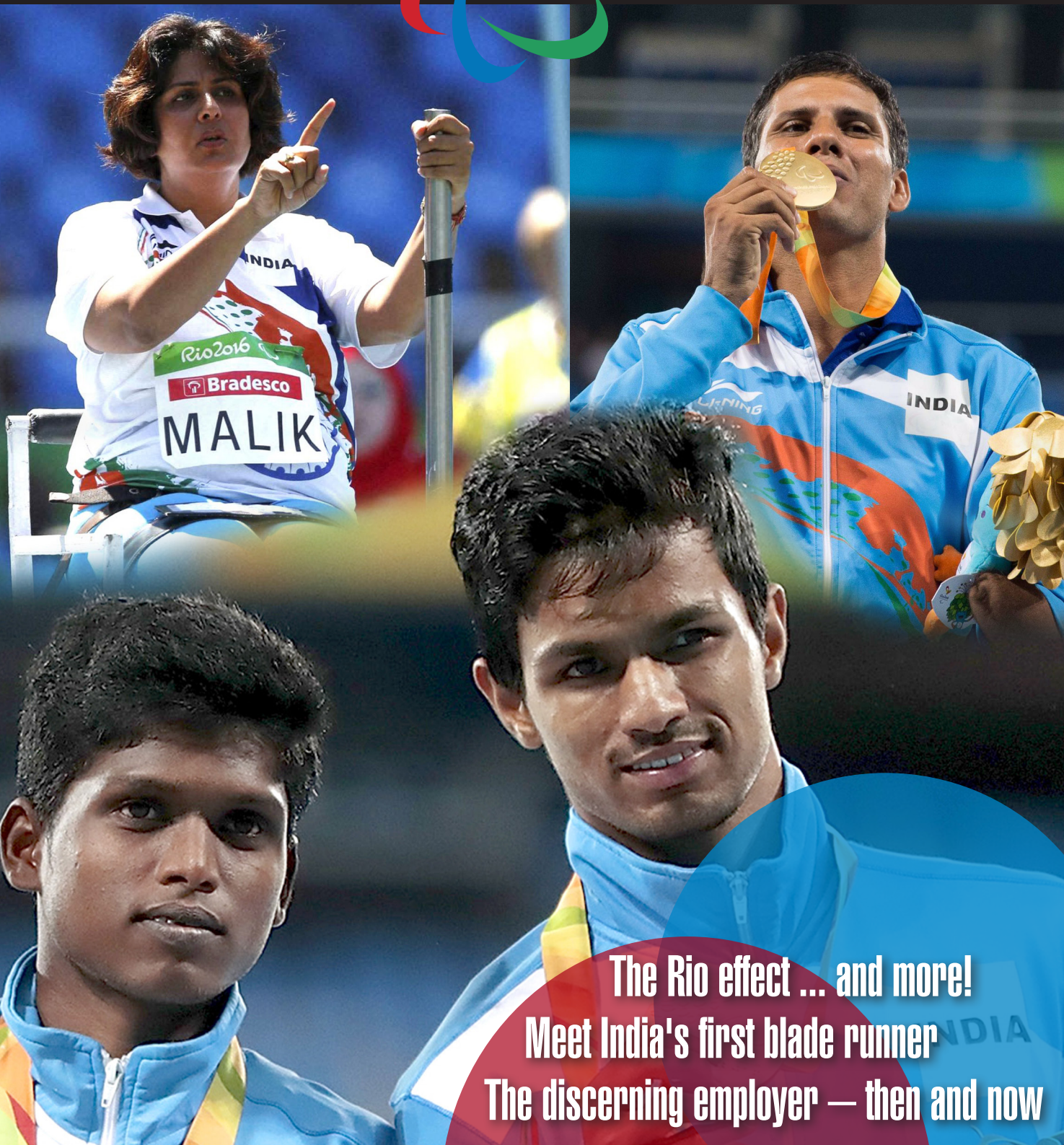


Success & ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

January - March 2017



The Rio effect ... and more!
Meet India's first blade runner
The discerning employer — then and now

16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

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



EDITOR Jayshree Raveendran
MANAGING EDITOR Janaki Pillai
DEPUTY EDITOR Hema Vijay
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Suchitra Iyappa
ASSISTANT DESIGNER Rahul Sood
DESIGN Global Adjustments Services Pvt. Ltd

CORRESPONDENTS

INDIA: CHENNAI

Sandeep Kanabar +919790924905

BANGALORE

Gayatri Kiran +919844525045

Ali Khwaja +9180 23330200

HYDERABAD

Sai Prasad Viswanathan +91810685503

NEW DELHI

Abhilasha Ojha +919810557946

GURUGRAM

Sidharth Taneja +919654329466

PUNE

Saaz Aggarwal +919823144189

BHUBANESHWAR

Dr Sruti Mohapatra +91674 2313311

BHOPAL

Anil Mudgal +91755 2589168

ANANTNAG (J & K)

Javed Ahmad Tak +911936 211363

DURGAPUR (WEST BENGAL)

Angshu Jajodia +919775876431

USA:

Dr. Madan Vasishtha

Ellicott City, Maryland, USA

+1(443)764-9006

PUBLISHERS Ability Foundation

Editorial Office: New #4, Old #23, 3rd Cross Street,
Radhakrishnan Nagar, Thiruvannamipur, Chennai 600 041. India

Ph: 91 44 2452 0016 / 2452 3013

e-mail: magazine@abilityfoundation.org

www.abilityfoundation.org

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

Ph: 91 44 2452 0016

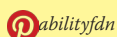
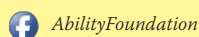
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From the Editor's Desk



Friends,

Another new year has come by. New hopes, fresh challenges, exhilaration at the passage of the RPD Bill, the turmoil at its minuses and hope for modifications... the list is long.

Joyous news is the accolades for our Paralympians. I am elated by the extent of publicity and honours that they have received this time. Not that there were no medallists ere this! I'm thrilled that this time round they got all the public acclaim they deserved. This is reward for labour... something sorely missed by our paralympians of yore. Close on the heels of this comes the announcement of the Padma Awards – Mariyappan Thangavelu, Deepa Malik, our Paralympians and Shekhar Naik, Captain, Indian blind cricket team. Fabulous. To me, the extent to which these rewards and acclaim have been exuberantly given, is proof that all the advocacy and activism that we – India's first gen advocates – have done, have not been in vain. This issue of "Success & ABILITY" thus focuses on the imperative need to improve sports facilities across the country. This could well be just a question of time. But it is important that we prod on and persevere, until the goal is reached.

Speaking of advocacy and activism, I remember – way back in 1997, the trepidation with which Ability Foundation's Placement Wing became functional and when, in 2003, we conceived EmployABILITY – an equal opportunity job fair... and our sheer nervousness until the idea finally took shape, and was accomplished in 2004. I remember – the day of the job fair then: the time to begin was set for 9.a.m., and we witnessed an array of candidates and escorts anxiously waiting at the venue at 7 a.m. To say that we were overwhelmed, would be putting it mildly. And the magnitude of responsibility that we had taken unto ourselves really hit us! As the day progressed, a sense of elation set in. And those very same feelings prevail to this day, added to which is an overwhelming sense of humility.

This time, the 9th time on... on Dec 18th 2016, was EmployABILITY day all over again. And what a day it turned out to be! Tamil Nadu had just seen the aftermath of Cyclone Vardha; road and rail travel were disrupted; telephones, electricity and Internet played hide and seek; we had just lost our Chief Minister; there was a seven-day State mourning on; demonetisation made the rupee scarce... does one need more? More reasons than not, to postpone/cancel the event. But no! We could not let down those who surmounted all these difficulties to come all the way to Chennai! We went ahead.

Now we look back on this as well. Jubilant with contentment and satisfaction. The participating corporates were stunned at the extent of qualifications and confidence the attending candidates possessed. Minimum graduates as always, they were. But this time, the quality of the candidates was so significantly superior. So too their demeanour. So too the expectations met. So too the point we had been making all these years. More power to us all. ■

Jayshree Raveendran

EmployABILITY[®]

2016

Aishwarya Lakshman and Hema Vijay report on EmployABILITY 2016, Ability Foundation's trendsetting job fair for qualified persons with disability, conducted on 17 December 2017.

A pioneering job fair, EmployABILITY has grown from strength to strength since its inaugural edition in 2004, EmployABILITY 2016 was co-organised by the Lions Club of Madras Padi Shenoyanagar, in association with The Hans Foundation and Naukri.com, and supported by AVT Limited, CavinKare (P) Limited, Wipro, The Hindu, The New Indian Express and Dinamani.

From the time it was initiated in 2004, EmployABILITY has been an eye opener in more ways than one, not just to Ability Foundation as organisers, but to the country at large. To qualified candidates with disabilities, it has come to symbolise hope – hope for a brighter future and great jobs; for corporates, the candidates' excellent qualifications are a revelation.



Left to right: Vijaya Bhaskaran, ISL interpreter; Jayshree Raveendran, Founder, Ability Foundation; Latha Pandiarajan, Managing Trustee, Ma Foi Foundation; K. Pandiarajan, Hon. Minister for School Education, Govt. of Tamil Nadu and Ln Suryanarayanan, President, Lions Club of Madras Padi Shenoyanagar.

The run-up to the job fair had been challenging – the demise of the then sitting Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J Jayalalithaa had put the state in a state of uncertainty, while cyclone ‘Vardha’ that uprooted over 10,000 trees struck mayhem in the city’s telecommunications network, power supply and road connectivity. With 925 registered candidates from 25 states across the country and 29 participating corporates representing almost every segment of industry, it was a monumental task, however, Team Ability rose to the challenge with gusto, yet again.

The fair drew a mix of freshers and professionals across disabilities looking to climb the career ladder. There were candidates with visual and orthopaedic impairments, polio, dwarfism, cerebral palsy, autism, dyslexia, muscular dystrophy and mental illness. There were even retired professionals wishing to keep themselves meaningfully and profitably occupied. The commonality being that every one of them was there on merit, and sought jobs on qualifications and skills.

On D-day, the venue, the ambient and accessible buildings of the Sri Rama Kalyana Mandapam in the heart of Chennai, was packed with candidates, volunteers and corporate employers. Speaking at the job fair, Jayshree Raveendran, Founder Director, Ability Foundation, said, “It gives us immense pleasure that companies are now willing to hire persons with disability not because of sympathy or pity, but because they have the necessary skills and qualifications”. She added, “Every one of the organisations at the fair is here to hire candidates purely on job-appropriate qualifications and an equal-opportunity basis, not as corporate social responsibility”.

Hon. Minister for School Education, Sports and Youth Welfare, Government of Tamil Nadu, K. Pandiarajan, who graced the occasion appreciated the fair and spoke of the State Government’s willingness to extend support for holding such job fairs in other parts of the state as well. He stated that the mandated 3% reservation for



Great expectations: Candidates at EmployABILITY 2016

persons with disability in Tamil Nadu Government was being adhered to, and had even gone up to 4%. At no point of time had there been a dearth of applications for positions in the State Government from disabled persons, he said. The Minister lauded the participating corporates, and urged industry at large to make reasonable accommodations at the workplace and welcome diversity, as this investment would only fetch rich dividends in the long run.

A few things stood out about the job fair; it was a gateway for better livelihood, an opportunity for persons with disability to come face-to-face with employers from

diverse industries; an opportunity to assess their own skills and understand current requirements of the market; and a platform to network with other candidates and organisations. For instance, there was Aaroohi Sinha, a wheelchair user who had travelled to the fair all the way from Gurugram, armed with B.Com. and B.B.A. degrees and a six-year job experience. She said, “I am looking to upgrade my job and take my career to the next level”.

The foreboding weather, demonetisation and other obstacles might have curtailed many candidates from attending the job fair. However, for those who did, it was certainly a memorable experience irrespective of whether they had been selected; or not and the



experience of myriad emotions – hope, comradeship, and the urge to give one's best and move ahead in life.

From tentative beginnings towards placement in 1997, when a small group of hearing impaired persons were trained in basic computer skills, life skills

and communication skills and then hired by a couple of companies through gentle persuasion to the advent of EmployABILITY, Ability foundation has today come a long way. While the initial editions of EmployABILITY were dominated primarily by IT/ITES companies, EmployABILITY 2016 threw open the doors to several sectors like banking, finance, HR, marketing, communication, customer relations and engineering, to name a few. This year, EmployABILITY led to a tenth of the candidates who participated in the fair getting jobs and multifold others shortlisted for further rounds of interviews.

From working with a few companies in 1997, today, Ability Foundation works with 225 companies for its round-the-year job portal, and has seen corporate employers evolve from being skeptical to being proactive equal-opportunities employers.

The vision of Ability Foundation is of a society where persons with and without disability walk hand-in-hand, work shoulder-to-shoulder and are accepted as equal partners; where help to all comes out of empathy, not sympathy. EmployABILITY 2016 carried forward this agenda with pride, commitment and success.

Corporate Quips

EmployABILITY®
2016

"EmployABILITY 2016 was indeed a successful event hosted by Ability Foundation. It was a trend-setting job fair that connected discerning employers and qualified persons with disabilities on a platform of equal opportunities. Candidates who participated in the fair possessed enriched experience, qualifications in different streams, and were from various job sectors. So, employers at the fair had an excellent opportunity to recruit the candidates they sought. The event was well organised, starting from registration to providing employer kits, easy accessibility to stalls, food courts, and much more. We met candidates from across India with visual, hearing, speech, facial and orthopaedic impairments. We met close to 200 candidates and have shortlisted 110 deserving resources amongst them. We would be channelising this information to our internal teams to assess and hire the best among them and make Ford Motor Company a diverse workforce-friendly organization. As an employer who empathises with diversity and inclusion, participating in this event was an enriching experience for all of us. We look forward to participate in more such events in the future."

Sandhya Shivakumar,
HR-Recruitment, Ford Motor Company.



"We believe that persons with disabilities (which can be physical, social or economic, leading to an opportunity deprivation) must be provided the same opportunities as others to realise their full potential and live with dignity. In order for us to make these values a part of our DNA, we have focused our efforts on creating a socially inclusive work environment which seeks to bring in people of different backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities. We are glad that we are part of EmployABILITY 2016 which has helped us to find candidates with high potential, and inspired us. Definitely, collaborating with so many different companies, people and aspirants is not an easy mission. You have come out with flying colors and left your imprint on our minds to do more."

Once again I thank you for the hospitality extended by you and your entire team, specially volunteers/interpreters who were helping us non-stop to connect with aspirants. All the best for more such fruitful events."

Kalpana Yemme,
Talent Acquisition, Wipro.

"It was our first time at EmployABILITY, and to be quite honest, at least a few in my team were apprehensive about the effort. What a pleasant surprise it turned out to be for all of us, especially the ones who were a bit skeptical. The event was superb and we met with some of the brightest minds we had encountered. The team had a busy but exhilarating day interviewing nearly a 100 candidates. Perspectives were broadened and there was a greater appreciation for humanity amongst us. I want to thank the tremendous group of people at Ability Foundation who continue to work tirelessly to make us better humans."

Tariq Akbar,
Chief Executive Officer, LegalEase Solutions LLC.



"Thank you for inviting us to EmployABILITY 2016 and for the wonderful experience during the event. The event was well organised and the hospitality shown by your team of volunteers was excellent. Hats off to Ability Foundation for creating such a platform beneficial to both candidates and organisations looking for talented resources! Though we had prepared ourselves on job requirements and had an agenda, we were not sure of the numbers and the quality of candidates that we would get to meet at the fair, but to our amazement, we met quite a number of candidates, and more importantly, the attitude with which these candidates approached us was worth applauding. They were realistic, well prepared and aware of their job strengths and capabilities. From them, we were also able to learn a few things that we weren't aware of. This was more of an eye-opening experience rather than just a job fair. We would like to participate in more such events in the future."

R. Sekar,
General Manager-HR,
Royal Sundaram General Insurance Co.

"Definitely we can hire them, many of the candidates' communication skills was excellent. The disability does not make a difference. As in any job fair, we found some candidates who match our requirement and some who don't."

Aniesh Kesavan,
Lead-HR Chennai, Sutherland Global Services.

"There are some very deserving candidates. Surely we can hire them."

Kalyanaraman,
Company Secretary,
India Motor Parts & Accessories.

"We have shortlisted a few candidates. They seem very talented and capable and we are working out how we can use their skills in our operations. Commuting can be a challenge for some candidates. A suggestion I wish to make is for holding such job fairs in different locations, and firms that operate in the vicinity can be invited to take part in the fair."

Yogasundaram Ramjee,
Founder,
Ramjee Leathers & Suppliers.

BE A CHAMPION!

Time for a Paradigm Shift



Rio 2016



Rio has shown like nothing else! We have it in us to be champions in international sports. What more, Mariyappan Thangavelu, Deepa Malik, Devendra Jhajharia and Varun Singh Bhati who ensured that the tricolour rose high at Rio are now sports icons and household names across the country. Until just a few years ago, this was inconceivable.



Yes. Indians have been competing – and winning – in international Paralympic championships for ages, but their struggles and successes have stayed unheard and unseen for the most part. Something has changed in recent times. Disability sports have now come to occupy centre stage in the nation's eye. The efforts of countless individuals and organisations that have been chipping away relentlessly at attitudinal and access barriers are finally bearing fruit. The future can only get better. It is now time for massive systemic reforms, however.

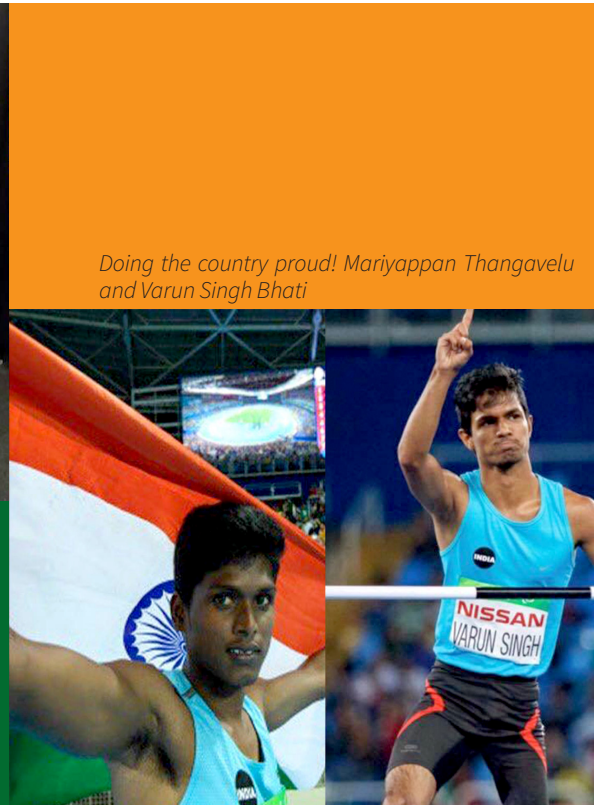
It's time to chalk out a calculated game plan for the future.



Hema Vijay



Triumph! Devendra Jhajharia and Deepa Malik



Doing the country proud! Mariyappan Thangavelu and Varun Singh Bhati

When Mariyappan Thangavelu hurled himself across the bar clearing 1.89m at the Rio Paralympics, it may have been a high jump for him, but it was a giant leap for the country. India had won two medals at the same event – a gold medal for Mariyappan Thangavelu, and a bronze medal for Varun Singh Bhati for his 1.86m high jump. The nation's euphoria grew further with Devendra Jhajharia's javelin throw winning another gold medal for the country and Deepa Malik becoming the first ever Indian woman to win a medal at the Paralympics through a shotput throw that cleared 4.61m and bagged her a silver.

Rio saw 19 Indians competing in five Paralympic sports and bringing home four medals making it India's most successful Paralympics. Contrast this with the 2012 London Paralympics that saw five Indians competing in four events and bringing home a lone medal. And we all know that at Rio, our 19-member Paralympic contingent bettered the medal tally of our 119-member Olympic contingent.

Back home from Rio, our Paralympics medal winners were given the same cash rewards as our Olympic medal winners. Paralympics 2016 hogged mindspace across the country. Its various events got telecast live on national television unlike the earlier editions of the games. Media lavished primetime on the medal winners, and the who's who of the country tweeted their congratulations.

Against the backdrop of paucity of funds, training and awareness on Paralympic sports, the success of Indian Paralympians has been nothing short of phenomenal.



Left to right: Mariyappan Thangavelu, Deepa Malik, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Devendra Jhajharia and Varun Singh Bhati

With all this, the Indian Paralympic movement today surely seems to be on the right track. Or is it? Let's take a look...



Mariyappan Thangavelu with coach Satyanarayana

Let's consider team games to begin with. So far, there has been no Indian representation in team games in Paralympics or other major tournaments. That's because disabled team sports was virtually non-existent



Wheelchair Basketball Team India (Under 23)

in our country. In recent times though, largely through the efforts of some motivated individuals, the Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBFi) has come into being and has created a raring-to-go team. Given a chance to compete at international events, the Indian Wheelchair Basketball team could well qualify for the Paralympics, perhaps in 2020, or at least in 2024. The hitch? No government funding coming in, the team had to seek donations to pay up even the six lakh rupees that was needed to register for U-23 Asian qualifiers at Bangkok. In the nick of time, South India Shelter Pvt. Ltd came to the team's aid and donated part of the money and the rest of the money was crowd-funded through FuelADream.com



India's Commonwealth Judo Championship 2016 medal winners

WBFI had approached the Sports Authority of India (SAI) for funds through the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), since SAI does not deal with para-sports bodies directly.

Likewise with Judo. The Commonwealth Judo Championship 2016 medal winners M Susheela (gold), R Vijayasanthi (gold) and J Manoharan (bronze), didn't qualify for Rio Paralympics because their ranking suffered as a result of missing World Judo Championships of 2014 and 2015 held in USA and Hungary respectively, for want of funds. As such, judo went unrepresented by the country at Rio. Had these judo champs competed at Rio, they were likely to have brought home more medals. In fact, even for sending these champs to the 2016 Commonwealth Judo Championships, it had been NGOs who mobilised the required amount of 1.14 lakh rupees per person, which they did by seeking donations through social media. "We (Manoharan, Vijayashanthi, Monisha and Papathy) are yet to receive the 25 lakh rupees each announced by the State Government for our 2014 Asian Para Games bronze medals. If we had received this, we could have funded ourselves", voices Manoharan. Meanwhile, wheelchair tennis player Prathima has had to start a petition on the crowdfunding platform Wishberry to raise three lakh rupees to get the needed international grade tennis wheelchair 'Match Point'. And so the tales continue – of systemic apathy and private initiative.

Against this backdrop, the success of Indian Paralympians has been nothing short of phenomenal.

Had our Commonwealth Judo Championship 2016 medal winners M Susheela (gold), R Vijayasanthi (gold) and J Manoharan (bronze) competed at Rio, they were likely to have brought home more medals.

The times, are they changing?

So far, para sports has seen abysmal handling in India. Who can forget the images of our



Despicable facilities: The National Para-Athletic Campship (2015) at Ghaziabad

para athletes forced to drag themselves up stairs, because PCI hadn't bothered to put in place ramps or other essential facilities at the venue? This is something that happened at no less an event as the 15th National Para-Athletic Championship at Ghaziabad in March 2015.

Another major problem with our Rio preparations was in that PCI had been suspended on and off during the years leading up to the Rio Paralympics.

Following political efforts, the suspension was revoked ahead of the Rio Paralympics. In place now is a newly elected committee of PCI (enacted on 08/10/2015), under the guidance of Rao Inderjit Singh, President of PCI and Minister of State (I/C) for Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Urban Development Housing and Poverty Alleviation, Government of India.

"PCI has implemented reforms and reported the same at the Asian Paralympic Committee (APC) Executive Board Meeting held in Bangkok on 22nd November", says J Chandrashekar, Secretary General, PCI. Gursharan Singh, Vice President, PCI mentions that the new PCI is determined to keep the athletes at the centre of everything it does. For instance, to let athletes voice their opinions on the workings and decisions of the Committee, PCI has set up an Athlete's Council with Deepa Malik and Devender Jhajharia as interim nominated representatives. PCI has also requested the Ministry of Human Resource & Development, Government of India to issue an advisory to all schools/colleges/universities to become members of the Para State Associations of their respective states/union territories, to promote mass participation and awareness of the Paralympic movement at the grass-root level. Further, PCI plans to host the 6th National Para Games in Delhi in October and stage it as a world-class sporting event under the guidance and administration of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. PCI would henceforth send talented para athletes to every IPC accredited international event, the major ones being the Para World Championships (2017), London and Asian Para Games (2018), Jakarta.

Will these promising and positive words materialize into action? Fingers crossed.

Road to Tokyo

So far, India has been doing well in para-athletics, perhaps because that's a discipline that requires least infrastructural support. Having said that, we now have the potential to strike it big in power lifting, judo, wheelchair badminton and table tennis, and perhaps wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis too, among the 23 Paralympic sports.

There was a time not too far back when there was widespread ignorance that there is such a thing as para-sports. "Is it like para-jumping?" was the response you might have heard, if you said 'para sports'. Those dark ages are behind us. It's now time to think big and take aim.



"We shall not return from Tokyo with less than 10 medals", says Satyanarayana Shimoga, co-founder of the Sports Academy of India For Differently Abled at Bengaluru and National Paralympic Coach who spotted and trained Mariyappan Thangavelu and Varun Singh Bhati, among others.

Talking to Paralympic sportspersons, coaches and administrators, we have put together a roadmap and action plan that will let us take Tokyo by storm.

1. Make the nationals a calendar event

There is hardly six months left for the next World Championships that are regarded on par with the Olympics. There has been no training camp yet for it! "We need to have a streamlined calendar of events and camps that allows athletes to plan and prepare for events", urges Deepa Malik, the gritty Paralympic champion.

2. Streamline the nationals

Indian Paralympians need to be in sync with minimum international qualification standards. Now however, adequate filtration is not done at state levels. Every competitor who plays at the state level shouldn't automatically be given entry into the nationals. At the Ghaziabad Nationals which was going to be the selection event



for the World Championships, there was a huge representation from a few states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana, and minuscule representation from other states. “The Nationals should not be a mela; it should be seriously handled and streamlined”, says Deepa. She adds that the forthcoming two National Para Games are going to be crucial for India’s Tokyo quest and that talent spotted there should be trained scientifically for the Tokyo Paralympics.

3. Compete in more international events

Obviously, international tournament experience is crucial for sportsmen to sharpen their competitive edge and keep abreast of latest practices and skills. We should ensure that our most talented and promising para athletes are routinely sent to international events, without them needing to run from pillar to post for funds.

4. Ongoing training

As of now, national training camps for Paralympics get conducted a mere three-four months before the Paralympics. Asian Para Games medal winner and student of St. Stephens’ Delhi, Ankur Dhama, who participated at the 1500m track event at the Rio Paralympics is now training for the 5km and the 1500m events for Tokyo. Ankur points out, “If we are to do well, training has to start three-four years ahead of the Paralympics. Olympic training happens round the year. There is some national training camp happening for Olympic athletes during at least 300 days of the year. Why can’t Paralympic athletes have the same?”

5. Zonal training camps

“Training camps need to be of durations of 120 days each, broken only by breaks

A major problem with our Rio preparations was in that PCI had been suspended on and off during the years leading up to the Rio Paralympics. In place now is a newly elected committee of PCI. Will Indian Paralympics now see better administration?

of 10 days between the camps”, Satyanarayana recommends. Otherwise, the athletes’ fitness levels and skills will get blunted. He suggests these camps be held at Bangalore, Patiala, Gandhinagar and Manipur or Calcutta for South, North, West and East zone athletes respectively, all of which locations offer conducive and pleasant weather conditions suitable for arduous training several hours a day, and sports infrastructure.

6. Accommodation & transportation

The success of our para athletes can be raised dramatically by providing boarding and lodging to para athletes within or near the stadiums. For instance, the Sports Academy for the Differently Abled that has produced so many paralympic champions provides everything from nutritious diet, shelter, training and logistics, once an athlete is selected for training.

“Adequate rest and recovery time and supply of nutritious food are indispensable for progress as an athlete. Travel becomes very strenuous and time-consuming for disabled athletes”, Ankur underlines. Ankur himself travels 20km up and down from his hostel at St. Stephens’ every single day, to train at the stadium. Likewise, Manoharan has to cover the 32km distance from his home at Chennai to the stadium where he trains under a SDAT judo coach. “So I get to train under my judo coach just twice a week. Friends give me a ride to the stadium”, he says.

7. General fitness & diet

Para athletes need to work on general fitness and physical strength too, in addition to training in their chosen sport. Justin Jesudas who won three Golds at the Can-Am Swimming Championship 2015 and got ranked in the top 20 at the IPC World

Swimming Championship 2015 voices, “That’s when optimum performance happens. I don’t see many para-sportsmen doing such general workouts at gyms now”. Moreover, a good majority of the para athletes are from lower economic groups who can’t

afford nutritious food and comfortable daily travel, so naturally, their performance suffers. Manoharan shares, “Being poor and jobless, I can’t afford it”. PCI could consider a diet allowance or providing Paralympians with nutritious food right at the stadiums.



8. Spot new talent

The Chinese Paralympic contingent that won 239 medals at Rio was 416 athletes strong while the U.S. contingent had 267 athletes. Contrast this with the Indian contingent – 19 para athletes from a country with a 2.68 crore populace of disabled persons (as per Census 2011). Obviously, we need to do something huge to have more and more disabled people taking to sports.

Justin Jesudas observes, “We tend to meet the same set of para sportsmen at



championships in the country year after year. We should keep unearthing fresh talent to make an impact in the Parlaympics”. He suggests that we do this by going to schools and colleges where children with disabilities study, and other such points of contact and identify children and young adults

who could do well in different para-sports. Para-sport training, like training for any sport, should begin as early as possible. It shouldn’t be left to chance and individual initiative. For instance, it was R. Rajendran, the physical education teacher at the government school in Periyavadagampatti village of Salem district, Tamil Nadu, where Mariyappan Thangavelu studied, who first inspired him to pursue athletics and high jump. Incidentally, Mariyappan has donated 30 lakh rupees from the prize money he received to this school.

9. Spread the word that disabled sports pays

“An Asian Para Games medal winner gets 25 lakh rupees from the Government of India. A Paralympic medal fetches him or her 75 lakh rupees. Jobs are offered to medal winners by Public Sector Enterprises. We should spread the word among the disabled that taking sports seriously can pay off handsomely and set them with careers for life”, remarks Satyanarayana. Besides, people with disabilities need sports all the more, as it ensures that they get the needed dose of fitness.

10. Raise awareness among stadium officials

Can a disabled athlete now train at any of the country’s stadiums? States like Tamil Nadu have issued Government Orders on treating Paralympic sports on par with Olympic sports – be it equal cash awards or equal opportunity for training at stadiums. However, the situation is quite grim in many states.

“In many states, sports for the disabled are unheard of and stadium officials hesitate to throw open the stadiums to disabled sportspersons. We are thrown questions like, ‘What will we do if you get an injury? What will we do if your equipment damages the stadium?’” says President of WBFI and para-swimmer P. Madhavi Latha. For instance, a national sports stadium refused permission for a wheelchair basketball camp claiming that the wheels would spoil the floor. It took elaborate talks to convince them that sports wheelchairs are designed for wooden and indoor courts, and the camp was allowed to take place after a long delay.



Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi

Nehru stadium and SAI Sonipat stadium. We found that while these places had accessibility barriers, they could be made accessible with modification like creating ramps at the right places, lowering of hangers, handles and knobs, and broadening of corridors and doors”.

Existing stadiums should be made accessible at least in a phased manner through government or private initiative. And new stadiums should be built keeping in mind that persons with disability too would be entering the stadium to train. Meanwhile, Minister for Social Justice Thaawarchand Gehlot had announced in October that five National Level Disability Sports Centres would be established in separate zones in the country. When would they materialize? Fingers crossed.

12. Coach the coach

Currently, there exists a paucity of coaches who can handle Paralympic sports. Madhavi recalls that when she started swimming, she had to train herself as none of the coaches she sought knew how to train her. Likewise para-swimmer Justin Jesudas had to resort to the YouTube and online tips from a U.K. based coach to teach himself competitive swimming.

11. Make all stadiums accessible

Most of the stadiums in the country are not accessible, being dominated as they are by flights of steps leading into the stadium or to facilities inside like toilets. Deepa Malik informs, “We conducted an accessibility assessment at Delhi’s

Besides our traditional stronghold of athletics, India now has the potential to strike it big in power lifting, judo, wheelchair badminton, wheelchair table tennis, and perhaps wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis too, among the 23 Paralympic sports.

“A regular coach can easily train both Olympic and Paralympic sportspersons”, says Madhavi. That’s because the variations are minor and most of the rules are very similar. So, an easy way to get more coaches for Paralympics would be to incorporate training modules on Paralympic sports as an add-on into the curriculum of Our B.Ed (Physical Education) and M.Ed (Physical Education) degrees. Likewise, to raise awareness among students and parents on Paralympics, Special Olympics, and Abilympics, we should introduce information on it in school curriculum, across boards.

13. Corporate sponsorship

A number of organisations and private entities now support Olympic athletes, such as Go Sports, JCW foundation, Olympic Gold Quest, Reebok, and ONGC. These organizations could be encouraged to look at Paralympic athletes too. “In fact, far more than Olympic athletes, Paralympic athletes need our support”, voices S.N. Barath, founder, Lit the Light which had mobilised funds for the participation of our Judo athletes at the 2016 Commonwealth Judo Championships along with the NGO Thozhan.

14. Equipment: Make it in India

“Each imported blade leg costs at least three and half lakh rupees and wears out in six months. Likewise, an imported sports wheelchair costs anywhere between three to 15 lakh rupees”, points out Satyanarayana Shimoga. As of now, there is hardly a local manufacturer of sports equipment for the disabled in the country and



importing the same pushes up equipment costs astronomically. Encouraging local manufacturers to take up manufacture of sports wheelchairs and the like would give disabled sports a positive thrust.

There is no dearth of talent or grit in India. If we start taking Paralympic sports seriously and pursue it professionally, we can bring back a huge haul from Tokyo, and this wouldn't be limited to just medals.

Promoting Paralympic sports is crucial in more ways than one, given that a robust Paralympic movement changes the way disability is viewed by the disabled, the non-disabled and even policy makers. It is a fact evidenced world over – the promotion of Paralympic sports gives a huge fillip to accessibility and inclusion at large.

So let's head to Tokyo full steam, with all positive energy and enthusiasm... Let's hit a home run. ■

RUNAWAY HERO



Hema Vijay

This Kargil veteran is still at war. This time though, the enemy he gutsily fights is societal prejudice that distrusts the ability of disabled persons. By running marathons on his blade leg and inspiring others like him to do the same, he is convincing onlookers across the country about the ability that lies untapped in disabled persons, writes HEMA VIJAY.

Rally sports is what Major Devendra Pal Singh wanted to take up post the Kargil war. Major Singh's amazing story is no secret. For those unaware of it though, here it is. During the Kargil war, a mortar shell had exploded three feet from Major Singh, almost killing him. In fact, he was initially declared dead. Luckily a physician realized he was alive and revived him.

The grenade explosion caused Major Singh to lose a good portion of his intestine and much of his right leg. He acquired partial hearing loss in both ears, needed a ligament implant in his left knee and still has shrapnel embedded

inside his body. Besides war wounds, he bears with cervical spondylosis and has had his urinary bladder operated upon for tumour. Notwithstanding all this, he has bounced back to amazing fitness and fantastic achievements: He is India's first blade runner, a successful half-marathoner who competes on par with non-disabled runners, a double Limca record holder, the founder of The Challenging Ones, and a champion of inclusion.

The path hasn't been easy. Post the war, once his rehabilitation was completed, Major Singh had sought financial backing for getting into rally sports. He drew a blank but discovered something: That most people look at the shortcomings and not the ability of disabled persons. "Peoplesalutedmeasawarheroandsympathizedwiththedisabilities I acquired, but stopped short of backing me. They apparently did not have confidence in my ability to carry off rally sports. Now, I think it could have been from a sense of insecurity",hemusesandcontinues,"Societyfailstounderstandthataperson,disabledor non-disabled, can prove his capability only if given the necessary opportunity and support".

Action, not words

He decided then that he would convince the world about his ability and the abilities of disabled people in general, and that this convincing would be through action, not words. "We have been holding symposiums on inclusion and advocating for access and inclusion for ages. They haven't really helped much, have they?" he quizzes. So the Major turned his attention to running, as running is an intense and demanding sport but doesn't require much financial or other support.

Major Singh's first run on an artificial leg run happened in November 2009. It was a run of a few kilometres at the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon. He ran this stretch on a prosthetic leg designed for

He decided then that he would convince the world about his ability and the abilities of disabled people; through action, not words.



All in a day's work



A person, disabled or non-disabled, can prove his capability only if given the necessary opportunity and support.

walking. So this run was more of a hop and walk, and it left the stump of his amputated leg wounded and bloodied. This first run was special. Along the way, Major Singh noticed a man on a wheelchair waving to him as he ran past. He shares, “That image kept me going. I felt I was doing something meaningful”.

Soon, he started running half marathons (21km runs). After his third half marathon, the army gifted him a ‘blade leg’ aka a ‘running leg’ that he links with his prosthetic knee. His first half marathon took him 229 minutes to complete. Since then, he has run eight half-marathons and now clocks 130 minutes. While top professional marathoners clock about 65 minutes for half marathons, there are categories like ‘Sub 2.5 hours’ and ‘Sub 2 hours’ that are considered challenging by non-disabled marathoners too, which makes Major Singh’s achievements quite awesome. Nevertheless, Major Singh grins and says, “I am not into running as a profession. My goal is to raise awareness”.

Altering perceptions

TRAILBLAZER

A huge milestone in this odyssey is his recent SwachAbility rally run from Chandigarh to Delhi, that saw the Major (accompanied by other disabled and non-disabled runners) running 10km stretches through small towns and villages along the highway, culminating on December 3, the World Disability Day. The run was paired with 'cleaning-up' or 'Swachata' drives along the route to underline that not only can the disabled hold themselves up and be achievers, they can contribute to society too. Major Singh intends the SwachAbility run to evolve into a pan-Indian run. Indeed, anything is possible.

The way Major Singh sees it, a marathon or a half marathon happens on roads, under public gaze. All along the way are hundreds of 'able bodied' onlookers, many of whom find it difficult to run a kilometre at one go. And they see a one-legged man running kilometers at a stretch with a blade fitted to his amputated leg. It gets them thinking: So much ability, despite disability. And they get shaken out of the misconception that disability is limiting. And slowly inclusion happens – first in their minds, and then in their homes and organizations they work for. Besides, when a man without a leg completes a half marathon, it encourages people, able or disabled, to dream and believe that they too can do anything they will.





People see a one-legged man running 21 kilometres at a stretch. It gets them thinking: So much ability, despite disability. And they get shaken out of the misconception that disability is limiting. And slowly inclusion happens – first in their minds, and then in their homes and organisations they work for.

Major Singh voices, “95% of disabled persons are capable of doing great things, but they get restrained. People say: Why should you take up this challenge? Why stress yourself? Can you manage it...? Restriction may come from affection or stigma, but nevertheless, it prevents disabled persons from soaring in life”.

The Challenging Ones

In 2011, Major D.P. Singh started The Challenging Ones (TCO). In his words, “Amputation strikes suddenly and makes one feel helpless. One can’t prepare ahead for it and strategize, ‘Next year I am going to be amputated and this is how I will handle it’. The Challenging Ones is an initiative to give to The Challengers (people call them physically challenged) a platform for discussing coping strategies, share best practices and information on latest adaptive aids, be a peer support group, and help them get into sports and adventure, as sports builds confidence and fitness”.

With 1100 members (most of them youngsters) from across the country, this group stays connected online and offline too. Members of TCO like Gokul, an M.B.B.S. student based in Chennai now run marathons regularly. These youngsters are also carrying the baton forward. For instance, last year, Gokul introduced a boy to the Wipro Marathon at Chennai. Later, this boy's father called Gokul to tell him, "I have never seen my son so happy. Please let me know whenever a marathon is scheduled. I'll send my son to it".

Very often, Major Singh spends from his own pocket for TCO, funding transport of runners and other expenses such as T-Shirts bearing the group's logo. Major Singh shrugs away this generosity, "It has been mandated in our culture that we should spend 10 to 15% of what we earn for society. I am not even spending that much". Sometimes, external funding comes in. For instance, last year, IDBI had sponsored the travel and accommodation of an 18-member team from TCO for the IDBI Federal Insurance Cochin Marathon (2015), while JK Cements sponsored the SwachAbility run.

In 2016, another significant stride was made. The New Delhi Marathon, organized by Nagaraj Adiga was made an inclusive run – it had non-disabled, disabled and wheelchair runners on the same track. This marathon saw three wheelchair runners and one amputee runner from TCO complete the half marathon

Everything is achieved, not by changing others, but by changing oneself. That is the most powerful mantra for success that I have and want to share.



Way to go! Members of The Challenging Ones

successfully without injury, while 31 other amputee runners from TCO completed successful 5km runs.

Meanwhile, India's two leading marathons The Airtel Delhi Half Marathon and the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon are not yet inclusive. Would the Major take up this issue with the organizers? "No, I shall get a sizeable number of TCO runners to complete two more half marathons. This would convince them to make their runs inclusive too", Major Singh says. Touché. Action, not words.

One wonders why Major Singh isn't looking at Paralympics too. "Well, Paralympics is a restricted niche, while a marathon can be taken up by anyone". Incidentally, Manasi Joshi, a paralympic badminton player now ranked sixth in the world is a TCO member who started off as a marathoner. "Our members live life the way it should be lived. With exhilaration", he asserts. He adds, "Anything is achieved not by changing others, but by changing oneself. That is a most powerful mantra for success that I have and want to share".

Members of TCO also go out to meet injured people in hospitals to motivate and show them how to cope with the new reality and move forward in life. "This type of counseling is better than any *gyan*, as it comes from us who have experienced disability", he remarks.

Over the years, perception and attitudes to disability have been changing. As Major Singh points out, "Girls now move around in mini-skirts flaunting prosthetic legs. Women attend marriages in beautiful gowns and crutches. Disabled people are learning to be proud of themselves – for what they are". ■

Over the years, perception and attitudes to disability have been changing. As Major Singh points out, girls now move around in mini-skirts flaunting prosthetic legs.





Disability and sexual violence

A REALITY CHECK

Contrary to popular perception, disabled persons are at a heightened vulnerability for sexual violence. Reports from around the world say that children with disabilities are twice to ten times as likely to face sexual abuse. This difficult and complex issue calls for an urgent and comprehensive response, writes YASHASVINI RAJESHWAR.

It usually starts with something small. A touch here, an extra chocolate slipped around when no one is looking, a lingering hug, a wink that no one else saw... In the beginning, the signs are fleeting at best. The child feels good, feels included, feels loved. A ladder of trust is built and the adult climbs up on it, one rung at a time, making memories that takes years to fade, causing scars that may never disappear entirely.

In some cases, the story gets told and help is sought, and the child finds a safe space in the company of expert adults who try and wade through the experience together. In so many other children, it is relegated to the dim recesses of the mind, never seeing daylight, and forever threatening to rear its ugly head in the most unexpected of places. Such is the crime of child sexual abuse, a malaise that rests in the nooks and crannies around us, even as we struggle to identify what we are looking for.

This complicated and difficult situation gets more complicated and difficult, the deeper one engages with it. Be this so, what then happens to cases of child sexual abuse when the child in question has a disability? How does one deal with that scenario? How does one bring the case to closure and justice when, for example, the process of communication poses a difficulty? When dealing with questions of law, should the witness be accounted for by chronological age or otherwise, assuming that there is a difference? How often are children with disability given sexuality education and the boundaries of the body? The questions are endless, and like most tough scenarios, the answers are sprinkled few and far between.

Talking about sexuality and disability in the same breath is often met with raised eyebrows and confused stares. In popular imagination, people with disabilities are not read as sexual beings, individuals who possess libido and seek ways to express it. The corollary therefore is that children with disabilities are not seen as possible targets of sexual violence. Vidya Reddy, co-founder of 'Tulir – Centre for the Prevention and Healing Child Sexual Abuse', goes on to speak of common reactions to this thought. "Most people think children with disabilities cannot be abused because they are seen as either unattractive or only as objects of sympathy. People just do not seem to be able to relate to the reality. Instead, we are constantly protectionist and cocooning, and so, we do not know how to deal with the facts," she says.

What then is this reality, you may ask. The official statistics are staggering. Disability results in a heightened vulnerability for sexual violence, making people with disability doubly exposed to the dangers of abuse. Reports from around the world place people with disabilities to be twice to ten times as likely to face abuse. The implication of these numbers, if we stop and think about them, is overwhelming*. One study, conducted by Sobsey and Doe (1991) showed that 79.6% of people with disability



**Yashasvini
Rajeshwar**

***Organisations
focusing on
disability
need to deal
with the issue
of sexual
abuse of
children with
disability on
a war footing.
We can no
longer be
silent.***

*Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Disabilities, California Coalition against Sexual Assault, 2010



'Margarita with a straw': A film that deals with disability and sexuality

were sexually assaulted on more than one occasion. The reality cannot speak louder – that is, more than three in every four people.

Going one step further, these generalized statistics get even more complicated once the category of disability itself is unpacked, differentiating between the individual experiences that populate the spectrum that disability is. Children who interact frequently with caregivers are more susceptible to violence, often leading to confusion on where to draw the line between 'help' and 'abuse'. Unsurprisingly, this in turn leads to questions about appropriate care-giving and assistance. When is it not okay to physically lift a child? How do you teach a child to differentiate between safe touch and unsafe touch? How does one identify the category of offenders tagged as 'professional perpetrators,' who seek out professions that put them in proximity with children susceptible or vulnerable to abuse? For people working in the field, the stories flowing in seem endless, each one more difficult and chilling than the last.

Having laid out the context, the problem that greets us is twofold. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, we are faced with a steep cultural battle of recognizing that everyone is a sexual being. Independent of sexuality, disability, or any other personal marker, it is imperative to come to terms with desires as being natural. From this acceptance will stem recognition of vulnerability and from this recognition should stem ways of

Independent of sexuality, disability or any other personal marker, it is imperative to come to terms with desires as being natural. From this acceptance will stem the recognition that children with disabilities too can be possible targets of sexual violence, and ways of preventing and healing of the same.

preventing as well as healing. The second issue on the subject is one of engagement in general, specifically, legislation. In situations where black and white are clearly just myths, legislating cases of sexual violence against children with disability becomes a complicated, layered affair. Every category, beginning from the definitions of acceptable testimony to understandings of what is a fair trial, become porous; no longer as airtight as the law would like us to believe. It is perhaps this complexity, this layered, uncharted nature of the subject that explains the lack of engagement as well.

“Today, sexual abuse of children with disability is a subject that is dealt with only on the fringes of organisations dealing with child abuse at large.

There is definitely a need for organisations focusing on disability to engage with the subject as well. We can no longer be silent,” exhorts Vidya Reddy.

No doubt, an article a thousand words long does no justice to a subject of this intensity and importance. Throwing up questions at a speed faster than most can blink, the subject is marked by an urgency coupled with a complexity that many seem uncomfortable engaging with.

Yet, if there is one thing that this article champions, let it be this – engage, question, rage. For those who work with disability, be conscious of your responsibility; include modules on body and sexuality; spread the word. For those who interact with children

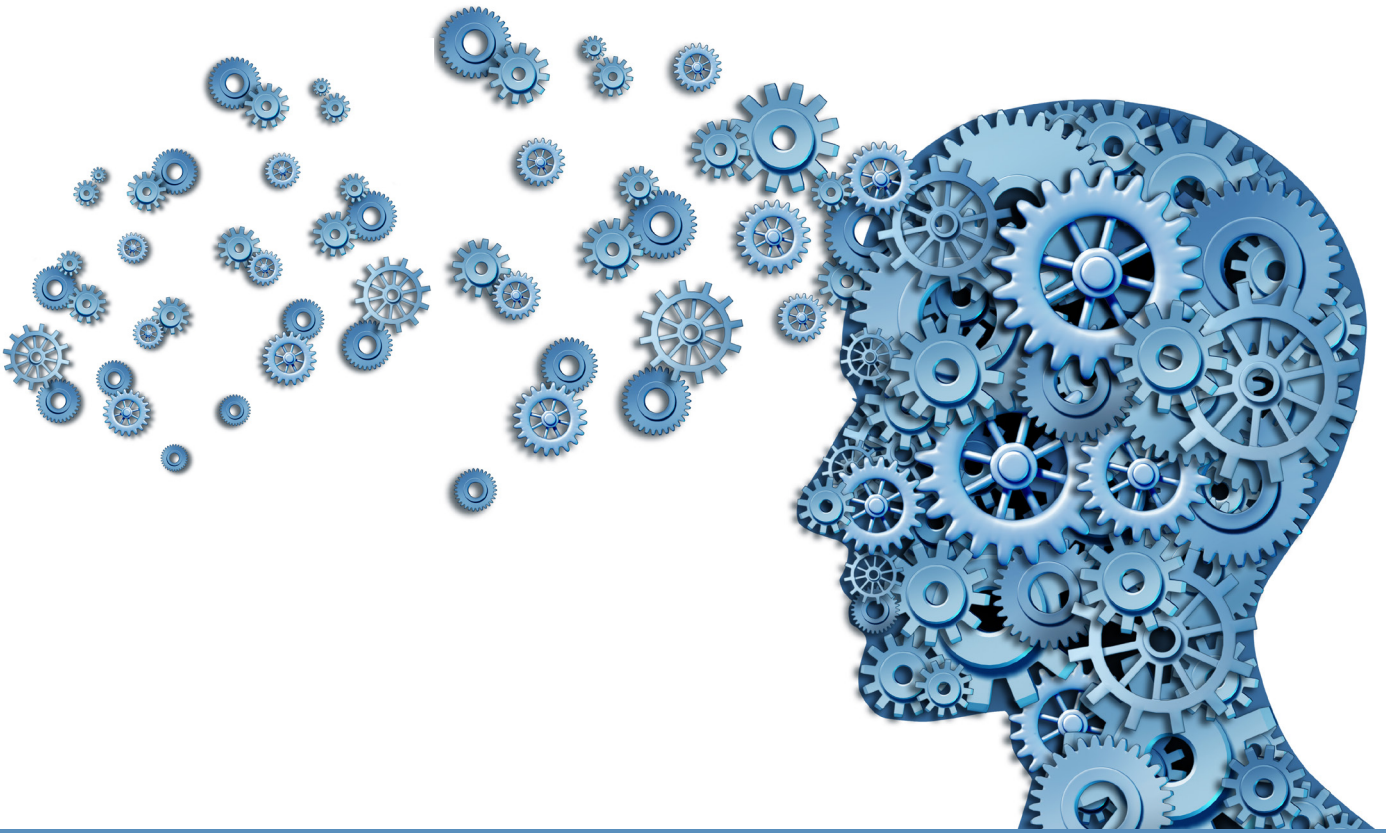
Reports from around the world place people with disabilities to be twice to ten times as likely to face abuse.

with disability, remember that they too are vulnerable, they too are sexual, and disability is

not a free pass for inappropriateness. For everyone else, keep an open mind and a conscious eye. Do not be afraid to seek help when you see the need, and call attention to what seems unjust, unfair, wrong.

The subject of disability, sexual violence and bodily integrity is fraught with difficult conversations and emotionally charged altercations. It is coloured in shades of grey, voiced more in questions than in answers, and sounds like a series of nightmares. But none of this is an excuse to shy away. Be aware, keep a keen eye, and speak out – you may be able to change a life, prevent or help heal some scars, and turn the page of someone else’s story. It is our job to try. ■





Are we Skill-Ready for the Future?

Are we weeding out from our youth, the skills to analyze and arrive at creative solutions? We seem to be dissuading them from divergent and out-of-the-box thinking, worries Dr. Ketna L. Mehta, Ph.D.



Dr. Ketna
L. Mehta

My favourite author is Edward de Bono, the author of ‘Six Thinking Hats’ and other popular, path-breaking books. His emphasis on divergent thinking and encouraging creativity in education is legendary. One of his quotes is:

*“The skills of action are every bit as important as the skills of knowledge.
That it is not recognized in education is a tragedy.”*

Some of my recent experiences reinforce how accurate he is.

Case 1: What happens when a child decides to THINK DIFFERENT? My 15-year-old nephew, Dev Mehta opted for Sanskrit as his second language for his 2016-17 S.S.C. Board exams. English being the first language he opted for and the third being Hindi (Composite) with French (Composite). His online registration was rejected. Apparently, his choice was a combination that none of the lakhs of students in Maharashtra had opted for! Now, the boy’s parents and school authorities are running all over the place to solve this issue.

Globally, students are free to mix and choose their subjects. When children get into higher education, they are asked to ‘think out-of-the-box’. After such a scary episode though, do you think any parent will allow his/her child to do so? Unless of course the regulators decide to THINK DIFFERENT!

So are we teaching our children to ‘fall in line’, ‘be similar’, and ‘dare not think differently or creatively’, because school education regulators have not thought of divergent options?

*Are we
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options?*



Case 2: At our home, we had a Tata Sky connection for everyone in the household to enjoy a plethora of channels. All was fine for 13 years and we enjoyed our entertainment and news. Then the skyline started changing with builders and developers getting permission to Shanghai our skies, building towers of 20, 24 or more storeys. Last month, an under-construction building cheek-by-jowl to ours rose higher and blanked out our TV screens.

Customer Care calls to Tata Sky resulted in the appearance of a novice one month into his job; he had no ID card, details or knowledge. Next came two technicians in uniform who quickly said we needed a new dish as well as a new camera. They installed the said objects and left, but our TV screens continued to remain blank. So yet another call was put through, and a third technician stated that the location of the dish needed to be changed. In the meanwhile, a little bit of research with neighbours threw up the fact that the two other Tata Sky connections in the building were dysfunctional too. The reason given to the said householders was that the cloth and bamboo on the newly constructed tower was disrupting the signals. When Tata Sky's Customer Care

called us next to enquire about the status of our solution, we apprised them of this diagnosis and urged them to take this problem to their most qualified experts and crack the same. They did not have one!

Companies are waxing eloquent about being Innovative, futuristic and focused on customer delight.

In our case, they failed on all counts. Surprisingly, their analytics did not even know that there were three complaints from the same building, for a similar problem, and around the same time. Well, skills and training, along with a problem-solutions FAQ module can truly make a company world class. Getting the basics right could have saved them from retreating.

Now we await our refund without any cuts (not to mention the mental agony and co-ordination that we had to undergo). Expecting a letter of apology is too farfetched. They were extremely swift in collecting their new dish and camera, carelessly leaving the cables strewn all over the terrace! Customers will think twice before buying into such big brands.

Thinking skills in management are under threat, going by the above two personal experiences.

Dr. Edward de Bono, may we borrow your Thinking Hats please? ■

Skills and training, along with a problem-solutions FAQ module can truly make a company world class.





an ecotourist's **PARADISE**

Exploring the diverse topography of this tiny Central American country, Hari Adarsh Sripathi discovers how history has shaped the geography of this beautiful land.



One can zipline from hills through ravines, over lakes and atop rainforest canopies; or ride a white water raft like a bull sitting on the bow; munch on mud-volcano cakes...



**Hari Adarsh
Sripathi**

America's neighbours have often paid the price for her commercial exceptionalism. The United Fruit Company was one such organization that once replaced a vast majority of the Central American rainforests with banana plantations, making those governments so dependent on the plantations that they came to be called Banana Republics. Gabriel Garcia Marquez lamented this sordid story in his seminal work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – “the company, brought with it modernity and then doom. It changed the pattern of rains, accelerated the cycle of harvests and moved the river from where it always has been.”

United Fruit has long ceased to exist in its original form. However the aftermath is still discernible a hundred years later. The rich in Costa Rica have vacation homes in Miami while the poor fight for basic sustenance. The lush vegetation throughout the country has at least partially come about over the plantations of yesteryears.

There is a distinct lack of major cities in Costa Rica. The capital city of San Jose is a collection of shanty towns

accentuated by highways passing over them. Most tourists use it merely for its airport. Local tour operators often shuttle away tourists into the countryside before they start forming the wrong first impressions.

Nature adventures

Costa Rica is blessed with diverse topography given its tiny size. Cloud-swept hills of Montverde are an hour's drive away from sandy beaches. The surfer's paradise of Manuel Antonio neighbours the rainforests of Arenal. In between, the undulating terrain and the persistent rainfall creates a staggering variety of cliffs, lakes, caves and volcanoes.

Costa Rica has reinvented itself as a leader in ecotourism. A tourist can experience ziplining from hills through ravines, over lakes and atop rainforest canopies. A toucan screeches to the entire forest, the human





being hurtling towards them ostensibly hanging from thin air. A macaque takes evasive action and scurries to a higher branch. The sloth chooses to ignore the happenings and resumes sleep. Meanwhile, a mud volcano, if not particularly active, inspires most restaurants to serve mud volcano cakes as the main course.

Alternately, one can ride a white water raft like a bull sitting on the bow. If you fall into the water, the locals will save you and push you right back into the next raft. If you make it past the bank, you can serve poetic justice by munching on, what else, but fruit sourced from the very forests you navigated.

Costa Rica has done leagues better than its less fortunate neighbours. Honduras and El Salvador continue to be mired in drug violence. Guatemala has steadily gotten worse. Nicaragua, while not as violent, remains the poorest country in the region. And while most Central American countries have strayed into anti-American sentiment, Costa Rica has somewhat sensibly realised that if you cannot beat them, join them. ■

Catch Them Young

Inclusion and children's books

Make a quick count. How many of the books you've read as a kid have had disabled characters? Not many, one would guess. Be it Enid Blyton or Chandamama... children's literature has largely stayed clear of featuring disabled children or typecast them as superheroes with super abilities, which is almost as bad. Well, what we need are books that show disabled children as just children – having fun, fights, dreams, fears, friends, enemies and adventures, just like any non-disabled child. This would ensure perception and inclusion of the disabled as 'one of us' early on in life.

'Children First' hosted by Vidya Sagar on 5 November at Chennai raised the flag on the lacuna of such books through a panel discussion with authors Shobha Viswanath, Sujatha Padmanabhan, Zai Whitaker and Zainab Sulaiman, all of whom have written books featuring children with disabilities. The session also saw the participation of the director of Chetana Charitable Trust, Dr. Namita Jacob, who converts early reading books into multi-sensory books to make them accessible for children with disability, and Swaha Sahoo of Tata Trusts. The discussion was moderated by Anushka Ravishankar who has written over thirty acclaimed books for children and is the co-founder of Duckbill Books that publishes contemporary and thought provoking books for Indian children. Present among the audience were many authors and experts working in the field of disability and inclusion.

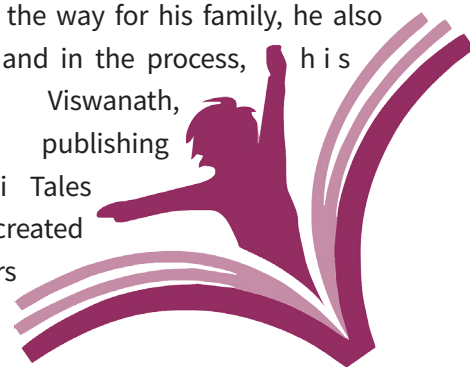
The discussion began by glossing over children's books that show disabled children in a normal light and assay what made them resonate with young readers. For instance, Zai Whitaker's latest

book Kanna Panna is about a young boy with a disability. One day, while at a cave temple with relatives, lights go off and the place is plunged into darkness. Everyone is scared, except, of course, Kanna. As he finds the way for his family, he also finds his strength, and in the process, his voice. Shobha Viswanath, co-founder and publishing director of Karadi Tales Company, who created Dreaming Fingers (illustrated books for the visually disabled) and Charkha (inspiring

audio biographies for young adults) authored Little Vinayaka, a touching allegorical tale about disability, featuring an elephant with a trunk that is too long. Meanwhile, Zainab Sulaiman's book Simply Nanju is a mystery set in an inclusive school for children with special needs and aimed at middle grade readers, while Sujatha Padmanabhan, who won the Good Books Award for the best children's book at the Hindu Literary festival last year, is the author of Chuskit that features a young girl on a wheelchair who gets her friends to build a bridge across a river so that she can go to school.

All these books inculcate inclusion of the disabled as 'one of us' without preaching. The session concluded that we need many more books that have children with disabilities treated like any other child – but with a disability. This would help foster a healthy acceptance of disability and lead to genuine friendships and acceptance of differences. ■

– **Success & ABILITY Bureau**





Left to right: Toufic Allouche, Classification Instructor, Asia-Oceania zone, IWBF; Anisa Ibrahim, Vice President, West Asia region, IWBF; Madhavi Latha, President, WBFI; Ulf Mehrens, President, IWBF; Saad Alazmaa, President, Asia-Oceania zone, IWBF; Kalyani Rajaraman, Secretary General, WBFI; and Maureen Orchard, Secretary General, IWBF.

ON A

FAST TRACK

In the last couple of years, the country has seen the rise of wheelchair basketball, an exciting sport played in 150 countries across the globe. G. Shrikanth tracks this amazing journey.

It was curiosity that drew Tasneem Fatima to wheelchair basketball. Tasneem had come across this sport at the Indian Spinal Injury Centre (ISIC) at New Delhi, a hospital that encourages patients with spinal injuries and wheelchair users to take up sports for physical and emotional recovery. ISIC's men's team had been practicing the sport for the last two years.

Watching one of their practice sessions, Tasneem was eager to learn how someone in a wheelchair could play

a rigorous sport like basketball. She was also struck by the gritty spirit of the men playing the sport. Tasneem soon became one of the first women players to join the practice sessions. Eventually, she became one of the 18 women participants at the 2nd National Wheelchair Basketball Championship at New Delhi, held between the 2nd and 6th of December, 2015.

Ever since its inception in 2013, the growth of wheelchair basketball in India has been rather unconventional. Spearheaded by two women, Chennai-based Madhavi Latha, a National Paralympic Swimming Champion and Kalyani Rajaraman, a lady who has immense experience in working with NGOs, India's wheelchair basketball movement has been growing through the support of NGOs and corporate agencies. Their efforts have led to the formation of a national body – the Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBFI).

Then of course, there was the challenge of finding individuals interested in the sport. This was tackled by coordinating with organisations working with people with disabilities, such as ISIC and Amar Jyoti at New Delhi that render rehabilitative services to children with disabilities and the Paraplegic Rehabilitation Centre at Pune, a centre for the aftercare and rehabilitation of injured defence personnel.

Towards the end of 2014, WBFI took its first major step in being recognised as the national body for the sport by bringing coaches from abroad to conduct workshops at these centres. This culminated in a nine-day clinic at Jawaharlal Nehru



G. Shrikkanth





indoor stadium in Chennai with 140 participants. In fact, December 2014 marked the symbolic birth of the sport in our country, with the First National Wheelchair Basketball Championship being held at the same venue. This championship saw the participation of five teams from five states – Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

With meagre fund reserves, it was a challenge for WBFI to make the event a success. The athletes themselves had to arrange for their transportation, bear its costs and also endure the hardship of travelling long hours to reach the venue. They were accommodated in simple dormitories and sad as it was, lacked access to barrier-free toilets.

The perseverance of the athletes and their enthusiasm for the sport overshadowed these concerns. Their collective efforts paid off and the event was staged successfully prompting the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) to recognise WBFI as a member.

A year later, I was in close association with the WBFI as photographer for the Second National Wheelchair Basketball Championship, held at New Delhi between the 2nd and 6th of December, 2015. In this event, the number of teams had almost doubled with nine teams from nine different states and 18 women players, including Tasneem

International Wheelchair Basketball Federation was excited by the huge untapped potential of India, and were keen to invest in its talent. Truly, WBF has come a long way in one year.

Fatima. The event also enjoyed the support of not-for-profit organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, Choice International (UK), besides volunteers from corporate agencies. The athletes were provided quality accommodation and disabled-friendly buses were arranged for by the Delhi Metro. Representatives from the IWBF, including IWBF's President Ulf Mehrens, Secretary General Maureen Orchard and three other colleagues graced and guided the tournament. They were excited by the huge untapped potential of India and were keen to invest in its talent. Truly, WBF has come a long way in one year.

For me, however, the tournament's greatest success lay in the goodwill and kindness expressed within the community and how all people came together and functioned as one to overcome shortcomings.

On the field, the competition was fierce though the strategies were similar, as most teams were familiar with each other, having undergone workshops together. Off the field, this facilitated amicability between the athletes – they were willing to share their sports wheelchairs and other equipment. Every one of those present was willing to pitch in and take on any task. In fact, the Secretary General of IWBF and her colleagues doubled up as coaches for the girl's teams. Maureen Orchard lent her time



to guide the referees and draft a schedule for the women's tournament. Meanwhile, Madhavi Latha, the president of WBF, led from the front by taking to a sports wheelchair and being part of a women's team thereby setting the tone for the other women who were participating in this competitive sport for the first time ever.

Tasneem ended up disappointed, as her team lost at the finals. Nevertheless, she realised that the bigger picture was in the sport giving her and others like her the courage to look beyond their disability. Tasneem now seeks to inspire more women to participate in the sport and thereby break existing societal perceptions that exclude the disabled from sports.

With WBF's vision and target of seeing a team from India at the Wheelchair Basketball Championship in the 2020 Paralympics at Tokyo, progress is imminent. And the growth of this sport in our country will not only ensure governmental measures towards a more inclusive society, it would also inspire and sensitise more people to the needs of the disabled, inspire more and more disabled persons to believe in his/her abilities and open up the minds of innumerable parents to their children's capabilities. ■



Evolving Angel

Disability from an experiential perspective is the central theme across the stories in 'Evolving Angel', finds
VENKATESWARAN VINOD



Venkateswaran
Vinod

Author: **V.S. Anjana** | Illustrations by: **Tejaswi K.** | Publishers: **CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform** | Price: **\$9.13**

Here is a collection of nine short, crisp and wonderfully written stories by V.S. Anjana, with impactful illustrations by Tejaswi K. aka Teja. Disability from an experiential perspective is the central theme across these stories and the book presents some simple solutions/answers and highlights the importance of a conducive environment for early identification and remedial strategies.

The book is an easy read. Really strong emotions bubble up in each of the stories. Each story has a context and a setting which gets well established, after which there is a situation or an incident. Many of the stories in 'Evolving Angel' are inspired by personal incidents from the author's life. In each of the stories, the lead character or people close to the character figure out the situation and then take action, leading to a happy ending. For instance, the story, "Love of Nature" is about a dyslexic kid (whose dyslexia is as yet undiagnosed). She tries hard to fit in with her peers. Her interest and passion towards nature is accidentally discovered during a school excursion, after which she becomes sociable and starts interacting with everyone around her. Her parents then enroll her in a

Really strong emotions bubble up in each of the stories... many of the stories in 'Evolving Angel' are inspired by real life incidents.

special needs school and soon, she even starts writing about dyslexia using technology such as speech-to-text application.

While disability is the central theme, other emotions and messages have been carefully interspersed in the storyline leaving the reader moved. The book gives a clear message about how individual attention is crucial for any child's development. Read this in the story 'Rainbow' where an art teacher identifies colour blindness, and 'Girl in the forest' featuring Rajesh the wood cutter. Anjana also does well to highlight the special talent amongst disabled children and how vital it is for people around them (teachers, parents, friends and family) playing a constructive role.

The story titles generate curiosity. They have been very well thought out and relate to the script in a unique way. The illustrations in the book capture the essence of the stories in a visually appealing form. Starting with the angel on the book jacket with a halo over her head, each of the nine drawings are colourful and reveal attention to detail. My personal favourites happen to be 'Puzzle' and 'Rainbow' for their vibrant colours and intricate design.

This review will be incomplete without elaborating on Anjana and Tejaswi. Anjana, who has a B.A. in English Communicative Skills, is passionate about music and authoring books for children. She wrote this book by dictating to a machine using text-to-type software. Her passion for learning is not limited by cerebral palsy. She is a testimony to the statement that "Cerebral Palsy is an intelligent mind caught in a disobedient body".

As for Tejaswi, he is a budding artist, comic creator and animator. He has completed his B.Sc. in Multimedia and loves to dabble in 3D animation and matte painting. He has showcased his works in the World Autism Day celebrations in New Delhi this year.

Reviewing this book has been an eye-opener for me and an enriching experience. Reading this book, one is reinforced by the sense that if society encouraged persons with disabilities to showcase their talents, it would enrich and empower all of us. ■



V.S. Anjana and Tejaswi. K

Optimism, The *Radiance* of *Life*



Bhaskar
Patnaik

Optimism manifests health, happiness and success, while pessimism diminishes us and sets us back in the journey of life. So nurture optimism, writes BHASKAR PATNAIK, while giving us a blueprint for how we could actually do this.

It is said that the world lives on optimism. Optimists are the embodiments of hopefulness, cheerfulness, brightness and buoyancy in the journey of life.

Optimism is not over-confidence. An optimist is a person with strong will. He is synonymous with inspiration, love, bliss, satisfaction, happiness, joy, and success. Optimists always hope for the best in life's oscillations. They wouldn't lose their nerves after a hundred failures. On the other hand, a pessimist is one who sees a crisis in every opportunity and has a constant threat perception. He is a worrywart, glum, unenthusiastic, cynical, sarcastic, scornful, doubtful, distrustful, and suspicious.

Why be an optimist?

The situations, resources and the nature and degree of problems could be the same. But optimists and pessimists perceive the same scenario differently. So their decision making differs diametrically. Fear creates danger; audacity creates paths towards opportunity.

Optimism is not over-confidence. An optimist is a person with strong will. He is synonymous with inspiration, love, bliss, satisfaction, happiness, joy, and success.



Pessimism kills our resolve and impoverishes the soul. Success for a pessimist may be fluke, and failure could further drive him into misery. For an optimist, failure is the stepping-stone for success.

An optimist may not find success every time. But, optimism surely gives him the strength to cope with failures positively, face the stresses of competition in a positive way, and plan a successful future.

Positive persons exhibit an optimism which is based on reality. To understand better, let us imagine a situation where mariners voyaging in the high seas are confronted with a major mechanical failure in the ship and efforts to revive the ship go in vain. In this situation, the pessimist feels doomed and disconcerted. According to him, the ship may sink. A whale may tilt the ship. A cyclone may lash out... He may not be wrong in this assessment, but such an attitude only exacerbates the situation; nor



When we operate from the premise of humaneness, our predicaments can be turned into achievements. As a result, our life will have a meaning and purpose.

would it help him to come out of the tough situation.

On the other hand, an optimist would continue with efforts to get the ship repaired. He goes on comforting the crew, explicates various possibilities for salvage operations and use of rescue boats; he alerts swimmers in the ship; he requests passengers not to worry and to wait for the rescue ship. This should be the spirit while dealing with a crisis.

Cultivating optimism

Optimism can be nurtured. One can re-script one's thoughts by restructuring one's attitudes, imaginations, perceptions, values, emotions, feelings, beliefs, expectations, assumptions, etc. Some of our thoughts that require re-scripting are: Fear of self-expression, frequent boredom, lack of clarity on one's goal in life, an extreme sense of urgency, lack of single mindedness of purpose, insecurity, diffidence due to uncertainty, poor interpersonal relationships, dissatisfaction with oneself, addiction to drugs, dislike towards job, etc.

Optimism, Health & Healing

The Mind-Body Connect

A state of joyfulness ensures the well-being of our body. Our body's healing mechanism too is guided by our thoughts. Let us mobilize our inner healing power to have good health and cure diseases

At the pre-verbal stage, our thoughts are chemical molecules in motion. A thought is a chemical event and neuropeptides are small informational chemical molecules that deliver messages within the body. Our thoughts influence every cell in our body. Positive thoughts give rise to neuropeptides that prolong our lives; negative thoughts can cut short our lives by causing illnesses.

When we fail to have a meaningful relationship with ourselves, we experience self-hatred, emptiness, worthlessness and personal disintegration. These feelings, and negative emotions like sadness, disgust, anger, fear, etc, trigger an outpouring of stress hormones like adrenalin and other bio-chemicals which cause damage to the body over time.

Negative thoughts also block production of melatonin hormone that runs the body's biological clock. On the other hand, intellectual stimulation, active social life, good self esteem, a clear purpose in life, skills of coping with stress, a happy mental state, etc, step up the production of this vital hormone.

We can put up with hardships if our brain produces enough serotonin, the hormone responsible for dynamism, fearlessness, initiative and character. To produce enough serotonin we should take on challenges in life. The moment we feel a sense of control, fulfillment, satisfaction, or achievement, this chemical is secreted and it gives power to the mind to control the body.

Our autonomous nervous system, systems of digestion, excretion, immunity, etc, are all interrupted by negative emotions. Increasing

positivity will slow down progress of systemic diseases. Heart patients who have undergone surgery survive better if they entertain positive thoughts, compared to those who don't. Likewise, old people with positive attitudes are found to be healthier than the pessimists. People who feel devoid of hope or feel a sense of despair die earlier than those who are cheerful and optimistic. A sense of resignation, cynicism and mistrust increases risk of heart attack.

Hostility and anger are also responsible for premature deaths. The coronary arteries accumulate fat deposits when hostility is experienced frequently, and prevent adequate blood supply to the heart under stressful conditions.

The differences in social support and lifestyle between optimists and pessimists too account for their respective states of health. Religious faith helps healing too. Those who feel the intimate presence of a Higher Power recover from illnesses faster than others.

The power of auto-suggestion can either heal sickness or accelerate death as per the desire of the person. If we feel we are victimized by our circumstances, we will allow harmful chemical molecules to take charge of our physiology. Research is currently being done on 'Notebook Effect', which causes people to fall ill because they think they will become ill.

Fear is the common denominator of negative feelings like hatred, anger, guilt, worry, hurt, etc. Our neurons trigger threat perceptions following negative interpretation of events, situations, environment and people. Psychological immunisation requires vaccination against negativity. We have to prepare our own vaccines against negativity in the shape of neural re-scripts (of feelings and perceptions) and inoculate ourselves. Only then can we be healthy and happy.



Re-scripting helps us see things afresh. The world will then appear different. A re-scripted person will also recognize and accept opportunities and respond to the change positively, quickly, and creatively.

Re-scripting Habits: Ideas and perceptions take deep root in our psyche and become habits. We unconsciously replay many old scripts under stressful conditions. Habits shape our behaviour, though we are not conscious of it. Negative emotions set a negative habit pattern. It is said that we generate around 60,000 thoughts every day. About 80% of these thoughts are of a repetitive nature. We can change our thoughts by our will. We can change our focus and redirect our thoughts. We should constantly review our behaviour and rectify our bad habits.

Positive intelligence: Positivism and optimism go side by side. Positive intelligence helps us develop honesty, feedback, connection, resilience, awareness, depth, etc. These traits direct our emotional energy to firm up our self worth, self image, self esteem, and self confidence. If our self-esteem and self confidence is high, social bondage will be firm. A positive emotional intelligence generates energy to build support and trust in relationships. A negative intelligence vitiates the social ethos and cherishes misery. We have to use our emotional intelligence to transcend negative neural scripts.

Self confidence will help us change the quality of our thoughts. We should pay attention to the messages of intuitive signals and start confidence building measures. Otherwise, we run the risk of losing our peace of mind.

Self worth is the ability to accept oneself without the need for approval from others. No one except us can measure our worth correctly.

*Whenever we
feel lost, we
should search
within us.
Our insight
will provide
creative
solutions.
We have
to discover
our inner
strength.*

Self actualization: When the meaning of life is missing, we adopt wrong strategies under the influence of our ego and guilt. When our ego misguides us, we experience inner pain and tension. If the meaning of life is missing, we mournfully feel that life is empty. Self knowledge is self discovery, which is essential for transformation.

Our perception is responsible for our deeds, experience, and the meaning of life. When we operate from the premise of humaneness, our predicaments can be turned into achievements. As a result, our life will have a meaning and purpose.

All human interactions are opportunities either to learn or to teach. If we understand ourselves we will discover that we have more potential than we had imagined. Whenever we feel lost, we should search within us. Our insight will provide creative solutions. We have to discover our inner strength.

Loving relationships act as psychotherapy and mobilises our resources to change negative into positive scripts. Love is that state of mind with which we can not only revel in hope, but also help chase away despair in others. Love turns the emotional vacuum created by fear into achievement and accomplishment.

Faith is more powerful than logic and reason. Anxiety makes us thoroughly incompetent. Instead of creating problems for ourselves by breaking down or giving space to negative thoughts, we should accept the realities and consciously strive for solutions by interpreting the experience on an optimistic note. Life may have problems, but we can live with exuberance and quality.

We cannot change what has already happened. However, we can ensure a better tomorrow with the help of our will, intelligence, discretion, experience, courage and patience. We can elevate our self worth and utilize our full potential.

The journey of life

We are made to sail (live) in oceans (temporal world). We cannot be afraid of the eternal profundity or the vastness of the mighty oceans and the roaring waves, because they are like that, by nature. NEVER ask yourself “Why are troubles always after me?” This is because they are your cohorts. Don’t fear “I have tiny hands, petite legs and miniature body. How can I swim in the gigantic ocean of odds?” There is the most powerful mind with you. It is only you who can whirl it. We will swim our life’s journey with determination till we reach the shore. We are soldiers in the battlefield called life. Let us move forward, with optimism as the light of our lives. ■

Bhaskar Patnaik is Manager, Andhra Bank Staff College, Visakhapatnam. He is the first ever blind person to complete both parts of C.A.I.I.B. conducted by the Indian Institute of Banking and Finance. Someone who has won multiple awards, he is an avid writer and proficient in four languages.

Optimism can be nurtured. One can re-script one's thoughts by restructuring one's attitudes, imaginations, perceptions, values, emotions, feelings, beliefs, expectations and assumptions.



{A fresh perspective}



**Dr. Lucas
Dengel**

Dr. Dengel studied medicine at the University of Mainz, Germany. He is the founder of AuroAnnam that promotes organic farming and ecological sanitation and Eco-Pro that specializes in Effective Microorganisms (EM) technology.

It is irrational, non-scientific and unwise to regard annihilation of all microbes on and in the body as a step towards greater health, says Auroville-based DR. LUCAS DENGEL, an expert on public hygiene and ecological sanitation and a consultant for UNICEF.

When we think of hygiene, we think of getting rid of microbes. The absence of “germs” is regarded as hygienic, and hence as healthy. Biologically, this is nonsense. Yet, the misconception is fostered and reinforced by practically every advertisement for soaps, shampoos, mouthwashes, cleaning agents, pest-killing agents, etc.

There is a historical trail to this errant belief and the captive market that it has spawned. Microbiology in the 19th century developed primarily as medical microbiology. Besides yeast used for the fermentative production of beer and wine, the early micro organisms discovered were pathogens that cause diseases like anthrax, tuberculosis, plague, typhoid fever, cholera, etc.

Up to the 1870s, death from surgery was more common than death from the disease the surgery was to treat. The need for disinfection of the skin prior to surgically opening up the body was not understood, and surgical patients commonly suffered from infections and often succumbed to sepsis. It was only after Joseph Lister convinced the medical community to administer phenol applications that surgery became safe. The discovery of biocides and the introduction of surgical hygiene into medicine, and in particular into the operation theatre, was a breakthrough for medicine and a boon for mankind; it has saved millions of lives.

However, it is irrational, non-scientific, and unwise to regard annihilation of all microbes on and in the body as a step towards greater health. The concept and practice that holds true for the limited time and body surface of wound care and surgery must not be transferred to our everyday life, to routine measures of body hygiene and home cleanliness, and even less to environmental management in general. Indeed, we pollute our rivers and water bodies not only with sewage and industrial effluents; we add insult to injury by washing life-killing, microbe-killing “hygiene agents” into the waters. Consequently, micro organisms that break down waste and pollutants and thus clean up and purify water are having a hard time.

Microbes protect our skin, our orifices, our digestion; they are responsible for the development of our immune system, for the production of vitamins, and for the uptake of nutrients and calories from food.

Good microbes, bad microbes

Microbes are present everywhere on this planet, down to the depths of several kilometres within the earth, in rocks, volcanoes, and thermal vents at the bottom of the sea. Microbes or unicellular organisms were the first forms of life, appearing some 3.8 billion years ago, preparing the ground for development of higher organisms. They shaped the earth's atmosphere, making it fit for higher life forms. Homo sapiens i.e., human beings evolved in the presence of and with the help of microbes.

Microbes protect our skin, our orifices, our digestion; they are responsible for the development of our immune system, for the production of vitamins, and for the uptake of nutrients and calories from food. While our bodies may contain one or a few trillions cells, it has been estimated that there are hundreds of trillions of microbes in our intestines alone. By the count of cells, we may be as much, or even more, microbial than human!

Modern biology knows the number of pathogens is negligible in comparison to the number of identified and yet-unknown microbial species. Indeed, soil organisms have been found that seem to be responsible for the development of a neurotransmitter in the human brain. The ongoing worldwide research project on the 'Human Microbiome' is expected to contribute new insights within the next few years.

Humans have to live along with and amongst microbes and efforts to eliminate them are based on misconceptions of biology and health. Besides the obvious need for surgical hygiene in the operation theatre, there is an equally essential need for a concept of ecological hygiene; a need for the public to realise its misconceptions of hygiene of body and environment; to avoid or drastically minimise the use of biocides, disinfectants, and cleaning agents; and lastly, there is an increasing need, especially for urbanites, to come into real contact with the natural environment, with soil and with animals, in order to train our bodies and immune systems to healthy responses.

This is not to discourage or belittle education in hand-washing, but rather an appeal to teach it with a focus on the essentials. Mindless soap rituals will not serve the purpose of controlling pathogen spread or create food hygiene.

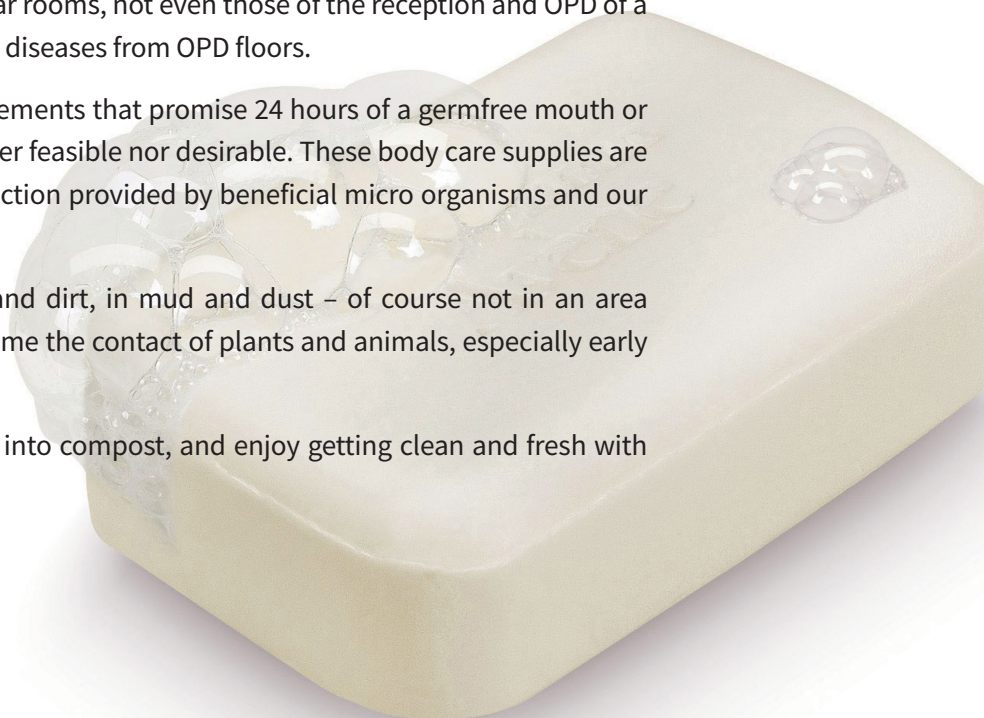
Unfortunately, authorities and practitioners of public hygiene seem to be unaware of the burden that large scale applications of bleaching powder poses on the natural environment; they are equally ignorant of uses of beneficial microorganisms to counteract the spread of pathogens and their vectors. While more eco-friendly products are introduced in the consumer market, the below suggested measures too need to be in place.

The concept and practice that holds good for wound care and surgery must not be transferred to everyday routine measures of body hygiene, home and environmental cleanliness.

When we discharge microbe-killing “hygiene agents” like biocides, disinfectants, and cleaning agents into our rivers, lakes and seas, we attack and deactivate micro organisms that break down waste and pollutants.

Dos & Don'ts

- Wash your hands thoroughly after toilet use; wash your hands prior to taking food.
- Protect stored drinking water and food from flies and dust with the help of lids and covers.
- Do not dip cups into drinking water.
- If your house has been flooded with stagnant waste water, disinfect those few surfaces that are to be in touch with food, once. Do not try to “disinfect” the entire house or environment.
- Use eco-friendly room-cleaning agents and introduce beneficial microorganisms into the environment.
- There is no need to disinfect toilets as they do not have contact with food. We do not catch faecal-borne diseases from toilets.
- As the soles of our feet and our shoes carry millions of microbes, there is no need to disinfect floors of regular rooms, not even those of the reception and OPD of a hospital – we do not catch diseases from OPD floors.
- Do not believe in advertisements that promise 24 hours of a germfree mouth or skin; these goals are neither feasible nor desirable. These body care supplies are likely to weaken the protection provided by beneficial micro organisms and our immune system.
- Let children play in soil and dirt, in mud and dust – of course not in an area of open defecation. Welcome the contact of plants and animals, especially early in childhood.
- Enjoy digging your hands into compost, and enjoy getting clean and fresh with water and soap. ■





**Oh, for missing
crucial information!**



Last year, while I was in India, I missed a train which was not exactly my train. You may wonder how that's possible. Well, it happened, because I could not hear train names and numbers being announced. But this happens all the time in airports and railways stations, in India and in the US.

I was in Coimbatore. On the last day of my trip, I was at a reception hosted by the local Rotary Club. I was to leave by a train to Trivandrum that night. Everyone at the reception kept reminding and advising me to “not to miss the train”, as if missing trains was a habit with me. I told them I had never missed a train or a plane. I have missed buses in my time, but buses are notorious for not following schedules.

Well, I should not have bragged, as such bragging became the proverbial “famous last word”.

At the reception, there was an open bar to which Amaresh, a colleague, made a beeline. He is a generous fellow and began to serve us all by bringing four glasses of vodka or whiskey at one go. I had a couple and wanted to continue hanging out, but soon got tired of everyone reminding me not to miss the train. There was a lot of time still left, as my train was to leave at 11 p.m. but I decided to leave early.

Arriving at the station over an hour before schedule, we walked slowly and located the designated platform. Just as we were approaching it we saw a train move slowly.

At first, I thought that it was my train, perhaps arriving early. Then, I noticed that the train was catching speed. It was not arriving; it was leaving! I looked at the board showing the train's destination. Sure enough, it was Trivandrum. My friend Sibaji confirmed it. My heart sank. I had missed the train!



Dr. Madan
Vasishta



In desperation, we waved to the passengers and the conductor to pull the emergency chain. No one paid attention and we saw the tail end of the train disappear into darkness. Like defeated soldiers, we walked back slowly and found that in our zeal to catch the train, we had run quite a distance. A 75-year-old man running after a train must have been a sight from the movies! We looked around and saw people looking at us in amusement. Could it be the sight of three deaf people signing to each other? Or the efforts to outrun an express train? Or both!

A 75-year-old man running after a train must have been a sight from the movies!

I checked my iPhone for the next train. But there were no more scheduled for the day. My friend Sibaji checked out buses heading to Trivandrum and found that the next and last bus was to leave in 15 minutes.

There was no alternative but to go back to the guesthouse!

I slept for an hour and then decided to look for the first available train the next day and book a seat. I was in for a shock. When I checked out the train schedules, I found that the train we had missed was not the one I was booked on. That had been just another train that had run late that night. We had actually seen a different train leaving! Stupid. Too late now, to do anything.

As I look back, I reflect that if there had been signage giving information on which train was leaving, we could have avoided this situation. Well, making all public transport accessible to deaf people has a long way to go.

It sounds funny as I write it, but it was certainly not funny that night. ■

it's a roller coaster ride!



Meera
Balachander

The pains and pleasures of parenting... It's the craziest roller coaster ride in life! You want it all inside out when you are downside up.



Infuriating brat or wide eyed angel? That cooing bundle of joy transforms unsuspecting parents into a bundle of nerves, declares MEERA BALACHANDER in this tongue and cheek article.

You want it, you don't want it.

It is either too early and you plan assiduously, or it is too late and you pray intensely.

And when it happens... One moment it is the most gratifying gift on planet earth, the next moment, you feel weighed down by the sheer relentlessness of the demands it makes on you.

You start out as a novice and discover that you are the one for life. It looks like you have bagged the most unique offer in the world, and then you are repeatedly stung by the competitive bug: has she got a better deal than me?

The pains and pleasures of parenting... it's the craziest roller coaster ride in life! You want it all inside out when you are downside up.

Nothing seems more precious than that elusive silence and a good night's sleep (forget daytime naps!) after you have so lovingly brought home that bundle of



joy. You like the cute smile the baby bestows on you but you count the hours to his next bout of (hopefully sound) sleep. She is all you and yours – the doll! But you would like someone (preferably mummy) to raise her for you. Her first words are divine but you want someone else to tutor her to preschool ASAP. You have stifled yawns gleaning over articles about parental pressure and what not, but now that Tinu is two, you cannot afford to let society sideline her. She must do a dance number in the New Year program. Or wield the fairy's wand in the fancy dress competition. Phew! Four hours spent sticking the damn silver foil on the stick, while Tinu in diapers is busy applying toothpaste all over herself, blissfully unaware of her filial duties! Drop her at the summer camp, it will build her character. "No way, she can barely take care of herself. I am her father and I do not want all this new fangled nonsense in my home. Safety first, you hear?"

Hear? Nothing is heard, especially not the voice of the spouse or that of reason.

And thus the endless loops of the roller coaster accelerate expectations, competition, comparisons, anxieties, hopes and so on, till it is time to step down the roller coaster, arthritic knees et al. Hopefully the fairy of yesteryear, fortified by her summer camp experiences and her mother's push and father's pull, is in society's limelight, with her degree and her worldly wisdom and a plum place(ment) where it matters. The pay packet speaks it all. For all.

And then, one day, you may be basking in the overseas sun, adapting to new values of new generations. You may be wiping off a tear under your thick glasses, looking at that dog-eared photo of the chubby fairy for the hundredth time – in the solitude of the retirement home.

Call it a good roll of the dice. Call it sound investment. Call it a great learning experience that shaped YOUR character like life was one unending summer camp! Or maybe, it was an all-guzzling ordeal that drove you bankrupt emotionally, financially... Professional hazards, you see, of defining parenting!

One day, you may be wiping off a tear under your thick glasses, looking at that dog-eared photo of the chubby fairy for the hundredth time – in the solitude of the retirement home.

As Kahlil Gibran eloquently puts it....

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable. ■*



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be
think
innovate

GRUNDFOS 



RISE TO THE GOLD STANDARD

100% ASSAM BLEND

R.NO. 66062/96

