

ABILITY

India's cross-disability magazine

June 2019

**Dharamshala:
Towards self-discovery**

**Dealing with
depression**

**A day in the life
of a bureaucrat**

Meet

Dr. Kalyan C Kankanala

The unconventional and pathbreaking
intellectual property attorney

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WE'D REALLY LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Whether you are a person with disability, or a parent, or a friend, or just someone who cares, we would love to hear from you.

You are just a **click** away!

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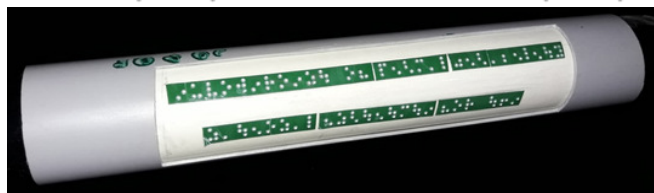
Here is an indigenously developed access feature that can be retrofitted on to existing infrastructure to bring in accessibility for visually impaired persons.

Award-winning Hyderabad-based inventor Dr. Milan Dass, Senior Research Officer (Technology), National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, who designed and developed many educational and recreational devices for persons with disabilities during his tenure with the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disability (NIEPVD), Dehradun/Secunderabad, has now come up with 'Braille on railings' an innovation to enable accessibility for visually impaired persons. This fixture has been developed in association with the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disability (NIEMD), Chennai and NIEPVD, Dehradun and Secunderabad.

Braille on railings is a cost-effective navigational fixture that can be fitted on existing steel railings to provide information in braille. Capitalising on the fact that steel pipe railings fixed



Slit and slot open



Brailled text inserted into the fixture



Fixture placed on the rail



Braille on railing is ready for use

at most buildings and public places have a standard diameter of 50mm, this fixture has been designed to be compatible with such railings. This simple design can be replicated on PVC pipes or steel pipes available in the open market by interested persons.

The fixtures are basically pipes given a 20mm wide slit throughout their length, so that they can be pressed and affixed on the railings, with a longitudinal opening created right opposite to this slit. Strips with information/instructions in braille, printed using Braille slate/ Braille machine/ Braille printers are created. These braille strips are inserted into the fixtures after which the fixture is fitted on to the railing. The braille information may be printed on thin aluminum sheets when the nature of information provided is permanent. Such 'braille on railing' fixtures can be retrofitted on railings in public places such as railway stations, airports, universities, etc., to display information accessible to persons with visual impairment and enable independent mobility to a great extent.

The brailled strips can be replaced as and when new information needs to be provided, allowing the facility to update information in braille at minimal cost. The cost of the fixture is Rs.100 plus postal charges. Users may avail the fixture or share their feedback by writing to milandass@yahoo.com



Danish toymaker Lego, an all-time favourite with children, has embarked on a pilot project 'Lego Braille Bricks' to enable blind and visually impaired children learn braille in a playful way. LEGO Braille Bricks will be moulded with the same number of studs used for individual letters and numbers in the Braille alphabet, while remaining fully compatible with other Lego bricks. Each brick will also feature a printed letter or character, allowing for inclusive play and learning by sighted and non-sighted children.

The concept behind LEGO Braille Bricks was first proposed to the LEGO Foundation in 2011 by the Danish Association of the Blind, and again in 2017 by the Brazilian-based Dorina Nowill Foundation for the Blind. Since then, it has been further shaped in close collaboration among blind associations from Denmark, Brazil, UK, and Norway, where the prototypes of the Lego Braille Bricks are being concept tested currently. LEGO Group's Senior art director, Morten Bonde, who suffers from a genetic eye disorder that is gradually turning him blind, worked as an internal consultant on the project. The final LEGO Braille Bricks kit is expected to be launched in 2020. It will contain approximately 250 LEGO Braille Bricks covering the full alphabet, numbers 0-9, select math symbols and inspiration for teaching and interactive games. For more, log on to <https://www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/news-room/2019/april/lego-braille-bricks>

**LEGO TO
LAUNCH
BRAILLE
BRICKS**

DECODER TO TURN BRAIN ACTIVITY INTO SPEECH

Scientists at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) have developed a neural decoder that can translate brain activity directly into speech, as complete sentences! What makes this technology exciting is that it could eventually enable creating clinically viable speech neuroprosthetic technology and restore speech in patients who have lost their voice as a result of neurological impairments, paralysis, throat cancer, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and Parkinson's disease. The scientists – Gopala K. Anumanchipalli, Josh Chartier and Edward F. Chang – describe the technology as a “virtual vocal tract” directed by brain activity in the speech area to produce the person's voice, a possibility supported by the fact that audio samples generated so far by this technology sounds like a human voice.

The scientists studied brain activity in volunteers about to undergo neurosurgery for epilepsy, through temporarily implanted electrodes, asking the volunteers to read out sentences, while the scientists recorded the activity in the brain area directing speech production by sending neural commands to the tongue, lips, jaw and throat to produce speech. Further to this, the scientists trained a machine learning algorithm to match the patterns of the electrical activity in this region of the brain with the speech-inducing movements it directs, such as pressing the lips together, pressing the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth, etc. For more, log on to <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1119-1>



Check out this sleek and inconspicuous assistive device that gives people with upper body mobility impairments the ability to fully access smart devices and mainstream technology. With this one assistive device Tecla-e, users can control multiple devices to send and receive emails, text messages, browse the web, watch videos, launch and use apps, read books, turn on their TV, control their thermostat, turn the lights on or off, make or hang up phone calls, enter commands using Siri, and more. Tecla-e works by connecting to ability switches or wheelchair driving controls and allows individuals to interact with their smartphones, tablets, computers and Internet-enabled appliances hands-free. This includes iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch, Android smartphones and tablets, Mac and Windows computers, Apple TV, sip-and-puff controllers, head arrays, joysticks and the driving controls of a wheelchair. Tecla-e is

SINGLE POINT CONTROL OVER SMART DEVICES

wireless and Bluetooth-enabled. With Tecla-e, users can interact with and switch between up to eight devices without the help of a caregiver. Tecla-e's built-in rechargeable battery lasts over 48 hours with continuous use. The device can be configured from the Tecla app for iOS and Android and the app may be used to remotely monitor a Tecla-e device. The cost of Tecla-e™ is 499 USD. For more, log on to <https://gettecla.com/products/tecla-e>

Tecla-e™



Health apps may be sharing our data with third parties without proper disclosure or authorisation, while many health apps don't even have a privacy policy. A study on data sharing and privacy practices of 36 top ranked smartphone apps for depression and smoking cessation for Android and iOS in the United States and Australia, by Kit Huckvale, John Torous, and Mark E. Larsen found that 29 of them transmitted data to services provided by Facebook or Google, but only 12 accurately disclosed this.

The study evaluated the privacy policy content with pre-specified criteria and assessed the encrypted and unencrypted data transmission and found that 25 of the 36 apps (69%) incorporated a privacy policy, and came out with the following findings: Twenty-two of 25 apps with a policy (88%) provided information about primary uses of collected data, while only 16 (64%) described secondary uses. While 23 of 25 apps with a privacy policy (92%) stated in their policies that data would be transmitted to a third party, transmission was detected in 33 of the 36 apps (92%). Twenty-nine of 36 apps (81%) transmitted data for advertising and marketing purposes or analytics to just two commercial entities, Google and Facebook, but only 12 of 28 (43%) transmitting data to Google and 6 of 12 (50%) transmitting data to Facebook disclosed this.

Such data breach not only denies users the right to make informed choices on sharing information, but also makes us vulnerable to privacy concerns relating to stigma, inadvertent disclosure, and targeted advertising of dubious products and services.

**IS OUR
HEALTH
DATA ON
APPS SAFE?**

**ONLINE
COURSE TO
TRAIN
PRIMARY
TEACHERS
TO WORK
WITH
DYSLEXIC
CHILDREN**

The Madras Dyslexia Association in association with NPTEL- IIT Madras has launched a free online course to train primary teachers in working with children with specific learning disability or dyslexia. This course, 'e-Shikshanam' will help provide widespread remedial support to children with specific learning difficulties, by empowering primary school teachers to provide active support to the children in their classrooms with mild to moderate dyslexia.

The course will offer essential knowledge on dyslexia, strategies that can help a child with dyslexia cope with difficulties in reading, spelling, writing and mathematics, and activities/assessment at the end of sessions to help the child in assimilating the curriculum. While the programme is free, one may opt to take the paid online exam that includes multiple choice questions and evaluation based on animated short case studies that simulate the difficulties of a child with dyslexia.

To enrol for the course, email mdatechproducts@gmail.com



A ROAD LESS TRAVELLED



A trailblazer who has carved out a spectacular success story hurdling over the challenges that came his way, DR. KALYAN C KANKANALA is a leading Intellectual Property (IP) attorney, author, professor and much more, finds out Suchitra Iyappa.



Acclaimed Intellectual Property (IP) attorney, author and professor, Dr. Kalyan C Kankanala carries his many avatars lightly on his shoulders. Behind his disarming smile and unassuming personality is a razor-sharp mind and astute professionalism that has taken him to the preeminent position he enjoys today.

At one level, as Managing Partner and Chief IP attorney of top ranked IP firm, BananaIP Counsels, he advises and assists knowledge, technology and creative driven businesses file and prosecute patents, trademarks, copyrights and industrial designs to maximise value from their intellectual property.

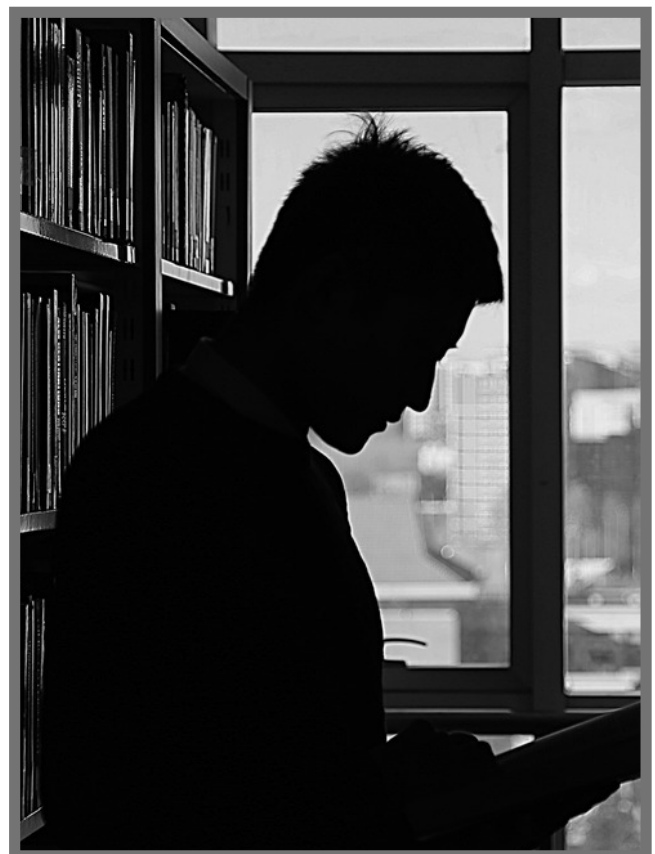
As a custodian of the products of the mind, he helps build, protect and grow IP portfolios and IP based market share of a plethora of industries, a veritable blue-chip roster of corporate India's heavy weights.

And then, on another plane, he is a prolific writer with several fiction and non-fiction books to his credit. As a much-published author and respected academic, Dr. Kalyan has drawn from his reservoir of knowledge and legal/policy framework to demonstrate his authority in his field.

That apart, he is adept at conjuring foreboding plots and sinister suspense in his legal thrillers. Employing his insights into law, policy and business, he draws inspiration from the corporate underbelly to highlight issues including piracy, pharmaceutical muscle power and traditional knowledge misappropriation, among others.

Like himself, the protagonist in some of his books is an upright, blind lawyer taking on unscrupulous heavyweights.

Dr Kalyan was a young boy when he was diagnosed with degenerative Retinitis Pigmentosa and lost his working vision by age 18. Coming from a family of doctors, he stumbled into law, a subject not many aspired to study. "I was introduced to Intellectual Property while doing my LLB in Hyderabad. Its interface with science and technology excited me so much that I decided to take that up as my specialisation", he shares.





Thereafter, he proceeded to get a scholarship to do an LLM at the Franklin Pierce Law Center, USA, followed by a PhD in Patent Law and Genetic Inventions from the National Law School of India University in 2006. “In fact, I co-founded my first firm, Brain League, now BananaIP, when I was at National Law School, pursuing doctoral research”, he says.

Today, BananaIP includes six senior partners, over 50 employees, and has advised more than 600 diverse companies over the years, including the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.

“A successful patent lawyer needs to be well versed in technology, business and law”, believes Dr Kalyan. “While all firms are specialised in IP, BananaIP is super specialised in specific practice areas such as AI patent law, Automotive patent law, Bio patent law, entertainment law and e-commerce law, among others, with specific departments focusing on these areas of IP law”.

That said, keeping abreast of developments in a knowledge intensive domain demanding multiple areas of expertise remains Dr. Kalyan's biggest challenge. According to him, “Specialty requires a certain amount of expertise and qualifications, and when you are super-specialised, these standards are heightened quite significantly. A super specialist is expected to know more than a specialist and specialists look up to her/him for advice. As it stands today, accessibility to IP information and knowledge is quite limited. Most material is in printed form and conversion to accessible format is time consuming and not very accurate. I rely heavily on online sources of information to keep track of changes and tend to spend a lot of time on discussions and thinking, to accumulate knowledge.”

“The objective is to get to the top and stay there.”

Additionally, given the competitive nature of this business, it is imperative to give clients the confidence that you can deliver, states Dr Kalyan. While 90% of his clients are able to look beyond his disability, there is the underlying pressure of a ruthless business that constantly looms large.

Even so, Dr. Kalyan reveals that changes have been made in the manner of working with him. “Besides the firm’s website being completely accessible, any limitation arising out of my blindness is taken care of as part of teamwork. It is involuntarily factored into every project and task and addressed efficiently without the need for any discussion on the matter”.



“Though most problems with accessibility and disability related hurdles can be worked around, the IP Office, Courts, and Government bodies have a long way to go.”

This prompts Dr Kalyan to count his blessings. “I have been extremely fortunate in terms of opportunities, resources, finance and recognition. The objective is to get to the top and stay there”, he says.

Keeping the less fortunate in mind, he started the Cane Foundation in 2015 with the objective of offering legal assistance to persons with disabilities on matters relating to disability law, on a *pro bono* basis. Today, the organisation has broadened its ambit with new proposals. One, to establish an Independent Skills Program to equip persons with disabilities to become independent, and two, to invest in research and technology for persons with disabilities.

The RPD Act, Dr Kalyan acknowledges, has been a big step forward, but does it have teeth? The answer is, 'not enough!', he claims. However, he is optimistic that it will be more effective in time. "Fortunately, we have had some positive judgments. The Courts are willing to go beyond the letter of law, but there are still a lot of grey areas like the categorisation of percentages in education which should hopefully be resolved through internal policy making".

"What it takes is strong focus and determination in charting one's path, even if it's a road less travelled."

He goes on to add, "Being part of advisory committees of certain policy and research bodies in IP gives me the opportunity to learn about upcoming changes in law and policy in advance. These, combined with my teaching at the National Law School of India University and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, helps me keep track of developments in IP.

Though most problems with accessibility and disability related hurdles can be worked around, the IP Office, Courts, and Government bodies have a long way to go. We are currently fighting a case before the CCPD to make the IP Office website and systems accessible for attorneys with blindness.

As of now, the rules require attorneys to file patent applications only online, but I cannot access the website and portal because of image captcha, and other accessibility issues. We plan to resolve this even if it means going to the highest court in the country, as the IP Office has so far been only lethargic and dismissive. The RPD Act has the requisite provisions to help us achieve this, and we hope to use those to achieve accessibility and facilities".

As a parting shot, he offers, "if a person with blindness chooses law, he should carefully consider which area of law to specialise in. Real estate law, for example, may be unsuited for the visually impaired on account of issues with access to documents. Patent, copyright and trademark law, on the other hand, are very good options".

The success story of Dr. Kalyan shows that nothing is impossible. What it takes is strong focus and determination in charting one's path, even if it's a road less travelled. ●

Dealing with Depression

Depression is among the most talked about topics today. The prevalence of depression seems to be increasing with every passing day. How does one differentiate depression from the general emotional lows that we go through? What are the indicators we should look out for and recognise, when a loved one is going through depression, when pep-up talks don't suffice, and professional help is needed? Meanwhile, thinking proactively, can we prevent depression? Are there lifestyle measures that can make us emotionally resilient?

In a *tête-à-tête* with Hema Vijay of *Success & ABILITY*, eminent neuropsychiatrist DR. U. GAUTHAMADAS throws light on these much-asked questions. A professor of psychiatry, specialist in neuro-behavioural medicine and expert in psychosocial interventions in disasters, he was conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015 by the Indian Medical Association. He has recently been elected as a member of the Mental Health Stigma section of the World Psychiatric Association.



In a *tête-à-tête* with Hema Vijay, eminent neuropsychiatrist DR. U. GAUTHAMADAS throws light on depression and answers much-asked questions.

The most common signs of depression that are usually missed are:

- Loss of interest in former hobbies, pastimes, social activities or sex.
- Loss of ability to feel joy and pleasure.
- Fatigue, sluggishness, and feeling physically drained.
- Small tasks beginning to feel that they are exhausting or take longer to complete.
- A bleak outlook – that nothing will ever get better and that there's nothing you can do to improve your situation.
- Alteration in sleep pattern. Disturbed sleep or waking in the early hours of the morning or oversleeping.
- Low tolerance level, short temper, and everything and everyone getting on your nerves.
- Feeling agitated, restless or angry in situations that you used to take in your stride.
 - An increase in physical complaints such as unexplained aches, pains, and gastric disturbances.
 - Loss of appetite or sudden unexplainable craving for food whenever tense or upset.
 - Significant weight loss or weight gain — a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month.
 - Self-loathing, strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt. Harshly criticizing yourself for perceived faults and mistakes.
 - Wanting to cry for every minor conflict in life, or for no reason at all.

Q. How do we identify when a loved one is going through depression?

Feeling sad or low from time to time is a normal part of life. However, when you or your loved one is unable to find any cheer in life, have no interest in the activities that used to excite you, find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning, or find that the day simply seems to stretch on... these may be due to depression.

Depression is caused by an imbalance in the chemistry in your brain. It totally changes the way you think, feel and function in daily activities. You cannot "pull yourself out of it", "divert or distract yourself", or "think positive" ...because there is a disorder in the functioning of your brain. For the same reason, yoga, meditation, spirituality, and self-help books and programmes will not help.

Depression manifests itself differently in different people. There are, however, some common signs and symptoms. You must remember, that these symptoms can

be part of life's normal lows. But the more symptoms you have, the stronger they are, the longer they last, and the more they disrupt your daily activities and life... the more likely it is that you are dealing with clinical depression. Men are more likely to complain about fatigue, irritability, sleep problems and loss of interest in work and hobbies. They're also more likely to display anger, aggression, reckless behaviour and substance abuse. Women are more likely to

have angry outbursts and crying spells. “Isn’t it normal for a woman to be upset and cry?” you may well ask. Unfortunately, this stereotyping of women is responsible for depression being missed or overlooked till something drastic happens. Women are more prone to emotional upheavals due to hormonal changes. However, it is NOT a feminine trait to yell, scream, quarrel, abuse, and cry for inconsequential matters, more so, when this happens for a prolonged period.

Q. Thinking proactively, how do we avoid falling into psychological issues when we face the battles of life? How do we immunise ourselves from feeling shamed at a debacle, broken by a loss, or despondent about an emotional break up? What are the lifestyle measures you recommend for making ourselves emotionally resilient?

A. “How can I prevent myself from getting depression?” you may ask. The answer is “You can’t”. This is because Depression is a chemical disorder of the brain. You can find hundreds of ways to reduce or manage stress, become resilient etc., from self-help books, the Internet, and even workshops. However, when such refer to “depression”, it is in the context of a transient mood change that everyone goes through in times of distress, and NOT CLINICAL DEPRESSION.

Q. Given these situations, how do we seek help? To whom or where, does one turn to? To friends, parents, relatives, well-wishers? Or do we look at counsellors and other psychiatric intervention, neuropsychiatry, or...?

A. When you are Depressed, you can try reaching out to friends and loved ones. The person you talk to doesn’t have to be able to fix you. He or she just needs to be a good listener: someone who’ll listen attentively without being distracted, and without being critical or judging you. Physical exercise may also help. Take a short walk or put on some music on and dance around. Start with small activities and build up from there. Find ways to engage yourself. Spend some time in nature, care for a pet, volunteer somewhere, or pick up a hobby that you used to enjoy or take up a new one. However, if you find that none of this helps, or is possible, you then need the help of a psychiatrist.

Q. Why a psychiatrist? Why not a counsellor or psychologist?

A. Only a psychiatrist is qualified to make a proper diagnosis. Symptoms of depression are sometimes hard to distinguish from the symptoms of stress. Also, some physical disorders, such as hypothyroidism, or a brain pathology can mimic the symptoms of depression. At times depression may be a complication of physical disorders such as ischemic heart disease, or renal disease. In such cases a psychologist or counsellor would not be able to make a diagnosis. Seeking a psychologist as a first recourse would therefore result in such diagnosis being missed, the physical disorder to be

Depression is caused by an imbalance in the chemistry of your brain. It totally changes the way you think, feel, and function in daily activities.

unidentified until it causes damage. Also, only a psychiatrist can determine whether you need medicines, or whether simply counselling or psychotherapy would suffice for you.

Q. How does one initiate a visit to an expert? Would the concerned person have to agree to make the first move and say, yes, I need expert intervention? If the person is not willing for this, how do we begin to help him/her?

A. The affected person may not want to consult a psychiatrist. In such a case, you may approach a qualified psychologist or counsellor. "Who is a qualified person?" you may ask. A qualified psychologist should have completed an M.Phil. in clinical psychology, and a qualified counsellor should have at least one year of post graduate training in counselling psychology from a reputed institution.

However, if the person begins to:

- express strong feelings of hopelessness or being trapped, or
- has an unusual preoccupation with death or dying, or
- begins to act recklessly, as if they have a death wish (e.g. speeding through red lights), or
- starts saying things like "Everyone would be better off without me" or "what is the use of my living?", or
- begins to talk of suicide, or
- withdraws from usual family and social interaction and begins to isolate self, or
- begins to indulge in uncharacteristic behaviour,

then, it's time to seek out a psychiatrist.

At this stage you cannot be worried about upsetting the person and may have to insist and ensure that the person gets treatment.

Q. Could depression, anxiety and panic attacks begin at any time? What are the potential flashpoints for these?

A. Flashpoints for depression include lack of social support, stressful life experiences, sudden transition to isolation (like going abroad for study), financial strain, family conflicts, unemployment or underemployment, job stress, marital or relationship problems, chronic health problems and pain. Menarche, pregnancy and menopause can also trigger clinical depression in women. One in seven women experience depression following childbirth. ●

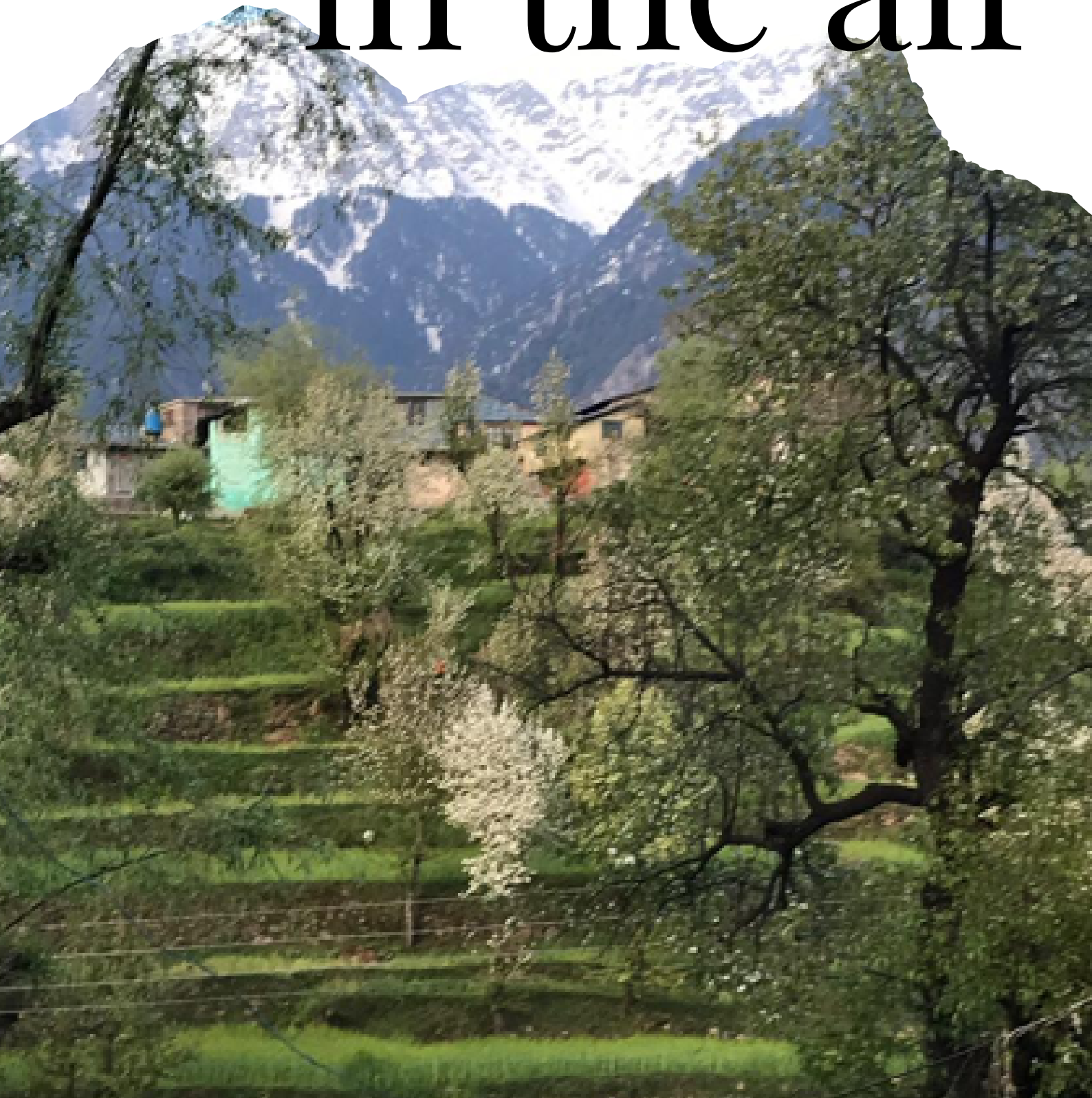
Symptoms of depression can be part of life's normal lows. But the more symptoms you have, the stronger they are, and the longer they last — the more likely it is that you are dealing with depression.



Spellbound by her recent sojourn at the scenic and spiritual retreat of Dharamshala, DR. KETNA L MEHTA, Founder Trustee, Nina Foundation, shares her happy experience and the reverberating reflections that the trip set off.



Kindness in the air



The magnificent Dhauladhar range of snow-capped mountains seem to have a language of their own – mysterious, mystical, and magical.

Lo and behold, one day I spotted a ‘heart’ on one of them as the white clouds drifted, and I instantly knew that these mountains conveyed love – abundant love for each and every one – suffused with spirituality. These mountains have the power to heal, its communion with the beholder conveying assurance, peace, faith and belief – forming a protective canopy all around this wonderful hill station in Himachal Pradesh aptly named Dharamshala – spiritual dwelling.

Kangra Valley Tea Estate



There was definitely a ‘mystical pull’ for me to visit this cool sanctuary, and to be sure, it was a spiritual experience, from the word go.

Confusion over baggage allowance made us reduce the contents of our bags before we embarked on our journey. My dear friend Balfour Manuel and Garima from Blue Dart were my angels all through this entire trip. God bless them and their entire team!

My interpretation of this development to my friend and co-traveller Anupama was: Empty yourself, travel light, get prepared to face the unknown with a clean slate and shed excess baggage. Let us free ourselves from clutter, free our minds of preparedness and explore the unknown. Let us learn to live with less! This proved to be prophetic.

All through the transit, be it airline staff or co-passengers, the people we met en route... there were angels everywhere. We articulated our wishes and instantly these were fulfilled. We were already experiencing a spiritual, and loving experience.

Our Fortune Park Moksha Hotel, an ITC managed property situated right up in Strawberry Hills, Satobari in McLeodGanj was an hour’s drive from Gagal airport.

Tenzin Palmo, the first Western Buddhist Nun blessing us at the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery



I love challenges and I love overcoming them too! It feeds my sense of adventure, reassuring me that nothing is impossible.

We were mesmerised by the landscape of beautiful tall pine trees, green hills, terraced tea gardens and bursts of red wild flowers, 'brar', a species of rhododendron.

The blue skies with white clouds, the bright sunlight minus pollution, and the cool breeze made us smile and cheer gleefully as every bend and turn took us higher and higher towards – a new design crafted by nature. It was absolutely beautiful and Dharamshala was a breathtaking paradise.

The traditional warm welcome was extremely heartening as we had left Mumbai at 5 a.m. and had clocked 12 hours of travel (tiring for a 56-year-old harbouring a spinal cord injury for the last 24 years). Our disabled friendly room was lovely, everything was comfortable and accessible for me – good bed height, wooden flooring without a carpet, sliding door, accessible washroom, and a big terrace with a panoramic view of the blue sky above, and the green carpet below with layers and layers of mountains, as far as our eyes could see.

The entire hotel was kindness personified. Each one of them reached out to us and went out of their way to delight and surprise us with smiles and kind gestures. Here, I must mention that when I announced that I would like to visit

Dharamshala is kindness personified – people here are happy to give, to make others happy, without any expectations whatsoever. They are happy in your happiness!



St. John Church, Forsyth Gunj



Rock-cut temples, Masrur



Norbulingka Institute -Tibetan art and culture centre

Dharamshala, a lot of people dissuaded me, saying: “Oh... not for you!” “It’s totally inaccessible”. “You will not be able to access most of the places”. “Don’t go there!”

Once settled, we were ready to explore this ‘Land of Gods and Goddesses’ as the brochures described it – though it offers much more than its temples and monastries. Well, I love challenges and I love overcoming them too! It feeds my sense of adventure, reassuring me that nothing is impossible. Every challenge makes me more confident and bolder.

Getting back to our Dharamshala sojourn, we set off, armed with a seasoned driver, Rajesh ji, a local young man.

My friend Anu suggested that we also take along a young hotel intern Raman Jeriyal to help with my wheelchair, which turned out to be a brilliant move. Raman was a proactive and willing escort and participated wholeheartedly in unravelling the local folklore, history and beauty of every place enthusiastically, never ever complaining about anything. He manoeuvred my wheelchair like a pro.

We visited several places in Dharamshala, and thanks to the great cooperation from the entire hotel staff, Raman, Rajeshji, locals, and tourists, who voluntarily came forward to lift me or my wheelchair. These gestures made me feel as if our path was strewn with rose petals and the entire universe had converged



together to ensure that we were able to visit and enjoy each and every place. Like I said to a kind Sardarji, Ram Rahim Singh Ji, who appeared, as if magically, and lifted me on my wheelchair as we crossed the threshold of the ancient Shiva temple Baijnath, “I am blessed to meet God even before entering the temple.”

This was true for every place in Dharamshala. I was never left out and was an active participant. We experienced a beautiful moment when we halted at a tea estate in Palampur. To the right, sunrays were shimmering on the snow-capped mountains and to the left, near the tea gardens, was a rainbow spangled setting sun. There was this wonderful cool nip in the air as we sipped our tea viewing this awesome natural wonder! A perfect, priceless moment. Even today, thinking about it makes me happy and elevates my spirit to a higher gear.

Much later, I chanced upon a hoarding on the road that had these words: Kindness - Be Kind. Let’s cultivate Dharamshala as a Kind city!! This brought into perspective all that I was experiencing. Dharamshala is kindness personified - people here are happy to give, to make others happy, without any expectations whatsoever. They are happy in your happiness!

In India, many a times, our family members, our colleagues and our community find it very difficult to take us, our wheelchairs, baggage, etc., to experience a great holiday together. Well, they too need to take a break and enjoy the tour. After my wonderful visit here, I believe people must get to understand the ‘art of making everything possible and enjoyable with love, kindness and happiness’. I wish that every child, adult and aged friend on a wheelchair has this kind of experience on a holiday in India. ●

Empty yourself, travel light, get prepared to face the unknown with a clean slate and shed excess baggage. Let us free ourselves from clutter, free our minds of preparedness and explore the unknown. Let us learn to live with less!



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A 'HARDWORKING' BUREAUCRAT



Is it possible to get through the working day without putting in an ounce of work? DR. MADAN VASISHTA recounts an encounter that will leave you flabbergasted!

I had a great experience directing an organisation under a ministry of the Government of India. Names in this story have been altered or have not been given to maintain privacy. The story, however, is factual. This will illustrate how some of our government officials work (or do not work).

One of the staffs assigned to our project was one 'Mr. Agarwal'. He had the nice title of Section Officer (SO). The organisation (we shall call it Org) was supposed to get an Assistant Registrar (AR) due to its size and scope of operation. However, it seemed that no AR was available or willing to move to Org. So, we got this SO. In some other office, he would perhaps have had 10 or 20 people working for him, and he would be a man with a lot of clout. However, Mr. Agarwal did not have much staff except for one assistant who was a Jill of all trades.

Mr. Agarwal had slowly gotten promoted to his present exalted position from his position as lower division clerk during his 25 plus years of loyal and devoted service to the Government of India. He had mastered all the skills needed to get promotion.

The main requirement for promotion in the efficient Indian bureaucracy is to avoid work. If one knows how to avoid work, one gets promoted. The other skill is to “know” all the rules that the government is run by. “Knowing” rules does not mandate actually reading up on them; one just has to pretend to know these rules and cite them at the right moment with the confidence of, well, a successful bureaucrat. I had asked Mr. Agarwal a few questions during our interactions and had learned that he had this uncanny ability to contradict himself within a few hours, and act as cocky as only a bureaucrat could. He could also invent rules and policies on the spur of the moment. Usually these policies were to justify his not working.

Mr. Agarwal would arrive at the office any time between 10.30 in the morning and noon, and depending on his mood, sit on his chair for a few minutes or for an hour or more. His favourite sitting position was with the back of his head resting on his palms, with his fingers laced together. He would lean his head back as far as his chair allowed, and then stare at a fixed spot on the wall or ceiling. After a few minutes of this, his eyes would close, and he would go to sleep or into a stupor. He would wake up after an hour or so and move both his hands from behind his back and bring them to rest on his protruding belly.

Sometimes, again, depending on his mood, he would turn on his computer and play a couple of games of solitaire. That was the only computer skill he had learned. After that, at times, he would step out of the office and slowly walk down to a teashop or to a friend’s



office, chat with other tea drinkers or with his friend for half an hour, and would then walk back to his office to resume his repose.

Like many other office workers, he brought along his tiffin box every day, and at 1 o'clock, he lunched with other staff, who actually worked and let him join them. They shared their lunch and would chat about office politics, the government and whatever. Mr. Agarwal spoke very little, as speaking requires a lot of effort, and he was a strong believer in conserving his energy.

After lunch, he would go back into the hands-behind-the-head position and start to snore immediately. After an hour of napping, he would be ready for action — three or four games of solitaire.

He could also invent rules and policies on the spur of the moment. Usually these policies were to justify his not working.



It would be teatime by then. He would go out for tea and have a bull session with his colleagues who would join him in the teashop after a hard day's work. The tea break would take about one or more hours, during which time they would discuss politics, their supervisors and the work piling up on their desks. There are devoted and loyal government employees like Mr. Agarwal, who must spend at least an hour drinking tea to re-energise themselves. By the time they finished their one or more cups of tea, it would be time to go home.

Another productive day for the loyal, hardworking government employee. ●



16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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

