

# SUNDAY TIMES

Bennett, Coleman & Co., Ltd.

OF INDIA



EVERY CRISIS IN LIFE  
COMES WITH AN  
OPPORTUNITY  
MIND OVER MATTER | P 13

JANUARY 31, 2010 | METRO | 36 PAGES | INCLUDING CHENNAI TIMES, TIMESLIFE! AND CLASSIFIEDS

## Visually challenged receive career guidance

NETHRODAYA, A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION THAT WORKS FOR THE CAUSE OF THE VISUALLY CHALLENGED ACROSS THE CITY, HELP THEIR SIXTH ANNUAL CAREER COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE CONFERENCE...



Gayathri Saranarajam Magappair (West)

For the sixth time in a row, a state-level career counseling and guidance conference was held for the visually challenged on January 23. Over 300 students from across Tamil Nadu participated in this event organised by Nethrodaya, an NGO for the visually challenged, at their campus. The conference was inaugurated by Justice S Manikumar, Madras High Court. The other guests of honor were Sugi Sivam, Vivek Anand, MD, Fitness One, Dr Arivanadam, Regional Director, NIVH and Dr Giri Hanumantha Rao, Proprietor, Giri and Company.

Understanding the importance of physical fitness, the NGO has also installed a gym on their premises. "It is important for everybody to stay fit. But our residents who are visually and physically challenged find it difficult to exercise or walk along the road or even in a park. So we decided to install a special facility, just for them," C Govindakrishnan, Founder, Nethrodaya, remarks. Apart from giving a dis-

count, Fitness One has also helped in installing special fitness equipment. "When Nethrodaya approached us, we were more than happy to help. Our fitness coaches and trainers will visit the gym everyday and train people," Vivek Anand said.

Highlighting the rising cost and unavailability of Braille books, Govindarajan said that they were looking for an alternative - audio books. "We wish to begin a revolution and to propagate the idea that the visually challenged can also be self-reliant, but that becomes difficult when they need to develop skills as simple and necessary as reading. Audio books are very good alternate study material," said the founder.

Audio books and CDs containing digitally recorded lectures on various subjects like English, Math, Science, Accountancy, Social Science, Commerce and Economics for students of classes 10 and twelve were distributed. Apart from study material, CDs on epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as other moral stories by Sugi Sivam were also made available for these students.

# THE TIMES OF INDIA

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 72

## Blind woman recounts horror in prison

R Vasundhara | INX

Chennai: February 22, 2010 was a dark day in the life of M Selvamani from Namakkal district, when two policemen entered her house and arrested her for allegedly murdering her grandfather and threw her into the stygian darkness of prison. Darkness, however, wasn't new to Selvamani as she has been visually challenged all her life.

But this darkness was new and terrifying — it was the darkness of uncertainty. She had no idea when she'd be out of prison. "I was seared out of my wits when I was taken there," she said in a quavering voice, still trying to come to grips with reality. "Within my own surroundings, I get around easily even though I can't see. But this was a new place. I was petrified thinking about how the place might be, about how I wouldn't be able to get around since I can't see. And then there was the fear of how the other people in the jail would be. I'd heard that authorities are very strict."

A victim of her family's feud with her neighbours, Selvamani's familial life went for a toss when her grandfather was murdered two years ago and her father arrested in connection with

it. "I was out at the Government Hospital that day because a neighbour had beaten me up without any provocation," she said. "But last month, two policemen came to my house and told me that I had to sign some papers in connection to the murder. They never told me that they had an arrest warrant to my name. At the station I was made to wait for 5-6 hours after which I was produced at the Namakkal sessions court. That is when I knew that I had been named as an accused for offences such as nuisance and intending to cause hurt."

Fortunately for Selvamani, both the warden and her co-inmates at Salem prison were fairly sympathetic towards her and helped her as much as they could. But even that couldn't overcome

the sense of helplessness and futility that threatened to swamp her. "It took me sometimes to get adjusted to the new surroundings," she said. "Initially, I needed to be led everywhere, right from washing up, to the toilet and even the outgates. All the time, there was this overpowering sense of claustrophobia and of being stuck in a place from where I couldn't get out. I mostly kept to myself, especially at night when fights broke out among six of my cell-mates."

Battling with her sense of helplessness, Selvamani also had to combat loneliness. "I missed my children a lot — the younger one, especially, who was barely two years old and needed breast-feeding," she said. "I would wait each day during visiting hours for my fami-

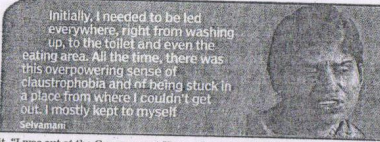
ly. Naturally, I knew that they couldn't come everyday, but I'd still hope that they would. I broke down completely when my brother visited me."

Twenty-eight days later, Selvamani was granted bail by the high court after a bail petition was filed with the help of an NGO for the visually-challenged, Nethradaya.

Justice S Nagamuthu, expressing shock at the arrest of a visually-disabled woman by police, lambasted the district judge for having denied her bail in a mechanical fashion "which reflected the total non-application of mind." He ruled that the fundamental rights of Selvamani had been seriously infringed by the action of the inspector and the sessions judge. The judge has summoned the inspector to appear before the court in person on March 29 and explain his conduct. The sessions judge too has been asked to submit a report.

A relieved Selvamani told TOI: "The day of the release was like a new lease of life for me after those endless days in the prison," she said. "I shall never be able to forget this period in my life. But had I been able to see, these people would have never dared take advantage of me this way!"

vasundhara.r@timesgroup.com



Selvamani