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October - December 2015

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Published by Jayshree Raveendran on behalf of Ability Foundation,
27 Fourth Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Chennai 600 020.


Ph: 91 44 2452 0016

Printed at Rathna Offset Printers,
40, Peter's Road, Royapettah, Chennai 600 014
Ph: 91 44 2813 2790 / 2813 1232

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From the Editor's Desk

Friends,

As I write this, my cup of happiness is nearly full. Ability Foundation is 20 years young! A spritely youngster all set to reach out yonder and beyond, towards more milestones, challenges and vision for our country's disability sector.

Way back in 1995 when I initiated Ability Foundation, taking baby steps towards total inclusion in every aspect of life, with more disbelievers than believers, more skeptics than supporters, little did I envisage the strides we'd make.

Time was... when I was asked appalling questions like – “which lame man would want to read about another lame man”; when I spoke about my desire to publish a magazine... to this day, when our magazine has influenced a high court judgment where the learned judge quoted from our magazine while decreeing a ruling in favour of a disabled person and the lines from our magazine were quoted in the Madras High Court journal.

Time was, when we had to talk on a one-is-to-one basis to friends, to employ a person with disability, to today when we have about 225 corporates from every segment of industry, constantly in touch with us, ready to employ persons with disabilities, on basis of qualifications and vacancies.

Time was, when I was told not to make a mockery of disabled persons when we spoke about inclusive and integrated cultural shows as talented equals, to today when commercial television shows periodically feature disabled persons in their prime time.

Time was, when there were only “schools for the deaf, blind, mentally retarded, spastics...” to today, when we have beautifully named schools like Vidya Sagar, Bala Vidyalaya, which don't classify school children with specific disabilities and, we also have some marvelous mainstream inclusive schools like Delhi Public School (North), Bengaluru and colleges like Sathyabama University where the concepts of inclusion and accessibility are genuinely believed in and nurtured.

Time was, when sensitive movies like “Koshish”, “Sparsh”, “Guna”... were few, and far between, to the array of disability related mainstream films we now have in the country: like “Barfi”, “My name is Khan”, “Deiva Thirumagan”, “Mozhi”, “Margarita with a straw” and more: commercial blockbusters all.

Time was, when there was no Persons with Disabilities Act and, when there was, it remained unimplemented to today, when we have spelt all our vision in the new Rights of Persons with Disabilities bill waiting in the wings, to be passed in parliament.



Time was, when wheelchair users rued the fact that every dress to be worn was a chore to wear, to today, when we have the National Institute of Fashion Technology thinking out of the box, on elegant accessible clothing.

Time was, when to be a person with disability meant that our whole world was an oyster, and time is... when we have in our midst, daredevils like Navin Gulia, Sai Prasad, Divyanshu Ganatra, Preeti... who are not merely role models for other disabled persons, but for the whole country and humanity as well.

Time was, when a blind person had to become either a music teacher or an English professor. And time is when we have a Beno Zephine in our midst as a Foreign Service officer.

Today, the word “inclusion” has become the buzz word. Even those who do not really understand the true context of the word, use it anyway. So how do we nurture the seeds of yesterday that have become young plants today, to grow to be the mighty the oaks of tomorrow? These were the points thrashed out at IncludAbility20 – our national level inclusive summit, which forms the cover feature of this issue.

And close on heels of includAbility20 followed our 6th edition of AbilityFest: India International Disability Film Fest... continuously monitored and curated by, none other than Sri P. K. Nair, the much respected stalwart of the film industry.

It is our enthusiasm and passion that drives us at Ability Foundation, from the very first day, to this day of our 20th year. Our striving continues towards an equal society where every man, woman and child with disability will receive his/her due. To walk hand in hand. To work shoulder to shoulder. As equals.

Read on about all this and more - in this issue of “Success & ABILITY” – a magazine, that is, as with the Foundation, 20 years young.

I eagerly await your views.

Jayshree Raveendran





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NEWS & NOTES

‘On-line On-site’ to aid persons with disability

How is ‘Digital India’ transforming the disability sector? ‘On-line On-site’ is one good example.

Replacing the age old manual registration process, the ‘On-line On-Site’ registration system will bring absolute transparency in the implementation of ADIP and ADIP-SSA schemes of the Government of India for providing assistive aids and appliances to persons with disabilities and children with special needs across the country, according to a statement from the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Minister, Thawar Chand Gehlot.

The ‘On-line On-Site’ beneficiaries registration system is an initiative taken up by ALIMCO, as part of the Digital India campaign. The details of online registered beneficiaries with their photograph will be uploaded immediately in the official website of ALIMCO during the assessment and will be accessible to the public. Moreover, beneficiaries will also be updated about the information on the distribution camp through mobile SMS service, the statement said.



Source: Economic Times



LIFTWARE

A revolutionary device invented by Lift Labs, which helps people with Parkinsons and other tremor related diseases to eat their food without spilling, making it a comfortable experience. Lift Labs was recently purchased by the Life Sciences wing of Google, Google X labs, which is renowned for its life saving inventions like the anti-ageing drug Calico and the famous Google Lens which measures the glucose levels in diabetics with the help of their tears.

Liftware is now available worldwide. The Liftware standard kit consists of a stabilizer and a soup spoon. Google also offers a fork and a spoon for daily use which will can be bought separately. A charging dock is also provided. This device has been a boon for so many people in need of the comfort it offers.

Source: enabled.in



CENTRAL SECTOR SCHEME

offering financial assistance for skill training

Improving vocational training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities is a critical element for enhancing the quality of life both for the individual with disability and the family.

In spite of the existence of various Government acts, plans and institutions like the National Skill Development Corporation and National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC), there is an alarming lacuna in vocational training facilities that are being offered to the disabled in rural areas.

To address this gap and introduce a holistic need based skill development programme, the Department of Persons with Disabilities has prepared a National Action Plan for Skill Training of Persons with Disabilities. The proposed plan will have a project monitoring unit, training facilitators including NGOs, private training institutions, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and the private sector.

The scheme will help skill building of five lakh persons with disabilities and create 200 skill development clusters across the nation. Persons with disabilities with 40% and above disability will be eligible to be covered under this scheme, provided they have not benefitted from any other government sponsored skill development program. 30% of the seats are reserved for women.

Source: Enabled.in

Accessibility Campaign

What if the Government takes the lead in championing accessibility by enforcing Acts and is accountable for its targets?

The Government's new initiative includes the conversion of 4,800 key buildings, all international airports, 75 railway stations, 25 percent of public transport buses and 3000 public-centric websites into disabled friendly services by July next year.

Under its Accessible India campaign, which is divided into three components: Accessible Environment, Transport and Information & Communication Accessibility, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment will conduct an access-audit of at least 100 important government buildings in 48 cities (as identified by the State Governments) and convert them into fully accessible infrastructure by July, 2016.

The second section of the campaign will cover public transportation. While all international airports are to be made accessible by July 2016, domestic airports will be actioned by July 2019. A1, A and B categories of railway stations, which are 75 in number will become disabled friendly by the same period.

For increased access to information, 3,000 out of 6,000 people-centric websites, including passport services will be made accessible, thereby aligning with the relevant International Organization for Standardization.

Source: Zee News



A hands free mouse, for internet access.

A 16-year-old Coimbatore boy is among the regional finalists of the Google Science Fair which attracts thousands of applications from all over the world.

Nishanth's inspiration came from a visit to a local home for people with disabilities on his birthday. They were unable to use computers which he felt was a necessity and the alternative technologies that were available were as expensive as \$1,000.

His 'hands-free mouse,' made with off-the-shelf parts performs all the functions of an optical mouse. The prototype which he calls as Human Interface Device (HID) mouse, uses an IMU for tracking head-movement and a sound/camera sensor for breath/blink input for mouse clicks. This is a much cheaper option to the existing alternatives and will grant computer access to thousands of people with disabilities who cannot use their hands which will cost about 50 times less (US \$21.91).

He says its ease-of-use will let people learn it in no time and enable them to get better jobs, access the internet and make their lives better.

Source: The Hindu

STOP PRESS



It is with a deep sense of sorrow that we share with our readers the demise of Shri Chidambaranathan, one of our country's first and foremost disability activists and campaigners, who toiled relentlessly for education, self-employment and access for all persons with disabilities. Initiating the Federation of Tamil Nadu Differently Abled Associations and going on to create a vast network of disabled persons throughout TamilNadu, he will always be remembered for his gentle persuasiveness and nerves of steel which helped countless persons to gain technical literacy and livelihood throughout the State.



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A season of celebration...



includAbility20

20 years. 20 years of the Persons with Disabilities Act. 20 years of Ability Foundation. 20 years of intensive dialogues on disability. 20 years of bringing in the cross-disability mentality. 20 years of drilling the concept of inclusion, access and equitable opportunities... unheard of words for the disability sector (mind you, there was not even such a thing as a disability sector, back then). What were the years like? What are they like now? And what can we look forward to in the next 20 years? This in a nutshell, formed the gist of includAbility20 - a national level inclusive summit that was held to mark 20 years of Ability Foundation. It proved to be a scintillating evening, to say the least...

A season of celebration...



Yashasvini Rajeshwar

The Big Indian Celebration

To say that the atmosphere was electric, could well be the understatement of the last two decades! The last two decades have seen the establishment of Ability Foundation, its growth from strength to strength as it cemented its position while working towards making the world more inclusive, disabled persons more empowered, and the public, more aware. Twenty years of work, hundreds of man hours of effort and thousands of people impacted; that was what was being celebrated at *includAbility20*.

As the clock raced to 4 O'clock, the mad frenzy of organizing, coordinating and ensuring that everything was done just right, gave way to a calm, quiet sense of expectation. Celebrities from various disciplines trickled into the room – from entertainment, administration, advertising, corporate, literature, education and everything else you could think of. The babble of conversation reached a crescendo overcoming barriers of language. True to the belief of Manju Arif, Principal DPS (North) Bengaluru, that “those who use sign or read Braille just speak a language that I don’t”, The Park Hotel was a linguistic paradise that day.

includAbility20 was a milestone in the history of Ability Foundation. Just as the team and their supporters took stock of all their achievements – the milestones that had been crossed and every success that had come their way – there was an unwavering focus on new things that had to happen, milestones that still await and new successes to be celebrated. From wheelchair users who considered dressing as a chore, to hosting a show for accessible fashion; from being discouraged when launching the magazine to contributing to a High Court Judgement; from not knowing

how to reach out to the disabled community to watching the journey of the country's first blind IFS officer – the officers and volunteers at Ability Foundation have seen it all.

It was on May 19th, 1995 when Ability Foundation was registered and Jayshree Raveendran decided to make her dream a reality: of introducing inclusion to everyday vocabulary and transforming it into a way of life. September 27th, 2015 was proof of how far her dream had spread. With her that day were the principal of an inclusive school (DPS North, Bengaluru), the director of an inclusive college (Sathyabama University), the representative of an inclusive multinational corporation (JP Morgan Chase) and diverse from the world of media celebrities who supported the cause. But perhaps, more importantly, there were role models who had walked the talk, individuals who had not let blindness stop them from paragliding, cerebral palsy be a deterrent to realising the corporate dream, deafness be a hurdle to benefitting from mainstream education or a wheelchair be a barrier to a life in research. The day was a celebration of spirit, of individuals committed to creating a change in every way they could.

includAbility20 began as a celebration of a professional organization. Yet, the room was filled with banter, full throated laughter at shared memories recollected, and embarrassments relived. There were squeals and smiles and hugs all around, as old friends caught up on the twenty years gone by.

This could have been a summary of who said what. I could've spun a paragraph from Mariazeena Johnson announcing the availability of Sathyabama University infrastructure to whoever Ability Foundation recommended. I could have written about the agreement that disability is not homogenous and education is the key to creating awareness. I could have told you of Kanika Agarwal's wish that every gathering has an interpreter and teleprompter to make it accessible, or Siddharth Taneja's struggle and triumph over writing his board exams with his toes. But I didn't, partly because each of these heroes deserves their own stories and partly because includAbility20 was more than just individuals. It was the celebration of a family, of Jayshree *didi* and Janaki *akka* and everyone else who had forged relationships and paved roads where none had existed for twenty years. includAbility20 celebrated Ability Foundation. The room was filled, not with celebrities, but with cheerleaders.

PANELISTS (L to R): Sruti Mohapatra, Prahlad Kakar, Jaya Bachchan, Divyanshu Ganatra, Revathy



A season of celebration...



Meera Balachander

IncludAbility 20

First there was darkness. And primordial silence.

And a voice said, "let there be light."

A beam appeared.

And a voice made itself heard.

An Amazon appeared, armed with the beam, the voice and imagination.

And determination.

She waved her beam and lo! changes happened!

The one woman army Jayshree, was now merged in a veritable battalion and the lone voice, now a confluence of rich ideas, opposing views, laughter and possibilities.

Having been with Ability Foundation for a long time, having shared Jayshree's vision for her organization, her baby steps, even though from long distance, I was taken in by the cosy, informal atmosphere of includAbility20, with its sangamam of eminence, think-tank, achievers and facilitators.

'She thinks up something and she just gets it done,' the words of Jayshree's mother, during our first meeting, ring afresh in my ears. And how!

As the panel discusses (yet more) ways of bringing into the (lime) light disability issues, my mind wonders how a chance introduction

to a nascent *Success & ABILITY* magazine by a writer cousin, became a relationship for life. How I, whose writing skills were until then, limited to guiding my children in their school projects, became the Mumbai correspondent for a magazine. How and what would I even write about? That phase of self-doubt is blurry, but presto! There I was, before the computer, for the daily morning energy chat with Jayshree! It was a gradual initiation into a new world, not only of disability issues, but of trust and hope from a visionary! An ad I gave in a Mumbai daily about Ability Foundation brought to me several exceptional friends with fierce integrity and sense of purpose. And then came unearthed, the many remarkable persons with disabilities who left me awed: a wheelchair-user oncologist, a mouth painter with cerebral palsy, a blind chess player, and I got to visit places like The Helen Keller Institute, The Ali Yavar Jung Institute, The Spastics Society... As she put forth her idea of instituting the Ability Awards, I instinctively scouted for the first recipients. If her (impossibly) high standards of selection seemed daunting at first, it was amazing to discover that matching recipients existed indeed! And their number has only grown exponentially since then. I remember the day spent with my dedicated friend Chittaranjan, visiting three award nominees in Mumbai, trying to capture the salient features of their daily life.

Which lame man would want to read another lame man's story? I would not know how Jayshree answered this one from the first skeptic, but 'lame' itself is obsoletely lame considering that we have been shown neck down paralysed individuals driving cars, swimming and shaping others' lives, as first speaker Sivasankari described the awe-inspiring, Ramakrishnan whom she featured in the first issue of "*Success & ABILITY*".

Jayshree and art were never ever apart and the doubting Thomases were given fitting replies when the exquisite blending of canvas, rhythm and melody, breaking the dis-ability border, enhanced the Award functions, year after year. I remember keenly watching a dance by a large group at one such function and trying to distinguish the visually impaired dancers from the sighted ones! Equally strongly etched in the mind is the inclusive fashion show when celebs walked the ramp with disabled models.

PANELISTS (L to R): Akhil S. Paul, Mariazeena Johnson, Manju Arif, R C Meena, N K Ranganath, Tanveer Alam, Kanika Agarwal, Siddharth Taneja



A season of celebration...

Divyanshu, whom I met as a young man who had lost his sight not very long back then, has the audience in splits over his stories. Blind in no longer just music and dance, it is counselling, it is leading others – on level ground and mountains! It is even flying independently! Or sky-diving! Blind is in fact a truly dumb word now, considering that the likes of Beno Zephine have graced the Indian disability scene. The media coverage that Beno's stunning selection as India's first blind Foreign Service officer comes to my mind. The media didn't stint over splashing her achievements. As Beno herself said in an interview, "the disabled have to be super achievers to get noticed and spoken about". Even as panelists discuss the possibilities of dedicated columns for disability issues in publications, I recall how while, tiling Beno's success, a few other persons with disabilities got written about in the newspapers. There were one or two remarkable achievers who wanted to emulate Beno but then, there were also some who were not given their due.

Public memory is as short as the media chooses to let it be. In the papers today, gone with the wind tomorrow. I ask a journalist friend how often disability issues are written about in her mainstream newspaper. Commemorative occasions, remarkable achievements mainly, she says, or else a sporadic splash about a sensational happening. It is when a visiting friend sits totally engrossed in *Success & ABILITY*, that the true import of this twenty year old baby(e) of Jayshree's hits home.

Traders refuse to allow ramp space for disabled people, goes a recent news article. And I see new, beautiful pavements with gentle slopes at the ends. I imagine a young mother wheeling her child for a small outing. Paraplegic denied scribe, says another headline. Blind lawyer reinstated, says another. Are we on a treadmill? Back and forth, back and forth?

Over to Ability Foundation, to make it all one steady march forward.

TEAM ABILITY (L to R): Devi Priya, S. Balaji, G. Ramachandran, Deepa Udday Kumar, Radhika Rammoorthy, Jayshree Raveendran, Janaki Pillai, Bharathi Sekhar, Lalitha Ganesh, Indira Ramesh, Sathya Ganapathi, Pavithra Parandhaman, Khyati Goswami.





Dr Sruti Mohapatra
Chief Executive, Swabhiman

Straight from the heart ...

From our earliest days as disability activists, diversity and inclusion have been at the heart of all our dialogues. includAbility20 was where I relived it. A small inclusive planet kept revolving around the Sun for a couple of hours over laughter and tears. There were hugs, a standing ovation and loud cheers, not necessarily always vocal – signs too spoke them all.

Seeing the next generation of persons with disabilities, their courage, their daring, their mirth and their desire to live life to the hilt - filled me with hope and happiness.

For me, meeting one of the greatest actors on celluloid Ms Jaya Bachchan, former Chief Election Commissioner Mr Navin Chawla, Ad Guru Mr Prahlad Kakar and many others was both a surprise and also an absolute delight. Where do you find celebrities and senior bureaucrats in disability dialogues? You see them in the inaugural session - lighting lamps, receiving a bouquet and giving a condescending speech. You don't see them amidst you – sharing the pain of your growing up years, concerned over the ridicule of your unclear speech or unusual gait, or laughing unbound over your humorous narratives.

We did all that and more in those few hours, in a packed conference hall at Park Hotel, in Chennai.

Thank you Jayshree!



Sivasankari

Zameer with his interpreter:

Akhil Paul

Siddharth Jayakumar

Navin Chawla



Sandeep Kanabar

Senior Software Engineer, Symantec

I imagine stepping into a 'mind spa' and walking out rejuvenated, supercharged and feeling like a 20 year old! That's the incredible experience I had on the evening of 27th of September, 2015, when I got an opportunity to be a part of includAbility20.

Every human, whether non-disabled or disabled, yearns for love from within and one of the aspects of love is the feeling of being 'included'. With 'Inclusion' as its core theme, the summit witnessed an exchange of some resolute ideas and heart-touching experiences at the podium. I was touched to the core when one of the panelists who happens to be the Principal of a reputed school, narrated her account of recruiting an amazing girl with 'mind vision' in her school to teach those with normal vision! What a beautiful example of inclusion! How I wish many more would follow her footsteps. It was heartening to hear MDs and CEOs of MNCs going all out to recruit disabled persons in large numbers and asserting that their attrition rate is pretty low and skill set is extremely high –a true example of judging a person purely by his/her ability. When the director of a highly acclaimed University went out of her way to reserve seats in every faculty for meritorious students with disabilities, even providing them full scholarship and boarding, my heart fluttered with utmost gratitude. Yet another young fellow stirred my dormant dreams when he spoke from his heart saying, "Take one step and miracles will happen." Yes, miracles do happen when one takes the most difficult first step, when one fights the fears that hold one down. As they say, the real battles are fought within the mind!

The second part of the summit transported me to an altogether different level from initial tears, to amazement, to finally spirited laughter. I was heart-broken to hear how the world of a sweet and beautiful girl full of life and about-to-be-married had turned upside down in a fatal accident that left her on a wheelchair. And yet, she emerged victorious, stronger, enriching hundreds of lives en-route and achieving a Doctorate and founding her own NGO. Fret not about the fall you had but just bounce back so hard that life itself gets amazed at you, her story seemed to tell me. And then... a tall and handsome guy, who reminded me of Hrithik Roshan had the entire audience roaring with laughter at his witty anecdotes, even making the versatile Jaya Bachchan blush! Seeing his face radiating such a sublime

confidence, grace and poise left me in awe. When he shared his experiences of flying solo overcoming his visual challenges, it made my heart fly into dreamland, wanting to go all out and achieve the countless dreams that I had shut doors to. Full of life and vigour, his story was all about 'play-hard' and not 'work-hard' because work was 'play' for him. What a fantastic 'karma yogi'! To top it all, Revathy, Prahlad Kakar and Jaya Bachchan stirred my heart with wonderful insights on 'inclusive society'.

includAbility20 was one of most august assemblies I've ever been privy to and I long for the day when 'inclusion' becomes the norm rather than exception.

Happy 20th B'day to Ability Foundation! No wonder it made me feel like a 20 year old!



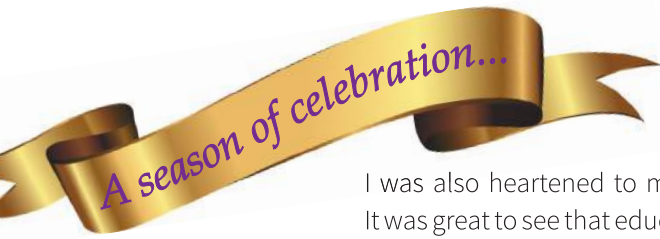
Tanveer Alam

Managing Director,
Consumer Banking
(Retail & Business),
JP Morgan Chase

Over the last few years, at JP Morgan Chase India, we have been on a journey to make our organization more inclusive for disabled persons. Like many other journeys of significance, this journey too has been made possible through the support of key partners. Ability Foundation has been an important partner on this journey. My recent visit to Chennai was an eventful one. includAbility20 was an outstanding opportunity for me to spend some time with Ability Foundation that Jayshree Raveendran has nurtured over the last twenty years. It was great to see so many supporters of the organization come out in full force to celebrate the anniversary event.

The event was an opportunity of great inspiration. Most of the inspiration came from listening to stories of triumph from those who didn't let their disabilities come in the way of their immense abilities, to make a difference.

The stories of Kanika Agarwal, Divyanshu Ganatra, Siddharth Jayakumar, Siddharth Taneja, Sandeep Kanabar must be heard by everyone who leads a business today for it will change their perspective on "value creation" by employees and especially by "employees with a disability". I am a strong believer in a diverse workplace for its strong benefits for the business and being at includAbility20 fortified that belief so much more.



I was also heartened to meet educationists like Dr Mariazeena Johnson and Manju Arif. It was great to see that educationists like them are trying to change the view of disability and the support for it at the grassroots level. I would like to see more educational institutions and their leaders join them in this pursuit. Education is a great leveler and this change can bring about a revolution in India's support to its citizens with a disability.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day, for it solidified my resolve to help build a more diverse organization, gave me the inspiration to take bolder steps and above all got me introduced to so many individuals who inspire you through their stories and actions. I am thankful to Jayshree for making me part of this event and congratulate her and the entire Ability Foundation team on this milestone. I hope that they continue to gain momentum on this journey and continue to help make India become a more diverse and inclusive country.



N K Ranganath
CEO, Grundfos India

To me, Ability Foundation has become synonymous with a movement that is helping ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to live, work and thrive in our society.

Most of the films screened at the AbilityFest sensitises people on, not just the physical, but also the emotional needs of persons with disabilities. These issues really need a spotlight and that is probably why the AbilityFest is different and significant.

Participating in includAbility20 Summit is our small way of identifying with this cause as we at Grundfos are extremely conscious about inclusiveness and the need to ensure that disabled people are treated with the dignity they deserve by creating opportunities for them to be contributors.

We, as a society, are witnessing a sea change in the attitudes of people towards persons with disabilities. I reckon it is primarily due to the interventions of organisations such as Ability Foundation. As they say small drops eventually make an ocean. Ability Foundation however is not a small drop; it has been a large wave that has the potential to turn change the world for the better for the millions of disabled people in the country.



Kanika Agarwal
Executive, V-shesh, Mumbai

It was just a usual weekday. After a long day I came home and opened my personal mailbox only to see an unusual kind of mail waiting for me. It was a mail from Madan Sir (Prof. Madan Vasishtha from Gallaudet University) asking me to join a conference to be held in Chennai. However, much to his disappointment, I was more skeptical than excited. I asked him all sorts of questions only to get an assurance that unlike my past experiences, this one would be 'different'. Though I agreed, the doubts and the skepticism in my mind wouldn't go away! Determined to make the most of it, I started thinking of it in a positive way. At the same time, I was even prepared to raise hell, should I feel excluded, as I had always felt in the past. But of course, I barely had any idea what fate had in store for me.

As D-Day came closer, I felt my anxiety increasing. The assurances seemed bleak, given my past experiences. To know more about the Summit, I started bombarding Mrs. Jayshree Raveendran, Executive Director of Ability Foundation, with all sorts of questions and true to her reputation, she gave me substantial responses, dispelling my doubts. Then came another surprise - the list of the panelists! When I broke the news to my family, my mother too was completely enthused. She just smiled and smiled. More than anything it was the smile and pat on my back from my sister, that further accelerated the excitement of attending the event.

First step into the hotel, and all my apprehensions had dissipated. The warm smile and welcome from the Ability officials and staff allayed my fears greatly. The panel was completely inspiring. It consisted of a forum of both disabled and non-disabled professionals who addressed the gathering with utmost sensitivity. The Summit became more engrossing as each one of them discussed how various disabilities can be integrated into society. While I actually got to learn a lot from the experiences of the speakers, I couldn't help but notice how little people understood about deafness!

At the conference, while I was taken aback by the fact that Sathyabama University had taken such a big step towards inclusivity (by providing 50 seats for students with disabilities with complete scholarship), I doubted if these students could really find an inclusive environment in the college. However, undoubtedly, the college has initiated the most effective means of inclusion for the deaf by providing an interpreter for lectures.



Though this was my first experience as a panelist, people seem to have been pretty impressed. Each and every person working in the field of disability mentioned how we could be a source of strength to so many of my kind and how it was the duty of people like us to lead the way for the others. A special request by Mr. Navin Chawla, former Election Commissioner of India, to come and teach the deaf kids in his school was the one thing I will never forget.

Keeping its audience in mind, Ability Foundation had ensured that the auditorium was completely accessible to all forms of disabilities. While ramps eased the movement for wheel-chair users, the presence of an interpreter facilitated translations of the discussions into the language of the deaf (like me). For other deaf/hard of hearing people (like Sandeep Kanabar) who knew no sign language, a written script of the discussion was provided with an onscreen display. This showed how well Ability Foundation understood its people and cared for them.

The four-day movie fest: AbilityFEST that followed, was equally enthralling. The movies were touching and reflected the lives of disabled people and the effect on their family and friends. Here again Ability Foundation saw to the little details - ramps at the entrances, captioned movies, interpreters for all the speeches... the event was completely inclusive, accessible as well as entertaining.



Siddharth Taneja

QA Engineer, Make My Trip

Finding the glory of God in helping someone and sustaining it with faith is very difficult. Helping others to a certain extent is a joy but to an extent only. At the end of the day we become selfish, we think about ourselves only. But those who wish to help others lead a happy life are great personalities who are born on earth, one of the greatest examples being Mother Teresa. And this is also what Ability Foundation has been doing for the past 20 years. All the members of this Foundation are incessantly helping people with disabilities become independent, to make them stand on their feet and to help

them realise their true worth. When we are able to face our struggles successfully, we feel proud. But Ability Foundation has focussed on a vulnerable, neglected section of society and helped make them independent. This is the ultimate proud moment when you progress not just individually, but a society as a whole.

I still recall when all the schools in my home town rejected me just because the parents of other students were uncomfortable. They could not digest the fact that I was studying and sharing the same class with their “perfect” kids. This was because they didn’t consider me a part of their society . Now, just a few days I ago participated in includAbility20 where the key focus was to create an inclusive society where people with and without disabilities will work together. This shows that we have come a long way although the finish line is yet to come.

Whenever there is a mail from Ability Foundation in my inbox I get excited in the hope that here comes a new opportunity for me. This time I went to Chennai to be part of a discussion panel on inclusive society and once again I got a chance to meet some exceptional people. The best part was when I got a standing ovation for the words I delivered. Meeting people like Siddharth, Divyanshu and others was a lifetime experience for me. Above all getting words of praise from Jaya Bachchan and Prahlad Kakar was like a dream come true. I am a big admirer of Amitabh Bachchan and Harivansh Rai Bachchan. One of the poems of Harivansh Rai Bachchan, “Madhushala” is my all-time favourite. The one thing or must I say the life changing thing for me, was meeting Navin Chawla and receiving his novel from his hands. Imagine... I got the book from the hands of the person who had written it! It was the best moment. I mean I just can’t explain the feeling using words, a mere combination of alphabets.

The most promising part of the event was to see the changing mindset of society towards disabled people. This is the need of the hour. Educators promised to teach more and more disabled people and work for an inclusive society. Government representatives also promised to launch new policies and many successful disabled people were there, who shared their experiences and inspired others. Hope that we will be able to see these promises actually finding their way.

And I so wish that Ability Foundation has many more energetic and enthusiastic members to help people at large. May God bless us all and keep us in His heart.



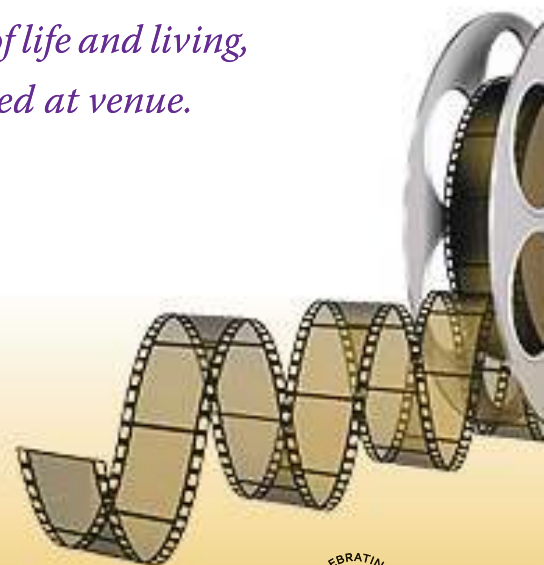
The Hans Foundation provides holistic and integrated support services to empower persons with disabilities across age groups, irrespective of the nature of disability, to maximize their potential and become self-reliant, while working to pave the way for a more inclusive eco system.



ABILITYFEST[®] 2015

INDIA INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY FILM FESTIVAL

Close on the heels of includAbility20, followed the sixth edition of AbilityFEST: India International Disability Film Fest. World cinema by, with, and about, people with disabilities. At Chennai's elite multiplex cinema: Sathyam Cinemas. Four full days of accessible movies, laughter, tears, excited chatter of the noisy and the silent kind. Scenes of life and living, eclectic and electric. Humanity captured at venue.



A season of celebration...



Yashasvini Rajeshwar

Conversation, discussion, debate

AbilityFEST is a cause for anticipation, celebration and camaraderie. It is, without doubt, an event worth marking on your calendars and then scheduling everything else around it. It is a four day bonanza of all things inclusive, bringing you path-breaking movies from all around the world; movies that otherwise in all likelihood will neither hit your TV sets nor your theatre screens. Cinema from Iran, Iraq, Australia, USA, UK and Germany as well as little-known directors and ventures from India, AbilityFEST has consistently shown us there is one place to find them all.

This year was no different. So much so, that I am still struggling to find the right superlatives that I haven't already used before. Eye-opening? Awe-inspiring? Inspiring? Everything has been used not once but multiple times before. Perhaps it would be sufficient to reassert it all again.

The inaugural session saw Kalki Koechlin, popular movie star and vocal supporter of multiple causes, fly down to Chennai to flag off the Fest. Though she couldn't stay longer, the next day brought with it, the screening of the hit movie, Margarita with a Straw. The story of a girl with cerebral palsy discovering herself, Kalki

ABILITYFEST® 2015

shared screen space with none other than Ability's own Revathy, who acted as her mother. The screening itself was followed by a discussion with Revathy and Nilesh, the co-writer and co-director of the film. "AbilityFEST needs to be treated like a temple," Nilesh announced. "We need to spread the word, enter families and work together to make this a success." Much like the work of the Foundation, Nilesh went on to speak of how the movie sought to be the mediator of conversation, helping everyone cross the bridge of acceptance.

Questions of parenthood and the difficult decisions that come with the knowledge of serious birth defects in their unborn child; a sneak peek into the world of blind chess champions; the journey of two autistic men as they travel the world – all these journeys came alive on the big screen at SPI Cinemas. The audience was taken on a rollercoaster ride, all willing parties on a voyage of smiles and laughter, followed closely by pin drop silence and the occasional tear. Whoever said movies were merely about entertainment evidently hadn't come to an AbilityFEST, where movies are stories, experiences and discoveries.

With active engagement from the audience and the ability to meet these storytellers upclose, AbilityFEST provided the platform for individuals from diverse backgrounds to interact, exchange stories, brainstorm ideas, plan change. Prahlad Kakar was asked if his company would support documentary films on disabled heroes. Nilesh was asked when he would direct the next movie focusing on disability and whether he'd consider casting a person with disability in the lead role.

Over four days, the future was dreamt of, the past was reminisced. Ability Foundation once again shone at what it does best - providing an arena for conversation, discussion and debate.

L to R: P K Nair; Jayshree Raveendran, Neha Deepak, Mahdi Zare, Kalki Koechlin, Prahlad Kakar.



A season of celebration...



Suchitra Iyappa

How often does one get to watch a panorama of powerful global cinema on inclusivity and disability for four full days... back to back films that speak a universal language of the need to belong, to be accepted, to be respected and to be given opportunities like the rest of mankind?

The 6th edition of AbilityFEST was back, showcasing films that told tales of love and longing, grit and determination, compassion and courage, friendship and loneliness and the ability to co-exist with dignity in a hostile world. However, what was evident was that, irrespective of whether the film came from the technologically advanced West or family-centric East, the issues surrounding disability were all too familiar global issues.

The genres were varied. *"iWitness"* was a psychological thriller while *"The Hyperglot"* with its articulate protagonist brought a smile to every face. The American film *"A Whole Lott More"* examined the wider world of employment options for people with disabilities, even as the poignant Iranian films dealt with families embracing a loved one's differing abilities.

India's *"Algorithms"*, a documentary on the thriving but little known world of blind chess in the country, was an eye opener. Shonali Bose's mainstream film *"Margarita With a Straw"* sensitively portrayed the life of a young girl, Laila, affected by cerebral palsy trying to come to terms with her sexuality. The film, with audio description for the first time in India, was acclaimed by the audience for its bold theme and treatment, clearly a milestone in Indian cinema.

In a stimulating interactive discussion after the screening, the co-director of *"Margarita With a Straw"*, Nilesh Maniyar and actress Revathy, who essayed the role of the mother, spoke about the inspiration, groundwork and aspirations for the film.

In making a film dealing with the sexuality of disabled people, they hoped to create a platform to address issues confronting them and present them as people who have the same emotions, insecurities and relationships as anyone else.

P K Nair, Festival Director, film archivist and scholar, rues the fact that honest films like *"Margarita With a Straw"* are few and far between in a country that produces more than 1000 films a year. "Unless more and more film makers come forward to tackle sensitive subjects, disabled people will always remain an enigma," he said. He also lauded the films screened at this years festival. Having tied up with "The Other Festival" of Australia, we have a good selection on offer for the public" he said.

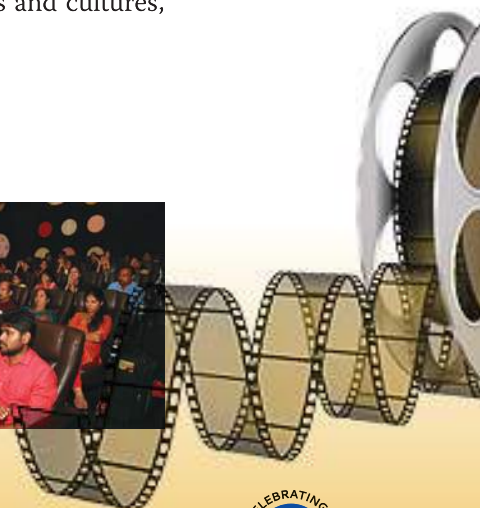
The atmosphere at Sathyam Cinemas, the venue for the festival, was electric. The volunteers from Sathyabama University were on their toes, steering wheelchairs, lending a hand to the blind and handing out screening schedules. The audience was inspired... special educators, people with disabilities and the film loving Chennai public interested in exploring the subject through world cinema.

Chandra who is deaf, signs animatedly when asked what her favourite films were. Leaving her household chores she has made sure she has watched every film at the festival. "The American film (*Wretches and Jabberers*) about the autistic duo inspires me to travel and explore the world", she says.

The deaf students from Presidency College were full of praise for the subtitles and the exposure they have got into a world of international films. "Foreign films are so innovative and tackle so many diverse aspects of disability. Why can't we make films like this in India?," questions Jabes Jabakumar.

In a movie crazy nation like India, AbilityFEST has been a successful platform for sensitizing the common man on the issues of disability and inclusion through the most effective medium of communication: cinema. The festival has given people the opportunity of watching hand-picked films, many of which are award winning, from diverse countries and cultures, each with its own challenges, social mores and societal structures.

Section of audience.



A season of celebration...

By providing access in a disabled friendly venue and through techniques like captioning and audio description people with and without disabilities were able to experience the magic of the movies together. Laughing, shedding a tear, cheering, sitting shoulder to shoulder and clapping in unison. Just like its meant to be.



60 Seconds Jo Fame!®

All India One Minute Film Competition On Disability

This competition is part of Ability Foundation's effort to harness the creative potential of people across the country. The theme this year was 'Coming together - hand in hand'. Of the 206 entries received from 19 states across India, 27 films were short listed for viewing by the jury. The jury this year was chaired by Ms Jaya Bachchan. The other members of the inclusive jury were Mr Prahlad Kakar, director A.L.Vijay, Dr Sruti Mohapatra and Mr Justin Jesudas. The prizes were announced and presented at the concluding function of AbilityFEST 2015.

The winners received cheques for rupees one lakh, seventy five thousand and fifty thousand respectively, in addition to certificates and citations signed by the eminent jury.



Vimal Raj,

Winner, First prize - "Along With Me"

"It's been an amazing experience to win the Best Film award in the AbilityFEST 2015. The best thing about this award was that I was never told or intimated that I had won the first prize until the last moment when my film was screened, My God, it was a dazzling, mind blowing happiness that I felt! It was really one of the best moments of my life and career. I will cherish the moment for my entire life. It was the first award I've received after I'd stepped into the visual medium and so it will always be close to my heart. This award has given me more respect and recognition from my friends, family and people I meet from the media industry. It has also given me the confidence that I am on the right path to achieving my goals and fulfilling my ambition of becoming a successful, future film director."



Arikarasudhan,

Winner, Second Prize - "Bus"

"The contest was a great learning experience. I started with a "let's-help-disabled-people" concept. But the process of interaction with disabled students made me reconsider my thoughts on disability issues and the very concept of my video."

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Ragesh Vijay,

Winner: Third Prize - "Veekshanam" (Perspective)

"When I heard that my film Veekshanam had won the third prize, I was really surprised because it was a big birthday gift from Ability Foundation on 1 October! I will never forget this day: it was not only a gift, but a national level of acceptance of my ability."

Prajin Pazhuvil,

Jury Special mention - "Oneness"

"60 seconds to fame!" is a great opportunity for talented film makers who are searching for a space to enter into the world of cinema. I am grateful to all the jury members discoveing such hidden personalities and bringing them to mainstream. I am also really proud to be a part of AbilityFEST which is an inspiration for an inclusive society."



Harikrishnan,

Jury Special mention - "Colors"

ABILITYFEST® 2015 showcased a wide range of films from around the world that were funny, sad, informative, but all of them thought provoking.

Excerpts from some voices from the audience:

MARGARITA WITH A STRAW

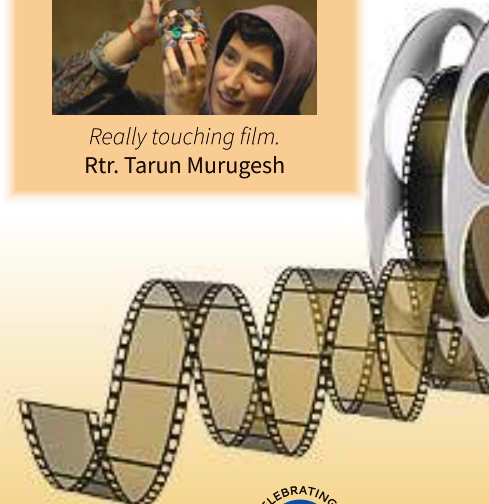
There are no words to express my appreciation for this film in terms of acting, production, sound effects, location and also the place of screening. Kudos to a great film that can change human thinking about cerebral palsy. V Mohan



THE PAINTING POOL



*Really touching film.
Rtr. Tarun Murugesh*





DOLPHIN TALE



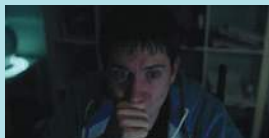
Everything is possible in the world! Thanks for the opportunity Ability Foundation. **B Kavibharathi**
Excellent movie. The bonding between animals and humans has been presented in a very attractive and affectionate way. **Aishwarya Chandrasekaran**
Lovely movie. Captioning helped me understand the movie better since i am deaf. **Kanika Agarwal**
Awesome! Great theme about disability. Very different. **Aftal kadavan**

THE HYPERGLOT



Really touching film. Thank you Ability Foundation for the special screening. Happy to be part of this unique festival !!
Jai Hind. **Rtr. Tarun Muruges**
A masterpiece. Hyperglot has got a humourous and good message.
Akessh

i WITNESS



A thriller which made us sit at the edge of the seat. A well directed film. Such a film makes us sit and watch.
S Ramesh

MIMI AND DONA



Brought a lump to my throat.
Anitha Sharma

The feelings of people who have this disorder should not be ignored in society. They should be taken care of, respected and their feelings understood. They should be treated well.

MM Abdul Haleem

M FOR MOTHER



Never seen such a great film. Please spread this wonder as much as possible to everyone.
Shrilekha J

ALGORITHMS



The film with three blind Indian chess champions reaching the final was interestingly depicted with the hurdles they faced on being blind. Quite awesome. Our heart beat when they played in a foreign land. Though I got disappointed when they lost the final, the lesson I learnt was "Do not give up" and "have faith till the end."

S Chandrasekaran

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WRETCHES & JABBERERS



Felt like going down the road of a autistic mind. Sure, they are perfect examples of intelligence. Thanks Ability Foundation for giving us an opportunity that will remain in our minds for a lifetime. SPASTN, Taramani Team

HIM



Insight into old age made me realize that old age can be lived with joy. Anitha Sharma

THE INTERVIEWER



The short film strives to highlight the fact the man with Down's syndrome is equally normal like all of us. B Shivakrish

FIXED



The film makes us aware of the need for being an inclusive society and the vital part of technology in aiding the disabled person. M Samandha Smith

ABILITYFEST® 2015

THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE

Joining hands with us... believing in all that AbilityFEST stood for and more... were our sponsors and supporters and volunteers, but for whom, we could not have taken it to such great heights. Special mention here must be made of The Hans Foundation, CavinKare Pvt Ltd and Sathyabama University.

Joining hands with them in a single unified voice of support were Wipro, Thums up, Grundfos and AVT.

Our media support was simply great... we were ably supported by The Hindu, Galatta, The New Indian Express and Chennai Live 104.8 FM.

And then of course the consulates - the U.S.Consulate-General, the Goethe Institut and Iran Culture House.

Blue Dart for the logistics and warm hospitality by The Park and lovely gifts by Kesar.

Last but not least... what would we ever have done without the warmth and spontaneity of SPI cinemas, the technicalities of the whole Fest handled so aptly by Qube.



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LAST DATE FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATION FORM : 31st MARCH, 2016

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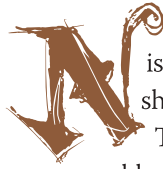
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NISHA GUPTA

Tattoo artist, sportswoman, mentor and more !

"If you want to be an excellent tattoo artist, the requirements are simple: You should be good at drawing. You should learn different types of designs, traditional tattoo patterns as well as tribal art from different parts of the world. You should be able to do calligraphy and portraits for personalised needs. You should learn how to do cover-up tattoos for someone who wants a new look over an old tattoo. Then there's the technical aspect. You must learn about needles and colours and how to operate the machine. These are the things you need to know and it doesn't matter whether you can walk on your own or not."



isha loved tattoos and had always wanted to learn. “I wasn’t that good at drawing,” she confesses, “so I practiced all day.” Her teacher, Shailesh Shinde, gave her exercises.

To get the knack of the vibrating machine before using it on a person, she practiced on a rubber sheet. The first tattoo Nisha did was on her sister Surekha, three years older than her. It was an angel, done on Surekha’s back and they were all thrilled to see what a good job she had done. More people came to get tattoos. Gradually, word about her skill spread and she began charging a small amount to cover the cost of materials. As her client base and confidence grew, she made a visiting card, and began charging a professional fee.

This vivacious and enterprising young Mumbai-based woman suffered a spinal injury while visiting her family village, Gopalapur (Uttar Pradesh), after appearing for her 12th standard examination. She climbed a wall to pluck mangoes from an overhanging tree leaned over for the next one, and fell down to the ground. The leg pain was excruciating. When, a short while later, she began vomiting, her father and the friends who were helping, realised that something was seriously wrong and rushed her to hospital in Varanasi. Nisha’s head wound was given stitches and her spinal injury was diagnosed. The family returned to Bombay by train, where her mother’s brother was waiting with an ambulance. Dr Samir Dalve, who operated on her at Bombay Hospital, explained to the family that Nisha had a spinal injury and this meant that she would never walk again. She would not even be able to sit without support.

This vivacious and enterprising young Mumbai-based woman suffered a spinal injury while visiting her family village, after appearing for her 12th standard examination.

She climbed a wall to pluck mangoes from an overhanging tree leaned over for the next one, and fell down to the ground.

There is a period of despair and desolation that someone in this position goes through, which is impossible to describe. With the medical care, infrastructure and reassurance that came with rehabilitation at the Haji Ali Centre along with tremendous love and support from her parents, sister and brothers, Nisha found the strength to face a new world in which she was totally dependent on others for her most basic needs. The doctors were frank. There was no hope. One day, if she was lucky, innovation in medical science would have a solution. Today there was none. She learnt to be strong, to show a cheerful face to the world. She learnt to stand and then to walk with calipers.



Nisha's first tattoo, an angel, done on her sister's back.

After about two years, Nisha gradually started going out. She attended a course which taught her how to do data-entry, going in a taxi accompanied by her brother, and then for a short while she did a job. She had hoped to continue her studies but was not able to.

What changed Nisha’s life was the Nina Foundation, an NGO working in the area of spinal injury run by Ketna Mehta. It was 21 June 2006, and Nisha was taken to a dance performance



Nisha and family

to celebrate spinal injury awareness. She saw others like herself dancing in wheelchairs on a stage. The joy and enthusiasm was compelling. For the first time after her accident, Nisha felt that there was hope, that her life had meaning and would amount to something.

It was through the Nina Foundation that Nisha first participated in the Mumbai marathon in 2007, something she now does every year. At first her brother would push her wheelchair along the 2.4 km route, but now she can do it on her own. She describes it as a beautiful, inspiring morning. People assemble near Metro cinema. Many of those running in the disability category are ex-servicemen, once highly capable athletes who sustained war injuries. The air is charged with energy and being with celebrities is an added bonus. Nisha was thrilled when at the 2015 marathon, John Abraham gave her a rose!

Over the years, Nisha has taken part in many of the performance events of the Nina Foundation. It was her association with them that encouraged her to take up tattooing, something she had always had a passion for. Her school friend, Kavita Varma, had helped her to develop her interest in photography. She then found Shailesh Shinde, a gym instructor and tattoo expert, who gave Nisha home lessons. He told her, "I will keep coming to teach you every day until you are ready to go out into the world and give tattoos!" The first tattoo he did for her was a butterfly with a heart inside which was inscribed with the letter C, for Nisha's husband Chetan.

Chetan Rathore was Nisha's younger brother Ankit's friend. He and Nisha met when the boys were in the 11th standard, practicing for a dance to be performed at an annual class function. When, after less than a year, Chetan told Nisha he wanted to marry her, she was stunned. "I didn't want to spoil his life!" she says and refused him, trying to explain what it meant to look after a person with spinal injury, the physical problems and responsibilities. However, he persisted, even overcoming her parents' reservations about giving their very vulnerable daughter to another family, to a husband who was two years younger than her and from a different community. Chetan's mother came to talk to Nisha's mother and tried to convince her that they would take the best possible care of Nisha but she still hesitated. It took four years of persuasion and finally Chetan and Nisha were married in 2013. Chetan works for Club Mahindra as a Quality Analyst and Nisha is very happy living in a home with liberal-minded people who do indeed take excellent care of her. They plan to wait another year before planning children and will have a two-year gap between their kids. Nisha is also happy to report that seeing her so well settled, her mother encouraged a friend to allow her disabled daughter marry the man of her choice.

Some months after she got married, Nisha decided to learn to swim. Naturally there were all kinds of objections, including people at the pool commenting, "How on earth does she think she can do it! Let's stop her," within her hearing. Eventually Nisha and Oliver D'Souza, a friend also in a wheelchair, started training at the Dharavi swimming pool, an accessible pool where

"Spinal injury is spinal injury. The babas and quacks exploit vulnerable people. They give hope and then you feel even more let down. The only thing that is going to help is rehabilitation and regular exercise. And then one must focus on ones career."

they knew a swimmer who had suffered a spinal injury and gone back to swimming. Chetan woke at 5am to take Nisha to the pool and kept a careful watch, alerting the instructor every time she went under the surface for a few seconds!

In March 2015 she won three medals: one gold and two silver at the Maharashtra State Paralympic competition.

Just one month later, the Paralympic committee having seen Nisha's swimming style, called her to participate in the national swimming competition in Indore. However, the arrangements there were inadequate. Participants were told that they would have to bear their own expenses. The pool was in a construction area and the road so strewn with stones that people walked on their hands to get to the pool. The washrooms were filthy and the water undrinkable. At the next competition in Ghaziabad, things were even worse. There were only two spinal injury participants, and they were unfairly made to compete against those with polio, who had movement in their legs. Still, Nisha came away with a bronze medal. In March 2015 she won three medals: one gold and two silver at the Maharashtra State Paralympic competition. Her next goal is to become an archer.

Nisha firmly believes that sport is essential to any person with disability because it helps to bring out all one's physical strength. She works hard to spread such messages, having learnt them the hard way. After her accident, as she gradually got reconciled to her physical condition, her family members continued to hope for a miracle. They paid a woman Rs 10,000 for a special ten-day Kerala hot-oil massage. Another 'healer' came on alternate days to give steam treatment. A kind neighbour took Nisha to a Bangalore faith healer, Benny Hill, for a special prayer blessing. This pure vegetarian family even tried pig-fat massage when a relative said it would help. Worst of all, was the gentleman who took Nisha's medical files home to inspect them and suggest a miracle cure – but never came back. Quasi-medical treatment involving stem cell treatment and bone marrow transplant failed too.

"Spinal injury is spinal injury," Nisha points out wryly. The babas and quacks exploit vulnerable people. They give hope and then you feel even more let down. My father took me everywhere so I would be cured. He tried his best. But people should not do this." Nisha's father

Nisha with her friends.



is a businessman, dealing in office interiors and maintenance, and the family could afford these treatments. Still, Nisha feels that the money was wasted. “People should save to secure their future,” she says. “When there is a real, tested medical cure they will be able to afford it. And if that doesn’t happen in their lifetime, at least they will be able to live comfortably. The only thing that is going to help is rehabilitation and regular exercise. And then they must focus on their career.”



Saaz Aggarwal

Nisha also wants to spread awareness about basic care. After her accident and several months in bed, she developed a bed sore. “Doctors only told us how to prevent a bedsore after I already had one so deep that it was touching a bone! There are simple ways like doing push-ups and changing sides regularly by which this can be avoided.” When the doctors who treated her realised that she was keen to spread awareness, they started connecting her with other patients. Over time, Nisha set up a Whatsapp group with their photos and basic information and started a group chat with motivating messages about their condition, the activities they can do, simple tips on things like how to get in, and out of a car or bladder management, precautions against bedsores, and ways of moving ahead in life. She has also been successful at counselling people this way. One of her group members a forty year old Ratnagiri resident, has started doing activities that he had not done for three decades.

In a nutshell, Nisha’s advice is very practical:

- *Understand your physical condition. Stop having unrealistic hopes.*
- *Do your exercises and physiotherapy exercises regularly and make sure you never get bedsores or any side effect of immobility.*
- *Don’t waste money in the hope of unlikely cures.*
- *Find a way to earn a livelihood and work hard to progress at it. Improve your skills. Improve your communication. Learn different things that will help you.*
- *Take up sports to develop yourself physically.*

A proud Nisha with her tattoo designs.



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INCLUSIVE DESIGN

A DESIGN FOR EQUALITY



Design is a people-centred, creative act that makes things or services more functional, beautiful, novel and irresistibly attractive. The latest smart phone, an Audi car, or a Dyson fan are some examples.

As a profession, design is young, having started only in the 20th century, but as an activity it is as old as mankind. Man is constantly shaping materials, a bone or a stone, an iron or a plastic, to be better, beautiful and fashionable. A good design is simple, futuristic, elegant as well as functional, ergonomic, easily producible, affordable and fits well into the socio-cultural ambience of the user.

If design is futuristic and people-centred, it should be centred on all people without discrimination and not just on some people. One of the most important modern concerns of design is, 'Why are we not designing for all people?' At present, the design profession is biased towards the physically fit, healthy, slim people in the age group of 15-45. It is also biased against many others such as the left handed, the elderly, fat persons and people with disabilities. And in the modern world, the numbers of these 'others' are increasing at an alarming rate.

Nearly 10 to 12 percent of the seven billion people on earth are impaired in one way or the other. More than 180 million people in the developing world are visually impaired.



Prof. S Balaram

India alone has 77 million elderly people and 63 million visually impaired, not to mention the other impairments. Many designers are not even aware of the invisible challenged people such as the left handed, stammering, colour blind or dyslexic. The world has progressed from the steam engine to the cell phone but the design profession has not bothered about the diverse needs of diverse people. All the controls in equipment and vehicles are located on the right side. Till Fiskars came up with a right handle and a left handle scissors, all scissors handles were right handed.

The world has progressed from the steam engine to cell phone but the design profession has not bothered about the diverse needs of the diverse people.

Lifts and toilet doors are so narrow that wheelchairs cannot get in. Neither public transport such as trains, buses and aeroplanes, nor public places such as malls, cinema halls and monuments are accessible to people who are disabled. It took a personality such as Stephen Hawking, the genius of this century, who was invited by the Government of India a few years ago as a state guest, to make some noise. He has a motor neuron disease and is a wheel chair user. But everybody is not a Stephen Hawking who can voice his needs and be heard. Most of our monuments are not accessible and we are depriving many people the richness of our heritage.

Recently an international design movement on “Universal Design” or design for all or inclusive design, began in progressive countries like USA, Britain and Japan. The idea was to include everybody, all the variants of human society: to recognise and cater to the diverse needs of the people. It is indeed sad to see that India is very slow to catch up. A few individuals and institutions are doing some work in this area but they are not coordinated and the impact is insignificant in proportion to the vastness of the problem.

Design in India faces three crucial challenges today. First, design in our country is quite young compared to other countries. It is only recently that India has started realizing the power and the potential of design. India has a long way to go in terms of global and national impact of design as well as in terms of quantity of designers produced by it. Second, India is a uniquely pluralistic country which has to battle on multiple fronts while coping with the pressures of ‘development’, in terms of providing basic necessities to its vast numbers of people in a democratic setup. Design has to operate within this rather complex socio-political context, fighting for its due place among pressing priorities. Third, universal design/inclusive design is still a far cry in a country that holds the world’s second largest population and the largest number of people who are disabled and disadvantaged. There is an urgent and crucial need to spread awareness among designers and design students in the country. Only a couple of design schools in India offer regular courses in universal design.

Ironically, India has the world’s richest heritage sites, but almost all of them are not accessible to people who are old or challenged. Most public spaces such as schools, shops, parks,

theatres, hospitals, etc., follow the same fate. Residential houses are even less inclusive. This side of human development seems to have totally escaped the attention of designers, architects, planners and the Government of this vast and culturally deep rooted country. An important issue is that, like in many other countries, the universal design principles that work for them, will not work in India since the physical, economical, and socio-cultural contexts are totally different. For example a wheelchair will not work in rural areas as there are no paved roads. This is the reality and this needs to be addressed by Indian designers specifically. A concerned group of Indians designers and thinkers developed Universal Design India Principles (UDIP) in 2011. However, this has a long way to go before these principles are implemented and taken up by design schools and design professionals.

Yet the real issue for “Universal Design for the Real world” is far beyond physical access, impairments, age or anomalies. The most crucial aspect which has remained unaddressed at world design forums is the definition of Universal Design, which is presently restricted to only physical access and biological challenges of people. This is a mistake and needs correction. Development must mean integrated human development in terms of, not only industrial development, but also economic, social, political and cultural development. Like many other ‘developing’ countries, Indians face serious challenges of caste discriminations, hunger, poverty, religious intolerance, illiteracy, ill-health and so on. These are serious issues of inequality and non-inclusiveness which override the physical challenges. Mere biological inclusiveness would be meaningless without considering these more oppressive barriers.

Some people may think that the poor developing countries cannot afford Inclusive Design. Inclusive Design is economically sustainable even in populated poor countries because Inclusive Design increases the consumer base by a substantial 10-12% of extended consumer base in the business aspect. There is also the more important aspect of social responsibility. Designers must open their eyes towards integrating society at large. People must voice their diverse needs and demand that design be inclusive.

Prof. Singanapalli Balam, Dean, DJ Academy of Design, Emeritus Professor of CEPT University and former Chairman of Education, National Institute of Design. He is an author and designer with 45 years of experience in Design Education.

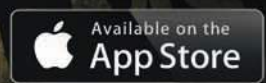
India alone has 77 million elderly people and 63 million visually impaired including the largest number of people who are disabled and disadvantaged.





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Special Olympics WORLD GAMES LOS ANGELES 2015



The Special Olympics is about moments of unbounded joy, emotion and exuberance. Here, the number of medals matter less and the smiles, hugs and high fives count more. The athletes are winners who have excelled in pushing their limits and are the celebrities who everybody wants a picture with. It is more of a festival, where their abilities are celebrated.

At Los Angeles this year, the Olympics had 177 participant countries and over 60,000 spectators during the opening ceremony.

As part of the Young Athletes Demonstration program at the Special Olympics, held earlier this year in July at Los Angeles, a three year old with intellectual disability was to play basketball for the first time in his life. The purpose of the event was to instill the joy of sports in other young intellectually disabled kids encourage them to engage in physical activity and use sports as a means to overcome their disability.

The children were guided to dribble their way to the basket and try shooting the ball into it. This three year old child was different though.

He ran the other way and refused to turn towards the basket.

Playing the game by his own rules, he instantly became the favourite player of the cheering crowds.

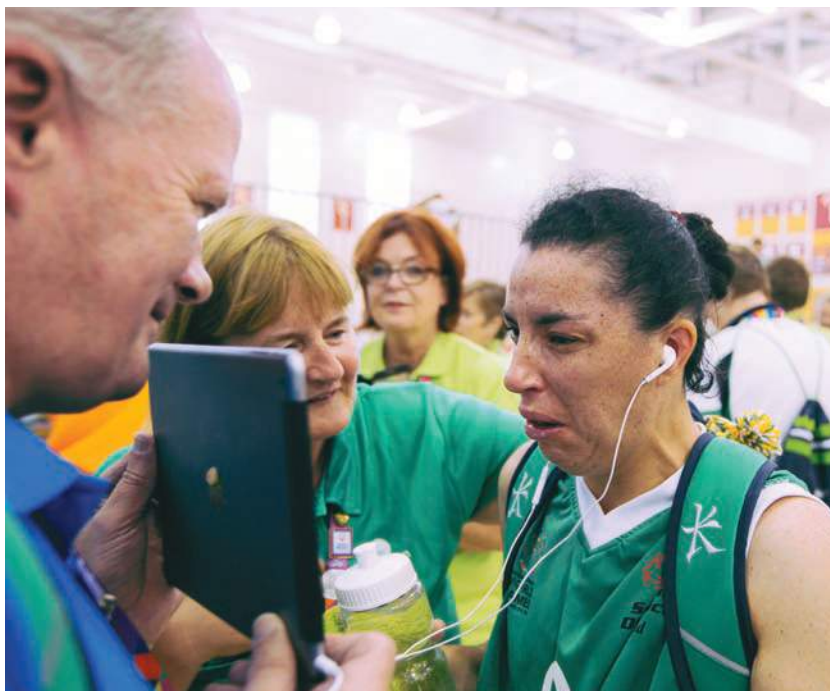
Almost every onlooker wanted a high-five and a picture with him. So did I.

When the first person held his hand out to him, he politely refused.

Soon, he surprised the crowd, coming forward from his mother's hold and giving the man a hug instead. The hug this young athlete gave me, without any apprehension from his end, was indeed one of the most cherished hugs of my life. It made me appreciate the innate nature of kindness and love that those with intellectual disabilities display.

I also realised that in the Special Olympics, "You always get more than what you give."





An athlete upon winning the basketball finals celebrated the victory with her family back in Ireland through an iPad.

The match was live streamed to them because they couldn't make it to Los Angeles.



An athlete from Costa Rica unwinded at the hands of the volunteer after sheer exhaustion, from a 100 meter race. The volunteer in turn, genuinely supported and appreciated the athlete's effort.



An athlete from a third world nation was able to see clearly for the first time in her life with new spectacles provided to her by the Healthy Athletes Campaign. This is the largest health care program in the world for those with intellectual disabilities.

The Special Olympics is about these moments of unbounded joy, emotion and exuberance.



The uniqueness doesn't end here. The process called divisioning is exclusive to the Special Olympics. Athletes are made to perform and are divided according to the extent of their intellectual ability. This process ensures that the competition is fair for all. Once every athlete becomes part of a division, they are made to participate in the final without any other intermediate league.

Special Athletes like any other athletes, have coaches to train them and improve their skills. They are serious competitors on the field, putting in their best efforts to succeed. The finals are an amazing display of skill, courage and, above all - sportsmanship.





Here, the number of medals matter less and yet the smiles, hugs and high fives count more. The athletes are winners who have excelled in pushing their limits and are the celebrities who everybody wants a picture with. It is more of a festival, where their abilities are celebrated.

The Special Olympics is a testament to the fact that what makes one different is what makes them beautiful. Witnessing it brings about a highly positive aspect of sports as a tool for inclusion and bringing people together.





My favourite part of the Olympics was the award ceremonies. The podium consisted of eight steps instead of three, so that every athlete who participated was given the opportunity to stand on it. The first three get a medal and the rest a ribbon. Some of the athletes do not even realise the outcome of the race, and to many, it doesn't matter as to which place they stand in. The moment of standing on the podium with their name called out, with hundreds of people cheering, is reason enough for them to rejoice.



The Special Olympics is a platform for change and transformation. It emphasizes the need for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, improving necessary healthcare facilities and the much required awareness about disabilities and relevant needs. The movement has grown rapidly from its inception in 1968, with 100 spectators and 26 states participating from the USA. At Los Angeles this year, the Olympics had 177 participant countries and over 60,000 spectators during the opening ceremony. Apart from the 6000 athletes representing their countries in the games, over 3.1 million athletes are associated with the movement and are being impacted positively by it. The Olympics yet provides opportunities only to a minuscule population of people with intellectual disabilities to demonstrate courage, improve confidence through sports, build friendships and experience the joy of a normal life.

Before I left for Los Angeles as part of the media team from Asia Pacific to shoot the Special Olympics, I was told by people who had witnessed the games, that it would be a life changing experience. The cynic in me dismissed it as an exaggeration, only to realise otherwise. The massive opening ceremony; standing on the red carpet witnessing special athletes from 177 countries march aside me; watching a group of volunteers give a guard of honour to the athletes walking into the stadium; witnessing the myriad expressions of joy on the face of the athletes when their names were called up during the award ceremony; these moments big and small, will linger with me throughout my life. I realise today that the Olympics is just one avenue in understanding people with intellectual disabilities better. There is every need to take a cue from it and in educating ourselves to work towards inclusive approaches for engaging their beautiful community in everyday life.

This experience has given me a lot to take back and I hope I will be able to give back to it in every way I can. As the saying goes, with respect to the Special Olympics, "You get more than what you give" and I shall always be indebted.

HERO INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE 2015



The curtain went up on an adrenalin packed extravaganza of glamour gusto & sportmanship... with a special touch!

The second season of the Hero Indian Super League, inaugurated on October 3, 2015 in Chennai, was kicked off with a glittering and vibrant opening ceremony. The programme included mesmerizing performances and appearances by personalities like Rajnikanth, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Alia Bhatt and Arjun Kapoor, as well as regional folk artists and dancers in their colourful costumes.

One of the highlights of the inaugural celebrations was a very special rendition of the National Anthem just before commencement of the first match. While the ceremony was unfolding in front of a packed and cheering stadium, a group of twenty one children from the CSI School for the Deaf, close associates of the Ability Foundation, were running through their last practice s for a very special performance. Over two weeks of rehearsals at the school and in the stadium was about to culminate into a truly unique and heartwarming signing of the National Anthem.

The children were to walk on to the stage to join one of the greatest music maestros of the nation, AR Rahman, along with Sivamani on drums accompanied by his set



Sujata Ayer



Children from the CSI School for the Deaf presented a moving rendition of the National Anthem



A section of the audience.

of drummers and choir singers. Nita Ambani, Founder & Chairperson, Football Sports Development, was also going to join the children on stage for the National Anthem.

The children, dressed in traditional finery, were full of nervous excitement. When they walked into the stadium to take their position on stage, they were welcomed by cheering spectators and waving crowds. Seeing their families seated upfront gave them the much needed encouragement.

AR Rahman then came on the stage, to weave his magic followed by the two playing teams who took position for the National Anthem. Nita Ambani stood right next to the children who were now beaming with confidence and smiles.

The National Anthem rendition by AR Rahman accompanied by the signing of the children was a truly inspiring moment for all present in the stadium. The National Anthem concluded with the stadium erupting into applause and cheers. The children were ecstatic. Staying back after their exams, their practice and determination had paid off.

This wonderful performance of the National Anthem set the tone for the rest of the evening as the first match of the Hero Indian Super League 2015 got underway with heady excitement.



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The Wonder of **Millets**



Dr. K. R. Jahanmohan
Head of Division (Agri),
State Planning Commission

With a plethora of health benefits, the humble millet is all set to make a comeback in the plates of the urban consumer, thanks to the Government's many initiatives.

Millets have a set of characteristics which make them unique amongst cereals. Generally, millets are grown in rain fed to dry land conditions, requiring minimal external inputs. In India it was once a staple food for major sections of society. Millets are known to have superior nutritional qualities compared to other cereals, being both non acidic and non glutinous. It is also considered to be the among the most digestible grains available. Compared to rice, especially polished rice, millets release a smaller percentage of glucose and over a longer period of time. This lowers the risk of diabetes. Millets are particularly high in minerals like iron, magnesium, phosphorous and potassium. For example, Finger millet (Ragi) is the richest in calcium content, about 10 times that of rice or wheat. Moreover, millets serve as a dual-purpose crop — for food as well as for fodder. Additionally, it has excellent drought resistance characteristics.

Millets are known to have superior nutritional qualities compared to other cereals, being both non acidic and non glutinous. Millets are particularly high in minerals like iron, magnesium, phosphorous and potassium. Compared to rice, millets release a small percentage of glucose over a long period of time, lowering the risk of diabetes.

Millets in Tamil Nadu

Millets have a long association with Dravidian Culture and Hindu mythology. Millets especially sorghum, bajra and ragi were the principal cereal crops grown across Tamil Nadu. But a high degree of urbanization, changes in life style and increased per capita and disposal incomes have resulted in a shift in consumption patterns thereby leading to the drastic reduction of millet cultivation in the State.

Millets are nutritional grains on par with the much celebrated high cost, new generation grains like quinoa.

Millets are an excellent all weather crop that consumes less water. For example, while rice consumes 1250mm water, millets like sorghum, bajra and ragi consume as little as 400 to 500mm of water. Therefore, twice the area of millets can be irrigated with water needed to raise one rice crop.

The State Planning Commission pragmatically drafted an innovative Millets Mission for promotion of millets in the State encompassing all the activities right from production to processing and value addition in the 12th Plan document.

Recognising the value of this nutritive cereal, the State Planning Commission has given adequate importance to millets and conducted a series of workshops covering the entire gamut of activities required for millets promotion viz., productivity enhancement, processing, inclusiveness of SHGs and tribals, dietary schedule for diabetics including key recommendations, forwarded to the Government.

Millets are nutritional grains on par with the much celebrated high cost, new generation grains like quinoa. In fact, scientific evidences shows that millets like Thinai score over this expensive imported grain in terms of nutrition and suitability for the designated population. Hence consumer friendly modules need to be designed for these emerging areas.

Tamil Nadu has a high prevalence of anaemia among women and children with reports indicating that more than 45 % of this population is anaemic. The SPC has spearheaded a pilot project for the inclusion of millets for school / anganwadi children in Perambalur district with millets snacks (laddu with an objective to eliminate the incidence of anaemia among school children. Preliminary results are highly encouraging and a perceptible improvement in weight and hemoglobin content among the target children were observed.

Way Forward

The Government of India has indicated that millets should be included in the Public Distribution System to enhance its consumption through easy availability of these nutritional grains. Millets can be made available along with essential commodities in Fair Price Shops, making it easily accessible to the common man at an affordable

cost. Moreover, the availability of millets through the Public Distribution System would further help to fetch a better price for the farmer producer.

Research should be employed to create new consumer friendly millet based products like ready to eat fare and popular items like pasta, vermicelli, etc., to widen the consumer base. Also, the methods to enhance shelf life of processed millet products should be explored.

Extension machinery should be appropriately oriented to propagate new technologies, like the millets intensification system amongst farming communities to enhance the productivity of millets.

Millets are an excellent source of fodder and in the event of any natural calamity they come in handy to meet the fodder requirement for cattle. The nutrient rich stalks of the millets is sufficient enough to meet the dietary requirements of cattle to tide over the difficult situation.

In general, penetration of concepts is high when it permeates from urban to rural consumers, as the rural market believes the product is validated by their urban counter parts and hence, the spread becomes easy and rapid. This learning may be exploited and Non-Government Organizations, institutions and media should design appropriate strategies for taking millets to the plates of the urban consumer first, which will have the desired ramifications among the rural masses.

Scientific evidences shows that millets like Thinai score over expensive imported grains in terms of nutrition and suitability for the designated population.



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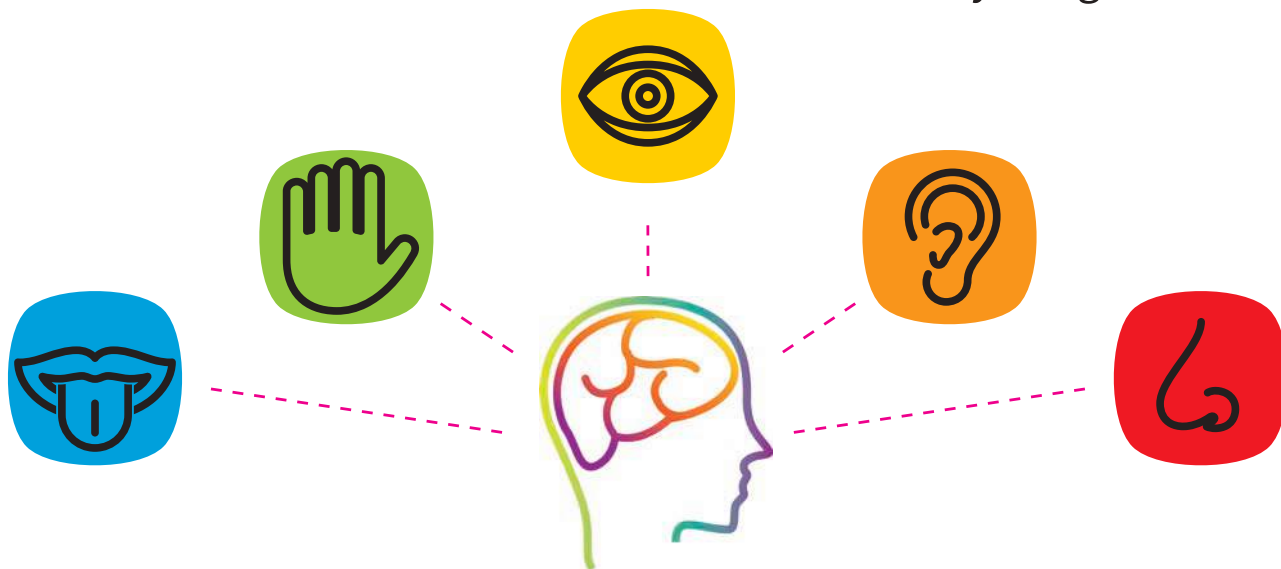
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Strategies to overcome

SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER

in young children



Sensory processing disorder (SPD) is a misinterpretation of sensory signals that causes an overreaction or under-reaction that can interfere with daily function. Sensory Processing Disorder is most commonly diagnosed in children, but people who reach adulthood without treatment also experience symptoms and continue to be affected by their inability to accurately and appropriately interpret sensory messages. At least one in twenty children's daily lives is affected by SPD (Ahn, Miller, Milberger, McIntosh, 2004).



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Identification of SPD

Children with sensory integration disorder can be identified easily by observing the child's response to various sensory stimuli. Also certain motor problems like poor posture, balance, coordination, eye movements will be present among them. There are also other possible indicators which demonstrates sensory integration dysfunctions like:

- Extra-sensitive to touch
- Sensitivity to sounds
- Picky eaters
- Avoidance of sensory stimulation
- Uneasiness with movement
- Hyperactivity
- Fear of crowds
- Poor, fine or gross motor skills
- Trouble with balance

Types of SPD

1. SENSORY MODULATION DISORDER (SMD)

The child experiences difficulty processing sensory information into appropriate behaviours/responses which match the intensity of the sensory information (Miller, 2006)

There are 3 types of SMD:

Sensory Over-Responsivity

(sensory defensiveness)

This is where children respond more intensely and faster for longer durations.

e.g. becoming really upset when touched by another child standing in line (Miller, 2006)

Sensory Under-Responsivity

These children show less of a response to sensory input than would be expected for the situation. They take longer to respond and require more intense input before they even respond.

e.g. having a high pain threshold (Miller, 2006)

Sensory Seeking

These children have an intense craving for sensory experiences and will actively seek this out, often in ways that aren't matched or appropriate to the environment.

e.g. running around during group time (Miller, 2006)

2. SENSORY-BASED MOTOR DISORDER (SBMD)

This is where the child has trouble controlling, planning and supporting his/her movements into a smooth, coordinated, sequential way.

There are 2 types of SBMD:

Dyspraxia

These children have difficulty processing sensory information to create physical, unfamiliar or sequenced movements.

e.g. difficulty riding a bike (Miller, 2006)

Postural Disorder

These children have difficulty maintaining enough control of their bodies to meet the demands of a given motor task.

e.g. difficulty remaining in an upright sitting position for writing tasks (Miller, 2006)

3. SENSORY DISCRIMINATION DISORDER

This is where the child experiences difficulty distinguishing between similar sensations. The child needs additional time to process sensory information and his/her capacity to perceive the information as quickly and naturally as other children do, is reduced. For example, such children may be unable to button their shirts or find their pencil in their pencil case without looking (Miller, 2006)

Children can have a combination of sensory processing patterns or may have only one of the above discussed difficulties.

Challenges faced by children with SPD in school

Children with a sensory processing disorder often "under register" movement. Their bodies just can't seem to get enough or get the right amount at the right time to endure tasks that require focus and concentration. There are also other kinds of issues such as -

- Concentrating
- Completing class work
- Behaviour problems
- Staying seated



Strategies to overcome SPD

There is no medication to treat sensory processing disorder, but there are therapies, as well as some strategies you can make at school and home to help your child feel and do better. Some of the common strategies are as follows:

1. SENSORY ROOMS

In order to provide opportunities for children to develop, stimulate or balance their sensory systems, sensory environments in the form of sensory rooms are created. As these kinds of environment are located mainly in special schools or hospitals, access is limited. Thus parents adapt a room in their home in order to create a separate space for sensory stimulation.

2. SENSORY INTEGRATION THERAPY

The concept of sensory integration therapy was introduced by Delacato in the year 1974. The aim of sensory integration therapy is to treat sensory integration dysfunction and strengthen, balance and develop the processing of sensory stimuli. A sensory integration room is designed to make the child want to run into it and play. During sensory integration therapy, the child interacts one-on-one with the occupational therapist and performs an activity that combines sensory input with motion. The therapy involves the gentle exposure to various sensory stimuli in the form of sensory oriented activities. Some of the activities include:

Heavy Work

- Wall push-ups
 - Chair push-ups
- (Calms & alerts the body)

Movement

- Cross crawls
 - Action songs
- (Organizes the mind & body)

Pressure & Touch

- Hand massage
 - Sock lap weights
 - Clay/play dough
 - Sand or rice tables
- (Calms & settles the nervous system & behavior)

3. IRLLEN LENSES METHOD

This is another method where children are provided with coloured filters in the form of glasses which when worn reduces the perceptual sensitivity or sensory overload. According to the rate at which the brain is able to process the information, colour may change which, in turn, eliminates the need for reducing sensory input.

4. PHYSICAL THERAPY

Some children with sensory processing disorder will need physical therapy in addition to occupational therapy. Physical therapy sessions are designed to help promote the development of gross motor skills needed for everyday activities. This type of therapy can also help increase flexibility and stimulate learning abilities through sensory integration activities.

5. SPEECH THERAPY

Speech therapy is often also required to help children with sensory processing disorder as it tends to affect the acquisition of speech. Speech therapists will help children work on sound development.

In conclusion, the sensory and perceptual process plays a very vital role in understanding the world. It is very difficult for a child with sensory perceptual problems to cope and to adapt themselves with the environment. Therefore it is very vital to identify the sensory perceptual problems at the earliest and to provide necessary intervention strategies to overcome these issues. A greater understanding of the sensory world allows professionals to plan necessary intervention programs that help children with autism to develop in a more comfortable environment.



Flying Officer M P Anil Kumar

Facing the toughest of odds, perhaps more than his colleagues in fighter planes had to, he always kept up his spirits. He fought for the welfare of his colleagues in the Rehab Centre, all of who, were lower ranking jawans, crippled by spinal injury in the line of duty and defence of the nation.

My friend **ANIL**

DR. ALI KHWAJA pays a touching tribute to his friend, while recalling a long, inspiring association.

Way back in 1993, I was very impressed on learning about a young courageous Indian Air Force Flying Officer Anil Kumar, whose flying career was cruelly cut off by an accident that left him paralyzed neck down. When I heard about how he was taking life so positively, working for the welfare of others from his wheelchair in the Paraplegic Home in Pune, I could not resist the temptation of shooting a letter to him, without much hope of a reply, given his limitations and other priorities.

When I received a beautifully crafted ‘hand written’ (I use the parenthesis because he actually wrote by clutching the pen in his mouth and writing on a pad that was held vertically in front of his face), I was amazed, to say the least. He encouraged me to write, saying “Let’s hope that we will be able to swap our thoughts, beliefs, eccentricities, experiences, etc., through the medium of letters. I’m sure that you will unravel the mystique of Ali Khwaja in your next letter.”

The correspondence did go on for over two decades, initially by ‘penned’ notes and then computer typed in Wordstar and sent through snail mail. Subsequently we switched over to email.

Facing the toughest of odds, perhaps more than his colleagues in fighter planes had to, he always kept up his spirits. He fought for the welfare of his colleagues in the Rehab Centre, all of who, were lower ranking jawans, crippled by spinal injury in the line of duty and in the defence of the nation. His awareness and vision on world affairs was impeccable. He wrote on 5th June 1999, “The Kargil flare-up, ignited by the combined complacency of a snoozing government, a hibernating army, plus other allied security forces and the cat’s whiskers Intelligence Bureau, has put the Air Force in the hot seat. Yet another Himalayan blunder! ...I’ve already lost two good friends in the undeclared war being fought to regain lost ground and prestige... Of course, I will grieve for all those nameless and faceless soldiers who are so selflessly laying down their lives for this thankless country.”

When I had asked him to consider writing his autobiography, he whimsically replied that he could write a small narration “...perhaps long enough to merit

a middling book, but not spicy enough to be a bestseller!" He had, in fact, written a very touching article which was included in text books. With his typical sense of humour he had written on 9th June 2000, "Unluckily for the students of class X in Maharashtra, an insufferable article written by me, titled Airborne to Chairborne is a lesson in the English textbook, since the past five years... A lot of students and teachers write to me to express their opinion about it and students from nearby schools visit me. More than once, a student or two had remarked tongue-in-cheek that they seldom get an opportunity to meet live authors. I cannot stop wondering whether that was a left-handed compliment. Nevertheless it's a good feeling to rub shoulders with the dead giants of English literature."

On 15th April the same year, he had expressed his deep concern for others notwithstanding his own journey of being paralyzed and strapped to a wheel chair, "Y2K has so far been an exceptionally bad year for me. The most disturbing event in this ever burgeoning list surely, is the kidnapping of a student friend hailing from Sangli. She was whisked away by a gang of seven louts belonging to her college and presumably gang-raped and dumped somewhere because she did not requite somebody's advances. My mind got numbed, at first and then choked with emotions, when I realized she was one of my students. What did that innocent girl do to deserve this gruesome fate? I've no answer."

A laudatory article about him was published by Indian Express newspaper in 2002, but the newshounds took the liberty of adding and deleting to what he had conveyed to them. When I congratulated him on the article, in his characteristic style he replied, "Apparently, the Delhi editor of the Indian Express used a lawnmower, not his common sense, to snip the original piece by Vinita Deshmukh. She was so piqued at the clever-work that she posted a copy of the original to me."

His concern for the nation and its people continued with his musings. "India, with a hobbling helmsman wielding trident, continues to chart an aimless course, simply lurching from one disaster to another. Who will navigate this adrift vessel away from the choppy water?... The Ganesh festival is just round the corner. Some spirited citizens' organizations are hard at work to limit the noisy and vulgar dimensions of the festival. The revelers are equally adamant in not conceding a decibel."

And so it was, till this year, mails flying between us, sometimes regularly, more often sporadically, but always enlightening and informative. I had only two opportunities to meet him briefly, once in 1997 and the next in 2011 when I visited Pune. He was the same when I met him after a gap of 14 years and he was an inspiration to me and many like us, who do not appreciate the blessings we have in life. His loss is irreparable.



DR. Ali Khwaja
Counsellor, columnist
& life skills coach,
Banjara Academy,
Bengaluru

*Anil's beautifully
crafted notes and
emails to the author,
over two decades,
cemented a valued
friendship.*



हिम्मत तो इंसानों में होती है।

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SILVER LININGS

This not for profit organization, works with girls/women with visual impairment, people with disability, besides issues on gender rights and citizens at large. Preeti Monga, Founder and CEO, herself a blind person, has been singlehandedly working towards improving lives; directly and indirectly impacting millions through her unremitting and arduous efforts for the last three decades.



Preeti Monga
Founder & CEO,
Silver Linings,
New Delhi

THE ORGANISATION

Silver Linings focuses on motivation and life skill training, executive search, disbanding existing biases, inclusion and diversity, mainstreaming, skill development, building awareness, creating quality and secure residential spaces for blind women and trauma counseling.

INITIATIVES

Fusion

A platform for meaningful face to face social interaction between the disabled and non disabled world, Fusion fosters friendships, relationships and partnerships, inspiring true inclusion across the board. We have conducted 13 programmes that have touched the lives of 259 disabled and non disabled people till date. 12 Fusion members went for a fantastic holiday into the hills of Uttaranchal in August 2015. Our vision is to introduce Fusion all over the country.

Dignity

This is a special mainstreaming programme for visually impaired girls/women wherein we endeavour to hone their potential and ensure they become independent, confident and productive citizens.

Employment

Silver Linings builds awareness of the abilities of people with disabilities especially in the corporate world, as well as helps companies with hiring of disabled candidates.



B REVIEW

“Because Life is a Gift” is a wonderful book by DISHA who has also written the popular ‘My Beloved’s MBA Plans’



Sunny Sheen

*Years after
you are gone,
people will
not remember
you for what
obstacles you
faced. People
will remember
how you emerged
victorious.*

As the name suggests, here is a book which makes us realise how thankful we should be to God for giving us such a beautiful life without too many hardships. This book presents the lives of 15 people interviewed by the author, the hardships they faced and how they overcame all the barriers put in front of them.

The book starts off with the heartwarming story of a boy, Sai Prasad, whose lower body is completely paralysed due to a growth in his spinal cord. The very same boy travelled to Antarctica with Sir Robert Swan, skydived from 14,000ft and completed his Post Grad. from the University Of Wisconsin. He broke all barriers thrown in front of him and emerged victorious. Another tells the story of a genius, Hridayeshwar Singh Bhati a.k.a Hearty who has Muscular Dystrophy(MD). At a time when kids his age played outside or had fun, Hearty was busy creating new inventions, He is the inventor of the 6 player chess game and is the youngest patent holder in India with three patents to his name.

The famous MTV roadies contestant Vinod Rawat is also profiled in the book. His is a story of how evil can transform into good starting as he did as a drug dealer, who went on to establish a biking club for the disabled which travelled all the way to Ladakh. Yet another story reveals how invaluable the love of the parents is in nurturing the child in the context of visually impaired Suresh Reddy who today holds a degree from India’s premier business school – the IIM.

Equally inspiring is the famous founder of the Family of the Disabled (FOD), Rajinder Johar. Here is a man who was shot in his chest and neck, rendering him bed ridden for life. Dejected Rajinder lost hope in life and had even contemplated

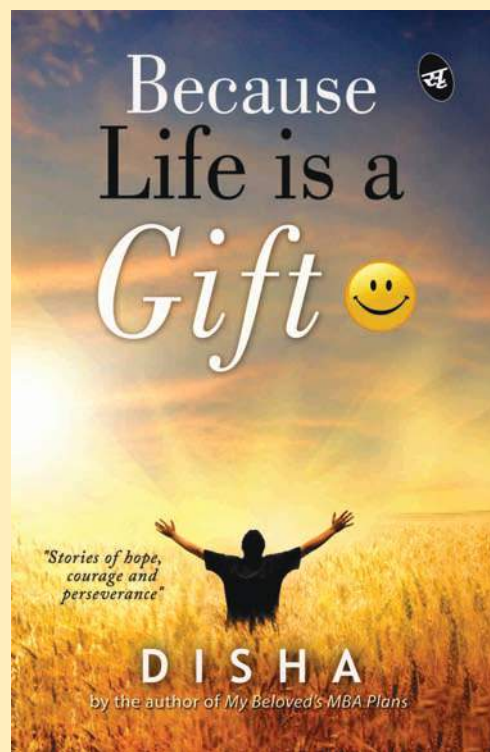


suicide till one day, he gathered all his will and with the help of two writers started the magazine 'Voice'. The magazine was unsuccessful but he did not lose hope. With the blessings of Mother Teresa, he founded the Family of the Disabled, an organisation whose sole objective was rendering help to disabled people. Rajinder, a man who hasn't seen daylight for over three decades, is making a huge difference in the lives of thousands of disabled people in India.

The book also throws light on various issues like Government policies, education and technology to name a few. It decries the fact that the government shows no sympathy nor provides any special status to its disabled citizens.

After reading this book I realised that the government does not include genetic disability under the disability status. This compels people like Sukhsohit Singh, who suffer from genetic disability, to run around for services from the government. The author also talks about the lack of government initiative towards disabled friendly infrastructure that are present in countries like the USA and Singapore.

"Because Life Is A Gift" can be one of those books which can bring about a big change in society. Based on real life experiences, the author, Disha's narration is simple and colloquial, making it an easy read for people of all ages.



Because Life is a Gift

Disha

Srishti Publishers

Rs 150 | PP 212





So you want to **DRIVE?**

‘So, you want to drive?’

‘Yes, Sir,’ I responded to the doctor’s question with enthusiasm, but at the same time being careful not to say more than necessary.

‘How do you drive?’ he asked, still looking at the form.

‘Quite well, Sir,’ I said with a hint of pride. ‘I’ve been driving for the past twenty years and no challans.’

He looked up from the form and fixed a stern gaze. I suddenly felt unsure of myself. I could feel a hole emerging in my stomach. The doctor gave me a long, cold stare and said slowly, ‘How do you drive with just your hands?’

‘Oh,’ I said, understanding now, ‘It’s quite easy actually. I can also swim with just my hands,’ I added helpfully.

‘Does this look like a swimming pool to you?’

‘No, Sir.’

‘Then why are you talking about swimming here, huh?’

‘Sorry, Sir. I meant that the car is modified, so it’s easy for me to drive. What they do is fix a device on an automatic transmission...’

‘This won’t do,’ he cut me short. ‘Why are you smiling?’

‘I’m not smiling, Sir,’ I said defensively and with earnestness.

‘In this picture,’ he said sternly again, pointing at the form. ‘Why are you smiling in the picture? This won’t do. You are a disabled person. You should be sad. You will need a new picture for this form. A be weepy.’

‘Be weepy?’ I asked, not sure what he meant.

‘Yes, a be-weepy. How many emotions can you do?’

‘Sir, I can do happy and angry,’ I said, feeling flustered. I suddenly felt I was in school again facing the Principal.

‘No, no. You need a be-weepy. You need a full body picture. This is only till your chest. Do you look disabled?’ he asked, thrusting the form in my face. ‘Take a new picture and fold up your trousers so your legs can be seen. And look sad. We need a be-weepy.’

‘Weepy?’ I asked to be sure.

‘Huh!’ he said dismissively. I knew it wasn’t going very well.

‘You want me to be weepy, Sir?’

‘No, no. The picture has to be in a be-weepy format. You people don’t understand anything. Stop wasting my time. I have many patients to see. This is a government hospital, not a fancy private hospital where I can have long talks on the weather with you.’

‘Sir, I am not sure I understand. If you could please...’

‘Be Weepy, Be Weepy... A Bichara Viklang Picture,’ he said, capitalising the first letters of the words as he spoke.

‘Oh ... a B.V.P.’ I said, understanding finally dawning on me.

‘Yes, a B.V.P. Now come back with two post-card size and two passport-size BVPs. This is a medical board, not a joke. Don’t take it lightly. When you are back, I’ll have to do a big test on you, boss. Only then the Medical Superintendent will sign. You must understand I’m trying to help you.’

‘Right, Sir,’ I said, reaching out for the form.

I came out of the doctor’s office feeling like a freshly deflated balloon. I perked up a little thinking that this experience would help in getting the emotion right for the B.V.P. I immediately told myself not to perk up otherwise the picture would come out all wrong.

This was my second day at the government hospital, facing a Medical Board so that I could get a form filled to claim the Excise Duty exemption on the new car that I wanted to purchase.

Some of the doctors had been quick about the examination, like the ophthalmologist who had asked me to read some letters from a distance and had promptly signed the form. The urologist had been somewhat different, though.

‘Why are you here?’ he had asked when I had entered his cabin. It was a small cramped room with about seven young medical interns who were there to learn and absorb the workings of a government hospital. They were all dressed in light green coats and they were all girls.

‘Sir, I want a new car and...’

‘So what can I do if you want a new car?’ he said. ‘This is not a showroom.’

‘I need your signature on the form, Sir.’

He took the form and studied it. ‘Now see,’ he said to the interns in his best complaining voice, ‘This person needs to drive a car and I have to check his testes. Twenty years as a specialist in a government hospital and this is what they expect me to do! I will also have to poke my fingers and check for piles and fistula,’ he said, clearly unhappy with the situation. ‘All because this gentleman wants to drive.’ The girls twittered en masse.

The doctor took me behind a screen and asked me to unbutton my trousers. As I undid the trousers he asked, ‘How many cars do you have?’

‘Only one, Sir. It’s now fourteen years old and I need a new one. I just want this medical form so I can claim the exemption...’

‘Which one are you buying?’

‘I was thinking of a mini-SUV, Sir. I like to travel with my wife.’ I named the model of the car.

‘Good choice,’ he said, perking up. ‘My son bought the same car. Good mileage it gives and very comfortable. The ground clearance is also quite good for Indian roads.’

I knew all this already, so I said, ‘Sir, the testes?’

‘Oh, forget the testes. You test drove the car, no?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Okay, button up your trouser and enjoy,’ and he packed me off.

I returned to the hospital after an hour, having gone to a photographer and clicked the B.V.P., but the Orthopaedician had left for the day.

The next day I landed up at the doctor’s OPD early in the morning. It had been raining heavily and there were very few people in the queue. I entered after only a half-hour wait. I showed the doctor the form and the desired B.V.Ps. He examined the pictures and seemed satisfied with my sad expression. He nodded his head and signed on the form and handed it over to me. I took the form and waited hesitantly.

‘You can go now,’ he said.

‘Sir, the big medical examination?’ I asked with surprise.

‘Oh, yes,’ he said.

He reached out his hand towards me and said, ‘Shake my hand.’ I took his hand and shook it.

‘All fine,’ he said. ‘You can go.’

As I wheeled myself out of his cubicle he called out, ‘Listen, if you need any further help in the future, we will do whatever is required, okay?’

I nodded and wheeled myself out of the office. I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror hanging near the door. I was smiling. I rushed out before the doctor caught me.



Salil Chaturvedi

Have GPS, will travel!

Gone are those days, when we had to pore over maps or stop to ask for directions. Now we follow the GPS and find ourselves exactly where we want to be.

Francis Bacon once said that travel, in the younger sort, is part of an education and in the elder sort, a part of experience. Truer words haven't been said, because travel unites people of all generations and cultures. Technology has now made it possible for us to book an entire trip within minutes. All we need is that thirst for seeking new adventures... and a smartphone.

And that's how my vacation began. After weeks of daydreaming about pristine turquoise seas, the other half and I found ourselves en route Phuket. We had our entire itinerary all planned out - TripAdvisor was our new fangled travel agent and we knew exactly where to stay, what to eat and what to do. Armed with our fully charged phones, we decided to explore Phuket on wheels - two to be precise. Scootys (as we like to call the hybrid vehicle that looks like a cross between a luna and a bike) are the most dominant species on Phuket's roadscape and it was but natural, that we

use those to explore the island. Our destination was the Big Buddha, a gigantic sculpture of the Buddha nestled among the hills. The sculpture is visible from nearly everywhere on the island, but reaching it, is quite an arduous task if you're unfamiliar with the roads. Given that my only experience with two wheels has been a bicycle, the other half agreed to be the designated driver and I became the navigator.

For the longest time, navigation has been entirely dependent on a three letter word. When I was a child, my parents would pore over that huge foldable sheet of paper with numerous lines and markings called a MAP. Sadly, it has now become extinct and children only recognize the word from an icon on their phones. Today, we rely on something equally life-saving - the GPS. GPS is the reason why taxis manage to find your house in a labyrinth of lanes. It decides when I can leave home to reach the theatre with just enough time to spare.



It dictates the route I need to take to work, in order to make it to that all important meeting. And of course, it encroaches our vacations like a third wheel, ensuring that it's always sharing every adventure with us.

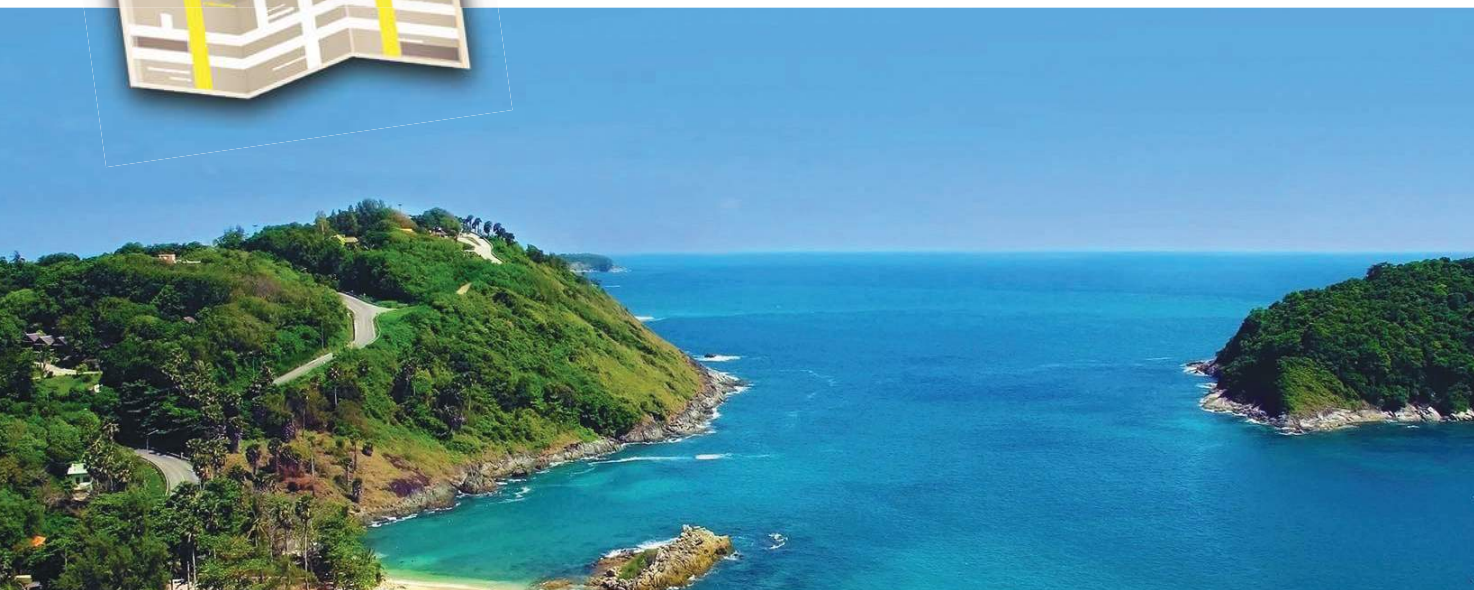


**Vaishnavi
Venkatesh**

Switching on our GPS, we began the journey of 20 odd kilometers on the trusty bike. The roads became narrower, the houses fewer and farther apart... and the Buddha still remained elusive and distant. But we refused to budge from the route assigned to us, knowing that GPS would never fail us. We finally reached a dead-end and realised that the kind lady giving us instructions from the phone had tricked us. "You have reached your destination", she assured us as we stood gazing at the Buddha on the hill ahead. I guess we had reached the destination, if our next step was to attempt cliff-climbing. The other half meekly suggested that we may have relied a bit too much on GPS, and less on our own sense of direction. As the navigator, I was too stubborn to admit defeat just yet, and tinkered with the phone to come up with a different route. Sure enough, this looked like it would take us (by road) all the way to the destination, so we turned around and began the next journey with our GPS guest.

As we rode away from our dead-end, we noticed several couples just like us. If one partner was driving, then the other was holding out the phone like an antenna - almost waiting for the Buddha to radio us all towards him. It felt comical, given that we were all headed in the same direction like homing pigeons. We finally reached our destination and the sight was definitely worth the banter we had with our GPS lady. It got me thinking about how dependent we've become on an electronic voice, that it makes us forget to look up from the phone and actually find our bearings.

But then again, how wonderful is an invention like GPS for people with disabilities! GPS has both audio and visual navigation systems, making it easy for people to find directions to their destinations with minimal dependence on others with the knowledge of exactly how long it will take them to get there. From navigating through college campuses to cities and countries, GPS has now made it possible for people to explore beyond the realm of their comfort zones. From being just a navigational app, GPS has now given more of us that thirst to seek new adventures. It has united us by being inclusive in its very core.



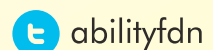
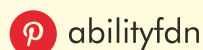
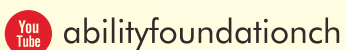


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16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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

