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Success & ABILITY, India's cross-disability magazine enjoys wide circulation both nationally and internationally, and has a wide readership that includes industrialists, administrators, Indian and overseas Government and Non-Government organisations, libraries, disabled persons, families and the general caring public.

We invite you to take on an advertisement in this pioneering magazine and become a part of this caring group. Publicity to your products or programmes would reap the dual benefits of enjoying a widespread readership and supporting a significant cause.

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From The Editor's Desk



Friends,

We begin this year with a lot of hopes in our hearts... with renewed vigour, stronger for the things done – right and wrong – taking lessons as it were – from Life's gigantic canvas.

It's ten years after the Persons with Disabilities Act has been passed... Where do we stand? Most of the euphoria it generated at the time of coming into force has evaporated... Whatever little has happened, has also not exactly met with approval. All this notwithstanding, we do know that huge changes have happened in the sector despite all the stumbling blocks, dead ends and the shortcomings of our system. I think we have a lot of things to be proud of.

After all this journeying through the world of change and positivism, I am all the more convinced, we should work determinedly and strive harder to bring about the equal opportunities we crave for and the time to do so, is now. There is a lot at stake. If we value the way we think, we must not allow the old stereotypes to remain. We have bravely crawled to where are now, in a developing country such as ours with its myriad problems. We have a government full of ambiguities which has a way of expressing itself that is often complex and elusive. We often have to do a tango to get ourselves noticed. There are options to think of - civil rights and equal opportunities, full participation... it is mind-boggling. But at such times, I tell myself... look at what we have achieved despite everything and then once again the feel-good sense returns... hope once again flares up and goads us onwards, towards further achievements. Having said this, I also want to iterate that while massive changes from the prevalent ideologies of a decade ago smiles at us, we should also guard ourselves from over reacting. There have been large changes all around us and yet these have also been woefully inadequate. P V S Giridhar a lawyer, gives us his perspective on this, in this issue.

Our live Indo-US Digital Video Conference, held with the cooperation of the U S Embassy in Chennai, brought in a global focus on a one-to-one basis and focussed on the two universal issues of education and human rights, on a more personal platform, than what large conferences usually offer. I believe this marks the beginning of more collaborative ventures to come.

Last year, EmployABILITY 2005 was an improvement on the previous year's. It turned out to be bigger in size as well as in rewards. So much so, we are already working towards making EmployABILITY 2006 better and finer, to make more progress and promote more employment for disabled persons. As we have pointed out in the feature about this inside, if EmployABILITY 2004 was a coming together for the first time, with the candidates eager just to get employed, EmployABILITY 2005 was a step ahead. Candidates, this time, came in with experience, and an awareness of their own worth, not merely asking for jobs, but asking for the right job... expressing themselves, their skills, aware of their potential... I must say, we, at Ability Foundation, gained two inches that day. It is heartening that people today, have become increasingly conscious of their worth and are no longer willing to take up a job that does not appeal to them.

I do believe that the days of disabled people getting employment just for altruistic reasons have now passed. Most disabled people know their worth and are informed individuals and need to feel appreciated, as well as emotionally connected, and as companies want loyal people on their side, they too are looking at qualified persons with disabilities with a new eye of discovery.

As cover stories go, Anjali Arora brings in her own exclusive shades to Life's spectrum of colours. A writer is said to paint the canvas of life with his/her words and add colours to it, with feelings and imagination. Anjali has done just this. The canvas she paints is striking. She has a way with words that is immediately motivating and poignant and will strike a chord of recognition among the "I've been there too" achievers, induce others to follow her example, and brighten the hearts of many as well. To this pretty lass who was India's first Supreme Court lawyer with visual impairment, being a lawyer isn't about wearing black coat and gold digging, it's about being informed and to be empowered through this information.

My heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for your wonderful comments of appreciation about our 10th anniversary issue. They made all the difference, coming as they did... from your heart. Please do keep them coming... they are what induces us to move further.

JAYSHREE RAVEENDRAN

I LIVE the value of SELF-RESPECT

ANJALI ARORA



I enjoyed writing this. Believe me, I was writing for myself and didn't think I was writing for something like a feature. I enjoy my company, both talking to myself and writing like this... thanks for the pleasure.

When I appear in a new social setting with new people I am asked about my life with subtle references to my disability. These remind me of my disability which, in my usual routine, I almost just forget! In daily life, my disability is no barrier in my skill to manage myself and my life. I say this excluding the disability unfriendly structures! I don't know how hard it would be for the non-disability sector to believe this and accept! The most common question asked is what happened and when... It is sometimes difficult to answer and sometimes it makes it an interesting thing to do—explaining to those who think and feel that they know it all! I answer these questions born out of ignorance and wonder, with a smile.

When answering what happened and how, I recollect and relive the moment when the bandage from



My parents tell me that I left the room saying thank you to the doctor. They had asked me how I had the courage to say thanks after such a news, and they tell me that I had said that the doctors had tried their best.

my eyes was to be removed after corneal transplant. This was my third transplant and I was scared, really scared. What if? In addition, if so, then what? I didn't know my fears were going to come true. After the bandage was removed, I saw nothing but black clouds! No light and no colours except black. The doctors kept examining my eyes and instructed me to move them left and right and up and down. I kept doing it accordingly. Finally, they said they wanted to talk to my parents and called them outside. I already knew by now what it was. I knew before they knew but said nothing. In my presence my parents asked the doctors what happened, with a lot of anxiety and concern. They always shared the information with me...after all I was to face the world and my situations of life! The doctor hesitated and said briefly that the vision could not be restored.

There was no time to feel the vacuum and despair that eclipsed us all at that moment. It emerged and disappeared gradually with time. My parents tell me that I left the room saying thank you to the doctor. They had asked me how I had the courage to say thanks after such a news, and they tell me that I had said that the doctors had tried their best. I could sense the tears in their eyes and the despair they were hiding from me. I could not weaken them by breaking down myself. I chose to cheer them up and myself in that process. Meanwhile, they displayed and lived with courage and positiveness to fill me with the

[COVER FEATURE]

same courage and strength.

My family tried to provide a positive environment around to give me time and appropriate opportunity to accept the change. All of us were trying to become each other's strength. This way of accepting life gave me and my family a positive direction to move ahead.

Reliving and recollecting those moments does not bring me pain or despair. Every time I go down the lanes of memory I experience new feelings which fill me with strength, courage, zeal and confidence and renewed energy. It reminds me of having a good family which is supportive, cooperative, and positive. Life's challenges surface my strengths and abilities to take life in good



I only lost my eyesight but not my vision! Sometimes I say in jest that I started seeing the world only after that! Life had different colours and tastes! A meaningful and purposeful life for me means to think big, dream high and extend myself beyond my stationing in life and discover new and interesting traits of my personality and challenging myself to always do better.



spirit and reshape it. Soon after my disability I began my journey of living a life worth living. I was to shape my destiny in my own way. I only lost my eyesight but not my vision! Sometimes I say in jest that I started seeing the world only after that! Life had different colours and tastes!

I wanted to continue my schooling. At that point of time, integrated education was not known nor was it advocated so fiercely. I wanted to be part of the mainstream educational system. The schools were new to the idea of giving admission to a blind student, and sought to escape taking the initiative on grounds of lack of resources, etc. I knew even then that





college of Delhi University. This was one of the colleges which did not find many blind students. But for me it was immaterial whether the college had any experience with blind students. It matched my preference and choice and so I joined this college.

College was fun. I made good friends, performed academically well and enjoyed every day there. My faculty had a lot of trust in my ability and expected much from me. Coming first every academic year became my habit.

From the final year of college my introspection mainly revolved around what career options I had. I appreciated the efforts of my teachers and lecturers to guide me but I knew where my interest lay and was acquiring the necessary skills to compete for the course. Of course I

wanted to do a professional course and not just any course. I sat for the all India competitive entrance exam for selection to L.L.B. in Delhi University. I qualified and I did not reconsider my choice.

My family as always was supportive and rendered all cooperation and help to me. Now I acknowledge the extent to which my family has contributed to my well-being and all the accomplishments and accolades that I receive from everywhere are for a joint effort.

the schools lacked resources both of tools and more so of mindset but still was ready or rather forthright to meet the challenge of bringing the change. Also, in such moments of trial, the dormant strength appears even to my own pleasant surprise. Life

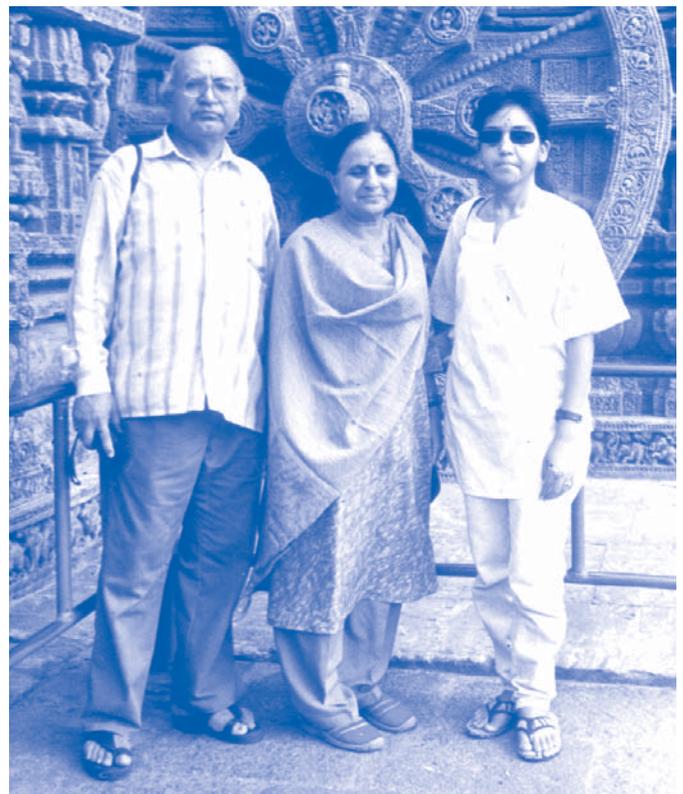


I had different reasons to become a lawyer. My image of a lawyer was not the one shown in Hindi films. It does not match the description which arouses fear or associated with the traits of deception and fraud. For me becoming a lawyer meant rationality, logic, creative expression and knowledge. I saw in reality the power of knowledge and of being informed!

was to be lived to its full and I decided to give my life a purpose.

A meaningful and purposeful life for me means to think big, dream high and extend myself beyond my stationing in life and discover new and interesting traits of my personality and challenging myself to always do better. I don't believe in condemning emotional fluctuations or feeling low off and on. I accept all emotions as natural. I appreciate life and my ability to respond to it in different ways comes to me spontaneously - sometimes being critical, other times assertively or with humility. For me, all of it is part of the evolution and that's what growth is all about.

After completing school education with excellence I joined an honours course in political science from Jesus and Mary





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For me becoming a lawyer meant rationality, logic, creative expression and knowledge. I'd seen my father being consulted by neighbours and family on various issues of the working class. I saw in reality the power of knowledge and of being informed!

A law degree would enable me to become informed, empowered...and I'm glad it met my expectations. I did work with commitment and resolute determination to attain this dream. The faculty was good and co-students co-operative.

In all educational institutions blind people are severely disadvantaged by lack of resources and non-availability of reading material in time. I faced the same challenge but chose not to be bogged down by it. I had the passion to become a

lawyer and hurdles were not bigger than my dream and purpose! At this time information technology had not developed to make reading and writing as easy as it is today. So I deployed the traditional talking books method. I generated my own resources and distributed it to more than one person, which included my friends and family.

After successfully finishing my law degree I enrolled myself in the Delhi State Bar as an Advocate in the year 1998. When I was in the final year, the requirement of being an apprentice was introduced which was later on withdrawn. I began my association with a senior counsel of the Supreme Court in the year 1998 and later started my independent practice. My location of Courts was the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India. I was drafting and preparing pleadings, putting up appearance in the courts and arguing matters in my own independent capacity. I had the privilege of appearing as an opponent counsel against senior advocates also. The level and quality of merit required to appear in High Court and Supreme Court were natural to me and of my



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choice. I primarily dealt with Constitutional Law issues and other civil matters.

By this time I had also acquired computing skills and was better equipped to research law packages, online law sites and all those resources which were becoming available in electronic format. My dream of self-empowerment benefited the disability sector and to some extent spread awareness in the non-disability sector. I don't have my own organisation but contributed in the evolution of facilities and protection of rights of persons with

disabilities both in the Courts and outside.

I am currently working as Assistant Law Manager with Airports Authority of India. My job profile still revolves around law and legal issues. I joined as a B grade officer directly after written examination followed by an interview. I take pride in being associated with an industry which is highly respected and also because it is a profitable PSU. I take pride in my association with this organisation which is giving me this opportunity. I'm not practising as an advocate, no, no, not now.

I see my current profile as different in some ways from the previous experience of practice but in no sense inferior... anything which is different is not inferior! If that was not so then all of us with disability would continue to be inferior forever because of

our differences! When I was practising I was my own boss in terms of my schedule, my priority, timings, choice of clients and matters. Now I am part of the team and learning ways to work in coordination and co-operation with my co-workers, colleagues and superiors. All of us are growing and learning for mutual benefit!

I am realistically optimistic and make positive choices for myself and have a positive opinion of others. I live by the values of my family. I accept life with all its flavours-sweet, sour and spicy.



It's not that life did not pose challenges or that my life was a bed of roses. There were negative people with negative comments to make but that was their problem and I feel that they should be concerned about it more than I. Often I've met people who would suggest what I should do as a person with a disability. They would tirelessly advise me to opt for the least challenging profession and a more convenient lifestyle. They would give living examples



Often I've met people who would suggest what I should do as a person with a disability. They would tirelessly advise me to opt for the least challenging profession and a more convenient lifestyle. To this I can't help but pass a pressed and controlled smile.

in support of their view! To this I can't help but pass a pressed and controlled smile. Who would explain to such people to believe in what I was already doing or have done! I hope and wish that emerging instances of visionary people with illustrious performances are seen as examples and noticed by the non-disability sector. I also hope that the handicapping barriers which accentuate the rigours of disability vanish with time and advocacy in the disability movement.

Persistence and determination towards my vision of life are the driving forces that burn as a fire within me. I am realistically optimistic and make positive choices for myself and have a positive opinion of others. I live by the values of my family.

I accept life with all its flavours-sweet, sour and spicy. I feel I'm a woman of substance and will live life to the fullest. I measure myself and my performance with my past record and not in comparison with anyone. That's what I call success and excellence. I am what I've made of myself with the lessons life's experiences have taught me.

Of Soaps & Tears

I cut corners, I reschedule appointments, I cut short phone calls, I stagger my washing/cleaning routine. I run in and out of rooms, I ... Monday to Thursday are my busiest blocks like... that of an executive's weekly schedule.

Two TV serials (soaps) back to back are enough I realise, to direct my life for a while. I do not know how I got hooked –or is it cabled - to these. It is not that I am impressionable or gullible. The engineering that goes behind each episode is all too obvious. Isn't the business tycoon sick of donning the same shiny robe and pacing about alike in both-or more-serials? The schemer has his/her part all stenciled out for use in any serial. Three to four flashes on a face denote agony, distress or shock. You can define the underlying emotion yourself as the faces are equally stony in expression. Eight or more flashes say that the end of the episode is due any moment; the stop watch will say when. Same dawn, same music for the same situation. Cellphones have acquired significance in serials. Half the story depends on its shrill beep; it can prepare, postpone or precipitate an event or transform a non-event into one. A character can suddenly be played by another actor, as it

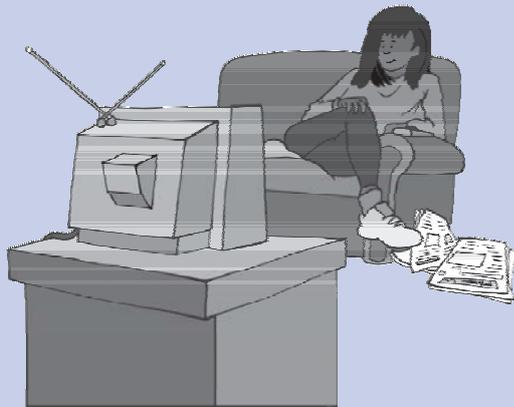
happened in the first of the two serials. Just when I was getting used to identify closely with the hero's travails and his expressionless expressions thereof, bang came another one to substitute him-a less expressionless substitute. Viewers' agony at this turn would probably be more expressive than the new hero's.

A recent report says that Tamil serials distort the image of the woman and influence the viewers. Women are portrayed as scheming, plotting and self-promoting beings, said the article. On the other hand are the near goddesses of Aquaguard purity. They can be relied on to neutralize the schemer's eternal plots and be bland like boiled veggies.

Coincidences are the backbone of serials. Imagine the heroine's best friend and her sister-in-law both being conned by the same man in a huge city like Mumbai. Court cases are more cry-n-laugh caricatures, with the right witness cropping up at the decisive moment. When the story is at one of its numerous-bleakest moments, a coincidence saves it. A recent newspaper article read 'I

*'Now what are you crying for?'
admonishes my daughter.
I wished she hadn't caught sight of that
little tear trying to trickle down my cheek.
It felt foolish.
Come to think of it
I am surprised at myself..*





am miserable, so I am'. It said that soaps influenced viewers into thinking that crises are essential to a happening life. The author, a psychiatrist gave the example of a patient who was advised to have not one but several boyfriends, in addition to her husband, to ward off boredom, and perhaps to invite crises. As most episodes end in critical situations, impressionable viewers would want their drab life to have some of those too. Think of it...our lives are so monochromatic, smooth and predictable. Meet a friend online/ in real after 4 months and after the initial happiness, there is nothing more to say...life is going on. Wouldn't it be thrilling to say 'I had a brush with a crisis you know?'

Even before we exchange niceties, the guests I am meeting after two years say, 'please switch on the TV; it is serial time'. They feel serials reflect family life and family confusions. It is pleasure pure. It's simple to follow the story in its hundredth episode...no questions asked. Never mind that by then the story and the characters have undergone much weathering.

So, am I watching serials to make life's smooth edges a little jagged? Was the tear that I shed for the lady in the sorry situation an expression of the repressed need for sentiments which would seem ridiculous in real life?

Watching soaps helps in other ways too. When my own future hangs like a suspenseful cloud, speculating on that of the battered heroes provides relief. It is another thing that the story manages to get more complicated than I could ever imagine, but I can still hope that a timely phone call will mend cracked relationships or iron out a difference. In a serial the imaginary happily co exists with the real; so I can always think-until tomorrow-that the sudden crisis was perhaps only imaginary. On another plane, when the amicably started discussion with the husband takes a slightly ugly turn, thinking of

Cock and bull stories, business tycoons in shiny robes, schemers, cell phones, jarring music, coincidences... there is no doubt that tear-jerkers have wheedled their way into our lives and influenced our lifestyles to a great extent.

yesterday's episode and the possibilities for today acts as a deterrent. He can go on as much as he wants, I am firmly anchored elsewhere, in 'no-bruise land'. Or when I wake up suddenly in the middle of the night and am assaulted by self-doubts or worries, steering my thoughts towards the snubbed hero and the possibilities that tomorrow will bring him have proved helpful ploys to bring back peace of mind.

Human interest?

Most stories are too 'cock-and-bull' for sustained human interest. Perhaps doses of it here and there, if one is equipped with a microscope. But perhaps one thing I have learnt is the value of nuisance value in serials-and in real life. Were it not for the petty schemers and bigger wheeler dealers, what and who would bring out the virtuous glories of the hero/heroine? Carrying tales may be bad but isn't the informer an important shaper of life-or so shows the serial? Also that super-refinement of character and super moral values are perhaps directly disproportionate to earthly success?

'So much thought for such a useless subject!' I can almost hear my daughter exclaim. I counter her squarely (of course in imagination): so what if I am a philosophical, intellectually superior soul? Can't I take a break from Vedanta and indulge in less existential debates occasionally?

Wait a minute! Like the serial which meanders aimlessly, I feel I am going in circles analysing my serial viewing fad. Unlike the two guests who wholeheartedly, simply, take serial viewing seriously, my efforts are the wary ones of a snob. It is not as an executive's schedule that I should treat serial viewing, but as a pure pleasure in itself. Perhaps I should first learn to let the tear trickle down openly...

MEERA BALACHANDER

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In many ways the first of its kind in India, *Success & ABILITY*, the magazine, with its principal focus on disability, not only informs and entertains but also interests, educates and empowers readers.

It connects the worlds of people with and without disabilities and opens the door to awareness-building, leading to a more informed and enlightened world - a world where people look beyond disability, a society where people are first and foremost people - disabled or non-disabled, only next.

As our readership grows, we want to reach out to more and more people who care - industrialists, administrators, Indian and overseas Government and non-Government

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