

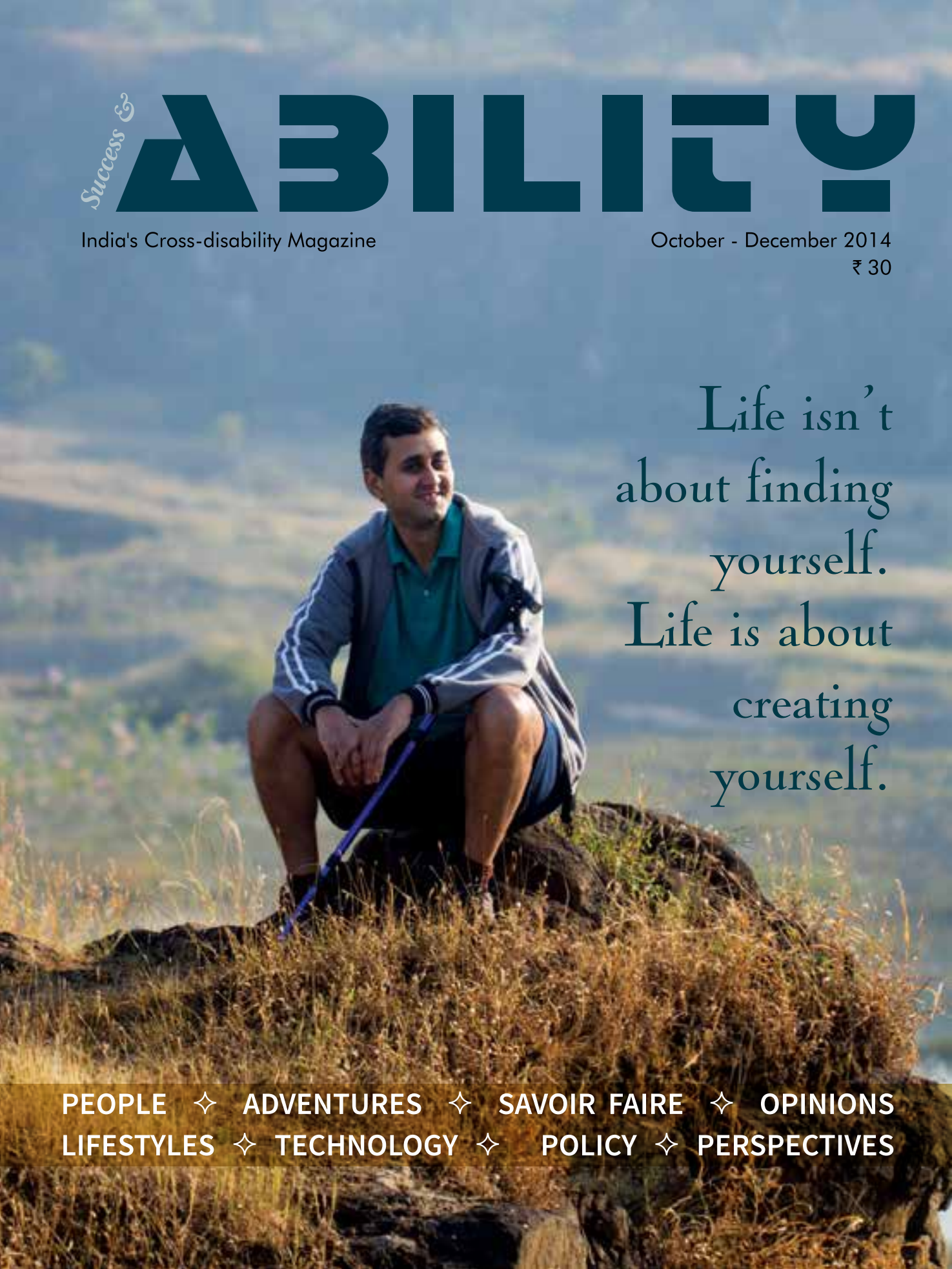
Success &

ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

October - December 2014

₹ 30



Life isn't
about finding
yourself.
Life is about
creating
yourself.

PEOPLE ✦ ADVENTURES ✦ SAVOIR FAIRE ✦ OPINIONS
LIFESTYLES ✦ TECHNOLOGY ✦ POLICY ✦ PERSPECTIVES

16 வகை

அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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



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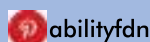
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From the Editor's Desk

Friends,

It is amazing... but we have reached the end of 2014, already! Hard to believe! It seems only yesterday when we were all wishing one another 'happy new year'! And now, once again, it seems to be that time of the year when we usually take stock of what we have done and make our wishes – awaiting the precise moment when the calendar will actually change. Year 2015, will of course, bring its own opportunities and challenges – some anticipated and some unexpected.

As we sit back, it's time to give ourselves and others around us, some congratulations richly deserved on accomplishments made. In this issue of Success & ABILITY, we have tried to capture a sense of brightness and cheerfulness with which we all can have a sense of hopefulness and optimism, as we await the coming year.

I am sure, our cover story on Divyanshu Ganatra, will invoke in many of us, the urge to get out and do things as well (that's what it did to me, honestly!)... "one-life-to-live-make-the-most-of-it" and all that. So too the marvellous things that many amongst us are involved with – like Tripura Kashyap's creative movement therapy that brings happiness to so many; Jinan's "Draw the world to know the world" that makes us ponder how something so important as drawing could have been sidelined all this time; the harsh realities of real-life disasters and the fantastic remedial measures done by people like Asha Hans; the ponderings of our own inimitable Salil Chaturvedi driving home the extent we all miss out on the free and bounteous canvas that *Life* round us offers; the watchful eye of law & policy – the aspects of financial inclusion – lucidly explained by Amba Salekar... All these and more, between the covers of this issue, will, we hope, provide you that much needed feel-good feel to look for, as you wait, with some trepidation and some anticipation, for the what-will-be's of year 2015.

Have a wonderful winter break! I hope each of you will enjoy your time with family and friends and all the special moments that the holiday season brings.

Until we meet again, in 2015.

Jayshree Raveendran





Srividya
Suryanarayanan

Prayer Bubble

*Seated within a prayer bubble
Seeking the higher self
Casting away old thoughts
Drawing the fringes of new ones
Likened to a soap bubble
Sparkling in various colour sprinkle
Surrounding space of peace
While the heart searches within
In lightening flash the truth
Springs forth towards me
I see myself in different hues
Sighing at the sight I wonder
What truth has revealed to me
Is the image deep seated within
Casting a shadow on my persona
Life likened to a mystery
Reveals itself in tricks and treats
Once a trick is played for me
Never twice repeated to feel
Lowering my guard on fear*

*The gripping moment springs forth
Thoughts unlike any other thought
Drowned in the moment of fear
I — the seeker, chase images weird
Until in the end spent of energy
Lay down to rest my thoughts
Only to awaken again with rebellion
From the evergreen comical farce
That surrounds me in a whirl
Yet deep within the prayer bubble
I am seated in deep fear
Awakening every thought and deed
That should ever discredit me
Wonder how there is still peace
With this waking hell of a place
For calmness glides like a swan
Into the river of reveries
Peace reigns supreme often
In the patient prayer bubble
Where I seek the person within me.*



Saaz Aggarwal

ADVENTURES

Beyond Barriers

Surmounting all obstacles to give wings to his dreams, Divyanshu Ganatra treks, para glides, flies and works tirelessly to ensure that other visually impaired people too experience that heady rush of adrenalin that he does which keeps him going.

DIVYANSHU GANATRA

The Man, The Adventurer, The Campaigner

I was meeting Divyanshu for the first time, but he knew my daughter, and as he entered the house, I heard him say, “Nice to see you, Veda!” So my first impression of this visually challenged young man was his easy conviction with which he could see. This impression was reinforced during our subsequent meetings. He is always alert; always taking in everything happening around him; never being the one you ignore or feel sorry for. Seeing this single-mindedness to always be on par, it’s easy to understand Divyanshu’s frustration when he talks about the early days of his sightlessness at 19. He was sent for ‘rehabilitation’, and found that he was being talked down to, denied dignity, because he could not see. “I had

a big problem with that,” he says. “They didn’t believe that blind people could do much besides making chalk and cane furniture. The really exceptional ones could perhaps rise to become telephone operators. I didn’t think I needed six months training for that. I am not someone who will allow someone else to decide for me what I can or cannot do. So I quit.”

Besides, Divyanshu will never take charity. He abhors the thought; he abhors the organizations that run on it. He feels instead that people must be viewed as individuals with rights even if they are disabled. And he bristles at the thought that able bodied people are collecting money for the disabled because they feel sorry for them. “How can any organization decide



what a person's right is, what they should have access to? In India, our legal rights are not properly defined. I was denied education. People working for the upliftment of the blind said I couldn't do it. After about seven years, I proved my point."

Divyanshu is completely comfortable with his blindness. He says, "I'm at absolute peace with who I am. My blindness has liberated me from every limiting emotion I once carried. Every single day I'm faced with challenges. Now my mind searches for solutions that I find. If you were to ask me whether I would choose to get operated to cure my blindness, I would ask you, 'as a woman in India, you understand weakness, discrimination, prejudice, oppression.

Would you get yourself operated?' I don't want to be sighted just so that I can drive a car!"

A few weeks later, I met Divyanshu and Devika, at a concert in Pune. Devika is a photographer and film maker (and incidentally, an exceptionally good looking woman). It was Devika's birthday. In his usual meticulous way, Divyanshu had planned things to the last detail. Seated nearby was another dear friend, Gladys Kothavala. Devika told me that whenever they met Gladys, she would say, "You will have to come close and speak clearly, because I am blind." And Divyanshu would reply, "Gladys, I am blind too!" To which Gladys would respond, "Oh, really? Good for you!"



DIVYANSHU The Man

Divyanshu is a trained clinical psychologist who started working in the corporate world twenty years ago. In 2006, he set up an organization, Yellow Brick Road (inspired by the Wizard of Oz), to train corporate organizations in the area of mental health, language and communications skills. Computer technology was then at a nascent stage in India. Divyanshu learnt computers with the help of sighted people. He got a franchisee with Datapro Info and later worked with CDac and other Information Technology companies on internet technology and web accessibility.

Recruiters were initially wary, but, as Divyanshu points out, "one thing which makes working in technology easier is that people are open. They are early adaptors."

In the new millennium Divyanshu and his team began a training firm to teach basic computers to persons with disability. Screen-reading software was still very expensive, but there were innovative ways to overcome that obstacle. Today much to Divyanshu's pride, many of his students are running their own software companies with international clientele.

An experience Divyanshu will never forget is the time he went to teach computers at a premier institute for the blind. Since screen readers are in English, he naturally started his course with some lessons in Basic English. The institute authorities were aghast, saying that on no account were their students to be taught English – after all, this was Maharashtra! Divyanshu had no choice but to quit.

In 2001, Divyanshu won the prestigious President's award for self-employment in IT. He says, "Even though I have a brilliant resume, the best testimonials and I have helped CEOs and MDs manage their companies as a consultant, I still find it difficult to get new clients. Companies like Tech Mahindra and Cognizant are open-minded - Blindness is not even part of the discussion there and yet, about three years ago, I lost a major contract with another company at the nth hour. Everything had been formalised and signed and I'd had an informal meeting the director. But two hours later their HR called to tell me that they were not comfortable with my blindness and we could not go ahead. Such is the attitudinal stigma that sticks to us all our lives."

"When you are looking for work, talk about your ability, talk about what you can do, what you're good at. Do not focus on your disability. Be honest, be well prepared. You are a professional, and that is the only reason why somebody should hire you. If you're being hired for your disability, you are being hired for the wrong reason. You should get hired because you've worked hard and you deserve it."

"When you're looking for work, talk about your ability, what you can do, what you're good at. Don't focus on your disability. Be honest, be well prepared. You are a professional. That's the only reason why somebody should hire you. If you're being hired for your disability, you're being hired for the wrong reason. You should get hired because you've worked hard and you deserve it."

"I can think of very few jobs that a disabled person really cannot do! We all know that there are amazing artists who are blind. The world's best photographer, Pete Eckert, is blind, competing with sighted people. I know a world-renowned percussionist, Evelyn Glennie, who plays one hundred instruments. She is deaf. There are always endless possibilities. Maybe you have to modify certain existing systems. I need screen readers, certain adaptive equipment. A wheelchair needs access to the toilets, to the desk, to the cafeteria. With some basic support, we can work independently."

"Yes, in today's world you have to put in more effort. You have to work four times as hard ... just do it!"





DIVYANSHU The Adventurer

It was an ordinary day in February 2014 when one hundred blind boys trekked up the hill to Tikona fort.

Tikona, about 60 km from Pune, is one of Shivaji's forts located on a hill in the shape of a pyramid. The climb is approximately 2957 feet from base. "It is said to be a relatively easy trek," Divyanshu Ganatra told me, "but there are some places where you have to be really careful. The path gets extremely narrow and there's a deep drop. There is one spot where there have been accidents and two sighted people have lost their lives. We had to manoeuvre these spots very carefully, and of course, that adds to the adventure. Our experienced volunteers, including my partner Shashank Katankar and I, knew what to expect. We led the trekkers carefully, ensuring that each one not only climbed to the top but also came down safely. We're very conscious that it's not over until every single person gets home safe!"

This spectacular trek was one of the early initiatives of Adventures Beyond Barriers, an NGO established by Divyanshu and Shashank, with the main purpose of working with disabled people and giving them experiences of adventure.

Divyanshu is 37 years old and a clinical psychologist by training and profession. He went blind when he

was 19. Of the many resilient efforts he has made since then, one of the most joyful and inspiring was his return to adventure sports, something he had always loved passionately. He knew he had to find a way to get back to it, and he did. Divyanshu has not let his visual impairment stop him from cycling, rafting, camping and mountaineering. Each of these activities posed challenges which Divyanshu faced fearlessly until he found solutions.

"For a long time I could not climb a mountain because there was nobody to escort me," he says. "Finding people who would go with me to the Himalayas was difficult. If I'm standing at the edge of a two-thousand-foot cliff, I have got to trust my escort completely. It's scary for them too. But that's one bridge we gradually crossed."

"I used to love cycling. I was mad about it and I could not do it anymore. But if I get on a tandem cycle, the other person navigates. We communicate constantly. It becomes a team effort. Then once again it's the same experience, with the wind in your face and that beautiful exhaustion which consumes you at the end of the trail!"

In 2014, Divyanshu's daring and relentless determination made him India's first blind solo

paraglider, and second in the world. Devika Shetty, explains: “It was just a question of finding the right person to teach him. Avi Malik took Divyanshu out on a paraglider not because he was trying to accomplish something special or because he was out to prove a point. In fact, the training was not about Divyanshu’s disability, but his passion for adventure and nature. Avi loved Divyanshu’s energy and wanted him to experience flying.”

As for Divyanshu, it was an experience that went beyond the physical exhilaration of adventure sports. There was a sublime emotional aspect to it too. He says, “This was about putting your whole trust and faith in one another. I mean, who would give their non-powered aircraft to a blind guy and say, ‘Let’s go flying!’ We were two thousand feet up in the sky and I just knew that he was looking out for me. One second delay, and I could crash to the ground. The feeling of that bond of human trust is just incredible.”

While Divyanshu was doing his three-day solo flying course at Temple Pilots in Kamshet, a number of other courses were being conducted. Some were in the same course; others were doing advanced courses; still others who were experienced fliers had come to fly. A new batch of students had joined the day Divyanshu’s first solo flight was scheduled. So there was a large group of onlookers, looking up



intently, watching with bated breath as Divyanshu soared and then gradually descended. When he landed and took off his gear, the crowd exploded in jubilation! People couldn’t stop talking about it. They had never witnessed an event like this before. The experienced fliers said that in Divyanshu’s flight, they had relived the excitement of their first flight all over again.

This shared feeling of human joy, Divyanshu is determined to spread and continue spreading. He is determined and also shares his passion for adventure sports with those who have been prevented from enjoying this by a society with a narrow-vision.

Adventures Beyond Barriers presents adventure sports to the disabled not just for building their confidence or exposure. Its primary objective is to bring them to the fore and show the world that nothing is impossible.



“Disabled people do not have the opportunities to have these experiences,” he says. “Adventures Beyond Barriers will create them.” While the joy that this experience creates along with the exposure, is only one objective, the other is the opportunity to bring disabled people into the public eye, and show to the world ways in which things that might be considered impossible, can actually be done.

“We have one hundred million disabled people in India,” he says. “Where are they? Why do we never see them? Such a huge population should be in the mainstream, sitting next to us in planes and movie halls, working alongside us in offices and factories. Why do we only get to see the beggars in the train? It’s because we have trapped them, confined them indoors because of inaccessible infrastructure. And an even bigger barrier than the poor infrastructure is the mindset of people who focus on limitations

rather than possibilities. When people see us out there, we become visible. And seeing us participating in adventure sports has the biggest potential to change and break stereotypes.”

Divyanshu’s vision for Adventures Beyond Barriers includes making India a premier destination for adventure sports. Not just for persons with disability but for all, creating the opportunities for safe adventures sports for everyone. And within this framework, he sees the way to contributing towards breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes, rebooting mindsets and bringing all those hundred million out into the mainstream.

The trek to Tikona was arranged for students of Niwant Andh Mukta Vikasalaya, Pune, an NGO for visually impaired students from across Maharashtra. Niwant provides braille books, vocational and computer training and other educational support. And every year there is a picnic. When Divyanshu suggested an adventure outing for their annual picnic, the founders, Meera and Anand Badve, agreed enthusiastically.

A call went out for experienced volunteers who were given an orientation. “Of the thirty-five volunteers, only five had ever interacted with blind persons before. We sensitised them to the requirements of the blind. We formulated common codes of verbal and non-verbal signals for giving directions such as forward, left or right, steps, height of the steps, describing the terrain that could be rocky, loose soil, narrow path and so on,” explains Devika.

Divyanshu exposed them to another facet. “One of the delights of trekking in these mountain ranges is the home-cooked village fare of bhakri, pitla, dal, rice and bhaji. And we wanted to give them the complete experience. So instead of carrying packed home food, we carried raw material and cooking implements so that our lunch could be cooked and served right there. It was a truly comprehensive experience.”

As they climbed, Adventures Beyond Barriers encountered another well-known trekking group



who voiced their disapproval to Devika. They took Devika aside and asked her very disapprovingly why this trek has been organized. They even complained to the villagers, trying to frighten them with threats of impending danger! However the trek went smoothly. For Divyanshu encountering negative reactions is a norm. People constantly question the escort and have to be told it's an activity everyone enjoys. "They never address me, perhaps assuming I am deaf as well", he says with amusement.

Divyanshu's vision for Adventures Beyond Barriers includes making India a premier destination for adventure sports not just for persons with disability but for everyone. And within that framework, he sees it contributing towards breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes, rebooting mindsets and bringing all those hundred million disabled people out into the mainstream.

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DIVYANSHU The Campaigner

"I was amazed at how encouraging everyone was. Divyanshu was standing at a precarious position telling me to be careful and helping me out. Tikona was as exciting coming down as it was going up, because there were a few slippery patches and everyone worked together as a team. Those with very little or low sight were helping those with no sight. This trek was a great experience because it helped create leaders among ourselves. It also inculcated a sense of achievement in the children. I know for a fact that no one has ever attempted to take so many visually impaired students on a trek and I am really proud of Divyanshu and his team.

If you ask me I will most certainly send the children on this kind of a trek again and again. The trek helped them in their self-confidence and self-respect. They now feel that they can achieve something that a sighted person can achieve and that bridges the gap between the so called 'sighted' and the 'world with no sight.'

- Meera Badve, Founder of Niwant Andh Mukta Vikasalaya

"This trek has made our visually impaired children feel they can achieve what a sighted person can.... That bridges the gap between the "sighted" and the "world with no sight"





Volunteers were sensitised to the requirements of the blind and given a week long orientation programme.

“When I went to Tikona I didn’t know what to expect. It was going to be a completely new experience for me and that was the most exciting thing. The energy, the non-stop chatter, so many voices, so many excited voices, it was all so infectious! I think what was most rewarding for me about the experience was being in the same space with so many people and being forced to let go of any preconceived notions about people with visual impairments and what they can do. They were fearless in a way, there was so much trust. And when someone trusts you so wholeheartedly, you want to give back, because you are also receiving all that trust from them. It was a super enriching experience and I had the time of my life. Thank you for letting me be a part of that!

I started seeing a lot of these young people as leaders, because they were literally leading their friends. With a different way of negotiating the world around them, they exemplified courage to go that extra mile.


What Adventures beyond Barriers does for the volunteers and participants is to create a sense of familiarity. It makes you realise that communication is not something different, but rather easy. You begin to realise that there are other people in this world who are different from you but that difference is okay. A lot of people are afraid to ask questions and to learn these new things.”

*- Anuj Vaidya, Artist. Visiting Specialist at Women’s and Gender Studies, Department of Montclair State University.
Curator- 3rd San Francisco South Asian Festival.*



draw to know

a small village school in kule, maharashtra, has unleashed the power of drawing and is using it effectively in the nurturing and the overall development of the child.

 We, at the Sadhana village school are exploring the cognitive potential of drawing as a tool for observation, articulation, analysis, abstraction and more importantly as a step to learn to write. Unfortunately, the importance of drawing has been undermined for two reasons. One is that writing is given greater importance even though it is not a cognitive tool and secondly drawing is considered a part of so called art.

In the evolution of writing, drawing preceded the written word. In fact it may be possible that drawing led to development of writing. Children draw naturally whereas writing skills have to be taught in the context of literate communities. If children are left alone they would spontaneously draw things that are connected with their experience and this need to be encouraged for their observation and imagination to be kept alive. Schooling kills this observation ability by giving predominance to writing. Writing in real life also requires observation but what we write in schools is usually out of our context and experience and therefore we hardly connect the content of writing with observation.

The last three years of our work with children at the Sadhana village school has given us new insights into the various aspects of drawing. At the Sadhana village school, children spend a lot of time drawing. They draw on the floor, wall, board, paper, they draw with chalk, stone, mud etc and they also draw in groups. This helps them observe the world as well as reflect on their experiences. Seeing the potential of drawing as a cognitive tool we organized a samvaad at Pune on October 27, 28, and 29, 2014. The program exhibited the drawings done by the children with special emphasis on showcasing the stages of proficiency as well as the cognitive development. There were presentations, videos on children drawing, sharing etc and sessions on learning to draw. Professionals like architects and designers also presented their experiences on the role of drawing their field. We also showed videos on Leonardo da Vinci's work as an example of how drawing was used for scientific investigation way back in history.



Jinan K B



picasso wanted to draw like a child towards the end of his life. that could be because children start off by drawing the essence, with the least number of lines they are able to convey the message simply and effectively.

genesis of this exploration

Soon after we began the 'Re imagining schools' initiative at the Sadhana village school, in 2011 I experienced an incident that totally challenged the way we deal with children. We had 'let' the children do what they felt like that day. Some were playing, some were drawing, some were reading etc. One child was drawing in a drawing book and after few minutes another child came and started drawing along with her and then yet another child joined them and also adding to the same drawing. After a few minutes the child who started the drawing left and the other two continued, completely engrossed.

We learned several lessons from that incident. One, that children by nature are co-operative, are not possessive about 'their' drawing and are able to accommodate others. We realised that one can also draw upside down (that is what the second girl was doing because she sat on the opposite side of the first child). Respect for autonomy was evident from the fact that there was no objection either to join the group drawing or to leave. May be 'self-expression' is yet another concept perpetuated by adults. The children were unconcerned about any ones approval or of individual ownership. They were not keen to display their drawing on the notice board or even have their names mentioned. How do we end up becoming so possessive, individualistic and selfish as adults, I wonder. Being here and now was what mattered to children. They were fully involved in the act and yet detached.

We also noticed that children were drawing anywhere and everywhere and were using any medium they could find. They were drawing on the floor, wall, ground, table, slate, paper and were using their own fingers water, chalk, stick, pencil, paint, powder made by crushing chalk or readymade colours used for rangoli. So we consciously began to make several changes to the 'class room' and to our rigid minds. We extended the black board by painting the lower half of the walls black and this enabled children to draw large pictures. Children were any way using the ground for drawing and hence the black board also found place on the ground. As we did not have a rigid time table the children had an opportunity for self-initiated activities.



One thing that is apparent is that children are clear about what they are drawing and there is always a concrete topic/ subject that they draw. They will also tell you exactly what they are drawing. One day we saw two children moving around and drawing on the floor all over the class. They were telling the other children that they were drawing water flowing from the tap!

Another interesting incident was of a girl drawing with a chalk on the floor. As she was drawing a big picture she was using both her hands. Although she was using her right hand most of the time while drawing on the left side she would immediately switch to her left hand.



Our school also has what we call observation drawing. One day the 9 year olds were drawing in a vegetable garden. Some children were drawing a chilly plant when one child suddenly caught the shadow of the plant on his paper and claimed that was his way of drawing. Then he went around and repeated this with the other plants. Since there are no rules and restrictions children are constantly surprising us with drawings on a variety of subjects. It is so gratifying to see their natural flair and inventiveness especially for us , conditioned by our rigid education. One quickly realizes how we have been damaging their innate creative instincts by forcing them to obey our rules. After all, are we not also victims? The saving grace is that perhaps we can recover some of what we have lost by assimilating from the children we nurture.

writing versus drawing

Writing is not a cognitive tool. It is primarily a communication tool. Biologically we are not made to understand the world/ the context/knowledge by reading and imagining but by exploring the world directly using our senses. Drawing helps in enhancing observation as it makes us observe what we draw more consciously and also in eye hand co ordination.

Almost all children draw instinctively and then for some reason most stop drawing. Only the encouraged 'artists' continue. But everyone learns to write which is a much more complicated task. Adults around must have coerced us and we are now scared to draw.

Once logic acquires predominance the cognitive processes related to our senses die and thinking and reasoning takes over. As children get caught in the linguistic trap the world of objects recede from their vision. From the realm of timelessness they also get caught up in the clutches of time. Senses are the cognitive tools that not only connect us to the outer world but also awaken sensitivity, sense of beauty and intelligence.

Observation drawing is an important activity to make children see things around them in detail. It helps to root ourselves to the three dimension world and this rooting helps us in our association with the conceptual world.

Literacy is a useful tool no doubt. It helps human beings retain their integrity and individuality. Conceptual tools are equally important provided they anchor us to the real world. However,

once logic acquires predominance the cognitive processes related to our senses die and thinking and reasoning takes over. as children get caught in the linguistic trap, the world of objects recede from their vision.



create an environment where children can draw what they want, where they want and with whatever they want



due to the introduction of literacy and schooling much before children root themselves in the world, their cognitive process gets rewired. Experiencing the world directly enables us to be in the three dimension world while literacy takes us to the two dimensional, mental, conceptual world.

dissociating drawing from art

Another important issue to be addressed is the division of the cognitive and aesthetic experience. This is an integral experience in children and for the so called illiterate. By creating art as a separate subject the opportunity of experiencing beauty in all its entirety is destroyed in the present educational context.

Art is a low priority subject in the present education scenario and is given least importance. UNESCO and other bodies are trying to make art a compulsory subject with the assumption that art will make children 'creative' as well as develop their aesthetic sense.

re claiming creativity and beauty from the captivity of art

Art education was introduced in schools as late as the 1960s for developing creativity and an aesthetic sense. This suggests that the other 'subjects' do not require creativity and sensitivity. In reality also in present school curriculum there is no scope for creativity.

I suspect that the introduction of art in schools is an after thought of a rational mind to accommodate some 'irrational' elements but time and again this gets rationalized or controlled by setting up a formal curriculum. Unfortunately a study of art is being interpreted as learning the theoretical aspects, leaving little room for imagination.

so what is the cognitive potential of drawing?

I feel that drawing has the potential of preventing the damages of literacy and schooling to some extent. But not through 'art' and so called self-expression. But just as a tool to enhance observation. The abstraction that ensues is quite remarkable and very difficult for an educated person to accomplish. Before they are caught by the rational framework children are able to see rationalising what they are seeing. They are able to just observe and draw. The educated person goes through three steps. They see, think and draw where as children are able to draw quite spontaneously.

Drawing is like a vaccination given to the child who is ejected from the real sensory world of experience in to the conditioned world of language, concepts, definitions and theories.

A child should draw without adult supervision. No corrections, no comments, no praise. Just let children draw. Create an environment where they can draw what they want, where they want and with whatever they want.

FINANCIAL INCLUSIVENESS

Financial Inclusion has been a buzzword for a long time now, with the Reserve Bank of India as well as the Government of India prioritizing steps to promote the delivery of financial services at affordable costs to sections of disadvantaged and low-income segments of society. An ideal state of 'Financial inclusion' is a state in which all people have access to financial products and services which are desired by them and which are actually appropriate for them, so that they can manage their money effectively. Financial inclusion is sought to be achieved by provision of financial literacy and development of financial capability on the part of the consumer and ensuring that the financial product is accessible.



Amba Salelkar

An estimated 2.5 billion working-age adults globally have no access to the types of formal financial services delivered by regulated financial institutions. It is argued that as banking services are in the nature of public good; the availability of banking and payment services to the entire population without discrimination is the prime objective of financial inclusion public policy. Unfortunately, there have not been enough measures taken to ensure that financial services and products are truly inclusive.

The finance sector has long since acknowledged that with regards to financial products and services, one size hardly fits all, which is reflected in the vast array of investment, insurance and account options open to the public. When it comes to people with disabilities, however, the tailoring of the product is as important as the tailoring of the access mechanism, and it is the inability to understand the necessity of these adaptations which continues to exclude persons with disabilities from true financial inclusion.

There is a large amount of disconnect between policy on financial inclusion and the reality of persons with disabilities, and in fact even policies which are beneficial to persons with disabilities rarely trickle down to actual access at the entry level, which could be at the level of an insurance agent or a bank manager. The Customer Service Guidelines, issued in 2010, are good on paper for certain disabilities, and have resulted in untoward consequences for others. Admittedly, the instances are largely anecdotal, and there has not been any authoritative research done on access to financial services and products by persons with disabilities.

A mere statistic of Bank Accounts held by persons with disabilities would hardly be indicative. There are instances where persons with disabilities have been encouraged, if not coerced, into opening joint accounts with a non-disabled person. On instances where persons with disabilities were allowed to open Bank Accounts on their own, they were often denied facilities like ATM Cards or Mobile and Internet Banking, on the grounds that the internet/mobile application or ATM Kiosks were inaccessible for them, or that there could be potential misuse on account of the perceived vulnerability of the impairment. Discrimination

There is a large amount of disconnect between policy on financial inclusion and the reality of persons with disabilities. In fact even policies which are beneficial to persons with disabilities rarely trickle down to actual access at the entry level, which could be at the level of an insurance agent or a bank manager.

against persons with disabilities in relation to accessing financial products and services is a reality, and while this discrimination often is in the guise of protectionism, at times it can just be a form of abuse.

In the case of certain impairments, which are covered under the National Trust Act, 2000, the Reserve Bank of India's legal opinion is that persons with such impairments would not be allowed to open a Bank Account except through a legal guardian. There are two issues with this: one is that it amounts to clear discrimination on the basis of disability, because the disqualification clearly is linked to an impairment, and the second is that it denies persons with disabilities the right to be the primary customer – guardianship systems treat the guardian as the primary customer, and direct all communication and information to the guardian. This absolves the service provider of any responsibility to make products and services accessible to these persons, or to respect the views which may have been expressed by the person with disability.

We are moving to a point where persons with disabilities are being more empowered economically. At present, they are seeking and getting employment in the public and private sector. Soon, with the proposed increase in reservation for persons with disabilities, and sops for the private sector employing persons with disabilities, this number is sure to increase.

It is easier and cheaper (in the short run) to deny persons with disabilities the ability, as it were, to avail of financial services, than to design safeguards which can help them participate. Financial service providers deny products to persons with disabilities routinely without basing the same on any acceptable research or prediction of risk. In any case, in an ableist system, which presumes optimum ability of a consumer, and safeguards also are similarly designed, persons with disabilities would definitely be counted as high risk individuals, as would the elderly or the illiterate.

The “rule for one is a rule for all” approach unfortunately hasn't changed, and the recent draft Charter of Customer Rights issued by the Reserve Bank of India on the 22nd of August 2014 continues to treat consumers as one entity and takes the easy route, as such, of committing to rights that can apply to all consumers as one homogenous body, without making individual accommodation part of these rights. In addition, the document gives ample discretion to financial service providers to discriminate on “fair” grounds, and to decide suitability of products for customers, and not to ensure that the customer is made the focus of the decision, including the acknowledgment of the accommodation that may be required for a customer with a disability to avail of a product.

We are moving to a point where persons with disabilities are being more empowered economically. At present, people with disabilities are seeking and getting employment in the public and private sector. Soon, with the proposed increase in reservation for persons with disabilities, and sops for the private sector employing persons with disabilities, this number is sure to increase. States are being more generous with persons with disabilities and allowances, and the National pension scheme also covers persons with disabilities. Without opportunities to entrust this money, to earn interest on it, or invest it, persons with disabilities are losing out on an opportunity to contribute to the economy of the Nation, besides being able to benefit themselves.

This viewpoint is now having takers outside the disability activism circle, with this year's SKOCH Summit having a special session on the financial inclusion of persons with disabilities, providing an interface for banking professionals and persons with disabilities to exchange views. Additionally, the Indian Banks Association has formed a Working Group on Banking facilities for persons with special needs, involving persons with disabilities as well. It is hoped that the coming year proves to be a turning point wherein requirements of persons with disabilities are taken into consideration in financial inclusion schemes – thereby becoming inclusive in the true sense of the term.

Small steps. Giant Strides.



Tripura Kashyap, a trained Bharatanatyam and Contemporary dancer, is among the pioneers of creative movement therapy in India, having worked on the concept since 1990. Tripura and a few movement therapists have launched the Creative Movement Therapy Association of India (CMTAI), a network of professionals from various disciplines that seek to reach out to the different realms of society.

Sheela, a thirteen year old with autism, studied in a school for children with special needs. She could neither cope with academics nor interact with her peers at school. Her younger sister was often the butt of her violent outbursts. Sheela's parents enrolled her for individual dance therapy sessions because she found it difficult to function in any kind of a group.

From frenzied movement and high energy responses to being immobile and oblivious of her actions, Sheela displayed a plethora of emotions just in the span of a session. Feelings of frustration and anger had resulted in her harming herself. The therapist devised a game in which they would say 'Sheela is sad' or 'Sheela is happy' and hit sticks on the floor, in order to vent her feelings.

As time went by, over the duration of the therapy Sheela slowly began to trust, respond and settle down. She soon began to sway to music and to completely immerse herself in the experience. The look of pleasure on her face was evident with every movement she made.





By and by, she began to attempt all the movements with the ease and confidence of a normal twelve year old. Though the idea was not to teach her to perform a dance, she eventually wanted to group the movements that she'd learnt, in a sequence. Towards the end of six months she began to need less physical help in performing movement tasks and progressed to responding appropriately to verbal instructions.

Tripura has shared her insights in her book "My Body My Wisdom", a user-friendly book that de-mystifies dance therapy and expands its scope and application to several kinds of communities.

Bengaluru based movement therapist and choreographer Tripura Kashyap has been using movement, including dance, to help her students like Sheela find their innate rhythm and peace. Apart from working with children and adults with disabilities, Tripura conducts training programs for special educators, teachers, mental health professionals and therapists all over India. Her clientele, therefore spans every segment of society... from the house wife to the professional, the visually impaired to the locomotor impaired.

Tripura, a product of Kalakshetra, Chennai, has been involved with movement therapy for over 20 years. According to her "Our bodies have immense potential for creative movement but most adults confine these to functional movement."

In fact, the idea that movement could be used for people with special needs came to her while observing her brother Pavan, who was a wheelchair user due to polio-meningitis. As his favourite songs came on, Pavan would use his upper body and hands to bang at his wheelchair and almost slide out of it. Sometimes both of them would sway their bodies in unison to the songs he loved, while he became completely animated and enraptured.

Movement therapy works on the premise that movement and emotion are interrelated and has positive effects on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Here, dance works as a physical stimuli and therapists encourage the flow of natural, unstructured movement rather than following the physical instructor.

"I use an array of physical disciplines like creative movement, ideas from yoga, elements of classical and folk dances, martial arts, theatre exercises,



relaxation techniques and mime. These disciplines are used either in combination with one another or independently, to address the body-mind linkage, to build up individual patterns of mobility and to reduce muscular tension”, says Tripura.

After her study in classical dance, a chance meeting with American dance therapist, Dr. Grace Valentine, in Bengaluru, proved to be a turning point. She accepted Dr. Valentine’s invitation to study at the Hancock Center for Dance/Movement Therapy in Wisconsin, where she was exposed to the therapy’s theoretical and practical aspects alongside concepts from psychology, physiology, modern dance and movement analysis.

“Towards the end of my training session I gradually became aware that Indian physical traditions and movement practices offered a large canvas for dance as therapy. I realized that throughout our own sub-continent, myriad dances like folk, tribal, social and ritualistic forms already had a healing aspect embedded in their ethos. For centuries, without the label of ‘dance therapy’, medicine men and priests across Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and other states used dance and movement as part of their healing rituals to cure people of mental and physical ailments. In a trance-like state, they danced and stirred others around them to go through ritualistic movements and chants. Common folks would go into a wild frenzy experiencing an inner catharsis as they danced with a free style movement base.”



Tripura has shared her insights in her book “My Body My Wisdom.” The idea of writing this user-friendly book was to de-mystify dance therapy and to expand its scope and application to several kinds of communities. The book also gives an overview of the discipline with step by step guidance on structuring sessions and creation of movement activities.

Tripura’s Creative Movement Therapy Association of India (CMTAI) recently conducted a workshop on Laban Movement Analysis which is a method to describe, visualise, interpret and document a diverse range of human movement.

Donning several hats, this multifaceted, passionate dancer aims at awakening the mind and body of every human being through dance... with her nimble, sure steps.

*“When we dance, boundaries between life and art blur,
a grey area emerges in which movements are born
and radiate out into the universe.
When imagination and movement are set free
from predictable parameters, something new and unexpected
is bound to surface.”*

Disability Inclusive

DISASTER

Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is about understanding our personal and environmental risks in hazards like earthquakes, floods, hurricanes/cyclones and landslides and mitigating this risk, so that we are not affected by them, or that, if affected, we are able to bounce back quickly. When disasters occur, not only does it render a person with disability more helpless than a non-disabled person, it also generates disabilities in some people, where none had existed before.

The United Nations CRPD states that the State shall provide all the necessary measures for the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

In recent years, many natural, as well as, man-made disasters have struck regions across the globe. The disasters have reflected an increase in magnitude and intensity. For instance, the tsunami that devastated regions from South East Asia to Africa; followed by hurricane Katrina which hit the United States; besides the tsunami that struck Japan, nearly causing a nuclear disaster.

Disasters & Disability

The World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO) have estimated that there are more than a billion persons with disabilities in the world. Many of them are very poor and excluded from policies and decision making in both private and public spaces. To change this situation, persons with disabilities globally came together, to formulate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Convention has been ratified by 151 States (September 2014) within the space of seven years. It includes rights under Article 11 relating to 'Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies' which states that: "State Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters."

This Article came at a timely juncture when extensive global warming and increasing disasters were greatly affecting persons with disabilities. Recent data of the Great East

Japan Earthquake of 2011, underscores that persons with disabilities are at least twice more likely to die than those without disabilities. This data has been substantiated in other disaster situations as well. According to WHO persons living with disability represent one-fifth of total world populations and still lack significant representation in the planning process to reduce and prevent disasters or build resilient societies and communities. The Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, in Article 7 attention was paid to inclusion in disasters in the Asia Pacific Region, which is the most affected region in the world.

To enable a better environment many Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) and activists have been working for the inclusion of Disaster Management and Risk Reduction. The recent focus has been due to global consultations for creating change in the Hyogo Framework (2005-2015). The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) came in the wake of the tsunami of 2004 and provided a paradigm shift from management to risk reduction. Under the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) the global map for HFA has been drawn. The Third UN World Conference on DRR scheduled in 2015 is to adopt a successor framework for DRR. Margareta Wahlström, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for DRR and a supporter of inclusion, initiated a ground-breaking global survey on persons living with disabilities and how they coped with disasters. She had also proposed “living with disability and disasters” as the 2013 theme of the International Day for Disaster Reduction. All these have contributed to a higher level of awareness among policy makers as well as the disabled community itself.

Consequently as part of the UNISDR global activities, Rehabilitation International, the Nippon Foundation, International Disability Alliance and the Disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network (DiDRR) came together and spoke to Margareta and other stakeholders in the HFA (2005-2015) process. The major aim of disability networks has been the need to be involved in planning, decision making and taking action to help their communities reduce their risk to disasters. Rehabilitation International set up a global Task Force on Disability, Armed Conflict & Disaster in 2013 (of which the author is a member). At a meeting in Sendai in 2014, it organized a major conference titled “DiDRR for Secure, Healthy, Wealthy and Resilient Communities and Nations in Asia-Pacific.” This brought a number of stake holders together including States and UN Agencies. The statement that emerged from the Conference centred around the following:

1. DiDRR is critical for the creation of secure, healthy, wealthy and resilient communities and nations.
2. Consulting with and involving, on an equitable basis, women and men with disabilities and their organizations in all phases of disaster risk management and in decision-making processes that are prerequisites for everyone’s meaningful participation. Communities will benefit from their knowledge and skills in strengthening resilience.

According to the WHO persons with disability represent one fifth of the total world population and still don’t have a significant representation in the planning process to reduce disaster risks, prevent disaster or build resilient communities.

India & DiDRR

The Government of India despite pressure from DPOs has paid little attention to inclusion of disability during disaster planning and implementation. The Disaster Act, Policies and Guidelines paid no or very little attention to disability inclusion in its policies. Even in its actions neither the Armed Forces nor National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) made an effort to include persons with disabilities in relief and rehabilitation, as in the recent Uttarkashi disaster. When cyclone Phyllin struck Odisha, however, special attention was paid to disability inclusive disaster strategies thanks to pressure from agencies such as Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC) and Handicap International. The Government of Odisha issued a protocol that:

1. special attention be paid to pregnant women, elderly & disabled in preparedness
2. 24 hour control room in WCD Dept be set up
3. ensure care of these groups pre and post cyclone
4. Information be given on the above groups shifted to hospitals
5. during evacuation special attention be paid to the above groups
6. Carers / family members be with them in the same shelter
7. Persons/children with intellectual disability and autism be kept separately with family members

This can be cited as one of the best practices of the Government of India . However, needless to say, this qualifies as disaster management and not disaster inclusive risk reduction.

Disasters & Disability



Asha Hans

Executive Vice
President, SMRC

This article will not be complete without citing the work of NDMA working out of India which has been playing an important role in DiDRR. The work of SMRC dates back to 1999 when a cyclone of an intense magnitude hit the coast of Odisha. Though SMRC was a member of the UN and State Coordination Committee and made every effort for their inclusion, there was complete chaos, and disability was excluded by policy makers, implementers and the thousands of donors who thronged the State. Finally, SMRC started to carry out relief work with the assistance of the persons with disabilities that it had worked with the people from the cyclone affected areas. It assisted about 3000 persons with disabilities in the areas of Jagatsingpur and Puri which were the most affected, without any funding support. Later with assistance from ActionAid, it provided comprehensive rehabilitation to 100 people with disabilities affected by the cyclone. This included medical treatment, barrier free housing and livelihood. At this stage the function of being disaster ready could not be taken up. The 2004 tsunami brought this issue to the fore and SMRC initiated a full-fledged campaign nationally and internationally on DiDRR.

At the national level SMRC collaborated with (NDMA) to make the law inclusive (2005-2008). However, General Vij, Chairperson and Vinod Menon Member, NDMA failed to make the necessary modifications. SMRC subsequently prepared a Guideline note for NDMA, United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Ministry of Social Justice, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and CCDI to create awareness. However the Guidelines make only a small mention of 'persons with disabilities' under the vulnerable category and do not take the agencies into account.

In 2005 during a conference of the Global Forum for Health Research inaugurated by the President of India, in Mumbai, SMRC organized a satellite meeting where national and international experts met to discuss the issue of inclusion. Judith E. Heumann then Advisor, Disability and Development, World Bank, Maria Reina and Anne Hayes CIR prepared a video on Disability and Tsunami which was shown and discussed. The meeting concluded with the creation of an International Task Force comprising members from the World Bank, UN, Universities, and disability activists. This Task Force worked at the international level for the next two years.

In 2006 the World Bank (GPCDD) took the initiative to host an E Discussion on "Persons with disabilities and other Vulnerable People in Natural Disasters". SMRC led the discussion on Emergency Response/Relief. The word on inclusion was spreading. SMRC organized an International Conference on Disaster and Disability in 2008 and released the India Declaration on inclusion of DiDRR. As a member of the Expert Committee nominated to change the Sphere Guidelines to include disability, it also organized consultations in India so that inclusion could take place at the local level through these important international guidelines.

SMRC's major thrust has been related to advocacy at all levels. Internationally, it has collaborated with all stakeholders working on disaster issues. This has included the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee, which drafted the CRPD and produced Article 11, in addition to Rehabilitation International in which it initiated a Core Committee on Disability, Disaster and Climate Change (2008). In 2013 SMRC established the Task Force on Disability, Armed Conflict and Disaster which has spearheaded the movement for inclusion internationally. It has also worked closely with Handicap International to ensure accessibility of cyclone shelters in Odisha. At the local level it has endeavoured to change the existing relief code (2004) and make Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) inclusive, while getting DPOs to come together.

For more details: www.smr corissa.org/view_article.php?id28

DiDRR: Objectives in a nutshell

- Ensure that warning systems are disability-friendly, that is, ensure that they meet universal design principles.
- Ensure that disability organizations are actively involved with disaster relief organizations and governments in the overall governance of response coordination offices during disasters.
- Ensure that relief workers understand and are sensitive to disability issues in working with people
- Ensure that universal design principles are met in facilities, like housing for disaster relief. To ensure that they are disability-friendly and accessible for the many more people becoming impaired during disasters and for disabled people already living in disaster-affected countries.
- Create a "level playing field" by providing funding for the inclusion of disabled in governance and policy making initiatives.



Exploring a Sea Gull

a 'SOUND' idea

It's a day with a special feeling. I'm maha-pleased and ultra-proud of the Goa Bird Conservation Network (GBCN), of which I am a member. Months ago, after visiting the National Association of Blind (Goa), I had mooted the idea of introducing visually impaired children to the pleasures of bird 'watching' and the group had responded enthusiastically. I think most of us birders saw the connection of sound to birding and were excited by this special affinity.



A Serpent Eagle's claw ... to be handled with care and respect!



A Shaheen Falcon gets a bit of attention



A student gets a feel of a parakeet feather



Rajiv playing bird sounds

We held two indoor sessions with the visually impaired children at NAB at St. Inez. Rajiv D'Silva took on the task of managing the whole show and many thanks to him. Carl D'Silva (I think he is distantly related to Rajiv ... not sure how) brought in birding artifacts from his collection so that the children could touch and feel parts of birds. Actually, this was also the first time that many of us who had volunteered felt an Owl's wing (to see how it dampens sound for a silent flight) or a Serpent Eagle's impressive claws.

Finally, on a Sunday morning, we took the children out to the Succur plateau to experience birds in the open. It was quite a convoy of cars and it felt like an expedition. We divided the large group into three smaller groups which headed off in different directions. We spent about two hours in the morning listening to various birds: Peacock, Spotted Dove, Scimitar Babbler, Crow Pheasant, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Purple Sunbird, White-browed Bulbul, Reed Warbler, Nilgiri Flower Pecker, Plum-headed Parakeets, Common Iora, Tailor Bird, Red-whiskered Bulbul. (You can hear their calls on birdsofgoa.org)

Kudos GBCN! Here's hoping there will be more 'Birding by Ear.'



Salil Chaturvedi



HERE'S WHAT'S

VAISHNAVI VENKATESH applauds the

My parents will readily concur with Einstein. As they try hard to pry me away from my phone each evening, they tell me that phones may have become smarter, but I certainly haven't. Among other things, technology is supposed to facilitate communication. And yet, we have 500 friends on our Facebook list but we don't know the names of our neighbours.

But like most things in this world, there's the good and the bad. Maybe the bad bit is that we over-communicate with people we don't care about, and under-communicate with those close to us. What we need to remember is the good bit – that technology has, in it's own way, given a lot of us the ability to communicate.

My mother has been volunteering at a school for the visually impaired for as long as I can remember. When I was younger (before the era of cell phones), I was fascinated by the concept of braille, and would spend hours just poring over the sheets as she wrote out notes. A few years later my computer had JAWS (Job Access with Speech) installed, which my mother learnt to use, in order to teach her students. And then came Skype, where she taught a class virtually.

Today, she's part of their whatsapp group, where they constantly hold engaging and hilarious conversations. Thoughts get translated into messages in seconds and the receiver gets them faster than you can say "Send". Technology has definitely broken the barriers of disability in this world.

"I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots"

- Albert Einstein



APP-ENING IN OUR WORLD

app that has broken the barriers of disability with its cutting edge technology

Most phones in our generation come enabled with apps (applications, for those who still belong to the era of the trusty old Nokia 1100) that make communication more inclusive. Whether it's the iPhone's SIRI application or Google Now – these apps help you find anything on your phone with just a command. Apart from this, every smartphone today comes with an accessibility feature which can be used to increase font size and icon size – this helps those with low visibility.

It's not just speech-to-text, but the vice versa that is also possible. A decade ago, people with hearing disabilities relied mostly on SMSes to communicate with those who called them. Today, companies have begun to build mobile software where text can be converted to speech and a phone conversation can be carried out as usual.

A quick search into the world of applications tells me that inclusive technology doesn't just end here. Tecla is an external switch access that can connect a wheelchair to a cellphone – where a person can control a phone through simple switches on the chair! These phones gives them access to an even bigger world.

But the realm of inclusivity extends beyond physical disabilities. With a plethora of creative learning games flooding the app stores, children with autism are beginning to learn with iPads and other tablets. Educational games and videos have now been brought to the small screen.

With smartphones being sold at reasonable and competitive rates today, more people are gaining access and awareness in being part of a connected world. The more I read about how technology is making this world more inclusive, the more I believe that Albert Einstein's thought has a silver lining to it. Technology hasn't just surpassed human interaction, it's made the interactions more intricate – the barriers are blurring and the world is now at everyone's finger tips.

Whether it is the iPhone's siri application or google now, every smartphone comes with an accessibility feature which can be used to increase font size and icon size helping those with low visibility.



THE ALS ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE

All for a good cause!

Capitalising on the global reach of social networking sites, The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge became a viral phenomenon collecting close to \$70.2 million for people with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.



Tarini Kumar

“Why are people throwing buckets of ice-cold water over their heads- that too voluntarily?”, you might ask. If you are yet to hear of this viral internet phenomena then it is time to realize that you live in the 21st century dictated by the all powerful, influential social media.

Popular social platforms like Facebook are currently filled with videos of celebrities, grandmothers and teenagers giggling as they so willingly drench themselves. But hold on, they are partaking in what is now called the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, a phenomenon that has captured public imagination while achieving its main objective - raising awareness and gathering funds for people affected by Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

According to the ALS Association, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis is a “progressive neuro degenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. The progressive degeneration of the motor neurons in ALS eventually leads to their death. When the motor neurons die, the ability of the brain to initiate and control muscle movement is lost. With voluntary muscle action progressively affected, patients in the later stages of the disease may become totally paralyzed.”

The United States ALS Association has received over \$70.2 million according to their website. Since the flood of donations has surpassed expectations thanks to it going viral, the different ALS societies across borders will decide how best to utilise the funds.

Now here is how the challenge works. People who have been nominated have 24 hours to post a video of themselves completing the challenge and donate \$10 to the ALS foundation. If they fail to meet the requirements, the terms of the challenge indicate that they need to donate \$100 instead (that’s roughly 6000 rupees for you folks and ice definitely costs less). The practice gained unprecedented popularity after celebrities across the world participated in the challenge.

The trend seems to have caught on in India as well as Bollywood stars and sportsmen continue to upload their videos. Shahrukh Khan, Akshay Kumar, Bipasha Basu, Abhishek Bachchan, Sania Mirza and several others participated in the chain to champion the cause of ALS. However, like the Bollywood industry, India has added a desi flavour to the traditional rules by introducing what is referred to as the “Rice Bucket Challenge”. This challenge involves people donating a bucket of rice to someone needy in order to alleviate some amount of their financial burden.

While the idea has no doubt caught on like wildfire, like every other global, heated topic (in this case freezing), it has its fair share of critics. On the one hand, people claim that participants’ motivations are primarily to have a “good time” while simultaneously indulging in self-promotion. On the other, some argue that the end goal is raising money for a charitable organization which has been achieved. Whether you opt to take an ice-bath (or not), the pervasive presence of this challenge in the social media is a creative lesson for anyone attempting to raise funds in future.

Former US President George Bush, Microsoft giant Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah Winfrey, Cristiano Ronaldo, Lady Gaga, among others, took the plunge by dumping freezing buckets of water over their heads, either in the privacy of their back garden or in full view of passers by on the street.

The Great

EXCHANGE

As long as there are people who have even a miniscule droplet of prejudice in their blood, they will complain. Complaining about others is human, says Dr. MADAN VASISHTA

Most of us notice that whenever a few deaf people get together and begin to discuss something, sooner or later, they will start complaining about hearing people. The same goes for hearing people who work with the deaf - they complain about deaf people.



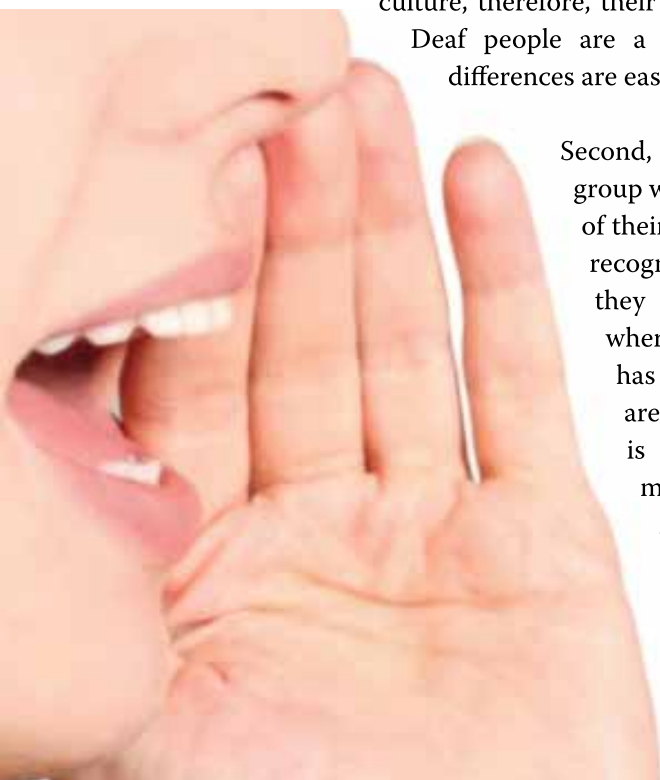
Well, so what? Deaf people complain about deaf people also and hearing people complain about hearing people. As long as there are people who have even a miniscule droplet of prejudice in their blood, they will complain. Complaining about others is human!

However, there are some stereotypes of complaints. I contacted several of my deaf and hearing friends — both in the United States and India — to help me compile a list of these complaints. This will help us analyze these complaints and learn what are aimed at stereotyping the deaf or the hearing and what are related to cultural factors.

First, we have to recognize the fact that, just like hearing people, no two deaf people are alike. People come in all sizes, shapes, colors and quiriness. The hearing are a majority culture, therefore, their individual differences are recognized.

Deaf people are a minority, therefore, their individual differences are easily stereotyped.

Second, the deaf form a distinct group with a language and culture of their own. The Deaf culture is recognized in countries where they are well organized and where academic research has been conducted in this area. This minority culture is superimposed on the majority hearing culture. In India, deaf people are still dispersed mostly due to



the rural nature of Indian population. With more than 70% people living in villages, we must say that about 70% of India's deaf population lives in villages. And, deafness being a low incident disability (1 out of 1000), we can also affirm that there is perhaps only one deaf person in every other village in India. They do not get together and are assimilated in the village population. Thus, we will limit our discussion to deaf people in urban areas.

Most hearing people see deaf people from a distance trying to communicate with each other using their hands or trying to lip-read each other. Communication is a normal process and when a person sees other people communicating in a strange way, the impression is very negative.

Deaf people congregate in deaf clubs, work places, social gatherings and their sports events. Just like hearing people, they discuss politics, cinema, religion and world events, not necessarily in that order. They also discuss hearing people or should I say, they complain about hearing people. Some of these complaints are about hearing people in general and others are about hearing people who work with the deaf.

From the lists I have generated from my sources, I have eliminated those related to personal prejudices or experiences. Eliminated also are those that sound nebulous. Here are some that are more common.

Hearing people:

- take over deaf people's job • have the "know-all" attitude • have no patience • do not respect deaf people's natural language - sign language • look down upon deaf people
- are patronizing • exploit deaf people • consider deaf people are cursed by god
- have low expectations of deaf people • are not helpful • do not respect deaf people's opinions, and so forth.

Before we analyze these accusations for their validity, let us first look at the complaints that hearing people have listed:

Deaf people:

- do not understand value of time • complain too much and about little things • are manipulative • take advantage of their deafness • expect hearing people to do their dirty work for them • are lazy • pretend to understand things they actually do not
- take people who help them for granted • are thankless • do not respect successful deaf people • are dependent.

There are more, but, as I mentioned above, most of them are personal or fall within the above general categories. I have summed up six pages of complaints from both groups in half a page above. But, these are all encompassing.

A cursory look at these shows these complaints are not very different from complaints expressed by other groups against each other. Look at North-South, Maharashtra-Gujarati, Bihari-Bengali and other groups that are pitted against each other. They have almost the same kind of complaints. However, the major difference between squabbles in these groups and the deaf-hearing groups is that the deaf suffer from serious communication problems due to their inability to hear. Thus, many of these complaints are based on misunderstandings in communication.

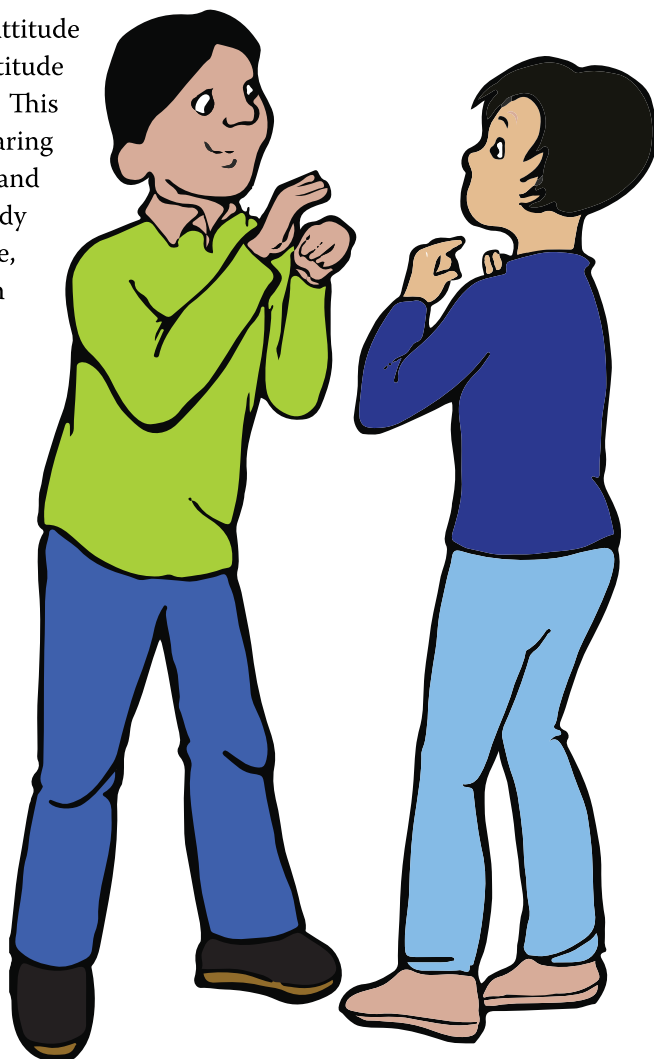
This analysis is based on my 50 plus years of working with the deaf and the hearing and of being in the middle of a lot of squabbles. This will not satisfy many people and that is not the purpose of this treatise. As the old Hindi saying goes, “wherever you put two utensils, they will clash with each other’. Any group living and interacting together will clash.

Most hearing people see deaf people from a distance trying to communicate with each other using their hands or trying to lip-read each other. This impression is usually very negative. Communication is a normal process and when a person sees other people communicating in a strange way, the impression is very negative. Thus most hearing people with little or no information about deaf people decide that deaf people are strange and stupid. Their lack of understanding communication is interpreted as lack of intelligence. Hearing people who work with the deaf or have deaf people in their families have a better understanding. They know that the lack of hearing does not make people brainless.

This lack of understanding leads to a condescending attitude toward the deaf. The deaf when targeted with this attitude develop hostility against the hearing community. This hostility becomes more intense when ignorant hearing people make fun of them. This is a long process and becomes deeply rooted in deaf people who are already isolated. Once these deaf people meet other deaf people, they begin to share their experiences and feed on each other’s negative expressions. The combined result of this is mistrust of hearing people. This mistrust leads to prejudice.

The expression of hostility by deaf people puzzles hearing people. They begin to consider deaf people ignorant and belligerent. This feeling is easily translated into accusation of laziness and other complaints generated against deaf people.

Reading the above will make one wonder if deaf and hearing people are pitted against each other fulltime. On the contrary, these two groups work very well with each other. They communicate when they can, they help each other, they appreciate each other and they live side by side. The complaints listed above form only a small negative part of a great positive experience that these groups bring to each other. It is great!





Saraswathi
Vasudevan

Detox through YOGA

When was the last time you woke up feeling refreshed in your body and mind and sprung out of bed smiling, welcoming the morning sun? When was the last time you went to bed relaxed and content, slipping into sleep effortlessly?



Brahmari (Humming Bee)



Sanmukhi Mudra (Six-headed Posture)



Jathara Parivrtti (Abdominal Twist)

Waking up with a groggy head, eyes wanting to remain shut, upper back and shoulders heavy, place the foot down and the heels hurt... the mind goes back to happenings of yesterday and if there is some unresolved issue, it brings up a familiar sensation of tightness in the upper chest, shortness of breath. This maybe an everyday experience for many people. And of course, not to talk about going to bed, mind buzzing with thoughts, work concerns, concerns about the characters from the television serials, emails to do, what to cook for breakfast tomorrow, body tired or heavy with minimum physical activity through the long day, sounds familiar?

Is there a better reality? Am I willing to take responsibility for myself and do something about it?

Do I have the time for it?

Recently, I met a person for a yoga consultation. She complained of severe neck and back pain, knee pain, very over-weight, relationship issues and so unhappy, tears swelling up in her eyes as she spoke softly. Her friend had brought her to me, so I asked, "are you willing to take some time for yourself and do yoga?" She said, "I am right now, busy with construction of my new apartment, in about 6 months time, I will be done with that and can move in, then I can take some time out to practice yoga." Strange as it may seem, most of us operate this way. But as the famous Tamil saying goes, 'we can't wait for the waves to rest before entering the waters for a bath'. I suggested that she start spending 15-20 minutes each day on setting herself in order. That way, she would walk into her new home, healthier and happier.

The toxins we accumulate

Ayurveda emphasizes on importance of good digestion, any food that remains undigested / partially digested (referred to as "aama") gets circulated in the blood stream and causes blockages, especially in the joints creating pain, stiffness and conditions such as arthritis. It is not, just the food that remains poorly assimilated, everyday we overload our system with mental, emotional and sensory experiences that stay undigested, unresolved thereby creating blocks, trapping the vital energy *Prana* and making it unavailable for all our vital functions. Almost all our stress related conditions are results of such accumulated toxins. While we are quite responsive to physical toxins and try to eat better, exercise better and so on, what about the constant overload of toxins on the sense organs and the mind? If I am not able to free my mind of an argument with somebody, if I am not able to forget a painful word from somebody, if I am constantly telling myself "I am not good enough", are these not toxins to be cleared from the system. Why are we so nonchalant and complacent about this?

What yoga can do

Everyday practice of yoga – appropriate asanas with breath coordination work wonderfully to open up parts of the body where we habitually accumulate residues of stress – like neck, shoulders, upper and lower back. The breath driven through these parts release the trapped energy.

The focus on long exhalation clears up the mind marvellously of stagnant, obsessive concerns and frees the space for a restful sleep in the night. Thus, when you can wake up with a clear mind, especially after a good night's sleep, you have the possibility of finding solutions to the problems that you were struggling with to sort out these in a muddled state of mind.

Imagine how it would be if the household then cheerfully prepares for a great day ahead, instead of screaming at one another. Imagine going to bed with a relaxed body, and a peaceful mind and waking up feeling light and enthusiastically welcoming another day!

So, what's stopping us from maximising on our own lives? Let us turn to yoga to show us the way.



Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)



Apanasana (Knee-to-Chest Pose)



*Urdhva Prasarita Padasana
(Upward Extended Foot Pose)*



Celebrating Diverse Abilities

YESHASVINI RAJESHWAR reviews a compelling book that takes us into the lives and soul of some extraordinary people. "If this isn't inspiration, then what is?" she asks.

Here is a book on fifteen people who chose to write their own story, script their own path, unmindful of others who may call it a dead end.

It was a cold, rainy day when I picked up 'Gifted – Inspiring Stories of People with Disabilities' by Sudha Menon and VR Ferose, looking forward to a good read to complement the wonderful weather. The book looked promising, with cheery balloons on the cover spreading happiness and uplifting spirits. The face of the girl holding these balloons is covered as she is airborne, jumping against the backdrop of the ocean. Perhaps the face isn't as important as the spirit, I thought. This proved to be the first of many carefully thought out illustrations in the anthology of life stories.

Just like most other readers (I hope!), I first skipped to the pictures, trying to put faces to the stories I was embarking on. Apart from the happy surprise of recognizing a friend in their midst, the breadth of experience intrigued me. There were sportspeople as well as those from the showbiz, pictures of families and medical clinics, fashion and music. The 250-odd pages were brimming with promise and I still hadn't read a word!

As I wove in and out of the stories (almost at a stretch, I must add), the one connecting thread that emerged was that of honesty. The stories spoke loud and clear of struggle, distress, pain and eventual rising above a plethora of difficulties. With the turning of every page, I was struck with the reality of people's lives... how everyone has a story: some just more visible than others, some from birth and others acquired. Here is a book on fifteen people who chose to write their own story, script their own path, unmindful of the others who might have called it a dead end. If this isn't inspiration, then what is!

The book begins with Aisha Chaudhary, a happy, beautiful teenager whose "constant companion for the last few years has been a portable oxygen concentrator." What follows is a story of one girl's coming of age and then impacting thousands of people as



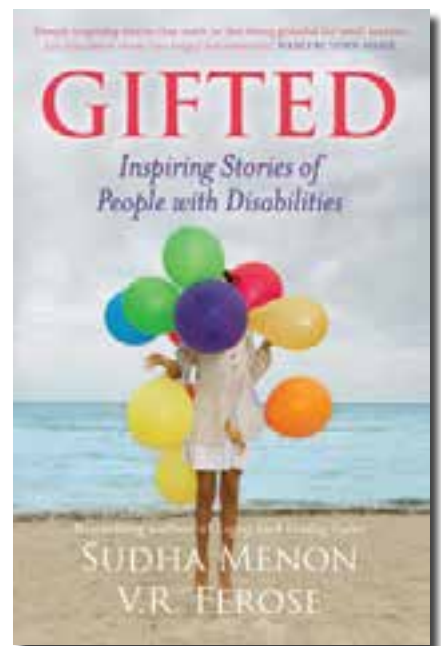
With every page, I was struck with the reality of people's lives, how everyone has a story; some just more visible than the others, some from birth, some acquired."

she takes to the stage. Ashwin Karthik's tale leaves you wondering about the hero of the story – is it Ashwin, a software engineer also a quadriplegic or is it Bharat Sharma, his long-time friend who stuck with him through thick and thin, sometimes even at the cost of his own plans? As Girisha writes about fulfilling the nation's dream by winning the silver medal for high jump at the Paralympics, I'd dare you not to have goosebumps.

The entire text is aptly supplemented by Nachiket's sketches, that capture each personality, each individual in all their depth. Though I initially found the explanation of these sketches a little cumbersome (there wasn't room for imagination if everything was explained, I thought), it gradually grows on you and by the end of the book you accept it as part of the larger picture.

All in all, 'Gifted' is a perfect pick-me-up on a day when the world is overcast in blue and grey. Its pages are packed with stories of exceptional people who have paved their own path. Whether they consider themselves 'disabled', 'differently-abled' or otherwise their pasts, their stories and their hope for the future makes it an anthem of courage and collective dreams.

If there is something we must take from the book, let it be its spirit, its honesty, its perpetual desire for growth and betterment and blatant refusal to compromise. As Malathi Holla says, "Nobody can tell me to dream only sensible dreams."



GIFTED

Sudha Menon, V. R. Feroze

Random House India

Rs 299 | PP 304



on **MEDIA** **AGINE**

Medical advice relayed on media can be misleading at times. Each human being is different and treatments have to be tailor-made for the patient, says DR. HIRAMALINI SESHADRI

The other day, a heart patient who was doing well on diltiazem, landed up with Angina. Reason? She read in a magazine that “diltiazem caused cancer”, she panicked, stopped the medicine, developed chest pain and finally ended up in the ICU. This is the kind of thing that causes problems between doctors and the media.

To scientists, research becomes reliable and therefore, newsworthy only through replication of one’s findings by other professional colleagues. Research findings are all only tentative and preliminary, and not at all newsworthy till they are certified by peers. For journalists, in contrast, established ideas are old news and less interesting than the fresh and dramatic, however tentative the research finding. Their role is to inform as well as to entertain and what makes a good copy therefore, may not be what is a scientifically tested fact. It is this kind of media response that ends up misleading the public, often with disastrous consequences, like the patient who landed up in the ICU.

It would not be fair however, to blame only the media. Many scientists succumb to the instant spotlight that media coverage brings. In contrast, peer review and attention from scientific bodies after publication in staid, solid, conservative medical journals is a very slow process. The hope that publicity will help generate research funds during these economically depressed times is another factor. Sometimes, such

coverage is good. For example, it was the dramatic press coverage that generated funds for polio research in the fifties, and more recently, AIDS is a typical example where media attention helped generate public funds for research.

Media attention can sometimes sweep even sober scientists off their feet; and then we end up with classic statements, such as the one made by the senior professor, who isolated the colon cancer gene; said he to the New York Times reporter, “now death can be avoided!” The media ensures national and international visibility. Increasingly therefore, scientists who want to influence national policy, research funding and so on, are resorting to media coverage of their research findings.

The irony of it all is that both journalists and scientists are committed to communicating the TRUTH. But scientific conclusions, with countless ifs and buts qualifying each sentence, read like the small print legal warnings and journalists, in an attempt to improve readability of the piece, often simplify it to straightforward ‘fact’ – which, in truth, it seldom is. This journalistic attempt to enhance audience appeal may violate strict scientific norms. For example, because of its graphic appeal, a journalist covering obesity research preferred to use the term “fat gene” rather than state the bland fact that a particular gene COULD be a marker, that MAY PREDISPOSE an individual to obesity.

The other hurdle is the editor. To get past editorial censorship, the scribe may have to make out a case for the newsworthiness of his/her story. This leads to undue emphasis on the ‘uniqueness’ of the research, ‘first’ discovery, major “breakthrough”, etc. Scientists too, very often succumb to the “breakthrough” syndrome. But since they have to continue in the field, they have to ultimately be committed to peer review, duplication of findings and the cumulative effect of further research.



The irony of it all is that both journalists and scientists are committed to communicating the TRUTH. But scientific conclusions, with countless ifs and buts qualifying each sentence, read like the small print legal warnings.

A word about the disastrous consequences of dramatic reporting: the 1994 plague epidemic is a classic example. The word epidemic in medical terms, only means a cluster of health related incidents greater than expected; whereas to the layman, the word epidemic connotes a rampantly spreading disease. In retrospect, we know that the plague was blown all out of proportion by the media. The whole country became an “untouchable” as it were, and what a nose – dive the Indian tourism industry took, as a result! With time of course, it all died down. But for a while, the tiny flurry of “suspected plague” cases at Surat (to date, it has not been confirmed!) was enough to put the whole subcontinent in the grip of a ‘ravaging epidemic!’ This media-spread epidemic finally died a natural media-death!

An annoying fact is that medicine is generally never black or white on any issue. It is mostly grey; and interpreting grey is always difficult! Journalists prefer polarities – either something is totally safe or it is very risky. Medical treatment of any kind involves risk. The cardinal principle that should guide the doctor and patient is that the risks of treatment

be much lesser than the risks of non-treatment. Not just that, each human being is different, and hence treatments have to be individualised and tailor-made for the patient concerned. It is difficult enough as it is, to convince the anxious, reluctant patient about the need to take proper treatment, and the health columnist, whose words are considered the Biblical truth by the patient, makes it more difficult for the poor doctor!

What then should be the relationship between media and medicine? Not easy to answer; but a fair example would be how the Reader’s Digest handles health issues in their “I am John’s / Jane’s...” series. Those articles seek to improve the reader’s understanding of the human body and its ailments. Only those facts that have been accepted by standard text-books, are quoted in these articles; there are no tentative research findings of today which may well be refuted tomorrow, no sensational breakthrough treatments either. Perhaps that is truly the best rule of thumb for the media – when it comes to medicine, accept only text book viewpoints. After all, that is what medical students learn too; surely, that should be good enough for the rest of us!

Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology Conference



Tarini Kumar

A mug with two handles, virtual computers, a scooter with four wheels – descriptions from a new lexicon? Some people might think so. However, these innovative inventions are currently available and serve to simplify everyday activities for people who need them. The science, affordability and practicality of these very devices formed the basis of a conference on Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology that took place in Chennai in August this year. “Success & ABILITY”, India’s cross disability magazine, published by Ability Foundation, was the Magazine Partner for the event.

The conference, organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Tamil Nadu Technology Development & Promotion Centre (TNTDPC) provided a stimulating forum for professionals comprising engineers, doctors, professors and social workers committed to the promotion of inclusive technology in India. The introductory speakers set the context by defining assistive technology as any equipment or device that facilitates individuals with disabilities.

Assistive Ergonomic Technology

At the outset, Dr. Neeradha Chandramohan, Director of the National Institute of Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD), defined ergonomics as employee efficiency in relation to task and equipment and discussed the merits of applying ergonomics to assistive and rehabilitative technology. She emphasised the need for technology development in improving the quality of life and maximizing productivity of the disabled. Citing the NIEPMD building as a successful example of ergonomic design encompassing disability inclusive infrastructure, Dr. Chandramohan stated that features such as anti-skid flooring, grab bars and braille signs were simple assistive devices useful to the disabled. Today, incorporating features like these costs merely 2% more than a “regular” building, making it a financially viable option.

Another significant ergonomic factor cited by Mr Barghav Sundaram, Chief Executive at Callidai Motor Works, is a product’s value to its user i.e., does the product achieve its purpose by augmenting the quality of life for its buyers? To ascertain its effectiveness, it was agreed that technology must be versatile enough to adapt to the specific needs of individual customers.

Speakers were also invited to shed light on available research opportunities to further develop assistive technology in a collaborative environment. Dr. Darius Gnanaraj, professor of mechanical engineering at Karunya University apprised the audience on the opportunities offered by his university including a department dedicated to ergonomic design in relation to inclusive technology.

Assistive Medical Technology

The second session of the conference dealt with recent medical advancements that have accelerated the rehabilitation of certain cases of disabilities. Dr. R Ramnaraya, a functional neurosurgeon at Apollo Hospital, explained the concept of Intrathecal Baclofen Therapy in treating spasticity - a condition where abnormal increase in muscle tone caused by damage to nerve pathways results in possible difficulty in movement. In this technique, the drug is administered directly to the patient's spinal cord. Since only a small dose of the drug is injected, the cost of treatment is substantially low and side effects, if any, are immediate making treatment easier.

Dr. Samuel N. Mathew, Executive Director at the National Institute of Speech & Hearing said communication is a fundamental requisite for human beings. Speech and hearing play a significant role in communication. Not everybody has the ability

to use both. A strategy must be developed to ensure successful communication for such people. Past solutions have constituted simple "picture books" as well as high-technology devices which generate artificial speech. On a positive note, assistive technology has enabled hitherto marginalized people with hearing and speech impairments to compete for jobs on an equal platform.

Finally, Mr. C Ananda, Chairman of the Sri Sugam Physiotherapy Institute, addressed the subject of sports rehabilitation in relation to assistive technology. He stressed the importance of physical activities for the disabled, as he felt it motivated them and instilled a sense of purpose. Additionally, the role of technology in facilitating movement cannot be undermined. For example, prosthetic legs have enabled amputees to participate successfully in both the Paralympic and Olympic Games.

Assistive Software Technology

The session on assistive software technology centred on making assistive software products accessible and easy to operate on regularly used devices. Examples of such technology include virtual keyboards and voice recognition software.

The conference concluded with a discussion of subjects that could potentially hinder advancement of assistive technology. One of the common concerns was the inaccurate representation of the disabled community in the census. It appeared that the number of disabled people in the community was far greater than that recorded in the census as officials did not specifically probe for people with disabilities, as mandated. This gave an unrealistic number of the disabled population in the country. Furthermore, a section of the audience believed

that assistive technology was mainly for the upper and middle classes as people from lower socio-economic backgrounds couldn't afford the necessary equipment. Thus, designers and engineers of assistive technology need to keep affordability in mind.

Overall, the conference was a meeting ground of diverse professionals who enlightened the audience on the current scenario and future focus areas in the field of assistive and rehabilitative technology. Although the possibilities are endless, this event served as a platform for collaborative learning and augmenting efforts in generating practical and creative solutions. A follow-up conference has been proposed to take stock of the points of action and review new developments in this dynamic field.

YES, I WEAR A HEARING AID. NO, I AM NOT DIFFERENT.

Just before the turn of the century, I started getting some noises in my ears. It was not a distraction but was definitely an irritation. I was in my early 30's happily married, upwardly mobile. Had just got my first international posting and the world was mine to conquer. Within months it all came crashing down.

While in Egypt I was diagnosed with Meniere's disease. It's not a life threatening illness. But it is a social taboo illness. It affects the hearing and sometimes causes vertigo. It's cause is yet unknown but is linked to an unhealthy lifestyle.....anxiety at work place, irregular eating and sleeping habits, processed food rich in sodium, cola and caffeine culture....all of which I was guilty of. There is no cure but one needs to take preventive measure. I went for diagnosis and treatment to UK, US and even got an unsuccessful surgery done in my inner ear. But my tinnitus in the ears kept on increasing, my hearing diminished. Frankly more than the hearing it was the speech discrimination which was an issue. In plain language, I could hear but was not sure of what was being spoken.

My first reaction was that this cannot be happening to me. But my immediate second reaction was that I am going to fight it. I acquired hearing aids of the highest order in order to improve my speech discrimination, I changed my eating habits totally. Cut out all tea, coffee, colas, processed foods and salt from my food. Started daily walks and jogs and also alternate medicine.

And I never allowed it to interfere with my work. I was concentrating much harder, was more focussed even developed a bit of lip reading! And the results showed. Some of my best years in terms of results happened in Egypt and Indonesia. In Egypt I turned around an ailing division restored client confidence in the agency on all globally aligned MNC clients and broke all records in client performance appraisals and bonuses. Exactly the same results came in Indonesia too where I was leading a team of more than 50 people and also handling regional responsibility, which meant extensive travel throughout Asia and London.

But I noticed another change. In the way society started dealing with me. I was no more a high flyer or a rising star. I was not shunned but when people realised I was wearing hearing aids, suddenly there would be doubt in their eyes and actions. Since I was wearing a hearing aid therefore it was assumed that I was at a handicap. People would raise their voice automatically, repeat the same things twice and if I asked them to repeat what they said would look at me with pity. First I thought it was mind playing tricks but on closer observation I realised it was a definite behaviour trait.

Worse was to follow. People started assuming that I was getting dumber. I could see exasperation setting in if I did not follow something at the first attempt. I could see impatience because it was assumed that having a handicap meant that I have become an inferior person.

And then the worst social behaviour emerged. I would notice people sniggering behind my back. If I misinterpreted something it was because I was hard of hearing, and I did face some moments when people actually took advantage of my condition. There were some colleagues and also superiors who blatantly lied, "But I told you so. Oh! You may not have heard it!" There were times when I knew that some one was trying to shift blame on me and use my problem to their advantage and I could do nothing about it. It was almost as if I was marked out.

Mind you I was in a communication business. I was at the beck and call of my clients 24x7. And I had to always keep in touch with my consumers too. Attending group discussions, strategy meetings, new business pitches were all a normal part of my day. It was a high pressure, result oriented, deadline driven career.

She would be on the net for hours surfing for more information on the disease. She would look at all types of alternate medicines. She would become part of medical groups or patient groups related to the illness. She would restore my self confidence and she would exhort me not to give up. She always looked at the brighter side of things. At least it is not a life threatening disease, would be her usual refrain. That certainly put things in perspective.

The interesting part was that while I was being set up for failure due to societal and even peer rejection, my results at work place weren't bad at all. Yes, there were hiccups and lows but then these happened when my confidence was at the lowest. In fact more often than not I realised that my clients were very appreciative but my industry and peers were not. The word was out on the street. He wears a hearing aid. Poor fellow, he has lost it.

THIS IS NOT AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE A VICTIM OF MYSELF. I DON'T WANT THIS PIECE TO GET ME SYMPATHY. BUT I THINK THERE HAS TO BE AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW SOME ACQUIRED PHYSICAL DISABILITY DOES NOT MAKE THE PERSON LESS THAN WHAT HE USED TO BE.

All this did get to me. It was not only frustrating but also dealt a severe blow to my self confidence. Maybe, I actually didn't hear what he said? Maybe, my mind is not processing information with same precision? Maybe, I am not capable of handling big projects? Maybe, I should retire and look at a more sedate profession?

My strength was my wife. She not only believed in me but was my walking talking medical advisor.

I was really frustrated. Down in the dumps. I started withdrawing into a shell. I was never a firm believer but I started losing faith in God and even humanity. I would decline invites to client social meets, I would shun office group events, I would not be part of any weekend outing trips... the more I secluded and cut myself off, the more tongues wagged. The more people became convinced that I am no more a capable professional or even a friend.

But I recovered with the help of my family support system. Luckily the worst in terms of the disease was also over. My ears stabilised and I doggedly got back into my groove. My life perspective had changed and I was now determined to change some more people's.

This is not an attempt to make a victim of myself. I don't want this piece to get me sympathy. But I think there has to be an understanding of how some acquired physical disability does not make the person less than what he used to be. How can society and work place change their impression about someone just because he is using a device which has him labelled, handicapped? Just because I had become poor in one of my physical faculty did not mean that I had diminished as a person.

It is funny. If I had a heart attack and I had survived it, I would have been more accepted than as a person who has got a disability. Isn't that ironic? So I soldiered on. Bagged new assignments, made a difference in my job. But the fact that I wore hearing aids always caught up.

Our society is full of preconceived notions. In as much as we try, it is not easy to fight and break these notions. My experience shows me that no one will fight for you. If you are lucky as me and have a good support system like my wife, my family, my in laws then you can fight. But what about those who do not have such support system. And also an economical support system. What do those people do? How do they fight these pre-conceived notion? What do they do? How do they survive?

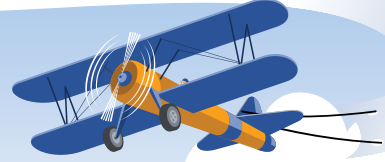
I turn fifty today. According to our customs and belief this is an age when a person gets into Vanaprastha ashram. Give up worldly goods, emotionally detach yourself from the world, give up the materialistic things. I will do none of that. For I want to be a role model. For I am a survivor who has survived to say his tale.



Vikas Mehta

**IT IS FUNNY.
IF I HAD A
HEART ATTACK
AND I HAD SURVIVED IT,
I WOULD HAVE BEEN
MORE ACCEPTED THAN
AS A PERSON WHO
HAS GOT A DISABILITY.
ISN'T THAT IRONIC?**

EDINBURGH



Following a historic referendum vote Scotland has chosen to remain with the British Union. Edinburgh, entices visitors with its medieval castles, unique culture and tales of yore.

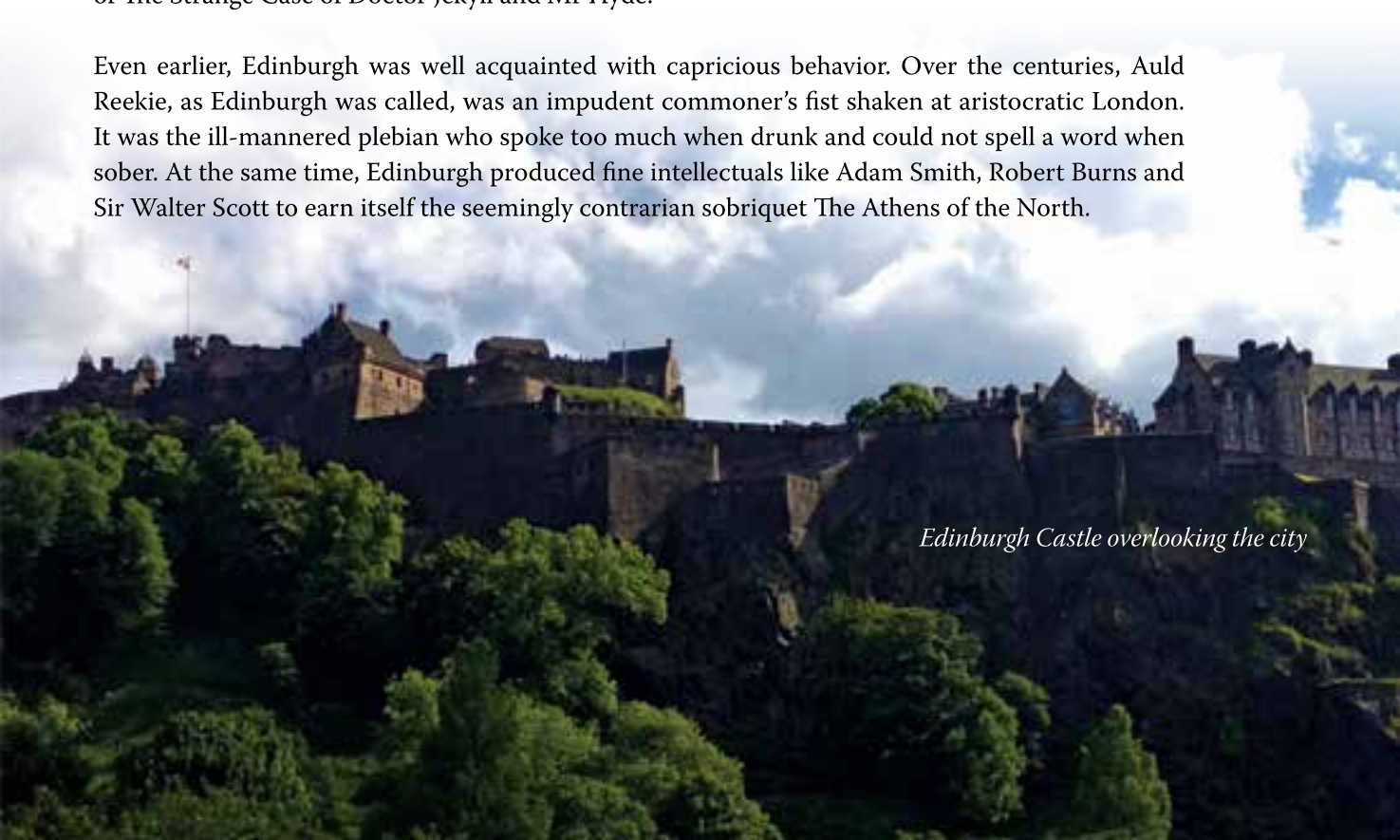
With Malice Towards None & Caprice Towards All

It was a late evening in May, when I walked into the quaint Deacon Brodie's Inn for a Scottish repast. As with most things in Edinburgh, the inn proudly proclaimed its antecedents. This one professed that it owed its name to a 19th century cabinet maker, who was among the most respectable gentlemen of his time and a privileged member of the town council. The Inn's guests had included a family of lighthouse engineers, the Stevensons, whose young son Robert had been showing promising talent as a writer.

The cabinet maker Decon's nightly hobbies were vastly more sinister. Having made secret wax replicas of his client's keys, he would often break into houses and fund his nighttime gambling addiction and daytime ostentation. As the story eventually unraveled, this inconceivable tale was bequeathed to posterity by the young Robert Louis Stevenson who rose to fame as the author of *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Even earlier, Edinburgh was well acquainted with capricious behavior. Over the centuries, Auld Reekie, as Edinburgh was called, was an impudent commoner's fist shaken at aristocratic London. It was the ill-mannered plebian who spoke too much when drunk and could not spell a word when sober. At the same time, Edinburgh produced fine intellectuals like Adam Smith, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott to earn itself the seemingly contrarian sobriquet *The Athens of the North*.

Edinburgh Castle overlooking the city



Such schizophrenic tendencies have hardly subsided. The pleas for independence from Britain had reached a crescendo while I was there, resulting in campaigns for the referendum in of September 2014. On one hand was J K Rowling, the most recent literary giant exported from Scotland, who claimed that the clamor for independence was too ‘Death-Eaterish’ for her liking. Her sparring rival was Sir Sean Connery who felt that the Scottish had needed a proud identity distinct from that of the English.



Hari Adarsh
Sripathi

There was the camp that felt even the Royal Bank of Scotland would move south upon the split, taking the entire Scottish economy with it. They felt Scotland could not survive without England and even asserted that insecure families would migrate en masse to England for a quality life. Nevertheless, there was the equally vociferous crowd that wanted England to pay up for Scottish oil. “They have never liked us. Why is the cricket team English but not British? When Andy Murray wins, he is British, but when he loses, it must be because he is Scottish.”

These raucous campaigners march back and forth the cobblestoned Royal Mile, Edinburgh’s main thoroughfare. At one end stands the Edinburgh Castle, the turreted sentinel that has been wistfully gazing down at the city since the 12th century. At the foot of the hill is the Scottish Parliament, an environmentally friendly abstract design skyscraper that opened as recently as 2004. En route, lies the old town of Edinburgh, with its chiming cathedrals, medieval alleyways and crowds gathered around to listen to bagpipers.



▲ *An Edinburgh street dotted with curiosity shops*

The medieval alleyways lead from the Royal Mile, down to the lower hills, where, in the days of yore, the working class lived. Today, these areas go by evocative names such as Cowgate, Grassmarket and Candlemaker Row. As twilight falls, the farmer’s market draws the drapes and a whisky bar opens. Under the fading light, the quintessentially Scottish obsession with ghost stories and the occult is rekindled.

The gothic tower yonder passed off as an elite school. The rolling hills could only be conquered through flying brooms. The city was a giant library, where upon

It’s hard to separate myth from reality in Edinburgh. The city’s old world charm, surreal beauty and Scottish obsession with ghost stories has inspired many a tale of fantasy.



One of the Coffee Houses where an unknown J K Rowling wrote the first Harry Potter ▲

the slightest summon, the many antique shops, bookstores and bars, flew off their perches to offer their stories and collectively bring Harry Potter to life.

While my dinner of Scottish neeps and tatties (turnips and potatoes), was not particularly memorable, I washed it down with rather inexpensive but intensely flavorful highlands scotch. Whether under its influence or without it, I found it hard to separate myth from reality while in Edinburgh. The city was at once childishly exuberant and extraordinarily elegant. It was a city of shifting lights, changing skies and sudden vistas. An eternal enigma that makes me yearn to return sooner rather than later.



Scottish Haggis, Tatties and Neeps ▲

It was of no surprise to me, that Edinburgh inspired so many tales of fantasy. A once penurious J K Rowling, only had to look around to see the stage set for her novels.



*The Blue Mormon
(Papilio polymnestor)*

The Butterfly Effect

SALIL CHATURVEDI ruminates over experiences that gently glide by in the journey called life



I was in the kitchen slicing cucumber for a salad when this large butterfly entered from the kitchen door leading to the backyard and settled on my shoulder. I took in a sharp breath and sat completely still, not wanting the butterfly to fly away. I had seen it a few days ago flitting in the backyard with other smaller butterflies. I quickly realized that this butterfly was not going to fly away. It was twitching slightly, almost in spasms. I prised it gently off my shoulder and took it in my palm.

It covered most of my palm (and I have large hands). I had never before held a live specimen of Blue Mormon (*Papilio polymnestor*), the second largest butterfly in India. The butterfly dug its spiky legs into my palm, rested its body - spreading out its large wings and lay quite still. When I tried to lift it, it gripped me again and its entire body shivered. So I let it rest. After a minute or so, (during which time Monika had got the camera and I had clicked a few hurried snaps) - the butterfly convulsed and then collapsed, all spent. I kept repeating *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* under my breath, perhaps more for myself than for the butterfly!

It was the perfect day to stretch one's wings and feel the cool monsoon winds. On a whim - probably spurred by the butterfly - Monika and I decided to explore Vashem, a small island close to the island we live on. We had to first take a ferry to Divar Island and from there take another ferry to Vashem Island. We weren't in a hurry. So we drove around aimlessly in Divar soaking in the monsoon drenched view.

On the ferry to Vashem Island I got talking to the attendant, or rather he got talking to me. 'From U.P.?' he asked, pointing to the car's number plate. 'Yup, Allahabad,' I said. Looking at the river, I commented that it was a great place to have a small boat. "There is no end to wants", the attendant opined. "Why think of things you don't have. Just be and feel fulfilled", he said. I knew I wasn't supposed to say anything to that so I kept quiet and took in his profound words in silence. He chuckled and continued said, "Well, if we were going to be here forever, it would make sense to acquire things ...' and trailed off, looking at me with his sparkling eyes and still chuckling away. I couldn't stop myself so I started to laugh too. When we had reached the other end of the river I offered him money for the ride. "Don't worry," he said, "there's no way off the island and you'll be coming back this way and I'll charge you then."

Monika and I loitered around the island often finding ourselves at dead ends and turning back several times. "Would you be able to stay on this island? Monika asked suddenly. "Hmm...", I responded, trying to keep it vague. "I would love to," Monika said suddenly. I busied myself taking pictures of the moss covered crosses on the island.



It's amazing how almost everything turns green during the monsoons in Goa. Walls, telephone poles, hoardings, houses, everything seems to come alive with life-affirming green. When it rained hard that night, I thought of the curly cross I saw at Vashem island and then of the three special 'visions' from my life that I return to often when I need to focus every once in a while.

*Still driving ▲
the old faithful*

The first was of an old man sitting under an enormous mango tree in a valley in the Himalayas. I've never seen a mango tree so big since. The old man sat beside his cycle, parked under the tree (and he was simply sitting there) perhaps taking a break from a journey. He was wearing a white kurta pajama. As I drove past him he just looked at me and smiled. That's all. A wide, toothless natural smile. Within seconds I just knew, I would spend the rest of my life learning how to smile like that.



I've often told my brother about this old man. I'm going to be interested in life till I can smile like that. What does it take to smile like that? I want that smile! No talk, no conversation, no song, no pyrotechnics, just to be able to smile.

The second vision was on the night that I saw a large handsome deer with tall

◀ *Cross at Vashem: Curly as a cloud*



▲ *It was that kind of a day*

I was sitting in the balcao enjoying a lazy late morning, watching the flowers, the trees, the birds, the cows, the weeds, the scooterists and marvelling at it all coming together so neatly in three dimensions. A friend walked across the road and sat in the balcao and we chatted for about an hour about various things, including missed opportunities in life. Then I realized – horror of horrors – I'd run out of Feni. My friend went home and immediately got me some, and said, "What the hell is happening on beaches all over Goa, and everywhere else? Have you seen the shells? Have you seen how they are shaped spirally? It's the same shape of a spiral galaxy. What do you think is going on?!" We talked endlessly until he left. They were good questions to ponder as I polished off a quarter bottle of Feni. Yes, I know... Feni in the late morning... Very bad.

antlers at the edge of a forest somewhere around Dehradun. He wasn't foraging or idling. As my lights caught him he was standing with one foot on a rock and looking up, almost posing for me. Same thing as with the old man... I knew instantly that I had been touched with something special. My lights just happened to pick out the deer who was standing there on his own without the slightest idea of an audience. There was something in his regal pose that got to me. I felt that I should be able to maintain that stature in my life, at least sometimes, I guess that is why my journey ever since, has steadily taken me towards the forest and away from the city. To be living on the edge of a forest is my ambition.

Finally there's the monkey that I saw, again, on the road between Rishikesh and Dehradun. I was passing a sun-dappled coppice when I looked to my right and I saw this really healthy monkey with a nice full coat stuck between two slender trees. The viewing was for a micro second because I was driving and the road was curvy as on a hill road. Yet, the image is frozen in my memory. The trees were young trees. The monkey had his back against one tree and his legs were out in front on the other tree. His bottom was suspended in air and his arms hung on his sides. His chin was resting on his chest and he was in a deep snooze as the morning sun shone warmly oblivious of the traffic that went on, to his left. It was a clear image that shouted out to me that the real worth of life was in its nothingness.

No surprises that I quit my job and told Monika, 'I won't be working anymore in my life. I'll do something only if I feel like doing it. If it feels like work I won't touch it.' 'OK,' she said, and that was that.

The LIGHTER side of *Life*

GEETA PADMANABHAN'S light-hearted look at her mother's 'cosmic' connection with 'rivers'

At eighty-one my mother is embarrassingly fit. As I see her sprinting across the road to board a public bus while I look for an auto, I wish she were less enthusiastic about life. You ask her the secret of health and the answer invariably is "The regular baths I take in rivers." I must find out if she has patented this panacea. But there is no doubt mother has a cosmic connection with rivers. Every time she takes a dip she comes out with a story.

For long years mother lived in a village situated on the bank of river Thambrabarni in Tamil Nadu. She generously shared its placid waters with twenty odd villagers, some temporary hands working in the paddy fields and a herd of buffaloes. One day she broke out in a severe rash after her ritual bath. "The industries! They have polluted the river!" cried Mother and came to the city for treatment. However, she returned and continued her ablutions in the river but completed them with a shower at home.

When she visited us in Kanpur she announced, "I want to bathe in the Ganga. It flows somewhere here." In her wisdom the Ganga had moved away from Kanpur and was now a thin stream of water in a deep canyon thirty miles away. But Mother was determined to take her plunge.

On a scorching summer day, we motored down to look for the river. Mother had a basketful of offerings and I, my binoculars. We stopped several times to ask startled villagers the way to Bittur where the river had been sighted last. At Bittur we crossed a vast expanse of sand to reach the edge of a high precipice. Without hesitation mother jumped on the soft silt below and trudged towards the thin ribbon of water half a kilometre away. Though I had known Mother all my life I wasn't prepared for what she did next. Wading into the water she began to splash about. That day we brought home enough mud to construct a small hut.





Mother now wanted to go to Varanasi. This was the time when the river was getting a wash through the Ganga Action Plan. “That is a lot of money down the drain,” she declared. “The Ganga carries herbs from the Himalayas that can purify anything thrown into her.” Mother had to see how the authorities were polluting the river with their attention. Not much later we descended the steps to the holy river pursued by a group of hopeful pandas. Undeterred by the muck around Mother slipped in with only her prayers to protect her from the swirling waters. I stood on the slimy steps wondering what would happen next. Mother did not disappoint me. Emerging like Venus out of those muddy depths, she simply pulled me inside! I still don’t know what saved me from joining the half-burnt body floating at the distance.

The mythical Saraswathi was Mother’s next destination. A ‘maaji’ rowed her to the Sangam and fleeced her for a ‘glimpse’ of the underground river. But to his credit he kept her from testing the waters.

At Nasik, she stepped into the Godavari saying, “This is where it is the purest.” With a thousand bathers scrubbing themselves down, it didn’t look so. Mother happily took several dips but came out shrieking, “My rudhraksha mala has been washed away!” I tried to tell her that the river goddess had taken her due for the health prescription. But Mother insisted on hiring a boy to look for it. If he found the string of prayer seeds he didn’t inform us about it. We bought her one at the temple but we couldn’t tell if it was from a tree.

Mother now lives in Chennai. She misses her river immersions To our immense relief, the Buckingham Canal doesn’t qualify as a river, so she is safe from it. But mother knows about the desilting plan. I watch her like a hawk whenever we pass the Adyar bridge.

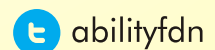
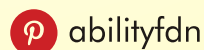
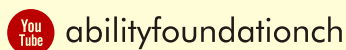
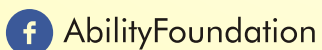


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