

Success & ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

April 2019



CONTENTS

3

NEWS & NOTES

AI to detect Alzheimer's disease, the exciting TetraSki, the successful Bitty & Beau's Coffee chain, Sense India's Online Course on deafblindness, latest access apps, and more.

COVER FEATURE

7

Experience the exhilaration of the 17th CavinKare Ability Awards night and meet this year's recipients – trailblazers, every single one of them. Yashasvini Rajeshwar replugs it for you.

27

CARING CONCERN

Get to know from Harish Lakshman, Vice Chairman, Rane Group, the Group's policy and practice towards embracing diversity.

THE ROAD TAKEN

30

Listen in as Sidharth Taneja recounts his journey to the USA to pursue higher education; cerebral palsy has not stopped him from surging ahead.

34

PAUSE

Words of wit and wisdom to spark a smile, brighten the day and ignite the mind.

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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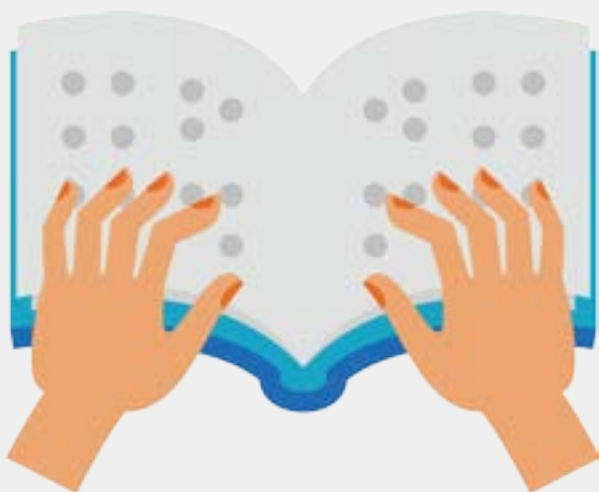
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News & Notes

BRAILLE GUIDE & VIDEO BROCHURE WITH SIGN LANGUAGE ON THENMALA



In a pioneering move that gives fresh impetus to accessible tourism, a visitor's guide in braille as also a video brochure with sign language have now been made available to travellers with disabilities to Thenmala, an ecotourism destination, courtesy the Thenmala Ecotourism Promotion Society (TEPS) that manages Thenmala. This video brochure can be accessed on www.thenmalaecotourism.com

Students of the Government School for the Blind, Vazhuthacaud, helped produce the 16-page braille brochure on Thenmala, while the students

of Government VHSS for Deaf, Jagathy, helped create the video brochure with sign language. These developments were triggered by a day trip organised for the students of these schools as part of a CSR initiative, that brought to TEPS's attention the constraints faced by visitors with disabilities.

TWO NEW GOOGLE APPS FOR MAKING AUDIO MORE ACCESSIBLE



Google has introduced two new android apps to make audio content accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people – Live Transcribe and Sound Amplifier. While Live Transcribe captions real-world speech to captions in real-time using just the phone’s microphone, Sound Amplifier clarifies sound.

Google’s partners at Gallaudet University, the world’s premier university for deaf and hard of hearing people, helped Google design and validate Live Transcribe. Live Transcribe is available in over 70 languages and dialects. It also enables two-way conversation via a type-back keyboard for users who can’t or don’t want to speak and connects with external microphones to improve transcription accuracy.

Sound Amplifier clarifies sound and can also come in handy especially in situations where there’s a lot of background noise – like at a loud cafe or airport lounge. With Sound Amplifier, audio is more clear and easier to hear. One can use Sound Amplifier on one’s android smartphone with wired headphones to filter, augment and amplify the sounds in the environment.

The user can also customise sound enhancement settings and apply noise reduction to minimise distracting background noise with simple sliders and toggles.

ONLINE COURSE ON DEAFBLINDNESS: EDUCATION, CARE AND REHABILITATION

It is estimated that there are about five lakh deafblind persons in India, though there are no official figures. Experts opine that deafblindness in many people goes unrecognised and gets mistaken for intellectual disability as their behaviour is different because they haven’t had the inputs that other

children have had. There is a paucity of trainers who can address the care, rehabilitation and education of deafblind children and adults. Taking this into account, Sense International India, a knowledge leader in the field of deafblindness, has launched India's first ever online course to train individuals to work with persons with deafblindness. This online course, Web.Ed.(DB), focuses on assisting teachers and individuals to be knowledgeable on the unique needs of children and adults with deafblindness and then provide quality and accessible services to them.

The course content may be of wider interest to parents, caregivers and other multi-disciplinary professionals across health and social care too, enabling them to fulfil a crucial role in understanding the educational settings and to meet the needs of persons with deafblindness. This is a six-month intensive training programme and two batches of this online course are to be held every year. Registrations are open now. For more, log on to <http://www.senseintindia.org/introducing-web-eddb> or e-mail webdb@senseintindia.org or call +91 79 26301282.

CUP OF HOPE: THREE AND GOING STRONG



Image courtesy: Bitty & Beau's Coffee

Bitty & Beau's Coffee, a famous coffee shop in the United States run by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, recently opened its third outlet.

The first Bitty & Beau's Coffee shop was started in January 2016 in Wilmington, N.C., by Amy Wright, to provide employment to her children Bitty and Beau who have Down's syndrome, as also to many others with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Today, together, these three coffee shops employ over two hundred people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bitty & Beau's Coffee has become a big success and is the official coffee of the American TV show, the 'Rachel Ray Show'. Plans are on to set up Bitty & Beau's Coffee shops across the United States.

WITH TETRASKI, DISABILITY IS NO BAR TO SKIING



Image courtesy: Tetraski

Recently, skiing enthusiast Derek Sundquist, who became paralysed neck down after an unexpected fall on the slopes, was in the news for skiing once again. This was made possible by TetraSki, a special ski for people with disabilities to steer themselves on ski slopes. TetraSki provides independent turning and speed variability through a joystick and/or breath control. The TetraSki is a modified version of the Tessier Snow’Kart, which features electric-powered actuators on each ski and both a joystick and mouth-controlled system for independent control of turning and speed. A tether to the instructor is used as an emergency brake but is not used for turning directions. A wireless remote offers TetraSki instructors a safe way to demonstrate proper skiing

technique. The TetraSki offers beginner and advanced modes for frustration-free learning and to unlock higher performance when desired.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DETECT ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Alzheimer’s, a terminal neurodegenerative disease, poses a huge challenge to aging populations across the world and has no cure as of now. Researchers working in this field are grappling with detecting the disease early, to slow down its progression. The changes in amyloid-beta, the peptide marker in an individual’s spinal fluid that can provide indications of Alzheimer’s disease decades before the onset of the disease, is difficult to extract. Now, there is good news on the anvil with IBM Research – Australia using machine learning to identify proteins in blood that can predict the concentration of amyloid-beta in spinal fluid. It is expected that these models could eventually help clinicians predict the risk carried by a person for Alzheimer’s with an accuracy of up to 77 percent. The IBM Research team is also working on a blood test for another key Alzheimer’s biomarker, tau. ■

The beginning of a DEEPER CONVERSATION

The CavinKare Ability Awards that honours achievers with disabilities has grown tremendously. This year saw its 17th edition, and the glitzy awards night was one of verve as well as reflection, writes YASHASVINI RAJESHWAR.



Many woke up on the morning of 23rd of February with expectation and anticipation. The evening would bring with it the 17th edition of the CavinKare Ability Awards. The event promised important stories, unheard voices, and a generous helping of food for thought. Amongst the audience, regulars and newcomers alike, there was an air of excited expectation.

The Cavin Kare Ability Awards night has been marking the social calendar of professionals across sectors, NGO representatives, and the city's who's who, year after year. The ceremony, conceived to recognise persons with disabilities achieving wondrous things in their lives. The three categories of awards are the Mastery awards for individuals who have overcome hurdles to achieve personal success, the award for Eminence for an individual who furthers the cause of disability rights, accessibility, and equality through his or her institution, and the Special Recognition award to an acknowledged leader in the disability sector with exceptional achievements. Year after year, the audience has watched these stories come alive before them, interspersed with entertainment and performances by artists with disabilities. "With the CavinKare Ability Awards, the outlook on, and awareness of disability has grown tremendously", voiced Sridhar, who has been attending successive editions of the Awards. Every year, it seemed, was an unadulterated celebration of *joie de vivre*.

This year was no different. The 2019 CavinKare Ability Awards brought forth five awe-inspiring journeys. There was Danish Mahajan from a small town in Punjab, a rockstar in the media and broadcast space with his Radio Udaan, a radio station run solely by blind and visually impaired volunteers that gets a listenership of 30,000 people a month. Venkatachalam M, from the interiors of Tamil Nadu, survived a freak road accident that killed his sister, overcame two years of bed rest, and went on to become an international para athlete with over 80 medals under his belt. Akshay Bhatnagar is the first graduate with autism from Rajasthan University. A college topper who is also interested in sports, dance and the keyboard, Akshay's acceptance speech showed how much effort and preparation he brings to the table with everything he does. And then there was Major D.P. Singh, a Kargil war veteran who has run over 25 half marathons as India's pioneering blade runner and is the country's first amputee blade runner at high

These awards have become a powerful reminder for each one of us in the field to be responsible about conversation, careful with generalisation, and sensitive in our portrayals.

altitudes. Today, he runs an organisation that seeks to platform role models whom people can emulate. For the Special Recognition Award that evening, the audience heard a story often underrepresented on many a mainstream stage. Bhargavi V Davar was felicitated for her fight to address the human rights aspects of mental health in the country, a journey that has led to the birth of the Bapu Trust for Research on Mind and Discourse in Pune. As a survivor and consciously choosing to not opt for psychiatry, Davar is a strong voice of support for all those fighting battles of mental health and illness.



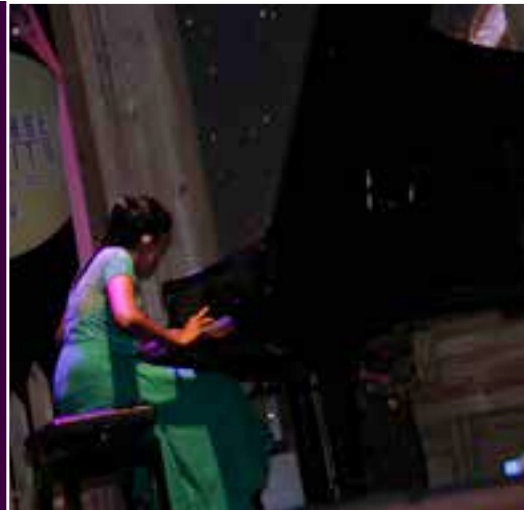
Between these journeys, we also saw the story of Nithila unfold. Born with a mild-facial deformity, her parents discovered the piano in an effort to find a space for her to grow and explore. Today, Nithila is with KM Conservatory, A.R. Rahman's music school, and in the words of her father, "she has not accepted that she has a problem". Her fingers flew across the piano and her music was magic brought alive. There was nothing that could stop her. The stage this year saw six powerful stories, each one worthy of their moments in the limelight. Yet what is especially noteworthy is how these stories



NITHILA



The awards night provided a wonderful stage to shed light on stories of disability. It is our responsibility to ensure that the spotlight stays on off stage as well.



weave together. All too often, the actors within the social sector in the country work in isolation, hustling and putting in the hours to solve problems and find solutions in their isolated bubbles. It is platforms like the CavinKare Ability Awards that allow us to step back and truly take in the sight in front of us. A mental health specialist from Pune, an athlete from Tamil Nadu and a runner from Haryana; an RJ from Punjab and an academic who beat the odds from Rajasthan – clearly, disability comes in all shapes and sizes. It affects people from different backgrounds, who have taken different paths, with the plot playing out differently each time, making every story a saga in itself.

The CavinKare Ability Awards therefore become a powerful reminder for each of us in the field – to be responsible about conversation, careful with generalisation, and sensitive in our portrayals. No two stories on that stage were the same. Each of them deserved the spotlight. Yet, as members of the audience commented later that evening, the responsibility does not end there. Investments in mainstreaming must be made. Actionable involvement must be encouraged for true accessibility and inclusion. The CavinKare Ability Awards provided a wonderful stage to shed light on stories of disability. It is our responsibility to ensure that the spotlight stays on off stage as well.



THE ABILITY FOUNDATION TEAM



Bhargavi V. Davar

Pune, Maharashtra



CavinKare Ability Special Recognition Award 2019

Many of us who suffer psychosocial disability don't look like persons with disabilities. We are the ones who battle with demons no one can see. We go to sleep at night – or toss restlessly for most of it – never knowing exactly who or what we are going to be when morning comes. When we hear the stories of people like Sylvia Plath and Kelly Catlin, they touch us at that invisible core that nobody knows about. Meeting Bhargavi V Davar and hearing her describe her situation threw new light on this condition. Along with respect for the work she does, I also felt gratitude.


 CIVINKARE
 ABILITY

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

given to

Bhargavi V Davar

on the 23rd day of February 2019 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds

Witnessing first hand, right from childhood
The agonies of being jeopardised by harsh, penalising procedures
A time when, persons with mental incumbrances, were
Locked up in sanctuaries that only further distressed, not
Diminished, the mystifications of the mind

A time when mental illness had no name of its own
A time when such persons were labelled either crazy or bad,
A time when people did not see it as a disability
And what existed was anguish as a result of society's obliviousness

More... Overcoming the pain of one's own personal experiences
Including the loss of her own child to severe disability
Establishing Bapu Trust, with the money she had inherited from her mother
At a time when there was none like it in India or even Asia

Being a forerunner and pioneer in mental health and advocacy
Exposing herself to the pain of being laughed at, when she
Spoke of human rights for those with mental illnesses
Battling disbelief and incredulity from most, that people, more so,
Women with mental health issues could have Human Rights

She rose to be the quintessence of all that a woman could be,
Not for a moment allowing personal traumas to prove detrimental
To anything she wanted to achieve, she works with
A strong identity as a survivor, making conscious choices
Not to opt for psychiatry even when seriously disabled

Today, she stands tall as a known figure in the disability sector
As well as a forerunner in the country's campaigns
For human rights in mental health.

Bhargavi established Bapu Trust in 1999, in memory of her mother, Bapu, as a source of hope and healing for women who are committed to mental asylums because their family members disapprove of the way they behave and find it more convenient to have them out of the way.

Bapu Trust works to create awareness that those who are significantly different needn't and shouldn't be ostracised for being 'crazy'.

One of its goals is to create a mindset shift from regarding mental health issues as a disease to perceiving it as disability; that they need understanding, tolerance, support and patience from their families and from society, just like everybody else.

Bhargavi campaigns against the archaic colonial laws under which any person admitted into a mental hospital is deemed to be committing a criminal act, were he or she to leave without permission.

She herself grew up immersed in the experience of having a mother, a gentle person inclined

One of Bapu Trust's goals is to create a mindset shift from regarding mental health issues as a disease to perceiving it as a disability; that they need understanding, tolerance, support and patience, just like everybody else.

to prayer and writing religious poetry, locked up in a mental asylum. Since the time she was five years old, she was taken, along with her brother Kartik who was two years younger, to visit her.

These memories have never left them. Bapu would escape. When she was spotted and the family informed, she would be forcibly readmitted. She would escape again and live on the streets, outside temples. Eventually, she was taken home and lived, 'bed-ridden' for 16 years until she died.

By this time, Bhargavi had already been working in the field of mental health and women's rights for some years. Her Ph.D., from IIT Bombay, was on why people with mental illness get treated so badly.

Despite this background, entering an institution remains an overwhelming experience. She faints. There are other vestiges of the long-term

trauma. Still, in 1999, she found the strength to use her inheritance from her mother to establish Bapu Trust in Pune.

Starting off with documentation projects, a community programme, Seher, developed. Field workers go into the community to create awareness, establishing relationships and conducting wellness activities to create an overall sense of belonging.

When there is distress, they work with the family to understand and care for the person, introducing inclusion as a fundamental value and not just a practice. They use traditional Indian techniques to release tension, stimulate group bonding, personal fulfilment and energy.

Their Arts Based Therapy course, for which the trust has 'permission to teach' from World Centre for Creative Learning Foundation in Pune, uses music, stories, drumming, theatre techniques, painting, poetry and other modalities. They continue to publish academic papers and, using their research as a base, have also created training modules.

Today, Bapu Trust works in around 30 slums, impacting a population of more than eight lakh people. Their work has been acknowledged by the Pune Municipal Corporation and they are now working to replicate their model in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Bapu Trust is leading the way to a gentle, compassionate way of working with people with psychosocial problems, with a focus on healing rather than medication.

Danish Mahajan

Shahpur Kandi, Punjab



*CavinKare
Ability
Award
for
Eminence
2019*

Danish Mahajan is the brain behind Radio Udaan, the pioneering online radio initiative that is bringing people with visual impairment and other disabilities out of isolation, and empowering them with news, counseling, and knowledge.

Why is there such limited media content for people with visual impairment? Why is there virtually no coverage of the issues faced by people disabilities? And why is there hardly any media professional with visual impairment?

These questions irked Danish Mahajan, prompting him to open up the world for the blind.

The year was 2014. Danish had lost his father and had discontinued his education to take up a job in Pathankot to earn to fend for the family.

This was a pity, considering that Danish had topped the general merit list in the state of Punjab in his 11th grade.

Some years ago, consequent to surgical negligence, Danish, partially blind since birth, lost his sight completely when he was 14 years old and was shut away from the world for four bleak years.

“That period was tough, but it gave me inspiration to contribute something to the country”, says Danish.

There was no scope for education for blind children in the small village of Shahpur Kandi in

CIVINKARE
ABILITY

AWARD FOR EMINENCE

given to

Danish Mahajan

on the 23rd day of February 2019 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds

Hailing from a small village in Pathankot district

Losing his sight totally as a young teenage boy

And the consequent trauma, he fought discrimination ever since

Forced to discontinue his own education as a result of

Discrimination on grounds of disability

Himself persistently being exposed to the wonders of technology

He was puzzled about the lack of awareness amidst others without sight

And struck by the stark absence of crucial information

That could be theirs for the asking just with technology and media

His voice and vision, then turned to and reverberated through the medium of radio,

Where he soon found in this his calling and for others, a veritable lifeline of information

Spreading his wings across the globe, he spearheaded

The launch of the pioneering, 24X7 Radio Udaan radio services

Giving opportunities of employment to a host of blind and low vision persons,

Promoting knowledge on technical skills and an array of other

Valuable information to several thousands of people

Across the world, making access to information and inspiration open to one and all

Making it his life's mission to thus bring dignity to others

His is a story of true grit and determination

And a source of inspiration to many.

Danish Mahajan is the brain behind Radio Udaan, the pioneering online radio initiative that is bringing people with visual impairment and other disabilities out of isolation and empowering them.

Pathankot, Punjab, where he lived. When he got to know of education programmes for blind people in Ludhiana, he rushed to sign up for the same, and learnt mobility, braille, online communication, and more, which helped him get back to academics.

Danish became fired up by the idea of enabling blind people access news and other useful information.

Chatting with friends on Skype let him discover that few others were thinking along the same lines.

He joined forces with them – Bala Nagendran in Chennai, Minal Singhvi in Hyderabad, Jyoti Malik in Ludhiana, Saif Rehman and Rajeev Bhambri in Delhi – to launch an online radio channel to reach out to disabled people, especially blind people across the globe, with news, useful information, and entertainment.

Danish decided that Radio Udaan would be run by people with disabilities, including all its RJs and tech support.

Today, Radio Udaan has over 30,000 subscribers and thousands of listeners tuning in daily from around the world (120 countries so far).

The six RJs that Radio Udaan started out with have become 30 RJs strong now, who enable Radio Udaan's airing of content 24 X 7.

This includes news, chat shows, panel discussions, interviews with experts, features like book translations, screen reader software training etc., besides music of course.

Danish, who had taught himself the skills needed to run a radio station, trains all the RJs. The operational and other costs of Radio Udaan is funded by the RJs themselves.

All these RJs happen to be volunteers and hold regular jobs elsewhere and work from their homes across the country.

Radio Udaan's Udaan Welfare Society also supports matrimonial get-togethers, technical workshops, theatre, a reality talent show called Udaan Idol and annual conventions across the country. It has been a momentous journey.

On receiving the CavinKare Ability Award for Eminence, Danish says, "I have received this award on behalf of the entire Radio Udaan, on behalf of all who have worked or are working for Radio Udaan. We still have a long way to go towards empowering people with disabilities, but we are sure we will get there".

Akshay Bhatnagar

Jaipur, Rajasthan

CavinKare Ability Mastery Award 2019



From academics to sports, he has done it all! Akshay Bhatnagar holds a job at the University of Rajasthan after clearing a competitive examination and standing second in his college in his B.A. exams. Additionally, he has won a gold medal in the 1500m event and a bronze medal in 800m event in a state-level para-athletic meet.

Akshay also plays the keyboard, participates in dance competitions, has lightning speed at shorthand (clocking 80 words per minute), holds a certificate in basic computer skills, and is a winner of the National Award for being a role model in the category of Developmental Disorder.

It's quite rare and perhaps unheard of for a person with severe autism to have done all this. Akshay's mother Pratibha attributes his plethora of achievements to appropriate exposure, the right line of action, disregard for limitations, and enabling of opportunities.

From speech therapy to mainstream education, Akshay's parents have determinedly ensured Akshay had every opportunity, from learning a requisite skill in order to teach it to Akshay or litigating/lobbying with boards for receiving just benefits.

So much so that, in equipping Akshay for life, Pratibha has become a disability rights activist who has so far raised seven petitions in the Rajasthan High Court resulting in many

CIVINKARE
ABILITY

MASTERY AWARD

given to

Akshay Bhatnagar

on the 23rd day of February 2019 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds

Unfazed by his severe disabilities

On account of Autism and the lack of awareness of this disability

His indomitable fighting spirit and unceasing optimism

Took him on the path that he designed for himself

Allowing neither disability nor other trials and tribulations

To stand in the way of achievement,

Working his way through a mainstream college, and becoming

The first graduate with Autism from the University of Rajasthan

Having faced rejection, stereotypical attitudes and discrimination

From day one, today he rides the crest of success

As a bona fide employee with a government job at the University

Emphasising that it is attitude that determines inclusion,

not a disability; he's surely an icon for all who aspire

To be masters of their own destiny.

Akshay's mother Pratibha attributes his plethora of achievements to appropriate exposure, the right line of action, disregard for limitations, and enabling of opportunities.

positive orders including the provision of job reservation for people with autism; she is a paralegal volunteer and counsellor too.

The parents continue to keep track of Akshay's progress. When they found that he was not given assignments in his first posting because there wasn't much work to do in the department, they intervened and got him transferred to another posting. Such is the parents' continued and focused efforts.

However, the going was never easy. Akshay's behaviour used to be mocked at, and the family encountered ignorance about autism at every stage and in every place.

Even the physician they consulted was clueless about the condition and attributed Akshay's autistic behavior to his 'being a spoilt brat'.

Once he got diagnosed with autism, getting admission in a school seemed impossible, until finally, thanks to the relentless efforts of his mother, in 1999, he was admitted into the new State Bank of India Officer's Public School, with its Principal, Preeti Sharma, accepting Akshay as "a challenge".

While there were hiccups, the Principal, the faculty, and many students, stood by Akshay and helped him settle down, and Akshay finished school with flying colours. "That is how inclusiveness became part of our school," said Preeti Sharma.

Pratibha recommends mainstreaming of children with intellectual challenges, because, she noticed that as Akshay was growing up, he was modeling his behaviour after others of his age in the school, which helped his development.

In 2010, when Akshay completed school, there was still no awareness about autism, and he was certified by state doctors as 'MR' (mentally retarded) and was refused admission to colleges.

A college came forward to admit him only after the State's Commissioner of Disability ordered that children with autism be given admission following a petition by Akshay's parents.

Akshay faces insensitivity even now, but his joyous, upbeat attitude and positivity never leaves him.

"I have won the CavinKare Award and will win more medals", he says with a beaming smile.

Major D. P. Singh

Gurgaon, Haryana



CavinKare Ability Mastery Award 2019

The highlight of the 17th CavinKare Ability Awards night, the star of the evening and a true celebrity in the eyes of everyone in the room, was Major Devender Pal Singh. Every pair of eyes in the auditorium were on him when he walked up to the dais. His gait and the aura around him made him stand apart in the crowd.

At a time when national sentiments are high, for many in the audience, it was their first time watching and interacting with a war hero.

Major D.P. Singh is the first Indian amputee blade runner to run half-marathons, founder of The Challenging Ones (TCO), and a visionary.

This Kargil war veteran was rendered disabled when a bomb exploded near him.

He endured several injuries, lost a part of his intestine, acquired some hearing loss and suffered the amputation of his right leg below the knee.

Beyond treatments and other medical interventions, his non-compromising attitude towards the quality of his life and the very essence of a soldier – courage – made him turn his life around.

“The CKA Award not only validates the work I have done so far, it also means that my work is in progress”, he said.

“Lead and inspire by example” is his motto in life. His choices, decisions and achievements reflect this. His injuries meant

CIVINKARE
ABILITY

MASTERY AWARD

given to

Major Devender Pal Singh

**on the 23rd day of February 2019 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

A Kargil war hero, still mentioned in despatches of Indian Army,
An amputee with multiple injuries across his body and acquired hearing impairment

Overcoming the stigma of being an amputee
Unwavering in his sense of purpose to excel
With no time for self pity, rising to be the true hero that he is
Allowing neither his inabilities, nor other trials and tribulations
To stand in the way of achievement, he became
India's first blade runner to complete a half marathon
And the first amputee blade runner to run at high altitude

Not just this, he went on to initiate “The Challenging Ones”,
An NGO that strives exclusively for empowerment and
Boosting the confidence of persons with disabilities
Each member of this group being called a “Challenger”,
Thus breaking the shackles of dependency and fears of acquired disabilities

Besides all this, he has involved himself in non-disability issues
Such as SwachhAbility, which brought together
the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan cleanliness drive to be an inclusive run
He was representative of the Indian Army's Year of Disabled Soldiers 2018,
And one of the four dynamic Indians chosen for the
Indian Ambassadors for Wings for Life... and much more
An epitome of that rare never-say-die spirit,
His calm acceptance of life, courage and strength of character
Make him a person anyone would want to emulate.

“For living a beautiful life, I should first appreciate my life. The limits you have set for your own body and mind can be broken **ONLY** by you!”

he could not continue active duty with the military and therefore he was given a sedentary desk job at the Army Ordnance Corps.

Major D.P. Singh felt urged to do something that would challenge the list of ‘can’t do’ activities of a person with disability. He chose one of the toughest activities for an amputee – running – at a time when he was using a walking prosthesis (2009). He soon became the first Indian Blade runner to complete a half marathon (2011) and at high altitude (10,000 feet, at Sangla Valley in 2013). He has since then completed 26 half marathons including high altitude runs at Sangla, Leh and Kargil. In 2013, he established The Challenging Ones (TCO).

A major and spectacular initiative of the 1700-member strong group is the SwachhAbility Run, a multi-city, annual run that sensitises people about disability, sports and cleanliness and demonstrates to the world that people

with disabilities are achievers and valuable contributors to society.

TCO’s other activities include awareness programmes, sharing of life experiences by persons with spinal cord injuries with those who have newly acquired such injuries to help them cope with it and move on in life, inclusive marathons, motivational talks, societal initiatives like aiding war veterans and injured soldiers, and aiding war widows in accessing pension due to them. Major D.P. Singh is also a Brand Ambassador for the Indian Army and advocates mandatory inclusion of services of clinical psychologists and counsellors to address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in soldiers.

Watching his story and achievements as an audio visual charged the atmosphere in the room and when he walked up to the stage to receive the award, he was greeted with thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

It was clear that people applauded not only his service to the nation but also for how he took charge of his own life.

By the end of the evening, there were long queues of people who wanted to click selfies with him, ask him a lot of questions and listen to his heroic tales.

Major D.P. Singh is inspired by his own life and the circumstances he has been thrown into.

According to him, “for living a beautiful life, I should first appreciate my life”, and his message for the world is, “The limits you have set for your own body and mind can be broken **ONLY** by you!”

Venkatachalam M

Gudiyatham, Tamil Nadu



CavinKare Ability Mastery Award 2019

Acquired disability can be a life altering experience that can derail a person's progress in life. Grief can do that to a person too. Venkatachalam not only encountered both early on in his life, he also chose to rise above it and emerge an achiever.

Hailing from a small village called Gudiyatham in Tamil Nadu, Venkatachalam had to travel a long, arduous and lonely journey towards his achievements in sports.

As a result of a road accident that claimed the life of his beloved sister, Venkatachalam also acquired a spinal cord injury that affected his mobility.

He spent many years in rehabilitation and learnt self-care, independence and mobility with calipers, crutches and wheelchair.

Unfortunately, during this time, he lost his elder brother, his strongest support until then, to a robbery.

If not for his inherent nature to absorb grief and pain and turn it into positivity and strength, such trauma could have crippled him mentally and emotionally.

His charming sense of humour and his simple way of looking at life keeps him motivated and focused on his goals.

His life turned around for the better when his physiotherapist ignited a spark in him to pursue sports. When he found this

C i VINKARE
I BILITY

MASTERY AWARD

given to

Venkatachalam. M

**on the 23rd day of February 2019 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

Having to mentally, physically and emotionally accept that,
His near and dear had vanished from this world
His sister and his brother who was the breadwinner of the family
Had, by a quirk of fate, been killed, and he himself was rendered disabled

Making him plunge into despair and depression for long
He rose like a phoenix, to meet the complexities of immobility
Resolutely followed his heart, pursuing
Sports as the destination that life had led him to,
Teaching himself to tackle his very existence head-on
Going on to challenge the national and international sports arenas
Bringing home gold, silver and bronze medals galore

Finding courage even where there was no comfort to hold on to
Accomplishing not just the expectations of athletic requirements
Taking on the mantle as an activist as well, for others with disabilities
In the suburban township of Gudiyatham where he lived

Not for him, the "Why me?" mentality
Seeking to attain over and beyond in his direction in life
Striving hard towards his next target – the Olympics
To sum him up, one could probably say
"Adversity causes some people to breakdown
and others, to break records".

If not for his inherent nature to absorb grief and pain and turn it into positivity and strength, such trauma could have crippled him mentally and emotionally.

purpose and direction in life, he evolved slowly and steadily, and began excelling in sports. He participated in shot put, javelin, discus throw and wheelchair basketball events.

He soon won a trophy at the state level (Tamil Nadu) Paralympics in 2015 in javelin and basketball events. He then trained under foreign coaches for National-level Paralympic events and won medals in javelin and shot put events.

The string of medals gave him further confidence and inspired him to pursue sports at the international level.

In the recently held International Para Games in Thailand in May 2018, Venkatachalam won gold and silver medals in shot put and javelin events.

He also went on to win gold and silver medals in discus and javelin events at the South-West Asian Para games in Nepal.

Accumulating medal after medal in national and international sporting events, Venkatachalam is currently training vigorously to participate and win medals at the next Olympic Games.

Sports is not his only focus. Venkatachalam is an activist who raises awareness on disability rights and sports, both in his town and wherever he travels.

Although his sports achievements do not contribute to his family's financial status, his passion drives him to train relentlessly to achieve his goals.

He currently runs a small mobile phone recharge shop from his home, and during his free time, he networks with people for sponsorship for sports equipment for him and his team.

The CKA Award and recognition gives him the energy to achieve more and inspire more people around him, he says.

Witnessing their son receive the award and standing next to him under the starry stage lights and surrounded by cheer and applause from the audience, his parents beamed with happiness and pride.

“Every time he travelled and won medals, we were happy for him, but today, for the first time, we witnessed the real significance of his achievements on this stage.

For all the years he spent bed-ridden, now, he keeps travelling around the world, winning wherever he goes, and we couldn't be prouder about his growth”, said his teary-eyed mother. ■

Profiles of the recipients of the Awards by Sruthi S. Raghavan & Hema Vijay

PURPOSE & PROFIT RANE GROUP



HARISH LAKSHMAN,
Vice Chairman, Rane Group,

Founded in 1929, and headquartered in Chennai, Rane Group is the most preferred original equipment manufacturer and supplier for global auto majors and serves a variety of industry segments. HARISH LAKSHMAN, Vice Chairman, Rane Group, shares with *Success & ABILITY* Rane's policy and practice towards embracing diversity and being a caring, equal opportunity employer.

Q. Please give us an insight into Rane's work philosophy and vision.

A: Rane Group believes in the simple philosophy of aligning with our people's aspirations, inspiring them to take on challenges and partnering with them in healthy and profitable growth.



The human resources vision of Rane is “To stimulate and nurture the intrinsic desire in people to learn, grow and enhance performance to achieve business success and growth”. The key to this is the commitment of our senior management to invest in the talent development process and to nurture a strong Employer brand. We strive to live up to our Employer Brand promise of creating an exciting workplace founded on the principles of values, fairness and transparency. We believe in providing a ‘career’ to each employee that goes a long way beyond just a job.

Q: Rane Group has always been progressive in its policies. With your CSR vision “to be a socially and environmentally responsible corporate citizen”, you contribute to society through employee volunteering, competency development, financial assistance and operational support. You support educational institutions and NGOs and have instituted the ‘Rane Pioneer of Change’ Award for recognising and rewarding social entrepreneurs. What are your views regarding Rane becoming an ‘equal opportunity employer’, which is now a buzz word in the corporate world?

A: Rane Group has been a proud equal opportunity employer – we practice our code unflinchingly. In an evolving job market where companies are balancing purpose with profit, it's time to further enhance the acceptance of all people in the workplace.

This, I believe, will create an atmosphere of goodwill and trust in the entire workplace. When the business world truly accommodates people with disabilities, you develop a compassionate workforce who help each other. It can positively impact employees and leave an impression on the customers and stakeholders we serve.

Q: Diversity and inclusion are now seen as powerful components of productivity. How do you see Rane progressing as a diverse and inclusive workplace? What are the measures Rane Group has adopted, or proposes to adopt, towards this?

A: Rane is an equal opportunity employer and we encourage hiring people from varied genders, age groups, race, disabilities, etc. Diversity and inclusion are very much work in progress at Rane. We do support people with disabilities to enter the mainstream workforce by engaging them in areas suitable for them.

We already have people with physical disabilities working in the shop floor, in packing, logistics, etc. One recent initiative we launched to increase the intake of people with disabilities was to provide internship opportunities, and this helped us gauge our preparedness to engage a diverse workforce.

Q: What has been your experience so far in hiring and working with people with disabilities? What are the difficulties you have come across on this path? What kind of support would you like, in order to reach out and employ qualified persons with disabilities?

A: Our limited experience so far has been positive. We find that working with people with disabilities empowers them, boosts their confidence and self-esteem and serves as a means for sustainable livelihood too. It also builds a sense of care and camaraderie among employees that couldn't have been generated from engagement workshops or leadership retreats. We realise that we need to overcome some challenges in employing people with disabilities. These are in areas of improving accessibility, providing assistive technology, enabling work integration, and sensitising and training the line managers to be acutely aware of their special needs and addressing them.

Q: When you advertise for vacancies, do you add a line about being open to hiring persons with disabilities? If not, would you consider doing so?

A: In some of our businesses, we have made efforts to identify career opportunities that can be performed by persons with disabilities and we have made specific efforts to engage them in such opportunities. We clearly state that we are an equal opportunity employer, but so far, we have not explicitly stated this in our communiques on career opportunities. We are happy to state so henceforth and will make reasonable accommodations to enable individuals with disabilities perform the essential functions.

Q: How do you ensure that every person in your firm is on the same page regarding disability awareness and inclusion?

A: Rane has a stated policy on Ethical Standards of Behaviours and we have christened this as Rane Compass. As part of the code, we emphasise the value of diversity, equal opportunity and respect, and we clearly articulate during induction and at every available opportunity that there should be no discrimination against anyone on basis of race, colour, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, etc. Further, employees actively participate in various CSR initiatives that creates space for employees to interact with people with disabilities. Such engagement shifts the mindset and ability of employees to appreciate the challenges faced by people with disabilities. ■

My Journey



to the USA



Challenges aplenty, and eventually sweet success. SIDHARTH TANEJA recounts his journey to the USA to pursue higher education.



Sidharth
Taneja

It's been a most memorable and adventurous journey – my journey to the United States of America to pursue further studies.

Coming to the USA was a goal I had chased for the last many years, and a childhood dream. Along the way, in reaching here, I experienced much anxiety, confusion, flip-flops, financial and many other issues. I did it because I wasn't aware of the implications, but now I realise that this journey was not easy, not at all.



It was around three years ago that I decided to work to fulfil my childhood dream of studying in the USA. It began with a casual attempt with a GRE book I ordered from Amazon. I hardly read that for the first two weeks, and it lay forgotten on my book shelf. But, during those two weeks, I discussed with several people the possibility of studying in the USA. After a couple of months, some of them asked me how my study for the GRE was shaping up, and I was like “It’s going on”, though I hadn’t read even 10 pages of the book. I had announced my USA plans in a burst of excitement, but now, I was forced to study; otherwise, my words would have no value. Most often, we take a decision following a commitment, but I did the reverse. I first took the decision and later, it became a commitment for me.

In my first attempt of the GRE practice test, I scored only 10 out of 100; it was a huge disappointment. Since it was my dream, I had no choice but to push myself to achieve it. Somehow, I managed to prepare and scored 316 in GRE. Due to cerebral palsy, I have always had a problem with speech, and this impacted my GRE and TOEFL scores to a great extent. Not knowing about the competition, I celebrated my 316 marks in the GRE and hoped to receive some good options. But of course, closing one’s eyes doesn’t take away the problem. As things developed, I found that my score was



Most often, we take a decision following a commitment, but I did the reverse. I first took the decision, and later it became a commitment for me.

just average and that I had to prepare a good Statement of Purpose (SOP) and Letter of Recommendation (LOR) to apply for universities.

I visited several institutes to get my SOP and LOR done. I discovered it was a big business in India, costing no less than forty thousand rupees! Who would invest such money in me, when reaching the US seemed impossible for me? Then I came to know about USIEF.

When they heard about my physical limitation, one of their representatives, Rupali Ma'm, offered to help me. It was a great moment for me. When I enquired about the charges,

I was pleasantly shocked to know that it was Rs. 8000 only, one fifth of what other institutes charged.

The most difficult conflicts are the ones where you have to go against your family. But I did not want to give up on my dream of studying in the US and regret it for the rest of my life.

One person, who kept pushing and supporting me throughout the thin and thick of this journey was Deep Kalra Sir, CEO of MakeMyTrip. I owe whatever I achieve to him.

Beginning with the SOP and LOR, Rupali Ma'm at the USIEF helped me in every possible way and we did all the communications over calls and mails. 30-40 iterations later, we arrived at the final SOP, followed by shortlisting of the University. Everything was completed without physically commuting to the USIEF even once. I salute their dedication and work ethics.

I was finally admitted to the University of Cincinnati and the feeling was out of this world. But there was a bigger challenge ahead. It was time to discuss all this with my parents. My parents were aware of the struggles I faced as a person with disability. After a 25-year struggle, they were able to see their son working with a reputed company, MakeMyTrip, and earning handsome money. They were happy with how MakeMyTrip gave me opportunities to grow and learn. It was more than anything they could ask for, and there I



I still remember the day I wrote my resignation letter amidst mixed feelings. I had got a job after 20-30 rejections just because of some physical limitations and created a significant place for myself in the world. And there I was, giving it up for studying in the US.

was, standing in front of them and saying that I wanted to leave all this and take up further study, that too, outside the country. I personally feel that the most difficult conflicts are the ones where you have to go against your family. But not want to give up on of studying in the US and for the rest of my life. I asked

I did my dream regret it my parents confidence

to meet people like Rupali Ma'm and Deep Kalra Sir to acquire the confidence that their son was going in the right direction. Finally, they decided to come with me.

I still remember the day I wrote my resignation letter amidst mixed feelings. I had got a job with MakeMyTrip after 20-30 rejections just because of some physical limitations. After having created a significant place for myself, I was nullifying it all for studying in the US.

Coming to the US has not been easy. My entire family has sacrificed something or the other to make this journey possible. My father came with me, leaving his business, my little brother and mom are in town alone, to name some. In the end, there is a cost to living out dreams and they are always expensive.

Now that I am here at the University of Cincinnati, my family is happy that I am doing well. Now they have seen what USA is like, the moral values here, the facilities that exist here for people with disabilities, all of which was beyond imagination for us. Luckily, I got an on-campus job, that too in the IT team of the University. It gave us more confidence that I can survive in a different country. In the beginning, I was tense that I was going to be unemployed after five years, but now, I am no more unemployed. Yippee!

I don't know what the end of this journey will be, but I am not going to regret it. This journey has taught me many things. I am thankful to those who helped make this possible. ■



Quote



The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple.

Oscar Wilde

What do you want a meaning for?
Life is a desire, not a meaning.

Charlie Chaplin

If you cannot be a poet, be the poem.

David Carradine

The key is not the will to win.
Everybody has that. It is the will to prepare to win that is important.

Bobby Knight

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.

Richard P. Feynman

Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.

Stephen Hawking

The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny..'

Isaac Asimov

That man has reached immortality who is disturbed by nothing material.

Swami Vivekananda

No self is of itself alone. It has a long chain of intellectual ancestors.

Erwin Schrödinger

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Mark Twain

Unquote



16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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

