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THE BRIDGE INDIA

Facilitating Social Partners

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INCLUSION
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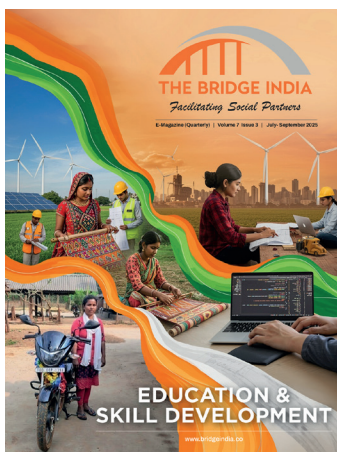
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Bridging India's Future

Inclusion Rising



Accessibility, Employability & Attitudes: India's Inclusion Shift

Guest Editor ▲ **SUBHASH CHANDRA VASHISHTH**

The conversation on disability inclusion in India has grown steadily over the past decade, becoming central to discussions on equity and dignity. What were once seen as isolated concerns—like ramps or accessible digital content—are now recognised as essential for full participation. The link between accessibility, employability, and the attitudes that shape both deserves continued attention.

Recent policy moves signal meaningful progress. The Government of India's renewed push for accessibility audits in public institutions marks an important shift. Greater emphasis on national guidelines and standards for public spaces is helping embed accessibility into planning and maintenance, rather than treating it as an afterthought. Digital accessibility, long overlooked, is also gaining ground, with clearer expectations for user-friendly and inclusive ICT systems.

Regulatory action has added further momentum. The Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities has begun imposing penalties on departments and private organisations whose websites and mobile applications remain inaccessible—sending a clear message that exclusion is not a minor lapse but a barrier to rights

and participation.

The corporate sector is also recognising that true employability relies on accessible workplaces, supportive systems, and inclusive culture. Many companies are beginning to redesign both their physical and digital environments to support meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Retrofitting still dominates over accessible design from the start, implementation varies widely, and attitudinal barriers continue to limit change. This is where platforms like The Bridge India's E-Magazine play a vital role—amplifying voices, shaping public understanding, and strengthening the culture of inclusion. I commend The Bridge India for sustaining this dialogue and for inviting me to share this editorial.

India is moving in the right direction. With thoughtful design, sustained engagement, and collective resolve, accessibility can become a shared national norm.

This edition of The Bridge E-Magazine reflects the energy and evolution of India's inclusion movement. It brings together stories of how corporates are using CSR commitments to advance accessibility; how NGOs are working tirelessly on training, employment creation, and attitudinal change; and how

government policies continue to fortify the national inclusion framework. It also captures the dynamic shifts within the social sector—leaders transitioning across organisations, carrying experience that deepens impact and accelerates change. These developments show a sector that is alive, learning, and constantly adapting to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Most importantly, this issue celebrates our Heroes of Humanity—individuals who, despite immense barriers, have achieved extraordinary success. They have represented India on global platforms with dignity, discipline, and excellence. Their journeys remind us that true inclusion is about recognising not limitations, but limitless human potential. Their stories inspire us to build an environment where everyone can thrive.

Through these narratives of policy progress, sectoral innovation, and personal courage, this edition stands as a testament to how policy, practice, and people are together reshaping India's inclusion landscape.

Subhash Chandra Vashissth
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Advancing Disability Inclusion in India:

The Transformative Role of NGOs in Strengthening Accessibility, Employability, and Attitudinal Change

• Dr Rabi Raj, (Senior Program Officer (Research), Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

India is home to an estimated 2.68 crore persons with disabilities according to the 2011 Census, though various research and policy sources suggest this figure could be as high as 80 million, making disability inclusion a significant development imperative. Despite landmark rights such as those enshrined in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act), which mandates government job quotas and universal accessibility standards, profound challenges remain. These include an 87% unemployment rate among disabled youth, a paltry 0.36% representation in formal corporate employment, and systemic infrastructural and social barriers limiting full participation. Over 69% of persons with disabilities reside in rural areas, where exclusion is most acute due to lower literacy and limited program access.

Within this context, select NGOs exemplify transformative practice by operationalizing UNCRPD principles through holistic interventions across accessibility, employability, and attitudinal change. This narrative showcases three such leaders: Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled in Bengaluru (accessibility), Sarthak Educational Trust in Delhi-NCR (employability), and Khushboo Welfare Society in Gurgaon (attitudinal change). Their Organizational histories, methodologies, and achievements illuminate pathways to scalable, evidence-based inclusion.

Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled: Pioneering Holistic Accessibility and Inclusion

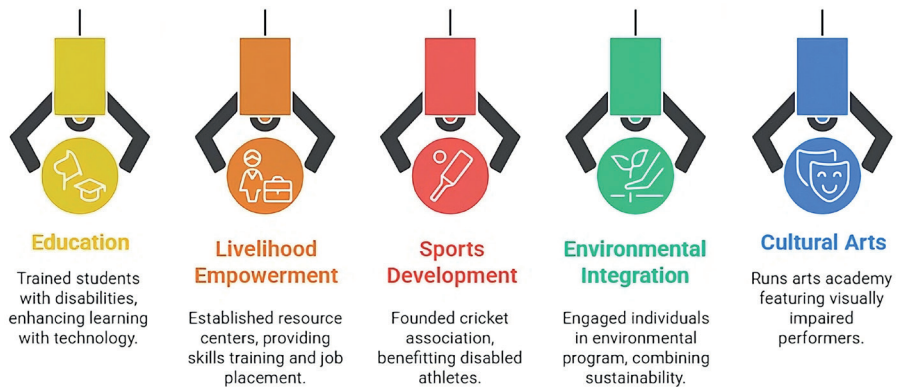
Founded in 1997 by visually impaired leaders Dr. Mahantesh G Kivadasannavar and Sugur Paramashivaiah Nagesh, Samarthanam Trust has grown from a local Bangalore initiative into a pan-India movement boasting 19 centers across 11 states impacting more than 5.5 lakh beneficiaries annually. The Trust's comprehensive approach integrates education, vocational training, sports, arts, rehabilitation, and environmental sustainability into its accessibility mission.

Historical Milestones and Key Achievements:

- **Education:** Trained 16,819 students with diverse disabilities from primary to higher education, incorporating assistive technologies to enhance learning for children with intellectual

and visual impairments.

- **L i v e l i h o o d Empowerment:** Established 13 Livelihood Resource Centres across states, providing skills training to nearly 25,000 youths with disabilities and achieving 64% job placement rates through corporate partnerships.
- **Sports Development:** Founded the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI), benefitting over 30,000 disabled athletes, with their blind cricket team recognized as Times of India's Team of the Year in 2019.
- **E n v i r o n m e n t a l Integration:** Engaged over 50,000 individuals through the Parisara community environmental program, combining sustainability with disability inclusion.
- **Cultural Arts:** Runs Sunadha arts academy featuring visually impaired performers, breaking stereotypes through dance and theater.



Samarthanam's accessibility initiatives embody the "Accessible India Campaign," retrofitting 1,000+ public venues with ramps, Braille signage, tactile paths, and audio navigation for over 100,000 users annually. Their guiding principle—"nothing about us without us"—ensures that disabled persons co-design interventions, resulting in 75% improvement in mobility and a documented 40% increase in community participation post-project implementation.

This holistic approach culminates in sports arenas and educational institutions becoming exemplars of inclusive design, empowering disabled persons as active contributors rather than spectators.

Sarthak Educational Trust: Transforming Employability through Skills and Support

Established in 2008, Sarthak Educational Trust addresses India's dire employment gap, where 1.3 crore disabled youth face an unemployment rate estimated at 87%. Operating 20+ employment centers nationwide, Sarthak has trained over 80,000 persons with disabilities across digital literacy, business process outsourcing, logistics, and customer service sectors in alignment with emerging gig economy demands.

Core Features of Sarthak's Employability Model:

- **Tailored Curriculum:** Includes screen reader training, sign language modules, and use of AI-powered learning to support diverse disabilities, enhancing employability in sectors like banking, IT, and e-commerce.
- **Corporate Partnerships:** Over 2,000 corporates collaborate with Sarthak, facilitating high-quality internships, placements, and sustained employment.
- **Post - Placement Support:** Recognizing retention challenges, Sarthak offers mentorship, reasonable accommodations (flexible hours, assistive technologies) and



Feature	Tailored Curriculum	Corporate Partnerships	Post-Placement Support	Awareness Campaigns
Description	Screen reader, sign language, AI learning	2,000+ corporates, internships, placements	Mentorship, accommodations, career development	Employer sensitization, stigma reduction

ongoing career development.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Drives stigma reduction through employer sensitization, successfully debunking myths around productivity and capabilities of disabled workers.

Outcomes have shown 70% placement success rates and 85% retention, with many alumni progressing into mid-management roles or high-demand gig work. Sarthak actively supports rural and peri-urban communities, bridging access gaps and contributing to economic independence and social inclusion.

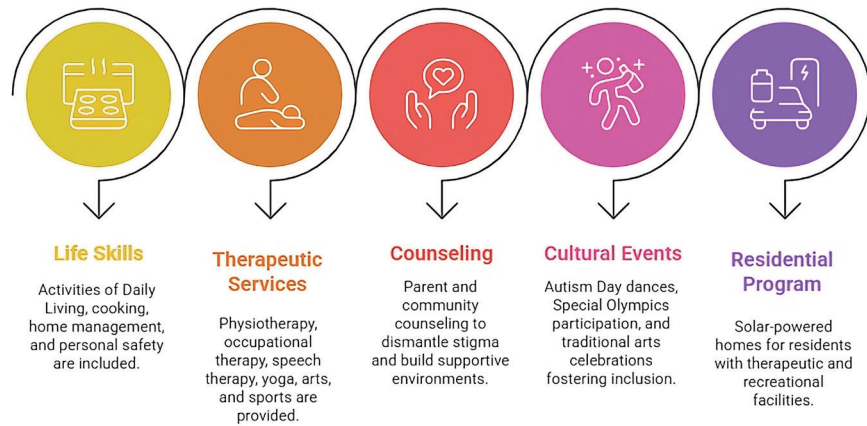
Khushboo Welfare Society: Championing Attitudinal Change and Holistic Care in Gurgaon

Founded in 1995, Khushboo Welfare Society operates a 0.4-acre campus in Gurgaon, offering daycare for 102 children with cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome, and multiple disabilities and residential care at

Tauru. Their programs emphasize family partnership and cater holistically to physical, cognitive, and emotional needs.

Program Components:

- Life Skills Development including Activities of Daily Living, cooking, home management, and personal safety.
- Therapeutic Services encompassing physiotherapy (3,251 sessions), occupational therapy (2,494 sessions), speech therapy (1,341 sessions), along with yoga, arts, and sports.
- Parent and community counseling to dismantle stigma and build supportive environments.
- Cultural and sports events such as Autism Day dances, Special Olympics participation (gold and multiple medals), and traditional arts celebrations fostering inclusion.
- Residential Program delivering solar-powered homes for 4-5 residents each, with comprehensive therapeutic and recreational facilities.



Khushboo's efforts result in documented improvements like independent walking and speech, significant boosts in child confidence, and enhanced family resilience. Coordinated funding of INR 1.53 crore supports these innovations, backed by corporate donors like Mastek and SBI Foundation.

Integrating Impact and Charting a Scalable Path Forward

Together, these NGOs represent an integrated, multisectoral model addressing the complex reality of disability in India: Samarthanam establishes physical and systemic access. Sarthak converts skills to opportunity, addressing employment. Khushboo transforms attitudes ensuring societal acceptance. Their collective governance structures maintain transparency and accountability, adhering to FCRA and 80G standards, with robust monitoring

frameworks that measure outcomes from mobility gains to employment retention and social inclusion.

Visualizable Key Highlights for Disability Inclusion in India:

- 5.5 lakh+ beneficiaries reached annually by Samarthanam across education, livelihoods, and sports sectors.
- 1,000+ accessibility retrofits enhancing momentum for the Accessible India Campaign.
- 80,000 disabled individuals skilled by Sarthak, with 70% securing jobs across 2,000 corporates.
- Over 100,000 community members sensitized through sports and advocacy programs.
- Khushboo's 3,251 physiotherapy and 2,494 occupational therapy sessions boosting child independence.
- INR 1.53 crore deployed by Khushboo

for residential care development.

- Gold and multiple medals won by Khushboo children in Special Olympics.

Policy Recommendations:

- Expand disability-inclusive technology deployment especially AI-enabled tools to bridge rural gaps.
- Enhance coordination for fund mobilization to stabilize NGO-led intervention sustainability.
- Increase employer mandates for inclusion supported by government incentives and compliance enforcement.
- Strengthen parent and community engagement programs to abolish stigma.

These three organizations exemplify how collaborative, rights-based, and community-embedded programs can transform India's disability landscape, fulfilling its constitutional promise of equity and dignity. By centering persons with disabilities as leaders and co-designers, they mirror successful models like the Uttarakhand NGO Cluster, where shared resources and disability champions drove organizational change across 50+ members, achieving early intervention referrals, accessibility funds for 21 beneficiaries, and disaster-resilient inclusion during 2013 floods. Similarly, SPARK's Disability Inclusion Facilitators in India have empowered youth advocates to secure UDID cards, unlocking welfare schemes for thousands, while Sarthak's alumni stories document career ascents from training to corporate leadership. Khushboo's family transformations parallel Enable India's mainstream integrations. Scaling these via inter-NGO federations, public-private partnerships like UNDP-MoSJE innovation challenges, and stricter RPwD enforcement could elevate 80 million lives, converting policy aspirations into lived realities of participation, productivity, and pride across urban-rural divides.



Embracing Abilities: CSR Initiatives Driving Disability Inclusion In India

• Meghna Sandhir

In the current corporate landscape, corporate social responsibility (CSR) needs to evolve from mere compliance to a strategic choice that shapes who reaps the rewards of economic growth. At the center of this evolution is disability inclusion. This is not just about philanthropy; it's a strategic imperative that enhances teams, broadens the talent pool, and showcases an organization's commitment to empathy and innovation. However, fostering inclusion cannot start only at the point of hiring. Many persons with disabilities (PwDs) encounter lifelong obstacles, such as low literacy, a lack of digital and life skills, limited job exposure, and rural isolation. These issues need to be addressed much earlier through CSR initiatives. Companies like Evalueserve, Titan, and IBM exemplify effective practices with approaches such as early intervention, skill-building pipelines, extensive training programs, and assistive technology, all of which create genuine opportunities for meaningful employment.

A Lifecycle Approach at Evalueserve

Evalueserve believes that individuals with disabilities deserve equal access to opportunities, not separate systems. This principle guides the company's commitments in Environment, Skill, Education, and Health. Inclusion is integral to dignity, fairness, and long-term development. To support this, Evalueserve partners with NGOs that assist children and youth with disabilities. Following the lifecycle approach, beginning with early childhood development and extending to youth skill-building, therapy, education,



and empowerment. They focus on early intervention, therapy, academic growth, digital literacy, and life skills to ensure inclusion begins before entering the workforce.

Merit-Based Opportunities and an Inclusive Culture

Evalueserve believes that talent shouldn't be defined by labels.

"This principle shapes our hiring process, where candidates are not required to disclose disabilities early on. Instead, we focus on skills and capabilities. Our offices in India, Romania, and Chile are designed for accessibility, promoting seamless participation. Our Chile office has repeatedly won the 'Migrante' Inclusion

Award, showcasing our commitment to inclusion."

Digital accessibility is also crucial. Evalueserve invests in advanced assistive tools, such as captioning, screen-reader compatibility, magnifiers, and adaptive workflows platforms.

Similarly, IBM India is known for its

Human Ability and Accessibility Centre, which creates innovative tools like local-language speech recognition and tactile devices. These efforts demonstrate that accessibility enhances performance and fosters independence. Its hiring practices, too, include strong partnerships with NGOs, trained managers, and "inclusion ambassadors" who help recruit talent and raise awareness. Their experience highlights a vital lesson: when culture and systems prioritise inclusion, companies benefit from improved morale, loyalty, and innovation.

Building Employability and Skill Pathways

Evalueserve's strongest contribution lies in converting CSR investment into actual employability pathways. Through NGO-led training, youth with disabilities gain communication skills, digital literacy, experiential learning, vocational exposure and confidence-building support. This prepares them not only for jobs but for the expectations of knowledge-sector work.

Evalueserve has mapped roles where



PwDs thrive when provided the right support:

- **Data annotation and moderation**
- **Content and document review**
- **Research support**
- **Design and digital operations**
- **Analytics and quality analysis**
- **Technology-enabled processes**

These positions leverage strengths such as pattern recognition, focus, consistency and cognitive endurance traits that many PwDs excel in when given accessible systems and patient mentorship.

Titan Company's CSR model reinforces this approach at scale. Its flagship programmes with the Association of People with Disability (APD) train PwDs for retail, logistics, ITES, horticulture and e-commerce roles, integrating communication, teamwork, digital literacy and internships. Adapted facilities and rural outreach ensure no trainee is left behind. Titan's experience shows that structured skilling plus workplace exposure directly translates to placements, especially for youth from underserved geographies.

Beyond Funding: Volunteering, Mentorship and Capacity Building

Evalueserve's inclusion efforts extend beyond grants. Employees contribute expertise in English communication, computing, financial literacy, digital workflows, leadership and confidence building. This mentorship strengthens NGO capacity and gives trainees authentic exposure to workplace expectations.

Internally, policies address both visible and invisible disabilities, supported by Employee Assistance Programmes and a Code of Business Ethics that reinforces equal opportunity. IBM, too, through barrier-free facilities, flexible policies, transportation support and active PwD councils, recognises and enhances inclusion. Its structured feedback loops show how organisations can ensure PwDs are not only hired but heard.

Thought Leadership and Collaborative Advocacy

Evalueserve participates actively in national platforms shaping disability inclusion. At the 12th National Conference on Disability (2025), its ESG leader spoke on collaborative CSR models aligned with SDG 17, emphasising that systemic change requires partnerships across sectors. This aligns with the company's broader approach: early investment, accessible workplaces, skill-building and shared advocacy as interconnected pieces of the same design.

Ultimately, Evalueserve's lifecycle approach creates a virtuous cycle—building confident PwD talent, strengthening NGOs, and feeding inclusive hiring goals. Titan and IBM complement this model through scale and technology, demonstrating how corporate India can collectively expand pathways to dignity, employability and long-term empowerment

Way Forward: An Inclusive CSR Framework

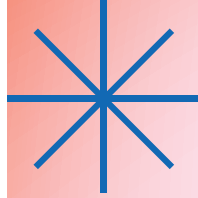
- **Adopt a Lifecycle Lens:** Invest early

in support therapy, education and foundational skills in childhood, then extend to digital literacy, vocational training and career guidance. Evalueserve's model shows how upstream investment builds a steady talent pipeline rather than last-minute hiring fixes.

- **Design for Accessibility:** Audit and upgrade physical spaces, retail outlets and digital platforms to meet universal access standards. Integrate assistive technologies, screen readers, captioning, and local-language tools, much like IBM's HAAC does, to enable full participation.
- **Build Inclusive Hiring Pathways:** Focus on skills, not labels. Delay disability disclosure at initial screening, expand sourcing through NGOs and community programmes, and create clear progression routes in operations, IT, admin and customer-facing roles.
- **Strengthen Skills and Exposure:** Partner with NGOs to offer communication, teamwork and digital skills training. Provide internships and on-the-job learning opportunities. Titan's vocational programmes show how structured training translates directly into employment.
- **Engage Employees and Communities:** Create mentorship channels, volunteering programmes and internal PwD networks. Employee ambassadors and co-designed NGO initiatives help sustain inclusion as a daily practice, not an annual CSR activity.
- **Measure What Matters:** Track placements, retention, role progression and workplace accessibility improvements. Share success stories and data to strengthen sector confidence and inspire peers.

The real test of CSR is simple: does it create pathways to paid, sustainable careers?

When the answer is yes, inclusion shifts from rhetoric to practice and companies that desit



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IMPACT MAKING NGOs

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Ek Koshish Special School	Mridul Singh	koshishsplschool@gmail.com	9811643244	www.ekkoshishspecialschool.org
Noida Deaf Society	Ruma Roka	ruma.roka@gmail.com	9811643244	www.noidadeafsociety.org

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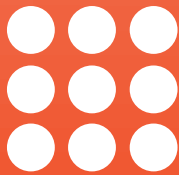
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Chhonzin Angmo – India's First Visually Challenged Woman to Conquer Everest

From a small village in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, Chhonzin Angmo lost her eyesight at just eight—but not her spirit. What many thought was darkness became the beginning of a new kind of inner light. Her journey from Mahabodhi Residential School in Ladakh to earning her Master's from Miranda House, Delhi University, reflects her belief that dreams grow stronger in adversity. Today, she serves as a Scale-1 Officer at Union Bank of India.

Chhonzin's world expanded through sports. She won gold in swimming, competed in national judo, earned medals in marathons, played football, cricket, and goalball at national and international levels, and even took flight through paragliding. Her Basic Mountaineering Course in 2016—where she was awarded Best Trainee—ignited her passion for the mountains.

She created history in 2021 as the only female mountaineer in *Operation Blue Freedom*, scaling the Siachen Glacier. Her feats continued with ascents of Mt. Kanamo, Kang Yatse

II, and an unnamed 6,000m peak. In 2024, she became the first visually challenged Indian woman to complete the Everest Base Camp trek.

On 19 May 2025, she achieved the impossible—summitting Mount Everest, becoming the first visually challenged woman in the world to stand at its peak. Her Everest was followed by Mt. Elbrus in August 2025.

Chhonzin proves that blindness is not a limitation but a force. Her mission now is the Seven Summits—lifting millions with the message that *true vision is purpose, passion, and courage*.



The Hero Who Fought Darkness With Determination

Kokila Kaushik's journey is a shining reminder that true vision comes from courage, not sight. Born with a visual impairment, Kokila stepped onto the judo mat not as a challenger, but as a warrior determined to rewrite India's para-sports history. Every fall, every struggle, and every doubt only strengthened her resolve.

Her extraordinary journey began with national dominance—eight consecutive Gold medals at the

National Blind Judo Championships, an achievement that reflects her perseverance and discipline. She carried this momentum to the global arena, earning 2 international Gold medals, 3 Silver medals, and 7 Bronze medals, making India proud time and again.

Kokila created history by becoming the first Indian woman to compete at the Paralympic Games in Paris, and a Bronze Medalist at the Asian Para Games, China. Her historic victory at the Judo Grand

Prix in Giza, Egypt, where she won Gold in the 52kg category after 21 years for India, stands as a landmark moment.

Most recently, on 7 November 2025, she added yet another feather to her cap with a Silver Medal at the Asian Para Judo Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Kokila is not just a champion—she is India's unstoppable spirit. Her journey inspires every Indian to believe that no barrier is powerful enough to defeat determination.

Sagar Parasari: The Peace Warrior on Wheels

Sagar Parasari – Turning 90% Disability Into 90% Success

His life is a testament to unshakable courage. Once a cheerful, active child, his world changed at the age of 12 when a rare, incurable condition left him 90% disabled. Schooling stopped, mobility weakened, and confidence collapsed. But even in that darkness, a spark within him refused to die.

At 15, Sagar made a quiet decision that shaped his destiny—to rise. With elbow crutches, immense determination, and a promise to himself, he re-entered school and proved that strength is not in the body but in the human spirit. He

completed his education, faced countless rejections, fought systemic barriers, and eventually earned a government position through sheer perseverance.

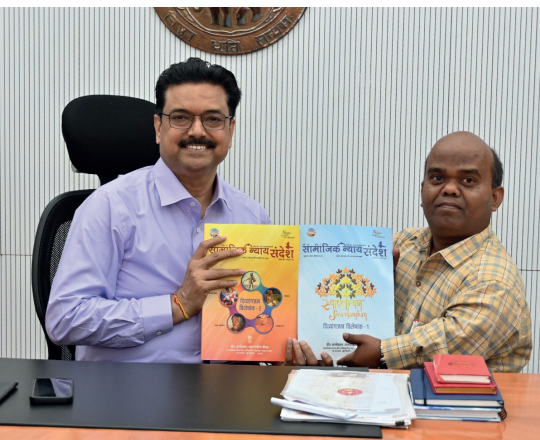
But his true calling was bigger: Peace.

Confined to a wheelchair, Sagar transformed his suffering into service. He wrote thousands of letters, poems, and messages of peace to leaders across the world. He founded the World Wide Peace Organization, authored *Discovery of Peace*, and travelled to more than 24 states—often to conflict zones—addressing over 2.2 million students on peace,



hope, and humanity.

Today, Sagar Parasari stands tall as a global messenger of peace. His life reminds us that disability cannot limit destiny—and that one determined soul can light the path for millions.



Short in Height, Giant In Impact: Dr. Santosh Kumar's Legacy

stone-throwing, and cruel questions about his disability. Yet, instead of breaking, these experiences shaped in him a powerful resolve: to stand not only for himself, but for every person with a disability.

Despite limitations in mobility, transportation, and daily routines, Dr. Santosh refused to stop. His brilliance led him to become India's first India Book Record holder under the disability category for earning a PhD in Social Science at the shortest height. His academic journey includes teaching at leading universities, two prestigious Postdoctoral Fellowships, and significant

contributions to national disability policies through the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Honoured with the Seva Samman, Uttar Pradesh Lokmat Samman, and several cultural and academic awards, Dr. Santosh continues to work tirelessly for the upliftment of marginalized communities.

A dedicated researcher, teacher, and advocate, he has published books, led workshops, coordinated national programmes, and inspired countless lives.

Dr. Santosh's story proves that true height is not measured in inches, but in impact—and he stands taller than most.

Dr. Santosh Kumar's life is a story of extraordinary courage born from extraordinary struggle. Growing up in rural Varanasi, he faced severe social discrimination and physical challenges caused by poor family circumstances that left him with dwarfism. As a child, he endured daily harassment—teasing,



Rising Beyond Limits

Simran Sharma



Simran Sharma's life is a testament to extraordinary courage. At just nine months old, a tragic accident left her with a major spinal injury at the C-6 level. Doctors said she would never regain sensation below her neck, but Simran chose a different destiny. With relentless physiotherapy, rehabilitation, and an unbreakable spirit, she fought her way back—step by step, breath by breath.

Today, Simran stands tall as one of

India's most promising National Para Rifle Shooters, having won 11 medals in three National Championships—including six Golds. Her dream is clear: to represent India at the World Cups, Asian Games, and the Paralympics.

Simran's journey, however, goes far beyond shooting. She has excelled in swimming, painting, chess, and even shone as a dancer trained under Shiamak Davar and Master Marzi. Her talent earned her a place

among India's top child prodigies on BYJU'S Young Genius, where she was introduced by legends Pullela Gopichand and Anjali Bhagwat.

Supported by her mentors and driven by a laser-sharp focus, Simran continues to break barriers with grace. Every medal she wins is not just a victory—but a reminder that courage can rewrite fate.

Simran Sharma is not just an athlete. She is India's unstoppable spirit—a true Hero of Humanity.



Policy Framework For 'Disability Inclusion'

Reviewing National Disability Policies And Programs In India.
Dr. K. Ranju Anthony, Transdisciplinary Research Foundation

The original 'National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006)' was developed to advance an inclusive, equitable and rights-based approach for the population of 22 million with varied disabilities in India, as documented in the 2001 Census. Ascribed in constitutional principles of parity or equality, integrity and pride/dignity, the policy views persons with disabilities (PwDs) as an important national resource and promotes

their meaningful participation in all spheres of life. There has been much significant legislation after this that includes the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), the National Trust Act (1999), and the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), that facilitates access to education, employment and further rehabilitation. This has been followed up with creation of a broad network of national institutes, rehabilitation centres and financial support systems. The

policy spans across prevention, early identification, physical and educational rehabilitation, livelihood enhancement, social accessibility and social protection. This further accentuates the need for coordinated efforts by different government bodies, non-governmental organisations and communities at large to improve quality of life and secure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The country has seen tremendous

strides since then with respect to advancing the welfare, rights, and empowerment of PwDs. Since last many years, the Government of India has developed a robust institutional, legislative, and programmatic framework aligned with international standards such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Pivotal to this evolution is the 'Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD)', established in 2012 to provide focused attention on disability issues that were earlier part of the broader Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Now, originally carved out as the Department of Disability Affairs, it has been renamed twice, first time in 2014 and then in 2016 to reflect a stronger emphasis on empowerment and to adopt the inclusive term 'Divyangjan'. Over time, the Department has built a comprehensive institutional network comprising of National Institutes, Composite Regional Centres (CRCs), District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRCs), statutory bodies like the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) and the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD), as well as welfare-focused entities such as the National Trust and financial institutions like the National Divyangjan Finance and Development Corporation (NDFDC).

While clubbed together, these organizations collectively in areas encompassing research, capacity development, rehabilitation, protection of rights, financial inclusion, and community engagement. Harmonizing with them is a suite of flagship government schemes that address critical aspects of accessibility, assistive technology, education, skill development, livelihood, and social security.

Following are the key schemes that are in varying stages of implementation pan India;

1. Scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP)

The ADIP Scheme, operational since 1981, is one of the Government's most impactful interventions, aiming to provide high-quality, scientifically manufactured aids and appliances to economically weaker PwDs. These include wheelchairs, prosthetic limbs, hearing aids, smart canes, braille kits, and more. By enhancing mobility, communication, and daily functioning, the scheme directly supports physical and socio-economic rehabilitation.

Under ADIP, grants-in-aid are released to implementing agencies such as ALIMCO, National Institutes, CRCs, DDRCs, and credible NGOs. Corrective surgeries, where necessary, are also supported before fitting appliances. The scheme underwent a major revision in 2024 and will continue through the 15th Finance Commission period until March 2026.

2. Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)

The DDRS provides financial support to voluntary organizations for delivering a wide range of rehabilitation services. These include early intervention, special education, vocational training, community-based rehabilitation, and therapeutic support for PwDs with intellectual, locomotor, visual, hearing, or multiple disabilities.

By strengthening civil society participation, the DDRS helps bridge service gaps in remote and underserved regions, ensuring that even rural PwDs receive structured rehabilitation support.

3. Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)

Launched in 2015, the Accessible India Campaign is a landmark initiative toward building a barrier-free nation. It focuses on three critical pillars of accessibility:

- **Built Environment Accessibility**
Ensuring ramps, lifts, tactile paths, adapted toilets, Braille signage, auditory signals, and other universal design features across public buildings, educational institutions, hospitals, and offices.
- **Transportation System Accessibility**
Improve accessibility in buses, railways, airports, and intermediate transport, enabling PwDs to travel independently and safely.
- **Information & Communication Accessibility**
Promoting accessible websites, captioned media content, sign-language interpretation, accessible documents, and improved availability of interpreters nationwide.

4. Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA)

SIPDA is a comprehensive scheme supporting State and Central agencies in implementing various provisions of the RPwD Act, 2016, thereby enabling structural, legislative, and administrative implementation of disability rights nationwide. Its components include:

- Creating barrier-free environments in public buildings.
- Making government websites accessible.
- Supporting CRCs, regional centres, and DDRCs.
- Funding disability certificates camps and issuance processes.
- Conducting awareness campaigns and sensitization workshops.
- Establishing early intervention centres and diagnostic facilities.



- Promoting accessible libraries, knowledge centres, and digital services.
- Supporting inclusive sports.
- Creating universal disability identification systems at district and state levels.

5. Unique Disability ID (UDID) Project

The UDID Scheme aims to create a national database of PwDs and issue a Unique Disability Identity Card to each beneficiary. This card ensures uniformity, portability, and ease of accessing benefits across states.

Key features include:

- Centralized online registration and application process.
- Digital and portable disability certificate.
- Elimination of duplicate records.
- Real-time tracking of benefits and service usage.
- Integration with various welfare schemes.
- Support for all 21 disabilities

notified under the RPwD Act.

- Medical Boards process applications digitally, while District Welfare Officers oversee implementation and ensure inclusion even in remote areas.

6. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)

Under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), the IGNDPS provides a monthly pension to persons with severe disability (80% or above) who fall within the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. Beneficiaries above 18 years receive financial assistance to support their daily sustenance and reduce vulnerability.

This scheme plays a critical role in the social security framework, especially for PwDs living in poverty without stable income support.

7. Scholarship Schemes for Students with Disabilities

The Government of India offers structured scholarships to promote inclusive education, including; Pre-matric Scholarships, Post-Matric Scholarships and Top-Class Education Scholarships

These support tuition fees, maintenance allowances, assistive devices, books, and hostel facilities. The aim is to eliminate financial barriers and promote equal participation in mainstream and higher education.

8. National Action Plan for Skill Development of PwDs (NAP-SDP)

Implemented since 2015 and updated regularly, the NAP-SDP empowers PwDs with market-relevant skills through:

- Skill training centres operated by National Institutes and CRCs
- Industry-linked training modules
- Entrepreneurship development
- Placement assistance and job fairs
- Training of trainers
- By enhancing employability, this scheme provides long-term livelihood opportunities.

9. Awareness Generation and Publicity (AGP) & In-Service Training Scheme

AGP focuses on spreading awareness about disability rights, government schemes, legal provisions, preventive care, and accessibility norms. Campaigns target PwDs, families, schools, employers, and the general public, especially in rural and remote areas.

In-Service Training complements this effort by sensitizing government officials, service providers, and community workers. Regular workshops enhance understanding of the RPwD Act, early intervention, rehabilitation, and inclusive practices.

10. National Trust Schemes

Established under the National Trust Act, 1999, these schemes cater to

persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability, and Multiple Disabilities. The Trust provides:

- Legal guardianship support through Local Level Committees
- Group homes, respite care, and long-term assisted living
- Awareness, training, and capacity building programmes
- Support for NGOs working in the field

These schemes ensure protection, care, and lifelong support for some of the most vulnerable groups.

11. Financial Assistance Schemes of NDFDC

NDFDC provides concessional loans for income-generating activities through:

- **Divyangjan Swavalamban Yojana**

- Enables PwDs to start or expand businesses, enhancing economic independence.

- **Vishesh Microfinance Yojana**
- Provides microfinance support through MFIs, SHGs, and state missions for small businesses and livelihood activities.

These schemes foster entrepreneurial spirit and financial inclusion among PwDs.

12. Assistance Through ALIMCO

ALIMCO manufactures and supplies high-quality assistive devices for PwDs under ADIP and other schemes. It operates multiple production and distribution centres across India and organizes mega camps for large-scale delivery of appliances, contributing significantly to

accessibility and rehabilitation.

Conclusion

India's disability welfare framework today is wide-ranging, multidimensional, and increasingly rights-based. From accessibility reforms and rehabilitation support to livelihood promotion, assistive technologies, social security, and capacity building, the Government of India has integrated global norms into national practice. While challenges remain in uniform implementation and inclusive infrastructure, the schemes discussed above provide a robust structure for ensuring equitable opportunities, dignity, and empowerment for persons with disabilities across the country.





Strengthening Inclusion: Goa's Purple Fest 2025 Launches Landmark Initiatives for PwDs



India's disability landscape witnessed a notable development with the 3rd edition of the International Purple Fest 2025 held in Goa from 9–12 October. Known for its inclusive programming and community-first approach, this year's edition introduced three initiatives that strengthen accessibility and learning opportunities for persons with disabilities across the country.

A key highlight was the launch

of the Inclusive IELTS Training Handbook, created to support candidates with visual, hearing and locomotor disabilities. The handbook offers adapted lesson plans, communication supports, and clear accommodation guidelines for educators and training centres.

The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) also announced two significant steps: a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certification

for Indian Sign Language interpreters, and a new programme to train practitioners in British and American Sign Language formats. Both initiatives begin on 3 December, marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Collectively, these measures reflect a strengthening national commitment to accessible education and skill development for persons with disabilities.

Delhi Introduces Monthly Support Scheme For High-Support-Need Persons with Disabilities



The quarter saw an important policy step from Delhi, which rolled out a dedicated financial assistance scheme for persons with benchmark disabilities who require high levels of support. Announced in October, the initiative offers a ₹6,000 monthly allowance to residents with a disability score of 60–100, provided their annual

family income is below ₹1 lakh and they have lived in Delhi for at least five years.

Unlike traditional pension-based support, this allowance is designed to meet real, recurring needs—caregivers' fees, assistive devices, transportation for therapies, medical consumables and home-based rehabilitation. Importantly, the scheme is supplementary and

not a replacement for existing social welfare benefits.

For many families managing intensive daily care, the new allocation signals long-overdue recognition of the financial and emotional load that high-support needs place on households. It also reinforces a broader shift in Indian disability policy which is becoming more nuanced and responsive.

Leadership in Motion: Meenakshi Ramesh To Lead Pratham's Next Chapter



Meenakshi Ramesh brings over two decades of social sector leadership to her role as CEO Designate of Pratham, marking a meaningful return to the organization where she began her journey in development work. She first joined Pratham Mumbai as a volunteer in 2001, working closely with the founders during the organization's

formative years until 2009.

Since then, Meenakshi has built a distinguished career driving social impact across multiple sectors. Most recently, she served as Chief Executive Officer of United Way Chennai, where she directed corporate funds toward education, healthcare, and livelihood initiatives. Her work has spanned organizing large-scale civic engagement initiatives, and establishing civic knowledge

platforms to empower urban citizens.

Meenakshi is an alumna of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). She also served on the boards of multiple NGOs working in education and health, where she provided strategic guidance and supported organizations committed to creating sustainable change.



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