The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) is a non-profit, voluntary organisation, working as an interface between the Government, Industry, International Agencies, and the Voluntary Sector, towards empowerment of persons with disabilities. NCPEDP works on five core principles, also called the five pillars of the organization, namely: 1) Education; 2) Employment; 3) Accessibility; 4) Legislation/Policy; and 5) Awareness/Communication. NCPEDP stresses the need to move away from traditionally held views of charity and welfare to those of productivity and empowerment of disabled people.
20 STORIES OF CHANGE
For everyday heroes
who fight their battles with dignity and determination
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Concept Note for Cover Design 85
Earlier this year, we felt it was time to commemorate twenty years of the implementation of a landmark act. With the aim of improving the lives of people with disabilities, the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, now stands as a fundamental chapter, laying the ground for future greater and more inclusive imperatives for its beneficiaries. We decided to search for twenty compelling stories—to mark each year of the passage of the act—which would uncover how legal provisions can, and do, impact the lives of people. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made this volume possible. Generous support from Mindtree Foundation ensured that the book could go into print. Timely and valuable input from colleagues at NCPEDP, and a dedicated team of writers and illustrators, made the process smoother. Kanchan Pamnani and Javed Abidi have provided us with valuable insight about their struggles in handling the act and getting its provisions implemented.

The promise and power of a book like this was first indicated to us by Dorodi Sharma, and we hope we have done her idea of chronicling 20 stories for 20 years of the disability law due justice.

But this book would not have materialized without several phone calls, e-mails, and long meetings with the people whose lives we have tried to encapsulate over its pages. We thank them all for the gracious contribution of their time, and their readiness to share often intimate, and sometimes uncomfortable, details of their lives. Some of the stories did not enter the book. We were not anticipating the kind of response we got, and we were caught unaware by the warmth and
abundance of support this initiative would attract. We went through the individual heartbreak of deciding which ones to leave out, but we thank Javed Ahmad Tak, Yogesh Chaurasia, Pooja Agarwal, Pynhoi Tang, Cober Ymbon, Diwakar Bhatt, Pratik Jindal, M. Srinivasulu, Mahesh Chandrasekar, Nishtha Thaker Anand, Sachin Singh, and Harish Kumar for taking out the time to share their experiences with us. Our National Disability Network partners helped us extensively in getting stories from the far reaches of the country, and we were able to access 20 states.

Our team of writers worked overtime to ensure we could deliver the stories punctually, and we thank Shazia Nigar, Mukta Patil, Reetika Subramanian, Suman Bhagchandani, Rajashree Gandhi, Uday Bhanu Saini, Mahima Taneja, and Kritika Chettri for being available all hours of the day. Biboswan Bose, Mahtab Irani, and Achintya Malviya spent their energies on ensuring the book also looks like what it tries to say, and while only one of their designs could be showcased, their cover illustrations are powerful and meaningful depictions of the powerful and meaningful stories within the book.

The Editorial Team
National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)
A Note from Mindtree

With India surging ahead on the world stage, it is only fair that all its people benefit from its progress. People with disabilities constitute 5-6% of India's population and we need to do everything in our power to build an inclusive society that supports them and treats them with the respect they deserve.

At Mindtree, we hold ourselves accountable to the community that we live in. We believe in giving back and making a difference. It is an essential part of the people-centric culture that we embrace across the organization. With a systematic approach, we aim to create a better world for people with disabilities by empowering them to reach their true potential. The Mindtree Foundation has devised several exclusive initiatives to help people with disabilities with education, medical aid and providing vocational training. As a technology company, we also develop Assistive Technologies (AT) to help people with disabilities in their activities of daily living (ADL). We work with Mindtree Minds, academia, NGOs, and AT product companies to build devices and software applications that are easily available and affordable for people with disabilities.

Mindtree is an equal opportunities employer. We have over 44 people with disabilities working and contributing to Mindtree's success. To create awareness, we have published our policy on benefits for people with disabilities in our internal website which is accessible to all Mindtree Minds. The company provides various benefits to Mindtree Minds with disabilities in line with Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. In addition to accessibility audits in all our premises for
accessibility features such as ramps, guiding rails, and toilets, we also provide assistive technology products including battery operated wheel chairs and screen readers to assist them at work. We have an in-house diversity team focused to support all Mindtree Minds with disabilities.

We strongly believe that people with disabilities should be encouraged to participate on an equal footing with the rest of us in society. To accomplish this, they need a great deal of help, reassurance, support and faith. It is, as an extension of this commitment and belief, that Mindtree has partnered with the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People to publish “20 Stories of Change”. The book stands testimony to the immense and important struggles that people with disabilities face in their everyday lives. We believe that it is important to publicize these stories of struggle and triumph to create role models who will inspire and encourage future generations in their endeavor for a life of equality and dignity. The Act of 1995 was the first step towards this liberation and we hope the new Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014 will complete the full circle.

Krishnakumar Natarajan
CEO and Managing Director
'At each step we have met with resistance and each resistance has been overcome at a price of health, family, and resources, but the country has grown and the law has bloomed.'

Kanchan Pamnani, Lawyer and Legal Activist
Maharashtra
A picture is worth a thousand words, they say. This is one such photo. The only one I have left with me in my archives. It is not very clear, and most of you would not even know many of us in this photograph. The dust of time does take its toll.

19th December, 1995. Winter had set in and Delhi was pretty cold, but the politics of India was just warming up. General Elections were round the corner. The air was thick with speculation. Narasimha Rao led Congress government was on its last leg and elections were to be announced any day now. Parliament was in session technically, but
Atal Bihari Vajpayee led opposition was boycotting it. Everything was in a state of limbo; no law could even be debated, leave alone passed.

When the boycott began in early December, no one took it very seriously. But as the Opposition dug in its heels and the boycott continued from one week to the next, as the dates on the calendar moved from 10\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} to 15\textsuperscript{th}, we became increasingly nervous. The Winter Session of Parliament was to officially conclude on 22nd December. Only a few days remained.

We were just a bunch of us, eight to be specific. Myself, Anuradha Mohit, Lal Advani, Ali Baquer, Jagdish Chander, Sarabjeet Singh, and two others. We had formed ourselves under the banner 'Disabled Rights Group' (DRG). We began work in a very quiet manner sometime in 1993. We were the people who demanded from the Government, a law to protect the rights of people with disabilities. Work happened rather speedily and by 1994-1995 we had a draft ready, and soon it took shape of a Bill, and the same was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Social Justice Minister.

We were hoping that the Bill would get passed in the Monsoon Session of 1995, but that did not happen. Then came the Winter Session, and then the chill, converting itself in no time into a political freeze. For three years, we had worked day and night, with single minded pursuit, on getting the disability law drafted, and for it to have reached a point where it was on the verge of becoming a law—the law that would not just be India's first disability rights legislation ever, but one that would actually bestow many rights on many people with disabilities. And then, the deep freeze.
From 1993 to 1995, we had also built up a movement. I would say India's first genuine cross-disability movement. So it was not just DRG anymore, not just the eight of us, but many more disabled leaders had joined hands with us. In spite of all our other differences, or our personal likes or dislikes, the dream to get India's first disability rights law brought us together and bonded us together.

So now if you look at the photo again, you can see me (on a wheelchair; argyle sweater); Lal Advani (blind; a father figure to the movement); Anuradha Mohit (National Association for the Blind); S. K. Rungta (National Federation of the Blind); Surrender Saini and Onkar Sharma (All India Federation of the Deaf); and several others. But even then, all together we were less than 200 people. Undaunted, we decided to undertake a 'March' towards Parliament on New Delhi's Sansad Marg.

Without our even realising it, history was in the making!

A few hundred people protesting in Delhi by and large means nothing. Delhi is a city that witnesses rallies and marches and protests by lakhs of people, and even then the Government doesn't move.

But this March clicked. It was a moment in time. Our attention seeking Rally was not so much against the Government, as they had already prepared the Bill and wanted to pass it. Our message was targeted towards the Opposition, to appeal to them to please cooperate with the Government to ensure that the Bill got passed and thus, became a law.

The Rally attracted a lot of attention. I remember the day as clearly as if it was yesterday. It is etched on my mind. There was more media on
Sansad Marg that day than persons with disabilities! We made front page news the next day. I remember Prannoy Roy inviting me to the NDTV studio for an interview. He asked pointedly as to how confident was I that the Opposition would relent and the Bill would get passed. I said (and till today, I can't figure out as to what gave me the confidence!) that I was 200% confident that the law would get passed.

I went home that night a nervous wreck. Sleep was hard to come. Next day (20th December), I was in my office at Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, trying hard to focus on what was in front of me. The phone rang. A journalist, a friend, told me in excited tones that the Opposition had a meeting and a change of heart, and that they will cooperate with the Government only on this one issue and allow the Disability Bill to get passed.

I was numb. I felt no joy, just a whole mix of emotions. I don't think I even shared the 'news' with anybody. It was just too stunning to be true.

Next day (21st December), nothing exceptional happened. But by the evening that day, the news broke - officially. That Parliament would work the next day (22nd December) and that the Disability Bill 1995 may eventually get passed.

Someone arranged a few passes for us. I and Anuradha Mohit, and one or two others, were in the Visitors' Gallery when Lok Sabha passed the Bill in the morning, and then, that very same day, Rajya Sabha passed the Bill in the afternoon.

And then, just like that, in one single day, the Bill (only a piece of
paper) became the law of the land. India's first ever disability rights legislation.

Who could have even thought that a rally of only a few hundred disabled persons would set the ground for changing the lives of millions! It has been 20 years now.

1995 to 2015 has been an amazing journey. India has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and we are now on the verge of getting a brand new (much more comprehensive, much more forceful) disability rights law, but what happened 20 years ago cannot be forgotten. It must not be forgotten, for it defines our present and will shape our future.
I remember hearing the news of the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 on TV one night. It made me think that it was great that India was being progressive, even though I did not know the implications at that time. I was a hundred percent legally blind but I could see something, and did not know if I fit into the definition of being 'disabled' under the law. Having started my own practice as a Solicitor in 1996, mine is a story that matches the story of the law, to some extent.

The initial few years were quiet on the law front, or that is what I thought, and I kept losing whatever little I could see. I was on a downward spiral and had to struggle to keep doing all that I had previously done with my changing vision. I had to decide on the kind of practice I wanted to have—litigation, non-litigation, or a hybrid. I did the easiest—I chose non-litigation, or chamber practice.

The complete loss of sight, the learning of adaptive technology, adjusting and accepting a changing environment, and establishing a good law practice took a couple of years. This was the time the law took, to lie still, garner strength, and build support.

In 2002, I attended my first workshop with Visually Impaired (VI) people in Delhi. I had just joined an e-group concerning technology and other problems of the VI. This was my first exposure to the disabled and it opened my eyes. I saw how the VI managed their lives; how intelligent and 'normal' they were. For the first time, I felt I belonged to the world of the disabled. My interactions showed me
how lack of knowledge and confidence, a medieval mindset, and non-implementation of the law by the Executive was hampering individuals' growth.

I met several leaders of the disabled world and heard of their struggles and achievements and how the law was being enforced through the courts and the street. I was impressed. I marveled at the timing and innovativeness of the activists and at the patience, farsightedness, and ingenuity of the judiciary in dealing with this law. This inspired me to restart my litigation practice, even though I did not yet appear for the disabled.

As my professional work grew, the number of paying clients grew, as did their confidence in my capabilities; my interest in the world of disability grew as well. I started speaking at conferences to audiences of disabled and non-disabled individuals, and began counseling people individually towards building their confidence and sorting out legal issues.

I started looking at the needs of the disabled beyond the traditional 'roti' and 'kapda'. I had read several judgements on education, employment, and other issues directly covered by the law, but I was not yet ready to appear in court for the disabled. When I was first approached to appear for a disabled person in an on-going litigation, I shrunk back and tried to palm it off to another lawyer. But, finally, when I did take it up and had to draft the Maharashtra Guidelines for Writers, I realized the raison d'être for my being a blind lawyer.

These Guidelines became the basis of the guidelines for India. They are now again under threat and need to be strongly defended. I have learnt in the last ten years the guidelines have been in place that enforcement and protection of rights needs continuous attention and so does the law, as many try to dilute whatever has been won earlier.
The Constitution of India guarantees every citizen equality before the law. The law has been written, but it is riddled with rules, which only hamper and take away from it. On being told about the discriminatory rules of the National Securities Depositories Limited, regarding VI investors, I thought it best to reason it out with the authorities by drafting a representation. The authorities immediately saw sense and the rules were revised after several NGOs lent their support. The law was evolving and it could be quoted and expanded to cover issues not directly covered by it. Sound reasoning was making people change their mindsets.

The disabled started finding employment as the law progressed but other issues started cropping up, for instance, the non-availability of banking services to the VI. To get the Reserve Bank of India to understand the problem and to issue a circular and the Indian Banks' Association to issue guidelines was not difficult, but to get each bank to understand the requirement and the ethos has been a monumental task and still continues. As I write, I am jogged back to reality—one bank is offering its VI customers savings accounts, but not current accounts. This absurdity reveals the abysmal reality as to how each inch of justice has to be fought for and how the fight continues.

At each step we have met with resistance and each resistance has been overcome at a price of health, family, and resources. But the country has grown and the law has bloomed. The print disabled had to struggle for their books and other resources as copyright law had no exemptions for us. It took ten years, the sweat and grime of lobbying, and consistent actions to get India to change its laws and lead the world on copyright exemptions for the print disabled.

Twenty years on, I can only say that we got more out of the law than the mere words in the statute, and I got more out of my career than what was dealt to me. We are in the process of saying farewell to the law and expectantly waiting for a law that is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the aspirations of the current times, and I am once again looking at my career and thinking of where I should steer it.
We Fight to Win
'It is very easy to lose hope and give up. But nothing, absolutely nothing, should hold us back,'

Syed Bashir-ud-din Qadri, Community Guide (Rehbar-e-Taleem)
Jammu & Kashmir
Mudit Deshmukh is a young boy with a hearing impairment. In 2001, when he was just 11 months old, he was diagnosed with bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss—a condition where significant hearing difficulty would remain even after using the strongest of hearing aids. As soon as they found out about the impairment, his parents began to take steps to rehabilitate and help him. This included counseling sessions for the couple, and hearing aids and speech therapy for Mudit.

His parents were dedicated to providing him with the best possible care, even though it meant making some hard decisions. At the time, his father Shambhu Nath worked as a boiler operator at the Bhilai Steel Plant, and his mother, Kusumanjali was a lecturer at a university in town. Kusumanjali quit her job to focus on her son's health and academic progress, and she and Mudit moved to Chennai to provide him with better care. Chennai has one of the most sought-after institutes in the country for young, deaf children, which prepares them for mainstream schooling. Mudit underwent extensive training to develop his speech and listening skills. Since he had been introduced to hearing aids and therapy from an early age, Mudit learnt quickly, and was a bright student. Mudit and his mother would stay in Chennai for nearly four years. This period of separation was extremely hard on the family, but the Deshmukhs persevered. It was important for them to ensure that Mudit could be admitted to a good school.
But when mother and son returned to Bhilai so Mudit could start school, they were in for a rude shock. He was denied admission to the Delhi Public School, Bhilai, because of his disability.

'Even though he could communicate clearly, and did well in his interview, the principal of the school refused him admission, stating he would not be able to keep up with the academics,' says Kusumanjali. They were made to go to the school every few months, in the hope that this would be the time they would be allowed to get their son admitted to Class 1. But it was all in vain.

Finally, Shambhu Nath filed a complaint with the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. He also wrote letters to several officials of the State Government, including the District Collector, the District Level Disability Commissioner, the Governor's office, and even the Chief Minister's Office, hoping to bring to their attention the blatant discrimination his son was experiencing, despite the presence of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, which made provisions for the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools.

After several such letters, the principal of the school and Mudit's parents were called for a video conference with the Governor's office. The facts were straightforward—Mudit had shown during his interview that he could study as well as a child without disabilities. He deserved a chance. After reviewing the case, both the CCPD and the Governor's office gave direct orders to the school authorities to allow Mudit to be enrolled for classes. However, these orders were ignored by the Principal of the school, who stuck to his assessment. Even though there was evidence to the contrary, he held his ground, insisting that Mudit was incapable of learning at this school. The principal threatened Shambhu Nath with dire consequences if he did not stop approaching the government with this case.
'But why must my son go to a special school? There are provisions made for people with disabilities in government institutions so that they can lead normal, productive lives. And Mudit has proved himself over and over again. Why should he be denied his rights? That is why we kept fighting,’ his father says.

During the proceedings, the principal was asked to provide previous records of students admitted, to see whether the school had been inclusive towards children with disabilities, but he could not do so. Under pressure from the state and central authorities, the principal relented. After Mudit's case however, the school now invites applications from persons with disabilities in its brochure, which is no small feat.

This hard won victory, however, left a bitter aftertaste with the Deshmukhs. While Mudit's story illustrates how enforcement of law can be successful in providing equal opportunity to persons with disabilities, it is important to sensitize people in positions of power to the needs of the disabled and ensure that their rights are safeguarded. This is especially necessary in the case of children with disabilities, who must not suffer from the repercussions of legal proceedings.

'Even though we fought so hard, and finally won, we were not happy with how reluctant the authorities were to let Mudit go to this school. The principal was extremely stubborn, and we did not want this to affect our son's future. He has struggled enough,' his mother said. Worried that such a hostile environment would hinder his learning and growth, they enrolled him into another Delhi Public School in Durg. The faculty and principal there were helpful, understanding Mudit's needs, and encouraging him. He has been studying there ever since, and doing exceptionally well. Faced with clear discrimination, Mudit and his family had to make use of the protection of the act to fight the actions and the attitude of the school in Bhilai. In 2010, Mudit got a cochlear implant, which greatly improved his hearing. He will soon appear for his Class 10 Board exams.
As you enter the classroom in the government-run Kanjinag School, located in Pulwama District in Kashmir, the sound of the loud chuckles and giggles of students intensifies. The overwhelming joy and excitement is testimony to the popularity of 'Sir', seated in their midst. The ten-year-olds raise their hands every now and then, seeking explanations to mathematics formulae and science equations. Sir is only more than willing to sit them down and put it in plain words.

'I am at my happiest best when I am with my children. In fact, I believe I already fulfilled all my life's goals and dreams in my 20s, when I got a job as a teaching guide in this school,' quips Syed Bashir-ud-din Qadri, the Rehbar-e-Taleem (teaching guide) of the school. Even as Bashir, 33, speaks with optimism and gratitude, the journey from his home to the classroom has been marked by several speed breakers over the years.

Bashir was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at a very young age. Unlike his peers, who were already climbing trees and running around the streets, he began taking his first steps only at the age of seven. 'Even moving around at home used to be a challenge. However, my family was incredibly supportive. They kept working towards making me independent,' says Bashir.
After completing his schooling in Noorpoora, Bashir realized that he had a passion for Physics and Mathematics. 'I knew clearly that I wanted to complete my graduation in science. However, there was no option to pursue it in my village,' he says. Bashir moved to his grandmother's house in Srinagar, where he signed up for the Bachelor in Science course, with a specialization in Physics, Mathematics, and Geology. It would soon become clear to him that he wanted to become a teacher and share his knowledge with children.

While Bashir was completing his degree, in 2004, the State of Jammu and Kashmir launched the 'Rehbar-e-Taleem' scheme under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, whereby teaching guides would be appointed for a period of five years, after which they would be considered for regularization as General Line Teachers in the Education Department. Armed with his degree and fuelled by his passion to teach children, Bashir applied for the post in Kanjinag School in January 2005. Of the three vacant positions available that were to be filled based on merit, Bashir was placed first. Before issuing his appointment letter, the Chief Education Officer, Pulwama, invited objections with regard to this list. It was at this point, Nazir Ahmad Shah, the candidate who was placed in the fourth position in the merit list, objected to Bashir's selection on the grounds of his physical handicap, calling him unfit for the post.

As days turned into weeks, with no sight of the appointment letter, Bashir decided to fight for his right and petitioned the Jammu and Kashmir High Court in Srinagar in April 2005, demanding the Education Department to issue his appointment letter. While the writ petition was pending, the Jammu and Kashmir Government issued a notification, providing for 3 percent reservation for appointment by direct recruitment for physically challenged candidates. Here, it was indicated that reservations in recruitment would be available for physically challenged persons for services and posts specified under Section 22 of the Jammu and Kashmir Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1998. This reservation also included a 1 percent reservation for
persons with locomotor disability which included cerebral palsy.

Based on the orders of the High Court in August 2006, the Director of School Education, Kashmir, constituted a three-member committee to certify Bashir's teaching abilities. Even as the committee found that Bashir was not able to write, their overall assessment with particular regard to the State's policy on rehabilitation of the physically handicapped stated that he be given a chance. Accordingly, Bashir received his appointment letter in November 2006 and began living his dream.

However, three months after Bashir began attending school Nazir Ahmed Shah filed another petition in the High Court, seeking the cancellation of the committee report that had given the nod to Bashir. Based on High Court orders, Bashir was examined by the Department of Neurology in the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Srinagar. The report did not back Bashir's abilities to perform his duties as a teacher. Based on this report, the Director of Education, Kashmir, constituted a committee to examine Bashir's performance in school.

'It was a very challenging period for me. I had been overcoming several odds for nearly two decades to teach in the school', says Bashir. 'My future was to be decided by this committee. I worked twice as hard and put my best foot forward,' he adds.

However, overcome by nervousness, Bashir couldn't give his best shot, and eventually, his appointment was cancelled.

'They were the darkest days of my life,' says Bashir. The next couple of months were spent walking in and out of advocate offices and court chambers. Bashir filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court of India stating that this order was contrary to the reservation provisions of the 1998 act. In the weeks that followed, questions were raised about his speech, his ability to hold the class together, and even the credibility of the certificates and reports.
Nearly a year after Bashir's journey was brought to a grinding halt, the Supreme Court ruled in his favour. The Court ruled that the former committee's observations that gave Bashir a go-ahead should 'have been continued without being pitch-forked into a controversy which was uncalled for'. The Bench pulled up the High Court for ordering his dismissal and directed his reinstatement, forthwith, with all notional service benefits.

'I believe that it is very important for persons with disabilities to equip themselves with the knowledge of their rights. It is very easy to lose hope and give up. But nothing, absolutely nothing should hold us back,' he concludes.

For now, it is back to the chapter on Newton's Law of Motion in the classroom.
For Joysanabi Devi, in 2006, getting a promotion as a teacher in a government school was no cause for celebration. The promotion required a transfer from her home town of Yaralkat in Manipur to Mulgaon in the state of Assam. Leaving her seven year old daughter Jessica (who has multiple disabilities) behind was out of the question as her father was working full time in a college in Manipur.

Since Mulgaon is in another state altogether, acquiring accommodation proved to be a major hurdle. The new school did not offer residential facilities. For Jessica, such a displacement was particularly harsh. Joysnabi goes on to explain her predicament—'In Yaralkat, one of the organisations working with children with disabilities functioned as more than a school for disabled children. It imparted training in various skills, taught them sign language, and even gave them therapy. My daughter used to attend this school; but in Mulgaon, there was no such facility for disabled children'.

All seven year olds require constant attention and care, but in Jessica's case, there were other needs to be met. 'Mulgaon is not a city like Guwahati. It is a remote region and we could not engage a physiotherapist here for my daughter.' Her daughter requires physiotherapeutic treatment.

Juggling between a career and the care of her daughter literally
involved running back and forth, for Joysanabi. 'I used to go for my classes, come back hurriedly in between to feed Jessica, then go back to class again'. The transfer would not only thrust Joysanabi and Jessica into a new environment, this environment was also significantly less accommodating than what their hometown offered.

A request for a transfer seemed inevitable in her case. Section 67 (2) of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, indicates alternative arrangements for social security need to be implemented to ensure equitable treatment for people with disabilities. Keeping this in mind, in 2002, a government order was passed, stating that 'mentally retarded children need special care for medication, education, vocational training etc., which may not be available at all stations. Ministries/Departments are requested to take sympathetic view on the merit of each case and accommodate such requests made by Government employee, who have Mentally Retarded children'.

Joysanabi states that her daughter is '90 percent disabled', having both 'mental and psychomotor disability'. This provision of the Act gives Joysanabi the right to ask for a transfer, in view of her daughter's needs, which could not be adequately met in Mulgaon. Clearly ignoring the order, the authorities chose to deny her request. Thereafter, a series of pleas and rejections followed, lasting five long years. Joysanabi appealed to the internal committee of the school before taking up the matter with the Disability Commissioner. 'We wrote so many letters to the Disability Commissioner, but it was all ignored,' she states.

The authorities rejected her request; there were no vacant posts in Yaralkat against which a transfer could be effected, they said. Joysanabi would question the basis of this claim when, in 2009, another female employee was transferred to that very same branch in Yaralkat. 'On what grounds were they rejecting my transfer plea, while another person got transferred to the same place?'
When innumerable appeals failed, the matter had to be taken to court. As she explains, 'We appealed to so many places, wrote so many letters before filing the court case'. With the aid of a state disability rights organisation, a court case was filed, in 2010, in a tribunal court in Guwahati.

Her lawyer's argument during the trail reverberates with her till this day. 'The lawyer madam said that this was a case about the right for survival of my daughter.'

Victorious in the court proceedings, she was finally transferred back to Yaralkat in 2012. 'This is a residential school so we do not have any accommodation problem', she asserts. With one less hurdle to cross, Joysanabi talks about the impact of this transfer on her daughter. The comforting environment of a home with a father and a younger sister is not missed on Jessica. 'Of course it affected Jessica in a positive way. Home is always better. Plus we can engage a physiotherapist here who comes once in a while for treatment, which wasn't possible in Mulgaon.'

For a while, after their return, Jessica continued to attend the school in Yaralkat, but it wasn't possible to do so on a daily basis. Joysanabi now not only manages to perform the duties of a parent, but also handles Jessica's tutoring at home. Jessica has demonstrated remarkable progress. As her mother proudly says, 'Now she can sew clothes and understand sign language'.

In an ideal scenario, a case like Joysanabi's should not have been a matter of much deliberation for the authorities in a position to grant the transfer. Years of struggle and tenacity to ensure their rights lead to a situation that is markedly better for Jessica and her family. While the state committees for rights of persons with disabilities remained blind to their struggle, provisions of the Disability Act 1995 acting on the intent in which the act was passed were crucial in providing the ground for fighting their case in court. Joysanabi's fight not only ensured a mother's right to take care of her child, but also allowed a young girl with multiple disabilities an environment suited to her needs.
The Mini Secretariat at Nuh, Mewat sits in the middle of dusty fields, just before the town limits begin. It is a Saturday, and while the offices usually remain shut on weekends, Mani Ram Sharma, Additional District Commissioner and CEO of the Mewat Development Authority, has a habit of popping in every day of the week to keep up with work.

Mani Ram started losing his hearing from a very young age, and by age five, his hearing loss was profound. His financial condition, compounded with his disability, relegated him to the peripheries of his village. But Mani Ram still walked the four kilometers to the nearest school every day. Enterprising and astute, he taught himself to lip-read, and grew so proficient at understanding lectures through lip-reading that he stood fifth in the entire state in his school leaving examinations. 'I listened with my eyes,' he says, smiling.

Mani Ram went on to read Political Science for both his bachelors and his masters degrees at Rajasthan University, and received the gold medal in both. In 1996, Mani Ram would apply for a clerk's position in a government office. Earlier, government guidelines made provisions for reservations for people with disabilities, but extended them only in the categories C and D of public servants. These were the non-supervisory and manual work roles—typists, sweepers, telephone operators, and so on. It was only in 2001 (six years after the Persons
with Disabilities Act, 1995 was passed) that the first, reluctant steps were taken to identify jobs for people with disabilities in the upper categories of public employment—the state and central services, including universities—opening up higher ranking positions to the 3 percent reservation rule.

'There were exactly two other people in my village who were government servants,' recalls Mani Ram. 'One was a sweeper, and another, a teacher in a neighbouring school.' The third such person in the village, and highest according to the organizational hierarchy of government jobs in India, was Mani Ram himself. 'This is when I saw the attitude of the villagers changing,' says Mani Ram, and this is how he would come to recognize the immense potential for social mobility embedded in working for the government. 'Someone like me, who grew up on the fringes, started getting proposals for marriage,' he laughs.

Dissatisfied with his clerical work, Mani Ram sat for and cleared the National Eligibility Test for Assistant Professorship and started working as a lecturer. Next, Mani Ram started aiming for his dream—the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). He first cleared his exams in 2004, ranking the highest in the country within the physically disabled category. By the time the results were declared the following year, Mani Ram had already cleared the 2005 preliminary examinations as well. After the declaration of the 2004 results, he received a letter stating that despite clearing all the requirements, he would not be placed this year, since no positions for people with 100 percent hearing disability had been identified in the IAS.

In 2005, Mani Ram topped the country under this category for a second time, only to be disqualified again from serving in the IAS. This time, the government had identified positions within the IAS for the hearing-impaired, but only for candidates with partial hearing impairment—those who could benefit from hearing aids and other assistive technology.
'Hearing aids help for people with up to 70 decibels of hearing loss. In my case, assistive technology could not have been used,' he says, 'but I was topping the interview section of the screening process every single time'.

After being ignored for the third time, in 2006, by the IAS, Mani Ram's story reached the ears of journalists and activists eager to ensure the government take action. He was called to Delhi where a series of official steps to ensure justice began. Here was a candidate who had cleared all the requirements for people with disabilities—requirements that had been set by the government itself—and yet was being told he hadn't performed well enough to work with the highest, despite clearly surpassing all criteria set for the highest.

This time too, Mani Ram topped the interview, scoring 243 out of 300. Word about his story was gathering momentum, leading to a massive campaign in 2006, at India Gate, New Delhi. 'People held a candle light vigil and stood with placards saying, it is not Mani Ram who is deaf, it is the government that is deaf,' he recalls. Meanwhile, a steady pool of donations ensured Mani Ram underwent a cochlear implant to aid his hearing. 'I was deaf at five, and hearing at 34', says Mani Ram. 'That was another adjustment process in itself. For weeks, I could hear, but I could not make sense of what was being said.' It usually takes years of dedicated speech therapy for people with cochlear implants to comprehend the spoken word. Mani Ram Sharma could follow everyday conversations within three months.

In 2010, after half a decade of fighting for his rights, Mani Ram's case was forwarded to the Prime Minister's Office. An order from the office instructed he be placed according to his merit, and Mani Ram Sharma was placed within the IAS. It was years before a decision based on his merit, and not his disability, would be carried out; something that the act sought to do, but implementation lags snagged
the process. Speaking about the act and its impact on his life, Mani Ram mentions that this was what enabled his fight. 'My life is what it is because of the act. UPSC was a way for me to conquer my deafness, not just for myself but also for others. The act made sure I could do that,' he says.

It is noon, and Mani Ram Sharma has to leave for official work. He gets into his car, folding his hands in goodbye as his teenage son, standing nearby, who recently got a cochlear implant himself, to address his hearing loss, squints in the sun and smiles.
Riitesh Sinha
Karnal, Haryana

Raikamal Roy

Riitesh Sinha is no stranger to painful assumptions about his disability. After successfully completing an undergraduate degree in science, and a post graduate diploma in computer application, in 1995, he would be dismissed offhand even before being considered for work by an NGO working with people with cerebral palsy. Riitesh's father, hopeful that the NGO would assist his enterprising son in getting a job, was told that it was unthinkable for a person with cerebral palsy to be gainfully employed.

'Such is an attitude of people towards persons with cerebral palsy,' says Riitesh, indicating a serious lack of awareness in the public about the capabilities and potential of people with disabilities. Riitesh, undaunted, went on to start his own training centre, where he administered computer training. 'I began a computer training centre in order to teach the basics of computers. Initially, doubts arose about my ability to teach, but my grip on the subject and dedication to teach, won me many students who still regard me as an excellent teacher. I also built myself a foot operated tricycle that helped me with my mobility,' he says.

In early 2010, the District and Sessions Court, Karnal, invited applications for the post of clerks, declaring that of the 71 slots available, one would be made available for people with disabilities, in accordance with the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. Riitesh
applied and successfully cleared all the selection processes, was selected, and joined later the same year. Prior to taking up his appointment, Riitesh also underwent a mandatory physical examination, where the degree of his disability was confirmed, and he was deemed suitable for office work under the disabled category.

Within three months of his appointment, in a move unanticipated by Riitesh and his family, he was served a termination letter. The employment officials of the court who delivered Riitesh's termination order took advantage of the probation period rules, which allowed them to end the contract without citing any reasons. Riitesh, refusing to accept his employers' decision, took matters up with the High Court of Punjab and Haryana.

In response to Riitesh's allegations of unfair dismissal, dark aspersions cast by his employers about Riitesh's ability to work started to emerge. Officials in Riitesh's workplace alleged that they had no choice but to dismiss Riitesh—this was due to his lack of performance, and not his disability. He was, they would go on to state, despite their best efforts, not equipped to perform within his role. Arguing that they were within their rights to terminate Riitesh's employment, his employers stood their ground.

A telling excerpt from Riitesh's case history reveals the myopia of his employers—'Every effort was made to accommodate the petitioner at the work place and his co-workers and other officials had rendered every help to him throughout at every step and at every moment but without any result,' his employers argued. In a circular argument that bit its own tail, Riitesh's employers would assert repeatedly that it wasn't Riitesh's disability that was grounds for his dismissal, but his performance. They would hold on to their standards of merit, while ignoring the genesis of those standards and the implicit privilege towards non-disabled people they contained. While mechanically interpreting the Disability Act 1995, Riitesh's employers ignored the
spirit in which it was passed, and the security and protection it promised. Even though they implemented the reservations they were required to, lack of sensitivity towards the living realities of people with cerebral palsy ensured that a conducive working environment could not be produced. Riitesh, already working under stressful conditions, was now asked to bear the burden of the system's failure to accommodate him.

During litigation, evidence of Riitesh successfully clearing his exams during the application was leveraged to illustrate that not only was Riitesh sufficiently equipped to handle the work he was supposed to do, he also cleared the examinations and interviews well enough to rank 26 among a total of 63 selected. Not only was Riitesh eligible and fit to work, he was also significantly ahead of a majority of his non-disabled peers. Moreover, the medical test prior to joining, too, declared him fit for employment under the requirements specific to the disabled category.

In court, the response from Riitesh's employers would be dismissed—having advertised for and cleared candidates with disabilities, they could not then deny continued employment in the very posts the candidates had successfully won. The error, the court saw, was not in Riitesh's inability to perform, but in his employers' inefficacy in ensuring compliance with the standards they themselves had set in accordance with the act.

While litigation continued, the court issued a stay order on Riitesh's dismissal and he rejoined service until the judgment was passed. Dissatisfied, and unhappy with the allegations against him, Riitesh made a compelling and somewhat untoward request to the court—'I was discussing the case with my father and told him that High Court should call me for a practical test and the matter shall be finalized there and then,' says Riitesh. In an unorthodox move, the court, for the first time in the country, ordered a fitness examination for a
petitioner, earning Riitesh an entry in the Limca Book of Records. Riitesh passed the court-ordered test, leaving no grounds for his employers to object to his employment, and leading to a final and definitive invalidation of his termination order. Riitesh's case is an instance of how the intent of the act—its considerations for accessibility and full participation—when given due consideration, leads to better and more effective implementations of the law.

'My winning the case in the High Court has paved a way for the employment of disabled persons, particularly persons with cerebral palsy', says Riitesh. It also ensured that future instances of discrimination could be prevented and the very same office that saw Riitesh as in need of help, now goes to him for assistance. 'Now, in office, I am sought after by my colleagues and I resolve all technology-related issues,' he declares.

"Earlier this year, Riitesh was given an honorary doctorate in Computer Science by the Indian Virtual University for Peace, as a recognition for this work in the field."
Caught in the lag between the passing of a law and its proper and ethical implementation, Rigzin Sampheal, despite ranking 120 in the entire country in the 2003 Union Public Service Commission examinations, and entitled to the highest order of employment, was placed far below what his rank warranted.

'My case was very strange,' says Rigzin. 'I found that the law itself was being leveraged against me.' In a twisted loop of implementation backlogs, much after the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 was passed, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), was still in the process of identifying and assigning services and jobs for people with disabilities. Only a select few departments in the public service commission had been identified during the time of Rgizin's admission. The identification of posts, according to the Disabilities Act 1995, was under the control of the respective governments, where only those jobs which they deemed as 'suitable' for people with disabilities were to be identified and set aside.

While on paper the act extended the reservation to all government units (which would technically include all the services listed under the civil services commission), lax implementation ensured that, by 2001, only some jobs in a handful of units had been identified. In 2003, research revealed that of the 26 listed services only five services had been identified for people with locomotor disabilities, two for people
with hearing disabilities, and none at all for people with visual disabilities—only three accommodated all three categories. The IAS and the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) remained free of any of these changes.

Rigzin, who cleared all the general selection criteria (the exams and the interview) in 2003, whose disability was unnoticed even to himself, went in for the medical fitness test where he was told he suffered from a stiff knee, and could no longer be accommodated within the general category. 'I had ranked second in the entire country under the Scheduled Tribe quota, but here the physically disabled quota and its accompanying rules were suddenly thrust on me. I had no choice but to fight it,' says Rigzin.

Had he adhered to the bent rules that the quota imposed on him, the only service available to Rigzin would be the Information Service—significantly lower than what his rank deserved. It was a move that proclaimed to follow the new act, yet retained the discrimination implicit in the prior 1977 guidelines which reserved only non-supervisory and semi-skilled roles for people with disabilities. The official orders trapped Rigzin in a double bind. Reservations, intended to protect people with disabilities against discriminatory practices, would here be unfairly enforced to restrict a candidate. Not only was the spirit of the 1995 act being thwarted, it was also being implemented in a narrow and discriminatory fashion.

Facing a decidedly unjust situation, Rigzin decided to take matters up with the courts. 'My entire career, my entire life was at stake. I had to fight this,' says Rigzin. Rigzin and another candidate, Lokesh Sharma, who was also facing a similar situation, went in, determined to get what was being unfairly denied to them. Meanwhile, media attention around the case was slowly, but steadily, building. An oversight of this magnitude could no longer be ignored. After knocking on several doors over thirteen months, Rigzin's case was forwarded to the Prime
Minister's Office, when on the orders of the Prime Minister, Rigzin was allotted a position within the IAS. Rigzin's perseverance, fuelled by the media furor, ensured that this time the implicit discrimination in government procedure, which seemingly adhered to policy guidelines, but continued and extended bias against people with disabilities, would be challenged, and overturned.

Rigzin's story marks the divide between prior government apathy regarding the reservations and a later, greater commitment to ensure equity in government job assignations. In a case where serious gaps in the implementation of the law came to be interpreted as lacks in the law itself, Rigzin's victory ensured that the law needed to be enacted in its true spirit. A landmark move, the effects of this case would snowball—leading to a complete overview of civil service post allotments in order to assess compliance with the provisions of the act. An entire backlog of positions from 1995 onwards, began to be laboriously filled.

Rigzin underwent training in 2004, and was allotted the Uttar Pradesh cadre. His career can be seen as a direct rebuttal to the practice of identifying only lower ranking jobs as 'suitable' for people with disabilities. During his tenure as the District Magistrate in Bahrauch, Uttar Pradesh, Rigzin devised WAT-SAN—a modified hand-pump that can provide safe drinking water during flooding. He would go on to work on devising a global online consortium and resource portal of disability groups and people with and without disabilities to meet, network, and share their experiences. Balancing several projects, Rigzin's work takes him to the rural reaches of Uttar Pradesh, where he spends his time working and interacting with the locals. His latest achievement in a very long list, is getting Jaipur Foot (the organisation that provides the signature prosthetic limb to the orthopedically disabled free of cost) to Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
In a small room located in the southern-most tip of the island city, in Ganesh Murti Nagar Slum in Colaba, Mumbai, Manisha Mhaske is seated in a corner. Her son, Keshav, a bus conductor, is seated beside her. The family is prepping up for Baba's (father) weekly visit to Mumbai from Ahmednagar District in Maharashtra.

After taking on a nearly ten-hour-long journey including a long-distance bus ride, a local train trip during the peak hours, and then, a local bus to reach his home, 'Baba', Kisan Mhaske, arrives—still energetic—garbed in a Safari Suit.

'I am here in Mumbai only for a few hours to meet my family. I will have to take the first bus in the morning back home to reach intime for my duty at 6PM', says 46-year-old Mhaske. Mhaske works as a Chowkidar in the Water Irrigation Department in Ahmednagar District. 'I have to guard the office through the night. The job has its challenges, but I have now got used to resting in the afternoon,' he adds.

For Mhaske, even the couple of thousands that he earns as the Chowkidar gives him an additional degree of pride, keeping in view the years of struggle that it took to obtain this posting. After losing his
left eye to an infection in 1992, Mhaske has been using his right eye—with a minus six number—to carry on his day-to-day life ever since.

While working as a security guard for a garment's showroom in south Mumbai, in 2011, Mhaske came across a newspaper advertisement for the post of the Chowkidar and sent in his application. With a score of 63 in his written test and a very fine oral assessment, Mhaske scored the highest marks among the 31 candidates taking the test. 'Most friends and family members were ridiculing me when I was planning to take the test. They were very confident that I would not be able to crack it,' says Mhaske, adding, 'I was quite positive as soon as I came out of the exam centre. The exam was not too tough'.

With a favorable result in tow, Mhaske approached the Superintending Engineer to get his appointment letter issued. 'I was told that unlike persons without disability, who had to take the medical test after receiving the appointment letter, I would have to first ensure that I was medically fit,' says Mhaske, adding, 'I found it unfair because I had cleared the exam without even taking the help of a scribe. I completed the medical tests nevertheless'. What followed dampened Mhaske's spirits.

The Medical Examination Board issued a certificate stating that Mhaske's extent of blindness was 40 percent and he was, thereby, not fit for the position of Chowkidar. He was left stranded without an appointment letter despite cracking the test with flying colours. 'I was deeply saddened and people around me found more reasons to ridicule me. I had to fight this,' he says. The legal route, for Mhaske, was the next best option.
Knocking on doors of advocates and legal assistants, Mhaske spent several weeks to find help. 'Most lawyers were quoting a fee that I would not have been able to afford even I had to give up on my entire life's savings. It was very tough,' he says. During this period of despair, Mhaske was introduced to a Mumbai-based Human Rights lawyer, who agreed to take up the matter for a nominal fee. Accordingly, Mhaske filed a petition in the Bombay High Court in February 2013. 'I had no idea that there were laws to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. It was only as I began attending court hearings and sat down to file my petition, did I realize the significance of law in furthering my own struggle.'

In the weeks and months that followed, Mhaske fought the battle tooth and nail, backed by the provisions of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. Several allegations were pressed against him and his abilities by the defense. 'However, I knew I couldn't give up,' he says.

Mhaske's legal counsel cited the notification of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Central Government on 15 March 2007, identifying posts that would be suitable for persons with disabilities. After referring to the study of various jobs performed in Government offices, the sub-committee appointed by the Government had made certain recommendations. On the basis of these recommendations, the Central Government prepared the list of posts in Group D identified as suitable for persons with disabilities. The notification makes a mention of jobs in 'Ministries/ Departments/Public Sector Undertakings/ Autonomous Bodies, etc'. The counsel also argued that due to the fact that Mhaske had cleared the written test conducted by the recruiting authority—which was also the basis of examination for
even the sighted candidates—there was no reason to declare him unfit for the post.

With legal provisions to back his struggle, the Bombay High Court ruled in his favour in October 2013. 'It was a very big victory for me. Ever since I had lost my left eye to unforeseen circumstances, I was extremely dejected and depressed,' says Mhaske. 'This moment reinforced my belief in the legal system as well as in my own self'. After his legal victory, Mhaske adds that a couple of persons with disabilities have approached him for help. 'It is very important for persons with disabilities to claim their rights to a good life and livelihood. I have told all the people who have come to me to engage with the law. Unless we make the effort to understand the various provisions, we will never be able to stop complaining,' says Mhaske.

The sun begins to set and Mhaske gets ready to catch up on a couple of hours of sleep before boarding the bus in the morning. 'The journey is far from over,' he winds up, arranging his petition papers back in the shelf.
Chasing Compliance, Ensuring Access
‘Disability is not limited to big cities; then why should awareness be?’

Karan Singhania, Management Trainee
Chhattisgarh
Arushi Singh is a vibrant 25 year old woman. A lawyer by profession and a literature enthusiast in her own time, she is also a wheelchair user who loves to explore cities and enjoys expressing herself by writing or talking. She has invested thought and action into making spaces accessible and wheelchair-friendly, and her struggle focuses on the basic need to be able to move around independently.

One of her favourite films is last year’s Margarita with a Straw. 'It is a beautifully made film. I could relate to it!' The film marks a shift from the perception of wheelchair-bound young women as objects of sympathy, to independent participants in society with their own agency.

In her early childhood, Arushi was detected with 'meningomylocele', a neuro-spinal condition that restricts her from walking. She studied in a progressive and reputed private school in Gurgaon, which, unlike many other schools at the time, did not refuse admission to children with disabilities. Arushi’s classrooms were always on the ground floor and the school community created a warm space for her. She recalls, 'Whatever I missed with respect to sports and physical education, I compensated by excelling at elocution and debate competitions'.

After completing her schooling in 2008, Arushi was eager to leave home and find her own way. She wanted to see the world outside her comfortable hometown of Delhi, and enrolled at Bhopal's National
Law University. Her parents, always encouraging of her choices but slightly apprehensive of the facilities, went to the campus to check if it met their daughter's needs. They would be surprised to see that it was, in Arushi's words, 'as accessible as a campus can be'. While the university invited applications from students with disabilities under the 3 percent reservation mandate of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, Arushi applied and was admitted through the open category.

In a refreshing case of compliance with the accessibility requirements laid out under the act (to ensure an environment free of barriers and discrimination for people with disabilities), the campus authorities had built ramps and accessible rooms with attached accessible washrooms, as soon as they came to know Arushi would be studying there. Within two months of her arrival they decided to use the University Grants Commission funds for students with disabilities, to equip Arushi with a battery operated wheelchair that could be regulated with a joystick. Arushi’s mobility was at her fingertips, and she recalls enjoying and discovering Bhopal with her friends as if unlocking a maze.

An ambitious and career-oriented individual, currently Arushi serves as a Legal Officer at a public sector unit in Gurgaon. The workplace is full of ramps and lifts, and very accessible, including the washrooms which are not just equipped with all the correct handles but are also kept very clean to avoid any infections. She feels that the 3 percent public employment reservations of the act have been implemented well. She met with many candidates with disabilities during her training for her work in Pune, and had applied through the 3 percent quota herself.

The office, however, Arushi says, is far better than the training centre in Pune where she spent two months. In an old structure without any infrastructure that could have made it comfortable for persons with disabilities, Arushi had to persuasively negotiate with authorities to
make the space more accessible. 'They were well-meaning people. But sometimes even if people want to help, they do not know what to do. I had to fill a huge communication gap to guide them on what should be done'.

The Disability Act 1995 mandates governments and local authorities ensure accessible toilets, warning signs, wheelchair-friendly pavements, symbols, Braille engravings, and so on; the onus of inclusion is on the local authorities and establishments. The idea is to get institutions to change and adapt to eradicate the discrimination. But it is these institutions that are most resistant to change. Moreover, 'the act too needs to evolve to address these concerns', points out Arushi.

'There are many ambiguities, and significant lack of implementation,' says Arushi, 'for example in Section 46, the definition of public building is not clear. Such loopholes allow people to get away with not caring'.

But it also takes social and individual initiative to ensure follow through with the mandates of the act. 'How much time does it take to build a ramp? It takes a day, some water and some cement. That's it, right? But mainly, people should have the willingness!' she argues.

To anyone who feels reservations are unfair or a matter of charity, Arushi has a quick and curt response. 'Reservations help people who have any kind of disadvantage over others to rise to the occasion. When there's so much restriction on our mobility, when everything including shopping for vegetables is a struggle, how do you expect that people with disabilities can compete with others without reservations?'

Though there is still a long way to go, we can be assured that young women like Arushi can lead the way and that disability will no longer deter anyone from accessing their cities, thoughts, and articulations.
Ranju Kumari has the tenacious spirit of a warrior, which never seems to die. Seven years after she fought against the discriminatory practices of the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) at the Jharkhand High Court, Ranju is now a Commercial Tax Officer in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. She loves working, wandering around the city, walking in Jubilee Park, street shopping, and attending functions with her colleagues and friends.

Born in the early 1970s, Ranju was diagnosed with congenital glaucoma when she was four. Despite loss in vision, she went to a mainstream school, paid her fees, and completed her studies, just like all the sighted students. Except for writers being assigned to her for exams, she had no other facilities to aid her education. She loved to study, and completed her schooling in 1990, five years before the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995.

The act mandates access to free education, books, equipment, and transport facilities for children with disabilities. Ranju, however, could not benefit from these provisions. But by the time she completed her education and was ready for employment, she would find she needed to use the support of the act to get access to employment, and fight for something that was being unfairly denied to her.

In 2008, Ranju appeared for the preliminary exams of the JPSC and
cleared them. When she was waiting for the results of her main exam (after which there would be the interview), she was taken aback when all results were declared except hers. 'I opened the newspaper, and it was only my result which had been left out. But I had complete faith in myself. It was time to be confident and take action, rather than be sad. I knew I had studied well and my exam was perfect, and I wanted to know my marks and the cut off for people with disabilities. So I filed an Right to Information application,' says Ranju, with a touch of resilience in her voice. JPSC's reply was inadequate and too late, when they mentioned 'clerical error' as the reason for the absence of Ranju's results. By then, Ranju had escalated matters to the Jharkhand High Court, using the support of the Disability Act 1995. After one hearing, and before the litigation process could be completed, JPSC backtracked and issued her an appointment letter.

The act promotes 'Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation' for people with disabilities. It lays the ground for many like Ranju to fight for their rights as individuals—those who demand a systemic change to lead better lives.

Ask Ranju to describe herself in three words and she quips with a response, 'tough and ultimate!' She had proved herself by fighting her case and getting appointed as the State Revenue Officer in Jharkhand. The legal procedure was tedious and took a lot of time and patience from her, yet she 'just kept running towards justice without stopping for a sad moment'. She completed a handful more of degrees after her post-graduation—in Political Science—a degree in Education from Indira Gandhi National Open University, and a diploma in Electro Homeo Medical Sciences. Today, she works round the clock—coming in even on Sundays—and contributes to a major chunk of domestic work at home, where she stays with her parents.

When asked about her pillars of support during these difficult journeys of life, she mentions her parents, her teachers, her friends,
and also her private tutors. But, she adds in return, 'you know which is the biggest pillar of strength for any person? You, yourself. If you are not strong and holding the roof from falling on your head, you will not rise'. She also describes those around her who have felt offended by her victory—those who still are suspicious about her merit—as jealous and unsuccessful. "There will be many simply waiting to pull you down!" she says. Her colleagues at work, however, she adds, have always respected her and ensured that she's involved in all office functions and get-togethers.

Ranju's workplace is a large one, where the workload keeps increasing from time to time. There are no facilities for her convenience as a person with disability, but Ranju does hope that the office should provide her with an assistant instead of her having to hire someone privately. Ranju recognizes that people with disabilities take longer doing certain tasks than those without (because of several barriers to access; advances in technology only prove that removing barriers ensures that people with disabilities work at par and maybe better than people without). However, in an environment where such considerations are rarely leveraged, she concludes that reservation is a crucial right, a powerful means of protection, and an empowering mechanism. It allows social and economic acceptance of the individual with disability, and she wants to send a message to all such individuals—'If you have the power of this act, do not sit at home and accept your fate, just fight and you will surprise everyone. Believe in yourself and in what you deserve'. She says this as if concluding an inspiring speech. But we all know she doesn't need to give any speeches, as the story of her struggle is an inspiration in itself.
An ordinary journey of passing out of school, getting a college degree, and acquiring a job turned into a battleground for Irshad Alam the moment he graduated from school. After clearing his medical entrance examination in 2003, like numerous other aspirants, he went through the counseling session before admission. One would think clearing the entrance was a big enough hurdle, but not so for Irshad. The counselors bluntly informed him that since the first year would involve conducting surgery in a standing position, his orthopedic disability would render him ineligible. As he goes on to say—'They said it would be very painful for me. I wouldn't be able to do it.'

'My family and I thought that's how it is. We didn't dare question it. We knew nothing about protecting ourselves from such situations. We knew nothing about the disability rights.' Section 39 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 clearly states that—'All Government educational institutions and other educational institutions receiving aid from the Government, shall reserve not less than 3 percent seats for persons with disabilities'. Although he applied through this 3 percent reservation provision, Irshad did not immediately understand the discrimination and laxity being shown by such governmental institutions and took it for granted that he was unfit to become a doctor.

Having lost a year, Irshad's trauma was repeated for the second time in 2004. This time, he cleared the engineering entrance examination. The Jorhat Engineering College refused him admission stating that
the first year would involve a lot of field work, which would be impossible for him. He had applied with full precaution—'I had specifically opted for the computer science engineering branch, which would not require fieldwork for I feared rejection a second time. But there were people who were against my admission. They said that the workshop would involve carpentry and handling of machinery, which would not be possible for me.'

According to the definition of disability laid out in the Disability Act 1995, Irshad falls under 'locomotor disability' definition. Despite inviting applications from candidates with physical disabilities, not only did both the institutes not adhere to the 3 percent reservation in assigning seats, but were also grossly violating sections 29 and 30 of the act which state that the institutes must equip themselves in every manner possible, right from training teachers to creating infrastructure, that would make life convenient for students with disabilities.

Though he had no knowledge of the act and its various provisions, this time, a question rose in his mind—'I wondered why the reservation even exists when these institutes are definitely not going to give us admission'. He would not remain silent this time.

'I was lucky to have a supportive family. My uncle and I decided to do something about it.' His uncle's friend in the media informed them about the act and at the same time introduced them to a disability rights organization, which gave them the confidence to carry out a legal battle for obtaining what was rightfully theirs. A litigation process against the Jorhat Engineering College followed in 2004, leading to his eventual victory.

Since his story was highlighted by the Assamese media, Irshad goes on to comment on the changed attitude of the institutions that had deemed him unfit—'I didn't even sit for the medical entrance that
year, but since my story was all over the newspapers, the Assam Medical College gave me an admission letter.'

With undeterred focus on obtaining an engineering degree, Irshad followed his court case to the very end the same year—a judgment was passed in his favour. The technical directors of the engineering institute chose to remain absent from the court proceedings. The Court granted him 'provisional admission', during which time the workshop supervisor would have to provide his feedback on Irshad's ability to successfully carry on with the class.

Though the institute would not meet his (and students with disabilities') other infrastructural requirements, he says he would always remember the contribution of certain people—'My supervisor motivated me a lot. He would say that it is indeed difficult, but everyone is doing it. Though I could walk with the aid of calipers I had numerous friends to assist me up to the classes on the first floor.'

Irshad's case is not only about the negligence of educational institutes to adequately maintain the decrees of the act but it is also about how simple awareness of the mandates of the act translates into better knowledge about one's basic rights. For Irshad, this awareness enabled him to obtain an engineering degree in 2008 and find employment as an Assistant Manager with the Assam Grahmin Vikas Bank in Golaghat, in 2011. At present, the 31 year old is enjoying his life of independence in Golaghat, away from his hometown of Jorhat, where his family is stationed.

Irshad radiates this sense of achievement and confidence when he talks about how the course of his life would be altered—'Like many others I had no idea about my rights. But I have done my own research now and I'm well aware of its various provisions that are there for me. The act changed my life. They have already placed the bill for increasing reservation to 5 percent in 2014. I am looking forward to that. I hope it gets passed'.
One gets a sense of hard fought accomplishment while listening to Abhijit Chakraborty, as he re-traces the path his life has taken.

When Abhijit was just about 2 years old, an overdose of antibiotics caused severe sensorineural hearing loss, leaving him with only traces of residual hearing. It was then left to his parents to select one of the two patterns of education for him—to either admit him in a school for deaf and hard of hearing, or to provide him with mainstream education, while hoping reasonable adjustments would be made to accommodate his specific needs. Abhijit’s parents selected the latter for his comprehensive personality development. Important enablers to aid his study in the mainstream school were a bulky Alps pocket model hearing aid, and the good fortune of having understanding friends and teachers. The school made an effort to ensure Abhijit sat close enough to observe the lip movement of his teachers, and friends always allowed him to follow lessons and lectures from their notebooks.

Abhijit completed his schooling with a desire to do something different. He had also been counseled to avoid trying for traditional options like medicine and engineering. Abhijit joined the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), but pragmatism in face of family responsibilities prompted him to opt out and settle for a more
conventional track. He completed his graduation in English Literature and went on to read for a post graduate degree at Jadavpur University, Kolkata. A student of the Arts, Abhijit started narrowing down possible career options that complied with his skills as well as his hearing disability. Given his educational background, journalism, copy editing, and so on, seemed natural options to follow. But Abhijit was alert to the fact that private agencies were under no obligation to select a person with a hearing disability, and that a practical decision was required.

In 2002, Abhijit joined the Metal Scrap Trade Corporation Limited (MSTC), a Government of India enterprise, which had launched an employment drive to fill up vacancies for people with disabilities (as mandated by the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995). In accordance with the act, MSTC allowed Abhijit to serve the organization from his hometown, Kolkata. “My four years in MSTC was an endearing period with very accommodating people. They conducted a review of my job profile to ensure I could be a good fit in the roles assigned to me. I was shifted from sales and marketing, which required handling phone calls of clients, to management information services, where my drafting and writing skills were more useful.” recalls Abhijit.

During his employment at MSTC, Abhijit was also preparing for the Civil Services Examination (CSE). An avid reader, he drew inspiration from what he read to strive for more.

In 2005, when Abhijit cleared the CSE, the customary congratulations and newspaper articles followed. However, a discrepancy in the medical test—mandatory for final selection—resulted in Abhijit not being allocated a service. According to the medical report, Abhijit was deaf with 100 percent hearing loss. Cadre assigning authorities told Abhijit that posts had been identified only for the partially deaf. Abhijit, with active encouragement from a disability rights activist, represented his case to the concerned government department and appealed to the Prime
Minister to address this.

The Prime Minister’s Office, taking note of his appeal, led Abhijit to appropriate authorities who arranged a more stringent medical test to reassess his hearing. The new report set his hearing loss at 90 percent. Rendered eligible for a service identified for the partially deaf, Abhijit was offered the Indian Foreign Service (IFS).

Abhijit would later get the opportunity to thank the Prime Minister during his customary call as an IFS probationer. Asked by a smiling Prime Minister, if he was happy to be finally allocated a service, Abhijit bowed in happy acknowledgement.

His present service has been challenging. Unsettling admissions of not knowing how to accommodate a partially deaf officer within the structure, uninvited advice to undergo operations to normalize his hearing, direct refusals by fellow officers to respond to phone calls on his behalf, verbal and non verbal slights, and even unfair assessment reports, have consistently plagued Abhijit. These instances place the onus of adjustment on the person with disability, while ignoring the entrenched discrimination unaccommodating structures carry within themselves.

However, Abhijit takes these acts in his stride. He has mastered a foreign language, Portuguese—a particular challenge for a hearing impaired person, who has access to only the sign language to communicate with under normal circumstances. Determined to shape his disadvantages into advantages, Abhijit is constantly working to ensure his career does not remain static. By taking advantage of advances in legislation and technology aimed at disability empowerment, Abhijit soldiers on. Legislative moves need to be accompanied with an open and accommodating environment for people with disabilities. Workplace challenges for disabled people are immense, and although mostly resilient to dismissive attitudes, they do need a word of acknowledgement; perhaps a gesture of belonging from time to time, concludes Abhishek.
‘Disability is not limited to big cities, then why should awareness be?’ asks Karan Singhania, who is currently a Management Trainee (Finance) with Bharti Airtel Corporate Limited. Diagnosed with 'retinitis pigmentosa' when he was 11 years old, Karan's story is that of resilience coupled with positive interventions. Hailing from Korba, a small town in Chhattisgarh, where the prevalent mindset assumes that visually impaired people must suffer the fate of illiteracy, unemployment, and beggary, Karan had to work hard to fight the stigma and prejudice associated with blindness to finish his education and secure a managerial position in the service sector.

After being diagnosed with 100 percent visual disability, Karan was expelled from his school in class 10. He was unable to go for class, and was asked to leave because of non-attendance. He was not allowed to appear for his board exams even though the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had issued him the admit card. He sought re-admission to the school the following year, only to be refused again. Dismayed and dejected and having lost two precious academic years, he appeared for the secondary board examination as a private candidate and secured 84 percent marks, after which he re-applied for admission to his school. His school principal, however, did not relent and refused him admission.
It was at this time that a teacher informed him about a law in place through which he could seek admission. Armed with this knowledge, and a belief in the legal system, he approached the District Magistrate, also serving as the State Disability Commissioner, and shared his plight with him. Under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, the Disability Commissioner holds the power to look into complaints of discrimination against persons with disability and non-implementation of laws and rules in place to protect disabled people. The District Magistrate handed him a copy of the act. Armed with the act, Karan approached the school principal, and demanded admission as a matter of right. Meanwhile, he was also introduced to softwares like J.A.W.S to access the computer, and learnt how to record lectures and scan books. As Karan puts it, 'these two things—technological enablement and enforcing admission in school through the act—started my journey, and I have never looked back since'.

Since his school lacked disabled-friendly infrastructure and a supportive environment, Karan struggled at every step to not only come to par with, but surpass his peers. With immense self-motivation and dedication he topped his school in the senior secondary board examination with 94 percent marks and was successfully admitted in Sri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC), University of Delhi (DU), through the persons with disability quota—also a mandate of the Disability Act 1995.

A central university located in the country's capital, DU's environment was lot more conducive for persons with disability. It was relatively easier to access resources and to learn. According to Karan, 'in Delhi, people don't assume that being blind means you cannot study.' He attributes this to enhanced awareness and understanding about the rights of the disabled people in a 'big city'. He adds that the Equal Opportunity Cell, along with the presence of sensitized professors, has been a crucial, though not a completely adequate intervention in the University space to safeguard the needs of persons with disability.

Towards the end of his graduation, Karan was offered a place in the
Post Graduate Programme (PGP) of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad, after scoring well in the Common Admission Test. Being the first 100 percent visually impaired student at IIM Ahmedabad, he was initially reluctant to join the campus due to inadequate supportive infrastructure, as compared to other institutions under the IIM banner. While facilities such as arrangement and payment of scribes, and acquisition of soft copy of all materials from the publishers directly, were all an improvement over those provided by DU, there was still need for more provisions. Readers and assistance for mobility for visually impaired students were not provided.

The institution assured Karan that all necessary support structures and facilities will be in place before he joins. An active pool of volunteers to assist People with Disabilities was created, an Equal Opportunity office was formalized, and the Student Activity Centre was made more accessible.

At the time of campus placements, he worked alongside the placement cell in identifying organisations that had hired people with disabilities in the past and claimed to be equal opportunity employers. Karan's applications were rejected by some recruiters where the same reasons such as lack of disabled friendly infrastructure in offices or his lack of experience to cope with the work environment were thrown around. In order to convince apprehensive employers, he created a document in addition to his resume, which categorically spelled out the problems and the solutions associated with his disability. This was Karan's intervention to address his employers' reluctance to question him directly about his physical abilities and mobility. It was his persistence and pragmatism that landed him with a job at Airtel.

Karan's story is a powerful example of how compliance with the act, without which he would not have been able to reclaim admission in school, is a potent solution to discrimination against people with disabilities. However, it also reminds us of the gap at the level of awareness and implementation, specifically in smaller towns and districts. As Karan rightly argues, the government should take steps towards spreading awareness about the existence of the act and its provisions to assure people with disabilities that they can move forward and excel despite their disability with the help of adequate 'legal tools'.
Rajesh Mulwani was a top student and star athlete in his college at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad. In the last year of his bachelor's degree (he was reading Psychology) he got hit by a cricket ball on his eye, causing extensive damage, leading to blindness in both eyes. This was 1987, and he was 20 years old. After the accident, he was completely immobilised and spent two years in rehabilitation. An association for blind people in Ahmedabad provided him with counselling, psychological support, and mobility orientation. He had always been a curious student and avid learner and it took him only six months to master Braille. 'I knew that life would not be easy after my accident, but through all the support and help I received I also realised that my life was not over. I would just have to keep fighting,' he says, about those two years that he spent adjusting to his disability.

Not only did he pass his undergraduate exams with a first class after this, but he also went on to finish his masters in Psychology, and a graduate and a post graduate degree in Education from Gujarat University. Eager to learn and work, he went on to complete his doctorate in Psychological Testing in 2002, all the while working as visiting faculty in his college. For someone who had to grapple with a sudden disability, this was an immense and important achievement. He was not alone in his fight, however, and his family and community stood by him and supported him throughout. His urge to keep
learning comes partly from the fact that everyone in his family is well educated, including his wife and brother.

In 1997, he began working at the District Institute of Educational Training (DIET) at Amreli in Gujarat. He had been working there for over ten years, when in 2010 the Gujarat Public Service Commission issued an advertisement for the posts of Class I officers (which is a post for educational administrator/Principal/Deputy Director). Rajesh cleared the written test as well as the viva for the post. According to Section 32 of the Persons with Disabilities Act,1995, the appropriate government is responsible for identifying posts in government establishments which can be reserved for persons with disabilities and according to Section 33, at least 3 percent of all vacancies should be allotted to disabled people. In this case, since the State had failed to identify such posts, Rajesh applied through the open category and was shortlisted. He received his selection letter in January 2010, but was never issued his selection order.

In 2012, he petitioned the Gujarat High Court under the Disabilities Act 1995 and they called him in for verification of his certificates and documents. However, it was only after repeated attempts over several months to get his case heard that the Gujarat High Court started the litigation process. The high court ruled in his favour in January 2013, and ensured that Mulwani was 'deemed fit' for the position of principal of the DIET, Amreli. 'It was clear from the start that I was qualified and capable of doing the job well. It was only because of their bias against blindness that I was refused the job, even though there are several examples of IAS officers being employed despite being completely blind,' Rajesh says. The court itself took cognizance of Rajesh's competence and skills. The High Court also said that since the District Court had already disposed off the matter in Rajesh's favour, the matter should not be discussed again and he should appointed without any further delays.
He had to fight for over two years for a position that he had rightfully earned. While it was an uphill climb, his example shows that proper implementation of the provisions of the act can ensure that others like him get justice and equal opportunity. This victory is also significant because it tackles the implicit bias that employers have against hiring persons with complete disabilities, as opposed to partial ones. People with complete loss of hearing or eyesight are almost always overlooked during selection procedures. People with up to 70 percent blindness are often deemed fit, but if a person suffers from 100 percent blindness, it is presumed that she or he is unfit for work. Rajesh’s case is testament to the fact that people with complete blindness can be just as productive and capable given an encouraging and open environment. Having cleared all the requirements under no special disability provisions, but denied an appointment letter all the same is illustrative of the systemic bias people with disabilities regularly face. 'I have been struggling since my graduation for things that are rightfully mine. I have learnt not to keep silent. If it is my right, I will ask for it and fight for it,' says Rajesh.

In conclusion, he adds that the government needs to become more proactive in identifying jobs and seats for persons with disabilities. The authorities need to change their attitude towards the disabled and embrace the provisions of the act. However, the act itself also needs to be looked at critically, as some of the problems arise because there are no guidelines for checking the fitness of blind people and proper guidelines are only a way to ensure proper implementation of all that the act promises.
Sneha made a lot of friends in Hooghly. Her disability was hardly visible to the children in her school and her neighbourhood. But she went on to face difficulties when she moved to Kolkata and joined a private school.

Initially the school was slightly reluctant to admit Sneha. Unaware of how to deal with disabled students, after admission no additional support was provided to her by the school. 'I sat stupidly on the bench all day and could not participate in classes,' shares Sneha. 'Attending classes for a deaf student is pointless without necessary support, since a deaf child does not follow and understand everything the same way as other students do, due to language barriers,' her mother adds. Lack of sensitivity and support coupled with a non-flexible curriculum made learning a tedious process for Sneha.

Born and brought up in West Bengal, Sneha Das Gupta was detected with hearing impairment when she was a year old. Early diagnosis had made timely intervention possible. Keeping in mind her daughter's difficult integration into a largely resistant society, Sneha's mother, Snigdha, approached a special school in the Hooghly district of West Bengal.
Bengal. A preparatory school for children with hearing impairments, the school worked with deaf children and their families to enable integration into regular schools.

The school worked closely with Sneha and her mother and trained Sneha in language and speech development. Sneha soon learnt to converse in her mother tongue, Bengali, and went on to study in a mainstream government school in Hooghly for the next four years, after which the family relocated to Kolkata.

Since communication is seen as key to operate and connect in this world, it was difficult for Sneha to overcome social barriers and make friends. She felt alienated at her new school as her peers did not know how to interact with her. Though they could sympathise with her disability, she could not forge any long lasting bonds of friendship.

Even though Sneha grew up a lonely child, she made full use of her school years. She read voraciously, and learnt Odissi dance and ice skating. With the support of her parents and a strong will, she remained determined to pursue higher education after finishing school in 2010.

Most universities in West Bengal offer no relaxation to students with disabilities in terms of minimum aggregate marks required to appear for entrance exams. Having scored 67 percent in her school leaving examinations, Sneha could not apply to some universities since the eligibility criteria demanded at least 70 percent marks, with no concession for people with disabilities.
She fulfilled Presidency College's (then under Calcutta University) eligibility criteria and appeared for the admission test. However, while applying online, she found out that the college had no provision of affirmative action for disabled students, even though the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, mandates all Government educational institutions must reserve not less than 3 percent seats for persons with disabilities.

Since matters of admission are time-pressed, Sneha's mother directly contacted the Education Minister of West Bengal, and demanded action be taken.

Following this, the college opened its doors to Sneha. Aware that her graduation would lay the foundation for her future studies, Sneha was determined to study at Presidency. 'Presidency College is a famous college and they offer Sociology. I wanted to study for my masters in Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and I knew that it would be easier for me to get in there if I studied Sociology from a good college,' says Sneha.

However, even after her admission no positive steps were taken by the college to integrate and support students with disabilities, and it lacks disabled-friendly infrastructure till date.

Despite hardships at every stage in educating herself, Sneha is currently pursuing a masters degree in Philosophy in Kolkata. She successfully completed her postgraduate degree from TISS, Mumbai; her dissertation was titled, 'To Study the Needs of Students with Hearing Impairment in the Higher Education'.

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TISS was a new chapter in Sneha's life. 'I enjoyed my time at TISS because of its cosmopolitan environment, and made good friends,' adds Sneha. Though she was admitted under the reservation, and received support from the institute in general and the department of disabilities in particular, hurdles persisted. While TISS had developed decent support provisions for students with visual impairments, hearing impaired students continued to remain largely overlooked.

Small changes in teaching methods and provision of appropriate technological tools can go a long way in ensuring inclusivity of deaf students, argues Sneha's mother.

Simple steps such as the use of appropriate lighting and seating arrangements to ensure that deaf students can see the instructor clearly at all times, use of visual aids and clear speech, and limiting physical movement while talking, are all minor changes that can make classroom instruction productive for deaf students.

Sneha is a confident woman, who is well-aware of her rights. She writes in her email interview, 'I stay in the mainstream society and studied in the mainstream institutions so I live in the non-deaf world with confidence. While some people are really nice, they do not know how to connect with a deaf person. I have accepted this situation and so don't feel alienated anymore.' She has also formed a group of adults with hearing impairment to raise awareness and advocate for their rights.
According to Sneha, the idea of full inclusivity remains elusive and voices of the disabled about their needs remain unheard, in spite of the existence of the act. The problem is that the act premises the provision of rights on the capacity of the appropriate government authorities and institutions.

However, as her mother vehemently argues, rights can not be conditional—they cannot be premised on whether the government has empty slots to be filled, they need to be universally incorporated. While Sneha acknowledges the role of act in securing her admission in various educational institutions, she feels that its implementation needs more work to ensure full participation and inclusion of people with disabilities.
Nothing about Us without Us
‘The state is at the giving end, I am at the receiving end, so they need to keep listening to us as we know better’

Vishant Nagvekar, Government Employee
Goa
For Ridahun Khriam, an average work day could span anywhere up to 12 to 15 hours. While a large part of her day is spent in meeting with students, job aspirants, and parents, she uses most evenings to interpret classroom notes and other documents into sign language for persons with hearing impairments. In between her field visits to villages across Meghalaya and undertaking case work and surveys, the 26-year-old also finds time to study Sociology, English, and History through a correspondence course.

'I love to multi-task. Thanks to my work, I get to meet so many interesting people,' says Ridahun, who was detected with a locomotive condition at birth. 'It isn't easy, but I have no reason to complain,' she adds.

Born and bred in Meghalaya, Rida, as she likes to be called, spent the early years of her life coming to terms with the loss of both her parents as well as her physical disability. From the age of five, she has been living with her maternal aunt, who enrolled her in a mainstream school. 'I used to find it really difficult to study in school. My classmates used to make fun of me and teachers would exclude me from activities thinking I wouldn't be able to cope,' says Rida, adding, 'I used to sit all alone, feeling dejected and ignored'.

From sitting in one corner of the classroom then, to motivating
young students with disabilities to seek their right to study in schools today, Rida's experiences over the years have been marked by several challenges, small victories, and big joys. 'I enrolled myself in a special school for children with disabilities. It was here that I started to become a person of my own,' she says. 'When I met with other children, who were also braving similar challenges, I began to appreciate myself and not get upset by people's taunts,' she adds.

For Rida, this platform gave her more than just vocational training. It was here that she met her 'best friend'—the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. Ever since, there has been no looking back for Rida. 'It was such a big blessing to come to know that there was an act meant to protect my rights as a person with disability. I spent days to understand every little detail mentioned in the act,' says Rida, adding that had she known about the provisions earlier on, she would have fought her own case as a child who was disregarded and discriminated against in school.

Recounting her 'big victory' from last year, Rida breaks into a smile. In 2014, during the course of college admissions in Meghalaya, two young students had to face rejections from nearly five colleges. 'Since they were visually challenged, a few colleges rejected them at once. Some others came up with excuses such as their seats were full or that the two students wouldn't be able to keep up with the rest of the class,' recounts Rida. Accompanied by their parents, the students approached Rida, hoping to find an alternative. It was at that moment, Rida says, that she went back to her best friend, the Disability Act 1995, picking out provisions that cited mandatory reservation for persons with disabilities in educational institutions.

With a copy of the act in tow, Rida accompanied the students and their parents to meet with the college principal. 'While initially, the principal kept claiming that the admissions were full and that they would not be able to enroll the students, I pointed out the provisions
in the act, and said that they could not be denied their right,' she says. 'The Principal had no choice. She had to accept their applications,' she adds, flashing a triumphant smile.

It is such moments of small victories that keep Rida going. 'I couldn't finish my studies at the right age on account of several financial and physical constraints. I don't want history to repeat itself for another child with disability,' she says. 'With knowledge of the law, one can fight even the toughest battles. Nobody has the right to poke fun at us, exclude us or question our abilities,' she adds.

As the clock strikes 8 pm, Rida sits on her power mobility scooter and starts for home. 'It has been a long day on the field,' she says. 'I still need to go back and read my Sociology notes,' she adds.
Bugga Mallesh, who makes a living by selling handkerchiefs on the footpaths of Secunderabad, has to commute daily by bus from his home on the outskirts of the city to reach the street where he works. Mallesh has dwarfism. A very short body structure makes daily travel difficult; he stands several heads below most commuters. Competing with the tall crowd everyday to get into the city buses was a tiresome ordeal for Mallesh. 'Our hands are small and it is difficult to get a grip to climb into the buses,' he says. The danger of falling and being trampled in the morning rush was Mallesh's constant companion.

Earlier, people with dwarfism in the state of Andhra Pradesh could avail of a handful of benefits from the state government. Free bus passes and a monthly pension of Rs. 75 were part of these. The bus pass made the journey a little bit easier for Mallesh—he could skip the ordinary service, and take express services which are less crowded. These benefits, however, were abruptly stopped in 2001. Mallesh, unaware of this development, went to renew his pass, but was insulted and pushed out from the queue by the officials there. 'When I was standing in the queue, the official issuing the pass yelled at someone asking him to move out. I stood there, wondering who he shouting at, when he pointed towards me and yelled pottada (little man) you are not eligible, get out! When I questioned why he used derogatory words, I was physically pushed out by the security guard'. In other areas in Andhra Pradesh, boards would be displayed, categorically stating—'No bus passes will be given to dwarfs'.
The discrimination and public humiliation Mallesh faced made him determined to fight for the rights of people with dwarfism, and for their inclusion under the orthopedically disabled category of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. But Mallesh's task was far from easy. He had to start from scratch, since there were no collective associations of people with dwarfism in the entire state. He started by establishing contact with the people who passed by on the roads of Secunderabad during his travel to and from work. He then spoke to people with dwarfism who passed the footpaths on which he worked. After mobilizing a group of around twenty, he started petitioning politicians, journalists, lawyers, and officials on the ongoing and incessant problems people with dwarfism faced. Sensitive people from different walks of life started contributing to their cause—national dailies wrote scathing reports, those who had experience with legal matters filed petitions, and Mallesh and his compatriots were connected to and given appointments with policy decision makers.

Through immense perseverance in mobilizing and networking with likeminded people Mallesh finally achieved a breakthrough—Mallesh and his co-members of the Dwarfs Association met with the then leader of opposition in the legislative assembly. The opposition leader promised the delegation led by Mallesh he would take up their cause with the state government.

After building an association of around 300 people with dwarfism and generating awareness among the opinion makers on their rights, Mallesh took the fight to the next level by taking the protest route. In 2004, right before the state was to go for elections, Mallesh organised a march of 200 people with dwarfism to the state assembly, and when the authorities refused to address them, they sat on a dharna. This time, the leader of the opposition promised again that if they were to form the next government, they would issue a Government Order (GO) bringing people with dwarfism under the Disability Act. This
statement brought Mallesh's fight under intense media scrutiny. In the summer of that year the government changed, and the opposition leader became the chief minister of the state.

In 2005, the GO for the inclusion of people with dwarfism under the category of orthopedically disabled was passed. This was a remarkable achievement for the community, and Mallesh in particular. This inclusion not only made them eligible again for pensions and bus passes, but for the first time they could also avail of reservations in education and employment opportunities as per the mandates of the act.

Mallesh, however, could not celebrate for long. While dwarfism as a category had been recognized, the implementation of GO was facing several obstacles and the benefits promised by it were not reaching those they were intended for. Mallesh was still not able to secure the elusive bus pass—the catalyst of his inclusion drive for people with dwarfism. A lack of communication on the modalities of implementation of the GO between the Road Transport Corporation (RTC) and the State Government put the process to a standstill. Mallesh had to now take the legal route for getting the GO implemented. It was after a struggle of two years that the government agreed to compensate the RTC for issuing bus passes to people with dwarfism. After seven years, in 2008, Mallesh got his bus pass.

Mallesh, recognizing the immense potential for empowerment promised by the Disability Act 1995, put up an extraordinary struggle for the inclusion of people with dwarfism as persons with orthopedic disability. The inclusion promises access to social security schemes like pensions of Rs.1500, bus passes, housing, and so on. The struggle waged by Mallesh and his fellow travelers to get safely on the buses to Secundarabad is an inspiration to all marginalized in their fight for rights.
Vishant Nagvekar is a 43 year old Goa resident. He has persistently involved himself in countless fights to make public spaces more accessible for wheelchair users like him. A graphic design enthusiast, he is about to finish 15 years of government service this year. Whenever Vishant comes across a public space that is unfriendly for the disabled, he uses his photo editing skills along with guidelines under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, to compile applications or complaints addressed to the State Commissioner for Disabilities. Through the edited photos, he aims to show how a particular space can be made more accessible, and to highlight how deeply discrimination against people with disabilities is rooted in public and social life.

Vishant considers accessibility as one of the most important aspects of social acceptance. His biggest struggle has been to make his own workplace, Shram Shakti Bhavan (SSB) more accessible. SSB has a parking lot reserved for persons with disabilities in the front of the building, but the ramp for wheelchair users is at the back. Vishant views this as not just an infrastructural accident, but a case of discrimination. 'Why is the entrance for the disabled at the back? There's clearly space for a ramp in the front. Why can't we enter from the front like everyone else?' he questions. He has to reach earlier than all the other employees to park at the back near the ramp in the lot which ironically does not have a parking space reserved for disabled
employees. Being the optimist he is, he thinks this keeps him punctual.

After Vishant's complaint regarding the SSB, an inspection was carried out and the Goa Human Rights Commission (GHRC) found 45 public buildings inaccessible for the disabled, including the GHRC office itself. Vishant works with several disability and human rights advocates and organisations. He writes official applications and complaints using the guidelines and provisions listed under the Disability Act 1995, attaches photos and a copy of his disability certificate, links the issue to human rights violations, and submits copies of the complaints in all relevant offices. Once they respond with a notice, there is a hearing where the final decisions are made. 'I am no advocate, but I have used the act a lot, for myself, my friends and many others,' he says.

Through the act, Vishant has found a legitimate method of voicing his concerns and demanding justice. Was it always possible? Perhaps, not. When Vishant was nearly two years old, he caught the polio fever. He went to a regular school without any special facilities or alternatives. During his school leaving examinations, his examination room was allocated on the fourth floor. He wrote a letter to the principal requesting a ground floor room. His 'appeal' was denied. From that appeal to the innumerable confident applications filed by Vishant in the last decade, he has come a long way with the help of the act.

After attending school in Bicholim, Vishant shifted to Mapusa for his college years. He stayed with his loving aaji (grandmother), and his helpful uncle—who often dropped him to college and picked him up. In those days, transport between towns was tough even for the non-disabled. Vishant couldn't pursue higher education after his graduation. He regrets it but also adds immediately, 'I wanted to join a computer course, but I went on and trained myself in Photoshop and Corel Draw. I even started my own computer institute and ran it for 4 years'.
For Vishant, access is not only about workplaces and parking spaces outside offices. It extends itself to accessing cinema theatres, beaches, and all other socio-cultural spaces. He has written to the organizers of the International Film Festival of India, Goa (2015) to demand a fee waiver and a 3 percent reservation for candidates with disabilities. While people from all parts of the country and the world visit Goa for its beaches, Vishant has always seen them from afar. He hasn't been able to go closer to the water because there is no arrangement for the smooth movement of wheelchairs. 'Cinema is the best form of entertainment, but theatres are full of steps. All romantic and natural spaces are not accessible for me. About the beach, the government will say this is nature, not a building in which we can make ramps or lifts. But I feel something has to be done if you want so-called full participation,' he adds.

Vishant's residence, however, he says, is one of the biggest rewards of the act. In 2005, the government issued a memorandum to give housing preference to the disabled, and to make the houses disabled-friendly in compliance with the act. He filed an appeal under the same and was assigned a house in 2013. 'My current house is on the ground floor and has its own parking space and accessible toilets,' he responds.

'Without the act', says Vishant, 'I wouldn't have a job! Even if I did get it by chance, in all probability my office would not be accessible, the parking space would not be there, and eventually, I would be discouraged to work altogether.'

Five years ago, Vishant exposed the seemingly accessible Arts & Culture Department and the Central Library of Goa by interviewing non-disabled people. Even people without disabilities found it difficult to move along the excessively steep ramp. 'Many people just want to show off. There is no actual intention to include. They do not remember that one day, they will also get old and need such facilities,' he points out.

Vishant, however, hopes for better implementation of the act. 'The state is at the giving end, I am at the receiving end, so they need to keep listening to me as we know better,' he adds, echoing the call of
Venugopal, like any aspiring and educated young man, was on the lookout for a secure job, so that he could settle in life. After graduating with a masters in business administration from a public university, he was preparing himself for the job market by attending coaching classes. He remembers it to be a very difficult period. 'Coming from a low income family and now without the hostel facility of the university, I was in a precarious position,' says Venugopal.

In September 2010, a non-government poverty alleviation organization partnering with the Government of Andhra Pradesh issued a notification for the recruitment of resource persons at the district level to be filled by persons with disabilities under the mandate of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. For Venugopal, who is orthopedically disabled, this was as an opportunity to secure a decent job and become financially independent.

He narrates the experience of getting the job—'the notification was very vague, it only stated that the jobs are reserved for persons with disabilities. I applied thinking that it would be something to do with rural development. I cleared the written exam and interview, and after the training period we got know that the Job profile was that of District Coordinator-Disability in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (MNREGS), to coordinate the employment guarantee scheme for persons with Disabilities'. Venugopal and several others like him were to be the people handling
the identification and allotment of jobs under the MNRGS for people with disabilities. In a landmark move, the services of people with disabilities and their unique expertise would be leveraged to expand employment opportunities under the country's largest employment and livelihood generation initiative. This promised an end-to-end involvement of people with disabilities in the employment economy of the country—offering inclusion and opportunity in everyday occupation, as well as at the level of programme implementation.

Venugopal remembers the recruitment process as an uncertain and frustrating experience, but he goes on to add—'this job helped me a lot, and at a very difficult time in my life'. However, for Venugopal, this uncertainty does not end with securing the job. He continuously faces barriers and impediments in delivering his everyday duties for the past five years. As per his employment requirements, he has to travel to the field on a regular basis to mobilize persons with disabilities to form their labour groups, and coordinate with the village and block level officials to provide these labour groups with work under the employment guarantee scheme.

Venugopal, who cannot walk more than half a kilometre at a stretch due to disabilities in both his legs, is entitled to a vehicle from the office in order to discharge his duties. When he initially joined and asked his superiors for a vehicle, Venugopal, who had secured his job after clearing all the qualifying tests, was made to undergo an additional arbitrary test quizzing him about the statistics of the district. Unable to answer satisfactorily, he was refused a vehicle. Venugopal says that he was denied a vehicle as part of the cost-cutting measures of the workplace.

When supervisors were changed after six months, Venugopal was provided with a vehicle. He could now work effectively; he went on to mobilise and create 1050 labour groups of persons with disabilities. When discriminatory barriers to Venugopal's mobility were removed, his involvement with the cause and his performance underwent a significant change.
But this period was short-lived. Even though Venugopal has access to a vehicle now, he has to share one vehicle with seven other officials, and has to depend on private transport for the last-mile connectivity. Due to the lack of initiative and disinterest after initial implementation of the disability guidelines, 1600 job cards of persons with disabilities have become inactive (they have not been provided with work), and 150 labour groups (out of the initial 1050) had to be removed.

It is the provisions of the Disability Act 1995 that ensure people with disabilities are incorporated for assigning as well as filling suitable positions of employment. However, discrimination continues in other forms after jobs are assigned. Since 2011, the salaries of the special district coordinators have remained static, but other officials have received a 40 percent raise. While other officials have become Fixed Term Employees (FTE), which allows them to avail benefits like maternity leave, reimbursement of medical bills, and long leaves, Venugopal and other special district coordinators are still employed on a contractual basis and denied these benefits on grounds of non-performance.

The arbitrary test Venugopal was made to go through, and allegations of non-performance do not indicate a lack of merit, they are indicative of the lack of commitment on the part of the administration in providing enabling conditions for the special coordinators to work in. Venugopal's experience highlights the absence of institutional mechanisms in providing conditions for persons with disabilities to work—something against the spirit in which the act was passed. Here, it is left to the struggle and perseverance of persons with disabilities themselves and the occasional individual initiative of sensitive officials who have to fight at every step in securing the rights promised by the act. While the protection the act offers and the employment mandates it incorporates truly benefit people with disabilities by opening up employment arenas, lack of systemic and institutional understanding about the act is what leads to continued discrimination, adds Venugopal. The struggle continues.
The village and surrounding land of Thadmuthlong in Phramer, in the West Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, is dotted with farmlands and abandoned coal mines. In May 2014, the National Green Tribunal stopped coal mining in Meghalaya. Environmental experts claimed that the relatively archaic mining techniques affected ground water, and several mining villages, including the ones in Phramer saw their livelihoods come to a grinding halt.

Not immediately apparent, this had and still has a serious impact on the lives of people with disabilities in the mining areas of the state. Already perceived as social misfits and economically unproductive, reduced employment opportunities for previously earning members amplifies financial pressures and heightens this perception. Long existing superstitions about people with disabilities make matters worse—they are believed to be cursed, and their families are too because of their presence.

Shwalet Tang, 22, grew up in Thadmuthlong. Visually impaired (the certificate puts his disability at 75 percent), he was subject to all the myriad assumptions and superstitions about people with disabilities in the village. Because two of the six children in the family were disabled (Shwalet and his sister both have visual disabilities), the family was isolated by others in the community. After his father's death in 2002, Shwalet's mother raised him and his siblings.
'When I was young, I faced lots of problems and discrimination among friends and people around; the whole village would make fun of my disability,' says Shwalet. In 1998, he came across a society for supporting people with disabilities, and stayed on at their hostel. Gradually, with care and support, he went on to complete his schooling, in 2007. Shwalet's self-perception went through a marked change during this period—'I adapted and changed; I gained understanding about my disability, and accepted it. I passed my matriculation from Jyot Sroat School in 2007. Thereafter, I joined St. Edmund's College and pursued higher studies till I completed my graduation in 2012'.

Through local networks of disability organisations, Shwalet went on to work with a non-government organisation to create livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities in the state. Aware of the serious discrimination people with disabilities face when it comes to educational and occupational opportunities, Shwalet decided to dedicate his time to implement the mandates of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, in rural Meghalaya. Education always held a place of significant importance in Shwalet's life, and, in 2013, he was appointed the headmaster of a school in Phramer, and joined a committee to start another school in his village. He was also simultaneously reading for a degree in Education. However, his time as headmaster would be cut short when the village committee raised questions about his efficacy as a person with disability to juggle both his duties as a student and a headmaster. He went on to join a voluntary position with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) under the Right to Education Act in Meghalaya, where he served as the local resource person for people with disabilities.

Through his engagement with organisations for people with disabilities, Shwalet would be introduced to the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. It was through awareness about the act that he came to know about the 3 percent reservation provision in
government jobs for people with disabilities. In 2014, the District Commissioner's office was recruiting peons, and Shwalet decided to apply. He was the only candidate with physical disability to apply for the position and passed both the examination and the interview.

When he did not receive any notice for his appointment, Shwalet decided to find out what went wrong. While others on the merit list were issued appointment letters, Shwalet found his was oddly missing. With support from disability rights advocacy groups, Shwalet approached the Employment Exchange Office. Refusing to give a reason for not issuing Shwalet's appointment letter, the office asked him to approach the Disability Commissioner's office. Shwalet then went directly to the District Commissioner's office and requested a meeting with the selection committee to know why he was not being appointed to a post that he was clearly eligible for. Here, Shwalet leveraged his knowledge about the act again. He argued the office was aware of the provisions of the act—as its application notice that invited candidates with disabilities under the 3 percent reservation had shown—and the onus to follow through with it was on them.

'I used a lot of communication skills I learnt during my time with the disability organisations to argue my case and talk about my rights,' says Shwalet. In December 2015, Shwalet was issued his appointment letter.

Shwalet's story demonstrates how awareness of rights can take a person places never imagined. 'It has been a long journey for us to empower ourselves,' says Shwalet. Isolated by his peers and his community, and hesitant to speak up, Shwalet now is confident and articulate. He travels alone on all his assignments and, while still associated with disability rights activists and advocates, he works as a traveling salesperson.
Reena Bhatia was a student at Delhi University, pursuing a degree in commerce, when she was diagnosed with dropsy. Due to improper medical treatment, which led to her being comatose for a while, Reena partially lost her vision and motor movements. Gradually, as Reena re-acquired motor and cognitive abilities, her family—with the assistance of organizations for the visually impaired—was able to arrange for her an adequate environment to resume her studies. However, her vision was permanently affected. Since her admission to an institute for the visually impaired in Delhi, Reena has voluntarily stayed away from her family in Shimla, and celebrates the feeling of self-reliance that comes with it.

Reena's struggle with social discrimination began the day she rejoined Delhi University for a correspondence course. 'Because of my low vision and imbalanced walk, many teachers accused me of drinking. They would not believe me when I said that I was recovering from a protracted illness,' recalls Reena. Public harassment became a regular practice for teachers and examiners at Delhi University, who were suspicious and asked for certification for her physical disability.

While pursuing a correspondence course with Gargi College, Reena cleared the foundation test for Chartered Accountancy (CA) and registered herself with Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Delhi. A significant part of the CA programme consists of an
'Articleship' which requires the students to join a firm for practical training. Reena worked in the office as a regular employee, until one of the senior officials discovered her visual impairment. She was sent away for a while after being told she would be given research work on her return. However, on rejoining the office she was informed by her colleagues that her low visual ability indicated she would not be able to work as efficiently or as much as her sighted colleagues. At that moment Reena was unaware of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. Not knowing any other way to address the discrimination she faced, Reena left her place of work.

Academically, however, Reena thrived, until more instances of discrimination would restart her struggle. She engaged volunteers and scribes for her CA exams. 'Initially I did not face many problems as I appeared for the Common Proficiency Test (CPT) exams, since the rules for the number of scribes were not so stringent. The examinees could change as many writers between exams as they wanted to so long as the writer was an undergraduate or under the age of twenty. But by the time I reached my final year, the examinee could change a scribe only once over all the days of the exam,' says Reena.

Reena recalls an incident in which one of the invigilators was not aware of the rules prescribed for a change of scribes, delaying the examination process for her. The ICAI authorities disregarded her complaints of that episode. The following semester, Reena requested for a change of a scribe more than once, or for ICAI to provide her with a competent, permanent scribe. The institute responded to her email just two days before the exams, without any clear answer.

Incidentally, for the first two exams Reena had to engage two different writers—the first couldn't continue writing for Reena, and the second was an incompetent candidate. On the third day, she requested a new scribe to accompany her. Reena was harassed publicly, and made to wait for an hour before she was allowed to write the exam. Struck with anxiety and deeply humiliated, she collapsed in the examination hall.
Reena reported the matter to the ICAI authorities the same day. The examination heads at ICAI accused her of taking different students, masters in respective subjects, for each exam, as a scheme to score better marks. Reena then took the matter up with the Delhi High court, where the ICAI was taken to task on for improper provision of facilities to visually handicapped candidates—in breach of the standards set by the Disability Act 1995. By failing to provide a non-discriminatory environment to ensure equal opportunity, ICAI was acting against the provisions and the intent of the act. In its defense, ICAI displayed a record of 377 centers in cities across India and abroad. The impossibility to equip each institute with a writer's bank was used as an excuse for their inability to provide a team of writers of their own. At the same time, restrictions on the number of scribes that an examinee could change was declared as a method to check improper sharing of knowledge between the writer and the candidate.

On November 18, 2013, the High Court passed a judgment in Reena's favour, and established new guidelines—guidelines reflecting those which Reena herself had framed when she petitioned the court—for the ICAI. According to the new rules, ICAI was asked to either organize a writers' bank for physically disabled candidates at each center, or register itself with another university to share a group of scribes for the examinations. Marking a milestone in the policies prescribed for the use of scribes, ICAI was also asked to eliminate the limit imposed on the number of scribes used by an examinee during the course of the examination, and to provide adequate remuneration to the writers in case they were engaged by the candidate. All these changes took place with support from the provisions of the act.

Reena's struggle for the rights of candidates with visual disabilities has paved the way for a more conducive environment for students at the ICAI, especially during examinations. Though Reena is nervous that the case against the institute may influence her examination result, a favourable judgment has also boosted her confidence for the forthcoming examinations. While advocating for equal opportunity in education, Reena has consistently practiced the same in her office. 'In office, I am often asked to conduct tasks which even I think maybe difficult for me, but my seniors prefer to help me than to reserve it for others,' says Reena.
This cover has been conceptualized and designed by Mahtab Irani, a part-time design enthusiast. The image is a modified sketch of a photo of the NCPEDP Walk to Freedom held on 3rd December, 2007. Taken at the iconic India Gate, this photo signifies that the combined strength and impetus of a movement can effect landmark change in the nation. A march by people with disabilities shows that all policy decisions should take place with the active involvement of the people themselves. It hopes to show that no longer are people with disabilities the passive receptors of charity from above, rather, they are involved agents, and masters of their own destinies.
Mani Ram Sharma fought discrimination in civil service post allotments for six long years to realize his dream of becoming an officer with the Indian Administrative Service.

Vishant Nagvekar tirelessly takes pictures of inaccessible public buildings in Goa, systematically collates information to send to the relevant authorities to fight discrimination in the built environment.

Bugga Mallesh fought for seven years to get a bus pass to make his daily commute manageable and earn a living.

These are the lives that this book deals with. These are the accounts of individuals who have, through immense perseverance, and the support of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, been able to lead richer and fuller lives. NCPEDP and Mindtree, through this book, hope to tell the world the stories of people with disabilities who have been impacted by legal reform, to show, perhaps, that change is possible.