

### Editorial

by Ilona Seure

**Small boys grow up to be big men: this newsletter features growth and change. It is now a few years ago since we spent some time as volunteers with Navajeevan. Every now and then, we visit it to see how 'our children' are doing. At the moment Heidi is returning from her visit to Navajeevan. She stayed in Chiguru in 2003/2004 and tells us here how the boys she knew then are faring now. Ilona and Hanka van Waas taught a group of boys how to play the recorder. One of these boys, Veera Brahman, writes his life story for us now.**

**In the Netherlands too, we have been thinking about our future. You will find a report of this meeting below. As always, the Newsletter closes with Mark's column. We hope you enjoy reading it and that you will have a fine summer.**

### My story

by Veera Brahman

**Hello Friends,**

**My name is Veera Brahman. For a long time, I lived in the Navajeevan project. I will tell you how I came there.**

When I was two months old, my mother died. She had a lot of problems with my father who was not a kind man. She committed suicide. Subsequently, my father left me with his parent and continued his life elsewhere. My mother's father was very upset by the death of his daughter. He took poison and died after six months. My grandparents really wanted me to live with them. This was a tremendous loss for them. However, they took good care of me. At first they were quite well off, but this changed because of all the problems in the family.



*Veera Brahman, back then (13 years of age) and now (24 years)...*

I wanted to study and have opportunities for my future, but I was afraid that this would no longer be possible. I thought about running away from home.

One day, I heard through the village headman about shelter homes for poor children in Vijayawada. I decided to go there. On 25 September 1996, I arrived in Vijayawada. I found Navajeevan close to the station. I immediately visited the shelter coordinator and told him my story. He referred me to Fr. Koshy.

Fr. Koshy ensured that I could follow my studies. In the different shelters, I came in contact with people who cared for me like a mother. This experience ensured that I managed to overcome my loneliness a little. In my teens, there was Auntie Anu. During this difficult age, she supported me with care and advice. She taught me how to take good decisions. Ultimately, I gained my diploma in information technology. At the moment, I am in Hyderabad looking for a job.

### Back to Navajeevan after four years

by Heidi Timmerman

**There is only one boy from that time in Chiguru – P. Nagesh. He is terribly happy to see me and would rather not have to share my attention with all the new boys.**

In fact it is not surprising that he is the only one of the 'old boys' here. Time has not stood still and everyone has moved on. The lads back then are now turning into young men... We had a lot of fun visiting the boys how are studying at college in Keesara based in Navajeevan. They are all first or second year students doing their intermediate, which is more or less comparable with the last and second last year of VWO in secondary school in The Netherlands. There are three different specialized streams from which they can choose – mathematics, physics, chemistry; biology, physics, chemistry; or public and social administration, economics and business. An overwhelming majority have chosen the first option. Only Elia and Kotababu are studying administration, economics and business. They both want to be a social worker or a priest – following Fr. Koshy's example?

I met G. Ramesh in Yuva Bhavan and his has already

started his professional training: hotel management. He tried the things he had learned out on the fathers and the volunteers until he fell out with the cook. The more things change, the more they stay the same! It is the people in the organization who make Navajeevan!

Navajeevan is extremely proud of the first batch of children whom they have taken care of and helped on their way over the years – and who are now settled, have good jobs (with a good salary) and some of whom are even hoping to do further studies in the United States. Brahmama is one of the latter.



## The future of the Friends of Navajeevan: a reflection

by Ilona Seure.

**Every now and then we organize a meeting focusing on our future. We did this again more than two months ago. We are happy to report to you about this meeting.**

The Friends of Navajeevan has been in existence for more than five years. We are very happy about the establishment of the Foundation and about how things are going now. In The Netherlands things are going well: we have a number of loyal Friends, and more and more new people (who are not our family members or friends) are finding their way to us via the website whenever they go looking for a good cause to support. In India also everything is going well – Navajeevan is growing and it is keeping its focus on the wellbeing of the children. Our brochure includes the following text:

‘Given that we have a very good relationship with the management and staff of Navajeevan and trust in their policy and working method in dealing with these children, we have decided to establish a foundation with the aim of raising funds so as to support the organization financially.’

But what if Fr. Koshy, the current director of the project, should stop his activities? This will happen one day. In the same way that staff members, with whom we have a good relationship, also look for other

work, and children whom we know grow up and leave Navajeevan. We were all unanimous that we want to continue with the Friends of Navajeevan. After all, we think that Navajeevan is a fantastic organization. On the evening of Friday 16 March, we shared our thoughts in a creative way about the possible scenarios when Fr. Koshy ceases to be Director. We then thought about what be necessary for us to be able to confirm that we trust the policy and working method of Fr. Koshy. The most important points are given below. Agreements about how we will actually achieve this still have to be made. But we have plenty of time to do that. Fr. Koshy has let us know that he will definitely be able to stay on for three more years as Director.

- \* Navajeevan must be there for the child. This is the most important of all to us. The child’s wellbeing is foremost. It must continue to be a child-friendly organisation, where children are not hit, where children are supported in a loving way and where opportunities are created for them to be able to function independently later on.
- \* Personal contact with the staff and children must continue. This could be achieved by regularly sending new volunteers to Navajeevan.
- \* Fr. Koshy must have faith in his successor.
- \* Good cooperation between our foundation and Navajeevan, especially in the area of information, exchange and expenditure must continue to exist
- \* Navajeevan’s financial management and reporting must be transparent.



## Bagunawa?

by Mark Bos

### At the cinema

*Taal* is a megasuperduper hit, scream the posters at the cinema. *Taal* is the Bollywood film of the year 2000. It is Sunday, time to escape the heat and to enjoy three hours of zooming fans and exhilarating entertainment on canvas. Since the actors in the film speak Hindi, this time I am with two boys who do speak Hindi. They are a bit older and that means that they won't jump into my lap in their excitement. At least I hope not.

While I enter the cinema, a group of Indians look at me with a little suspicious amusement. Although body language is always difficult to decipher, I imagine they are thinking 'What on earth is a white boy doing at a Hindi film?' I smile back in a slightly friendly way, in the hope that they won't want to become friends immediately. When the light goes out, I am swamped by dancing, fights, romantic moments, colours and long incomprehensible conversations. The heroine is played by Aishwarya Rai, one of the most beautiful women on earth and rightly a former Miss Universe. A rather stupid-looking policeman is clearly the fool in the film, and when suddenly everybody starts to laugh at one of his jokes, I laugh loudly too. This surprises the man sitting next to me, and it surprises me too. Quickly Jagadeesh explains what the joke meant. Luckily it was quite funny. After two and a half hours, when my backside feels like a piece of old rubber, the climax finally comes. The hero is going to try to kiss the heroine. Kissing is still a taboo which is always carefully cut by the Film Censor Board. The moment is staged on a green hill in the pouring rain. This makes the white sari which Ms. Rai is wearing rather see-through. There is an icy calm in the cinema. The boys next to me are holding their breath. Are they really going to..? The two heads come closer and at the instant that the lips must touch, the camera zooms in on the wonderful landscape behind them. Three hundred people simultaneously heave a deep sigh of emotion mixed possibly with a little disappointment. Whatever it was, when the lights to on again, I walk outside considerably cooled down back into the sun again. Jagadeesh asks if we can go again tomorrow, but then to a violent film please. I say that I want to wait a week before I sit for three hours again.



But the words of the theme song echo through my head, *Taal e se taal, le mina...*

I don't know their meaning, but they convey that magnificent mountain scenery and dancing lovers. From

now on I will always have a weakness for Bollywood romance. Maybe I might even start liking *Onderweg naar Morgen* (a popular sitcom in The Netherlands).

## Vimukthi

by Banu Rajesh

**Vimukthi is the centre where addicted street children can kick their habit and orient themselves on a future without drugs.**



Recently a new building has been utilized to enable more children to be received. A part of the building has been converted into a bridge school. This is where the drop-outs come – children from the surrounding villages who no longer go to school. Here they get extra coaching so that within a short time they can join children of the same age in class. There is also a special class for girls.



*The old building*

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