

# Newsletter

October, 2006



## NETHRODAYA

Lets share the light

### A story from the railway platform

A visually impaired person, Vadivelan, came to Chennai from Virudhachalam to study. He had no place to stay. He left his luggage in his friend's room and slept on the platforms of Egmore railway station, only to be harassed by the police. For one month he lived on the platforms and went home for weekends as he could not afford to pay rent. He finally found a place to stay. After 8 months, the landlord increased the rent and he was rendered homeless... He found home and acceptance in Nethrodaya.

A year since... he is training to be a teacher at the Teacher Training institute in Poonamallee. Vadivelan was born blind. Does that mean there is no hope of his dreams coming true? Nethrodaya believes there is hope.



Vadivelan

### Nethrodaya's Philosophy

**"Feed a man a fish and you feed him a meal. Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."**

Nethrodaya's aim is not to provide shoulders for the blind to lean on and grope through life, but walking sticks that will help them lead the way. To that end Nethrodaya is a catalyst that believes in integrating the visually impaired with mainstream society.

### Nethrodaya -The Lifeline for many



C. Govindakrishnan

C. Govindakrishnan, fondly addressed as Gopi, founded Nethrodaya on the 2nd of October 2002.

#### Gopi and Nethrodaya...

**Gopi:** "I was born with an incurable, deteriorating visual impairment. The impairment I experienced made me develop an apathy to the fellow visually impaired. Serving my community of the visually impaired is the journey of my life as also its vision."

#### His Background...

"I studied post graduation in Social Entrepreneurship at the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM). In a study of the blind people in Chennai, who made their living in trains, I found that 80% of them were graduates! They were begging because they were blind! After this discovery, I dedicated my life for the envisioned as I call them."

#### His punch line...

"I believe that my disability has been my opportunity."

#### What others say of him...

- With a person like Gopi, Nethrodaya will be among the top institutions for the visually impaired, not just in Tamil Nadu, but also in India - *Padma, Reader for Nethrodaya*.
- Nethrodaya is an example of what one committed person can do to bring about social change - *A J John, Reader*.
- While a sighted person can easily run an institution for the visually impaired, it is indeed wonderful that a partially blind person like Gopi is doing fabulous work for the visually impaired - *P. Manivannan, Volunteer for Nethrodaya, Proprietor of Pushpa Video*.



## Nethrodaya at work



**Bridging the rural-urban divide:** The rural blind population lacks access to higher education and a career. Nethrodaya's effort bridges this divide by bringing the rural blind population to cities and providing them with free accommodation and academic fees, so that they can pursue their higher education and look forward to a career.

**The cow to the rescue!** It is not sufficient to simply transport people from a village to a city and provide for them. "What happens to their families?" Nethrodaya tackles these problems with the help of the Nethradhenu Scheme. As part of this scheme, Nethrodaya provides their families with a cow and a calf. While the livestock comes free for the families, they sign agreements to maintain the animals and cannot sell the cow or calf. They are bound to give monthly reports relating to their maintenance. You could contribute to the cow scheme by helping in donating a cow to a visually impaired person's family. So

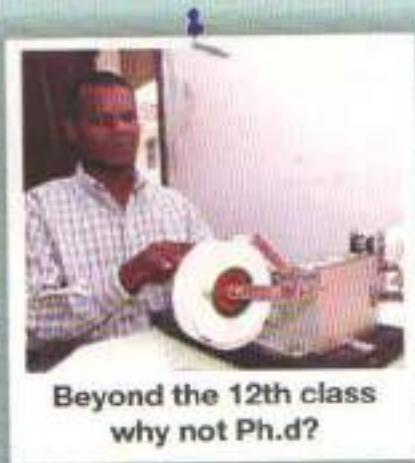
far, in Tamil Nadu, Nethrodaya has covered 10 districts through this scheme, thanks to ICRU.

### Beyond the blind schools... A college to study, a home to stay

College Education in a city-based environment is the prime focus of Nethrodaya as it is inaccessible for the visually impaired person due to financial limitations. Many students from Nethrodaya study in the popular colleges of Chennai city including, Pachaiyappa's College, Presidency College, Loyola College, Madras University, Ethiraj College and Quaid-E-Millat College. Nethrodaya is the first place in Tamil Nadu, that provides absolutely free residential accommodation for the blind.

### The e-Vision Campaign

Nethrodaya has enabled a visually impaired person to operate the computer, work on specific software and access the internet, all with the support of "Jaws" software.



Sudhakar, from Thenkaasi, who has partial vision is a regular internet user. He comes across inspiring stories about blind people and their achievements on the internet. These stories have instilled a great sense of hope, and self-confidence in him.

Nethrodaya also conducts part time computer courses, for the visually impaired, certified by the National Institute of Computer Technology (NICT). This is a pioneering step at the national level, towards computer literacy for the blind.

We thank the Vice President of IBM, Mr. Damodaran who has encouraged us by presenting certificates to students for completion of their computer courses.



The e-vision campaign is an effort to make the visually impaired feel a part of the World Wide Web. You could be a part of this World Wide Web by contributing old computers, CDs, and software.

### User-friendly Study Atmosphere



Sound - The greatest sense of the Blind

The students of Nethrodaya study by listening. Readers and volunteers come in the evenings to read out to students. Nethrodaya provides tapes and tape recorders to record reading sessions for future reference. There are also a large number of plug points, and lesson tapes enabling students to study whenever they want.

There is a state-of-the-art sound studio facility where many lesson tapes are recorded and given out to the students. You could also lend your voice to read out their lessons.

**E for English!** Coming from rural areas many students can hardly communicate in English. Nethrodaya conducts Spoken English classes to help students improve their English language skills.



Yoga Classes



Chess with Suchi



Trip to Ooty - 2005

### Beyond Academics

**Nethrodaya** equips students to play chess, organizing a number of tournaments for them to compete with each other. All the students can effectively Check Mate you in a game of chess!

**Yoga** is part of the curriculum. Come early Sunday Morning and there is a yoga class with a professional yoga instructor, who takes the students through many asanas.

**Nethrodaya** holidays regularly, the latest being the trip to Ooty in 2005. A trip to Kutraalam is on the cards this year. You could help us take our students for excursions, by co-ordinating our travel plans with people you know or offering to travel with us and being our travel guide.



## HELP LINE for the blind 044-26565012 - First in India

Nethrodaya has set up a 24- hour help line that addresses medical emergencies of the visually impaired. This help line offers emergency services and counselling for visually impaired accident victims, and those suffering from ailments. Nethrodaya has supported many visually challenged persons during a crisis.

Our sincere thanks to Sundaram Medical Foundation (SMF), Hindu Mission Hospital, Sri Ramachandra Medical College (SRMC), Madras Medical Mission (MMM), and Precision Diagnostic Centre, who have all supported this effort whole-heartedly.

As the general public, you could donate blood, antibiotic medicines, and offer to act as attendants on visually impaired accident victims. Doctors and others related to the medical fraternity could donate medicines, first aid material and theatre disposables to our medicine bank.



## Supporting the children of the visually impaired



A common myth is that blind people give birth only to blind children.. However, children of blind parents are not blind. Nethrodaya supports these sighted children by financially aiding in their education, also laying the foundation for them to care for their blind parents.

While a visually impaired man finds a sighted bride for a life partner easily, a visually impaired girl finds it twice as tough to find a sighted groom who is willing to marry her. This is an area where a social change must occur and doing away with myths related to blindness is the only way out.

## Self Employment Programmes

Many of the visually impaired resort to begging, for sustenance, as mainstream society does not place any confidence in their ability to undertake full time employment or be entrepreneurs. Nethrodaya believes

In making the visually impaired self sufficient through self employment. Nethrodaya initiates this process by giving them seed capital in the form of saleable goods, of their choice, worth Rs. 500/- The sale of these products on trains, stations and roadsides generates a modest income, which caters to their day-to-day expenses, making them self-sufficient. You could help a blind person by donating the seed capital.

## The blind tenant

Finding a house is the greatest crisis faced by many a blind family. Nethrodaya finds suitable houses for them and funds their rental advance, making them proud tenants of their new home! You could make a blind family, tenants to a home by paying their rental advance.



## The Interview section

**A J John (Reader):** A retired pensioner, worked as a regional manager for an MNC

**Q: What do you do for Nethrodaya?**

I work as a fundraiser, a driver for Gopi who is partially blind, read English texts for the students...

**Q: Nethrodaya needs...**

Volunteers...

**Q: Future of Nethrodaya:**

This place survives on donations. For Nethrodaya to gain some stability of cash inflow, there has to be a source of income... an endowment of some kind needs to be there for funds to be raised on a more permanent basis.

**Selvam, brother of one of the students, Andavar**

**Q: What made you bring your brother to Nethrodaya?**

It was his own effort... I did nothing special



Shyam, Harini and Revathy



**Q: What is the reason for his blindness?**

He has been blind from birth. The doctor asked us to make him study though he was born blind.

**Q: How have you dealt with his blindness?**

I am open about it. It is not something I fear or hide. I accept it as part of him.

**Q: What is your dream for him?**

I want to make him study as much as he wants. I want him to lead a normal life. Once he gets a job he should get married and have a family.

**P. Manivannan, (Owner of Pushpa Video)**

**Q: How do you know Nethrodaya?**

I was acquainted with Nethrodaya through my deceased brother, Gurumoorthy. I carry forward his relationship with the organization... it is my way of fulfilling my brother's aspirations in the field of social work.

**Q: A long acquaintance?**

It is a three year-long friendship that began when Nethrodaya approached us to do a documentary film for them.

**Q: Your dream for Nethrodaya...**

They are looking for their own space and I hope they get it soon. This will improve their infrastructure, helping them cater to more people.



Mirchi Suchi



## Nethrodaya News And Events

### FUND RAISERS

Nethrodaya is supported by The Central and Tamilnadu Governments, the Judiciary and Security forces of India.



Nethrodaya on  
TOP priority list



Of Singing and Music



Jyothirbhavan invited  
to Raj Bhavan



Working on a Sunday



The woman behind  
"Agal"



Wellington Corporate  
Foundation



An Anniyan visits  
Nethrodaya



Run out...



If its July its  
Volley Ball



Enakku oru girlfriend  
venum ada...



Man behind sensational  
Veerappan Episode



A policeman's poem  
Mr. Alexander - DGP



A politician who came  
in like a surgeon...



The long arm of  
the law...



A new definition for  
Thiruonam



Sillunu oru visit



With singer  
Harish Ragavendra

### **An Anniyan (stranger) visits Nethrodaya**

Actor Vikram came for a chess tournament for the visually impaired in Nethrodaya. He was surprised that blind people could play chess. He said that he had a tough time convincing his family that this was where he was coming. They simply did not believe that blind people could play chess and Vikram was going to watch!

### **Run out...**

Singer Unnikrishnan once did a quick "run out" of a family get together in Palakkad to be there for Nethrodaya's musical evening. A "run out" for which Nethrodaya's cricket loving students are very grateful! Many of the students love cricket and follow up the game diligently when India is playing. Nethrodaya conducts cricket tournaments for the visually impaired.

### **If its July its Volley Ball**

This is another sport that the students of Nethrodaya enjoy playing!

### **Enakku Oru Girlfriend venum ada!**

It is a wonder that Karthik is not singing this song every other day, considering what he did on the evening he was supposed to buy his fiancé her bridal saree! Karthik stayed back at Nethrodaya for a function, foregoing an important evening engagement. "It was kind of you Karthik. Thank you for making time and space in your life for Nethrodaya"!

### **The man behind the sensational Veerappan Episode**

Assistant Director General of Police, (ADGP), Vijayakumar visited Nethrodaya and made a most generous contribution of Rupees Fifty Thousand for Nethrodaya's cause. He was bombarded by endless questions from the visually challenged students, about the Veerappan encounter.

### **A policeman's poem**

Director General of Police (DGP) Alexander found the time in his hectic schedule to write a poem for Nethrodaya's anniversary celebrations. He brought the poem and dedicated it to all the students – A wonderful gesture Sir! Thank you.

### **A politician who came in like a surgeon – Bang on time!**

A gynecologist by profession, currently holding the portfolio of Minister of State for Social Welfare, Ms. Poongodai pledged her unconditional support for Nethrodaya. Reinforcing Nethrodaya's philosophy, she said "People who are challenged in anyway, be it physically, visually or otherwise must not be institutionalized. Society must accept them as part of its mainstream".

### **The long arm of the law...**

If a person commits a petty legal offence and the court charges him a fine for it, he pays it to Nethrodaya if the case is judged by Justice Prabha Sridevan.

### **A new definition for Thiruonam**

Singer Unni Menon told his family that on Onam day, while everyone goes to a temple, he would go to his temple, Nethrodaya. On that day, Jeyachandran, one of the students, requested him to sing the most popular song of the year... paartha mudal naale from Vettai adu vilaiyadu. Unni Menon honored his request and sang the song.

### **Sillinu Oru Visit!**

Actor Surya says, "I would not be able to run an institution for the visually impaired and take the responsibility for it. However, when there are people who are doing that work, I feel a great need in me to be a part of it and contribute whatever little I can".

### **Nethrodaya on top priority list**

Actor Srikant was to be a part of the film fraternity that was meeting the Pondicherry Chief Minister to file a petition against pirated CDs. However, he chose to stay on for Nethrodaya's function.

**Mirchi Suchi...** Nethrodaya honored Suchitra as an ambassador for their cause. She feels proud to be associated with Nethrodaya and promises to take their philosophy to people with her ace conversational skills. On one of the many occasions she had been invited for, she could not make it and sent her husband, actor Karthik Kumar as her representative. Thanks to Karthik for taking Suchi's word and being there for the event...

### **Of singing and music**

**Singer Srinivas** was kept a little too busy that evening! He sang fourteen songs, including popular numbers from Azhagiya Theeye and April Maadhaththil.

**"Nethrodaya is close to our hearts". Singer Anuradha Sriram and family**

**"Our family will support and stand by Nethrodaya and their efforts at all times". Tipu and Harini**

### **Jyotirbhavan invited to Raj Bhavan**

The Governor, Mr. Surjeet Singh Barnala invited the visually impaired students of Nethrodaya to the Raj Bhavan to celebrate the White Cane day. The students who shook hands with him came back and said, "He has very large hands with long fingers!"

### **Working on a Sunday**

Back in town on a sunday morning, Mr. N. S. Palaniappan IAS, Social Welfare Secretary, took time to preside over Nethrodaya's state level chess tournament. that very sunday afternoon. He congratulated Nethrodaya's rapid progress in serving the visually impaired population of Tamil Nadu.

### **Pushpam Appalanaidu - The Woman behind "Agal", the evening of Music - A fund raiser event**

Ms. Pushpam has always been a constant source of support and encouragement to Nethrodaya. She has been a volunteer of sorts; a generous contributor, a pillar of strength, and a great friend and guide to us.

### **Wellington Corporate Foundation - A friend in need... A friend indeed!**

When Nethrodaya was in dire need for a house to accomodate the blind girls, the Chairman of Wellington Corporate Foundation, Mr. Narayanan, made a timely intervention and helped in constructing the new building which is their home today. He has also promised that if Nethrodaya gets their own space, he will support in the construction of their buildings.

### **A few inspiring stories from Nethrodaya**

**Jayabalan...** MA in Tamil literature... pursuing an M.Phil in Ulaga Tamil Aaraichi Niruvanam... his aim is to be an IAS officer...

**Celine...** from Ramanathapuram, studying B.A English Literature in Quaid-e-Millat College. . . born blind. . . aspires to do a Phd and become an English language Professor in a College...

**Rakesh Sharma...** from Tirunelveli, studying his BA first year, English Lit, from Vivekananda College... has learnt specific classical dance pieces and choreographs, for certain songs... loves to dance... enjoys Yoga classes in Nethrodaya...

**Jayachandran...** B. A. History, 3rd year, Madras University, Correspondence course... Wants to study B.Ed after which he wants to do social service for the blind... serve people who are blind, deaf and dumb...

P. Maruthupaandi...BA first year... English Literature, Vivekananda College. Became blind at one and a half years... Wants to be a teacher... his poem reads

Himayam uyarem endru ninaikkiraya? Ennaththa perthaaku, athu sinthu aayidum  
Oonam (bad mind... negative thinking) unathu ulaththi irundhaal athai uthari podu vaanam unathu kaiyil vara  
gaanam paadu.  
Aiyi ilaignane jananaayakam unathu kaiyil ullathu, athai maranthuvidathe

#### Translation:

Do you think the Himalayas are too high to reach?

Expand your thinking and intentions, the Himalayas will become a lot less high

If you have negative thoughts in you, throw it out of your system

Sing the songs of the soul that reach for the skies

Youth... it is in your hands that democracy lies... do not forget that!

#### Fact Corner

##### 1. Did you know that Louis Braille, the son of a leather maker, founded Braille?

A three year old was playing with his father's leather making tools. An awl (a sharp tool to make holes) slipped accidentally poking one of his eyes. Within a few days the little boy lost sight in both eyes. Years later, driven by a burning desire to read he returned to his father's workshop, and with a blunt awl invented a coded script of alphabets made of exactly six dots. The embossed script could be read with the help of fingers. The boy was Louis Braille and the embossed script he invented is accepted worldwide as Braille- a finger reading technique for the blind.

##### 2. Did you know that the visually impaired people all over the world celebrate the white cane day?

It was the day on which an American, Richard Cooper founded the white cane, which was used by the blind to walk.

##### 3. Who is Hellen Keller?

Helen Keller - Born in Alabama in 1880... a blind and deaf child... lost her sight and hearing at the age of one after an attack of scarlet fever... went on to become a teacher, an orator and a writer...

#### Editorial

By Sowmya Nandakumar

I always used to sympathise the blind, pity them. But that evening, after a partially blind man from Nethrodaya escorted me to my bus stand because I did not know the way I realised that the visually impaired person needed neither pity, nor sympathy, but acceptance and equal access to opportunity.

I happened to visit Nethrodaya to do their newsletter for this year. I spoke to the Mr. Gopi, the founder of Nethrodaya, and will recollect a part of that conversation all my life with the greatest respect and admiration. He gave me the address and directions and then said, "I run the activities of Nethrodaya. I get a sense of serving the people to whom I also belong, since I am partially blind". I was taken aback. It was said with the as much ease and casualness as saying, "Oh I am a film maker, or a writer or a lecturer or anything else"!

A recollection of that reinforces the thought that with acceptance from society at its various institutional levels; be it the family, the educational institutions, the working environments, the social circles, marriage and so on, the visually impaired will be enabled to achieve a lot.

This is the effort that Nethrodaya is making - An effort that needs to be understood, a cause that needs to be supported, a revolution in thought and approach that needs to be propelled by people like you and me.

## An achiever from Nethrodaya

Yuvraj, who belongs to the village, Odukaththoor, in the Vellore district was born blind. His sister was also born blind. His father had sleepless nights wondering how he would raise his special children, in an ordinary manner. Who would care for them after he died? As his children grew up, they learnt, quite naturally, to live as ordinarily as sighted people. They were independent, responsible and ambitious.

Yuvraj came to Nethrodaya and completed his college education. He went on to become a teacher at the Odukaththoor Government School, the first among his generation of children in the village to hold a government job. Today he draws a salary of Rupees 11,000/- . He is educating his sister, taking care of his parents and hopes to get his sister married.



## Some people who run Nethrodaya from the outside

The barber shop near Nethrodaya gives all the students free hair cuts regularly.

Manivanan of Pushpa Video, does videography and photography for all of Nethrodaya's events

Mrs. George, a cancer patient, who passed away recently, left all her savings were to go to Nethrodaya.

## What you can do as an outsider

Share a meal

Sponsor a student

Donate your time: Read, write or scribe

Lend a helping hand: Donate a walking stick

Life's a song: Call upon the services of our orchestra

Celebrate with us- your birthdays, anniversaries

Sharing your vision with the visually impaired... Take a visually impaired person for a ride on a motorbike... Take a visually impaired girl shopping with you... Tell them about the beauties and wonders of the world in which we all live... You could help them see the world through your eyes.

**Monetary Contributions: Cheques and Demand Drafts can be drawn in favour of Nethrodaya**





1. Annanagar Times
2. Madras High court
3. The Bridge
4. Sir Ratan Tata Trust
5. Government of Tamilnadu
6. Force One Guarding Service
7. Wellingdon Corporate Foundation
8. Questnet International
9. V. T. Lazar Charitable Trust
10. Pranic Healing Centre
11. Pazhamudhir Cholai
12. Bhoomika Trust
13. DOS Club
14. Pushpa Video
15. Fine Cut
16. Team Vision
17. Picture Productions
18. Larsen & Toubro
19. India Cements
20. Hotel Green Park
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22. Infinite Dimensional Charitable Trust
23. Theresa Womens' Hostel
24. Spartan School
25. The Hindu
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