

Success & ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

January - March 2014

₹ 30



**EXPLORING
THE UNKNOWN**
sight vs vision

LAW & POLICY
cinematograph
bill of 2013

ATTITUDES
the 'can't do'
syndrome

INNOVATION
a robotleg
that enables
walking

& MORE...

th

ABILITYFEST®

INDIA INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY FILM FESTIVAL

critiques | appraisals | acclamations | analyses | discussions | reviews

16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

உங்கள் உணவை மேலும் சிறப்பாக்க,
நாங்கள் ஆவக்காய், தொக்கு, எலுமிச்சம்,
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Friends,

There is nothing like the beginning of a brand new year to add extra planning and energy to the process. When the clock strikes twelve on December 31st, people all over the world cheer and wish each other a very Happy New Year. Just by affixing a brand new calendar to the wall, all the fears and challenges that held us back the previous year, magically fade away and, anything and everything looks possible. The New Year symbolizes the beginning of a better tomorrow. Such is the magic of enthusiasm, hope, anticipation and optimism.

This issue of Success & ABILITY thus comes with a sense of contrition and a promise. Contrition on last year's missing issues and promise on this year's recompense. Thank you – all of you who wrote in – for your support, patience and faith.

This brand new issue of year 2014, brings you the magazine in all its shades and hues. We give you a totally outsider's perspective of our AbilityFest: India International Disability Film Festival that proved a really awesome affair this time... much more than ever before. And thereby reinstating our conviction that perspectives and attitudes towards disability have undergone a sea change these few years. So "inclusive" was the event that it made us all aglow to see the cinema - loving general public milling into the theatre to watch meaningful films, albeit disability related. So too, the fact that the Indian panorama this time, had so many sensitive, thoughtful and beautiful films on disability.

And then we bring you inspiring people and happenings, as with Vishal Jain's thrilling account of his mountaineering expedition, as the only blind person amongst a team of sighted youngsters; Dr. Mariazeena Johnson heading Sathyabhama University, Chennai, is one dynamic lady determined to foster inclusive environment in its truest sense for all her students - with or without disability. May her tribe increase! Celebrated rapper BlaaZe took it upon himself to rap his praises on all 2013 CavinKare Ability Award recipients... we present you these for your reading pleasure... an account of the awardees in verse! Corporate entities such as Grundfos are rare... they present an example worth emulating... on how just the thought and the implementation of that thought can make so much difference in the lives of so many people. Celebrity musician Anil Srinivasan opens up on the hard route to following one's dreams. More food for thought comes with such articles as what makes psychics, child prodigies and clairvoyants tick and on whether people's attitudes, as pointed out by Prof. Madan Vasishta, have actually changed or are still largely governed by the "cannot do" syndrome.

Happy reading. Happy 2014.

Jayshree Raveendran

SHADOW PLAY



Srividya
Suryanarayanan

I trace all my fragile moments,
To draw strength from within,
I sort those moments in order;
While the past gathers at speed
Blinding the relative reality.
In manageable missed points
I gather tokens of small grief
In my leaky cupped hands;
I watch for the sudden line cast
Making drastic changes within.
Askance I watch for a bright cell
Burning bright within the chrysalis;
Clubbed web feet make progress
In incremental slow shy steps.
Erring moments take shape
Becoming a virtual reality,
Across mind's vibrant vacancy,
Shakes the vibratory scroll
Drawing fate's home run.
The nuances of creative life
Well lived like those butterflies
Breaking free into existence
Chrysalis cracks open
Setting free and carefree
The communal air of vision
Bundled in snapshots of joy.
I watch the shadow play
In vibrant colours of life.



Inside the Mind

The wind was howling outside, rattling shutters
Barely withstood Mother Nature's force
The mind in intense stillness so complete,
Silently, watched and awaited the screenplay.

Thrown open with a splash of past colors,
Revived from imagined past shadow tricks;
Will negated and cast aside, sat the being
Mixed metaphors play on contrary fields.

Gargoyles from within gray matters
Taking fierce shape forms the reality
For the moment captured as real
Another life event waits to happen.

What seems naturally so to some
Would be unnaturally so to some
Ogling eyes revolves around illusion
Which is verily a veritable truth abound

Sometime there is relative peace,
That suddenly disappears in a flash;
Caustic fluid movement, the fear lurks,
Then what is unreal is a true verity.

Sentence move into tense voluble,
Meters of recognized internal beat,
As the viewer and the viewed mingle;
Dissolved; the essential difference remain.

The world inside the mind seem
To come alive for just one onlooker;
Yet withstanding the nocturnal force,
Fought a fragile mind a grim fight;

Longing on the shore of peace
The wonder being who recognized
Within and without dual realities
Coming together as one part of a whole

Stay within such a mind to find but for
Lasting moments of joyous reckoning
Gathered with gentle delicacy of a new born
Fragrant lotus of still stoic pond of life.



Diamond Tears

Little moments strung together
Past and Future sandwich the Present
I am a monk of beginner's mind
Two gongs a straightened spine avows
In the present moment to dwell.

Found at last the silent one
Watching the larger play.
Enter the Narrator in splashes
Of evergreen musical blues
Tra la la enter the hero, our protagonist

Sought to find his way in a labyrinth
Leading to the center of the maze
On a high castle was the Princess
Imprisoned and hidden from all

Two lines of dry tears dropped
From the window where she stood
As it reached the ground
It turned into bright diamonds
Way up in the sky sat the narrator
Grinning with glee at what could be
An interesting twist to the turn of events
A frog comes out and says,
"Will you quit crying on me?"
The floundering prince hears this
And follows the sound of dropping
Diamond blobs on the screeching creature

As the Prince stood under the castle
Serenading to his heart's true treasure
Being the Elvis of Presley from the '60s
The Princess stopped to just note
The off-key notes, dropping in out-synch

With notes like that, I sure need not have
Any fear of scaring the Witch of the East
So she begs, "Oh! Prince please do bray,
Oops! Sorry beautifully sing when the Witch
Arrives in style for tonight's beach ball party.

Then what happens is a dried spring
Working on the Inspiration's waterworks valves.

Let's talk Sole to Sole

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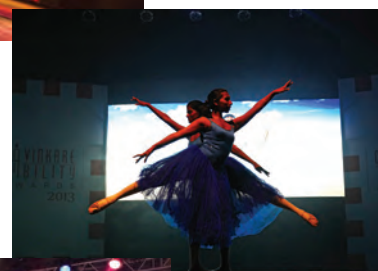


For some it is the height of the mountains, for some the depth of the oceans, for some it is nature and for others, technology. The first caveman who painted, the inventor of the wheel, the intrepid astronaut, the conservationist, all share it.

Call it the adrenaline rush, the fire in the belly madness or restlessness - the compulsion to push one's limits is an exclusively human trait. While coping with the stress of modern living, while adventure is enough for most of us, some are driven to raise the bar. And win. The focus of an Arjun, the inner vision of a Helen Keller, the dedication of an Ekalavya...combine these to understand somewhat the heady stuff achievers are made of. In other words, passion. Passion has been variously described as the genesis of the genius, as the most powerful weapon on earth, a roaring fire in a person's soul. Guess we are all born with that element in us but most of us barter it away for the comforts of a 'settled' life. A person dominated by this emotion does not worry about the disturbances or hardships he/she has to endure while coming truly alive.

For some, the calling comes early. Poverty is a powerful caller. Many a successful entrepreneur has seen the ignominy of poverty up front before rising way above it. Dhirubhai Ambani, for instance. For some, the passion kernel comes alive in the hospital bed, like for young Jana. Recuperating after multiple amputations, the eight year old discovered his passion for painting - so what if he had to hold the brush in his mouth? He went on to win several prizes for his art and rose as a role model to many. Most recently, Arunima Sinha, a former national level volleyball player, who had lost her leg after being thrown off a moving train by some hoodlums, created history by becoming the first Indian amputee to conquer Mount Everest. It was while recuperating, that she decided that she did not want to be pitied for her condition.

Accepting reality, would then be the first step for potential winners. For persons with disabilities, life can be full of limitations if they



MASTERY

Deepa Malik, NEW DELHI



A Celebrating a celebrity - we gaze with awe

*At her record of road trips,
full throttle experiences, national
Swimming events, India Bike Weeks
and at her animated personality*

*When she blossoms on her dozen phone calls
per minute...*

*And to think that hidden behind all this,
Lies narratives of heartbreaks tackled!
Laughing away misplaced sympathies
Revelling in applause,*

Where there was once disdain...

*From starting her own restaurant to
Thrice rallying with MTV Roadies
On this Woman's Day Month of 2013,
we say, Womanhood...
thy name is Deepa Malik*

accept the lines drawn for them by society and others. However when they take over the line of control of their life, their life is a new map. It is no longer governed by 'you cannot do this.' Failure, hurt and obstacles, when turned inside out, lead to new paths to self-realisation. The world may be round but it is not flat and a level playing field is something one has to bulldoze for oneself from the ups and downs of life, in other words, with one's unflagging enthusiasm and courage. It may stand still for most of us watch-gazers but when a young child realizes that the sands of time are running swiftly through his hour-glass, and he accepts it happily, it is a special grace.

For all it's intensity, the fire in the achiever's belly roars better with support - Parents, siblings, spouse, friends, society, government. Ultimately, however, the supporter feels more rewarded than the supported one.

The achievers who are most noteworthy are those whose enthusiasm and vision not only makes them stand apart but also benefit others.

The times and the lives of those awarded the CavinKare Ability Awards 2013, are simply awe-inspiring. The citations that they received, speak for themselves. So to does Blaaze's rendition about them in Rap.

MEERA BALACHANDER

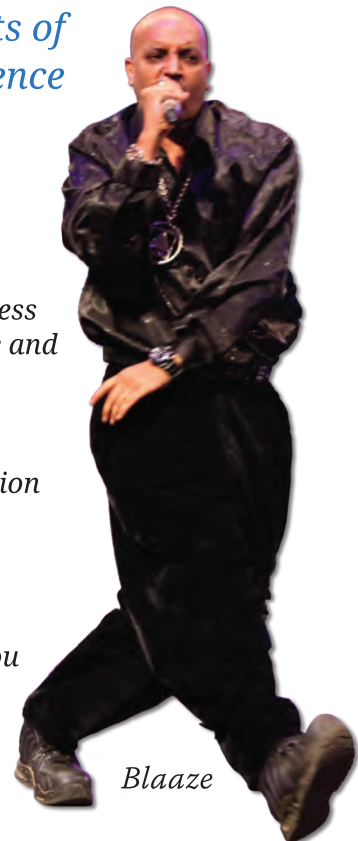
A RAP song for the recipients of the CavinKare Ability Eminence and Mastery Awards by

BIAAZE

*We spend so much time
Watching the tv
The news has become
Our only reality
But we fail to see beyond the lens
We are to blame for our own
nonsense
When I got a call to be a part of
the jury of ability
I didn't realise what was really
ability
This is not a competition
This is not a contest
It is the journey
Of all who are the best*

*At Overcoming the
obstacles
Of Overcoming the stress
Through perseverance and
hard work
Achieving success
These are the stories
You need to pay attention
As I begin
Now let me mention*

*We say a prayer
We say a prayer for you
Please stay strong
Cause God loves you*



Blaaze

Ranjan Kumar Biswal*Born in 85**Totally blind**But you always shine**We see your light**From the way you care**From 2004**You were always there**The founder of Milton**A foundation for the visually handicapped**Dreaming to read in Braille**And in audio formats**You made this a reality**The talking book**I'm a say it again**The talking book**I wish that we all**Take a lesson or two**To be humble and true**A real hero like you**We say a prayer**We say a prayer for you**Please stay strong**Cause God loves you**For the mastery awards**And also the eminence**In our life**You ALL stand for excellence**So may I continue**To explain with a rhyme**The recipients for mastery**To All who shine***Deepa Malik***You are a superstar**A sports icon**With a golden heart**Whether in motor sports**Or swimming or throws**3 limca records**And so many more**All of this success**But do we realize**You did this on your own**Despite being paralysed***EMINENCE****Ranjan Kumar Biswal****ODISHA***A person with visual impairment,
he triumphed over his odds**To make them his strengths... Gaining inspiration**From the achievements of
international champions**As a young boy of illiterate parents, he
Charted out his dreams**To lead others with visual impairment
Improving upon the quality of their lives
On finding that books in Braille were
sadly missing**He set about undoing this wrong
by establishing talking book library.**Rising sky high above the rest
A pioneer in every way, he established
The Milton Charitable Foundation,
in a small village in Orissa**Beginning at a time when such services
were negligible,**He worked towards the implementation of
Several projects for the blind**Continuing to work in various capacities,
Changing lives of countless people and**Making it his life's mission to bring
Dignity to several others with visual impairment
His is a story of true grit and determination
and a source of inspiration to many*



MASTERY

Samuel Ashish Marcus
KARNATAKA



*His Living his dream from the boy who refused
To toe the line to others' tunes, rather...
chose to sing his own*

*He shaped not only his career in music, but those
of others as well*

*With a Bachelor's Degree in Music to boot
Surmounting indescribable tribulations towards*

*His pursuit of creative distinction, battling
Widespread bias on account of disability: caused
by ASD*

*Aspiring for the greatest triumph in musicology:
To be an A.R.Rahman no less!*

*Dismissing as frivolous,
The doubts that arose about his ability to teach
And winning himself a following of students
Who swear by him with awe and admiration*

*We say a prayer
We say a prayer for you
Please stay strong
Cause god loves you*

Samuel Ashish Marcus

25

ASD

*At the age of three
The saying that I learnt
And still rings true
Music has no language
And Is so beautiful
Aware of the time
And of his condition
His parents found a path
To a new direction
Into the sounds
Even though autistic*

*He found his calling
He found the music
Perfect pitch
And kindness abound
Divinity in sound
Is what he found*

*We say a prayer
We say a prayer for you
Please stay strong
Cause god loves you*

Sayomdeb Mukherjee

*To me, brother, you are a ten on ten
What I mean to say is
That you are so special
Your success
Is so exceptional
25 years
Without a voice
And now when I hear you
I just rejoice
Rejoice in your blessing
Rejoice in your strength
Rejoice in the happiness
That radio brings*

MASTERY

Sayomdeb Mukherjee
WEST BENGAL



*His locomotor impediments notwithstanding
Nor his lack of speech until age 25
Due to his limitations - Dopa Responsive
Dystonia*

*His sheer genius surged forward
Ahead of all the detriments that came his way
"This is my India, where every difference
is a challenge"*

*Says he... talking his way to popularity
Through his 'Haal Cherona Bondhu',
on Friends FM, Kolkata*

*A phrase that means: "Never give up, my friend"
Sharing a little of himself to show the right path*

*He connects to all through love,
Solace, friendship & humanism
Not just through his talks, but also through
His writing, theatre, puppetry
and community services*



*I pray you continue
To do what you do
To inspire the whole world
To listen to you*

*We say a prayer
We say a prayer for you
Please stay strong
Cause god loves you*

Hridayeshwar Singh Bhati

9 and a half years old

That's it

Here is a champ

Who just won't quit

A little genius

A little super kid

Right amongst us

Like a game of chess

With the whites and

blacks

He went on

much further than that

The youngest Indian

With a patent and invention

Circular chess

Now that needs a mention

Circular chess

Yes you heard right

With arcs instead of squares

Now that's a real fight

One of a kind

A young Stephen Hawkins

And on his wheel chair

That's what he drives in

And to us today

Who are sitting, my friends

Lets give A standing ovation

To ability's finest

We say a prayer

We say a prayer for you

Please stay strong

Cause god loves you

Much love and peace

BlaaZé



SPECIAL RECOGNITION

**Hridayeshwar Singh
Bhati, RAJASTHAN**



A sprightly lad of just nine and a half

Diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

He is the epitome of confidence and cheer

A school topper with several accomplishments

And accolades to his credit

Not for a moment allowing his condition

To prove detrimental to anything he wants

A will to play the game he loved chess

With all his friends, led him to explore

Ways of doing so... Guiding him to create

A chess board for up to six players

Ending up in being India's youngest patent holder

Surrounded by love, admiration and

his own self-confidence

He strides towards newer pastures every day

Spreading out his net of accomplishments

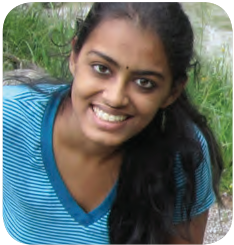
Far & wide as God wills Who swear by him with

awe and admiration





WHEN A UNIVERSITY OPENS ITS DOORS



**Yashasvini
Rajeshwar**

***The motivation
for inclusivity
should come
from the heart.
It should not
be driven
by rankings
or branding
opportunities.***

Walk into the spacious office of Dr. Mariazeena Johnson and you are caught off guard. Waiting to enter the Director's office, you imagine a space that is slightly intimidating, formal and very rigid. In contrast, Dr. Mariazeena's office is warm, welcoming and oozes cheery confidence. The lady behind the large desk is no different, greeting you with an effervescent smile and profuse apologies for the delay in meeting you.

"It is such a pleasure to see you! Ability Foundation is always welcome here!" she says, getting up to shake my hand before I can readjust my gaze from the imposing facade of Sathyabama University's massive white buildings to the warmth of her well-furnished office.

Dr. Mariazeena Johnson, daughter of politician-turned-philanthropist Colonel Dr. Jeppiar, and an educationist in her own right, took over the reins of Sathyabama University in 2001, when she was merely twenty years old. Since then, she has strived to stay true to her father's mission, vision

and values while also diversifying to leave her mark on the social fabric that surrounds her institution.

Sathyabama Engineering College was founded in 1987 and was granted university status in 2001, the year Dr. Mariazeena took up the mantle with her husband Dr. Marie Johnson. With her main focus being on expanding the institution's boundaries beyond her father's vision, she began concentrating on providing education to deserving, economically disadvantaged candidates. Apart from providing scholarships to students within Sathyabama itself, she has begun an initiative to adopt government schools and train the teaching staff to ensure sustainably high quality learning. The Sathyabama campus also houses a crèche for the children of the university's staff, allowing the children to grow up in comfortable, home-like surroundings even as the parents work. Apart from this, Dr. Mariazeena is also personally involved in the support of various organizations including the Cancer Institute, World Vision and

The Banyan. "I wanted to open my own trust, but since I couldn't assure my 100% dedication due to my work at Sathyabama university, I decided to support those who can!"

The project perhaps closest to her heart remains the attempt to make Sathyabama an inclusive university. "I met Jayshree Ma'am at an event," she begins, narrating the story of her association with Ability Foundation. "I remember being so excited to meet her, but not knowing exactly what she does. Even today, I believe that Ability is not heard of as much as it should be. Ma'am is giving the best and yet, not enough people know of it" she rues. Adoration fills her voice as she begins describing Jayshree Raveendran, Founder of Ability Foundation. "I have such respect for her. After working with Ability for a year now, I am honoured to be able to continue that association."

Even before Dr. Mariazeena met Ability, her dreams of inclusivity were born. "Ten years ago, we sponsored two students with physical disabilities for both primary as well as higher education. Ability Foundation helped us find them employment and now, we have begun to reach out to visually challenged students as well. Five such students have completed their under graduation in Education and in fact, one of them was even the institute topper! This year, we have welcomed seven more into the Sathyabama family," she smiles. Ask her about her understanding of inclusion and her response is insightful. "Inclusion is not directed at those with disabilities," she explains. "On the other hand, it is the so called 'normal' people who need to be sensitized and truly included in the larger society."

From learning about the Ability Foundation on the stage of an event, to being a part of the jury at the Cavin Kare Ability Awards, Dr. Mariazeena's association with the foundation has grown. "I was easily the most talkative jury member" she laughs. "I remember the kind of involvement it inspired in me. I would go fully prepared with a written documentation of all participants and their projects." The university provided financial support to deserving candidates who are identified during the selection process. Sathyabama University was one of the official sponsors of AbilityFEST 2013.

As the conversation comes to a close and Dr. Mariazeena's eyes are shining with memory and recollection, she says she has just one more thing to add. "What we need today are governmental guidelines for how to institutionalize inclusivity in educational settings. We hope to open as an inclusive campus in a month but that is because of the support lent by Ability Foundation. If standardization is achieved, it will motivate more institutions to take up the task and make education more accessible. The motivation for inclusivity should come from the heart. It should not be driven by rankings or branding opportunities. It should be done because everyone has the right to education and we are here to provide it."

Dr. Mariazeena Johnson has many feathers in her cap. Yet, the more you speak to her, the more you realize that some are closer to her heart than others. She points indulgently to a live stream being fed onto a computer – her staff's children playing in the nursery she has set up for them. She speaks of blind parents coming to seek admission for their sighted son and how they inspired her to open Sathyabama's doors to everyone who wishes to learn. She rues the need for institutional improvement, public awareness and citizen participation. And just as I am getting ready to leave, she pulls out the cherry on the cake. Sathyabama's admission form is now available in Braille, a language which is "as important as German and French for the common man to learn". In Dr. Mariazeena's able hands, Sathyabama University is well on its way to becoming a forerunner in the field of inclusive higher education.

Dr. Mariazeena Johnson, Director ▼



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GRUNDFOS 



ABILITYFEST[®] 2013

AbilityFEST 2013 India International Disability Film Festival was held at Sathyam cinemas, Chennai from September 23 to 26, 2013. There were many reason why AbilityFEST2013 made our hearts sing...why 2013 in particular, you might ask. True. After all, beginning with the first edition in 2005, each and every edition has been special. And yet... there was something magical about the four days this year.

For starters, it was the fifth edition of AbilityFEST! Looking back, it truly seems incredible that those tentative steps that we took at the beginning of 2005 bore fruit, and AbilityFEST became a reality. For us at Ability Foundation, it was the discovery of a whole new world, and new people.. amazing films which made us sit up and think..amazing people with a wealth of experience and goodwill to share with us.. *Reason for celebration.*

OnehundredyearsofIndiaincinema,thetalkingpoint through the year. In the fitness of things, we were so delighted to present a veritable film feast from India. These included the first public screening with audio description for the blind of the Tamil film “*Haridas*”; the all India premiere of the Telugu film “*Minugurulu*”; the Malayalam film “*Beautiful*” and the feature length documentary “*Indelible*”. From 2005, when we were hard pressed to find a single Indian film to include in AbilityFEST to 2013, when we had seven....I don't know about one hundred years of Indian cinema, but certainly, eight meaningful years of disability in Indian cinema as far as AbilityFEST is concerned. *Reason for hope.*

Acinematic tribute released in April 2013 to coincide with the release of the first Indian film *Raja Harishchandra* a hundred years ago, was special to us too. Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's “*Celluloid Man*” was a testament to the life and times of P.K.Nair,

who single handedly, and against many odds, preserved and acquired film prints from around the world on his journey to set up the National Film Archive of India. The film has been screened to much acclaim , at a record forty five film festivals around the world. That such a man , should have been the backbone of AbilityFEST, curating every edition of it, that just the mention of his name should give our event credibility and good standing... *Reason for gratitude.*

And the films...food for the soul, truly. Award winning films were selected to give this year's Fest a global perspective to disability and inclusion. These included a selection of highly acclaimed films from Iran - “*Gold and Copper*”, “*Here without me*” and “*Alzheimer*”. The short films included the heartwarming “*Special Interview*” (Israel), the spirited, the thought provoking “*Special People*” (UK) and “*Blind. So what?*” (Germany) and the inspiring true story “*Aphasia*” (USA). 14 countries. And films representing a range of thought and presentation. *Reason for reflection.*

Along with presenting meaningful cinema by, with and about people with disabilities, AbilityFEST underlines the importance of access. Access to mainstream theatres, captioned films, audio described films... until 2011, our work included getting ramps made. In 2013, Sathyam had ramps that were ready to use by use! *Reason for our existence!*

Record audiences. The sight of serpentine queues of people waiting to enter, the overflowing theatre, people on the floors, in the aisles, on the steps... made every effort to put together AbilityFEST worthwhile. The wonderful words penned by the audience, their comments on several of the films, reflecting the impact of the films and the spirit of the event.. honestly, they've put it far better than we could have.. with great depth and eloquence. *So, here they are...*

ABILITYFEST® 2013

People Speak



When I first heard of AbilityFEST, an international film festival that was open to the public, I imagined it to be a fun way of spending a few holidays while also gaining a better understanding of common disabilities. I have to admit that, while I was eager to learn, I was also expecting to be entertained. But little had I imagined that I would also be deeply engaged, surprised, thrilled, saddened, heartened, moved, and above all, truly sensitized to the lives, challenges and realities of people with disabilities. It is this last effect that I wish to focus on.

Probably the most striking feature of AbilityFEST was the breadth of its coverage. First, it covered every type of disability required for a thorough introduction to the subject: from blindness, deafness, physical impairment and multiple sclerosis to autism, Down syndrome, *Alzheimers* and even the rare *Aphasia*.

Second, it was comprehensive in its impact on the viewer. By the end of the festival, I had clearly been made to realize that disability was not something that happened to 'them,' but instead, something that could affect anyone – including me. Films like *I'm deaf and I didn't know* (France) and *Aphasia* (USA) led the audience straight into the lives of the affected. The effect was still more intense in *Indelible* (India), a sincere and moving portrayal of the lives of seven people with Down syndrome who strive to rise above their condition.

Other films brought to light the ways in which the lives of those around people with disabilities are touched. For instance, *Gold and Copper* (Iran) weaves a brilliant tale of a perfectly normal housewife whose family life gradually spins out of control as she starts to battle Multiple Sclerosis (MS). The action-packed *Haridas* (India) shows a single father's immense sacrifice to give his son, who has autism, the best life that he could in order for him to achieve his ambition in life. I should also not forget the numerous short

films that succinctly explored challenges and issues related to disability.

It was through these that I, and many others of the audience, received our fullest acquaintance with both the everyday and lifelong struggles of people with various disabilities. We were gently brought to empathize with them, because now we understood them better.

But to make things clear, at no point was there any plea for sympathy. That impression, if it ever existed, was soundly dispelled by the brilliant successes of people with disabilities represented throughout. I will never forget the standing ovation that *Indelible* (India) garnered for Archana Jayaram, a girl with Down syndrome who earned gold for India at the special Olympics. Neither can I forget the amazing travels of Efrat and Matanel from *Special Interview* (Israel), two Israeli youngsters with developmental disabilities who, through their unique journalistic abilities, achieve international fame as interviewers.

And there was still plenty to cheer for in the more fictional offerings. Take, for instance, the amazing indomitable spirit of the blind children in *Minugurulu* (Telugu), whose concerted efforts finally oust their demented and abusive headmaster, paving the way to a better life and education for them. Or consider the aforementioned *Haridas*, whose protagonist achieves tremendous success as a track athlete through his father's selfless sacrifices.

Yet, on top of all this and everything I learned about disability, there was also another fascinating element that kept me coming back for more and more (in fact, three full screenings on the final day). In only four days, I had experienced and learned more about foreign cultures than I could perhaps have hoped for in a much longer vacation around the globe. Through the light-hearted *Intouchables* (French).

I became aware of class differences, conflicts and interactions in French society. The poignant *Gold and Copper* (Iran) and *Alzheimer* (Iran) painted an elaborate and authentic picture of modern Iranian culture. For the sake of brevity, I refrain from listing the numerous others that contributed to this incredible cultural roller coaster.

Overall, if the goal of AbilityFEST was to sensitize the public to the reality of disability, it achieved that goal in spades. To be clear, this wasn't merely a collection of niche films meant for a special audience already concerned with the subject.

Rather, this was some of the best that world cinema had to offer, brought together by the uniting theme of disability. And to me, that is where the AbilityFEST truly shines – in raising awareness of disability among the general public through the medium of quality entertainment.

If you missed AbilityFEST 2013, check if any of these things appeal to you: award-winning films from around the world; extraordinary insight into people's lives, minds, and cultures; and unforgettable experiences.

If they do, there is no excuse for missing it in 2015.

- Ganesh Kumar

INCREDIBLE ABILITY!

A much awaited event, AbilityFEST never fails to move, overwhelm and inspire viewers. This year's Fest was no exception; in fact, it perhaps exceeded expectation from what I could see and hear. Every show ran to a full house. Even people who came on time had to sit in the aisles or on the steps. So many more films from India than ever before...

This year, I was not one of those fortunate enough (as indeed I myself was two years ago) to see all the films. However the very few I saw, left an 'Indelible' imprint on my mind. Yet, it wasn't the impact of only the powerful *Indelible*; it was all of the real life of *Aphasia*, the wonderful fantasy world of the *Princess*, the burnishing of *Gold and Copper* and the pathos and sad confusion of *Alzheimer*.

The inaugural evening held a welcome surprise when, in a manner befitting his achievements and contribution, Shri P K Nair, Festival Director, was felicitated, not only by recollections sprinkled with rich anecdotes but by the screening of *Celluloid Man*, a much-awarded film in his honour. Much was said by the dignitaries on the dais and ever so often there was need for loud applause, for how often do we see one man pass through the history of our country, offering the passion of his life for the richness of the screen and thereby bestowing on us a world of illusion so real?

For me, however, one passing remark by Mr Nair, in his response to the felicitations, made my heart swell with

pride: the Ability Film Fest, in its 5th edition, was now amongst the dozen or so internationally recognised events on disability and inclusion. This eminent position does not come easily. It is the sustained, enthusiastic, innovatively-thought, challenge-seeking, debate-prompting, boundaries-stretching, persistent standard-raising approach of the committed team of Ability Foundation, so admirably led by Jayshree Raveendran, that has brought this honour to the Film Fest and the nation it represents.

The opening night's film *Gold and Copper* had me hooked at once to the beauty and sensitivity that can create meaning from the lasting values of caring, suffering, sharing intense joy and pain with a loved one; from those moments when we struggle to comprehend the universal truths which are often believed to be at the heart of religion and awaken to the deeper and more fulfilling realities of spirituality. For me the beauty lay in the film treating these realities without becoming maudlin or sentimental. Zahra, who is diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, will suffer, yes, but there is so much beauty in her suffering because she herself never really suffers from the physical impact of MS; rather her suffering is centred around her inability to go home from the hospital and look after her children, her inability to weave rugs and earn a living... her most intense pangs of pain are felt when Reza, her young Iranian cleric husband, has to start to weave rugs at night to support the family financially and take over her role as the children's primary caretaker.

The film scores high on emotion-packed minutes played out with fine restraint and commanding dignity. As Reza struggles to balance his family responsibilities and as tormented thoughts of Zahra's pain and dying haunt him, his study of the Koran, his prayers and faith take on a deeper meaning. "I love you very much", a simple expression shared between the two, rekindles the all-embracing power of the word and even as he recalls the outpouring of this emotion with Zahra, he is spiritually led to translating this into a truly humble gesture of cleaning the footwear of his fellow clerics and the faithful who have come to study and worship. As the film ends, Reza's smile sets his own eyes a-sparkle and we know that he can face the future; he has found the strength, and both he and the beautiful Zahra can cope with their struggles, anchored in love.

An hour's interview with the directors of three films, *Haridas* (Tamil), *Beautiful* (Malayalam) and *Minugurulu* (Telugu), brought home to the audience the constraints and the significance of the achievements of making films based on individuals with autism, paraplegia and blindness. The audience had obviously earlier engaged itself fully with the life of these individuals on screen and participated in their struggles while celebrating their successes.

The Film Fest team had selected the films very carefully and so we were treated to those that had moving stories to tell along with documentaries that spoke volumes on a particular disability. To the latter category belonged *I'm deaf and I didn't know*, a drama-documentary and a true story where we "hear" the way Sandrine did. She is a young French girl who was born deaf to hearing parents and who grew up with puzzlement and wonder in a hearing world.

I was fortunate to enjoy the beauty of the terrain of Iran yet again during the week when I saw the second Iranian film *Alzheimer*. Aseih, the protagonist of the film, is not convinced of her husband's death as his body was not retrieved after the accident in which he died and places ads in newspapers hoping to find him. 20 years later, when a man resembling him shows up, she is not sure he is her husband.

Aseih's expression is as starkly beautiful as it is full of conviction that her husband would return.

As one interested in the world of the mind and all that it holds, I was completely caught up in the life of the psychiatric patient, *Prinsessa*, in Finland. Anna, who insists on being called "*Princess*" or "Your Highness", is moved from one foster home to another until she is finally put into a mental asylum. We share the experience of her incredibly endearing personality, capturing the hearts of those around her; we share the brittle tension of her refusal to defer to the authority of the institution's doctor leading to a battle of wills. And as we move through the asylum with Princess, we catch glimpses into the minds of the nurses, sisters and doctors - some caring, some hard, some indifferent - in whose care the patients trust themselves.

Every show was extremely well attended. One afternoon, although I was present for one set of films and had just stepped out for awhile before the next could be screened, I came into the theatre to find myself standing! I was also delighted to hear that the morning shows which are primarily open for schools did not have only the special schools participating in them but drew a good number of mainstream schools as well. We need to support Ability Foundation in spreading awareness of ability in those who are disabled and supporting their inclusiveness in our lives.

Two years is a long time to wait before the spotlights turn on AbilityFEST again. And we recognise that it isn't at all easy to organise an event of such scale and impact more frequently. In the interim, Ability Foundation could plan smaller campaigns to continue to sensitise us by working with academic institutions, both schools and colleges, through poster campaigns, and other visual media in departments of visual communication, through workshops, seminars and panel discussions, holding poetry and short story competitions.... ensuring, of course, that these are open to all... any forum that will compel participants to read and assimilate the literature available in the field, to reflect on these issues and to practise inclusiveness and equality as naturally as exercising for good health. This may also help raise the bar for the content of presentation in the

“60 seconds to Fame” category of films and give us more from the perspective of persons with disability.

Come 2015, Ability Film Fest will display Ability to an even incredibly higher level!

- **Shantha Gabriel**

A film festival? With the central theme of disability? Are you sure this will fly?

Yes. Fly it did! Never underestimate the power of great curation!

Kudos to the selection committee for the great range of films shown.

I saw *Gold and Copper*, an Iranian film with real people whose pain you feel and culture you try to comprehend.

Intouchables, a French film about friendship, despair and laughter in the face of social disparity took my heart away.

Being members of a global community allows us to participate in the trials and tribulations, sadness and laughter, hopes and dreams and the love and longing of protagonists who become so close to us that they almost belong in our world!

I look forward to the next edition of this wonderful festival.

- **Hemu Ramaiah**

I spent most of Thursday, September 26 at Sathyam cinemas, watching one film after another from 11 am to 10 pm at night. It was a day full of emotion and wonder, a feast for my senses and my soul. I do not know what it is about these international films about disability, but they are in a class apart. I watch dozens of films a year, but they normally do not stay with me, but I can remember most details of the AbilityFEST films I watched in 2011 (on autism and Thalidomide victims). This year's classics were “*I’m Deaf and I didn’t know it*” (France); *Princessa* (Finland) which gave a heart warming portrait of a lovable mentally ill woman who touched the lives of everyone who came in contact with her. We all breathed a sigh of relief as she escaped having a lobotomy due to a clash of wills with her doctors. From Iran, the wonderful film *Alzheimer* was both touching and full of suspense. It made us aware of how challenging it can be to deal with someone with near total memory loss, and how communicating love is the only way to connect or get through to an Alzheimer’s patient. *Aphasia* (USA), was hugely inspiring – a true

life story of an adult American actor, who loses the ability to talk and read, and how through his own grit and determination in tandem with love and patience of his wife and caregivers, he slowly begins to recover and communicate again. The final film, *Intouchables* from France was just brilliant – instead of invoking sympathy in the audience, it used humour and the message of friendship and trust to tell the story of a rich quadriplegic and his smooth talking but ex-con caregiver from the African ghettos of Paris.

The AbilityFEST India International Film Festival has a unique quality of bringing us films that are not only intellectual and entertaining, but that help us take time off to become more aware of issues concerning people with disability and how we can do our bit to become part of this movement. By the end of that day, my 14 year old son was inspired to learn sign language and I hope to join him in doing so. Thank you Ability Foundation and your amazing team for bringing us this festival and giving me a day I will never forget.

- **Sharmila Ribeiro**

“I had little or no knowledge of Down’s Syndrome until I saw “*Indelible*”, a film on people born with the condition. It was a real revelation for me. I watched amazed at their love for life, the resilience and pride of their family, the understanding of their immediate circle of friends.

It opened up my narrow world and got my complete awe and respect, all 60 minutes of it.”

- **Meera Zachariah**

From the harried husband whose most trusted baby-sitter is the neighbour with Down's Syndrome to the boy who tried on women's clothing in a shop so that his friend in the wheelchair could see how they looked when worn, the AbilityFEST 2013 revealed the real story of disability in ways subtle and intimate. With over 2% of India's population classified by the census as disabled, disability is an aspect of almost every Indian family. And it is through family that AbilityFEST made its most powerful impact, combining a series of beautiful, illuminating films with moving in-person discussions by several films' protagonists and their family members.

In a country where attitudes towards anyone who deviates from an idealized picture of health are so retrograde that health campaigns must remind us that leprosy is completely curable and cancer is not infectious, the movies in the AbilityFEST made no apologies for disability, and asked for no favours. The films' heroes encountered the barriers of their disability in practical terms, and without fuss, made clear counterpoint of what they were able to do.

One of the common characteristics of people with Down's syndrome, according to their relatives and those who work with them, is their happy and loving nature. A very poignant moment in one of the festival's films was a mother's observation about her Down Syndrome

child's lack of envy or possessiveness and his simple need to be accepted. If these 'abilities' for happiness and a simple love for humanity are more difficult to attain for the world's majority, we have to ask ourselves: who is really 'disabled'? What is the point of being 'abled' if basic traits of humanity are difficult to attain?

The link between love and spiritual fulfilment was revealed beautifully in the final message of the Iranian movie, in which a family moves from the countryside to Tehran so the protagonist can become a cleric. But he is forced to give up his studies to look after his wife and 2 children after his wife is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. While his life becomes difficult and frustrating in many respects, it dawns on him slowly that he truly loves his wife and children. In the final scene, our hero is sitting outside the lecture hall and listening to the teacher's lesson that love is the most powerful channel for attaining God. It is a moment of revelation for both the hero and the audience.

In sum, AbilityFEST struck a powerful note of dignity, love and fulfilment. Without glossing over the frustrations of daily life, the films made clear that disability has nothing to do with capability, and helped all who saw the movies to understand and embrace the full range of human potential.

- Malathi & Matthew Wennersten

Sometimes life takes you to places where you never thought you would be, worlds which you never thought existed and people you never imagined you would meet. It is these moments that touch you deeply, change the way you look at the world or at the least, leave a lasting impression on your mind. Some call it enlightening. I like to call it a humbling experience.

Being a part of the AbilityFEST 2013 was one such experience for me. Although being a doctor has tuned me to a certain extent about the hurdles faced by the differently-abled, in all honesty I didn't know what to expect. But right from the moment I walked in, I was glad I was there. From the genuine smiles and the warmth of the organisers, to meeting the differently-abled and the people working with them and watching the movies themselves, it was an experience that will stay with me for a long time.

The movies that I watched were so beautifully done, being sensitive and heartwarming portrayals of people with Down syndrome. Their quest for life and their determination to be independent was inspirational. I am not ashamed to say that I was crying through most of it, counting God's blessings for myself yet feeling small at how little I have done for my fellow men. A lesson well learnt I would say. And the highlight of the evening was meeting the actors themselves. They all got a well-deserved standing ovation and were the real celebrities of the evening.

I thank the organisers for choosing me to be a part of it and I pledge my support to the AbilityFEST in the future as well.

- Dr Tausif Tangalvadi

It was a great honour to participate in the AbilityFEST. I made “*Minugurulu – The fire flies*” with 40 visually impaired children. It was screened on Day 1. It was received very well, the house was full, I was overwhelmed with audience response.

I really appreciate Ability Foundation's efforts to bring disability issue based films together. It is a rare commodity. I am glad to have participated and the experience was amazing and unforgettable.

- *Ayodhyakumar*

Gold And Copper (Tala Va Mes); Director: Homayoun Assadian; Writer: Hamed Mohammadi

Seyed, an aspiring cleric, relocates to Tehran with his wife Zahra and two young children to pursue Koranic studies. His world falls apart when his hard working wife falls ill and is diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. With no family to support him, Seyed has to look after his young children as well as his wheelchair bound wife.

This is a very human story of real life trials and tribulations. Well nuanced and working at various levels, it explores the depth of human character and bonding in times of adversity. Seyed finds well wishers from unexpected quarters: a friend who helps him to put his financial affairs in order, a young neighbour with Down's syndrome and her caring

grandmother who give him hope, and a sensitive nurse who goes beyond the call of duty to point out the love they share as a family.

Seyed begins to delve deeper into the teachings of the Koran and realizes the universal truth that it is only love that holds the world together. It gives him the strength to be a better father, a caring and compassionate husband and a good friend.

Screened by Ability Foundation as part of their festival at Satyam theatres, this Iranian film was a treat to watch. The resounding ovation at the end of the film was a pointer in that direction.

- *Linika Kumar*

Isaw the films screened by your Foundation from 23rd – 26th Sep 2013 at Sathyam theatre. There were films on people with different disabilities which were aimed at creating a positive attitude in the community. These were entertaining as well as educating. There were films on methods to educate disabled persons; and there were short films that promoted understanding these persons. In brief, these films acted as a spokesperson to represent the needs, problems and aspirations of disabled persons and created an awareness in the audience - students, parents, siblings and the public.

- *A. Boopalan*

THE POWER OF FILMS !

Late night packing, last minute confirmations, and after a lot of planning between 16 students, the journey from Pondicherry to Chennai began on Monday, 23rd September early morning, even before the sun woke up! The new city welcomed us with open arms and after exploring its many lanes and bridges, albeit not intentionally, we finally reached the Youth Hostel in Adyar, our home for the next four days. After a quick refreshment, we were right on time at the Sathyam Cinemas for the fifth edition of AbilityFEST 2013, India International Disability Film Festival.

As a person who is not very fascinated by the film medium itself, I will say I did not have many expectations about the festival. To me it was just another study tour, where I was hoping to add something to my academic learning. I wasn't very enthusiastic about being confined to a dark hall all day, watching one film after another. For me watching two or three films on a single day, in itself is a daunting task. And here I am in a film festival solely dedicated to disability, about which I have little or no awareness. It was a herculean task. At one point of time, just before entering the hall, there was a lingering doubt in my mind, is this really cut out for me?



It did not take me much time to realize how much I would have missed had I given into my apprehensions. I was literally glued to my seat all day watching one film after the other. Each of them portraying something new, different and entertaining. The AbilityFEST opened a fresh new vista which brought me closer to the world of films. Each film captured a different facet of people living with disabilities. True to life, it neither made them out be heroes, nor the martyrs of the social structure. The films had protagonists having their share of happiness, sorrow, and all the challenges that come with life.

It was the French film *Left Foot Cinderella*, by Benjamin Lehrer that hooked me on and from then, there was no looking back. The story is about Lea, who has a 'plastic leg. She is getting fluttery over what to wear for a party where she was setup for a blind date by her friend. As the day unravels, it is filled with catastrophes and her road to finding her Prince Charming becomes more and more treacherous. After a disastrous night with a young man she met at the party, she finds herself in a police station. Battered and bruised after the interrogation where she is asked to leave her plastic leg behind, she begins to feel helpless. In her state of distress, she meets one of the cops from the police station who promises to get her leg back, with her new shoe intact. Lea sees a glimmer of hope for a future with this man beside her, who is ready to hop with her all the way to the end.

A humorous yet a charming take on disability was portrayed by the UK film *Deaf Mugger*. The film was screened more than a couple of times and it never failed to elicit laughter each and every time. A sign language interpreter is brought in as an assistant by a deaf mugger on his daily job. This 2 minute long film evokes the ordinariness of a mugger who robs people with an interpreter if that is what it takes for him to get the job done.

As I stepped out of the theatre during a break, there was a flurry of activity all around me, people gesturing to each other in sign language, enthusiastically describing their experiences so far. All around me there was a buzz of energy with innumerable animated conversations flying around and I sat at one corner just looking at them. As I failed to understand what was being communicated, I also had the sense of how it would feel to be excluded. If I knew sign language, I wouldn't have felt left out. And I wondered, in their world, am I not the one who is not normal? So what is "normal"?

As it would happen, a film, *46/47* by Nadine Heinze and Marc Dietschreit touched this particular note. In a world of people with Down's syndrome (having 47 chromosomes), there is this one person Daniel who has only 46 chromosomes which is perceived by us to be normal. Towards the end, somebody asks him if he has found his extra chromosome. By turning the tables, this short film of over 8 minutes beautifully brings out the experience of social exclusion.

As the festival progressed, I felt myself growing more aware of the world and space that belongs to everybody. Where everybody has the right to live the way they want with the abilities that they have. As Ms.Revathy Menon, actor, film maker, activist and vice-chairperson of AbilityFEST said at the beginning, "The world is for everybody. We are not trying to make space for anybody. We are not trying to give space to anybody. Everybody has space, and everybody has the right to their space."

When it ended, I was overwhelmed with a sense of satisfaction of having been a part of this study tour which sensitized me to disability. Along with a wholesome selection of a wide range of films, the way the festival was organized was itself an education. AbilityFEST demonstrated the commitment to access

by providing a barrier free environment; audio description, closed captioning and subtitling of films for the visually challenged and hearing impaired. “Celebrate Inclusion; Celebrate Life” was not only the theme of the competition of “60 Seconds to Fame” this year but also the underlying spirit of the entire festival.

Furthermore, the informal sessions conducted by AbilityFEST volunteers on teaching sign language to all of us who were there was also truly inspiring. I

hope a day would soon come, when sign language would be taught as a second or third language in all schools across India so that we all can discover the joy of communicating with this beautiful language. I also hope to harness the power of media (radio, television, film making, print and web journalism) to sensitize many more about disability, through my own work as a young media professional. My 15 friends who joined me from Pondicherry University would also hopefully walk this path with me...

- Krishnaveni Ilanthirayan,

Student, 1st year M.A (Mass Communication), Pondicherry University.

Thank you, and you, and you

There was something in the air at AbilityFest 2013, an energy that is hard to miss but equally difficult to trace. There is always something in the air at the Fest.

As filmmakers and actors, directors and script writers, movie buffs and critics gather together, there is only one obvious aim in the room – to watch, understand and appreciate movies from around the world. The movies, unlike most others, are inclusive and often not a part of mainstream cinema, and yet, to the crowd at Satyam Cinemas, that did not make the slightest difference.

I walked into *Minugurulu* on the first day of the fest armed with a notebook and a pen, mentally prepared to take notes and play my role as a writer. Five minutes into the movie, the notebook was returned to the bag and my pen remained capped. The rest of the movie saw me watching wide-eyed and fist clenched in nervous anticipation of what would happen next. Would the children get caught in their effort to expose inhuman conditions of their shelter? How are these children, all blind, able to shoot a movie after judging light and distance? I set out to write the textbook movie review. I ended up being an astounded member of the audience, in complete awe of the cast and crew. In hindsight, perhaps that is the best review I can give.

Every day of the festival, I would ambitiously plan to take notes and transcribe quotes, describe scenes and critique the style. Every day, I came back without as much as a letter written. I would stand in the foyer and look around me, a silent spectator in a crowd of excited voices and animated discussion. In one corner would be the volunteers for Ability Foundation, a relaxed, satisfied look on their faces, taking pride in the full house screenings that every evening session could boast of. The cast and crew of the various movies wore an expression of silent pride, at their ability to make a mark in their own pockets of the film fraternity. One corner was crowded by a group of young men, engaging in a lively conversation, their hands moving in a mere blur of signs and symbols. All around, there was the buzz of activity.

My four days at AbilityFEST had me watch Indian movies and Iranian movies and American movies. Yet, if I were to describe my biggest takeaway from the event, it would be the people; it would be the comfort that lies in their ability to enjoy offbeat cinema and embrace differences. AbilityFEST is about the movies but more so, it is about the people – on screen, behind it and in front of it. The people make the movies and the people applaud them. The people make all the difference, looking beyond disabilities and breaking barriers together.

- Yashasvini Rajeshwar

CELLULOID MAN A Critique



Released:
2012

Genre:
Documentary
Language:

English, Hindi,
Bengali

Runtime:
150 min

Director:
Shivendra Singh
Durgapur

Starring:
P.K. Nair,
Yash Chopra,
Krzysztof Zanussi,
Dilip Kumar, Gulzar,
Lester James Periesu

“A generation that ignores its history has no past” – this quote from the documentary *Celluloid Man*, captures the essence of Mr. Nair’s ideology. The 150-minute documentary by Shivendra Singh Durgapur is a homage to the work and life of P K Nair, the founder of the National Film Archive of India and the acknowledged guardian of Indian Cinema.

Through interviews with the who’s who of Indian cinema, with farmers from remote villages and with Mr. Nair himself, Durgapur has shown not just the breadth of Mr. Nair’s influence on film makers, actors, cinematographers and film lovers in our country but also the depth of his commitment, passion and absolute devotion towards preserving our past achievements.

Over a period of 3 decades, with patience and dedication, he painstakingly built an archive of over 12000 films. In a country that has shown immense apathy and resistance towards preserving its film history, Mr. Nair’s achievement can only be described as phenomenal. He dedicated his life to building the film archives and this passion and dedication for cinema has been a source of inspiration for generations of cinema students.

Mr. Nair has been the director of the AbilityFEST for the past 5 editions. We at the Ability Foundation, have been fortunate to have benefitted from his seemingly endless knowledge of cinema, his insistence on perfection and his wide reaching influence. We can fully understand and appreciate the respect and admiration that the people in the film express for him.

“I understand the world and people better through cinema”, says Mr. Nair. If you share this feeling, make time to watch *Celluloid Man*.

Portrayal of disabilities in films

COMBINING SENSITIVITY AND COMMERCIAL SENSIBILITIES: a discussion

AbilityFEST featured a panel discussion with directors, RADHA MOHAN (*Mozhi*), A.L. VIJAY (*Deivathirumagal*) and GNR KUMARAVELAN (*Haridas*) that was moderated by REVATHY. They discussed the source of inspiration for their movies, the importance of portraying disability positively and how to make movies more accessible. Some excerpts from the discussion:



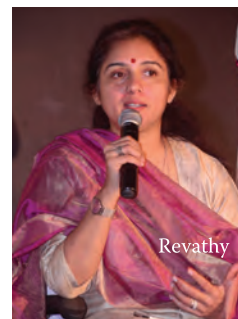
A L Vijay



Radha Mohan



G N R Kumaravelan



Revathy

Who was your inspiration for Mozhi?

Radha Mohan: When I was boy, there was a beautiful hearing and speech impaired girl who lived in my colony. She must have been in the 8th or 9th grade. She had many friends and I was always curious about how she managed at school and with her friends. I tried to recreate that in *Mozhi* where the setting is also a similar colony.

Mozhi was screened at AbilityFEST 2011. How was the experience?

Radha Mohan: It was very emotional for me. A girl with tears in her eyes came and thanked me in sign language for making the film. It was the most beautiful moment of my life and I will always cherish that memory.

At AbilityFEST 2011, Deivathirumagal was screened with audio description. How was the experience?

Vijay: I didn't know about audio description until Jayshree and Janaki told me about it, and I was very curious. But when I saw the audio described movie and saw the response, it was overwhelming. I have received many awards for this film. But the best moment was during the screening at the FEST when a 16 year old girl was so moved by the movie that she started crying. She so badly wanted to show me her appreciation that she gave me the chocolate that she was holding in her hand. It is the best award that I have received.

You have introduced us to the real-life Hari who inspired your movie Haridas? What was your experience of the audio described screening from this afternoon.

Kumaravelan: I knew it was going to be incredible but it was 10% more than what I thought! It was a great experience with a special audience and great technology. Amazing!

We make a lot of movies in India. Disability is usually portrayed insensitively and used to extract sympathy. Now there is a difference and I hope that a lot of research goes into making these movies. What research did you do while making Haridas? How important do you think research is for film making?

Kumaravelan: I have seen Hari grow up. There is so much positive energy about him and I've seen the difference in him in 7 years. After I finished my last film, I was thinking about my next project. At that time, Hari began school and I saw the difference in him. The graph of his growth was very positive. So I thought about making a movie about autism and motivate and educate audiences about it. I have also seen a lot of positive films about disability like *Mozhi* and *Deivathirumagal* and they were an inspiration and I wanted to make a movie as good as those. So Hari and these movies gave me a lot of positive energy.

Haridas is a regular commercial film. It has action, emotion and family drama as one track. One of the characters has autism and his achievements form another track in the movie. These two tracks combined together is great. Usually if there is a disabled person in a film, either they are depicted as a hero or as a failure. It is usually only one of these possibilities. Either they are put on a pedestal or treated as a source of comedy. Without either of these two extremes, you have handled the two tracks beautifully and you should be applauded for it.

Kumaravelan: Thank you. A lot of people asked me why Kishore died during the climax. "If you are trying to make a positive film why did you have kill him?," is a common question that I am asked. I wanted to show a father's sacrifice. I want children to realize that their fathers also make a lot of sacrifices for them and they don't have to go somewhere else to look for a hero. They have one in their own fathers. In a movie, that message had to be shown in an extreme way for a dramatic ending. That drama is needed for a successful commercial movie.

I asked our festival director Mr. P K Nair about what he thought about Kishore dying and he said that there could not have been any other ending. If Kishore had not died it would not have worked because then it would have been one of those films with a cliched end; where inspite of everything, all works out perfectly in the end and every one is happy. Kishore's death was necessary for a dramatic ending and this is what film making is about. So you have got his approval!

You did a lot of research. How important is the research? What did you do?

Radha Mohan: Research is very important. Disability of any kind is a sensitive topic and we should not show it incorrectly. That will send the wrong message. People will see the film and get the wrong impression. So I was thinking about how to handle it and saw an advertisement by Ability Foundation for a crash course in sign language. I enrolled for it and studied it for 10 days. The experience was so positive. The teacher made jokes in sign language and it was all so natural.

In Indian movies, these kinds of scenes are usually accompanied with sad music. That is wrong.

Radha Mohan: I have a child who has Asperger's syndrome. We have always treated him like a normal child and it came naturally to us to do so. I don't think of him as being different. So with the same idea I did the sign language course and after that Vijaya madam helped a lot. She worked with Jyothika during the making of the movie.

So all the sign language that Jyothika uses in the film has been taught to her by Vijaya?

Radha Mohan: Yes. Vijaya told me that she has a sister who also has hearing disabilities and told me a lot about her. How she would put her hand on the speakers to feel the music. I didn't know how deaf people related to music, until she told me. So there is a similar scene in the movie. Vijaya told me about how her sister gets angry and how she shows her feelings. The sign language class was like going back to school days. I had a notebook and took notes and it was a great personal experience for me. And that made all the difference while making *Mozhi*.

Which scene in Mozhi is your favorite?

Radha Mohan: There is one scene that has several dimensions to it. The one where she goes to Prithviraj's home and wants to know what music feels like. Prithviraj tells her that it is like the cakes that she makes and she can experience music too. She puts her hands on the speakers and feels the music and you can see the emotions on her face. She is nervous, excited and scared and at this very emotional moment when he proposes to her, she is so overwhelmed that she slaps him. All her feelings, emotions and reaction of her character are very natural and true in that scene. That is my favorite. It is the most important scene in the movie.

Which scene was the most difficult for you to film? One in which you, as a director, struggled?

Vijay: The struggle was to portray the character played by Vikram. For the first 2 days, I just made him walk around to get into character without actually shooting any scenes. The main difficulty was in working with the child actress. She spoke only Hindi so she had to learn the dialogues without understanding them. Since she is a child she was also disinterested in the script. She had done only ad films until then and would get cranky

easily. So we could work with her for only about two hours everyday and in those two hours I had to get the best acting out of her. Shooting the climax scene was very difficult because she could not get it and did not know how to act. So finally I put her actual father into the scene, dressed as Vikram and saying his dialogues. We filmed the interactions between the two of them and then used that in the movie.

Radha I have a question for you. Usually we have actors play disabled roles. Is it possible to make a disabled person act?

Radha Mohan: Yes of course it is possible. If it is someone who has severe autism, then it might be difficult for them. But for someone with borderline disabilities like Asperger's syndrome, it is definitely possible. For someone with physical disabilities there is, of course, no problem at all. At the end of the day, acting is a talent like singing and painting. So a person with the talent of acting can be an actor, whether they are disabled or not.

Yes, acting basically requires training. Maybe Ability Foundation can run an acting class and we will bring out the acting talents of some disabled people. Acting is a job like any other and requires training and technique.

Kumaravelan: For Haridas we did briefly work with children with Autism who wanted to act. It was difficult because I did not know how to handle them. In several European films, people with Autism have acted in films. I think if the director has been trained in how to work with people with disabilities then it can definitely be done.

Jayshree Raveendran, Ability Foundation: The idea of the AbilityFEST is to bridge the divide between people with and without disabilities. To bring people from all walks of life to enjoy movies on disability. How can we take this forward from now on? How can you all help us in that? How can you portray the characters of people with disabilities beautifully and sensitively so that the common man can understand?

Kumaravelan: We need the support of the big actors and stars in our film industry. If they are willing to play role of disabled people, the movies will be commercially successful.

Radha Mohan: The most important thing is the support of the audience. Producers want to make money on their films. If movies with the theme of disability are not commercially successful because the audiences don't want to see them, then the producers will not invest in these movies. I think Ability Foundation should invite producers to the next AbilityFEST. When they see the response that audiences have, they will be willing to produce more such movies.

Film making is an entertainment business. It is a business. If producers put in money they want to get more money back. So a producer has to believe in the subject and invest in it. This year, seven Indian movies have been screened at the AbilityFEST. Such movies work in festivals. But, it is not so easy in regular theatres. We have to break through barriers and make producers, distributors and actors believe in their vision. Theatres can make an impact too. For example, once a week if they screen all movies with subtitles, the movies will be more accessible. Thank you to all three of you for sharing your thoughts.





Haridas deals with the subject of autism dispassionately and with empathy. Describing autism as something that every one of us has in varying degrees, the movie shows how attention and love can change the life of an autistic child.

Release Date:
22 Feb 2013 (India)

Genre:
Drama

Language:
Tamil

Runtime:
146 min

Director:
Kumaravelan

Starring:
Kishore

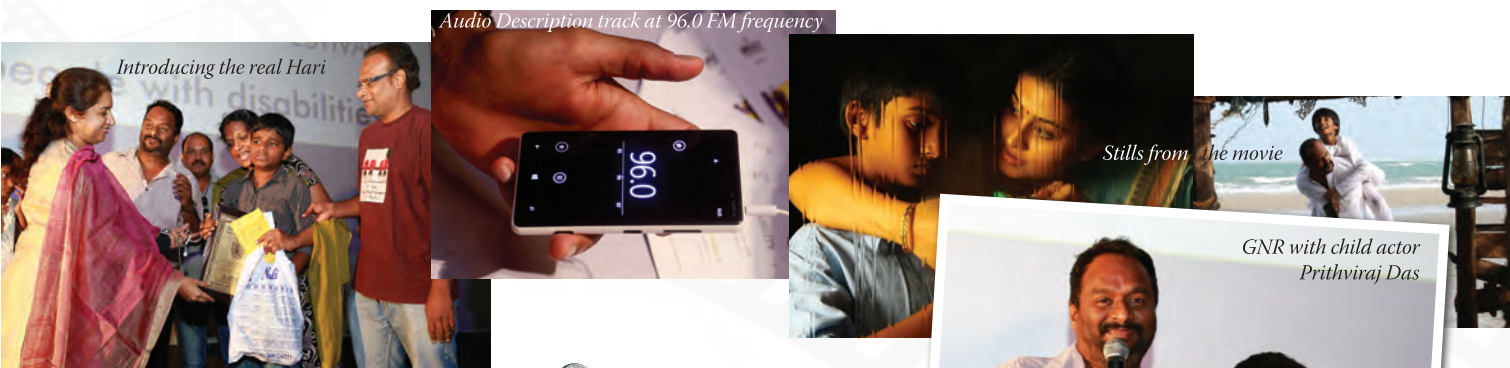
Prithviraj Das
Sneha

Yugi Sethu

The film opens with an adult Hari recollecting his past. His thoughts dwell on his achievements and on the people who motivated and supported him, chiefly his father Sivadas (played by actor Kishore) and his teacher, Amudhavalli (played by actress Sneha). Sivadas is a meticulous encounter specialist, highly respected by his team and the police force. Forced to take care of his motherless son after the demise of his own mother, he rises to the challenge. Being the primary care giver, Siva nurtures Hari with total focus and affection. He admits Hari to a regular school where the child is in Amudhavalli's class. The trials and tribulations of raising Hari with patience and love is amply brought out on various occasions. The anxiety of a father when Hari goes missing is subtly and powerfully essayed. The teacher's special bond for Hari, for whom she goes beyond all call of duty, is inspiring for all educators.

Hari's love for horses is translated into a passion for running. Ably advised by Yugi Sethu playing the paediatric neurologist, Sivadas trains Hari to be a runner. Despite discouraging advice from a sports coach, Hari blossoms not only as a runner but socially as well. Sivadas's professional commitment and sincerity lead to his untimely death while Hari is taking part in a Junior marathon. Amudhavalli stands in and encourages and spurs young Hari to reach for his goals. Hari goes on to win the junior marathon title and many more in the years to come.

The character of Hari is well researched and Hari's role is brought out beautifully by child actor Prithviraj's body language and subtle emotions. It is a film that will move you to tears and make you want to stand up and applaud. A must watch movie that I highly recommend.



in conversation with **Mr G N R Kumaravelan**

After the hugely successful screening of his Tamil movie “Haridas” with audio-description during the AbilityFEST 2013, director Kumaravelan shared his thoughts with Success & Ability.

What was your objective in making Haridas?

Autism is a disability that I have come to see and experience as my sister-in-law’s son has autism. After my second movie Yuvan Yuvathi, I decided to write a story and script revolving around autism and how it affects the people around that autistic child. It was intended to show and motivate the audience on autism and inform the audience that a child with autism simply has some special requirements and needs care and affection to help them grow and understand the world around.

Do you feel that you have achieved this objective?

Definitely yes. The response that I got was tremendous and heartwarming. More people were educated about autism and parents of children with autism were motivated and reassured that with love, affection and patience they would understand their child’s needs.

In what way was the screening of your film Haridas at the AbilityFEST different from other screenings of the film that you have been to?

I couldn’t have asked for a better audience because the people who came to the AbilityFEST are either tailored to watch films on disability as it is something

that each of them experience in their day-to-day life or they are people who are curious to know about the various disabilities that different people from different walks of life face.

What did you feel as a director, knowing that a substantial portion of the audience was “watching” your movie with audio-description?

The feeling was great as a whole new audience group was introduced to me. The idea of the audience listening to the audio description transmitted through the radio is brilliant as blind people also get to “watch” our movies. Hats off to the Ability Foundation for introducing such innovations in entertainment for everyone, especially the blind.

When you introduced the real Hari at the AbilityFEST, you mentioned that it was the first time that you were doing so. What made you decide to do so?

There is always a person behind every inspiration. I wanted to introduce the real Hari, my inspiration at the AbilityFEST. It was a special moment as it would encourage and motivate, not only the audience but also Hari himself.

BOLLYWOOD Quiz

How much do you know about disability portrayed in movies? Test your knowledge!

1. In the movie 'Lagaan', how many team members had a disability in the Indian Cricket Team?

- a. One
- b. Two
- c. Three
- d. Four

2. In the movie 'Lagaan', what reasonable accommodation was provided to the injured batsman, Ismail (played by Raj Zutshi)?

- a. Given a runner
- b. Exempted from batting
- c. Another player replaces him
- d. Was given a two bedroom apartment

3. In the movie 'Black', how does Michelle McNally (played by Rani Mukherjee), a deaf-blind girl, write her exams?

- a. Her teacher, Debraj Sahai (played by Amitabh Bachchan) writes the exams for her
- b. She is exempted from writing exams
- c. She uses a computer



- d. She uses a manual Braille typewriter

4. In the movie, 'Black', how do people (teacher and other family members) communicate with Michelle McNally (played by Rani Mukherjee)?

- a. In Hindi
- b. Do not communicate
- c. Use Tactile Sign Language
- d. Use Sign Language

5. In the movie 'Guzaarish' how does Ethan Mascarenhas (played by Hrithik Roshan) move his wheelchair?

- a. It is a remote controlled wheelchair
- b. He propels his wheelchair with his hands
- c. His nurse Sofia D'Souza (played by Aishwarya Rai) pushes it
- d. uses Sip-n-Puff technique to move his wheelchair

6. In the film 'Khamoshi: The Musical', in the scene in the Church after the Baptising Ceremony of the new-born

child, who interprets Joseph's (played by Nana Patekar) speech?

- Annie (played by Manisha Koirala), daughter of Joseph
- Raj (played by Salman Khan), son-in-law of Joseph
- Professional interpreter
- Friend of Joseph

7. In the movie 'Paa', when Auro (played by Amitabh Bachchan) has a breathing difficulty in the classroom, who provides the necessary help?

- Doctor in the school
- Teacher in the classroom
- Other students in the class
- Mother

8. What helps Ishaan Nandkishore Awasthi (played by Darsheel Safary), an eight year old child with dyslexia in the movie 'Taare Zameen Par' to progress in his education?

- A sensitive teacher in the regular school who gives him extra coaching
- Moving him to Tulips, a special school
- Moving him to a boarding school
- Giving him home based education

9. In the movie 'Black', Michelle McNally (played by Rani Mukherjee), a girl with deaf blindness, studies till which level?

- She does not get any formal qualification as she studies at home
- She studies till Class 10
- She does Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
- She takes a course in cane weaving



10. In the movie 'Burfi!', who makes the decision for Jhilmil Chatterjee (played by Priyanka Chopra), a person with Autism, regarding whether or not to reunite with Barfi! (played by Ranbir Kapoor)?

- Jhilmil's father Mr. Chatterjee
- Jhilmil herself
- The Director of the Special-Care Home
- Barfi's ex-girlfriend Shruti Ghosh

11. In the movie, 'Iqbal', how does Guruji (played by Girish Karnad) communicate with Iqbal (played by Shreyas Talpade) when he offers him a bribe to fix the final match?

- Speaks to him through his coach Mohit (played by Naseeruddin Shah)
- Writes the proposal and gives it to him
- Speaks to him and Iqbal lip-reads
- Uses a professional interpreter

12. In the movie 'Ghajini', how does Sanjay Singhania (played by Aamir Khan), who loses memory every 15 minutes remember people and places that are important to him?

- He clicks photos of people whom he should remember and writes their names on the photo
- Makes tattoos on his body
- Writes notes
- All of the above

*Now flip to page 63
to know your scores*

Courtesy:
Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre
www.deoc.in



Cinema For, By and About
Actions & events captu



*Persons with Disabilities
 ured through the lens*



THE RIGHT TO ACCESS cinematic expression

*A Look At The Proposed Cinematograph Bill And It's Implications
For Persons With Disabilities.*



Amba Salelkar

When the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting announced the revamping of the Cinematograph Act, it made me think about how this would impact the lives of persons with disabilities and access to entertainment. Though the Act has an apparently wide scope, in reality all that the Cinematograph Act is concerned with, is pre-censorship. If the certification board finds a film is suited to public consumption, it will also regulate the age groups of those who are allowed to view the film. The question is the content that is under the regulation of this Certification Board.

It's safe to assume that Indian Cinema, with its various languages and styles and audiences, is one of the country's largest industries. Like all industries, there is a healthy amount of government regulation in this one as well. Unlike the United States, where "Hollywood" developed the codes of conduct in relation to motion pictures on its own, India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is deemed to have the final say in what cinema should and should not be. The amount of government regulation, however, goes beyond this: The Ministry lays down the laws, while the certification board (a governmental institution) and the various States and the Centre are also given powers to allow (with incentives, like tax breaks) or disallow (through curfew orders, Police Acts, etc.), the exhibition of films. What's more, a jury constituted by yet another Government body – the Directorate of Film Festivals - decides the most prestigious recognition given to cinema: the National Film Awards.

Obviously, in this set up, a lot of what goes or does not go into films is decided – explicitly or otherwise – by the powers-that-be. Content regulation is a slippery slope and, at the outset, I do not believe that the role of the Government in filmmaking should be to regulate content. Which is why the draft Cinematograph Bill, 2013, recently floated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on their website, is disappointing. This Bill does not seem to do enough for filmmakers: for the protection of their right to free speech and the freedom of expression. It does even less for consumers: for their right to access that expression. Do we even have a legal right to access works of artistic expression, such as film?

Article 19 (1) (a) reads : "All citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression" However, one may well argue that there can be no effective right of expression without a corresponding right to access such expressions – the exercising of the freedom of speech and expression was never meant to be in a vacuum, after all.

What also creates an interesting obligation upon the Indian Government is the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is an international human rights treaty of the United Nations intended to protect the rights

and dignity of persons with disabilities. Parties to the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law.

Article 30 pertaining to participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport, obliges States Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and to take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:

- (a) enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- (b) enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- (c) enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

Significantly, **Article 30 (3)** obliges State Parties to take all appropriate steps, to ensure that the laws protecting intellectual property rights do not constitute an unreasonable or discriminatory barrier to access by persons with disabilities to cultural materials.

In accordance with this, the Indian Copyright Act was amended in 2012, and now, **Section 52 (1) (zb)** makes it clear that: the adaptation, reproduction, issue of copies or communication to the public of any work in any accessible format, by any person, to facilitate persons with disability to access to works is not a copyright violation. This can also be done by any organization working for the benefit of the persons with disabilities in case the normal format prevents the enjoyment of such works by such persons. Of course, this only applies when on a non profit basis.

Section 31B of the Copyright Act deals with cases where accessible formats are to be made available on a “for profit” basis, and allows for persons or organizations to apply for compulsory licenses to the Copyright Board, to publish any work in which copyright subsists for the benefit of such persons.

What this means is that technically, with regard to films, a parallel audio description track (for persons who are blind/visually impaired), or closed captions (for the deaf/hard of hearing) could be created by practically anyone, on a non profit basis or otherwise. This could be either played along with films by theatres, or made available through some other technological modifications.

However, the proposed Cinematograph Bill poses a bit of a problem here, with its all encompassing definition clauses. Under the new Bill, no person shall exhibit or cause the exhibition of any film or any part thereof, which has not been certified by the Board.

The definition of “film” means a cinematograph film and includes its songs, lyrics thereof and the related advertising material. The definition of a “cinematograph” is extremely wide and covers any medium, apparatus, product or device, analogue or digital or any other technology, used for the representation of moving pictures or series of pictures. This could include also Internet and broadcast television, or anything that is subject to “public medium”.

The definition of a “cinematograph” includes a medium, forum or place that the general public have access to, with or without payment. The definition of “exhibition” includes the audio or visual dissemination of a film or making available a film, through use of a public medium, to persons not directly connected with the production, distribution, promotion or certification of that film.

To summarize, any accessible measure taken under the Copyright Act may potentially clash with the Cinematograph Act, which means that any “accessible means” created by any person will be subjected to the sanctioning of the Certification Board. Of course, in the case where third parties wish to make a film accessible (transcription of dialogue and sound effects for closed captioning, or preparing audio descriptions), they can only do so after the film has already been certified. What the Cinematograph Act needs to do is to resolve this duplicity of procedure. In my opinion, it would be best to exempt the measures to make a film accessible, from certification.

There is also strong opinion that there must be some deterrent, perhaps criminal prosecution, to prevent persons with disabilities from being ridiculed or misrepresented in the manner that they are in movies. Petitions have even been filed before the NHRC complaining of the manner in which persons with disabilities have been depicted in films, and the use of derogatory terms to refer to persons with disabilities. One of the solutions to this issue is to include provisions in the Cinematograph Act to penalize such representations.

The problem with penal legislation or potential banning of films is that filmmakers may just hesitate to have characters with disabilities in the fear that someone, somewhere may take offense and jeopardize the release of the film. Instead, let everyone have their right to freedom of speech and expression intact: filmmakers who choose to depict persons with disabilities in a poor light will have to run the risk of losing a substantial portion of consumers with disabilities and their families and friends. The World Health Organization estimates that a minimum of 15% of any given population has a disability, and that’s a sizeable audience!

I would venture to state that by empowering persons with disabilities as consumers – by making films accessible in the manner stated above, by making theatres accessible on the lines of the National Building Code and the **Persons with Disabilities Act, 1996** - persons with disabilities would be in a better position to see the way in which they are represented, and speak out against it, which would be much more effective than penal legislation.

Movies should be reviewed from the perspective of persons with disabilities, and tests similar to the “Bechedel Test”(a gender bias test that checks whether a work of fiction features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man.) should be evolved to gauge performances of actors as persons with disabilities and the way persons with disabilities are “used” in films. This will, hopefully, ensure that the purpose of their representation will move from comic relief and sure-shot award nominations to positive mainstream characters. I assume the road to this goal will be full of mirth and tears and suspense – but we are dealing with cinema, after all – so stay tuned!

*This piece would be entirely incomplete without the valuable inputs of
Anand Krishnamoorthi, Screenwriter, Chennai.*

GRUNDFOS

a flexible workplace

Sustainable water purification technologies are at the forefront at Grundfos; the Danish-based advanced technology company. It is one of the world's leading pump manufacturers and is dedicated to preserving the environment and its natural resources. Grundfos, which produces more than 16 million pump units per year gives equal commitment to their 16,609 employees in over 55 different countries.

“Diversity gives innovation” says Mogens Lindhard, Sustainability Manager at Grundfos Denmark, describing the company's people-centric founding values. “Our policy is never to discriminate, and this is anchored in our corporate values”, he adds. Putting values into practice is evident at Grundfos, with ‘flexible workshops’, designed for those employees with disabilities and those from socially-disadvantaged groups, established at six locations in China, Denmark and Hungary. The flexible workshops function as regular production facilities, but the roles and requirements are adapted to suit each employee's needs. Within the workshops, workers are employed to carry out manual assembly roles, for the production of small spare parts and recycling of materials.

Grundfos has promoted inclusion in the workplace since 1968 and employees with physical, intellectual, and mental health disabilities hold a range of jobs in the company. Flexibility in the workplace is key for inclusion at Grundfos, where the global goal that at least 3% of employees should be persons with disabilities, has been set. Outside of the workshops, accommodations for persons with disabilities are also met in office roles. “In our I.T service department, we have rearranged the office so that a new employee in a wheelchair can move around”, Lindhard adds. In order to meet the requirements



Mr. Ole Østerballe, Grundfos-Denmark

of employees with disabilities to work to their full potential, the company provides adapted chairs, desks and equipment, wheelchair ramps to worksites, lifts and extra rest time if needed.

A core goal at Grundfos is that employees whose capacity to work has been hindered by disability, illness, or otherwise, are able to retain employment. “People with disabilities can apply for jobs on the same terms as every other candidate”, says Lindhard.

As such there is no separate recruitment process for persons with disabilities. Integration programmes are held to sustain a connection with local communities, and those with disabilities seeking employment are connected with flexible workshop production managers, who cater to any adaptations needed in the workplace. As diversity is an important aspect of Grundfos, managers throughout the company are trained on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

In 2006, Grundfos Denmark won the European Foundation for Quality Management Award, for efforts in employing people with disabilities and sustainable activities. To date, 120 persons with disabilities have been employed in branches across Denmark, and are ensured the same career growth opportunities as the rest of the organisation. With the focus on both hiring and retaining employees with disabilities at Grundfos, this figure looks set to grow.

In an exclusive interview for Success & ABILITY, Mr. N. K. Ranganath, Managing Director of Grundfos, India talks about their flexible, integrated and inclusive workplace...

Could you please give some insight into the work philosophy and vision at Grundfos?

Grundfos has sustainability at its core and this is reflected in its purpose statement as well:

Grundfos Pumps in India will work towards helping its customers and the nation to conserve Water and Energy.

Grundfos will, through all its actions, focus on how it can co-create value with its stakeholders by being a responsible partner for a cleaner and greener planet.

One of Grundfos's core values is being 'Focused on People'. We believe that:

- Everyone in Grundfos has passion and potential.
- Everyone has the power to influence.
- Everyone must feel respected and valued.

Grundfos is owned by the Poul Due Jensen Foundation and the Foundation uses its income for reinvestment in Grundfos's R&D to make better products and social work.

Worldwide, Grundfos is establishing itself as an equal opportunity employer. What are the initiatives being taken in India, towards this goal?

Grundfos believes in being an equal opportunity employer. We would like to create opportunities for those that are generally thought of as not normally employable. We believe that with the right opportunities and facilities we can create a good environment for all our employees. In India we currently employ three people with autism, two people with physical challenges, as well as one other physically challenged person who works in our premises, employed through an outsourced agency. We have had other people with challenges who have found good jobs elsewhere because of the training given in Grundfos India. We are also exploring the possibility of cooperating

with other institutions to create special workshops where people with various challenges can work comfortably and produce components that can be used in our products.

What is your experience hiring and working with persons with disabilities?

We have successfully recruited and employed people with disabilities but have not found it easy although it has been meaningful and enriching for us. Training, accessibility in public spaces and transport is an issue. Even though our building is accessible, getting to it is not easy as our roads and public transport systems are not friendly for disabled persons. We also find it difficult to get trained manpower but have managed this with on-the-job training for about a year.

What is the process by which you place persons with disabilities at Grundfos, India and in what areas are they employed?

Grundfos employs people with disabilities as per the competence required for performing the role assigned to them, as long as they possess the abilities to do the tasks required, and the disability is not a hindrance to performance. Assessment for suitability to the role is made based on their capability to function in that role. Disability that does not impact the same is not considered as one. Employees with disabilities work in the areas of Production (Shop floor), Planning, and Office Administration.

Do you have any training programmes especially for employees with disabilities? What are these?

We do not have a specific programme. They are part of the programmes meant for all employees and we sometimes modify these to suit.

How is the general atmosphere and integration between staff throughout Grundfos, India?

The integration within the organization has been quite

seamless; all employees in Grundfos India treat each other equally and this is no different for the employees with disabilities. Each one is accepted and respected as any other employee. We don't see a difference.

Once employed, what are the opportunities and scope for career growth within the organisation?

The scope and opportunities are the same for one and all. Growth and advancement are based on performance and potential. Care is taken to assess their performance and potential appropriately.

How do you ensure sensitization of staff and managers at Grundfos, India?

The work allocated to the employees with disabilities is done with thought and sensitivity – more so for employees with autism. The respective managers take care to be attentive to any needs that are specific to these employees. The staff members are aware of the disabilities of specific employees, and in keeping with the culture of the organization treat them with respect. When we first employed persons with autism, we had a sensitization class for around 50 employees on how to interact with them. We also had a trained coordinator be with them for the first three months. Now after almost three years, they have merged so well with the rest of the employees, that one cannot even make out that they have autism.

Have you needed to make adaptations or changes to the infrastructure and facilities to suit employees with disabilities at the workplace?



▲ N. K. Ranganath,
Managing Director, Grundfos - India

The infrastructure at Grundfos in Chennai is 'disabled-friendly', with most amenities that are required. The building when built in 2005, was built with ramps, lifts and accessible toilets.

What according to you, makes a company truly an equal opportunity employer?

A truly equal opportunity employer is one where the discussions around statistics and measurement of the number of diverse people in the organization do not take place. Employment of people from different gender, race, ability and beliefs is a given, and there is a healthy respect and open culture within the organization where the differences do not matter to team work and performance.

The compensation for similar work is the same, irrespective of the kind of person handling it.

Do you have a recruitment policy on inclusion for persons with disabilities? If so, how does this work?

Though we don't have a formal recruitment policy specifically stating the inclusion, we did decide when we started the company that we would employ between 3% and 5% of the workforce from the disabled section of society.

How do you see Grundfos in India progressing as a diverse and inclusive place to work?

Grundfos India wishes to increase the number of women in all levels of the organization – especially the senior leadership level. We also want to employ a larger number of people with disabilities.



“ Industry has a special responsibility towards society. It has better resources and superior organizational strengths and managerial acumen. If we can help the world win the war on HIV/AIDS, we will be helping society in a very special way. ”

- A. M. Naik, Chairman & Managing Director

L&T offers the community HIV/AIDS prevention and detection services, counselling and treatment. L&T received an award from the Global Business Council (London) for Business Excellence in HIV/AIDS.



L&T Construction

MIND OVER MATTER

Have you ever felt that some of the biggest successes of your life actually began with uncertainty, reservations and doubts: not just in your own self, but also reflected in those around you? That is what happened to me when, fresh out of MBA life from IIM(L), I landed in Mumbai for my first job at Tata Motors.

As a part of the induction program, we were to go for a trek to Surya Top, a mountain peak at 13,100 ft at the foothills of the Himalayas, near Uttarkashi. This was part of the leadership and team building training camp and trek conducted by Tata Steel Adventure Foundation (TSAF). TSAF is headed by Ms. Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb Mt. Everest.

One of my colleagues, who attended the camp before me, was very concerned about me undertaking this trek. Referring to the hardships of the Camp, he said,

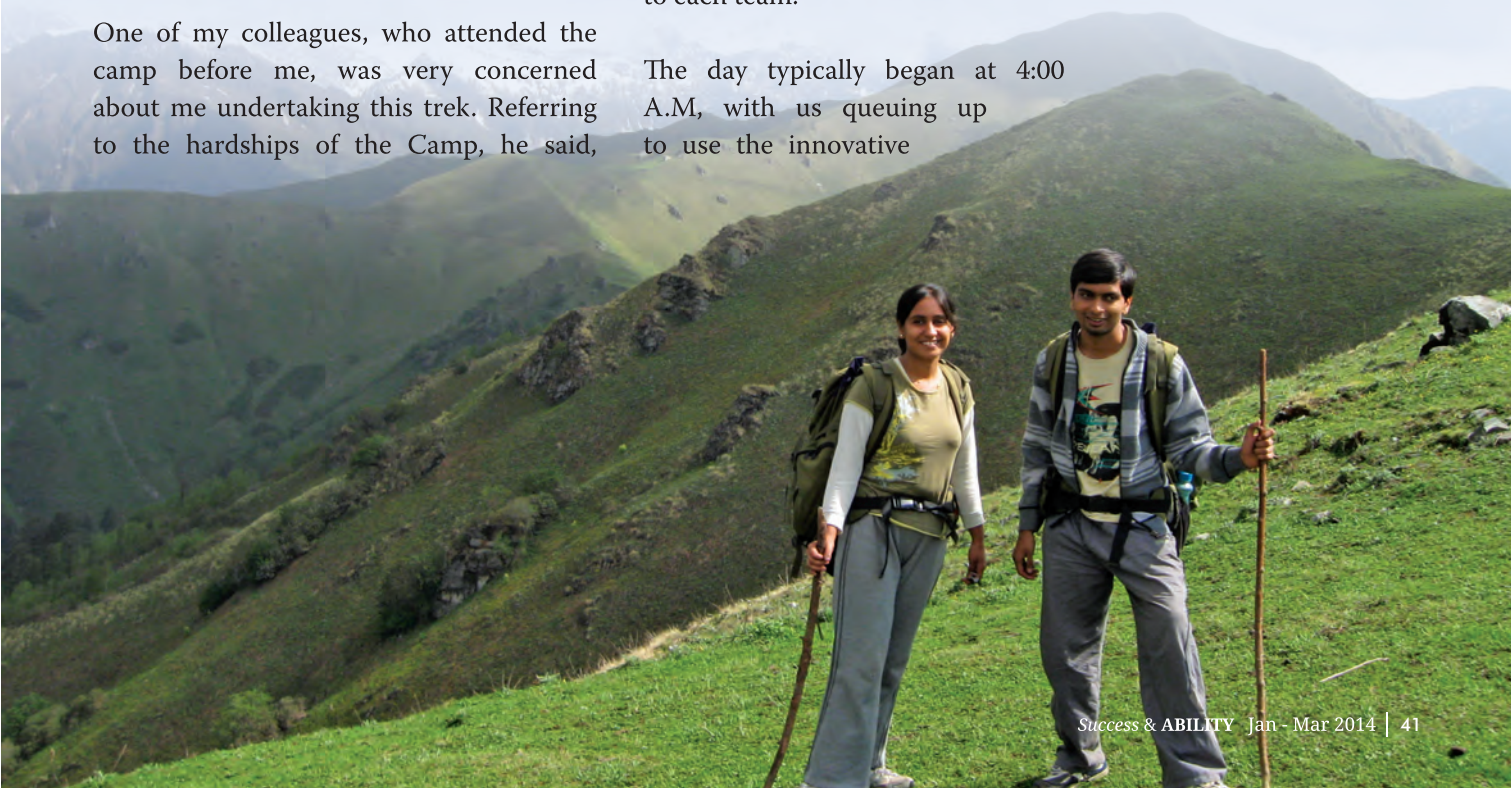
“We, the supposedly physically strong lot, have twisted our ankles and have broken our knees; it’s not possible to manage when you can’t see”. I was worried too, but I didn’t want to give up without trying. So along with the others, I set out for my journey to the Himalayan Base Camp.

The base camp was set up near Assi Ganga River, which was to be our home for the next 10 days. The first 5 days were scheduled to acclimatize our bodies to the mountainous conditions. Abhishek, a colleague, quickly oriented me to the camp by describing the surroundings. We were a group of 50 people - 25 from Tata Motors and 25 from MJunction. We were divided into 6 teams and a TSAF instructor was assigned to each team.

The day typically began at 4:00 A.M, with us queuing up to use the innovative



Vishal
Kumar Jain



'jugaad washroom' with no roof, and just a jute curtain for privacy. We had to bathe in the freezing cold water of the Ganges flowing right beside the camp. The team building began with ice breaker activities. Many wondered why I was there when they noticed that I couldn't see. We experienced a series of adventure games like rock climbing, rappelling, river crossing and flying fox. We climbed rocks, that were about 10 to 15 ft high and around 70° steep, without ropes. My team members guided me and described the surroundings to me, thus helping me to manage all tasks. I started focusing on using my other senses and finding ways to manage more independently. Very soon, after their initial hesitation, people started cooperating and encouraging me in completing each activity.

"When the body gives up, the mind takes over"

On Day 3, I was leading the team. We climbed up for about 6 kms for an over-night jungle survival camp. We had to set up our tent immediately as it had started to rain. We had limited drinking water, and it was only after we had finished the 6 km climb that we realized that the water source was a kilometer downhill. We also had to find wood to cook our meal. However, the ambiance was very calm with the soothing sound of a stream somewhere in the far background. It was the most beautiful place that I had ever experienced.

We set out for Surya Top on Day 6. The target for the day was to walk 9 km to Morsona which is at a height of 7,500 ft. The rucksack was much heavier (around 20 Kgs) as we had to carry everything that we would need for the next 5 days. Our stamina had increased, but so had the difficulty of the terrain. Also, leaving the base camp meant leaving the jugaad washroom behind, knowing that for the rest of the journey, we

would have no such luxuries. We just had to attend to nature's calls in the open.

The next day, we had to climb up to 10,200 ft. The terrain was very challenging and steep throughout the trek. Vidhi, a team member, had become an expert in guiding me. She knew just when to guide, how much to guide and how to communicate. We had to cross a landslide area, a stretch of almost a kilometer, which terrified most of us. "One wrong step and you will fall 1,000 ft", Vidhi alerted me describing the deep valley and the loose rocks.

Day 8 was the day we had to climb to the summit. As I came out of the tent in the morning, I heard that there was snow all around; the temperature had plummeted to 0° C. We had to be prepared for a very long day as we had to cross mountain ranges and walk 16 Kms to reach Surya top and back. The journey started with an almost vertical cliff with a height of a 1,000 ft, but crossing it uncovered an extremely beautiful meadow. The Sun had just risen and the warm sunlight felt simply wonderful. There were no trees, but just a vast expanse of fresh green grass as far as one could see. The air was light, the sky bright blue and I truly felt one with nature.

We kept on walking on the mountain ridges till we reached the foot of Surya Top. This became a turning point for many in the group; many lost their motivation after seeing the towering heights of Surya Top just above them and realizing how tough it would be, to reach the summit. I, on the other hand, could not fathom what the fuss was all about, since, below my feet, the terrain felt no different. I kept on continuing along with one of my team members. As the oxygen levels kept getting depleted, my body felt more and more tired and I remembered Ms. Pal's words at the base camp. "When the body gives up, the mind

takes over". I realized the actual meaning of the words only at this stage. With great effort and determination, I reached the summit. After conquering the summit, I realized that what mattered most to me, was not just the scenic beauty, or the sense of achievement, but the people with whom I had made the journey. I felt that I had found the best companions of my life.

During the return journey, initially, we maintained a slow pace, as we were exhausted. Although we soon realized that we had to quicken our pace to reach the camp before sunset, we finally made it back only after sunset. We learnt an important lesson - the importance of remaining alert and focused even after achieving the goal.

The descent began on Day 9. We were to descend 10 km to Morsona and then ascend 3 km to reach a small village called Aghora. The descent wasn't as easy as we had thought. Our knees were hurting because of all the weight we were carrying. Also, with the rains and the slippery mud, it became a lot more difficult to maintain balance.

Aghora had "advanced" technology, like taps and toilets. We talked of how we'd gone from a life where we were used to having the best luxuries, to getting excited about a tap! That night, the group, exuberated by the conquest, let it's hair down and danced hard to Dhol and folk music.

The last trek was 6 km downhill to Sangamchatti. By the end of Day 10, the team had experienced several extreme conditions together and had developed a strong level of understanding and bonding.

I finally returned to the base camp and took home the most exciting memories of my life. It was an experience which made me realize my potential, my ability to adjust, my ability to work both as a team player



The change in the group's reaction...

"He can't do it, he's blind"; "how will he do it, he's blind"; "he can do it", and finally... "he did it, though he's blind."

and as a leader and most of all, to know that I could deal with unfamiliar situations and adapt to them.

Nature has a way of nurturing and inspiring us and of bringing out the best in us. I saw the change in the group's reaction towards me : from the "He can't do it, he's blind", to the "How will he do this, he's blind", to the "He can do it", and finally to the , "He did it, though he's blind". It was the openness of Tata Motors and TSAF and most importantly the support and diligence of my team members in guiding me unfalteringly that motivated me to take on the challenge and complete it successfully.

I could not see the terrain, but I had felt it. I could not see the splendor of nature, but I had smelt the wild flowers, felt the breeze in my hair, the sunshine on my face, and heard the chirping of birds.

The world is how one perceives it to be, and every perception is a reality unto itself.

Project Prerana

The Association of People with Disability (APD), Bangalore

APD, Bangalore has launched a structured training program for Government Officers, Workers (like teachers & health workers), social workers, parents, and District Collectives of People with Disability on October 2nd 2013.

The unique feature in this project is use of advanced Information & Communication Technology (ICT). As of now, it serves the stakeholders in Bijapur district on Karnataka. The main problem of access to quality trainers and professionals has been addressed through this process.

A fully-equipped digital studio in Bangalore will be the hub and teachers/faculty will conduct structured sessions here along with practical demonstrations, wherever required. There is a receiving classroom/studio in Bijapur where candidates will attend classes. The sessions are transmitted live through technology and it will be interactive.

In Year 1, APD intends to train/educate 700+ stakeholders in the space of disability which will impact over 7000 people with disability in terms of education and healthcare. Through this project APD has taken a target to impact 25,000 people with disability in three years which is roughly 50% of disabled population in the district. The Government has also indicated that if this Pilot Project meets with success in Bijapur it will initiate the model in another 10 districts of Karnataka and if that is done it will impact over 1.5 lakhs of people with disability in the state in terms of education and healthcare and, of course, employability and financial independence. This is planned for in a span of 3 to 4 years.



Accessible Transport Solutions



Funded by the Mphasis Limited, as a Corporate Social Responsibility program, KickStart Cabs is a joint initiative of Wheels of Change and KickStart Services Pvt Ltd.

The project is being piloted in Bangalore with 3 taxis right now. The venture was flagged off on November 28 ,2013. It has been received well in the month and a half of it's beginning.

KickStart is a brand that promotes equitable opportunities in transportation services. KickStart Cabs provide personalized and accessible transport that will be comfortable to those with any kind of mobility restrictions. With fully remodeled cars, these will provide comfort in seating and make the entry and exit from vehicles much smoother. Moreover, the users will get assistance from sensitive and trained drivers in escorting them to and from their venues. While the vehicles will be specifically remodeled to suit the needs of people with disabilities and senior citizens, it will also remain comfortable for those who are not disabled.

They offer point to point , local hire and airport transfers. There are options for online booking, www.kickstartcabs.com and a call center booking.



- Michael Mili



A SCIENTIST WHO READS THE MIND

Haven't we all wondered about the magic of consciousness, about what lies behind our instincts and intuition, of how psychics and child prodigies access knowledge, about what transpires during near-death-experiences (NDEs) and déjà vu moments? HEMA VIJAY throws an insight on the work of Dr. Powell.

Dr. Diane Hennacy Powell researches these ideas as intriguing scientific phenomena that reveal the spectacular potential of human consciousness. A luminary of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) in the U.S. and a John-Hopkins trained neuroscientist, psychiatrist and geneticist, she is the author of the best seller 'The ESP Enigma: The Scientific Case for Psychic Phenomena' and other books.

Dr. Powell was recently in Chennai to conduct workshops and interview child savants (children who have extraordinary abilities like extra sensory perception (ESP) or advanced knowledge of the Sciences or Arts without ever having studied them), as part of her research into understanding how some of us are able to tap into mysterious intelligence that may very well be latent in all of us.

A child prodigy in Mathematics, who also studied Advanced Physics, Dr. Powell became fascinated by consciousness following two encounters. "One person I met could voice words I read (in my mind) from any random book in a library, which he had no way of seeing. Another woman reeled out specific information about me she had no way of knowing, which she said she saw in my aura, and predicted events which came true a 100%", Dr. Powell shares, remarking, "A true scientist doesn't throw away data just because it does not fit one's theory, and I decided to research psychic phenomena".

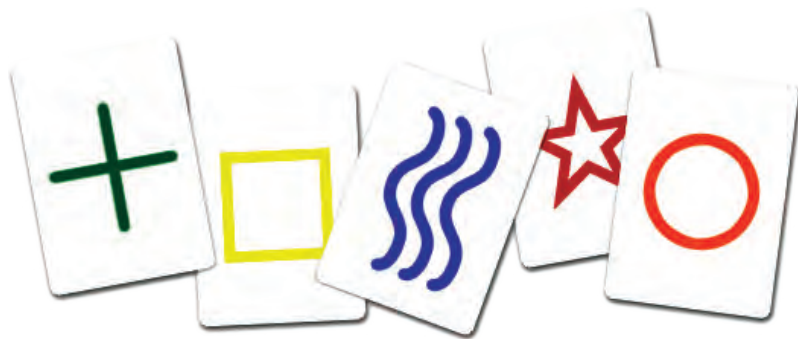
The Mobius Mind

Like the Mobius strip, created by twisting a strip of paper through 180° and connecting its ends, which paradoxically makes the strip's two surfaces seem to be a single twisting surface, our inner and outer worlds are interdependent, believes Dr. Powell. "Our brain and sensory organs limit our perceptions, which shape our brains, which in turn affect our ability to perceive, creating psychological constructs in the process. We are just beginning to understand the human mind. The current neuroscience model assumes that the brain creates consciousness; but it does not explain how a material brain creates immaterial consciousness, which makes consciousness seem supernatural. But remember, even electromagnetism was considered supernatural before we understood it. I believe that consciousness acts like a force field", Dr. Powell says.



▲ Mobius Strip

What adds punch to her claims is the fact that Dr. Powell platforms psychic things like time travel and clairvoyance on scientific premises. "If time and space are a continuum as Einstein says, it follows that the past, the present and the future exists simultaneously; clairvoyant people just see the future across time", she says. She also subscribes to the view that psychic events are related to the dream state, and may have evolved so that sleeping babies can detect threats and communicate them psychically to their parents.



Zener Cards ▲

Of course, Dr. Powell has her detractors, who argue that she doesn't provide enough evidence-based substantiation and work mechanisms for her staggering premises and surmises. But Dr. Powell counters, "There is voluminous evidence validating psychic phenomena; it is just that today's mainstream science chooses to ignore it. In any case, we accept a single brontosaurus fossil as evidence of the past existence of their species. Likewise, if ESP is validated in just one single person, it should be accepted as evidence for the fascinating reach of the human consciousness".

Currently, Dr. Powell is setting up an experiment that considers the error rates when autistic savants reel out amazing calculations in a fraction of a second. Complicated mental calculations by even the best of mathematicians do have a certain error rate. "If savants are just seeing such figures in their mind's eye and reading it out rather than doing quick fire calculations, the error rate would be much less or even non-existent, which would validate ESP ability", she says. Dr. Powell is also just about to publish her next book on the human mind, one that looks at various intriguing subjects like 'savant' potential and synesthesia (in which people see colour/image or other connections to information) along with relevant laboratory research and observations on the subject.

"If time and space are a continuum as Einstein says, it follows that the past, the present and the future exists simultaneously; clairvoyant people just see the future across time"

Check out Dr. Powell's website <http://dianehennacypowell.com> to know more.



The ground beneath the last

HURRAH!

Days before his final test match, Sachin Tendulkar ensured that the entrance to Wankhede stadium was wheelchair-friendly for his mother's visit. We asked some cricket-crazy persons with disability what they felt about it...



▲ Stadium Ramp

Malay Desai

A cricketer who's played for the time he has and has become nothing less than an institution is entitled to move mountains for his octogenarian mother Rajni, a wheelchair user.

It was a weekend of many firsts. It was the first time in this decade, that a cricket test was getting much attention, it was the first time that millions were watching one man spend his last days at work... and it was the first time that many of them, mostly grown-ups, found themselves crying, either in solitude or in full public view when that man made the long walk back home.

In the midst of all this, in a non-descript entrance to the nucleus of this all, the Wankhede stadium of Mumbai, his mother had made her first trip in 25 years to watch him play. Facilitating her wheelchair up to the President's Box was a specially installed ramp, because, well, she is Sachin Tendulkar's mother.

To point out that this usually isn't the case for commoners and to question this preferential treatment will only be folly. A cricketer who's played for the time he has and has become nothing less than an institution is entitled to move mountains for his octogenarian mother Rajni, a wheelchair user. And as we saw from the first day's play, even Tendulkar's coach, Mr Ramakant Achrekar, didn't mind the ramp while being wheelchaired up the stadium.

That said, it's an important moment to notice that the prime enclosure of this stadium, which also houses the headquarters of the richest sporting body of the world, is not equipped for wheelchair users. Unfortunately, that doesn't really come as a shock.

Truth is, we live amidst an infrastructure where public transport, most government offices and places of leisure are not friendly toward persons with disability – whether wheelchair users or not; sporting venues are still a long shot. We are also amidst a culture where ramps get installed, lifts get setup and railings emerge overnight if influential powers want them to. Not that it's comforting, but this tendency to wield one's importance in the public sphere is a universal truth, although India doesn't rank too high in being disability friendly.

Prasad Phanasgaonkar, a Mumbaikar with quadriplegia who designs travel-friendly wheelchairs, compares the Master Blaster to Stephen Hawking while talking of influence. "Tendulkar and Stephen Hawking are both people who have the power to have wheelchair accessibility in institutions reluctant to implement guidelines. Such institutions have a mindset of making temporary ramps but aren't really concerned. Their attitude becomes our problem, not theirs."

And attitude it is, that shows it's not-so-pretty face in Indian cities. So while trains and buses have mandatory reservations for persons with disability, that the authorities don't do much to improve accessibility to railway stations and at bus stops is an attitude problem.

Nilesh Singit, a disability rights advocate, consultant and someone who lives with cerebral palsy (a group of movement disorders caused by damage to the brain) is more vocal over this moot point. "Sachin may not be aware but there are many persons with disability who are his fans. Spare a thought for those who've been born blind, have never seen him play but still continue to love him. Let's not forget he is a Member of Parliament. If he truly wishes, he can make the right moves towards making sporting venues more accessible. It's not just about a ramp, we realise after speaking with him; what about the toilets? In fact, when was the last time you came across a urinal with wheelchair access?"

The last hurrahs were made at Wankhede that weekend and the legend bowed out on a high. Now, it will take a while to sink in, that there might never be another Tendulkar. But the worry that there might never be another ramp at an Indian cricket stadium, is a lot more fearsome for many.



Sachin may not be aware but there are many persons with disability who are his fans... Let's not forget he is a Member of Parliament. If he truly wishes, he can make the right moves towards making sporting venues more accessible...

Article courtesy:
TRINAYANI, a cross-disability advocacy & support group, Mumbai

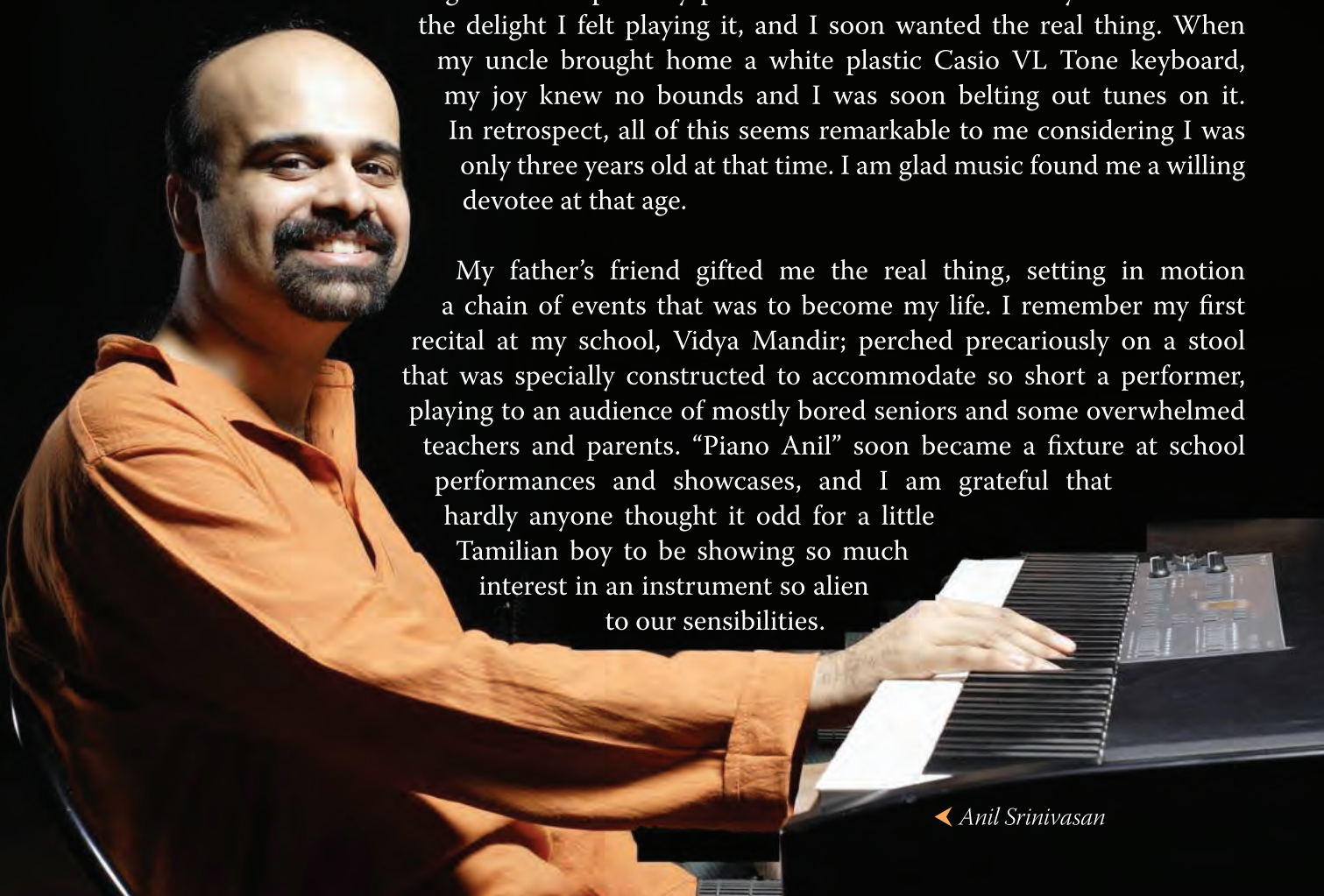
NOTES *between the*

ANIL SRINIVASAN, the well known classical pianist from Chennai, talks about his passion for music, the unpaved route to his dream and the lessons he learnt during this journey...

During moments of quiet solitude, I often wonder about my true purpose as a musician. As a performer, I love the stage, enjoy making my music and appreciate the inevitable applause that follows. This, however, is short lived. Anxiety over the next performance takes over, eradicating whatever confidence I thought I had. This process of living and dying might seem a bit self indulgent to the lay reader, but herein lies a central philosophy behind all practitioners that I believe holds some lessons.

My earliest memory is that of gingerly clutching my mother's hand as someone brought home a pink toy piano with black and white keys. I remember the delight I felt playing it, and I soon wanted the real thing. When my uncle brought home a white plastic Casio VL Tone keyboard, my joy knew no bounds and I was soon belting out tunes on it. In retrospect, all of this seems remarkable to me considering I was only three years old at that time. I am glad music found me a willing devotee at that age.

My father's friend gifted me the real thing, setting in motion a chain of events that was to become my life. I remember my first recital at my school, Vidya Mandir; perched precariously on a stool that was specially constructed to accommodate so short a performer, playing to an audience of mostly bored seniors and some overwhelmed teachers and parents. "Piano Anil" soon became a fixture at school performances and showcases, and I am grateful that hardly anyone thought it odd for a little Tamilian boy to be showing so much interest in an instrument so alien to our sensibilities.



Formal training under my first teacher, Smt Meena Radhakrishnan, was followed by even greater rigour under Mrs Anna Abraham, a brilliant, if somewhat exacting, teacher who shaped my idea for aesthetics.

Unfortunately, this is where the linearity of the narrative ends. I did not grow up to be a successful musician, performing worldwide, winning accolades and thanking all the forces that shaped my life.

Life came to an abrupt halt when I was perhaps thirteen. My father experienced tremendous losses in his business and then had a nervous breakdown that lasted for a decade or more. Our family difficulties were compounded when we were forced to sell our home and seek refuge with my uncle's family. My adolescent mind struggled to cope with the traumatic experience of seeing my father stare blankly into space, mutter incoherently and hallucinate about impending disasters. My mother became (and even now continues to be) our role model, struggling to keep us all afloat, keeping her cheerfulness intact, and bearing the indignities that an unwitting business context and a sudden incapacitation of a husband can enforce in an Indian context. The dream of "growing up to become a professional musician" became a luxury that I felt guilty of furthering when our tomorrows were themselves in danger.

After finishing school and college with an Economics degree, I pursued a Master's degree in Communications from MICA, Ahmedabad and went on to work in the advertising industry in Mumbai. These years were confusing, as I felt like a fish out of water, drumming Mozart minuets on the railings of suburban trains and not quite fitting into these scenarios with the ease with which my friends could. Management education in the US followed, accentuating a growing sense of quiet desperation that I was moving way too far away from what I thought ought to be destiny's compass.

Throughout my life, there have been certain unique points of inflection. These critical decision points have been instrumental in leading me towards leading a life I feel more comfortable with.

While I was a doctoral student at Columbia University, a series of misunderstandings with some members of the faculty led me to a decision to move away from the PhD and get back to my music.

My passion for music, in combination with my love for children and teaching, led me to create an enterprise tailored towards teaching music in a structured way to children in schools.

My passion for music, in combination with my love for children and teaching, led me to create an enterprise tailored towards teaching music in a structured way to children in schools. In this, I experienced some heartache through certain individuals whose only goal was to "invest to harvest", a lesson for me to be careful about the people I should allow into my life.

As an artist, there are battles I fight everyday. From the choice of instrument (i.e. the piano) to the type of music I play, I am forced to explain myself and work very hard to create a career that is both meaningful and sustainable. The media revolution coupled with the preponderance of film-based reality entertainment has brought with it a paradigm where "alternative music" has found new meaning. I do not fit into this new realm either.

I feel overwhelmed when I consider every mile I have walked, every strange situation I have found myself in and every good Samaritan who has helped me turn yet another corner. Despite the sheer impossibility of the task, I have managed to collaborate with some of the best names in music, create a little space for myself in the scorching sun and keep creating the music that I love.

Life throws curve balls every so often. In my quest to find myself, I have realized that the trick is in being able to swing away regardless.



a matter of ATTITUDE

Attitude may have changed from out-of-sight to full inclusion, but that is mostly only on paper and in slogans. The inherent attitude is still the same, says Dr. MADAN VASISHTA.

Attitude or the development of it costs nothing, but changing an attitude is one of the most difficult things in the world. Our attitude shapes our behaviour both as an individual and as a group. The attitude also feeds on itself and the resulting behaviour of the recipients. People scale the Everest, dig deep under the ocean bed, fly into unknown spaces and discover the impossible by developing a winning or positive attitude. Similarly, people end up in gutters with a losing attitude.

The same goes for the rehabilitation and education of persons with disabilities!

A societal change in attitude toward people with disabilities will resolve most of the problems caused by disabilities. Here, it is important to remember that problems are NOT caused by the disabilities, but the attitude toward the disabilities. A look at successful persons with disabilities clearly shows that it was the attitude — their own, their families', their friends' and that of society in general — that helped them overcome hurdles and emerge as heroes and role models to other persons both with and without disabilities. When we feel pity for the disabled, we, with or without our knowledge, sow the seeds of dependence in their minds. When we respect them, we empower them to become independent.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the attitude in the United States about the disabled was: *out of sight, out of mind*. The idea was to send your children with

disabilities to a faraway place and forget about them. The goal was to make sure that the family stigma was hidden and the dirty little secret was buried. The life of the person with disability was sacrificed to salvage the family name. How many persons with disability lived miserably and died unsung and unheard of in this way? We do not know and we do not want to know.

These attitudes changed over time and spawned a number of slogans. Each of these slogans sounded wonderful and the words that propagated these slogans were built around catching themes. These themes changed over time, but only after sacrificing still more lives.

A lot of progress has been made in educating and rehabilitating our citizens with disabilities. However, we are still VERY much behind in these efforts. The main reason is the attitude. Attitude may have changed from out-of-sight to full inclusion, but that is mostly only on paper and in slogans. The inherent attitude is still the same: the disabled cannot... This 'they cannot' is projected into self-fulfilling prophecy and becomes an inherent behaviour among the disabled.

When the disabled were carted out to little towns or to the peripheries of cities to lead a life in glorified jails, their parents and guardians expected them to somehow live their lives in oblivion. Later, when the attitude changed and these children were 'mainstreamed', a lot of noise was made about

providing equal services. However, these services were never equal. Persons with disability require a number of services to accommodate them on an equal basis. A blind student needs access to Braille so that he/she can read and write at the same level as his 'normal' peer. An intellectually challenged person needs extra time, breakdown of tasks, tutoring and counselling to create a level field to compete with his/her peers. The same goes for persons with other disabilities. They were 'mainstreamed' and then with minimal support were expected to 'do well.'

The well-meaning and supportive parents saw this flaw in mainstreaming. They found that while their children were 'mainstreamed' they were also excluded from full participation. Hence came the term 'full inclusion.' There are various definitions to show the difference between 'mainstreaming' and 'full inclusion.' Mainly, as the word 'full' implies, children with disabilities should have equal access to be able to meaningfully participate in all activities with their peers. Again, the key factor was missing here—support. A 'fully included' deaf child who could not lip-read and did not have access to an interpreter, is actually 'fully excluded.' Still, he was expected to 'fully participate' in classes with his peers.

**It is important
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The attitude has changed, but only on the surface. Children with disabilities are still being shortchanged. Barring a few exceptions, most educators and parents still have very low expectations. "He speaks very well for a deaf person", or "she reads pretty good for a mentally challenged person", are the comments that clearly illustrate this attitude of low expectations. The failure of special education illustrates this fact very clearly.

I am not saying that the great advocates of persons with disabilities are not doing their job. They are trying. They are sincere and they do want these children to succeed. However, they all suffer, without knowing it, from the 'missionary attitude.' The missionary attitude, as the name implies, is the attitude that missionaries

had about 'natives.' They wanted to help the natives. They made sacrifices and did their best to educate and help the natives. However, once a native showed real promise, they pulled back the help. The idea that a native could be as good as them was unacceptable. These missionaries took measures to make sure that the bright native did not learn too much to threaten their own 'superior' status.

Some readers might say that there are cracks in my logic. People with disabilities and natives are not the same, they may contend. A native might be much smarter than the missionary. That cannot be true with persons with disabilities! Pardon me, but your slip is showing here.

There are people with deafness or blindness who are way ahead of their 'normal' peers, but they are not involved at policy-making levels in the government. How many deaf or blind individuals have high-level positions in major government offices that make and implement policies on education of the deaf or the blind? How many intellectually challenged individuals are involved in support positions? Mr Lal Advani was secretary of the special education department a long while ago. Did any person with disability replace him?

This is part of the whole attitude problem.

How do we change this attitude? Let us go back to the missionary analogy. Let the 'natives' take over. Involve persons with disabilities in the administration of programmes that serve them. Involve them in making decisions that affect their destinies. Recognize their potential not with slogans but with offers of partnership at all levels. That is when education and rehabilitation of the disabled will take roots and wings.

Some, perhaps, will say, "But, they are not ready for this!"

But then, that is an attitudinal issue.

Inform.

"Success & ABILITY", India's quarterly cross-disability lifestyle magazine

Interest.

that bridges the divide between people with and without disabilities...

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MAYAN *Rebirth*



Hari Adarsh
Sripathi

When I was two years old, someone gave me an Atlas. Not quite comprehending what those many weird shapes in different colors meant, I made a hobby of tracing out the boundaries of countries and changing them to see how an alternate cartography would have looked. A lifelong obsession to become the new age Magellan thus started...



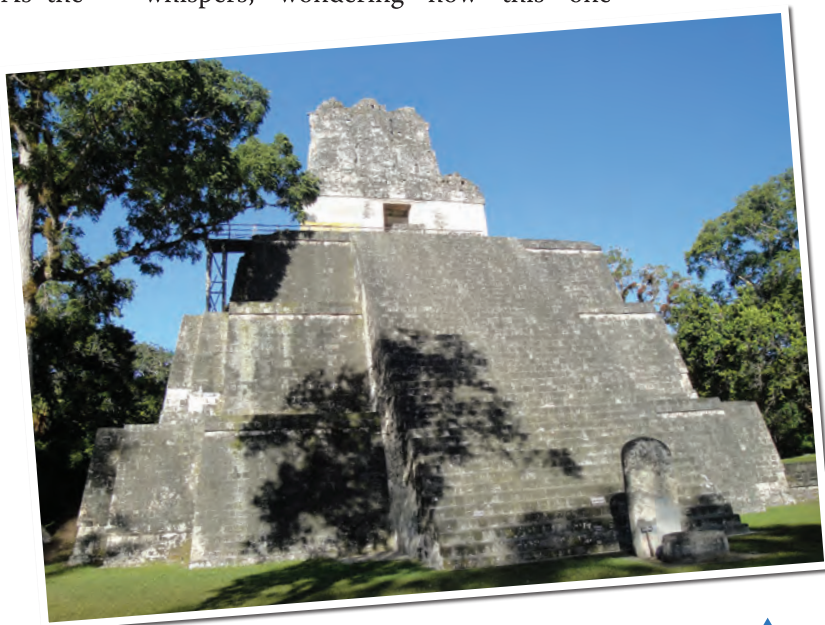
There could not have been a more auspicious day to land in Guatemala than the first day of the new Mayan era, December 22, 2012, the day after global media had confused the End of the World with a Mesoamerican retelling of the Y2K fable. Tourists, clearly disappointed at the world surviving the previous day, had left Tikal empty, silent and authentic.

The silence was soon broken at the break of dawn by a symphony of howler monkeys sounding like the amplified panting of a restless panther. As the horizon grew brighter, the pyramids lit up like sporadic candles amidst a sea of tree canopies. In many ways, that melancholic morning was a flash video of the lifespan of a civilization. These structures had once been the skyscrapers of the 4th century in an overpopulated rival to today's New York. In three Baktuns, the forest had reclaimed them completely. That very day was the first of 144 thousand days of the 14th Baktun.

In many ways Guatemala tells the grim story of human progress - of established elites, the simmering oppressed, and their perpetual discord over control of the soil. The current society bears scars of over thirty years of civil war and is infected by ongoing class strife between the ladinos(of Latin descent), the

indigenous Maya, and the many mestizo communities that had resulted from their occasional intermarriages. A self-imposed apartheid was readily apparent.

The elite, who run most institutions, often walk around with heavily armed bodyguards. They drive sports vehicles with American license plates into the fortified gates that close behind them. Meanwhile, the Maya peddle wares on the street, dressed in colorful but ragged garbs and occasionally point to me in excited whispers, wondering how this one



The Grand Tikal Pyramids



▲ *Antigua Dawn with Volcano Agua*

specimen that looked like them wore ladino clothes. Christopher Columbus was ostensibly confused when he chanced upon the New World “Indians.” I had quite the reverse effect.

The ladino towns of Guatemala offer a tapestry of cobblestoned alleys, Baroque churches and the occasional mariachi band doffing a polite sombrero to the tourist. A rusted Ford Pinto from the 1980s meanders through the Sunday morning pedestrian crowd, with its driver yelling out that the brakes have failed and he had never learnt to use them. The occasional pedestrian whose foot has been stomped, howls out as a few old men playing cards in a nearby tavern shake their heads at how he should have heeded the driver’s expletives.

Towns like Antigua have become a haunt for Western retirees largely due to their warm climates, affable expenses and ambling pace. Tom Flaherty, who ran a used books store near the La Merced church, engaged me in conversation for over an hour on how Aldous Huxley had described Guatemala in his seminal work *Beyond the Mexique Bay*. Tom, being characteristically Irish, then led me into his popular whisky den where a group of aging hippies from Austria were easing into the night.

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Many others have run to Guatemala to escape oppression in America. Jim, a gregarious architect with nefarious antecedents, had taken refuge in P G Wodehouse and Guatemalan citizenship when he found that having three former wives chasing his alimony, was not a sound business proposition in California. “Wives, children and debt, keep you poor,” he advised me while downing a tequila. “Here in Guatemala, none of them can find me.”

While tequila and rum are the spirits most consumed in Guatemala, coffee and chocolate have a unique place. The word chocolate is derived from the Aztec *xocohatl*, and had been traded to Guatemala from Mexico much before Europeans took it global. Jim introduced me to his gringo friend who runs extortionist chocolate shops charging American prices for what they claim, is authentically grown Guatemalan chocolate. Thankfully I had already spent



Shopping in Antigua ▲

considerable time near Tikal buying genuine chocolate while chatting up a sagacious baker and helping him mix cocoa.

Not one to let an innocent tourist go unscathed, Jim forced me to take a trip up a smoking volcano. Keeping up with the Guatemalan stereotype, the Pacaya has been merrily spewing out lava for the last ten years. Thinking a trip to an active volcano would have to be the highlight of the trip, I heeded Jim's advice and started hiking up the mountain all by myself. A lone stray dog followed me. It took me a good two hours hike to find out that the Pacaya had, of late, grown health conscious and given up smoking. The dog commiserated as I made multiple tumbles in the loose volcanic sand as I turned.

Back on firm footing, I decided to limit my exertion to Guatemala's many gastronomic delights. The pueblos around Lake Atitlan provided strong repasts of Mole Poblano, a chocolate and pepper sauce whose recipe was first created when the invading Spanish got influenced by Maya cuisine. As I looked out into the lake surrounded by three volcanoes, I could hear distant strains of Mayan vendors selling their trinkets to ensure that they got to feed their struggling families. I made a note to give some money to the hawkers outside.



▲ Mole Poblano



▲ The Grand Tikal Pyramids peek out from the overgrowth

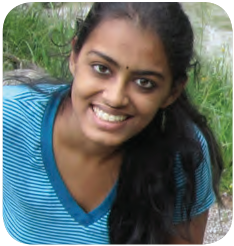
As I looked out into the lake surrounded by three volcanoes, I could hear distant strains of Mayan vendors selling their trinkets to ensure that they got to feed their struggling families.

The last few years though, have seen a welcome, but uneasy peace. New generations face the choice between forgiving the past and beginning a new chapter; or revisiting the horrors to ensure justice. Like Cambodians, Angolans and so many peoples before them, Guatemalans are conscientiously aware that if they were to start witch hunting, it would boomerang on each of them.

Meanwhile, foreign aid that previously worried about Africa has found Guatemala a surer bet, creating optimism in the economy. With the cautious hope that Guatemala can only improve, I might have been among the first generation of foreigners who flocked to this delicate but profound country.

walking TALL

STM Veerabahu is driven by his desire to make a change where it counts. He and his team at Cybernoid Technologies have developed a robotic leg which allows the user to climb, sit, walk... and be independent.



**Yashasvini
Rajeshwar**

Veerabahu has recently been recognized by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as one of the top 25 technology innovators in India under the age of 35.

For many, waking up in the morning and heading to the bathroom to brush their teeth is just a matter of routine. Mundane at best, frustrating at worst, no one pays active attention to what they are doing or how they are doing it. Walking on their own legs to get where they need to go and having the freedom of independent movement is taken for granted, not consciously considered in their quotidian lives. Yet, there are many who miss this independence, aspire for the freedom and wish for intervention that can enrich their daily lives.

Nestled in the bylanes of Kolathur, Chennai, at the end of a dirt path, lies a board announcing *Cybernoid Technologies*. Nondescript and underplayed, it doesn't catch the eye of a random passerby nor does it wear its success on its sleeve. Inside that building though, lies the key to unrestricted movement. Enter the small basement room and one will find an array of computers with a few people typing away; a scene straight out of any urban workspace. Yet, their success lies quietly in a corner, resting on a few boards of cardboard. Cybernoid Technologies houses a robotic leg which allows the user to walk, climb and sit. The leg represents independence.

The mastermind behind its creation, STM Veerabahu is calm, composed and quietly proud of his work. Having returned to India after a brief stint abroad, the robotic leg is symbolic of what drove him back – a drive to make a change where it counts. “I met a man called Arokyadas who runs a trust by himself. He does not have limbs and crawls on the floor to move. He became one of my most important inspirations to take up a project like this” he begins. The seed that was planted motivated him to shift base back to India and focus on his project, a task that he envisaged would take no more than three months. Three years later, Veerabahu is still here and has recently been recognized by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as one of the top 25 technology innovators in India under the age of 35.

Veerabahu's social consciousness is not the product of a sudden reverie. As a Masters student in the field of electrical engineering, his thesis concerned a Brain to Machine interface and involved designing an eyebrow-controlled wheelchair. “My desire to work on socially relevant projects was born from the exposure I gained from our trust, *Towards a Better World* formed in 2002. By 2009, we had begun work on this project” he recollects. The project got seed funding under the Department of Scientific Industrial Research's Technopreneur Promotion Programme (TePP). However, a large part of the project was self financed and supported through American donation programs. “Here at Cybernoid, we follow a multiple revenue scheme which kept us afloat” says Veerabahu.

The year 2012 saw the completion of the prototype. Veerabahu and his team tested their product at a preliminary level on polio-affected patients. “In another three months, we should have a tested product ready for the market” Veerabahu envisages.

The creation of a product like this did not come without its fair share of speed bumps and hurdles. “You tell us the challenge and we would have faced it” he jokes. Funding was a hurdle in the very beginning since the government finances took time to come through. The engineering that the product demanded was multi-disciplinary which meant a sharp learning curve for the team. “At the end of the day, we all chose to build this prototype. It is what we want to do. The challenges are just that, not hurdles”, he clarifies.

Currently, Veerabahu provides a solution in a space where there does not exist one so far. The only alternative present at this point are wheelchairs, which limit movement and independence.



The team at Cybernoid has worked hard to make the product financially feasible as well. The market version is tentatively priced at Rs. 65,000 to Rs. 1 lakh, the same as a wheelchair and yet, so much better. For Veerabahu, commercialization is the key to success. In his words, “That is the only way we can reach out to people who need the product. We hope to have 150 users in two years.”

Veerabahu and his team are driven by a vision, a simple goal that they have set themselves and slowly achieved over three years. “For thirty years, people have been pushing wheelchairs. There should be development of some sort” they believed. At the end of their road, they had in their hands a product that could change the lives of polio affected patients and those who suffered spinal cord injuries. With their Research and Development wing working on solutions to supplement neuro-rehabilitation for children with cerebral palsy and neuromuscular disorders, Veerabahu’s expected temporary Indian hiatus has expanded into a full-fledged dedication to bettering the lives of the disabled.

The entire journey of the robotic leg spanned three years but as its creator rightly pointed out, ideas like this do not spring out of thin air. A thought bore fruit and a dedicated team led by a passionate leader saw it through to reality. Though the solution is a complex mix of technical know-how and innovative thinking, the motivating factor was simple. “I basically want everyone to walk,” Veerabahu says as he signs off. “There is nothing like getting up on two feet and living your own life, without being reliant on a wheelchair. That is what I hope to provide.”

The entire journey of the robotic leg spanned three years... A thought bore fruit and a dedicated team led by a passionate leader saw it through to reality.

◀ Mr. STM Veerabahu demonstrating the Robotic leg

PAIN PAIN GO AWAY

The key to preventing Computer Related Injuries (CRI) is good posture.

Dr SUNDER explains the do's and don'ts...



What is one of the most common cause of medical leave and loss of man-days of production in the developed world today? No, it is not cancer, or heart ailment. It is back pain. 40% of patients with back pain are chronic sufferers and together with neck pain, back pain is on the rise all over the world because of major changes in our lifestyles.

A hundred years ago, mankind had a lot to do with the human body; after all we were evolved from the animal kingdom. Earlier man had been a hunter, gatherer, farmer and in the last century a lot of physical work was part and parcel of daily activities. Why, even four decades ago, we were at least walking to the bank, standing in queues to get our tickets booked...but today, everything has changed.

Over the past decade, we have begun spending longer hours sitting in front of a computer. Several jobs that earlier required moving around, are now being achieved by sitting in front of a monitor. It is amazing, the convenience of having your food delivered, your dream house designed, your exams written and your favourite movies seen in the cosy confines of your drawing room.

There's a flip side though. In the last decade, hundreds of thousands of otherwise healthy computer users have developed painful, debilitating and sometimes disabling conditions known as Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI), also termed as Computer Related Injuries (CRI).

15-25% of all computer users worldwide are estimated to have CRI. This becomes all the more significant when we realise that the median age of sufferers, where the majority of users lie, is in the third decade, the most productive phase of one's life.

Today's computer whiz kids

The typical computer professional today is anywhere between 20 and 30 years old, works 12 to 14 hours a day (of course, more during delivery deadlines), travels frequently and is constantly under high pressure. Needless to say, s/he tends to spend long hours gazing, zombie-like at the monitor. He or she is at high risk of developing neck and back pain. The bad news is some youngsters have had to back off from computers or undergo surgery. The good news is that, very often, CRI is preventable.



These injuries in computer users are caused by incessant work in a static posture, with highly repetitive actions, such as typing on a keyboard. It can seriously disrupt work and domestic life, sometimes even forcing individuals to become unemployed and unemployable. They burn out faster than their CDs.

The symptoms classically involve the neck and back, upper limb (shoulder, arm, elbow, forearm, wrist, hand), but any part of the body may be affected, including the upper and lower back, and even the legs...

It may be a software or hardware problem in your body, variously diagnosed as carpal tunnel syndrome, peri arthritis, cervicobrachial neuralgia or lumbosacral strain. Of course your family physician or the specialist s/he refers you to would treat you effectively, but the problem can recur if you do not avoid the factors that cause it. When this happens of course, you don't know whom to go to, because the nearest we can get to is an ergonomist, who is a rare commodity.

There is still a long way to go in the diagnosis, investigations and the treatment of CRIs. Only recently have international health organisations recognised the multi-factorial nature of CRI. There is no software repair wizard to take care of this problem. One has to install a preventive package in place. Following some simple tips on posture, and an exercise regime at the workstation (computer break exercises) would do the needful.

Dr Sunder,

Medical Director, PREM CENTER, Chennai.

Symptoms of CRI

- pain, burning, numbness, stiffness, or tingling sensation in the fingers, arms, shoulder, neck or back
- a constant need to stretch or massage your arms
- heaviness or weakness in hands or forearms
- back strain or fatigue while working
- difficulty in bending forward
- difficulty in day-to-day activities such as shaking hands, opening doors, holding newspapers, using a comb, or even holding a tea cup

Factors that contribute to CRI

- Static loading or holding a posture, which promotes muscle tension for a long period.
- Prolonged, repetitive, forceful or awkward hand movements.
- Direct mechanical pressure on tissues.
- Poorly fitting furniture
- Basic inadequacies of the keyboard, monitor and workstation design.

Good posture to prevent CRI

Posture

Good posture and back support are critical to reducing the incidence of back and neck pain. Back support is especially important for patients who spend many hours sitting in an office chair or standing throughout the day. Over time, the stress of poor posture can lead to constricted blood vessels and nerves, and lack of blood supply to muscles, discs and joints. Proper posture keeps all parts balanced and supported.

✗ Don't

- Slouching with the shoulders hunched forward.
- Stooping or leaning forward in the chair.
- Swaying back, which causes an exaggerated inward curve in the lower back.
- Carrying something heavy on one side of the body, asymmetrically.
- Cradling a phone receiver between the neck and the shoulder.
- Wearing high-heeled shoes.
- Wearing tight clothes.
- Looking down too much, as in reading a book while lying down.
- Sleeping with a mattress or pillow that doesn't provide proper back support, or in a position that compromises posture.

✓ Sitting Posture for Office Chairs

- Sit well into the back of the office chair.
- A good ergonomic chair which is altered to suit yourself, paying attention to the height of the seat, arm rest, keyboard, monitor height to be checked.
- Arms should be flexed at a 75 to 90 degree angle at the elbows.
- Knees should be at level with the hips, or slightly higher.
- Keep both feet flat on the floor. Use a footrest if not possible.
- Sit in the office chair with shoulders square and straight.
- Move around and stretch as needed.



✓ Lifting and Carrying

- Always bend at the knees and hips, not the lower back.
- Use the large leg and abdominal muscles for lifting, not the back muscles.
- If you lift frequently, use a lumbar belt.
- When carrying a heavy or large object, keep it close to the body.
- If carrying something unilaterally, switch arms frequently and balance the weight on both sides as much as possible.

✓ Standing Posture

- Stand straight and tall, with shoulders square.
- Shift weight from one foot to the other, or rock from heels to toes.
- Keep feet about shoulder-width apart.
- Let arms hang naturally down the sides of the body.
- Tuck the chin in a little to keep the head level.
- Be sure the head is symmetrical and not pushed out forward.



✓ Sleeping posture with mattresses and pillows

- Select a relatively firm mattress, like cotton or coir foam.
- Sleeping on the side with knees bent and a pillow placed between the legs will help keep the spine aligned and straight.
- Use a thin pillow to provide proper support for the head and shoulders.
- Place a rolled-up towel under the neck and a pillow under the knees.



BOLLYWOOD

Quiz : The Answers!

1. **C** One was Kachra (played by Aditya Lakhia), spinner, who had impairment in his hand due to polio. Second, Bagha (played by Amin Hajee), the drummer and a batsman who had speech impairment and third, Ismail (played by Raj Zutshi), who had 'temporary disability' due to injury in his legs. Researches has proved that diversity leads to better functioning team and business success. The Lagaan team, apart from having people with disabilities, also had people from different class, caste, religion and professions. Their coach was a British woman.
2. **A** Reasonable accommodation means adjustments made for people with disabilities to exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. In this case, the 'essential function' was batting and providing him with a runner was a reasonable accommodation. This helped Ismail to bat and he was able to make a significant contribution by reducing the required runs to a gettable total.
3. **D** A Braille Typewriter enabled her to write the exams independently. Allowing her to use the typewriter is a reasonable accommodation provided to her. There are quite a few assistive technologies available for people with deaf-blindness for communication, learning, mobility and work. One example is 'Refreshable Braille Display'. Braille Display is a hardware that enable blind users to use the computer. It helps users to read in Braille the text displayed on the computer screen. Using this device, deaf-blind people can navigate through the computer, create and edit documents, and browse the Internet.
4. **C** Tactile Sign Language is a means of communication commonly used by people with deaf blindness. The deaf-blind person's hands are placed lightly upon the back of the hands of the signer to read the signs through touch and movement.
5. **D** Sip-and-Puff or Sip 'n' Puff (SNP) technology is a method used to send signals to a device using air pressure by "sipping" (inhaling) or "puffing" (exhaling) on a straw, tube or "wand." It is primarily used by people who have difficulty using their hands.
6. **B** Raj learns sign language from Annie. Like Raj, all of us can learn the language! Sign Language should be recognised as an official language and should be taught in schools and colleges.
7. **C** Auro's classmates immediately recognise that Auro is having breathing difficulty and they take out the medicine from Auro's bag and give it to him. Inclusive schools help in creating a more sensitive society.
8. **A** Ram Shankar Nikumbh (played by Aamir Khan), a teacher in the school, who has an understanding of Dyslexia, teaches Ishaan to read and write using multisensorial methods. Nikumbh convinces the Principal of the school to not dismiss Ishaan or move him to a special school. Every child has the right to study in a regular school and to get necessary support that she/he may need in the school.
9. **C** Mischelle got a Bachelor of Arts(B.A.) degree from a regular University. Initially, she is not given admission stating that it is difficult for the University to provide her the necessary support and that she should go to a special school. Later, the Principal not only gives her admission but also gives her books in Braille to help her read on her own and also learns to sign. All colleges should have books in Braille and in other accessible formats (audio books, readable soft copy, etc.).
10. **B** Jhilmil calls out for Barfi! and the Director of the Institution is supportive of the decision. Every person has the right to make decisions about the issues concerning themselves, including people with disabilities.
11. **C** Some people with deafness can lip-read. The speaker should speak clearly in a normal tone facing them.
12. **D** Sanjay uses a system of photographs, notes and tattoos on his body to recover his memory after each cycle. Some people with disabilities use multiple methods to communicate and remember. Some methods could be quite unique to them. One should not stereotype and club people with disabilities as one homogeneous group. Individuals are individuals. The possibilities are endless!



Salil Chaturvedi

To describe this banyan tree would I not need to describe all the other creatures that lived on it and existed in a direct relationship with it?

I often sit under this banyan tree; it's almost like a ritual. The tree is halfway up a hill, straddling a part of its western slope, and when you are near the edge of the slope you realize that the tree is slowly, inch-by-inch, week-by-week, walking down the slope. I like this aspect of banyan trees, their slow gait.

The last time I was under the tree I began wondering about how I could describe this banyan tree. *Ficus Benghalensis* could be one way, but that hardly seemed to do justice to the tree. It gave no details, no particulars, and certainly no feeling about this tree. So, how was I to describe this banyan tree? Was it the highways of branches with the complicated vertical streets of hanging roots, the thousands of soft-backed leaves, the dozens of small, round, red fruits, the gnarled, bearded trunk or the lattice of the roots under the soil? God only knows how long and deep the roots might be. Was all of this the banyan tree, along with all the sap that was running through its many limbs?

What about the scores of flies, ants, spiders, bugs, lizards, orioles, starlings, treepies, sunbirds, doves and the family of squirrels,

that I had been watching with great enjoyment for the past half-hour, not to forget the slender snake that I saw one day slowly going up one of its hanging branches? Were they not an inseparable part of the banyan tree? To describe this banyan tree, would I not need to describe all the other creatures that lived on it and existed in a direct relationship with it? Wasn't a banyan tree's life incomplete without all these others? In fact, I began seriously doubting if the lives of these other creatures depended on the banyan tree. Could it not be that the banyan tree depended on all of them?

Suddenly it struck me that among all the others, there was also me! Okay, agreed that I wasn't a regular; I drove up the hill to the tree in a bright-red Santro, sometimes with a camera. I spent only about forty-five minutes under the tree, long minutes of which were spent smiling. What about the smile then? Wasn't the smile a direct response to the banyan tree? If it was, could it really be separated from the banyan tree? I smiled again, thinking about this, because it was so clear to me that for those forty-five minutes, I was not really separate from the banyan tree. I was the banyan tree's smile.



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