IT'S TIME FOR ACTION
Tenth Year of the Disability Act
It was on a cold December day, some ten years ago, when our Parliamentarians passed 'The Disability Act 1995'. I was one of the privileged few who witnessed this historical moment - dew eyed - from the Visitor's Gallery of Rajya Sabha.

The last ten years have been like a Magnum Opus, with its due share of heroism, tragedy, and even a few comical moments as well. The Legislation gave the Indian disabled people the power to 'Act'. And act they did. They got united, they raised their voice, they came out in the open and demanded their due share. The two landmark victories were to get enumerated in the National Census and to be able to cast our vote in an accessible way in the General Elections. In other words - first, the Nation was forced to recognise that we existed and then, it was made to realise that we did not merely exist but that we were citizens too!

To have a law with no one to implement it has been the tragedy of the Indian disability sector. First, for as long as 3 years, the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) was not even appointed! And then, in recent years, while the office has a decorative head, she/he is more a puppet in the hands of the Ministry of Social Justice than the watchdog that she/he is supposed to be.

If we want 'The Disability Act 1995' to not merely exist on paper but to get enforced, we will have to free the office of the CCPD from the shackles of the Ministry of Social Justice. Infact, we need a radical paradigm shift.

If we want the entire issue of disability to be not viewed from the 'Welfare' looking glass, then we definitely need to take away this subject matter to another Ministry. The dream scenario would be to have a Ministry of our own - the Ministry of Disability Affairs! But for some reason, if that is not possible, then for sure the subject matter of disability should be shifted from the Ministry of Social Justice to the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Javed Abidi
Executive Director
NCPEDP

2nd December, 2005
Be not dumb, obedient slaves in an army of destruction! Be heroes in an army of construction!

- Helen Keller
Ability is the outcome of challenges surmounted. By this standard, the "differently-abled" have an edge in demonstrating a willingness to face adversity and succeed in spite of it. Thus, ability to perform in the modern corporate world must be viewed from an organisational mindset of facilitation and a willingness to accommodate as well as leverage varied complementary skill sets.

If we are increasingly moving towards a non-discriminatory world, it is because of the untiring contributions of a few to whom we owe much.

The NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards 2005 are a small recognition of the outstanding contributions towards ensuring that diversity in the workforce is decisively welcomed as an asset for organisations.

In Shell, in those activities where we have successfully employed "differently-abled" persons side by side with others, it has only enhanced the work environment, raised workplace standards and aided our commitment to deliver our best to the customer.

This year, the Helen Keller Awards have a simplified list of categories - namely, individuals with & without disabilities and organisations. I understand that, as has been the case previously, the choice of winners is a difficult task. The combination of personal commitment, effort & surmounting challenges along with social achievement is not an easy one to attain. For this reason, each of these awardees is a role model for all of us. As for the organisations that have made it to the list of awardees, their role is exemplary and I commend them.

I therefore take great pleasure in felicitating the winners of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards 2005.

Vikram Singh Mehta
Chairman
Shell Group of Companies in India
On the eve of the World Disability Day 2005, we at NCPEDP and Shell are proud to present the 7th NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards.

Over the years, the Awards - instituted in 1999 - have become the definitive benchmark for honouring people - both disabled and non disabled - and organisations who have been instrumental in promoting rehabilitation, equal opportunity and employment for disabled persons.

One change over the last year has been that the number of Awards has been reduced to a total of 9, with three awards each being presented in three categories. However, considering the commendable work being done by companies/organisations/institutions, one more award is being presented in this category this year.

While honouring this year's winners and celebrating World Disability Day 2005 here in Delhi - and indeed all over India and the world - we must not forget that much more needs to be done. As a survey conducted by NCPEDP showed, the private sector employs a dismal 0.28% people with disabilities, the public sector only 0.54% and multinational corporations a mere 0.05%! If this is the case in Business India's Super 100 Companies, one can just imagine the situation in others.

The encouraging part is that as long as role models such as this year's winners continue to have a dream and work selflessly towards their vision, we shall continue to celebrate the spirit of empowerment!

To all the winners, congratulations and thank you!
THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

**Subodh Bhargava**

The ex-Group Chairman and Chief Executive of the Eicher Group of Companies, and past President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Subodh Bhargava is also one of the Founder Trustees of NCPEDP. One of the most influential spokespersons for Indian industry, he substantially contributes towards and influences government policy in relation to industry. Subodh Bhargava is currently associated with several boards as an Independent Director. He is also the Chairman of VSNL and Wartsila India Ltd.

**Sujit Gupta**

Sujit Gupta graduated with honours from the London School of Economics, prior to joining TATA Steel as a management trainee in 1961. A career with the TATA Group culminated in his holding responsibility as the Resident Director in Delhi. Since his retirement, he continues to be on the Board of a number of TATA Companies and is also a Trustee of the Wildlife Trust of India. While working with the TATA Group, Sujit Gupta worked closely with WHO as Chief Coordinator for Eradication of Small Pox. He is also the Chairman of the CII Core Committee on Disability.

**D.S. Chauhan**

Hearing impaired since 1943, D. S. Chauhan has been working for the welfare of the hearing impaired since 1955. He has been associated with numerous organisations in this regard, and has been the Hony. Secretary of the Delhi Association of the Deaf since 1985. He has been a member of the Working Group on Vocational Rehabilitation Centres for Physically Disabled constituted by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, and is currently a Committee Member of Standard Sign Language for Deaf Persons of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

**Asha Mehra**

Asha Mehra is the Secretary of Swavalamban, an organisation formed by parents of slow learners. With her own daughter being a slow learner, she is deeply committed to and involved with the issue of slow learning. Prior to this, as the wife of a senior officer in the Army, she served on the Army Wives’ Welfare Association (AWWA) Committee and was in charge of the scholarship disbursals to disabled children of Army personnel.

**Shailaja D. Sharma**

Overseeing the corporate social responsibility blueprint of Shell India, Dr. Shailaja Sharma is currently developing a portfolio of programmes and communications that further the social performance of Shell India. In addition to her previous assignments with the World Bank and NIIT, she has worked as a consultant to research projects on education, the unorganised sector and gender issues. She takes keen interest in development issues, is well known in the non-profit sector and often invited to participate in their deliberations.
CATEGORY A

DISABLED PERSONS FROM
WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE
DISABILITY SECTOR WHO
HAVE BEEN ACTIVE AS
AMBASSADORS OF THE
CAUSE OF EMPLOYMENT
FOR DISABLED PEOPLE AND
ARE A POSITIVE ROLE
MODEL FOR OTHERS
At a very young age, while studying in Class IX, Harish had a firecracker accident, which left him with 100% visual impairment. Harish and his family then spent two years attempting to restore his sight through a series of unsuccessful operations.

After a rehabilitation programme, Harish resumed his studies, while joining Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as a telephone operator. His tenacity paid off - he not only graduated in Economics and Political Science, but also completed his post graduation, attending evening classes at Mumbai University. Simultaneously, he also attended a diploma programme in business management and software development, becoming the first visually impaired computer programmer in India!

Harish is actively involved in the promotion of computer literacy to visually impaired persons, and is a consultant to organisations such as Vinayan Project of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Indian Guild for the Blind and the Computer Society of India. He has also made several presentations promoting IT education for the visually disabled at the International Council for the Visually Impaired, and has been part of an international initiative on development of an open source DAISY format e-text player for people with visual impairments.

Harish's achievements don't stop at helping others - he participated in the first mountaineering expedition for disabled people, scaling the 17,200 ft. Kshitidar peak in Manali, and was a runner up in a navigational car rally organised by the All India Automotive Racing Club!

Harish has been awarded the 'Star of the Millennium' by the Governor of Karnataka, the Piloo Kambatta Memorial Best Employee Award in 2000, and the Best Employee Award in the visually impaired category by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2003.
A 'CAN DO' SPIRIT

This spirited lady gave up a secure career to devote her life to rehabilitate others less privileged.

Naseema Hurzuk
Founder & President, Helpers of the Handicapped.
'Nasheman', 235/11, E, Tarabai Park, Kolhapur - 416 003.
Tel.: 91-231-2660026; E-mail: klp_crusade@sancharnet.in

At the tender age of 16, Naseema was afflicted with paraplegia, was bedridden and confined to her room. At a time filled with despair, her father came to her help, telling her “Khudi ko kar buland itna ke har taqdeer se pehle, Khuda bande se khud pooche bataa teri raza kya hai” (Raise yourself to such heights that God himself asks you as to what you desire). Even though her father passed away shortly after, she remembered his words and was charged with a new zeal to face her future with courage and fortitude.

Armed with a positive outlook, she graduated in Economics, got herself a job, and eventually rose to the post of Deputy Office Superintendent of Customs & Central Excise.

Recognising that her success was partly due to the opportunities available to her, she wanted to do something for the less privileged, and, in 1983, started ‘Helpers of the Handicapped’. As the work grew substantially over the years, she gave up her secure government job in 1999 to pursue rehabilitation of physically disabled people full time.

‘Helpers of the Handicapped’ was started to rehabilitate the physically disabled people from rural areas all over India. Currently, the Hostel-cum-Rehabilitation Centre at Kolhapur is accommodating 135 physically disabled students, vocational trainees, and staff members. In addition, a Vocational Training Centre produces wheelchairs, tricycles, crutches and other aids. Moreover, as part of becoming totally self-reliant, the organisation also farms large tracts of land at Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra, runs a Cooperative Credit Society and operates a Gas Agency.

Attributing her success to the fact that most ‘Helpers’ are themselves physically disabled, Naseema has directly been responsible for helping over 12,000 disabled persons, involving over Rs.33.4 million in educational/medical/vocational aids!

Naseema’s dedication and determination have won her laurels including those from the Government of India, Governor of Delhi, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Governor of Maharashtra, Union Home Minister, as well as the Outlook Speak Out Awards 2005.
It was sheer determination that got S. Sankara Raman, a wheelchair user afflicted with muscular dystrophy since childhood, through school and college. Moreover, his physical condition didn’t deter him from passing his Chartered Accountancy, and that too with a gold medal!

In 1992, at the age of 30, he came across S. Ramakrishnan and all the work that was being done by Amar Seva Sangam for rehabilitating physically disabled children. Without hesitation, he gave up his lucrative practice, and plunged whole-heartedly into his life’s dream: that of empowering disabled citizens by establishing a ‘Valley of the Disabled’ as a Rehabilitation and Development Centre.

Today, Amar Seva Sangam has a full-time home for 60 disabled children with integrated education, mobility aids and medical support, a day-care centre for 40 mentally impaired children as well as a hostel for 105 physically disabled youth, who are taught vocational skills. It has also set up a computer training centre for people with disabilities and has assisted in designing disabled-friendly EMU coaches for Mumbai.

Village-based rehabilitation initiatives include spreading awareness about disability issues among 60 lakh rural poor, spread over 4 blocks of 330 villages in Tamil Nadu and the formation of 75 Self-Help Groups consisting of 800 members.

For his selfless service over the years, S. Sankara Raman has been honoured repeatedly by the Government of India, Government of Tamil Nadu, and numerous other organisations and bodies.
CATEGORY B

NON DISABLED PERSONS FROM WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE DISABILITY SECTOR WHO CONTRIBUTED SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE CAUSE OF PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME
Shanti Raghavan
Managing Trustee, EnAble India.
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Shanti's first encounter with disability was when her brother was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes the patient to become progressively visually impaired. She and her husband Dipesh were instrumental in rehabilitating her brother, not only through orienting him to speech-enabled computers and tools and techniques for his studies, but also outdoor activities such as cycling, rafting and snorkelling!

After returning from the US with a M.S. degree in Computer Science, Shanti decided to use her experience to empower others with disability, sacrificing a high profile career with GE Aircraft Engines.

EnAble India was set up in 1999, and, since then, has been actively involved in education, employment and rehabilitation of people with disabilities. It currently has over 500 disabled persons registered. A popular facet of EnAble India is its Computer Centre which caters to disabled students of different age groups and education levels, and provides training in using speech-enabled computers.

Shanti also uses her 12 years of experience in the software industry to train disabled candidates in soft skills, personality development, computers and other employment related training. EnAble India's Employer Outreach programme has helped forge long-term partnerships with premier companies and has resulted in creation of job opportunities across all disabilities.

For her selfless service to the cause of promotion of employment for disabled people over the years, Shanti has been elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2005. She has also received an Award from Rotary Club of Cubbon Park in 2004 and the Rotary Inner Wheel Teachers' Award in 2005.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Shyam Kedare
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After obtaining a degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Mumbai, Shyam went on to work with organisations such as Bharat Bijlee, TCS, Hewlett Packard and BNR (Research), in India and overseas.

On returning to India in 1998, he set up Softnet Interactive, concentrating mainly on voice technologies. In the period 1998-2000, while interacting with visually impaired people in several US-based companies, he realised that voice applications for visually impaired people had much more potential. He also dwelled on the fact that even though Bangalore was an international IT hub - exporting software to make working simpler for millions across the world - not enough was being done for the visually impaired in the same city!

The next logical step was to visit The National Association for the Blind (NAB), which at that time, was operating a tele-marketing unit for Tata Indicom. Shyam’s company developed a software named NEIL (Navigation and Expert Interaction Logic), which allowed visually impaired users to navigate voice applications - hosted on a remote server and accessible from anywhere in India - using only 12 keys of a touchtone telephone instrument!

After training on NEIL, currently 5 visually impaired persons are employed with a major telecom service provider. Four more are undergoing training, and the next phase of the project will see them trained to take incoming calls, opening up new avenues of employment in the BPO industry.

Shyam’s expertise, far-sightedness and perseverance reflect his rare achievement: that of developing a low cost, innovative solution to make a difference to the lives of many.
Rev. Valeriano Vaz started his career as a teacher in a Seminary in Goa. It was at that time that he started getting involved in social issues affecting the people of Goa. After addressing diverse subjects, he became interested in the cause of disability and was appointed Director of Caritas Goa, which works in the area of rehabilitation of disabled persons.

The Vocational Training Centre - one of their first initiatives and the first in Goa - provides training in screen printing, carpentry, wood carving, welding, mechanics, baking, etc. Not only has this centre trained thousands of disabled persons, but it has also helped them to gain suitable self-employment or placements in the private sector, notably the hotel industry.

Realising that the key to helping disabled persons gain employment was formal education, a school for persons with disability was started. The concept of 'Reverse Inclusion', which is being used at St. Xavier's Academy (special school) - whereby non-disabled students join the disabled students and benefit from the special school - has been very successful, particularly for children with certain kinds of disability, who find it extremely difficult to cope in regular schools. This model is now also being promoted in another special school in Goa.

Rev. Vaz has spearheaded several initiatives to promote disability rights in Goa. He led a campaign to make public buildings barrier-free, has strongly advocated for implementing 3% reservation in the public/government sector, and is creating a network of NGOs in the disability sector in Goa to work towards a common vision.

Rev. Vaz's standing in the society, impeccable reputation, vision and leadership have helped in bringing disability-related issues into sharp focus in Goa. He has played a key role in influencing the government, NGOs and the society at large to see disability in the right perspective.
ABB Limited

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ABB is a global leader in Power and Automation technologies that enable utility and industry customers to improve their performance while lowering environmental impact. The ABB Group operates in about 100 countries and employs over 100,000 people across the world. ABB has a long-standing presence in India spanning several decades, and employs around 4,000 people. ABB's vision is to create value for society and the communities in which it operates, by 'living' its commitment to sustainability in keeping with ABB's triple bottom line approach of balancing the economic, environmental and social impact of business.

The company's social responsibility is also reflected in the explicit non-discrimination clause in its Social Policy. ABB does not discriminate on the basis of disability and has also identified employment opportunities for disabled persons in addition to supporting external initiatives in this area.

In Nasik, the company partners with Prabodhini, a sheltered workshop for mentally disabled individuals. The partnership commenced in 1993 modestly with the purchase of 1,000 greeting cards. After evaluation, identification of suitable work/products and extensive training initiatives, the partnership with Prabodhini grew surely and steadily. Today, Prabodhini meets ABB's requirements for Packing Stickers, Caution Cards, Box Files, Flat Files and Earth Contact Assemblies. This year, 7 new
Assemblies are being developed in partnership with Prabodhini to increase the quantum of work outsourced to them. This process, like earlier, will involve intensive consultation between ABB’s engineers and Prabodhini’s teachers, modification of ABB’s components to suit Prabodhini’s needs, and subsequently, trial production. A point of departure from the past is that Prabodhini will supply assemblies along with material. ABB rightly contends that this will help Prabodhini students learn management and purchasing skills, get familiar with materials management, and overall, raise their self-confidence and skill levels.

ABB is now in the process of replicating this novel and pioneering initiative across all its manufacturing locations in India. It recently identified component assemblies that could potentially be outsourced from its factory in Peenya, Bangalore, and has initiated a partnership with Prerana, an NGO working with visually and orthopaedically disabled girls.

As part of its Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme, ABB has partnered with Action Aid and the District Disability Network, Nagapattinam, to rehabilitate persons with disability affected by the disaster. While most companies focussed their efforts on building houses, donating boats and nets and other infrastructural inputs, ABB did a need-gap analysis after extensive stakeholder dialogue. This resulted in ABB consciously deciding to rebuild the livelihoods of persons with disability through locally relevant employment options.

A recipient of many awards for its economic performance, ABB was also voted among the Top Ten Greenest Companies by Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) in 2001.
Providing equal opportunity to people with disabilities has always been a part of the corporate philosophy of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL). BPCL’s practice of this philosophy is what made it a winner of the 1st NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards, way back in 1999.

What remains unchanged since then is that BPCL continues to fulfill its corporate responsibilities. What has changed, however, is the fact that the percentage of disabled persons employed by BPCL has risen from 1.11% to 1.37%, despite the total employee strength reducing from 12,411 to 12,082!

“We shall continue to recruit disabled people in the organisation as per the laid down guidelines”, says S. Mohan, Executive Director, HRD. And that is exactly what they have been doing. Currently, 166 disabled persons are employed with BPCL. The recruitment process is duly monitored to ensure that vacancies for physically impaired persons do not remain vacant. Special relaxation is given for up to 10 years of the required age profile for the post. And whenever required, special recruitment drives are undertaken.
It's not just recruiting candidates with disability - BPCL ensures that they are assigned suitable work and a good working environment in the organisation. For example, visually impaired employees are provided with customised computers equipped with optical character recognisers, enabling them to work independently.

Disabled employees are also encouraged in activities outside the organisation - a visually impaired employee was sent on Rock Climbing Mountaineering Course, and successfully scaled a peak of over 13,000 feet in West Sikkim!

BPCL also follows carefully laid down reservation policies for allotment of dealerships and distributorships to physically disabled candidates. What's more, special concessions and financial assistance is given to deserving candidates initiating the business.

Other areas of Corporate Social Responsibility that BPCL is active in: it has adopted 37 villages in 13 states, directly impacting 120,000 people; it has initiated the 'Bharat Petroleum Scholarship' to promote excellence in higher education; it has contributed towards community facilities and infrastructure; and it has donated generously in times of calamity and disaster.

Truly, a company that deserves to be called a 'Nav Ratna'!
What is bad for one country could prove to be good for another. In this particular case, USA's loss was India's gain when Suresh Kamath, a graduate of IIT Chennai, opted to stay back in India instead of looking for 'greener' pastures abroad. What held him back was his dream of building a world class software company and also of creating job opportunities for the less privileged youth of India.

Suresh set up Laser Soft Infosystems in 1986, along with a small group of professionals. Today, it enjoys an enviable reputation in the market, with a focus on products for the Banking and Financial Service sectors. About 25 specialised product offerings cover the entire range of banking operations and activities.

Right from its start in 1986, Laser Soft has rigorously implemented its policy of employing disabled persons. In fact, they prefer to employ a physically disabled or socially impacted person, provided s/he possesses the necessary skills and qualifications. The company offers facilitation by way of a barrier-free workplace and transport. Free accommodation and meals on duty are also made available to such employees.
Laser Soft has also started the Life Institute for Technical Education (LITE), an advanced technical institute for physically disabled and economically backward persons. LITE provides students with quality technical education while paying them a stipend and transforms them into IT professionals with enough skills to gain employment in frontline IT companies. Two batches of such students have already been trained and placed, and the third batch is currently under way.

Laser Soft is also associated with VASANTHAM, a school for mentally disabled children. Established with 6 children at Mogappair on the outskirts of Chennai in 1989, VASANTHAM has qualified staff to counsel, train and look after the special developmental needs of such children.

Laser Soft has been awarded the “Motivation Award 2001” by Federation of Tamil Nadu Physically Handicapped Association for being the best disability friendly software company in employing persons with disability, and in 2005 has been honoured with the Best Private Employer Award by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Suresh Kamath is also the proud recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award from his Alma Mater, IIT Chennai, in 2001.
The journey of Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind (SRMAB) over the last three and a half decades has been nothing short of phenomenal. It has grown from an Academy with just one visually impaired student to one that covers over 16,000 today; from a service delivery agency to a resource organisation; from addressing only visual impairment to covering all disabilities; and from just looking at the symptoms of disability to delving deep into its root causes through education and poverty alleviation.

The journey started with the setting up of a school in 1969. Today, the academy has more than 9 projects, providing services in the field of health, education and socio-economic rehabilitation to disabled people in suburban and rural areas of Karnataka.

Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Programmes include Soulabya, which aims at rehabilitation of visually impaired children from rural areas. A residential set-up, Soulabya provides free educational and vocational training from nursery to class 10. Vocational programmes include industrial training, packaging, computer training, Braille transcription, horticulture and the production of talking books for the use of the visually impaired.
The Thirumurthy Rural Development Centre is an agro-based training and resource centre for the rural disabled in Kanakapura Taluk, Bangalore Rural District. With free residential facilities during the 3-year course, the centre provides training and non-formal education in agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, poultry, fisheries and weaving. CBR programmes like Tharabethi, Sangama, Samyukta, Samudaya and Sampoorna cover hundreds of villages in rural areas, benefiting thousands through rehabilitation and developmental programmes.

It's not just work and no play at SRMAB. Extra curricular activities like classical and folk dance, Carnatic music, dramatics, and games and sports are actively pursued. In fact, the Academy's dance troupe has performed in major towns in India, and countries like U.S.A., Italy and U.K., and has won laurels at various national meets.

SRMAB has been honoured with many awards over the years, including the National Award for the Welfare of Disabled People by the Ministry of Welfare in 1989 and the Thomas Memorial National Award for Exemplary Service by the All India Blind Welfare Trust in 2002.
The handshake - a gesture of equality, of affirmation. The backdrop - the yin and yang symbolising the opposing forces of life. The colours - internationally used yellow and blue.

The Disability Friendly Corporate Logo, conceived in 1999, stands for hiring policies that are non-discriminatory; asks for dignity at the workplace; and demands a work environment that is accessible. In return, it promises productivity, loyalty and a high standard of work ethics.

If we work together, this can be done. Let's all reach out and ensure that people with disabilities get more opportunities at the workplace, and get the chance to lead a life of productivity and fulfillment.
It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.
- Helen Keller