



Society for the Visually Handicapped was formed in 1983. Prior to that a few of us attempted to develop our exposure in the field of serving Persons with loss of vision. Our leader was Mr Shyamal Datta (henceforth abbreviated as SD). I must say a few lines to bring the background here.

My uncle late Netai Bose had been a Setar player of Jaipur Seniya Gharana trained under Ustad Mustaq Ali Khan Saheb and he was extremely close to SD, whom we have seen paying sudden visits to our Paikpara home, sometime with a camera and we kids were taken on the roof and placed in groups while he clicked. Then occasionally he would drop by late at night and collect my uncle, and two of them would disappear in a car, driven by SD to some unknown destination. Later during our adolescence we saw my father's first cousin Anuradha Das, getting married to SD and the bond became very close now. We would continue to hear with awe about his vast knowledge, sharp intellect, very affectionate and amiable personality and extremely generous. It was with him that "Rotary" entered into our big network of families.

During the decade of 1968 or so my father took VRS from Burmah Shell as the Aviation Manager and we came to live on Ritchie Road. Later SD with my aunt shifted residence from his Sinthee house to Ritchie Road and we would meet them frequently. Door of their house has always been open for whoever chose to enter.

Around 1980 onwards we seriously thought of starting an organization for serving Persons with Blindness and Low Vision and on 23 February 1983 it was finally formed with his address 34 Ritchie Road, as our registered office.

What is very special here is that SD brought in Rtn Atin Mitter, Rtn J V Ranga Rao, Rtn Sandip Bandyopadhyay, Rtn Arijit Ray, Rtn Chandramohan, Rtn Chittaranjan Sarkar, Rtn Ranajit Ray as initial members of the Society and even the Rotary Constitution to draft the Memorandum of our Society. Step by step we would progress in our mission which he coined as EDUCATION TO SIGHTLESS CITIZENS. He would work out every detail of our projects, managed by very limited resources, mostly raised by him through R C Behala and his contacts with other Rotary & Inner Wheel Clubs.

How this Society grew to become a technical expert and consultant in the field of Education of the Blind is history now. But I would like to draw your attention to two very innovative projects which he steered with grit and determination.

1. Braille Slate Production Project

For this considerable efforts were made to produce international standard plastic Interpoint A4 Braille writing frames here but for some reasons it could not reach his goal. He even brought Rtn Peter Dada from Germany to give this project a hand of support. Finally SD took a lot of efforts to bring a Computerized Braille Embosser which RC Behala gifted to us courtesy Rtn Deepnath.

2. Mountaineering for the Blind at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute 1989-2001

When we first conceived this project Darjeeling was in flames due to Gorkhaland agitation and people thought we were crazy to think of implementing such a daring project. But he stood firm and organized support from RC Siliguri, R C Darjeeling and other local Clubs to mobilize support for our safety and successful training!

My humble salutations to Him!

Hena Basu
Hon. Secretary
Society for the Visually Handicapped