaired students who had completed their schooling. Gopi observed that mainstream hostels weren't conducive to the specific requirements of these students. Jyotirbhavan was thus set up to address those special needs. Initially Jyotirbhavan began with 10 students. In a short span, they have been able to increase this number to 30.



The home, located in a one storied building in Moggapair, Chennai, is equipped with adequate plug points, for students to listen to tape recorded study material. In fact, Nethrodaya furnishes the required study tapes, based on the individual's college syllabus. Moreover, Nethrodaya has enlisted the help of volunteers to read to students on a regular basis. In addition, boarding and food is provided absolutely free.

However, Gopi points out that the aim of Jyotirbhavan is to not cushion their existence but rather lead them to the path of self-reliance. "We don't believe in institutionalising students. This is a transit home. They take our services and go back to society. It's about self help," he asserts, adding, "The focus is on growth and not on comforts."



Mr. Rajeswaran, a volunteer, reading for the students.



In this direction, the residents of Jyotirbhavan handle day to day tasks of washing clothes, plates, cleaning the premises and so on. They even travel to college on their own. Undoubtedly, the aim is not to pamper but to guide. So career counselling is also provided.

Of course, their emphasis on growth isn't just academic. In their endeavour to facilitate all round development, Nethrodaya provides training in yoga for all students, and in music for those interested. Moreover, the boys are taken on fun trips to recreational parks such as Queen's Land Water Kingdom and so forth. Therefore, by exposing them to culture, entertainment and wellness activities, Nethrodaya attempts to provide holistic development to their residents.

Their efforts are certainly yielding positive results, going by the achievements of some of their promising residents.

Seyampatti near Trichy. After his schooling, it was difficult for him to study in his village, where there was no electricity. Nethrodaya has given him accommodation and has also paid his examination fees.

Nazir Ahmed, a resident of Nethrodaya who studies at the Music College, Adyar, received an award from Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman for distinction in violin. He said, "when I came to the city I was full of worries and I was also scared of the city. My dream is to become a big musician. But my family was not able to afford me because of the economic constraint. So I was knocking all the doors. Finally I came to know there is an organisation which provides food, shelter, educational assistance, free of cost. For me it was a golden opportunity. After availing this opportunity I developed self confidence in myself and I realised my potential to reach greater heights."

Ravi, another resident, shared his emotions while celebrating his birthday. He said, "this is my first birthday celebration in my life. And I developed oneness. I feel Nethrodaya is my family."

Concurs Venkatapathi, who's doing his second year BBA, "the place is good, and neat. If you need help, they help you out." Adds Chellamuthu, who is training to be a teacher, "They ask what we need, even before we ask them."

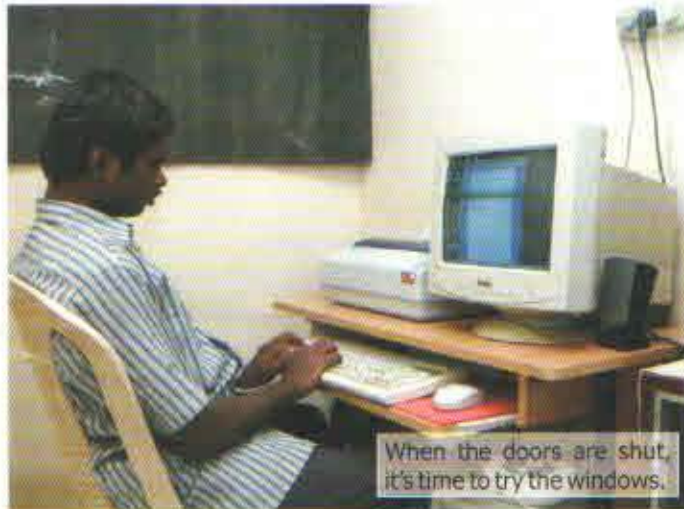
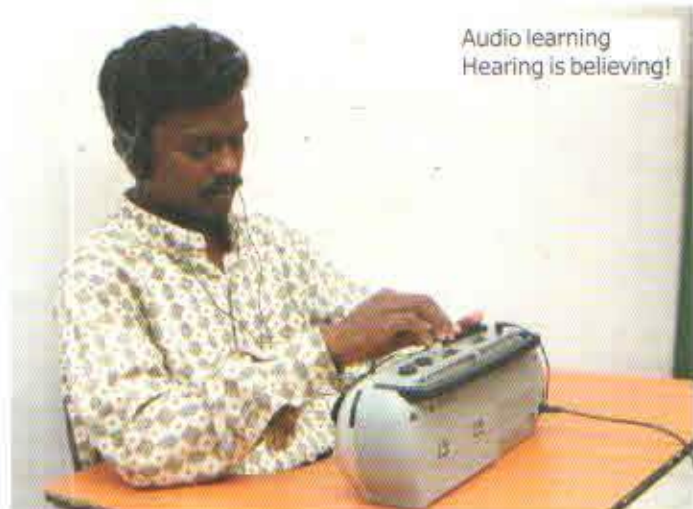
Certainly, these responses are but a few indicators of the unique and valuable endeavour of Nethrodaya, in leading those afflicted with visual impairment into the path of self-empowerment.

- Sharmishta Koushik  
Journalist



Kuzhandaivel - where there is a Vel, there's a way!

Audio learning  
Hearing is believing!



When the doors are shut, it's time to try the windows.

When courage meets encouragement, mountains can turn into molehills.



## Help line for the visually impaired - first ever in India

The roads are unfriendly and traffic, chaotic. This has resulted in many visually impaired losing their lives or getting seriously injured, losing their limbs, etc., Which makes their life even more miserable. The visually impaired aged go through unbearable sufferings due to lack of proper medical care.

To address these problems, Nethrodaya has set up a 24hour help line that offers emergency services for accident victims, people suffering from physical ailments, counselling for the visually impaired, etc.

Pichaandi, a middle aged man doing a small scale business lost his eye sight due to an accident. Nethrodaya was able to rescue him and arrange for a surgery. This has helped him to see the world again. The joy in his face is unexpressible.

Veerapan, a visually impaired vendor in railway stations, fell on the railway track and fractured his right leg. Nethrodaya's immediate intervention made Veerapan walk again.

So far Nethrodaya has been able to reach 44 visually impaired persons in their moment of crisis. Our sincere thanks to Sundaram Medical Foundation and Madras Medical Mission who support us whole-heartedly.

**Nethrodaya appeals to the kind hearted to contribute generously. This will enable us to meet the expense and other consumables.**

## Self-employment Scheme

The government jobs are becoming a dream for visually impaired in today's world. Nethrodaya believes supporting the visually impaired for their self employment will make them independent and earn them a decent living out of their income. This will save them from falling into the quagmire of begging. Nethrodaya is supporting 155 visually impaired families and is helping them lead a decent life. Nethrodaya provides items worth Rs.500/-. By selling these products on trains and at stations, the visually impaired are able to make a decent income and take care of their daily needs.

Devan, a visually impaired person who resorted to begging, came to know about Nethrodaya. Now he has given up begging and has started earning through a telephone booth set up with the help of Nethrodaya.

## Shelter for shelterless

Many visually impaired persons who are homeless live on the streets and pavements. Nethrodaya believes a dignified living is indispensable. 19 visually impaired families have been provided shelters in their vicinity itself. Nethrodaya is able to put them all in proper houses.

Alphonse and Sarasu, a visually impaired couple, were leading their life on the streets along with their 3 year old child Issac. They were not able to afford a house due to their poverty. Nethrodaya's intervention made a huge difference to them. Now they are in a proper house, under proper care.

## Light at the end of the tunnel

It is a common misconception that blind people give birth to blind children. The fact is that these children have normal vision. Nethrodaya believes that providing quality education for these children will make them independent. So far 74 children of visually impaired people have been benefitted.

Aparna, studying in 7<sup>th</sup> standard, confidently says, "I will become a doctor and not only look after my parents but I will also look after other visually impaired people." This thought of a small child should bring glimpses of hope to the visually impaired.

- C. Govindakrishnan



**HELP  
BLIND**  
**26565012**





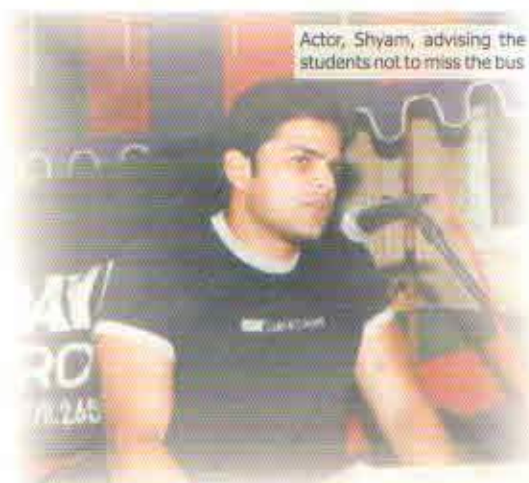
## Events



V. T. Lazar Memorial Chess Tournament



A Memento for Ms Ganiyali, IAS, for presiding over the chess tournament



Actor, Shyam, advising the students not to miss the bus

## Nethrodaya's Award of Excellence



Mr Mohan Verghese Chingnath presenting the Award of Excellence Dr. Sushma Agarwal



New Year Nite

**NETHRODAYA**  
LET'S SHARE THE LIGHT  
TEL: 26565472, 36389472

## Nethrodaya's Music Troupe

A budding band of inspired musicians who perform in weddings and other celebrations at a reasonable rate. This has helped many visually impaired musicians to earn a living and lead their lives independently.



We hope this newsletter reaches Mr Sivamani.



Singing along with Harini - Playback singer



## Supporters of Nethrodaya

His Excellency Hon'ble Shri Ram Mohan Rao, Governor of Tamilnadu wished Nethrodaya a grand success and bright future.

Mr M.S.Swaminathan, scientist, assured his full support for Nethrodaya.

Ms. C.K.Gariyali, IAS., admired Nethrodaya's progress.

Mr. Mohan Verghese Chungath, Commissioner for disabled has underlined that Nethrodaya is a spear heading organisation.

Mr. Vijaya Ragavan, Social Welfare Secretary, Government of Tamilnadu, said, "I am confident that you will grow to greater heights."

**Thanks to the Government of Tamilnadu , Rathan Tata Trust, Annanagar Times, BRIDGE, Inner Wheel Club of Central Aditya, Inter Touch Metal Limited, VT Lazer Charitable Trust and the Pranik Healing Center.**

## Board of Trustees

**Mr. C. Govinda Krishnan,**  
Founder and Managing Trustee

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Ms. Jayanthi Karthikeyan, Trustee

Dr. Heera Malini Seshadhiri, Trustee

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## Volunteers' Action Group

Mr. Sampath kumar

Mr. M. C. Madhavan

Ms. Mythili Ganesh

Mr. A. J. John

## Support us:

### Share a meal

Breakfast	: Rs.250/-
Lunch	: Rs.375/-
Dinner	: Rs.375/-

### Sponsor a student

A month	: Rs.1,200/-
A year	: Rs.14,400/-

Donate a stick for a visually impaired person	: Rs.120/-
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Donate your time for helping a blind student by:  
Reading lessons  
Writing assignments  
Being a scribe for their exams

Currently, Nethrodaya is in a rented premises giving accommodation for 30 visually impaired students. Due to space constraints Nethrodaya is not able to accommodate more students due to lack of infrastructure, space and permanent structure. The permanent home for Nethrodaya will allow many visually impaired poor students to avail of our services.

A future project of Nethrodaya is a home for the visually impaired aged - first ever in India. This will ensure the safety and care for the aged.

The Government of Tamilnadu has directed us to identify a suitable land for construction of our new premises and handing over of the land is underway. Nethrodaya appeals to you to contribute towards the building fund:  
Sponsor a sq.ft : Rs.500/-

Support a visually impaired for self employment by donating: Rs.500/-

Donate generously for the medical fund.

DONATIONS ARE TAX EXEMPT UNDER SECTION 80G.



**Nethrodaya**  
LET'S SHARE THE LIGHT

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