

Success &

# ABILITY


India's Cross-disability Magazine

June 2018



**DR. ALIM CHANDANI**

**SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL  
ENTREPRENEUR, LEADER  
AND UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR,  
DR. ALIM CHANDANI HELPS  
DEAF PEOPLE IN INDIA  
SUCCEED IN BUSINESS AND  
OTHER CAREERS**



**INDIA'S FIRST  
ENGINEER WITH  
CEREBRAL PALSY  
QUADRIPLEGIA**

**ASHWIN KARTHIK S.N.**

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

You are just a **click** away!



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# THINK BIG!



Dr. Madan Vasishtha

*Leadership, education, business and the work-a-day world... Dr. Alim Chandani is empowering scores of deaf people in India to succeed big time. He shares his story in this exclusive interview with Dr. MADAN VASISHTA.*

**D**r. Alim Chandani, who has worked all his life to become a successful social entrepreneur, leader and a university professor, has now put his own career aside to help deaf people in India become successful in business as well as in the work-a-day world. I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Chandani for several years and have seen him grow both as a person and a professional. It is an even greater pleasure to see him spread his work ethics to deaf people in India.

Born in Mumbai, Dr. Chandani attended Mill Hall Oral School for the Deaf in London until he was eight years old, followed by other mainstream schools in the United States for his middle and high school education. For his college education, he chose the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). After doing his M.A. in Deaf Rehabilitation and Higher Education at New York University, Dr. Chandani moved to Washington DC, for his doctoral degree in Special Education Administration from Gallaudet University.

Dr. Chandani has been very active in social entrepreneurship and leadership training. He established Global Reach Out (GRO) while he was working at RIT in 2007 and continues to be its chief executive officer.

Dr. Chandani taught at Gallaudet University for several years before coming to India two years ago to establish a leadership and entrepreneurial training centre at Centum, in collaboration with GRO. He is the Associate Vice President of Centum Learning Limited, New Delhi. A dynamic and very focused young man, Dr. Chandani is making a major impact in education, employment, training and empowerment of deaf people in India.



Here are excerpts from my interview with him conducted via email exchanges.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **What role did your parents play in shaping your educational success?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: My parents sacrificed their livelihood in India for giving me the best education. They made sure I got all kinds of support for my education.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **What made you decide to go in for a doctoral degree in administration?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: I remember I had met you, Dr. Madan Vasishtha, at the Deaf Expo in Coimbatore in 2007. I mentioned that I had finished my M.A and had started my NGO – the Global Reach Out Initiative and you told me to make sure that I get a Ph.D degree in order to bring about change in India, otherwise people wouldn't listen to me. In 2008, I got an offer to do a Ph.D programme. You were one of my professors as

well as my mentor. I knew there were a lot of problems in the special education programmes in India and not enough deaf Indian experts to provide the necessary tools, so here I am.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **Did this degree help you in your career? Or did you have to get additional education and in-service training, to reach where you are now?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: I am so grateful for completing my Ph.D. I am able to utilise the information and knowledge that I gained from my degree. Even though I am not a fan of research and writing, it is critical to have these skills. These skills are helping me research on the status of education in deaf schools in Haryana and the states in Northeast India. There is a lot to be done regarding our education system, including the quality of education for the deaf and the attitude towards deaf children. Five years of Ph.D. studies is a long time. However, this education, and teaching Social Entrepreneurship at the Department of Business at Gallaudet certainly helped shape my skills and knowledge.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **How long did you teach at Gallaudet, and what subjects?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: I taught there for eight years. First Year Seminar courses for new students at Gallaudet included providing a roadmap for their career success as well opportunities to explore their self-reflections based on various personality



Alim Chandani, Amanda Fish, Tushar Viradiya and Babloo Kumar

tests. I have co-taught Social Entrepreneurship courses to encourage the concept of creating businesses that have social impacts. Many deaf people are not aware of the resources and tools needed for starting a business.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **How did you get the Centum-GRO project started?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: After teaching Social Entrepreneurship at Gallaudet, I developed a proposal on creating an Entrepreneurship Hub for the Deaf, which I felt would be an incredible space for deaf individuals to brainstorm on what kind of businesses they could start. Through my sister's connections, my proposal was sent to Sunil Bharti Mittal, the chairman of Airtel. He called me to his office in November 2015 wherein I presented my proposal. Upon approval of my proposal, I moved to India to create a state-of-the-art Leadership and Training Centre for the Deaf in New Delhi.

There are about 70 million people with disabilities (PWD) in India. Only one million of them are employed. This is a significant problem, which led the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, to create the National Action Plan 2015. The goal is to create 2.5 million jobs for people with disabilities by 2022.

There are many NGOs and corporations that have started training persons with disabilities so that they can qualify for funds from the government. However, most of them are managed by hearing individuals. I do know that there are exceptional deaf Indians who could manage and coordinate a response to this challenge posed by the Prime Minister.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **What are the goals of Centum-GRO project?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: There are three major goals:

1. Improve the quality of deaf education all over India by providing necessary data.



Dr. Alim Chandani with his sister Joe Bryant

2. Advocate for our information access rights such as subtitling on TV and movies or providing support services such as interpreters at public events and schools.

3. Self-initiation skills – provide the necessary knowledge on Deaf Identity, culture, and leadership skills so that deaf individuals can be proud of their identity and can educate the hearing audience on sign language.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **Are you satisfied with your achievements so far, or do you feel you have higher rungs to climb?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: I am humbled and grateful for having an amazing team to help create a positive brand, Centum-GRO, for the deaf community. Now, after a year and half of being here, I have many more goals to focus on. While we have training programmes at Centum-GRO Centre in Hauz Khas, a lot of outsiders such as parents, leaders, interpreters, teachers and corporation officials come to see how we conduct our programme, because it is a model of success created by, for, and of the deaf. The whole team is

deaf excepting one person, who is the interpreter. The team decides what is best and creates the curriculum for the training, with no influence from the hearing experts. People come and ask us for advice and consultations. It is a perfect time to awaken existing deaf organisations and move forward to a better livelihood for the deaf. Especially, with the RPWD Act being passed last year, we need to become more active by sending

recommendations on reforming education, accessibility, employment, etc.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **What specific support system helped you achieve your goals?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: My amazing team – especially Deaf Expert, Amanda Fish from USA, who provides the necessary training to teachers (using train-the-teachers mode) to train Indian students. The second is Saurav Roychowdhury, my rock, a sign language interpreter. And third, you, my ongoing cheerleader!

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **What is your advice to deaf people in India who do not have the American support system? How can they realise their dreams?**

Dr. Alim Chandani: Deaf individuals and children need more exposure from successful deaf role models to believe that they too can achieve as much. More awareness on the RPWD 2016 Act, as well as learning how to advocate for their rights.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: **In India, the government is emphasising “full inclusion” for all disabled**

children. This also means – no special schools for disabled children. Do you think deaf children can successfully participate in regular schools? Or are special schools with full access to communication important?

Dr. Alim Chandani: This is a challenge. I have visited about 15 deaf schools in various states so far, and so many of them are already adopting the concept of Inclusive Education, but most of the teachers have no prior training or knowledge on how to successfully implement this model. It is nearly impossible unless the whole class is in sign language, then maybe it would work. It is critical to retain special institutions for the deaf with more deaf teachers where they can work closely with the existing hearing teachers. The teachers need to learn how to become innovative with the teaching methodologies for the deaf.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: *What's your message for parents of deaf children in India? What kind of support should they provide these children, keeping in mind the limited resources here?*

Dr. Alim Chandani: All parents must understand how sign language can actually help increase the language development of their deaf children. They need to be aware that deaf children can achieve a lot, by meeting successful deaf role models.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: *In addition to interpreters, what kind of support system did RIT provide you?*

Dr. Alim Chandani: I had full support at RIT and Gallaudet with note takers and interpreters in the classroom.

Dr. Madan Vasishtha: *Anything else that you would like to add...?*

Dr. Alim Chandani: My purpose for moving to India was to focus on two things that I believe all deaf and hard of hearing individuals deserve to have:



Fareed Zakaria, Saurav Roychowdhury and Joe Bryant with Dr. Alim Chandani

**1. Quality Education** – Provide training to existing teachers in a variety of teaching methodologies for the deaf. Build up an alliance between existing teachers and Deaf consultants (assistants) to work closely and provide actual learning tools to deaf children. Encourage the Bilingualism approach by using Indian Sign Language (ISL) and written English. Create deaf-friendly classroom spaces for the children.

**2. Information Access** – To ensure that all deaf individuals have equal access to information such as by captioning on TV, sign language interpreters at public events, to spread more awareness about ISL and so forth.

We, deaf individuals in India, have been neglected for far too long. It is time to raise the bar by involving us as equal citizens of India. It is time for the hearing society to LISTEN to us instead of making assumptions on what's best for us. My metaphor on Ally is that the hearing audience who are currently working in our "world" are the mechanics while deaf individuals should be considered as Pilots. The pilots cannot fly without the support of the mechanics. We want the hearing audience to start LISTENING to us based on our PERSONAL experience as DEAF individuals and work along with us to give the best solutions for our deaf community. It is time to hand over the reins to us, and by working together and providing the support we need, we certainly will fly higher! ■

# RELIVE

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# Beyond LIMITS



**Suchitra  
Iyappa**

*Writer, blogger, lyricist and India's first engineer with cerebral palsy quadriplegia, Ashwin Karthik has many claims to fame, finds  
SUCHITRA IYAPPA.*



**ASHWIN KARTHIK S.N.**

**T**he ANZ facility in Bengaluru's Manyata Tech Park is among the bank's largest operations hub in the country. It is also the workplace of Ashwin Karthik S N, India's first engineer with cerebral palsy quadriplegia, who is a successful Solutions Architect with the organisation. He may be a wheelchair user, have quadriplegia and be completely dependent on an attendant, but this 33-year-old has made his mark as a valuable contributor to the team, battling deadlines like everybody else in a highly stressful environment.

Handsome, sharp and articulate, Ashwin's story is not only about his grit, determination and fortitude

in light of a crippling condition. His is also a story of a mother's unstinting devotion to her son, of sacrifice, the joys of a loving family, an extraordinary friendship and most of all, an empowerment that has made him the man he is today.

When Ashwin was born, deficient supply of oxygen to his brain resulted in the severest form of cerebral palsy affecting all his four limbs. The diagnosis and cruel medical pronouncement that the infant would be a vegetable all his life was the beginning of an arduous journey for the devastated family.

Ashwin's mother, a sheltered young woman, was forced to travel for his treatment, leaving her older son with her husband. Ashwin's hands-on father, a banker with a transferable job, had to balance the demands of his career while caring for his family.

Determined to give their child as normal a life as possible, Ashwin was enrolled in a regular school. Ashwin recalls his mother sitting on the footpath outside the school gate, day in and day out, so she could be close at hand to feed him and take him to the toilet. Managing studies involved borrowing his classmates' books, his parents and brother furiously copying the notes and returning the borrowed books...alongside their own responsibilities. "People say I am unlucky, but with a family like mine, I am the luckiest person in the world", says Ashwin.

When Ashwin was 12, life took a cruel turn with the sudden demise of his father, the backbone of the family, forcing his mother to become the

breadwinner. "Those were tough times but mum took it in her stride, without a word of self pity or complaint, thinking only about the family", recalls Ashwin.

All the efforts paid off, with Ashwin scoring 84% in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard examination, the highest ever score by a student with cerebral palsy. And yet, the struggle was far from over. When Ashwin decided to pursue engineering after his success in the 12<sup>th</sup> board exam he was denied admission despite having cleared the Common Entrance Test (CET). "As a disabled candidate I was examined by a panel of doctors who deemed me unfit to pursue the course in spite of my having done well in the examination. We waited for ten hours as they sat deliberating the case...I would not take 'No' for an answer..." he says, looking back. After much persuasion and assurances, Ashwin was finally granted permission to do his B.E. in Computer Science.



“  
*He is constantly testing his own limits, ever restless in a comfort zone.*  
 ”

At this juncture, his friend and classmate Bharat Sharma, who had been unsuccessful in his first attempt at the CET, volunteered to become Ashwin's scribe through the engineering course. Placing his own ambitions of becoming an engineer on hold, compromising on his own studies and going against his parents' wishes, Bharat took on Ashwin's challenges as his own, helping Ashwin become India's first successful engineer with cerebral palsy.

Despite this, frustrations continued unabated. Ashwin spent the next two years looking for

a job. He was interviewed by around 45 firms. He cleared almost all the interviews, only to be rebuffed by apprehensive human resources personnel. Eventually, with the help of Enable India, he landed a job with Mphasis where he worked till 2015. His dedication and hard work won him several awards of excellence, but the highlight was receiving the National Award for the Best Employee with Disability from the then President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, in 2013 at New Delhi.

After a two-year stint, Ashwin felt the need to move on and joined the ANZ team. Today, he sets out to work at 6.30 a.m. by the office cab, commuting more than 25km one way, and returns home at 8.30 p.m. after a workout at the gym. By his own admission, he is constantly testing his own limits, ever restless in a comfort zone. His heroes – his mother, Stephen Hawking and Sachin Tendulkar spur him on.

In fact, a meeting with Sachin which started as a fan boy moment has led to a long friendship. “I couldn’t have imagined the man I admire the most, Sachin Tendulkar, telling me that I inspire him!” he gushes. Every year, Sachin unfailingly wishes him on his birthday, reinforcing Ashwin’s admiration of his hero’s humility and kindness.

Ashwin is all praise for his employers, ANZ, a firm he cites as a role model for inclusion. By assigning a personal attendant to take care of his needs, Ashwin is able to put in his best. Today, he has represented his organisation at high profile corporate meetings and also

accompanied his MD to receive ‘The Most Inclusive Organisation’ Award conferred on his company by NASSCOM in 2016.

At the workplace, Ashwin is respected as a thorough professional and is also considered a fun guy. His buddy at work, Krishnamohan, reveals that Ashwin is a great inspiration to all of them, motivating them to get things done. “Ashwin is an exceptional human being... caring and generous”, he says.

Lakshmi Kulkarni, his reporting manager for the last two years, believes that Ashwin brings strength to the table. “Ashwin does not depend on support from his seniors. He is super independent”, she says. “Ultimately the prime focus of every organisation is cost and maximising efficiency towards meeting

this end. Therefore, there is constant pressure on teams like ours which support business”, she shares.

“  
Ashwin’s story is not only one of grit, determination and fortitude, but also one of a mother’s unstinting devotion, a loving family and an extraordinary friendship.”





*Ashwin has been an achiever since the day he was born, proving that with the right support, education and empowerment, people with disabilities can achieve as much as anyone else.*



“Ashwin’s interface with development stakeholders is critical as the right information has to be captured. He consults, discusses and then executes the approach with success.”

Lakshmi admires how Ashwin breaks mindsets at the workplace and makes everyone, including her, feel, “If Ashwin can do it, so can I”. As his supervisor, she believes nothing differentiates Ashwin from the rest. “Like everyone in the team, he is pushed and challenged, which is necessary to unleash hidden potential.”

Ashwin is given equal opportunity to apply for bigger roles and is evaluated on performance like everyone else in the team. His greatest asset? “Ashwin speaks from the heart!” declares Lakshmi. He is always the one assigned the job of giving speeches at functions, which he pulls off gracefully, with very little preparation.

Indeed, Ashwin confesses to wanting to become a professional writer ultimately. His debut novel, *The Relic*, co-authored with his visually impaired friend, is a historical thriller. Painstakingly typing with one finger, after a long workday, he is already on to his next book. And then, there is his weekly blog, ‘Monday Truclusions’ that dwells on the positive aspects of life. Passion and drive is clearly what keeps him surging ahead.

This apart, this multifaceted young man is a poet too. “It started out with me writing love letters for my friends who were courting girls”, he confesses with a twinkle in his eye. Collaborating with Mumbai based music composer Rohan Patel, Ashwin has written lyrics for four songs of a 70 minute film soon to be released on Cartoon Network.

A major feather in his cap was writing the lyrics for the internationally acclaimed 3D animation film *Rabby and the Tortue – Hunt for the Golden Seed*. Working with a team of professionals from across the world, helmed by animator Hrishikesh Jadhav, this delightful film has won an award at the Goa International Film Festival and made it to the semi finals in film festivals at both Miami and Berlin.

I don’t have the speed  
But the golden seed  
Has brought the power I need  
But not for my own need

I was a child living alone  
Weak and lonely I have grown  
But now I am stronger  
Yes I am not alone any long

Ashwin’s stirring lyrics in the song ‘I feel stronger’ in this film seems to resonate with his own story, having been liberated by his own empowerment.

Ashwin’s family has expanded by embracing his friend Bharat in gratitude and in love, all living together under the same roof.

This is a happy, heartening story despite the trials. By living life to the fullest, Ashwin has been an achiever since the day he was born, proving that with the right support, education and empowerment, people with disabilities can achieve as much as anyone else. Ashwin’s life demonstrates that despite difficulties and challenges, one can steer one’s life towards positivity and become the master of one’s destiny. ■

# Creative MOVEMENT Therapy Certification Course



Certified by CID-UNESCO (IDC, France) and CMTAI (Member of ADTA), this course is designed to help participants develop their personal movement language for holistic growth.

By fusing the theoretical framework with creative healing movement experiences, it empowers students with the tools to help individuals and groups therapeutically.

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# News & Notes

## **WOOF! WOOF! HOW ABOUT A SERVICE DOG?**

Service dogs are trained to fit an individual's specific needs related to their disability, and can be trained to help people with multiple sclerosis (MS). For instance, Tammie Decroteau who has multiple sclerosis, has her service dog Logan help her with simple tasks throughout the day. She says that Logan's companionship has been "life-changing" for her. Logan can assist Tammie with picking up items off the floor, fetching a cell phone from a table, nudging a light switch with her nose, opening a refrigerator by pulling a rope wrapped around the door handle, and more.



Service dogs can also be trained to assist with balance or to help their owners get up from the floor by bracing their bodies for their owners to lean on. Dr. Ellen Lathi, a neurologist and medical director of the Elliot Lewis MS Center, advises those looking to get a service dog to buy a dog and train it as per one's requirements, and using the services of a private dog trainer to teach it MS-related commands, like fetching fallen objects. One could also get support from organisations that train service dogs for people with MS.

Getting a service dog is a long process, but well worth it, according to Dr. Lathi. Apart from rendering services, the service dog helps prevent persons with MS from becoming isolated, as the dog is there to listen to you, look into your eyes and cuddle up and give a sense of purpose.

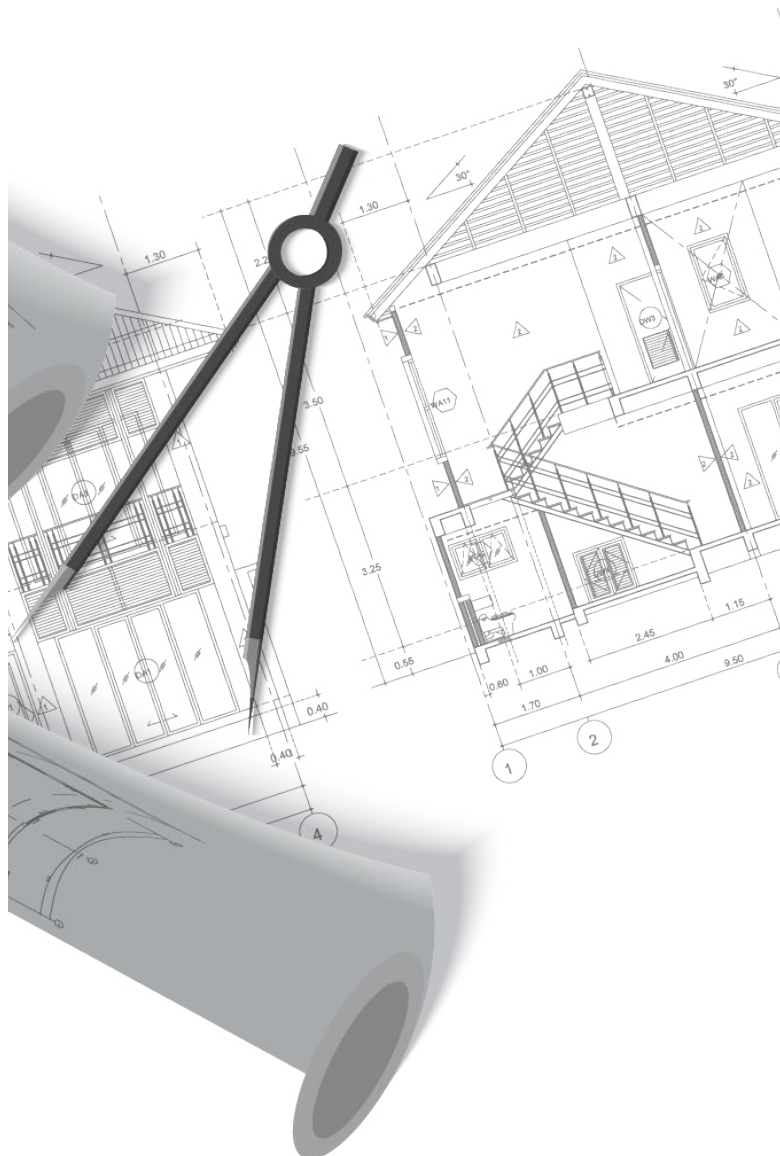
Source: AbleThrive

## CENTRE SEEKS DATA ON ACCESSIBLE BUILDINGS

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has sought data from various departments of the Delhi Government and local bodies on the number of accessible public buildings and places under their jurisdiction. It has also asked them to draw an action plan with a definite timeline for making all the public buildings under their jurisdiction accessible, under the Accessible India campaign, by December 3, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

In Delhi, 23 buildings were identified for making them accessible and the Centre has so far released funds for 19 of those, based on proposals from the Delhi government. However, taking it beyond the Accessible India campaign, the DEPwD has proposed eight categories, covering over 250 public buildings and spaces including educational institutes, healthcare facilities and office buildings. If the national capital could transform itself into a prime example of a "barrier-free environment" and "inclusivity", it would enhance the visibility of the campaign and serve as a model for others to follow, according to Shakuntala Gamlin, Secretary, DEPwD.

Source: PTI



## AWARENESS DRIVE ON DISABILITY IN ODISHA



Sashakt, a state-wide campaign to promote inclusion and awareness on disability issues, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and existing government facilities, was flagged off from Puri by the Odisha State disAbility Network and concluded on June 13, 2018.

According to disability activist Dr. Sruti Mohapatra who spearheaded the campaign, all residents of Odisha have a lot to offer to society, including those with disabilities, but they are often left behind. The campaign focuses on promoting inclusion and raising awareness and would help everyone in Odisha to live more self-determined and independent lives. Over million people were sensitised by the campaign. An awareness *rath* along with a mobile photo exhibition moved along with the campaign team across the state. Further, the campaign included several awareness programmes for discussing, analysing and understanding the RPWD law, and roles and responsibilities of stake holders.

Source: Odisha State disAbility Network

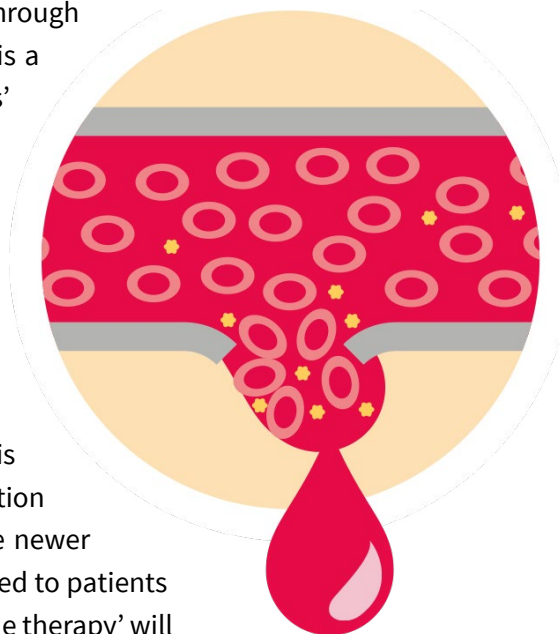
## HAEMOPHILIA: PROPHYLAXIS THERAPY TO AVERT DISABILITY

Now included as a disability by the RPWD Act 2016, haemophilia is a blood disorder that mostly affects men. People with severe haemophilia can bleed for days or weeks from even minor injuries; they can even bleed spontaneously. Because of repetitive bleeding in the joints, people with haemophilia tend to become progressively disabled. About 100,000 Indians are estimated to have haemophilia, and many of the affected persons discontinue their education and remain unemployed, in stark contrast to other countries where the disability rates are much lower and people with haemophilia are known to participate in contact and adventure sports.



A major reason for this is, in India, haemophilia is treated through on-demand therapy, i.e., giving factors if and when there is a bleed. The alternative, 'replacement therapy' or 'prophylaxis' therapy, involves giving clotting factors regularly to prevent anticipated bleeding. If started at a young age, it can avert and/or halt the progression of joint disease and hence prevent disability.

A few centres across India have instituted pilot prophylaxis programmes in recent times with limited, but very encouraging results, proving that such programmes can be run effectively in India. The next step is to take this therapy across India. Treatment options like third generation recombinant clotting factors will further this cause, as the newer agents are stable at room temperature and can be dispensed to patients at their convenience, at a centre near their home. This 'home therapy' will allow better compliance to regular therapy as well as decrease the total consumption of clotting factors.



Source: *The Economic Times*

## ROAD ACCIDENT VICTIM COMPENSATION INCREASED TEN FOLD



So far, the compensation paid to road accident victims or their next of kin in the event of death, disability or minor injury has been very low. Now, a Government of India notification raises the compensation ten fold from current rates. The rates are being changed after a gap of 24 years. As per the new norms, next of kin of those involved in fatal accidents will be paid a compensation of INR 5 lakhs; compensation for permanent disability will

range between INR 50,000 and INR 5 lakhs depending on the level of disability, and this will be increased by 5% annually.

The current rate for compensation in the event of death is INR 50,000 and at INR 25,000 for permanent disability. This is binding on all insurance companies. However, it is noted that these amounts are negligible and no accident victim accepts this meagre compensation thus leading to all of them appealing to the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT). The Motor Vehicle Act allows for amending of these rates of compensation, taking into account the increased cost of living. The new rates are slated to bring down these litigation issues but those seeking still higher compensation can appeal accordingly. ■

Source: PTI

# LESSONS from Mumbai DABBAWALAS



Dr. Ketna  
L Mehta

*Look no further than the amazing Dabbawalas of Mumbai to learn lessons in efficiency and time management, vouches DR. KETNA L MEHTA, Founder Trustee, Nina Foundation.*

Most of us are familiar with the poem 'To Realise', that succinctly reiterates the value of time. Dabbawalas of Mumbai have been a world renowned case study in time management since eons. B School students are exposed to the virtues of quality systems and management with emphasis on 'Six Sigma' as a learning paradigm. However, the connection between time management and the dabbawalas saga is not emphasised in management text books.

A dabbawala, (Hindi: *dabba* - (lunch) box, *wala* - one who carries) is a person, whose job is to carry and deliver freshly made food from home in lunch boxes to office workers. Though the work sounds simple, it is actually a highly specialised trade that is over a century old and has become integral to Mumbai's culture.

Mumbai is India's most densely populated city with a huge flow of traffic. Because of this, lengthy commutes to workplaces are common, with many people travelling to work by train. A collecting dabbawala, usually on bicycle, collects dabbas from homes, or, more often, from the dabba makers (who actually cook the food). The dabbas have a mark on them, such as a colour or symbol, as identification mark, as most dabbawalas are illiterate.

The dabbawala then takes them to a designated sorting place, where he and others like him, sort (and sometimes bundle) the lunch boxes into groups. The grouped boxes are put in the coaches of trains, with the markings to identify the destination of the box (usually there is a designated car for the boxes). The markings include the rail station to unload the boxes and the address to which the box has to be delivered. At each station, boxes are handed over to the local dabbawala of that area, who deliver them to the right place. After lunch, the empty boxes are once again collected and sent back to the respective houses.

According to a survey, there is only one mistake in every 6,000,000 deliveries. The American business magazine *Forbes* gave a Six Sigma performance rating for the precision of the Mumbai dabbawala. Wow!



### “ToRealise”

To realise the value of one year:

**Ask a student who has failed a final exam.**

To realise the value of one month:

**Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.**

To realise the value of one week:

**Ask an editor of a weekly newspaper.**

To realise the value of one hour:

**Ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.**

To realise the value of one minute:

**Ask a person who has missed the train, bus or plane.**

To realise the value of one second:

**Ask a person who has survived an accident.**

To realise the value of one millisecond:

**Ask the person who has won a silver medal in the Olympics.**

The BBC has produced a documentary on dabbawalas, and Prince Charles, during his visit to India, met with them, aligning with their schedule to learn from them. Some of the dabbawalas have even been invited to give guest lectures in top business schools of India. Most remarkably, the success of the dabbawala trade involves no modern technology. The main reason for their popularity is the Indian people's love of home-made food delivered punctually.



*According to a survey, there is only one mistake in every 6,000,000 deliveries. The American business magazine Forbes gave a Six Sigma performance rating for the precision of the Mumbai dabbawala. Wow!*

The service is uninterrupted even on days of extreme weather, such as Mumbai's monsoons. The local dabbawalas at both ends are known to the customers personally, so there is no question of lack of trust. Also, they are well accustomed to the local areas that they cater to, which allows them to access any destination.

99.99% success rate, on time, every time! How do they do it?

Each and every office goer gets their dabba on time, satiating their appetite with homemade food. The dabbawalas are generally uneducated and illiterate, many don't wear a watch either, but they perform to six sigma levels day in and day out, on time, relentlessly.

Imagine if one of the dabbawalas thinks: "I am too tired to get up at 5.15 a.m., I will get up at 6.15 a.m. instead." This would be catastrophic as it would impact 15 customers who would have to go without their meal that day.

It is the realisation that the customer is the *Annadataa*, and the prime consideration of giving them their lunch, that is the compelling reason for the dabbawalas' work efficiency.

Maybe, the brand toting management graduates should be made to do a field internship with these hard working, faultless and efficient dabbawalas. Forsake an international internship jaunt to exotic locales and learn the basics of time management on our very own Indian soil.

Well, we can add our own line to the poem 'To Realise':

To realise the value of a sumptuous homemade lunch in the office, miles away, each day:

*Ask the Mumbai Dabbawala the secret of his efficiency and time management. ■*

# Never GIVE UP!



A K Singh



*He was a shy boy with hearing impairment, born in a backward village in Bihar. Today, he is a top rung manager in a leading PSE.*

*A K SINGH, General Manager, Finance, CMPDI (Coal India Ltd.) shares the twists and turns in his life and career path.*

**I** was born and schooled in a very backward village in Bihar. My father was working with Tata Co., at Jamshedpur, visiting our village only once or twice a year or perhaps during some ceremonies. My mother, my siblings and I stayed back in the village with our other relatives.

Once, our region was hit by some epidemic – perhaps typhoid. I too suffered a bout, so much so there was even a question of my survival. I survived. However, the typhoid took its toll and destroyed the nerves that convey sound from my ear to my brain, and I gradually lost my hearing. The tragedy was that nobody understood or recognised this. My uncles were fond of me. But eventually, since I couldn't hear and therefore didn't obey them, they assumed that I had become arrogant and termed me 'bekar' (useless). My classmates at school called me 'bahra' (deaf), which hurt me terribly. Villagers looked at me with pity. This created an element of rebellion in me. I took to avoiding the company of



A K SINGH

friends and became an introvert. A Sadhu Baba who visited our house was the first to recognise that I had lost my hearing. In those days, going to the city was a luxury. By the time my dad took me to Jamshedpur and other places for treatment, it was too late.

Once I passed matric exams, my uncle suggested that since I wouldn't be able to get a job, I should stop further studies and take up farming. But there was a fire burning in my belly. I was good at science and I aspired to be a doctor. So I opted for biology in my intermediate level. I attended all the classes, though I didn't hear anything spoken

by the teachers, and merely copied down the notes from my fellow students.

One day, my biology professor asked me what I aspired to be, and I proudly said "Doctor". He looked at me with curiosity and said, "You can't hear, how can you become a doctor? And even if you became a doctor, how would you be able to hear the problems voiced by patients?" That struck me hard, but it was the first real career guidance I'd received. I decided to do Economics Honours. Meanwhile, someone told me that chartered accountants were in great demand and that a career in finance didn't require much

hearing. So, I decided to do CA. Concerned about my career, my father mentioned to his chairman and managing director that I had a hearing disability. A very kind person, he, Bodhanwala sir inducted me into the company as an accounts trainee. He also

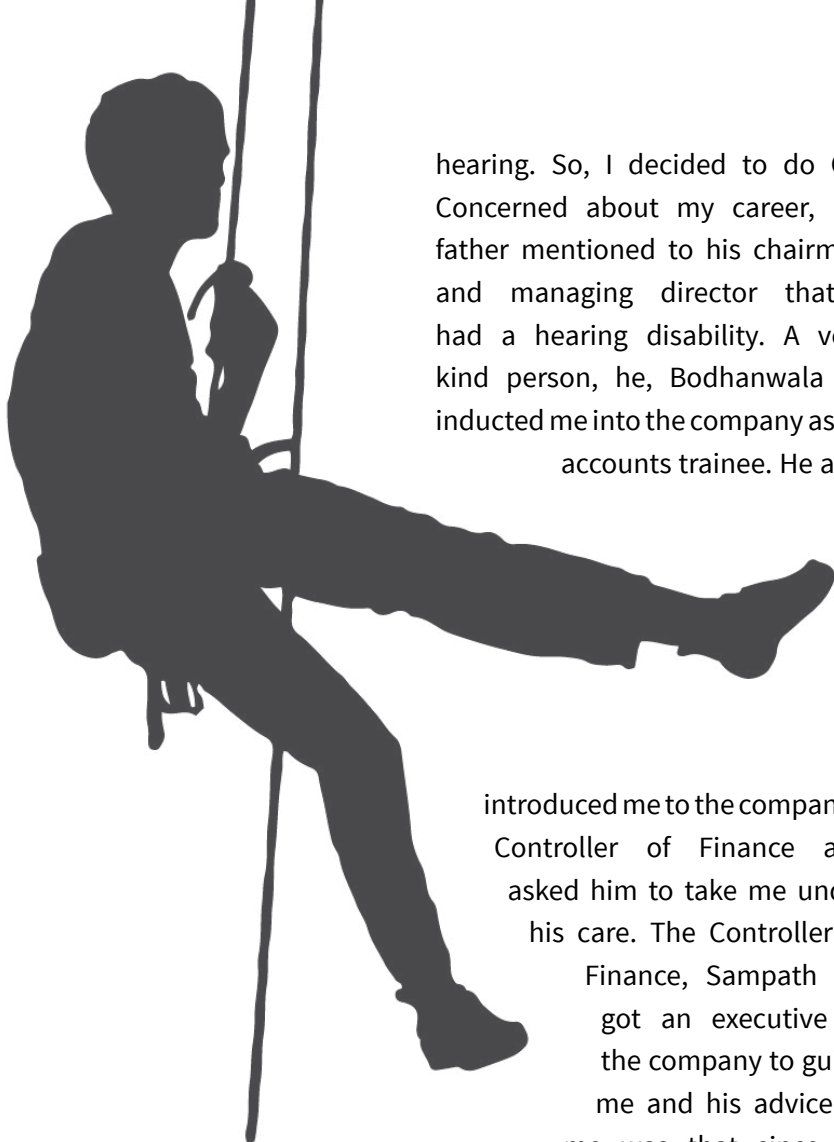
introduced me to the company's Controller of Finance and asked him to take me under his care. The Controller of Finance, Sampath sir, got an executive in the company to guide me and his advice to me was that since CA required three years of extensive and daily training in a CA firm, I wouldn't be able to do it alongside working on a job. He suggested that I could consider ICWA instead. I took his advice and cleared ICWA Inter in my first attempt.

I was still very timid, introverted and avoided interacting with people. This worried my father. So he got me to read books like Dale Carnegie's 'How to succeed in life', 'How to influence people and make friends', 'How to live a happy life', 'Cooperate with the inevitable', etc. These books influenced me.

It was around this time that I saw an advertisement for the post of Accountant in CCL. I applied and got selected under Physically Handicapped quota and was offered a job at CMPDI. This was the second turning point in my life. On my first day at CMPDI, Krishnan sir, CMPDI's Deputy Chairman and Finance Manager, called me to his room. He asked for my name; but since I was extremely nervous, I could not reply. I think he understood my state of mind then and gently asked me to sit down and relax. By signing, he asked me how hearing impairment had happened to me, of my family, village, etc. He told me to not to worry and advised that since I had a hearing impairment, I should learn computer operations.

Krishnan sir requested the head of CMPDI's computer department to let me sit in his department to observe and learn programming, and I did that. I am proud to say that many of the computer programmes that I developed in 1990 are still in use at CMPDI.

Another gentleman who influenced and guided me was Mahip Singh sir, then the CMD of CMPDI. Once I read in the newspapers that he had been honoured with some award. I wrote a letter to him congratulating him. He immediately responded with a 'Thank You' letter and also called me to his office. When he came to know that I was hearing



*I wonder how I transformed from being a very shy, introverted boy to the extrovert that I am today. Thanks to CMPDI and to all my bosses for motivating and transforming me.*



impaired, he called upon Krishnan sir and asked him to provide me with all possible support. This motivated me very much.

One more person who made a huge influence on me was S.K. Ganguly sir. Not only did he guide me, he also gave me the freedom to improvise and do things in a better way. I learnt the basics of central and corporate accounts under him. Together, we introduced a new set of codes for accounts, departmental codes to find out department-specific profitability, cost and so on. Under his guidance and support I learnt how to extract data from RABMN. I developed a method to export Trial Balance data from all seven RIs of CMPDI and consolidated this, which saved the company a lot of time and effort.

I received appreciation from all my bosses at CMPDI and was handed timely promotions all along.

The next turning point in my life occurred when my boss A.K. Soni sir issued me a transfer order to Singrauli. Transfers to Singrauli were considered as punishment orders. I pleaded unsuccessfully with him to consider my disability and reconsider the transfer order.

That night I cried through the night, unable to accept the situation. Then I said to myself, “I am not going to hell; so many directors, CMDs and persons in senior positions have been posted there. Why can’t I work from there? I thank God for always being kind to me”. And I packed my bags for Singrauli.

At Singrauli, I met Bahadur sir, the RD. He gave me all the support anyone could want. Within a few months, I was promoted to HOD Finance. I soon got to visit active coal fields like Jayant, Nigahi, Amlohri, Dudhichua, etc. I also got to do camping, and enjoyed the beauty of Singrauli’s forests and rivers. I tried to streamline and computerise financial transactions there. I made many good



*To everyone, I say this:  
The only success mantra is  
“Believe in yourself.  
Then the world will believe in  
you”. Have the courage to  
aspire, and never,  
never give up.*



friends at Singrauli and tried to win the hearts of my subordinates. When I was transferred from Singrauli, I could see tears in my subordinates’ eyes, which made me become emotional as well. This transfer had been a blessing in disguise to me. It led me to a lot of learning, besides some amazing experiences. A big thanks to Soni sir.

I do believe that there is some good behind every development. We only have to realise, experience, and learn from it. Today, I have risen to become the Chief Manager – Finance at CMPDI. I had the privilege of being Treasurer of CMPDI’s Gondwana Club for nearly 10 years and the Treasurer of CMPDI’s Welfare Fund for five years. I also got to participate in chess and other competitions.

I wonder how I transformed from being a very shy, introverted boy to the extrovert that I am today. Today, I have every happiness in life – a great career, a house, a caring and supportive wife and two wonderful daughters. For someone who had started life in an atmosphere of utter negativity and had, at one point of time, even considered ending his life, the life I now live is a huge and happy achievement. My thanks to CMPDI and all my bosses for motivating and transforming me. ■



# MIND'S EYE



**Meera  
Balachander**

*Is the obsession to click and forward photographs inducing us to neglect etching and savouring the beautiful moments that make up the memories of our lifetime – of events, places or situations, muses MEERA BALACHANDER.*

**A** three-year-old autistic, non-verbal child, helps crack a serious crime without even being aware that he has been abducted. All he does is draw on the walls of the room he is confined in. But his drawings are so accurate that the police solve the crime in no time.

Sounds bizarre? Not really. Author Lakshmi Mohan, who has seen many autistic kids, wrote this novelette from her experience with a similarly talented child.

Indeed, some autistic individuals – the most famous being Stephen Wiltshire – make up for their lack of verbal expression with extreme accuracy in visual observation and its artistic reproduction. Wiltshire required just a 15-minute helicopter view of a city to accurately draw all its features.

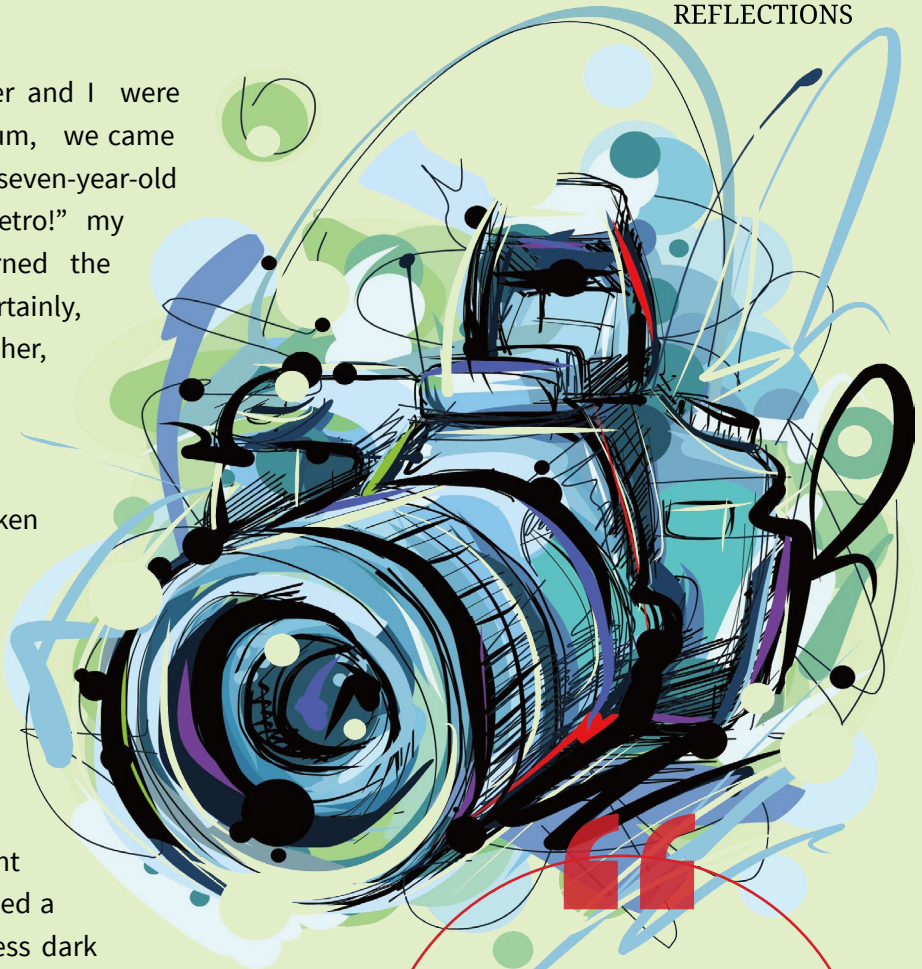
Oh well, they are the rarest exceptions in a world overwhelmingly tuned in to the visual. For the rest of us, photographs amply fill the need.



The other day, when my daughter and I were flipping through an old photo album, we came across my old photograph – a seven-year-old chubby girl in a frock. “How retro!” my daughter remarked, as she turned the dog-eared old photo album. Certainly, that frock wouldn’t mesmerise her, with her extensive exposure to contemporary clothes. But that black and white picture spoke volumes to me. This photo was taken on Diwali, the only time of the year a new ready-made dress came my way. I had set my eyes on this dark green cotton frock, with a panel of dancing girls and a pocket too with more of these! When my father gave in to my wishes and I lovingly brought home the paper packet, it had raised a little storm in a teacup. A sleeveless dark coloured frock?! My granny had not contended with the tears her comments would bring to my eyes. Thankfully, her love for me settled the issue amicably.

Roll the years forward a bit, and there I was, in a third class train compartment, travelling with my young kids. It was Diwali night. As the train passed village after village, the sight of beautifully lit houses made my heart skip a beat. The cool November night breeze, the hum of the train and the play of light and darkness etched a permanent image in my mind that I can delve into and relive those times when life was simpler and more wholesome. No, I don’t even have a photo of those moments as witness.

And now, here we are, in the digital age, where everything is available at a click, or even less. Is memory defunct? Nope. There is plenty of it in phone cameras, as the ads claim! They may



*Is capturing a moment,  
or an event, an act of the  
present or a storehouse of  
the past for the future?*

be phones but they bring out our best moods, forms and attire, or so we think, Narcissus-like, when we go click, click, click.

But then, these photos do not end up in dog-eared albums. They do not even stay in one place. They are off in a jiffy to friends and foes alike. They are truly nomadic. They are so many, so repetitive, they clog the phone’s memory, or so we complain, even as the next lot falls in our line of vision, forwarded through a maze



“

*The cool November night breeze, the hum of the train and the play of light and darkness etched a permanent image in my mind that I can delve into and relive...and no, I don't even have a photo of those moments as witness.*

”

of recipients. They keep us in the social loop, never mind that we have not even registered fully their relevance or otherwise. For instance, on a museum visit with a group, I observe that the exhibits and the descriptions are only as important as the camera phones will capture them. Who needs to stand and read? Just click and forward. Click and forward. It is more important that the world out here knows where we have been.

Guess the profound question that gnaws at me is the role of time – as in tenses – in our lives. Is capturing a moment, or an event, an act of the present or a storehouse of the past for the future? If it is enough to remember things from the past to guide us into the future as says a ‘Speaking Tree’ article, isn’t it enough to keep our personal albums in the mind and heart, even just impressions, even inaccurate in details, to act as guides? Has my granny’s large-heartedness not left a slight imprint in me, which could have influenced some of my decisions till now?

But then, such intellectual ruminations are just too much gas, shrug the shutterbugs, the camera kinds. It is our *dharma* to waste not a single possibility to connect with the world through our shots, they seem to say... Even that tree there speaks volumes to them. They just have to tweak a branch or say ‘find the endangered sparrow on the branch’ to send it viral! ■

## 16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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

