

16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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



CONTENTS

04

NEWS & NOTES

New accessible software and board games, the World Amputee Fitness Festival, health updates, and more news that you can use.

09

COVER FEATURE

Transformational films, experiences to remember, churning for new vistas in accessible cinema... Take in the magic of AbilityFEST 2019: India International Disability Film Festival.

21

BREAKING BARRIERS

DescribABILITY, Ability Foundation's trend-setting audio description workshop left practicing and aspiring media professionals motivated to include AD in their work, reports Hema Vijay.

33

TRAILBLAZER

Cerebral palsy is just a muse, not an impediment for journalist, author and corporate communication professional Sundari Sivasubbu. She shares her engrossing journey.

43

SOCIETY

Civic sense is a social ethic. Shouldn't we keep our surroundings as clean as we keep our homes, asks Dr. Ketna L Mehta, Founder Trustee, Nina Foundation.



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 would love to hear from you.

You are just a **click** away!

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News & Notes

GOOD VIBES APP



Google has developed software that can turn hand gestures into speech. This software can be used to make apps for smartphones to interpret hand gestures of sign language (currently focused on American Sign Language) and convert it to speech. Google has made public the algorithms needed for such an app.

Google launched the speech engine for Live Transcribe, a speech recognition and transcription tool for Android as an open source software, which uses machine learning algorithms to turn audio into real-time captions on mobile devices. Live Transcribe's source code can be downloaded on GitHub. This new software can identify motions and shapes of hands. Google continues to work on this algorithm to stabilise and improve it.



Samsung Good Vibes is a two-way communication app that allows the deafblind to send and receive messages with friends, family or anybody else through their smartphones. It translates Morse Code input into text or voice and vice versa. The app has two interfaces. From its interface for deafblind people, one can send a message by tapping on the screen using Morse Code, where all letters of the English alphabet are combinations of dots and dashes. The letters can be input as short tap for a dot, and long press for a dash. Likewise, incoming messages can be understood as vibrations by the deafblind, where small vibration means a dot and long vibration means a dash. Through another

interface of the app, one can send a message, by typing or speaking. It has a standard chat/voice interface that delivers the message to the deafblind person as Morse Code vibrations. To know more, log on to <https://www.samsung.com/in/microsite/good-vibes/>

.....

The United Nations' Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in its 22nd session that concluded in September, has stated that the usage of word 'Divyangjan' for people with disabilities is controversial. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) is the new name given to this department, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested that the term 'divyang' meaning 'divine body' be used instead of 'viklang' or 'disabled' for persons with disabilities.

"Legislation, public policies and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities, in particular guardianship, institutionalisation, psychiatric treatment and segregated community services based on disability, and negative perceptions, including 'normal life' as opposed to the lives of persons with disabilities, and derogatory terminology like 'mentally ill', or 'divyangjan', the latter which is still controversial", CRPD mentioned in its concluding observations on the initial report of India.

.....

Stroke is a major cause of death and disability in older people. A recent study in the science journal The Lancet postulates that in older people, risk of covert or silent stroke (that comes without any previous warnings or symptoms) increases after undergoing non-cardiac surgery.

This study, 'Perioperative covert stroke in patients undergoing non-cardiac surgery (NeuroVISION): a prospective cohort study' analysed the progress of 1,114 patients aged 65 years and above who had undergone cardiac surgery. The study was conducted between 24 March 2014 and 21 July 2017. The researchers studied brain MRIs taken after surgery and brain MRIs taken at the time of the one-year follow-up examination and discovered

CRPD: "DIVYANGJAN" IS CONTROVERSIAL

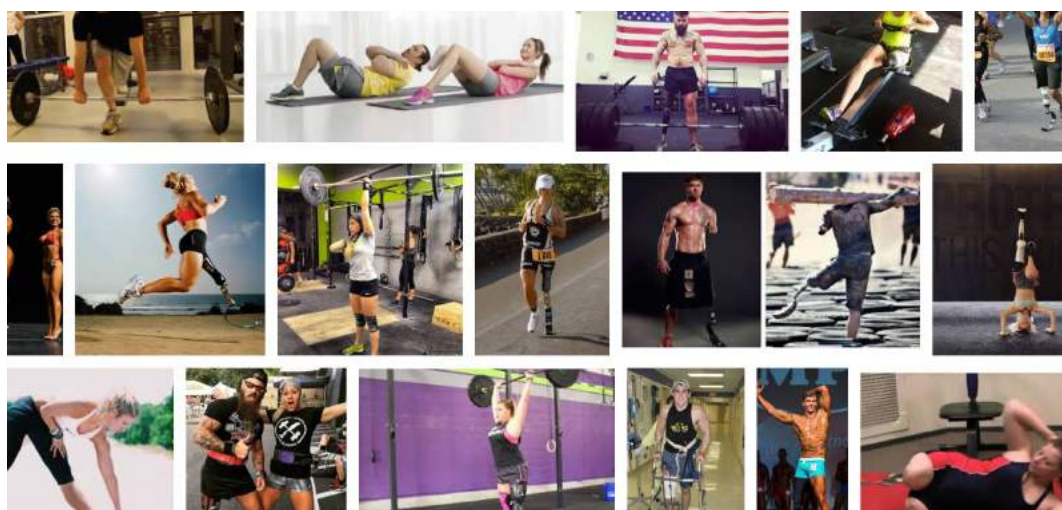
NON-CARDIAC SURGERY UPS RISK OF SILENT STROKE IN OLDER PEOPLE

that about 7% of the patients had had a perioperative (at or around the time of operation) covert stroke. Twenty-nine of the 69 patients who had had a perioperative covert stroke and came back for examination after one year, showed a cognitive decline after surgery. Even among patients who had not suffered a perioperative covert stroke, the researchers observed a cognitive decline in 29% (274 of 932) participants after one year.



It is well established that lack of sleep can impair our cognitive functioning and judgement, the ability to concentrate and do repetitive things, increase risk-taking behaviour, lower our capacity to respond appropriately to challenging situations leading up to road and industrial accidents, and more.

According to Dr. Swami Subramaniam, neuroscientist and author of 'Mastering Sleep', lack of sufficient sleep can also cause accumulation of metabolic waste products in the brain, leading to dementia and Alzheimer's disease. That's because it is during sleep that the clearing of metabolites generated in the brain happens.



World Amputee Fitness Festival (WAFF) is a free community fitness festival that brings together fitness enthusiasts of all abilities from all over the world to host and participate in fitness various activities. An inclusive sports and fitness event, WAFF 2019 is scheduled to happen from Dec 01 to Dec 15 at Chiang Mai, Thailand.

The festival's three governing principles are participation and collaboration, self-reliance and self-expression, and community

**LACK OF
SLEEP CAN
CAUSE
DEMENTIA,
ALZHEIMER'S**

**WORLD
AMPUTEE
FITNESS
FESTIVAL**

cooperation and civic responsibility. In the festival, amputees and able-bodied individuals come together, share and learn from each other the best methods for physical fitness, emotional well-being and personal growth. For more, log on to <https://worldamputeefitnessfestival.org>



A café run by people with mental illnesses is now in operation at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (Nimhans). This café, Recovery Oriented Services (ROSeS) Café, was launched on 16 August.

ROSeS Café was earlier part of Nimhans' rehabilitation services wing, offering training to people with mental illness undergoing treatment. This café can now cater to over a hundred persons per day and takes up orders from the faculty besides orders placed to cater to conferences hosted at Nimhans. Patients from Nimhans' day care section too help in serving the food.



Heritage architect, access consultant and founder of Access for ALL, Siddhant Shah has developed accessible Ludo and Snakes and Ladders for children with blindness and low vision. Inspired by blind cricket, he took up the task of making board games accessible for children with visual impairment and proposed the idea to Lions Club, Juhu. Following this, these games have been introduced at Kamla Mehta Blind School in Mumbai, and the students are totally enthused following this.

For making these board games accessible, Siddhant and his team worked with the teachers of the school to understand the challenges in accessing board games and developed features to make these board games accessible.

In addition to being fun activities, these games also help students develop fine and gross motor skills, besides camaraderie and better interpersonal skills as it is a group activity. So then, one hopes that every blind school in India will introduce such accessible board games. ●

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The biennial AbilityFEST 2019: India International Disability Film Festival was a thumping success, attracting discerning film makers from across the world and audiences with and without disabilities, leaving in its wake, a deep introspection on our attitudes towards disability and in the bargain, sowing the seeds for making mainstream cinema accessible, a widespread reality. Here is a kaleidoscope of impressions from the Fest...



AbilityFEST 2019

Cinema by, with and about
people with disabilities

A LASTING IMPACT



“When I entered Sathyam Cinemas on September 9 for AbilityFEST 2019, I had no idea what it was about. I had been invited to the fest and was there purely out of curiosity and an eagerness to know what the film fest was about. There was a short inaugural function which gave a gist of what the fest was about, and the films screened during this fest from all over the world. The first film I watched after the formal inauguration was 'Ian, a moving story', a film from Argentina, which was about a boy with cerebral palsy who faces bullying and discrimination. Though a very short film, it had a strong message of how important being included in society is. After that film, I couldn't stop myself from attending the fest, and was there every day of the fest, right up to 'Still Alice', the last film screened at the fest.



Empathy towards people is all very well. It was, however, a succinct awareness and the eye-opening platform that AbilityFest 2019 proved to be, that changed V. APARNA JAYACHANDRAN, someone who has been in the teaching profession for over two decades, from teaching pre-kindergarten children to teaching communicative English language to adults, when she attended the India International Disability Film Festival that showcased an array of movies by, with and about people with disabilities. In her own words:

The Indian film 'Chuskit' is another movie that touched my heart. The girl has expressed the feelings and frustrations of being unable to walk and being dependent so well that I could feel her pain as I watched it. Little do we, as society, realise the emotions of people who have disabilities. In fact, all the movies that were screened highlighted the necessity for the world to see them as part of society and not

as disabled and incapable. The film, 'Learning to Drive' is one such film that drives home a strong message that people with disabilities are capable of doing the same things that non-disabled people do. It was great to notice that the objective of such a film fest was not to gain sympathy from society but to bring in awareness among the so-called “normal” people of society – awareness about the various



disabilities that people have and how they strive throughout their lives, in spite of minimal or no support system around them. The film 'Downside Up' is one such movie which illustrates the reverse of what is happening to disabled persons. This film left the audience in deep thought.

I always empathise with people who are disabled, be it physical or mental, but have never had a chance to see what they go through in day-to-day life. This film fest has revealed, in depth, how difficult it is, emotionally and physically, for people with disabilities to wade through their lives. It also showed that acceptance of the disability by the family and their constant moral support help them face life's challenges better. The documentary film 'By Stanley for Stanley' and the film, 'Still Alice' were excellent examples of this.

It was great to notice that the objective of such a film fest was not to gain sympathy from society, but to bring in awareness among the so-called "normal" people of society.

Every movie had a great impact on the minds of the audience. I wish these films could be screened in as many places as possible, to spread the message that people with disabilities are 'humans' (as said by Andre in the film 'Andre the Anti Giant') and need to lead a life in this world with as much acceptance and respect as anyone else.

Overall, those four days at AbilityFEST 2019 has been so much of an eye opener to me, as well as a heartwarming experience. Congratulations to Ability Foundation for this poignant film festival and I wish them all success in their future endeavours. ●



Non-disabled people need to get proactive in making the world a more inclusive and accessible place for people with disabilities, says **Shailini Bhat**, an ELT professional who strives for a deeper understanding of people with disabilities stirred on by the stories of grit and apathy screened at the AbilityFest: India International Disability Film Festival.

LET'S BE PROACTIVE

It was by sheer coincidence, that one morning, I read a piece of news that some herpetologists in New Jersey had captured a young rattlesnake of a rare species that had two heads. Apparently, it was named Double-Dave after the two scientists (both called Dave) who found them. As soon as I read this piece of news, as an animal lover, I couldn't help wondering what it would have been like in those swathes of forests if an animal was born, or rendered by an accident, disabled? Would they have had to fight for survival alongside their able bodied counterparts? In order to be fit and function independently without any help or without depending on anyone? My search for answers revealed that such animals rarely survive to maturity in the wild.

So, the coincidence was that I read this at the same time, that AbilityFEST was happening in Chennai. Since 2013, I have been attending this Fest to understand the many facets of disability that can affect people. The reaction from people around me, who knew I had to put aside several other commitments of mine to be



Excited, no-noise conversations...

able to attend this – there were many who were curious to know if I had a disabled member in my family. Surprising attitude to me! Let me tell you... Here's why this fest is clearly for everyone!

A good part of what I saw at AbilityFEST were vivid stories and eye opening accounts of how people with disabilities had to struggle for access even for basic facilities, and also had to deal with discrimination, and more, helplessly tolerate lack of empathy. Often, it was the non-disabled who further inflicted the afflicted. I was ruffled by the callous mother of a deaf daughter in 'The Silent Child', the jeering that 'Andre the Anti-giant' had to face, and the indifference of the community towards 'Hale'.

A fair measure of stories of refreshing grit made many of the screenings inspirational. Be it a village coming together to help 'Chuskit', a girl using a wheelchair, get to school or the relentless efforts of a teenage boy to cross borders in a conflict zone to get his brother to a hospital in 'Time for Drunken Horses', the tenacity of the non-disabled, driven by the emotion to empower people with disabilities, in some of these stories, was extraordinary.

One could learn a thing or two from Ability Foundation's arrangements at the venue which reflected sensitivity. Announcements in sign language, subtitles for nearly every film that was screened, provisions to accommodate people in wheelchairs, and a dedicated group of volunteers to lend a helping hand were just some of them.

For those of us who are not dependent, it is easy to take our state of affairs for granted. As even debility from ageing can result in certain kinds of disabilities, a proactive approach to inclusivity is imperative.

By the way, lucky little Double-Dave won the Daves' sympathy and got included as an inmate in their office, where he seems to be comfortably growing in an understanding and non-threatening environment! ●●



One could learn a thing or two from Ability Foundation's arrangements at the venue which reflected sensitivity.



"I love AbilityFEST"

"This was my first visit to India, and of course, my first experience of AbilityFEST. I had been afraid of how the audience would react to my film. Everything in India is completely different from Poland, was my thought. But I was in for a surprise! People are the same, everywhere. People all over the world have the same dreams and feelings. And the people in India are great! They are kind, happy and smiling! I love AbilityFEST. I think it's a great initiative and people really need it. We need to see films about success and ability! We need to see good things. Barriers exist only in our minds. Deep in our hearts, we can do everything! I hope I will be back at this wonderful festival next year!"

- Monika Melen, Director
Film Dla Stasia (By Stanley For Stanley), Poland.



INCLUSION IMMERSION

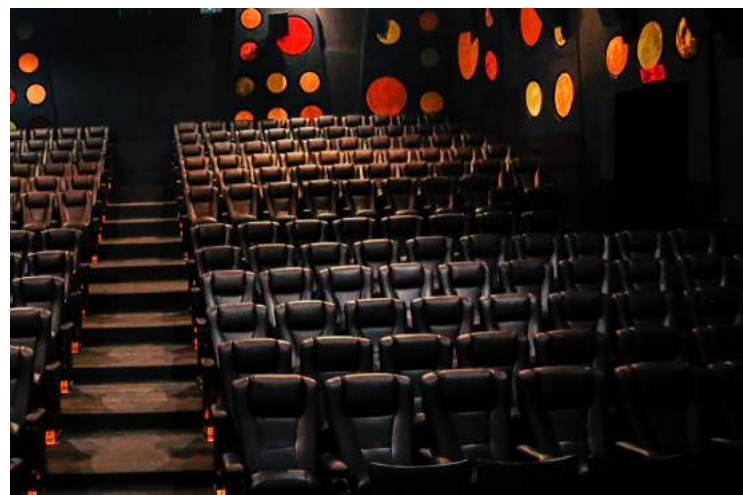


AbilityFEST 2019 was not just an eye-opener on inclusivity, but also a veritable feast for her mind and heart, writes **BHUVANESWARI MAHALINGAM**, who has over two decades of experience in the child rights and education sector.

AbilityFEST 2019: India International Disability Film Festival exemplifies Ability Foundation's intention to bridge the divide between persons with and without disabilities. AbilityFest is by, with and about people with disabilities. The festival *does* succeed in building bridges. More empathy, more understanding, more patience and more support in many different ways, with absolute sensitivity as the message. To me, it felt like an immersion in inclusion because I could make it for 14 of the 16 shows of the fest.



What a big hit the festival was, with a range of sponsors and co-sponsors, space at Sathyam Cinemas for four days, live schedule-revision, constant updating in social media and good press coverage! The displays, the registration counter, the presence of volunteers to guide the audience and collect feedback, the stage-setting for events, the pamphlets and booklets, the inauguration, first ever screening with audio description of the blockbuster 'Viswasam' and the interaction with its director Siva, interactions with Brad Bailey and Monika Melen, film directors from USA and Poland respectively, huge audiences from schools and colleges, representatives from different communities and people with



disabilities, show announcements with movie descriptions and sign language interpretation, sign-alphabet tutorials for school children, and above all, putting together this collection of films and bringing them to India with the necessary clearance, give an indication of the volume of work that would have happened behind the scene. Punctuality was maintained all through the fest. This deserves much appreciation. It was a blessing to watch 'Hale' and get inspired by stalwart disability rights activist Hale Zukas who interacts with the world on the power of his will. A rare privilege to witness the child-to-child compassion of the Kurdish family in 'A time for drunken horses'. A window to view the refreshing beauty of Japan, and the equally beautiful heart of the film's protagonist Ben, who amuses and leaves people with deep learning, tears of joy and a smile, in 'Shakespeare in Tokyo'.

After watching 'Shakespeare in Tokyo', I wrote to a friend in Japan, Nana, "What a beautiful country yours is". Nana replied, "What an event! I'm so impressed by it! Is it the culture of Chennai?"

Alex's dad in 'CODA' steals the heart with his big smile as he continues drumming for his girl who pleads "More daddy! Please". From not knowing what CODA means to decoding Alex's pain of



Celebrating diversity begins with the inclusion of every identity.

belonging nowhere, what a movie it was, with the message, "Be Yourself"! Choreography, music, song and the treatment of the film makes 'CODA' a world class movie. Dance as a medium to convey the truth reveals its power to heal both the performer and the viewer. The charm of Chuskit, her village, her friends, her physiotherapist, her brother, her stubborn grandfather and her loving parents are profound. Chuskit doesn't want to miss school, leave home or leave her grandfather behind. The power of people and their love for Chuskit is the message of this film 'Chuskit'. Andre, the social butterfly with a full-size heart, as his father aptly describes him, leaves us in tears in 'Andre the anti-giant'. 'Ian, a moving story' is such a powerful depiction of breaking barriers for inclusion, effortlessly portraying inclusion as a two way process. If 'Parents Inc' was a commercial, every child might demand the remote! The pride in deaf culture transcends acceptance in "The End".

Celebrating diversity begins with the inclusion of every identity. The sign language interactions at Sathyam brought in a festive spirit and the place resembled a forest lit by light and the colours of flowers. Sign language conversations bridged the distance; from the entry door to the last row, messages were communicated. The noise-free chit-chat was so lovely and the "No-noise world felt like a nice-world".

The universality of sign language makes it worth learning for all, especially teachers. Joanne, the social worker with sign language skills in 'The Silent Child' is a classic character. An empathetic, progressive and perfectionist professional who goes out of her way to break the child's silence, and later, to convince the difficult parent. Joanne advocates for and expresses interest to be a sign language interpreter in Libby's classroom. If this had materialised, Libby would have



Sign language interpretation accompanied every presentation...



Sign language conversations bridged the distance; from the entry door to the last row, messages were communicated. The noise-free chat-chat was so lovely and the "No-noise world felt like a nice-world".



been the happiest child and her learning environment might have turned ideal with perhaps every teacher and every child mastering sign language in due course. Sue's ego and obsession over her image in society rather than the child's interests shuts the door that opened when Libby signed for 'Orange'. In the end, Libby signing "I love you" to Joanne leaves Joanne, and us, in tears.

Harsh reality and struggles are brought out realistically in 'Junha's Planet', 'Normal Autisticky', 'The girl, the mother and the demons', 'Still Alice' and 'Unstuck'. No amount of reading can explain the pain of someone living with Alzheimer's as well as 'Still Alice' does. The contrast between a very articulate and intelligent professor and the one losing herself because of memory loss is moving.

My friend Kavitha, a designer, was present on two days of the fest and enjoyed it immensely. She texted me later: "Madi (from 'A time for drunken horses') is in my mind. The film was very inspiring. Seeing those children, I won't complain about my household work anymore!"

If not for viewing the audio-described 'Viswasam' at the fest (the second time I was viewing this film), I wouldn't have realised that there is so much happening on the screen that

AbilityFest was a treat, a feast and a gift for everyone.



needs audio description. The synchronization of the audio description in harmony with the cinematography makes me wonder... Why can't audio description be done for every movie along with the film's dubbing?

Revathy's natural commentary during the felicitation ceremony (not forgetting the shiny blue gift wrappers that she described) was a true tribute and a reminder of how much we tend to forget or take for granted.

AbilityFEST was a treat, a feast and a gift for everyone. I guess the rough cost for 40 hours of film-screening might work out to at least Rs. 10,000 per person (at Rs. 250 per hour). Being an international festival, the cost might have been several times more! The festival offered this feast for free! ●

Thank You

Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to our crowdfunding campaign on Wishberry and made AbilityFEST2019 possible!

**Taste that cannot
be explained,
And cannot be
forgotten**



Blended after tasting
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DescribABILITY

A trendsetting workshop on audio description

Imagine...

A gripping action sequence, poignant flashback or spectacular cinematography unfolds silently on the screen, punctuated by the non-verbal sounds accompanying the onscreen happenings and the background music score. To a sighted person in the audience, the film gets gripping now...





Dr. Joel Snyder

To a person with blindness or low vision, the film becomes inaccessible now as he can no longer understand what's happening.

What demolishes this barrier to entertainment is Audio Description (AD). An AD track basically narrates the onscreen visual happenings, in sync with the film, in the gaps between the dialogues verbalised in the film. AD is all about making the visual verbal – be it an event, film, a parade, or a ceremony – wherever the visual image is important to be understood. "Audio Description provides access to the visual elements – action, costumes, settings, gestures, facial expressions and other visually important images", explained internationally acclaimed pioneer audio describer and guru Dr. Joel Snyder. This is done by verbally describing the silent portions of the film. Dr. Joel Snyder is the winner of the 2014 Vernon Henley Media Award for promoting and

furthering the availability of audio description. "There is no good reason for a disabled person to be culturally disabled too", he remarked, during Ability Foundation's path-breaking two-day audio description workshop conducted at IIT-Madras' Research Park. Dr. Snyder, who is President of Audio Description Associates and Director of the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project, has been taking audio description to the world, having visited dozens of countries to teach and prime film makers and audiences on AD.



How does one enjoy movies to the full, including its visual elements like actions, expressions, setting and so on, when one cannot see? Or an event that greatly relies on visuals? Here comes Audio Description (AD) to the rescue. AD can enable persons with low vision or blindness experience those beautiful visual moments, discovered participants of DescribABILITY, a two-day workshop on AD, organised by Ability Foundation and conducted by Dr. JOEL SNYDER, pioneer audio describer and AD guru. HEMA VIJAY reports.

By the way, an AD track is not just for persons with visual impairment. It could help every viewer enjoy the film better, by narrating every significant cue or nuance of the film, which the viewer may have seen but not observed. It is also for the sighted person in the next room, listening to the telecast. The cost of creating the film's AD track is negligible considering the overall budget of the film. In fact, it actually pays to audio describe films.

Worldwide, around 285 million people are visually impaired, 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision. An audio described film basically addresses this segment of the population, effectively expanding the scope of the film's audience. As actor and film maker Revathy stated during the workshop, "When you caption and audio describe films, the number of people who walk into theatres will increase".

But then, it's not just about numbers and profitability. Jayshree Raveendran, founder director, Ability Foundation, stated, "This is about rights of people with disabilities to access entertainment. Every single person matters. It does not matter if it is for one viewer or a thousand viewers".

A point underlined by Moulik Berkana, cultural affairs officer, Consulate General of USA, Chennai, who inaugurated the AD workshop, "If you see ramps in theatres across the US, it's because of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). NGOs ensure robust enactment of the Act". Enacted in 1990, ADA, a civil rights law, prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life. Congratulating Ability Foundation on its 25th anniversary, Moulik pointed out, "Disability rights are universal human rights to be promoted all over the world". One of the fallouts of the ADA has been widespread audio description of films in the US. Our own RPD Act 2016, could perhaps be elaborated upon for such an interpretation.



Dr. Snyder with Team Ability and the participants of the workshop



Snapshots from
DescriBABILITY

"It is the film maker's responsibility to accommodate every viewer. After all, you are releasing the film to the public, and people with visual impairment are part of that 'Public'. It's the duty of every film maker to be inclusive", said Dr. Snyder, during the workshop. "AD should one day become part and parcel of the film making process", voiced Senthil Kumar, co-founder, Qube Cinema, speaking at the panel discussion during the workshop. Digital cinema makes it perfectly possible, he added. "Just like how one can't release a film without certification, there ought to be a legislation to make AD mandatory. Govt should notify the standards", Senthil Kumar added.

"There are challenges, primarily stemming from producers' fears that the film may be leaked when given for audio description, and the challenge of accommodating last minute changes in the AD track. However, first is the intent. Then execution", analysed Susmitha

AD is all about making the visual verbal – be it an event, film, parade, or a ceremony – wherever the visual image is important to be understood.

Chakkungal, National Head, Corporate Social Responsibility at Entertainment Network India Limited (Radio Mirchi). Audio described films need to be released on day one, since today, a film's shelf life in theatres is just three days, she remarked.

DescriBABILITY unrolled a tantalising primer on the many nuances of audio description for the participants of the two-day workshop, who included students and professionals of media and film industries, among others.

From audio describing silent happenings on the screen to describing a text or logo flashed on the screen, Dr. Snyder taught participants the nuances of effective audio description. The workshop also triggered participants' introspection and exploration of their skills of observation, vocabulary, visual literacy and appreciation, making for an engrossing, as well as educative experience. Since AD tries to get at the essence of the scene, just like art, AD could be roped into the curriculum when it comes to teaching languages and art.

M Gunasekharan, a person with visual impairment and someone who participated in the workshop's panel discussion sums it up, "Watching an audio described film is a great experience. If every film came with audio description, more of us would go to theatres. It will be a wonderful day when every Indian film released, is released with its AD track". ●

It is the film makers' responsibility to accommodate every viewer. It's the duty of every film maker to be inclusive.



Imagine a day when your friend who is blind or has low vision can sit beside you at a theatre and experience a movie more completely! Or, you could both visit an art gallery and experience paintings and sculptures in all their richness and depth! This is what audio description can bring to our lives – a chance to enjoy things, fully together, with your friends.

Simply put, audio description is 'a visual made verbal'. Over a two-day workshop, Dr. Joel Snyder, a pioneer in the field, took us through the process and elements involved in providing an audio narration of the visual elements of a film, image, or an event. Audio description brings in-depth information on the same to people with vision impairment and allows them to have a shared experience with others.



I learnt a lot from the workshop. A huge takeaway was in learning to observe. Reporting observation without being subjective is key to being a successful audio describer.

Dr. Snyder led the workshop with videos, theory, and of course, audio! Each day was interactive with many exercises to enhance our observational, editing, language and vocal skills. My favourite part of the workshop was when a few of us were given a symbol and asked to describe it. We each took a few minutes to collect our thoughts, and then, using words that were vivid and imaginative, we each tried to convey the visual image accurately. The other participants in the room drew the symbol based on our descriptions.

I work at Chetana, a library based in Chennai where we create and lend tactile story books to children who have print disabilities. Curious about the role audio description could potentially play in the creation of our books, I attended the workshop.

Pictures provide the first step to literacy for a sighted child. Similarly, we find that children who are blind

respond the same way to tactile elements, objects and images. But, imagine a page filled with many tactile elements – what would you want the child to explore first? Or a page with a tactual illustration of an elephant presented in side profile. If the child lacks spacial concepts and exploration techniques, the image would not be easy to understand. Without taking away from the process of enhancing reading skills, perhaps, audio description is a great way to teach children understand tactile elements and their positioning on a page.

Attending this workshop was a great experience. The possibilities with audio description seem endless and I am excited to explore the same!

- Teresa Antony Alapatt

*Participant, Audio Description
Workshop held on 6th & 7th Sept 2019*





AD's
a type
of poetry!



Sighted viewers often use audio descriptions: it provides access to television for persons who are blind or have low vision, as well as sighted people who want to be in the kitchen washing dishes while the show is on. A blind fellow visiting a museum with some friends was once asked, “Excuse me, but what are you doing in a museum? You can’t see any of the exhibits”. His response? “I’m here for the same reason anyone goes to a museum. I want to learn, to know, and be a part of our culture.” His inability to see shouldn’t deny him access to our culture and I believe it’s the responsibility of our art institutions to be as inclusive as possible. There simply is no good reason why a person with a disability must also be culturally disadvantaged.

Audio Description is a kind of literary art form. It’s a type of poetry – a haiku. It provides a verbal version of the visual; the visual is made verbal, aural, and oral. Using words that are succinct, vivid and imaginative, we convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a segment of the population – new estimates by the American Foundation for the Blind now put that number at over 21 million Americans who are blind or have difficulty seeing even with correction – and not fully realized by the rest of us – the rest of us, sighted folks who see but may not observe. AD’s useful for anyone who wants to truly notice and appreciate a fuller perspective on any visual event, while it is especially helpful as an access tool for people who are blind or have low vision.

Audio description can also be helpful in building literacy. Consider children and picture books. A teacher trained in audio description techniques would never simply hold up a picture of a red ball and read the text: ‘See the ball.’ He or she might add: “The ball is red – just like a fire engine. I think that the ball is as large as one of you! It’s as round as the sun – a bright red circle or sphere.” The teacher has introduced new vocabulary, invited comparisons, and used metaphor and simile – with toddlers! By using audio description, you make these books accessible to children who have low vision or are blind and help all kids develop more sophisticated language skills.

A picture is worth a thousand words? Maybe. But the audio describer might say that a few well-chosen words can conjure vivid and lasting images.

In the United States, the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of about 70%. I am certain that with more meaningful access to our culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals – and thus, more employable.

It was my great honour to be in Chennai recently at the invitation of Ability Foundation. I was able to share these notions and even provide some training in audio description fundamentals through a two-day workshop organised by the Foundation. Bravo to Ability Foundation on its initiative and its commitment to build accessibility to the arts for people who are blind or have low vision. ●

- JOEL SNYDER



At the time we publish this issue, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, has issued a directive to the Central Bureau of Film Certification (CBFC), to use audio descriptions and closed captioning in cinemas.

In its letter dated October 1, 2019, a copy of which has been provided to representatives of the disability sector as well as multiplex chains, the MIB states that in keeping with The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, “it is requested to motivate and persuade your (CBFC’s) associated members to make audio description a part of the production and distribution of a film itself”.

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Sundari Sivasubbu

**MAKE
YOUR LIFE'S
NARRATIVE
YOUR OWN**

Most of the time, we believe in myths about ourselves – assumptions, damaging misconceptions and incorrect beliefs – and not in our abilities.

Why is it that we are never good enough, smart enough or talented enough to follow our heart? I choose to believe that I am strong, capable and beautiful, says firebrand author, journalist and corporate professional SUNDARI SIVASUBBU. Listen in as she narrates her engrossing journey of how she reached for the stars.

“She is a mere girl child, that too a disabled child! Why do you both fuss about her so much? Anyway, she’ll not be able to do anything”.

“You both are moving to the city to educate your disabled girl? Ridiculous! You can always put her in a home for such children”

“Poor girl! Must be a sin of some evil ancestor that she’s born this way!”

These were some of the comments often hurled at my parents, a young helpless couple then, in our native village in southern Tamil Nadu.

When I was born, I struggled to breathe for an hour. It was a small Government hospital and before doctors could intervene, much of the damage was done. Most of the cells in my cerebellum died within that critical hour, resulting in a permanent neuro-musculoskeletal disability. My earliest memories are of frequent trips to hospitals, orthopedic clinics, indigenous medical practitioners, quacks, temples, churches, astrologers, yoga centres, acupressure clinics and what not! My parents left no stone unturned to treat me, but it was more of a marathon in a dark forest for them, blindfolded. There was no clarity, no guidance, and the future seemed so uncertain.

It was only when I was almost nine years old, during one of the treatment trips to Chennai, that my parents learnt about my exact condition – Cerebral

Palsy Ataxia. Though it was already too late for early intervention, they made a crucial decision – to leave their large home, family and a secured and comfortable life in our village, to shift to Chennai to give me good education and exposure.

My journey in Chennai began at SPASTN, a special school, where I received physiotherapy every day. It was a most fascinating and transformational phase of my life. For the first time, I found myself at a place where being different was normal. We had the freedom to walk the way we wanted, to crawl if that was the only way of mobility possible. We also had the freedom to fall down without being gawked at. Moreover, there were plenty of new skills to be learnt every day. During the next two years there, I participated and excelled in special dance programmes, music, drama, sports and speech contests. But my first love was always academics.

I was a constant topper in our village school earlier. Thanks to the efforts of my teachers at SPASTN and my parents, I gave my Class 3 and 4 exams as an external student at Vana Vani, a mainstream school inside IIT Madras campus, where I became a full time student from 1995-2003. Thanks to amazing support from my parents, brother, friends and teachers, I performed well consistently., The school conferred me with the “Best Role Model” award when I was in Class 12.

The Challenges

There were lots of barriers while growing up... Physical, access, emotional, socio-psychological, financial... My physical abilities were so unpredictable and transient. Cerebral Palsy affected all my physical activities including standing, walking, balancing, coordination, hearing, vision, muscle power, muscle tone and even sensory perceptions. When I was younger, I managed to walk and climb steps with support. But I fell down frequently and always had some injury, cuts, bleeding, fracture, sprains or swelling on the head due to falls. I also had chronic extreme fatigue.

I used to be very upset when I had to miss an opportunity due to access issues or when my body wouldn't support what I wanted to do. I fell into depression during my teens when I couldn't understand my cerebral palsy and the mounting challenges it thrust upon my body and mind daily. But my family patiently supported me through tears, fears, pain and anxiety and motivated me to complete my schooling and college despite the hurdles. It was my

mother who taught me to focus my attention on what I had, rather than thinking about what I did not have. Over the years, focusing on strengths, skills and all the positive things and ignoring the negatives became a habit with me.

Meanwhile, after teenage, it was becoming very difficult to walk or move, and I lost a lot of physical abilities. I hated the wheelchair when I was younger and resisted using it for as long as I could. However, when I got my first job in 2006, I felt I could be independent and more productive if I had a

Achievements galore!



wheelchair. I got my first wheelchair in 2007, one operated by a joy-stick. Likewise, I have wholeheartedly embraced contact lenses for my progressive vision loss and hearing aids for my hearing loss. One shouldn't feel bad about using assistive devices when there is a need. They have definitely liberated me and enabled me to explore life in a more dynamic manner!

Writing



When I was nine years old, I asked my mother a series of questions about the concept of gravity which I had learnt in school that day... "If gravity is the same for everybody, why does it act more on me? Why do I fall down when everybody else is standing? Why do my hands shake all the time? Why do I need support to walk when my friends can walk on their own? Why is my body behaving differently when it looks just like anybody else...?"

My mother smiled calmly and asked me to write down all my questions and we sat and framed the sentences together. Soon, it began to look like a poem. I had just then started reading poetry in school and loved it immensely. My joy knew no bounds when I discovered that I could also create a poem. I was barely ten. Amma gave this to my school newsletter and my first poem was published.

Once I discovered my love for writing, questions like why gravity acted more on me ceased to matter to me. Instead, I fell in love with the art of writing, something that strengthened me from inside out and, later, shaped my identity to a large extent.

I fell in love with the art of writing, something that strengthened me from inside out and later shaped my identity to a large extent.

Career and workplace

I started working soon after completing my B.Com. Like many of my friends, I participated in campus recruitment drives, wrote aptitude tests and attended interviews. I did not expect to clear all rounds of interviews conducted by the bank I had been interviewed by, so I was undecided when I got the job. Nevertheless, I took it up because the bank was so supportive, and I wanted to prove to myself that I could work full time in a regular work environment. But as I had always known, banking was not my passion. I was always fascinated by words and dabbled in writing in my free time. Got published here and there during college days. When I was in trade financing, my boss entrusted me with the task of editing and publishing a daily internal trade



newsletter. Writing gave me such joy which banking did not. So eventually I quit and did my Masters in Communication, following which I worked at a daily newspaper 'The New Indian Express'. During my interview with the daily, the executive editor warned me: "Journalism doesn't pay like banking". I replied that writing would make me a richer person at heart, because I would be happy.

I have no regrets about this shift. Even now, I tell myself how lucky I am to have my passion as my profession!



Sundari with her family

For the last six years, I've been working with HCL Foundation, the CSR division of IT major HCL. I have a demanding work profile which I carry out without any barriers, thanks to a unique work arrangement, and an honest, consistent and constant communication and feedback practice we adopt in my team. I have flexitime and remote working option, which helps me avoid daily commuting. This means a lot, as transportation is still a huge challenge and very expensive for wheelchair users.

My work is very hectic and responsibilities are huge, but my team is very supportive of my special needs. I get plenty of opportunity to travel and my company ensures that I get accessible accommodation and

travel support. All this has enabled me to perform well and give my best at work. My bosses are exceptional leaders who walk the talk when it comes to Equality and Inclusion. I wish other companies and teams have the same disabled-friendly attitude.

Personally, I have not faced much discrimination or explicit negative experiences in public or at workplaces. One reason could be the strong foundation for dignity and self-respect given by my parents, which equipped me to express myself and tell people outright if they discriminate or patronise. Though I have always been a quiet person, I have been very articulate about how I wished to be treated – at school, college,



workplaces and outside. I am not confrontational and don't fight or argue, but I don't compromise on dignity or self-esteem.

But that doesn't mean that discrimination or prejudices do not exist. It's not just the huge staircases that challenge inclusion and equality. The challenges are often subtle.

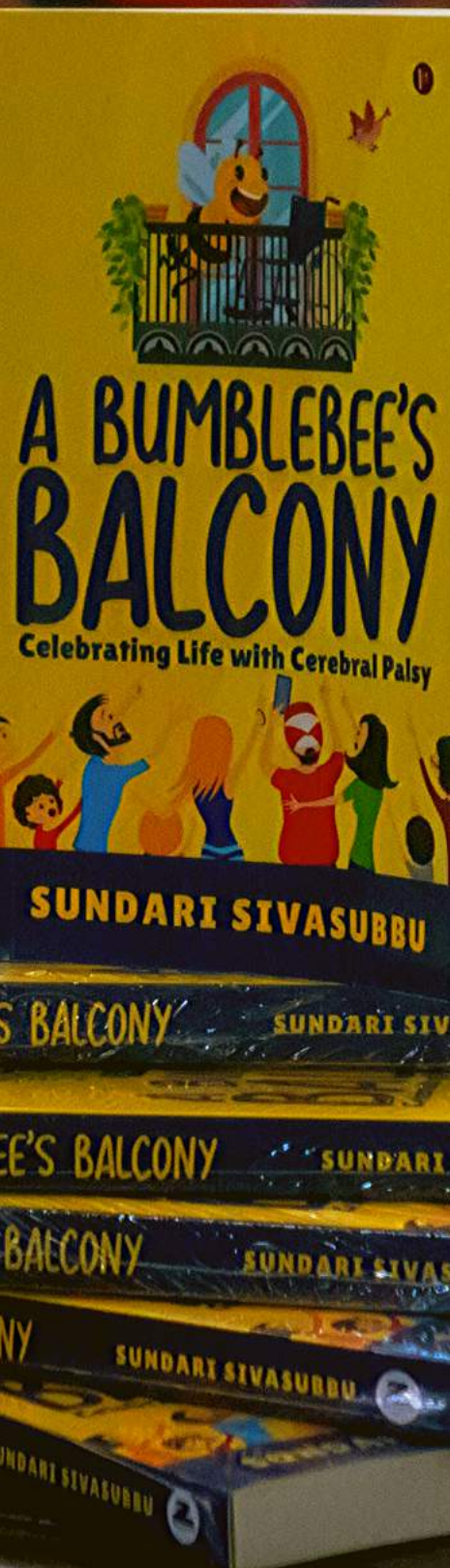
We still have a long way to go to make our public places and workplaces inclusive and equipped to ensure full participation of people with disabilities. It is not enough to hire persons with disabilities because there is a Diversity Policy for hiring. It's also important to train and empower the team to be inclusive in their day-to-day work. Tokenism and charity are also forms of discrimination! We need to work on a basic pedestal of trust and mutual understanding, backed by clear, concise and hands-off communication to understand needs and expectations better, to erase stigma and barriers, and to leverage the situation to the advantage of all involved.



Sundari Sivasubbu is a Senior Communications Specialist with the HCL Foundation and the author of 'A Bumblebee's Balcony'. Sundari began her career in trade financing in a multinational bank at the age of 22, but the lure of vowels, consonants and images was so strong that she left banking to pursue a career in writing and communication. Acquiring a master's degree in communication, she worked at the New Indian Express as a sub-editor and regularly contributed book reviews, wrote articles, features and interviews under art, education, cinema, environment, and health. Now, as a Communication Specialist with HCL Foundation, she brings together her passion for communication and a desire to support vulnerable communities.

Sundari was born with Cerebral Palsy, a neuro-skeletal and muscular condition that limits most of the physical activities and poses several challenges in day-to-day living, including vision problems, hearing challenges, balancing, coordination, muscle power and motor skills. She views these challenges as her 'muse' that inspires her personal, professional and creative journeys.

I choose to adopt a narrative arc for my life which is propelled by Positivity, Possibility & Purpose.



Becoming an author

Around 11 years ago, I had gone to a temple near the beach in Kalakshetra, Besant Nagar, with my cousins. I was 23, had just acquired my wheelchair and was rejoicing in the newfound freedom to move around freely. I noticed a gracious elderly lady observing me from a few paces away. When I smiled at her, she began to walk towards me and we exchanged a few words. She said that her daughter too couldn't walk following an accident, and though she had assistants and a house close to the beach, her daughter never came out of their house. "I wish my daughter would come out and see the world. I wish she was positive and smiling like you. I'm going to tell her about you and try my best", said the lady and left. Her daughter was 50 years old and was still unable to cope with her disability.

I had always wanted to write a memoir. I consciously committed myself to writing it after this incident. I wanted to share my story and tell people like this old lady's daughter that it's ok to be vulnerable, to be angry, to be scared; that I wasn't always smiling or positive. I wanted to share that we can be vulnerable and yet be strong.

When you are on a wheelchair, whether you like it or not, you are constantly being watched by others. And often judged with extreme labels. You are either being snubbed as incapable of leading productive lives, or are being called a role model and inspiration. You are never considered a "normal" person with a normal life.

To change this thinking, it's important to tell stories from within – stories of fear, pain, doubts, confusion, anger, and acceptance from within. My book 'A Bumblebee's Balcony' is just that insider story. It's about dealing with those small moments that threaten to make you want to give up, those minute details of letting go of one's chains and embracing strength and hope. And choosing happiness despite one's circumstances! It is also a tribute to the unconditional love of family and friends. And the transition into a role model. At the outset, the book appears to be a very personal story, tracing one person's or one family's journey. I believe that it's also about the journey of thousands of individuals and their families, their struggles, strength, hope and the indomitable spirit of not giving up. Many a time, we miss opportunities because of society and the thousand and one barriers such as physical, financial, socio-psychological imposed by our "normalcy" and "uniformity" obsessed world. I hope that my book will open conversations into inclusion and push people to be inclusive in whatever they do.

A narrative arc

We all need to have a narrative arc for our lives. I believe that the stories we tell about ourselves, our journey, our work and life's purpose impact our success to a large extent. It begins with what we choose to believe about ourselves. Most of the time, we believe in myths about ourselves, assumptions, damaging misconceptions and incorrect beliefs, and not in our abilities. Why is it that we are never good enough, smart enough or talented enough to follow our heart? Often we have no say in the big things – both good and difficult ones – that happen to us. But we still have control over the small decisions, our everyday attitude, the way we do our work, how we treat others and how we choose to look at what happens to us. I choose to adopt a narrative arc for my life which is propelled by Positivity, Possibility and Purpose. I choose to ditch blaming, bitterness, judgements, prejudices and own my life with all its beauty and flaws. I choose to believe that I am strong, capable and beautiful! And I wish the same for anyone who is reading this:

**Let us be like the Bumblebee and not believe in myths about ourselves.
Let us believe in dreams, spread our wings and just fly! ●**

*Most of the time,
we believe in
myths about
ourselves,
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A BUMBLEBEE'S BALCONY

Author: Sundari Sivasubbu
 Publisher: Notion Press
 No. of Pages: 275



By Hema Vijay

Many of us would have experienced these moments... Scattered pauses that happen during the rush of our lives, especially when we look back at the daydreams of our youth...those glorious passions and ambitions that we nurtured but never actually pursued...held back, as we were, by self-doubt and a sense of inadequacy. Well, 'A Bumblebee's Balcony' is that swig of adrenalin that makes us take off in pursuit of our goals – however enormous or far-fetched or impossible they may seem. It's a true-life account that's an antidote to negativity and hopelessness. Its not just a manual for success, but a manual for successful living.

Coming from Sundari Sivasubbu, a professional writer herself, her language is flawless, vivid and lingers on in your mind. The narration is natural and you get a sense of the setting of the story. It is a delight to relive the old world charm of Srivaikuntam village where she was born in, through her own words, and the intense moments in her life and the lighter ones, her descriptions of her family and their lives, and the ordinary

everyday experiences as well as the extraordinary ones. Her descriptions are equally effective as she takes us through her schooling and the corporate phase of her life in Chennai city.

It's quite incredible how Sundari recounts the early years of her life, including her birth (combination of thoughtful reconstruction and vivid memories), and the interactions of her parents before she was born! That's when you realise that she is not just a gifted writer, but an intuitive one too.

The book takes you through the countless trying situations that a child with cerebral palsy goes through – and the parents too – and how these could be extrapolated to the experiences of those with other disabilities too. The narration infuses empathy in the reader, never sympathy. The lack of even one iota of bitterness and negativity in Sundari's narration, even when she takes us through her toughest moments – leaves a most powerful impact. I, for one, hope it stays on with me and influences my attitudes and behaviour. ●

Civic Sense & INCREDIBLE INDIA



Educated or not, our civic sense has collapsed to an all-time low in current times. Shouldn't we hold a mirror to ourselves and resolve to keep our surroundings as clean as we keep our homes, asks DR. KETNA L MEHTA, Founder Trustee, Nina Foundation.

Even though much of India has a highly educated population, the civic sense of the public in general is appalling. If there is a ranking index for lack of civic sense, India for sure would top this list!

Civic sense is governed by the administration in most western countries. For instance, if dog owners don't pick up their dogs' poop, they are identified and their license for keeping pets is cancelled.

Indians, in general, have a habit of littering, spitting in public places, throwing lit cigarette butts on the streets and even relieving themselves on the road, in broad daylight. Homes are kept spic and span, but garbage is all over the roads, streets, below flyovers, everywhere. The stench in most cities has to be experienced, for the extent of degradation to be believed. It's a common sight everywhere: Terrace water tanks overflowing, leaky old taps wasting water, broken pipelines, streetlights switched on even during the day, remnants of road/bridge construction or repairs left lying around inconveniencing pedestrians. Movie theatres, where tickets cost Rs. 800 plus, transform into garbage dumps with popcorn, spilt food, cans, paper packets and more all over the seats and floors. A country where people

respect food, but actually walk on the same inside the theatre! Do we eat like this at home?

Residential building complexes have paper, banana peels, food packets, tetra packs and even hair strewn all around. Notwithstanding that some of these are swank gated societies where the collective incomes would be substantially high. On an average, women (and some men too!) have long hair and the habit is to comb hair and throw the hair outside the window, which sometimes float into the sambhar being cooked in a (neighbour's) kitchen below. So very unhygienic.

Street food is very popular in most Indian cities, and it's a common sight whereby used paper cups, tissues and more are dumped right next to the vendor. Flies and other insects feed on the leftovers as well as the cart. Overflowing gutters which are left unattended breed mosquitoes and more, causing serious health issues.

“Movie theatres, where tickets cost Rs. 800 plus, transform into garbage dumps with popcorn, spilt food, cans, paper packets and more all over the seats and floors. Do we eat like this at home?”

Throwing unwanted stuff outside the house windows is a most simple way of disposing things, without caring for the passers-by. Throwing or spitting outside moving cars/bus/trains is also common. Paan-chewing is an old habit for many, and the red saliva is spit inside trains, buses, platforms, staircases of buildings and streets. Very soon, we can rename cities like Mumbai as 'the red city', *a la* pink city – Jaipur!

Brushing and touching people while walking on crowded streets, without any respect for others and their personal space; scratching their private parts in public and staring at women and their anatomy is supposed by many men to be their birth-right; taxi drivers adjusting their rear-view mirrors to keep looking at lady passengers and behaving crudely, making them uncomfortable and suspicious; deliberately and inappropriately touching lady passengers' elbows or thighs while seated in a bus or train, and no amount of glares or admonishments correct their pervert behaviour; breaking bus queues, pushing the elderly, children and ladies aside to get into a crowded bus; talking loudly in restaurants

Civic sense as social ethics educational modules will have to be developed and taught to each and every one, from children to senior citizens, as a sustainable best practice to reclaim India's glory.

and parks, chatting loudly on their mobiles and misusing seats meant for the aged or disabled and refusing to offer the seats back – an absolute lack of basic values and civic sense. Local trains are also used as toilets and washrooms sometimes, the dirt and stench making it impossible for others to sit in them.

Shouldn't we be showing respect for other fellow human beings and what our age-old Sanskrit shlokas have taught us – *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* - meaning "the world is one family"?



ABILITYFEST[®] 2019

Audience Speak

These are movies we will remember for a lifetime. How nice of Ability Foundation to bring these to us. Thank you! - anonymous

"Very good films. Each and every film telling a different energy to all. Very very nice things. Thank you a lot"
- K.S Sasthri

All the movies shown are an inspiration piece. Everybody need a little, valuable support. These movies made my day.
- Vidhya

Incredible selection of movies on such important and powerful issue. We need more festivals like this! Truly touching work.
- Craig Jenkins

Incredible selection of movies, on such important and powerful issues. We need more festivals like this. Truly touching work. Excellent depiction, really good message to the society to be inclusive and have empathy to the disabled and bring out the hidden talents in them. Well done.
- Jayachandran K

On screening 'Viswasam' with audio description:
It was a great inclusive effort very well. Very neatly done with brevity. It can easily be part of all movies.
- Bhuvaneshwari

Big thank you. Since last 3 days I am enjoying the most powerful medium 'FILMS'. Some movies truly disturbed and meet the true purpose of festival. This 8th edition once again proves and reminds the society the dynamic combination of courage and determination to achieve and head towards our goal and growth. As a documentary producer, I am sure some of the movies will impact many lives and change with challenges. - Zyed



**UNITED IN
THE FIGHT
AGAINST
CYBER THREATS.**

