FOUNDER & SOCIAL ACTIVIST



C. Govindakrishnan

Nethrodaya · Chennai

M.A. English Literature · B.Ed. Special Education (Visual Impairment) · P.G Diploma – Social Initiative & Management · Honorary Doctorate in Social Work – Asian Vedic Culture Research University

ABOUT

Profile Overview

I, C. Govindakrishnan, was born on May 10, 1971, in Chennai. Being visually challenged since birth, my parents encouraged me to pursue education in general schools rather than special ones. This led me to complete my schooling and earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English Literature. My college years were transformative, as I connected with other visually challenged students and recognized their struggles, which ignited my passion for serving this community.

In my early advocacy work, I spent five years with the Association of the Blind Students, leading movements to secure education and employment rights for visually challenged individuals. Through protests, rallies, and hunger strikes, I was imprisoned over fifteen times, but our efforts compelled government action, resulting in employment opportunities and welfare facilities.

Later, as a Project Officer at Banyan, I worked to rescue and rehabilitate mentally ill, destitute women, reuniting 122 of them with their families. In 2002, I founded Nethrodaya, an institution dedicated to empowering the differently abled, which has been serving the community with innovative programs for over 25 years.

Reflecting on my journey, I see my life as a gift. Though I often wonder how life might have been had I been sighted, I am grateful for the opportunity to transform challenges into avenues of service. The fulfilment I derive from helping others is

indescribable, proving that perseverance, thought, and action can overcome any obstacle to make a difference.

CAREER

Work Experience

1991 – 1995

Social Activist – College Students Graduate Association of the Blind (CSGAB)

Spearheading various movements for securing the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities.

1996 – 2001

Project Officer – Banyan (Home for Mentally Ill and Destitute Women)

Worked to rescue and rehabilitate mentally ill, destitute women, reuniting 122 of them with their families.

2002 – PRESENT

Founder – Nethrodaya (Institution for the Differently Abled)

Founded Nethrodaya in 2002, an institution for the Differently Abled, serving the community with innovative programs for over 24 years.

HONOURS

Awards & Recognitions

A journey over three decades earning recognition at state, national, and international levels.

1. **National Award**
   Presented by the Honourable President of India
2. **Best Social Worker Award**
   Government of Tamil Nadu
3. **Best Institution Award**
   Government of Tamil Nadu
4. **NCPEDP-LTI Mindtree Helen Keller Award**
   Role Model Supporters of Increased Employment for Persons with Disabilities
5. **The Lincoln Global Leadership Award**
   Lincoln Global Law Chambers
6. **Ashoka Fellow International Award**
   Ashoka Innovators for the Public

7. **Citizen of the Year Award**
   Australian Consulate General

8. **Ability Award for Eminence**
   Cavin Care Ability Foundation

9. **"Master of Achievement"**
   National Integrity Cultural Academy

10. **Exceptional Leader of Excellence Award**
    Women Economic Forum

11. **Outstanding Achievers Award**
    M.S. Dadha Foundation

12. **Alert Being Award for Real Life Hero**
    A Good Smartian

13. **Lifetime Achievement Award**
    Lions Club of Chennai Phoenix

14. **Service Excellence Award**
    Confederation of Tamil Nadu Malayalee Associations

15. **Life Time Achievement Award**
    Rotary Club of Chennai Midcity

16. **State Award for Eminence**
    Indian Association for the Blind

GOVERNANCE

Memberships

1. Served as Member in State Advisory Board, Constituted by Government of Tamil Nadu.
2. Served as Member in Welfare Board, Constituted by Government of Tamil Nadu.
3. Served as Member of Zonal Railway Users' Consultative Committee, Southern Railway.
4. Member, Multi-Disciplinary Grant in Aid Committee, Department for the Welfare of Differently Abled, Tamil Nadu.
5. Served as Member in State Planning Commission for the Differently Abled, Tamil Nadu.
6. Served as Member in Special Schools Committee for Differently Abled – Government of Tamil Nadu.
7. Served as Member, Executive Committee for implementation of Audio Alert System in City buses for the benefit of Visually Impaired Persons, Government of Tamil Nadu.
8. Member in Technical Committee for arriving specifications for procurement of magnifiers, Angel pro digital player, reflective folding sticks etc., for the welfare of differently abled persons, Government of Tamil Nadu.
9. Served as Technical Committee Member for designing and procuring auditory signal for the benefit of visually impaired persons – Government of Tamil Nadu.
10. Served as Advisory Committee Member in program designing for mobile therapy unit for Department of Differently Abled – Government of Tamil Nadu.

PROGRAMS

Special Initiatives under My Leadership

I — PROMOTION OF LITERACY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Nethrodaya Free Residential Higher Secondary Special School

(Recognized by Government of Tamil Nadu)

Provides free education for the underprivileged, visually impaired and physically challenged children, with separate boarding and lodging facilities for girls and boys, at the state of the art, barrier free campus, completely free of cost.

Nethrodaya's Learning Academy

Ensures that the differently abled students can appear for various competitive exams and government recruitment exams such as TNPSC, RRB, TRB and banking exams.

Free Hostel Facility for College Going Underprivileged Differently Abled Students (Boys & Girls)

To support educational aspirations of underprivileged, differently abled students who hail from remote villages and wish to pursue higher education in city colleges, it offers free hostel facilities and a Resource Centre on campus, fully equipped with the latest in assistive learning enabled devices.

Education Assistance to Children of Visually Impaired Parents

Through our Education Assistance scheme, we aid underprivileged, visually impaired parents by funding the education of their sighted children which secures the future of the child and the family.

II — PROMOTION OF SPORTS & CULTURE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Annual Sports & Music Competitions

Nethrodaya hosts various sporting events for the visually impaired on an annual basis such as Chess, Volleyball and Cricket and Music Competitions. Participants across the southern states who participate in these events are encouraged by Nethrodaya by reimbursing transportation charges and by providing all hospitality such as food, accommodation and high value cash awards for the winners.

III — CREATION OF LIVELIHOOD

Self-Employment Scheme for Poor Visually Impaired Families

Our rehabilitation and self-employment scheme benefit Visually Impaired persons who have had to resort to begging to support themselves. A seed capital with a business kit containing marketable products helps them to start a business, and earn a livelihood with dignity.

Individual Cattle Rearing Unit

Under this scheme we provide a Cow and a Female Calf to the Illiterate Visually Impaired Families in the remote districts of Tamil Nadu.

IV — ENSURING DIGNITY AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Shelter for Shelterless

We also provide shelter for the differently abled, homeless persons deserted by their family members due to their disability.

Free Distribution of Monthly Groceries to Underprivileged Poor Visually Impaired Families

Having witnessed the severe impact of Covid pandemic on the disabled population and to ensure food security for underprivileged families of people with disabilities, we launched a “Monthly Free Groceries Distribution Scheme” to the Visually Impaired, Poor Families.

Providing Free White Cane

For ease of mobility to the Visually Impaired persons.

Free Medical Helpline

To provide equitable access to health for the many visually impaired persons who are suffering from various medical ailments, we provide free Medical Aid Services, so that they receive timely and quality medical assistance.

"Death with Dignity" Scheme

Provides financial assistance to visually impaired persons and their families so that they may perform final rites and funerals of their deceased loved ones with dignity and respect they deserve.

LEGAL & POLICY

Advocacy Initiatives

I am deeply passionate about advocating for the differently abled community. As a **Member of the State Advisory Board, Government of Tamil Nadu**, and having served on various high-level committees, I have actively worked to secure their rights, influence policies, and ensure the effective implementation of government schemes. My efforts include lobbying with the government and fighting pivotal legal battles, such as the landmark Madras High Court judgment on **28.01.2016**, which mandated the **appointment of scribes for school and college students** appearing for Board Exams, leading to GO No. 54 dated 29.02.2016 and an order dated 08.03.2016 from the Higher Education Department.

Another significant milestone was securing a judgment on **31.08.2017 exempting the payment of Infrastructure & Development Amenity Charges, enabling the issuance of GO No. 31 dated 09.03.2018 by the Housing and Urban Development Department.** This decision has benefited numerous institutions serving the differently abled. Additionally, I played a key role in the historic Madras High Court judgment on **19.09.2022** that increased the **monthly pension for differently abled persons** from ₹1,000 to ₹1,500, positively impacting 5,92,000 beneficiaries in Tamil Nadu.

My determination also led to the restoration of land allocated for the differently abled (GO No. 748 dated 20.11.2006), despite challenges from a residents' welfare association. This victory was solidified by a favourable Madras High Court order on 17.10.2008. Furthermore, I facilitated a special order from the Tamil Nadu Government **waiving fees for visually impaired private candidates appearing for Board Exams (GO No. 220 dated 09.07.2013)** and successfully advocated for enabling visually impaired students to **apply online for their Board Exams** under the same GO.

These initiatives reflect my unwavering commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of the differently abled community.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Expertise and Media Participation

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted "Recommendations to Improve the Conditions of Visually Impaired Population in Tamil Nadu" to the Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu (2003).

PAPER PRESENTATION

Presented a paper on "Health Education on Development of Children with Differently Abled" at a joint event organized by UNICEF and the Government of Tamil Nadu.

MEDIA PARTICIPATION

Participated in various talk shows, debates, and interviews with prominent media houses including:

- NDTV
- CNN-IBN
- Sun TV
- Jaya TV
- News7Tamil
- Puthiya Thalamurai & Other leading channels

OUTREACH

Inspirational and Awareness Speeches

Delivered over 100 speeches on Persons with Disability, Personality Development, and Leadership at institutions across Tamil Nadu and India, including:

- **IIT Madras**
- **Anna University**
- **MOP Vaishnav College for Women**
- **SSN College of Engineering**
- **Velammal Engineering College**
- **Sankara Nethralaya – Medical Research Foundation**
- **Aravind Eye Care System & Hospital**
- **Avinashilingam Institute of Home Science and Higher Education for Women**
- **Dr. MGR Institute of Special Education and Research**
- **Saveetha University**

Corporate Organizations

Standard Chartered Bank, TCS, Infosys, and others.

Rotary Club and Lions Club Forums

Across multiple chapters in Tamil Nadu.