

Success &

ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

October 2018



MEDIA & DISABILITY



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WE'D REALLY LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Whether you are a person with disability,
or a parent or a friend or just someone who cares,
we look forward to getting to know you and your concerns.

You are just a click away!



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*Looking Beyond Disabilities &
Breaking Barriers Together*



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Our Partners



Audio description of the all-time favourite movie *Sholay* is available through this app for users to do a trial run. Users may share their experience of listening to the audio description through the XL Cinema app by mailing info@saksham.org so that the app can be improved further. Users can also call the Saksham helpline numbers or 011-42411015 for any assistance during working hours. The audio description facility is available free of cost to all users. Audio descriptions being made available through the XL Cinema app are created by Saksham under the leadership of Rummi Seth with technical collaboration of Narender Joshi.

To register on XL Cinema app to listen to the audio described movies, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skPqU1zeEvs&t=7s>

To learn how to access audio described movies through XL-Cinema app, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS4K6cphTd0&t=217s>

Source: Saksham

CBSE PROPOSES MAJOR REFORMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has proposed radical reforms in its comprehensive guidelines for students with special needs, including the option of taking up Indian Sign Language or Braille as a subject, computer-based tests, attendance waivers, multi difficulty-level options for core subjects, and flexible subject selection options.

In its academic and examination recommendations, the board also proposes introduction of the option of more subjects at the secondary and senior secondary levels which are skill-based, and two or three difficulty levels in core subjects such as mathematics, science and social studies at the secondary level. It has proposed different subject combinations at the senior secondary level. For students with mobility challenges, CBSE has recommended creation of online class content. Attendance requirements in cases of children with severe disabilities like cancer or/and living in remote locations and those with severe physical disabilities could be waived.

The draft policy also mandates infrastructural guidelines for schools to make them inclusive. The draft recommends that all school buildings be barrier-free, all parts of the school building be accessible either by ramp or lift, and that at least one accessible toilet be constructed.

CBSE has written to all states and other stakeholders for their comments on the policy draft, which the Ministry of Human Resource Development is likely to take up as a model for the country. To draft this policy, CBSE had held consultations with stakeholders including 20 education boards, the National Council of Educational Research and Training, National Institute of Open Schooling, Rehabilitation Council of India, Ministry of Social Justice, the National Book Trust, and the office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, Ira Singhal, the IAS 2015 topper with disability, the National Institute of the Deaf, and Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust.

Source: *The Times of India*

ASK BLEE!



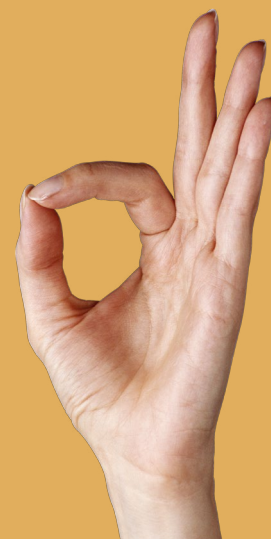
Do you have a question and wish to get answers for the same in Indian Sign Language (ISL)? Try the Ask Blee app! Operated by Bleetech Innovations, a design and technology company working for the deaf community, Ask Blee is an innovative platform to post questions and get answers in ISL. Ask Blee covers topics ranging from general knowledge and current affairs to questions on learning the English language. A deaf person can ask a question in any comfortable format through a simple chat. The team at Ask Blee will answer each question in ISL or a format comfortable for the deaf. The platform also

offers exclusive education and entertainment content in ISL through a library of information and education videos. Once a user has installed this app, he/she will get a daily update of different ISL videos on new English words, current affairs, etc. One can also WhatsApp the question to 8828983830 as a text message or in ISL as a video message.

Source: Bleetech Innovations

WILL ISL BECOME INDIA'S 23RD OFFICIAL LANGUAGE?

In a major step towards recognising India's deaf community, the Delhi High Court will hear a petition seeking official recognition for Indian Sign Language (ISL). The case will come up on 10, December, this year. If recognised, ISL will become the 23rd official language of India. The petition was moved by disability rights activist, Nipun Malhotra. According to Malhotra, recognising ISL is critical since India's deaf community makes up 38% of the country's disabled population. Official recognition is even more important when one considers that hearing impairment is an invisible disability. If recognised as an official language, ISL can be used to conduct important examinations like the Union Public Service Commission exams, among many others. Many countries like Ireland, New Zealand and Mexico have granted sign language legal status. Will India join them? 10 December will tell us. ■



Source: Newz Hook

ARE RESERVATIONS OUR ONLY RESPONSIBILITY?



Are we done with our responsibilities towards inclusion by merely establishing a few institutional measures, asks PREETI SINGH, disability rights activist, freelance writer and first runner up of Miss Wheelchair India 2017.

These days I'm reading a lot about how Delhi University has introduced reservations for acid attack survivors. Apart from this, the University has decided to include individuals with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental illness, disabilities caused by chronic neurological conditions, and blood disorders.

This is such a welcome move! Honestly I couldn't be more grateful. But there's an aspect which is being ignored completely – are we done with our responsibilities just because we're providing reservations?

It's okay if someone doesn't look as perfect as you do, but they can still be the coolest people around.

In a country where there's so much stigma attached to disability, are we doing enough by letting them in but not saving them from the constant weird glances, comments and unintended mockery?

I'm not saying that everybody in this world is mean or trying to bog you down. All I'm trying to say is that there's always a level of curiosity in people when they see someone who is different from the others. That curiosity at times, most times, leads to insensitive expressions which unintentionally make the other person conscious of his/her own existence!

NOTHING FOR US,



WITHOUT US!

I honestly do not know who to blame. You see. While they are growing up, we teach our children – this is a car, this a bus, cycle, plane, train, and so on, but how many of us tell our children – this is a wheelchair, this is a tactile path, a hearing aid, etc?

Sometimes I feel disability is like menstruation, everybody knows it's there but even today, nobody knows how to not react. There is some awkwardness when they see a sanitary napkin. However, schools/institutions have started conducting sex education classes and workshops, to make everyone understand in an all-pervasive environment. How then, does one justify that even in 2018, there are no programmes when it comes to disability inclusivity!

I do believe that instead of merely providing reservations, something more crucial should be started and catered to, like perhaps, workshops and sensitivity programmes to sensitise people with regard to disability and inclusivity. It is important to make others understand that it's okay if someone doesn't look the same as we do, but they still can be the coolest people around. They are people, not to be looked upon with sympathy or with pity, not to be stared at when you pass them by, but to be accepted as part of the society that we all exist in.



It's a two way process. There's a lot of trauma a person goes through when incidents like acid attack, accidents, or surgeries happen. A lot of confidence is lost. Many-a-time, they are too scared to face the outside world independently by themselves. This is why it's very important to make everyone believe that they are an integral part of the same world.

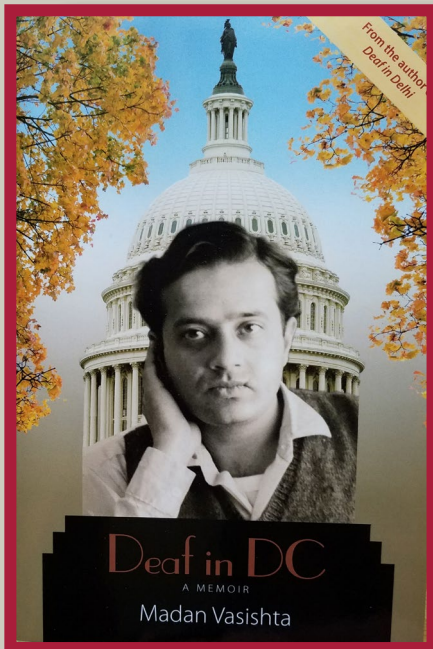
It is up to schools and universities to include such programmes, which in turn, would lead to a confidence building in these students, and introduce them to new possibilities with high morale and self-love, with no self-pity or the feeling of victimisation.

Wouldn't it indeed be a nicer world if we were to stop using the word "VICTIM" and the looks that come with it?

Of course, we go step by step and reservations are the first step to inclusivity. However, it just turns out that, more than often, it is the only step taken. It's like we're just trying to get rid of something by doing 2% of the work needed for it, and forgetting that there is still 98% of work left to be done.

I love what this world has given me – the confidence to say things out loud, to be independent, and most importantly, to be myself. I wish for a day when everyone feels the same. That's what inclusivity is for! ■

Double Impact

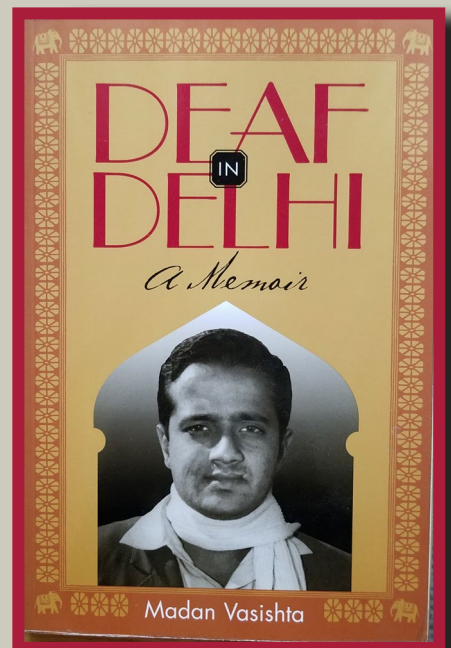


Deaf in DC

Author: Dr. Madan Vasishtha

Publisher: Gallaudet University Press

No. of Pages: 196



Deaf in Delhi

Author: Dr. Madan Vasishtha

Publisher: Gallaudet University Press

No. of Pages: 220

Deaf in Delhi and its sequel Deaf in DC, penned by Dr. Madan Vasishta, researcher, writer, and former teacher, principal and administrator at various schools for the deaf in the USA, narrate an inspiring autobiographical account with the aplomb of a natural story teller, finds NIVEDITA SEIB.

These books portray the story of an ambitious deaf person who proved that deafness is not to be seen as an inability, and that stumbling blocks could be used as stepping stones. Deaf in Delhi recounts Madan's life from the age of 11 up to the point he left New Delhi to attend Gallaudet College (as Gallaudet University was then called) in Washington, D.C. Deaf in DC continues from there.

Deaf in Delhi

"Daddy, you're lucky you became deaf!" Dheeraj, Dr. Madan Vasishta's young son once told him. Indeed, Madan could never have predicted how deafness would completely change his life. He initially had the goal of becoming a doctor, which became hopeless and pointless when he

Deaf in Delhi is dotted with humorous outlooks on his growing up deaf, going through numerous struggles to obtain education on his own, as there were no schools available then for deaf children post high school. Madan wanted to be like his older hearing siblings, but lack of communication made it hard for him to have friends, much less converse freely with his own family.

Meanwhile, from time to time, Madan frequently dreamed of traveling outside of India. He kept his dream alive by devouring whatever few magazine articles he could lay hands on.

His future looked bleak since deafness was considered as a "dead-end" at that time, until he attended a photography school in New Delhi that catered to deaf persons.

“ Both books take the reader along an epic life journey, of a determined individual who uses his deafness as a source of strength. ”

became deaf at the age of 11 in the India of the 1950s. Deafness was "looked down" during Madan's childhood, but he managed to come out "unscathed". In fact, no one in his family has ever achieved what he has.

There, he met other deaf people for the first time, and learned sign language. He subsequently became very active in deaf organisations which eventually

propelled him to heights he could never have imagined.

Deaf in Delhi is a funny and poignant memoir, a must-read and a cannot-put-down book!

Deaf in DC

Deaf in DC narrates Madan's experiences after he left India, at Gallaudet College, and of his subsequent career in the field of education of deaf persons in the USA. Though Madan relished his higher education at Gallaudet, he had to constantly struggle against the prejudice he faced on account of being a foreigner, learning a sign language that was different from the one used in India, and the numerous cultural clashes for being an Indian in the 1960's racial America.

Fortunately for him, being the only student from India helped him too, in a way. He not only managed to arouse the other students' curiosity to get to know him, and his culture as well, but also got them to gradually "adopt" him as one of their own. In spite of all the hardships, Madan maintained a positive and a humorous outlook of life.

The book is an inspiration to all readers, recounting his triumph over mountain-high difficulties, his rise from a teacher to becoming the Principal of several schools for the deaf, and going on to become the Superintendent of deaf schools in the USA, and a Professor

at his alma mater as well! The academic in him made him devote himself to conducting seminal research on India's sign languages, and subsequently publish dictionaries on each of the four varieties of Indian Sign Language. His

greatest achievement to date.

A true story of The American Dream this book is an inspiration not just to deaf people, but to people from all walks of life. The narration followed in the book reveals a natural story telling style with the various incidents recounted with an aplomb that makes the reader feel that the story is being told to him personally.

Both books take the readers on an epic life journey, of a determined boy-to-man who uses his deafness as a source of strength, thus making these books sources of the power of positive thinking as well. ■

“
*In spite of hardships,
Madan maintains a positive,
albeit humorous, outlook on
life throughout the years.*
”



Nivedita
Seib

The Sound of *Music*



It is common knowledge that everybody loves music, be it singing or simply listening to it. However, has it ever struck you that people with hearing and speech impairments too have a taste for this art?



**Subhashini
Murthy**

Yes! We do! We love music too. No doubt about that. Of course, it is very natural for you to have doubts and queries creeping in your minds, all of you “normal” hearing people. “How is that possible?” you wonder. “Unbelievable!” “Amazing!” So on, and so forth.

As with everywhere else, critics are part and parcel of our lives too, and we often face negative remarks like “You can’t hear, then how can you sing/hear the music?” and “You are not fit to be interested in this art”. Such discouraging comments are very dispiriting and depressing, infusing pessimism in their minds and in ours.



The first priority is to recognise one’s own voice, and there are several techniques for this.



We observe that some persons with hearing loss manage music on their own. What about those others with severe hearing loss? They too can experience music, I would say... with just a little bit of special attention. There is a saying “Nothing is impossible”. What is the need to feel guilty in liking what you enjoy or what you want to become? We can explore music too, with just some optimistic encouragement and a holistic environment.

There are several techniques to recognise one’s own voice. Let’s begin with the indoors. The first priority is to recognise one’s own vocal sounds. To do this, you need to keep your palm on your throat;



start with random sounds like “AAAAA”, “EEEE”, humming etc., with an increased volume, with full energy and effort. Once acquainted with clarity through practice, try to gradually reduce it to the normal tone and then to the lowest tone possible.

Yet another technique to recognise one’s own voice is to place your palms tightly upon the ears, and hum from a descending pitch, such that you feel the vibrations of your own voice through your palms. To recognise another’s voice, place your palms on the person’s ears and let them raise their voice in descending tone.

What next? Let’s consider an important mode of communication – the RADIO. If you were born and brought up in the pre-liberalised era, the radio would have been a vital mode of communication that disseminated information to the masses. First time users may keep their ear or hand on the speaker and set the volume to high and then steadily reduce the volume to the level he/she gets the capacity of the vibrational frequency that sets in. Placing the ear on the speaker gives the best results, and helps the user to use it frequently and on a regular basis, till he/she gets acquainted with the sounds played. Start with listening to percussion beats, string instruments like the guitar, violin etc., and then, wind instruments such as the flute. The next level involves using hearing aids. The pocket sized hearing aids with clips are the best for this, as you can place one



First time users may keep their ear or hand on the speaker and set the volume to high and then steadily reduce the volume to the level he/she gets the capacity of the vibrational frequency that sets in.



near the radio’s speaker and try to hear the different sounds being played.

Now, there are technologically advanced new hearing aids that are free of clips that attach on to clothes, such as behind the ear (BTE), receiver in the ear (RTE), invisible ear, and receiver in the canal (RIC), which bring about improved sound quality. A hearing aid with good sound quality gives a feeling of excitement, as though one is a hearing person. The models – BTE and RTE are worn





Now, there are advanced new hearing aids such as behind the ear (BTE), receiver in the ear (RTE), invisible ear, and receiver in the canal (RIC), which bring about improved sound quality.



behind the ears while the RIC is placed inside the ear. To listen to the radio, place your ear with the hearing aid on, near the speaker. Repeat the process as many times as you want to. This helps the wearer gain confidence by listening in constantly, until satisfied with his/her progress.

To experience this well, start with saying slokas or chanting with hearing aids on, away from a noisy atmosphere so that it enhances the vocal sounds, pitches, tones and pace (slow, normal and fast beats). Start with using pocket type hearing aids at full volume, then, gradually reduce it to the normal tone. Repeat the same if the user wears BTE, RIC or ITE hearing aids. Initially it is bound to be tough, but with constant practice, it is easily picked up. Then comes, listening to Carnatic or Hindustani music, before moving on to film songs.

Now, come to the millennia and beyond. With the advent of Internet and digitalisation of technology, hearing aids too have

transitioned from analogue to digital platforms. There are also many added improvisations such as Bluetooth, FM link and other wireless technology. And why not! Android gadgets too have got their way in, for further development.

Before the advent of digital technology, it was difficult for the hearing impaired person to get the exact lyrics. Post digitalisation however, the lyrics are easily downloadable and available in readable formats. Cheers to that!

Also, prior to embarking on the digitalised hearing aids, you need to test yourself by listening without a hearing aid on in any one of the ears, and try to listen, depending on the volume capacity for your comfort. Next is to try using the head jacks that are connected to laptops or MP3 player devices. Find out the right device, which you are comfortable with. Laptops are best suited when head jacks are used for viewing a film or any other multimedia. For mobiles, using head jacks might not be very clear, although they sometimes work well depending on its technological version or the apps downloaded.

Nowadays, android applications have been upgraded to the next level. Bluetooth and USB are frequently used in mobile phones which are in sync with hearing aids in order to pave the way for better hearing.

It is now up to the hearing aid user to enjoy the music for maximum leisure and pleasure. Go and explore... HAPPY LISTENING!!! ■

THE MEDIA BANDWAGON

Time for Course Correction

Can media change society? Or is media a product of society? Where does the answer lie? Somewhere in the middle...holding the potency of constant churning, setting the course and heralding the change. While every segment, sector and interest group of society has been employing or trying to employ media to its own advantage, there are times when media seems to internalise and take upon itself, the onus of campaigning for change – especially when it comes to issues of universal concern: forest conservation, women's empowerment, child safety, to cite a few. The various agencies and stakeholders of these sectors capitalise on this, leading to a positive cycle of change and progress.

So then, where is media, when it comes to disability? Has the right perspective of disability been imprinted in the media?

So many myths, so much stereotyping and discrimination, lack of awareness on rights and the need to utilise them... Has media overlooked these or maximised the focus on these?



Has media internalised the movement towards inclusion and campaigned for the same? Is media giving appropriate space and visibility to the needs and concerns of a huge segment of the population, that of persons with disabilities? Is media aware of the right language and terminology related to disability? Has the media industry itself, been sensitised on the issue of disability?

Here, we present to you in a nutshell, some perspectives on the role and impact of media across genres, on disability issues. The articles presented below for your reflection, contemplation and retrospect on how media represents disability – by omission or by commission. The intention is to moot some powerful ideas for change. Read on...

NO MORE STEREOTYPING, PLEASE!



Shefali
Udani

Media must play a more active role in busting myths and portray people with disability in better, more realistic light, and accord due space and proper perspective to disability issues, write SHEFALI UDANI and SUCHITRA IYAPPA.



Suchitra
Iyappa

MEDIA... this all pervasive entity, as we all know, has the power to sway the masses, influence opinions, trigger sociological change, challenge norms, to create, to vanquish, to herald a brave, new world. So much that empires have crumbled, age old values have changed, institutions and governments have fallen apart or built up under its scrutiny. And yet – on its own it's powerless, but in the hands of a coherent, informed team, it can transform into an unstoppable force...

In a country like ours, media wields enormous power – being the watchdog of democracy. From its earlier confines to the print medium and then slowly on to radio and television, the media has spread its bandwidth along with technological breakthroughs on to newer avatars. Gone are the days of reading newspapers leisurely on the couch. Today with the dominance of electronic media, world news can be had with a click of an app while on the go, while manufacturers persuade you to buy their latest offering in a spoilt-for-choice digital marketplace. Clearly, there is no refuting the role of the media as the greatest influencer of human minds.

And that apart, media has a big hand as a harbinger of social change. Be it the portrayal of women as financially independent and equal halves of their spouses or same sex couples or even jobs such as photography, etc. as lucrative careers, the media challenges and busts many a myth. By creating awareness

about social evils such as child marriage and female foeticide, the positive results initiated by the media are there to see.

Unfortunately though, there is a large lacuna in media's role towards the world's largest minority: people with disabilities. Mainstream media has glossed over, and often, ignored the issues confronting the 2.68 crore Indians who constitute the country's disabled population today. In the press, people with disabilities are portrayed as pitiable or as larger than life. When N.L. Beno Zephine cracked the civil services examination, for instance, the focus was on her disability rather than her inspirational achievement. That apart, news is rarely made available to people with sight or hearing disability. While the first newspaper in India was published way back in 1780, India's first Braille newspaper was published as recently as 2008. Besides, there are only a handful of news bulletins on Doordarshan that are currently in sign language, other than a YouTube channel called NewzHook that caters to the deaf.

Thankfully, the Internet has become an active channel of communication with various podcasts and Internet radio stations like Radio Udaan targeted at the disabled. Additionally, All India Radio Chennai and Ability Foundation's joint production Thiramayin Thissaiyyil ("In the direction of your abilities") was a popular programme that sensitised and educated the masses on issues surrounding disability.

All these efforts notwithstanding, the portrayal of people with disabilities in mainstream media



Disabled persons are presented as weak, inferior, comical, pitiable, non-sexual, evil, or on the other hand as larger-than-life, heroic beings, but seldom as normal people.

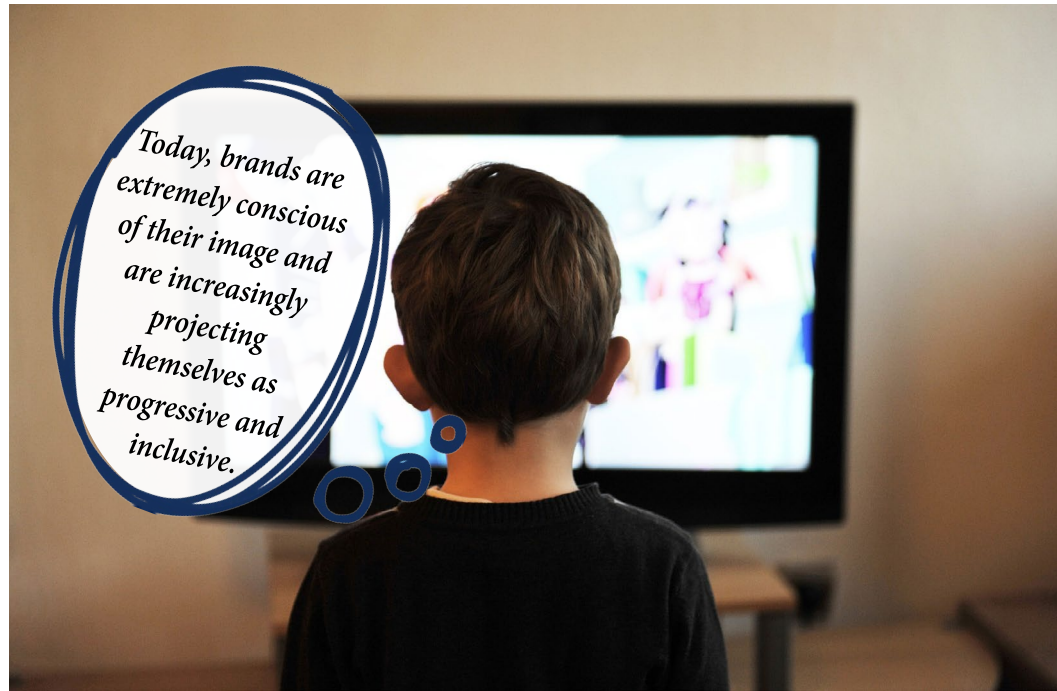
has been, by and large, inaccurate, frivolous and reeks of stereotypes. The truth is, most of us are programmed to indulge in typecasting, even if unconsciously. If only content creators realised the task on hand and used their power judiciously, the world would be such a wonderful, empathetic place sans clichés!

The visual media further perpetuates these hackneyed stereotypes by portraying people with disabilities as sidekicks who occasionally add to the plot's narrative or even provide comic relief. They are presented as weak, inferior, comical, pitiable, non-sexual, evil, or on the other hand as larger-than-life, heroic beings, but seldom as normal people. This was evident in the film

Tare Zameen Par, where the child protagonist's best friend is a disabled boy who is showcased as meek and because of his disability, is able to connect with the dyslexic boy. In *The Greatest Showman*, the protagonist creates a museum of 'freaks' – people with disabilities and physical abnormalities. Closer home, the protagonist in *Mozhi* is portrayed as one with deep-rooted, emotional issues.

However, with the advent and acceptance of experimental cinema, this incidence is fast changing. The protagonists in *Margarita with a Straw*, *Ships of Theseus* and *Theory of Everything*, are people with disability who are strong characters who hold the plot together. Many stereotypes are being challenged with more people being sensitised, as is evident in the spurt of advertisements showcasing people with disabilities as capable human beings.

One reason could be the changing dynamics of brand and consumer engagement. Today, brands are extremely conscious of their image and are increasingly projecting themselves as progressive and inclusive. This has led to a conscious change in their communication strategy in terms of the content being shared on social media as well as inclusive advertising. A good example is the Joyallukas advertisement



Today, brands are extremely conscious of their image and are increasingly projecting themselves as progressive and inclusive.

starring Kajol. Although she is the 'star' of the ad, the other protagonist is a wheelchair-using bride. The KFC Friendship Bucket advertisement has a man conversing in sign language with his friend over a meal.

With disability gaining greater visibility, media professionals will hopefully bite the bullet and tell it like it is, thereby educating and sensitising the public. Mainstream media – print and electronic, as well as social media, must play a more active role in busting myths and portray people with disability in better, more realistic light. The more open and informed the conversations we have, the faster we will evolve into a developed society. As the Guinness World Record Holder Robert M. Hensel said, "There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more". It is time media took a collective stand to present the disabled as equal, contributing members of society and gives them as much exposure for their achievements as their fellow countrymen.

CHOICE, CHANCE, CHANGE



Taking a critical look at the quantity and the quality of representation of persons with disabilities in Indian advertising, **YASHASVINI RAJESHWAR** calls for redefining narratives and designing advertisements that inspire the spirit of agency, access, and equality.



There is something special about Nike's latest ad; and I am not talking about the hike in sales that it resulted in. I am not even talking about their controversial decision to feature Colin Kaepernick, the American footballer who knelt for the anthem in protest against racial injustice in 2016. I am talking about the ad itself, one that ends with the call to "believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything". In the about-two-minutes ad, there are multiple images that stand out. There are amputee children playing sport. There is a clip of wheelchair basketball. There is a game of amputee rugby. There is no explanation, no idolising, no underlining the point. In the line-up of visuals featuring skateboarders, boxers, surfers and tennis players, there were also, as it happened, sportspersons with disabilities. That was all. And that was powerful.

All too often, we become passive consumers of the media barrage that is fed to us on a daily basis. Scrolling through our phone on a cab ride, looking idly out of the window on our daily commute, all the suggested advertisements based on previous e-commerce records... every day is a sensory media overdose, one that we don't often engage with critically. A one-second pause leads us to a strong realisation. The bodies, voices, images, personal agencies that are represented by our media are largely unidimensional. Anything

outside that norm merits a second glance, social media applause, congratulatory responses. Because on a daily basis, where do we see wheelchair basketball on our screens?

In recent years, there has been a drop in the ocean of representation with some large brands attempting to make their campaigns more diverse. For example, Apple launched an ad in October 2016 focussing on accessibility. In a welcome breath of fresh air, the ad did not homogenise disability, and showcased deafness, paralysis, and the use of screen readers, amongst others. Not only this, there was also an active effort to portray the ambitions of the individuals as being independent of their disability. All characters in the ad were shown as having dreams, aspirations, and goals, feeding on not just Apple's pitch for accessible design, but also the larger view that true disability does not lie within the body alone, but instead in societal barriers that make the world inaccessible. The ad ends with a powerful call-out: "When technology is designed for everyone, it lets anyone do what they love, including me."

There are other examples of positive representations of disability in international advertisements as well. Maltersers, a British confectionery product, launched an ad in 2016 that focussed on the oft-ignored subject of disability and sexuality. A girl sits with a group of her friends discussing a date with a new boyfriend, seemingly ignorant of the

CINEMA FOR EVERYONE



Bhavesh Shah
Head of Experience and F&B
SPI Cinemas Private Limited

Despite the fact that over 15% of the world's population is differently abled, inclusivity still remains a subject in the shadows. Cinemas, at large, continue to have gaps in accessibility – primarily by design.

Over the years, we've witnessed firsthand how a simple trip to the movies can turn out to be an extremely challenging ordeal for families with special needs. Thus, with the help of Ability Foundation's AbilityFest - India International Disability Film Festival, we opened our doors to the first ever audio-descriptive show at Sathyam Cinemas, Chennai, nearly a decade ago, and continue to screen these films at our theatres from time to time. This further led to the inception of our subtitled screenings, on Wednesdays and Thursdays of every week. This quickly became a popular and regular feature across all our theatres.

Earlier this year, we also introduced SENS, India's first sensory-friendly screenings that take place monthly at Sathyam and at The Cinema, Coimbatore, with the aim to build an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for such families...their very own "safe" space.

Going forward, we see technology playing a paramount role in making our cinemas completely accessible. Our aspiration is to ensure that one day, our 'First Day First Show' experience is enjoyed by everyone who walks through our doors... and even though we have a long way to go, these initiatives falling under our project, #CinemaForEveryone are small steps towards achieving that dream.

camera. She speaks openly about “wandering” hands soon followed by a spasm. The girls laugh about the episode, as the ad ends with a call-out to “look at the light side”. The message, however, is far from light. Disability does not impair sexuality, and there is a need to normalise both. Gillette also followed suite in 2017 for their first-of-its-kind assisted shaving razor. The ad throws light on the perspective of caregivers, through the eyes of a son who takes care of his ailing father after looking up to his “Popeye”-esque arms as a child.

Taking a moment’s pause at the ad will reveal an important aspect of disability, another aspect that is not discussed enough – that of consent. The son is shown telling his father, “I am going to get your feet up”, treating his father as an individual and not a mere body. The father in turn instructs the son on how to shave, what kind of sideburns he would like, and the rest of it. In an era where persons with disabilities often need to actively exert their individualism to be treated equally, this is an important message. No matter who it may be, no matter what the nature of the disability, the person is an individual with preferences, opinions, and a voice that must be heard.

While all of these ads have been for an international audience, there have been a

couple of notable ads focused on Indian viewers as well. Savlon recently launched an ad for their new product packaging with Braille. The ad, a quick 20-second peppy piece, has a simple message – if you can get hurt easily, you should be able to get help easily as well. The ad makes no frills of disability, and shows a girl dancing around her kitchen to fast-paced music. It so happens that she is blind. KFC India launched an ad for their Friendship Bucket, claiming “*dost*

jitney alag hote hain, friendship utne kamaal ki hoti hai” (Friendship is as amazing as the different kinds of friends one has). The ad shows two men, one who uses sign language and the other who speaks and signs simultaneously. It reinforces the idea that

the deaf community can banter as well, but unfortunately enforces a self-deprecatory tone on the non-hearing man who asks his friend why he is hanging out with him when he could be with “(hearing) others”. While KFC India could be lauded for the effort, they are still a few steps away from truly mainstreaming the non-hearing community. The second example, that of Google India, is perhaps not as much an ad as an example of positive storytelling. Product placement is subtle and the five-minute video introduces us to Amit’s life. The question that is left to be asked then is this – would the story have been just as



It is these questions that allow us to analyse whether we are contributing to the mainstreaming of disability or further indulging in ‘othering’ the narrative of persons with disabilities.

appealing if Amit had not been blind? Would the story hold up without the disability angle?

Questions as these, allow us to analyse whether we are contributing to the mainstreaming of disability or simply further indulging in ‘othering’ the narrative of persons with disabilities. While the former aids the discourse about and amongst the disabled community, the latter does nothing to help break stereotypes and shun stigma. In fact, on the contrary, it may even go to reinforce these images, associating the imagery with emotions of pity, sympathy, or idolatry.

Unfortunately, one need not look far for examples of such reinforcement. In their ad released in late 2017, Joyalukkas shows a bride-to-be addressing Kajol, speaking of how she found her “Raj” and of how monumental Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge has been in her life. Predictably, Kajol shows up in her dressing room and makes her day. About halfway through the ad, in a grand reveal, the bride is shown to be in a wheelchair and the ad ends with Kajol wheeling her out. This picturisation demands critical analysis. What is the purpose of the wheelchair in this narrative? Other than

a love for all things Bollywood and melodrama, why did the makers feel it necessary to have a disabled protagonist? Similarly, in what Samsung India claims is the ‘Most Watched Video of 2017’, a customer service representative

travels through arduous roads to repair a TV only to realise that it is in a hostel for blind children. Is the addition of disability here intended solely for the “feel good factor” of seeing a very obviously branded employee “help those in need”? Would he be less of a good representative if those children weren’t blind?

It is high time both consumers and producers realise the power that media has in moulding thoughts, opinions and ideas in mainstream society. We think about what we watch, and subconsciously we normalise these thoughts. While the norm today seems to be media images reinforcing current stereotypes,

the possibility of inverting this to redefine the “norm” is not only a powerful but an entirely necessary tool in today’s day and age. With a marked difference in not just the quantity but also the quality of representation of persons with disabilities in Indian advertising, the time is now for those in decision-making positions to redefine narratives, repaint representation, and build platforms rooted in the spirit of agency, access, and equality.



There is no explanation, no idolising. In the line-up of visuals featuring skateboarders, boxers, surfers, and tennis players, there also happened to be sportspeople with disability. That was all. And that was powerful.

What is the imPRINT?



Disability news and related content constitutes a very small percentage of print media coverage, and the potential of print media in tackling stigma and discrimination against disability is yet to be realised, observes SRUTHI S. RAGHAVAN.

September 6 2018 will go down in history as one of the most important dates in India's history. When the country's Supreme Court struck down an archaic provision in the law that criminalised homosexuality, the entire nation rejoiced. Thanks to powerful media houses, television channels, newspapers and digital media, the news spread to all corners of the country. There were news reports, organised panel discussions, interviews with key personalities, analyses and editorials on the issue. It was indeed a historic moment, and worthy of such attention, but does every issue get such coverage?

Two years ago, in December 2016, a legal instrument that has the power to impact nearly 27 million people in India – the Rights of Persons with Disability (RPD) bill – was passed. Such a pivotal, empowering step for a country that, after years of advocacy and lobbying from the sector, acknowledged the rights of people with disabilities, and yet, it did not receive the attention it deserved. In fact, it appeared that the Indian media could not recognise the importance of the disability act and its ramifications, judging from the fact that one scarcely found an analysis of the bill in the media. Besides a few mentions in newspapers and television, no panel discussions, opinions or interviews were conducted. Unfortunately, this state of affairs continues to date, as disability news and related content constitutes a very small percentage of media coverage. One can only find patronising articles, inspirational stories or discussions about the unfairness meted out to people with disabilities.

This indicates that disability is still not viewed as a national developmental issue and the potential of journalism in tackling stigma and discrimination against disability is not yet realised.

According to the Government, as on March 2017, there are 1,14,820 registered publications, including 16,993 under the newspaper category. There has been approximately 4% growth in the number of publications since last year, with 39% percent of Indians reading newspapers (IRS 2017), indicating the strong reach and the vantage position of the Indian print industry.

Keeping illiteracy aside, the disabled sector is a key contributor to the readership percentage of newspapers and magazines in the country. Yet, content printed about disability, including in national magazines,

be setting right the lack of uniformity in addressing people with disabilities with the right terminology – ‘divyang’, ‘differently-abled’, ‘disabled’, ‘specially-abled’ or others. Certainly, achieving a consensus from all quarters of a democratic country is challenging, but newspapers and magazines can adopt uniform editorial policies to address this.

HAND OF GOD?



Paresh Palicha

Writer, film critic and corporate employee

It is really amusing how, people continue saying: “When God deprives you of one faculty, He strengthens all other faculties for you to cope with life”. This sort of answer, mainly given to a child with disability when he approaches his elders with the “Why Me?” question continues to bewilder me. I am in my late forties and I continue to hear such unconvincing, saccharine sweet words that drive me mad, but, more often than not, I try to act as if I’m amused and smile as if to imply ‘you’re right and why didn’t I realise this before?’

It may have been a decade ago that I was going through a bad phase, when a good and well-meaning friend came up to me and said: “As a child did you even imagine that there will be something like computers and Internet? Or the fact that you’d be working, earning money? So, do not despair, things can only get better”. It was a long winding lecture with an imaginary bullet-point list of my problems and their solutions.

In that pep talk, there was even a mention of social media, “See the number of friends and followers you have, people look up to you.”

Yes, in the virtual world, your picture will look ‘nice’ and your life ‘a real inspiration’. I agree. It gives me confidence when I put up an ambiguous one line post and the people I truly respect click the ‘Like’ button or friends try to decipher what I’m really trying to convey.

One positive change that I’ve found gradually happening to me in the last decade is that I am not scared of verbal communication; I pick up the phone even if it is from an unidentified number, or say ‘Hi!’ to a person looking at me but is hesitant to start a conversation. Now, if a person starts a conversation saying that he/she is my friend or follower on social media and if I take a while to respond, they don’t turn and walk away like before, but they wait patiently for me to regain my composure knowing that it will be worthwhile to do so.

So, social media does create a level playing field for people like me and I guess for this, I don’t mind if someone puts in the ‘hand of God’ theory behind it.

The code of editorial values adopted by all newspapers in India have fairness and justice at the crux of their operations. Media is a powerful tool that has the potential to change attitudes and perceptions amongst people. The print media continues to enjoy wide readership and penetration despite the rise of digital and social media. Online blogs, magazines, websites, social media and other digital portals are doing a better job when it comes to talking about disability. They encourage both disabled and non-disabled people

to voice their opinions and ideas, which has certainly helped increase awareness. Today, there are many social media influencers who are disabled and they are changing the way society looks at them through their posts, articles and images. Therefore, it is no longer the sole responsibility of activists, rights and advocacy groups to bring changes in society. It is time the print media gives the rightful attention the disabled sector deserves.

SENSITISING AUDIENCES



Don Bosco
Film Editor and Director

To put it in a nutshell, disability lies not in the body, but in the mind. No one is perfect and people who identify with their disability will not achieve success easily. The film industry is no exception to this.

The film industry is an ocean, but it is here that I learnt to swim. That is why I don't register the vulnerability of the waves, I don't care about the depths of the oceans and am not even afraid of big sharks that lurk in its depths. My sole objective is to find the pearl that lies in this ocean, and so I jumped headlong into it. My experience was like that of a baby who walked for the first time and a bird on its first flight.

Down the ages, society at large, has had diverse views of disabled people. Despite perpetual advances in technology, the involvement of disabled people has been marginal. The film industry has been no exception to this. However, now perspectives have changed and people with disabilities are involved in every sphere of life.

Director James Cameron's blockbuster film 'Avatar', had a disabled man in the lead role. The movie touched people's hearts across the world, and was a huge success. Similarly, the French film, 'The Untouchables' by directors Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledona, was very successful. These films were subtitled/dubbed into many languages including Tamil. Likewise, Brazilian director Daniel Ribeiro's 'The Way He Looks', the Irish movie 'My Left Foot' by director Jim Sheridan, and the American movies 'The Sessions' by director Ben Lewin and 'I am Sam' by director 'Jessie Nelson' saw massive success. In Bollywood, the protagonist of Aamir Khan's 'Taare Zameen Par' was a disabled boy. This movie collected almost ₹889 million at the box office. 'Margarita with a Straw' by director Sonali Bose was another such notable film. In Kollywood, 'Deiva Thirumagal', 'Mozhi' and director Raj Mohan's 'Cukoo' had huge box office collections.

Understanding people with disabilities made these filmmakers realise that they are as normal as anyone else and these films communicated the same. Thus the film industry plays and has played a major role in changing people's mindsets and attitudes, helping improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Ultimately, be it an advertisement, a news article, a radio/television programme, or a feature film, what is vital and needed is not just more visibility of persons with disabilities, but also presenting them in the right perspective. Not token attention, but mainstreaming. Not casting of halos/sob stories, but just simply inclusion, as a matter of fact, as a matter of right. So then... Dear Media, do your magic... ■

M A S T E R



or DISASTER?



Tongue-in-cheek, VAISHNAVI VENKATESH mulls over her social media habits and sparks off some introspection... Is all the information that we consume on social media really relevant for us? Is it worth our time and mind space?

As a child, I was constantly berated about burying my face in books during dinner time. I also grew up in a generation where phones had dial tones and the Internet had a dial-up modem, neither of which had the potential to entertain me. Books were my way to escape reality and enter a thrilling world of mysteries, fantasies and idealism.

Two decades later, I continue to get berated, but about burying my face in my phone. It continues to be a way to escape reality, so I guess that some things don't really change. But before you brand me as being addicted to social media, look around you. You will find people staring into their phones during their daily commute. Family members will each have their personal entertainment

“ I had started using social media to escape reality, while reality was slowly escaping from me without my knowledge.”



device during dinner. Toddlers, who haven't yet learned to talk, can deftly switch on their favourite nursery rhyme on YouTube. Teenagers who turn up their noses at friendly street puppies will spend hours on Instagram trying to perfect the “puppy filter picture”. It is a phenomenon that's taking the whole world by storm, and we treat social media as our personal armoury.

Instagram is my weapon of choice. I've reached the unfortunate age when joining Snapchat would be “uncool”, since I don't lead a life fascinating enough to “Snapchat” about every day. I'm always worried that by scrolling through Facebook, I will accidentally “like” or “share” an article I'm not proud to be reading. But Instagram gives me enough room to scroll with my plump thumbs, without committing such

faux pas. In a way, it's like escaping reality by entering a glossy magazine with pictures of colourful people and food. It also carries a world of information that is utterly useless to me. But I consume it anyway. The 10-year-old me who spent her free time devouring the World Book series would not be proud that the 30-year-old me knows exactly who wore what during the recent Priyanka Chopra-Nick Jonas engagement. I don't exactly dream of leading their lives or aspire for that kind of wealth, beauty or attire. But I still can't resist the temptation to follow the popular accounts and mentally comment on nepotism, airport looks, and latest memes.

If you were to come across my profile on Instagram, you would probably see pictures of food, occasional sunsets, more food, geo-tagged holiday pictures (because a beach can be found in Besant Nagar and in Bali, and my coterie of 10



I've reached the unfortunate age where joining Snapchat would be "uncool", since I don't lead a life fascinating enough to "Snapchat" about every day.

followers simply have to know where I really am), and more food. I probably appear to be a calm, well-travelled and well-fed person. However, underneath that mask, I confess to be someone who wakes up and immediately logs on to all her social media sites to see what's happening around the world. Occasionally, I experience FOMO (fear of missing out) when I see friends hanging out together, even if they're in a different country. More often than not, I experience second-hand outrage at all the Internet trolls and certain international presidents. The outrage often spills into reality and I end up resembling a sulking Hulk, which invites more berating from the beloved family.

Therefore, I decided to try an experiment to see how much social media was actually affecting my lifestyle and behaviour. Using my fitness tracker, I monitored my heart

rate, sleep and physical activity over a period of time. I was at home during some of those days and I observed that instead of having a lower resting heart rate and better sleep, I fared worse on days when I was at home. Being busy (and not necessarily busy

I haven't yet completely gotten over the obsession with all things "hashtagged". But I have started reducing the time I spend on it in small, but significant ways. No Instagram/Twitter/Facebook before I sleep or after I wake up. My husband has kindly offered to



exercising) made me lead a better lifestyle. That's when I discovered just how much time I wasted on social media, simply lying on my couch/bed/chair/anywhere at home. And the impact it had on my sleep schedules and quality of sleep. I would go to bed outraged at everything and everyone (these are people I have never met in real life, mind you) and wake up feeling the same. I had started using social media to escape reality, while reality was slowly escaping from me without my knowledge.

And so, if you expect to see how I changed my life around, I'm sorry to disappoint you.

set up a contraption on my phone that shuts off the app if I'm exceeding a certain period of time on it. I am yet to take up the offer, but my recent spike in eyesight power suggests that I do so quickly. I am hardly the one to talk (after having shared my many flaws in trying to overcome social media obsessions), but I would encourage you to reflect on your social media habits. How much time do you spend on it? Is all the information that you are consuming really relevant for you? Is it worth that loss of sleep, physical and mental health?

Make memories that last in your mind, not in a profile. ■

16 வகை

அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

உங்கள் உணவை மேலும் சிறப்பாக்க,
நாங்கள் ஆவக்காய், தொக்கு, எலுமிச்சம்,
பூண்டு, தக்காளி, இஞ்சி போன்ற 16
சிறந்த ஊறுகாய் வகைகள் தருகிறோம்.
அத்தனையும் ருசித்திடுங்கள்.

