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On a path paved with hope and determination



Aruna Devi, who was working at a matchbox-making unit in a remote village, is now a senior revenue inspector with the State government.
PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

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When it rains, it pours. So goes the adage. It has been proved true in the life of Aruna Devi. When she was a Class XI student, she lost her father. When in Class XII, she lost her eyesight due to retinopathy. This was in 1980, when she was planning to work towards becoming a chartered accountant.

Two years after Aruna lost her vision, her elder brother also developed the same condition and turned blind too. Doctors attributed the loss of vision in the siblings to the consanguineous marriage of their parents.

To support her widowed mother and other dependents in her family, Aruna took up a menial job in a matchbox-making unit near her village in Elayirampennai, Virudhunagar district. She worked at this unit for eight years, where she had been employed on a daily wage basis. Despite the situation she found herself in, Aruna continued to nurture her dream of pursuing higher education and finding a better job.

Things began to take a turn for the better, when Aruna had a chance meeting with members of College Students and Graduates Association of the Blind, which functions from

the premises of Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya in T. Nagar.

With the Association's support and guidance, she signed up for an undergraduate programme in sociology at Queen Mary's College. As she completed her bachelor's degree with a gold medal, she became eligible for a scholarship worth Rs. 12,000 every year to pursue post-graduate studies. The scholarship had been instituted by the All-India Confederation of The Blind, New Delhi.

With the help of scholarships from the State Government and Madras University, Aruna completed her MA in social work at Stella Maris College. Following this, she joined an NGO at Pallavaram that works for the betterment of poor women and adolescent girls. In the meantime, she also enrolled for M. Phil course at Bharathidasan University, Tiruchi, through distance education.

She did her thesis on the topic 'rehabilitation of women prisoners,' after their release from prisons.

"The recommendations I made in my thesis were considered by the State government and it issued an order in 2007 enabling women prisoners to get sewing machines, wet grinders and any other devices

of their choice at the time of their release."

Between 2008 and 2013, she was working with Tamil Nadu Differently-Abled Charitable Trust, Ekkaduthangal. During this period, she had the opportunity of travelling abroad. In 2010, she was chosen by the U.S. Consulate to be part of an exchange programme in which she had to study some of the best practices of NGOs (working in the field of disability) in Los Angeles, California and North Carolina.

Also, in 2012, Disabled Peoples' International chose Aruna to represent India at a conference in Sydney Law School. She had to deliver a speech on rehabilitation of children, the differently-abled and women who are refugees.

She also appeared for Group II Tamil Nadu Public Service examination. She cleared the test with a good

score and was posted as Senior Revenue Inspector in the State government in 2013.

At present, she is the honorary treasurer of Society for the Rights of All Women with Disabilities at Alwarpet.

"We give vocational training on how to make jewellery, jute bags, paper bags, quilts and embroidery. We also guide them in availing loans, procuring the necessary documents to set an enterprise. If someone is interested in taking up a government job, we guide them on how to enrol for coaching programme to clear competitive examinations; we also make arrangements for people to have career counselling," says Aruna.

Aruna Devi can be reached at 90032 81341.

Nethrodaya honours Aruna Devi

Recognising the services she has rendered to women with different disabilities, Aruna Devi, a resident of Thiruvanniyur, was honoured by Nethrodaya, an organisation based in Mogappair West,

which works for the welfare of visually-impaired people.

She was presented with the Nethrodaya Award for Eminence - 2016 and was conferred the title "Trailblazer in Social Work."