



**MEMORANDUM TO THE GOVERNMENT OF KERALA**  
**(SUBMITTED TO THE HONOURABLE CHIEF MINISTER OF KERALA STATE,**  
**MR. OOMMEN CHANDY ON THE 9<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2011).**

**Introduction:**

To be unable to hear a loved one's voice or a lovely song; to be unable to speak and to be understood; to be unable to communicate and learn like the rest of the world; and to be deprived of the ability to earn and to save – are probably the worst a person can endure in his life. This, in short, describes the agony the deaf or hearing-impaired person faces every day of his / her life. Don't we, the more blessed ones, need to turn a sympathetic ear to this plight and do our mite to reduce this misery?

Unfortunately, this handicap comes with a strange paradox - it has to be discovered when no one knows it exists! Unless the children born with hearing loss are detected within three months of birth and appropriate intervention applied, the brain does not recognize the language spoken and the individual is sadly deprived of speech. There are a staggering 3 crores of hearing-impaired people in India alone.

Four out of every thousand newborn infants are born with significant hearing loss and some of them will not develop normal speech, even with the most powerful hearing aids and training. Even though Cochlear Implants help these children to overcome this handicap and help them to speak like everyone else and lead a normal life, its prohibitive cost keeps it out of the reach of the economically deprived people. It costs 6,50,000 rupees for a Cochlear Implant Surgery to be performed even at the lowest tier.

It is in this context that **HRIDAYATHARANGAM**, a noble initiative by the living legendary singer **Padmabhushan Dr. K. J. Yesudas** has stepped in through his **DIVYAKARUNYA TRUST**. Touched by the plight of people who cannot hear, the maestro has laid plans for financial help for deserving children who cannot afford Cochlear Implantation.

His initiative is nothing new - the **HRIDYATHALAM** project for Cardiac Surgery Patients has already given life for more than 303 patients who might have otherwise lost their lives for want of money for this life saving surgery. It is only fitting that the voice that has enthralled generations of music lovers speaks up for our fellow human beings deprived of the sense of hearing. And for its illustrious son, **can't the State of Kerala too join hands in this just and noble cause?**

The foundation for this has already been laid; on 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, a group of Surgeons and audiologists performing Cochlear Implantation in Kerala joined hands with Dr. K.J. Yesudas to bring life to his project. They, in unison, pledged support for **Hridayatharangam** and offered to do Cochlear Implant surgery at an all-inclusive cost of approximately Rs.5,85,000 making it the lowest cost of this very exclusive procedure in the country.

The Divya Karunya Trust led by Padmabhushan Dr. K. J. Yesudas and Janapaksham, led by Mr. Benny Joseph jointly formulated the Hridayatharangam Project, with an aim to help the poorest among the poor who are, by birth, unable to hear and speak, for their Cochlear Implant Surgeries and for the subsequent requisite training thereafter, for which around Rs. 8 lakhs to 12 lakhs were charged in each case, in the beginning when this surgery was commenced in Kerala. The Hridayatharangam Project came to know that the charges for this surgery are exorbitant in Kerala and in other parts of India and the costs differ from place to place and from hospital to hospital with vast difference in the total sum charged. Hridayatharangam and Janapaksham called up a meeting at Gokulam Park Inn Hotel presided by Dr. K. J. Yesudas with all the leading doctors and technicians of cochlear implant surgery. After a long debates, the meeting was concluded on the basis of a promise by the doctors that they will do these cochlear surgeries for around Rs.5.80 lakhs in which they will use only the branded Cochlear machines which is approved by F.D.A. and we formed an organization by name CIFK (Cochlear Implant Federation of Kerala).

The motivation for this Hridayatharangam project was from the great success of Hridayathalam project which was started at the function held at Le Meridian, Cochin in connection with the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dr. K. J. Yesudas 70th birthday, by which we could save the lives of more than 303 heart patients till now. This was not just a life saving program alone, but we could bring down the costs of heart surgeries by more than 50%, in almost all hospitals in Kerala where heart surgeries are done. We could also bring out the day light robbery of the so called “medicine/medical mafia” who charges even 10 times of the actual costs of many life-saving medicines for Kidney, Heart and Cancer patients and we could bring this fact to the notice of the authorities concerned and thus we could also bring down its prices to a great extent. We also filed a Writ Petition in this connection in the Hon’ble High Court of Kerala for reducing and for controlling the prices of important life-saving medicines.

Now coming back to the Hridayatharangam Project and the Cochlear Implant Surgeries in Kerala, we would like to inform the Govt. of Kerala that:

- a) This project should have 100% transparency and the public must be able to know what is happening in this project and all its details through its website that shall be easily accessible.
- b) The cochlear Implant machines / style of operations, charges etc. should have a uniform pattern and should maintain an uniformity in every centre, approved by the Committee.
- c) Now Kerala Govt. has declared to sponsor 200 Cochlear Implant surgeries per year, for which we request the Govt. that the patients from every district which shall be almost equal and reasonable, but definitely some of the rare and urgent cases may demand/need urgent surgeries. Such cases shall be considered by special screening & ethic committee.
- d) To analyze the patient's financial background, there should be a special investigation team; this is to be done because as the Govt. had passed Rs. 5 lakhs for each patient, but this facility should not be misused in any way; it is recommended that full subsidy shall be given to only for the BPL and the poorest among poor patients. The reason is that the full success of this particular surgery and this cochlear implant program lies not only on the hands of doctors and technicians, but it needs a very important involvement from the parents and family; so we demand that according to the families financial background, a small contribution must be there from the family in the surgery; then only it will be fully successful.

- e) Patient Registration:
  - i. Patient should produce Doctor's Certificate with all relevant records.
  - ii. Should provide Income proof, Address proof, age proof, two passport size photographs, and if possible the photograph with the parents.
  - iii. Must provide the Recommendation /suggestion letter that the patient deserves the surgery from the Surgeon /M.P./M.L.A/Councilor or from any other competent authorities.
  - iv. We request to have evaluation meeting for this unique project in every month or at least in alternative months as such a meeting will help to improve its functioning and to keep up its goodwill.

Kerala, where Cochlear Implantation began relatively late in 2002, has many successful Cochlear Implant programs, and boasts of the highest density of Cochlear Implant candidates in the country, and also the lowest average age of Cochlear Implanted children. This is a feather in the cap of this highly educated state and with the support from the Government, we can also boast of one of the best-funded programs for the poor, especially with such a dynamic and famous personality like Dr. Yesudas driving the goals.

### **THE HRIDAYATHARANGAM PROJECT**

The **Hridayatharangam** project has been carved out of pure passion for hearing. It aims:

1. To join together all the specialists associated with Cochlear Implantation in Kerala under one group.
2. To formulate strict guidelines for evaluation, selection, surgical intervention, post-operative mapping and habilitation that matches the best available in the world today.
3. **To ensure that only high quality, reliable FDA approved Cochlear Implants are used and every implant surgery and post operative performance is audited.**
4. To make sure that the centers associated with the project have robust, well functioning Cochlear Implant programs; that have surgery, audiology and auditory-verbal habilitation support so that every child performs to the expected outcomes.
5. To ensure that the lowest cost per implant is offered to the economically deprived subjects.
6. To keep the maximum age for implantation at 3 years so that the best outcomes are achieved.
7. To spread the message of early intervention of hearing loss and thereby to further improve results of surgery.
8. To ensure a funding system without bias of any kind.

### **HRIDAYATHARANGAM and COCHLEAR IMPLANT SPECIALISTS OF KERALA (CISK)**

At the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2010 at the Gokulam Park Hotel at, Ernakulam, where all the Cochlear Implant Surgeons of Kerala and top audiologists were present, the following decisions were made:

1. The group by name, Cochlear Implant Foundation of Kerala, **(CIFK)**, was formed.
2. It was resolved in the same meeting that Dr. K. J. Yesudas will be the Chief Patron of the Foundation, Mr. Benny Joseph-Janapaksham will be the General Convener of the State and Dr. Mohammed Naushad the Joint Convener.
3. **It was further resolved that apart from the above officials, there will be district office-bearers, district conveners and joint conveners. Districts were grouped into Kasargod, Kannur,**

Kozhikode and Wayanad districts as one Unit with the convener being Dr. M. P. Manoj and Joint convener Dr. Ravi; Malappuram district – Dr. Sharaffudin; Thrissur district – Dr. Ram Mohan; Ernakulam, and Idukki Districts - Dr. Matthew Dominic; Alleppey, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam Districts as one unit with Dr. Muhammad Noushad; Quilon, and Thiruvananthapuram districts as one Unit with Dr. John Panicker and Dr. K.G. Matthew.

4. It was also resolved to have an Ethics Committee in the matters of expert opinion and disputes, comprising of General ENT Surgeon Dr. Lenin Chathuruthy, Cochlear Implant Surgeons Dr. M. P. Manoj & Dr. Muhammad Noushad, Audiologists Mr. Sasidharan P. Nair & Mrs. Manju Thomas, Pediatricians Dr. Abraham K. Paul & Dr. Sachithananda Kamath, State Co-ordinator Mr. Thomas Punelil, Director of L.F. Hospital Fr. (Dr.) Sebastian Vadakkumpadan & Lions Int'l Multiple Chairperson Roy Varghese.

### **REQUEST TO THE GOVERNMENT OF KERALA**

**We, at the Hridayatharangam Trust, at the Cochlear Implant Foundation of Kerala (CIFK), and at the Cochlear Implant Specialists of Kerala (CISK) request the Government of Kerala to:**

1. Recognize early detection of hearing loss, very early fitting of hearing aids and if indicated, Cochlear Implantation before two years as a main health objective of Kerala State.
2. Co-operate with the Cochlear Implant Specialists of Kerala to draw guidelines for pre-operative assessment, surgical protocols and post-operative care in tune with the best available in the world today.
3. Draw up minimum necessary protocols for Cochlear Implant programs
4. Empanel well performing Cochlear Implant centers in the State private sector for reimbursement for government employees and allied personnel
5. Audit results of Cochlear Implants performed in the state with assistance from CISK
6. Subsidize, if necessary fully, in most deserving cases, the cost of Cochlear Implantation for economically backward people in the state, especially those who are supported by the HRIDAYATHARANGAM Trust.
7. Associate with CISK for setting up newborn hearing screening centers in every Taluk Headquarters in the state.
8. Subsidize electricity and taxes to private clinics and hospitals that are associated with HRIDAYATHARANGAM trust, for they are severely undercutting their costs for the benefit of the poor.
9. Subsidize hearing aids to the poor.

It is our fond wish that the State of Kerala be an example for a state funded Cochlear Implant program in the likes of similar programs in the western world. Let our dreams of a hearing-impairment free world be a reality. Let our Patron Dr. K.J. Yesudas' dream of "**hearing for all**" is an example of his driving force- "**MY VISION- MY MISSION**"

**Dr. K. J. Yesudas**  
Chief Patron

**Mr. Benny Joseph**  
General Convener

**HRIDAYATHALAM - HRIDYATHARANGAM PROJECTS**  
Supported by: **Cochlear Implant Foundation of Kerala (CIFK)**