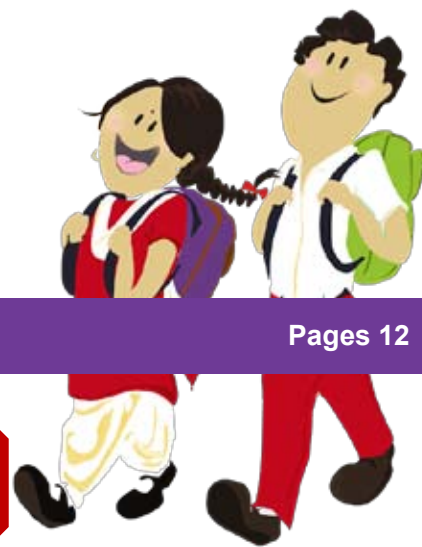




# The Peace Gong

Connecting Children for a Non-Violent Planet



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Aliens nahin hain hum, humein  
ghurro mat  
Soch Galat Nahin Hai, aisa socho  
mat  
Kuch kar nahin sakte  
Toh himmat todo mat!!

We are not aliens, don't stare at us,  
Our thinking is not wrong,  
if you can't do anything for us,  
atleast don't break our spirit!!

(Kavya, a girl with special abilities is in Class XI, Tagore International School, Delhi)

## Ground Realities

### Sharing the world with your voice



Many young people nowadays spend their precious time chatting, posting trivia on the 'Facebook' and using 'WhatsApp' feverishly. We may end up making more than a dozen posts in the entire day without gaining anything substantially, or contributing to any genuine cause.

Studies show that an average person speaks around 13,000 words a day. But have you ever thought how we can use the spoken words to help our friends with disability? Teachers make us read chapters in the classroom, and we have the choice to read it at home when we want to. But, for some, this is not an option.

So how do we young people help these children revise their lessons, or enjoy reading story books and novels for entertainment? Instead of spending time on trivia, we can contribute some time of ours every week -- in recording

books, novels, magazines and many other educational resources. If we can enjoy reading, we can also make others enjoy, by feeding our voices in computers.

As a young person, I always enjoy recording. I have been recording books and other material for the past several years at Arushi -- a voluntary organisation in Bhopal. It gives me immense satisfaction, as I am contributing to a cause. All children who are visually impaired have a right to education and entertainment. Denying this right is a violation of their dignity. We can't let them remain excluded, as all of them are our friends.

So I request all my friends through this platform of the Peace Gong to think -- and act. You too can make a difference and contribute to the cause of our friends who may be differently-abled.

Find some school in your community which may be having special children, or there may be such children in your own school. Make them realise they have equal rights like you -- and make it a point to hold their hands, and work together for the cause of all children.

**Kanupriya Gupta**

Class X - Carmel Convent School,  
BHEL  
Bhopal

A Reality Check conducted by children of Abhas in Tughlakabad area of Delhi reveals the severity of different types of social disabilities faced by the children there. These children constitute the most socially disabled and deprived sections of the community. They suffer from safety hazards, substance abuse, sexual abuse, violence and lack of parental care, complete lack of education and basic services. Consequently enrollment and retention in school also suffer.

As part of the Reality Check, the children covered four main areas of social disabilities : Early Marriage, Child Sexual Abuse, Child Labor, and Disabilities which pose a serious risk of violence in respect of children.

The children during this process discussed on how to tackle these disabilities. They observed that the word disability doesn't stand for weakness. They also learnt about the sufferings of children with disabilities and the problems they face as part of their routine life.

The children felt that all of them need to come together and do whatever they could to help their peers with disabilities. "We are all one" was their pledge at the end of the Reality Check.

About 89 families were surveyed as part of the Reality Check. Out of the total of 224 children who were surveyed, 108 children did not have their birth registration. It also found that 28 children had never been to school and 36 had dropped out. The team found eight cases of child marriage and three cases of child sexual abuse. It also found three reported cases of child labour, though almost 100 children were known to be working.

*Mat dekho hamari kamzoriyon ko  
Kyonki viklaang toh manav ka mastishk bhi ho gaya hai!!  
Don't look for our weaknesses,*

*Because the human mind has become crippled!!*

(Pratima; Naznee; Yogesh; Komal all of Class XII, Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, Tughlakabad Village, New Delhi)

# Keep rejuvenating the world: GULZAR

Regular sensitisation programmes for children in schools and community settings are very necessary to end age-old stereotypes and attitudes towards people with disabilities



Eminent lyricist-cum-film director **Gulzar**, who has developed a large number of Talking Books for children with visual impairment, stresses on how regular interaction between children with disability and other children breaks the barriers of understanding with each other. Here is the interview conducted by The Peace Gong Team :

**Kanchan, Malvika, Sana – Bhopal**  
**Sauma Afreen & Aresha – Class XI, AMU, Aligarh**  
**Manoj – Class X, Imphal, Manipur**

## How to make children aware about disability?

You are one of those helping us to do this. People like you who are conscious, and people like you who are active in this field. The feeling that comes in you, and you are activated -- that is how it spreads. That is how we make people aware. We have to move out, the children have to move out, and the society has to accept this.

One of the best ways to create awareness on disability is by including one page of information in every school textbook. The Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh have already done this, and it should be implemented at the national level. Students should be properly advised, right from a young age, on how they should work and deal with a differently-abled person.

## People often say "Ignorance of ability brings disability". What would you like to say on this?

Yes, I do agree with that. People often ignore these children. People are mean, they look for their own happiness, they never think of others. People should care about them. They need love, affection and opportunity, not your pity. We are one family, and should treat them as a part of the family. We Indians believe that the world is one big family, so please give one message to today's youth who will take over for the world of tomorrow.

## We Indians believe that the world is one big family, so please give one message to today's youth who will take over the world of tomorrow.

It's our responsibility to make a better world and work for the rejuvenation of the world we see -- I request and I initiate and I expect the rejuvenation. Keep on growing, keep on polishing, make the quality of life better. *Hamesha zindagi sanwarte chalo!*

## What is your view on Inclusive Education?

While we should try to promote the concept of inclusive education wherever possible, we should also try to facilitate regular joint activities and events between children with disabilities and others. Promoting participation of children with disabilities in all spheres of life will help nurture their talents and also contribute in changing the mindsets of others.

We have to understand that each one of us has some disability or the other. The disability might not be a physical aspect -- as somewhere or the other, we all have some problem or the other. Moral, psychological and social disabilities have a more adverse impact on society than any other disability can have. So we have to help young people develop understanding of different dimensions of disability.

## Your Talking Books -- with its short stories and songs -- play an important role in taking up the causes of children with disabilities. What help do you get to develop the Talking Books?

There's not much material and resources available for children with disability. It is the duty of the society to ensure they get equal opportunities in education. This is the reason organisations like Arushi have been working on inclusive education, and developing Talking Books. The need of the hour is to promote all these initiatives in a big way, and reach out to children who simply don't get any opportunity.

## The Peace Gong team is honoured to receive an inspiring message from an eminent lyricist like you.

I hope the Peace Gong becomes a truly inclusive and global platform for children to work for peace and justice.

## Good Health can be key to overcome disability

For children of Moldanga Shishu Panchayat and their peers, good health facilities in childhood was crucial in avoiding many types of disability. Exploring the areas which helped overcome disabilities, the children and their senior mentors felt immunization and proper nutrition were significant.

In an interaction organized by students of Centre for Journalism and Mass Communication, Visva Bharati University, West Bengal and the Moldanga Shishu Panchayat (a children's group) on November 9 in Moldanga, a village by the side of Sriniketan campus of the University, the participants felt malnutrition was a major cause of disability.

A village panchayat member, Ms Mala Khatun talking about the health camps in the village explained to the students how many children with disability also faced prospects of malnutrition. For instance, children with cerebral palsy, she said could have difficulties in chewing. She also said severe diarrhoea in childhood could be one reason for disability. "For this a good environment and safe food are necessary," she added.

Reshma Khatun, a student of Class X said after visiting different areas, members of the Moldanga Shishu Panchayat felt good drinking water, proper sanitation facilities and maintaining good hygiene were also important in preventing different types of disability.

Also according to Tuhina Khatun, another member of the Shishu Panchayat their team felt that most of the schools did not have proper toilet facilities for children with disabilities. "In most of our areas, the general school students do not have toilet facilities. For children with disability it must be very difficult as a physically challenged child will definitely have problems going outside the school and in the open for toilet," she felt.

Along with the interaction, different programmes were organized for the children like painting, drawing, essay writing, dance and games. Another issue which was discussed in this interaction was on the concerns of child marriage in the area.

(Translated from Bengali)

**Maya Khatun (Class X), Miraj Mir (Class XII), Sarukh Mia (Class XI), Shamim Mian (Class XII)**  
Shantiniketan, West Bengal



Moldanga Shishu Panchayat (Shantiniketan) discussing rights of children with disabilities and child marriage



## Sharing My Experience

My name is Chandrawati Kumari. I study in Class 8. I am not blind by birth. My life was full of brightness. But a day came when all these things were snatched by the cruel hands of fate.

I was doing my homework when a group of fellow students started teasing me. They took away my books. I reported against them to my class teacher who scolded them.

Next day, these students – against whom I had complained -- asked me to play with them during lunch time. I did not understand what they actually wanted to do. While playing they covered my eyes with a cloth and asked me to catch them.

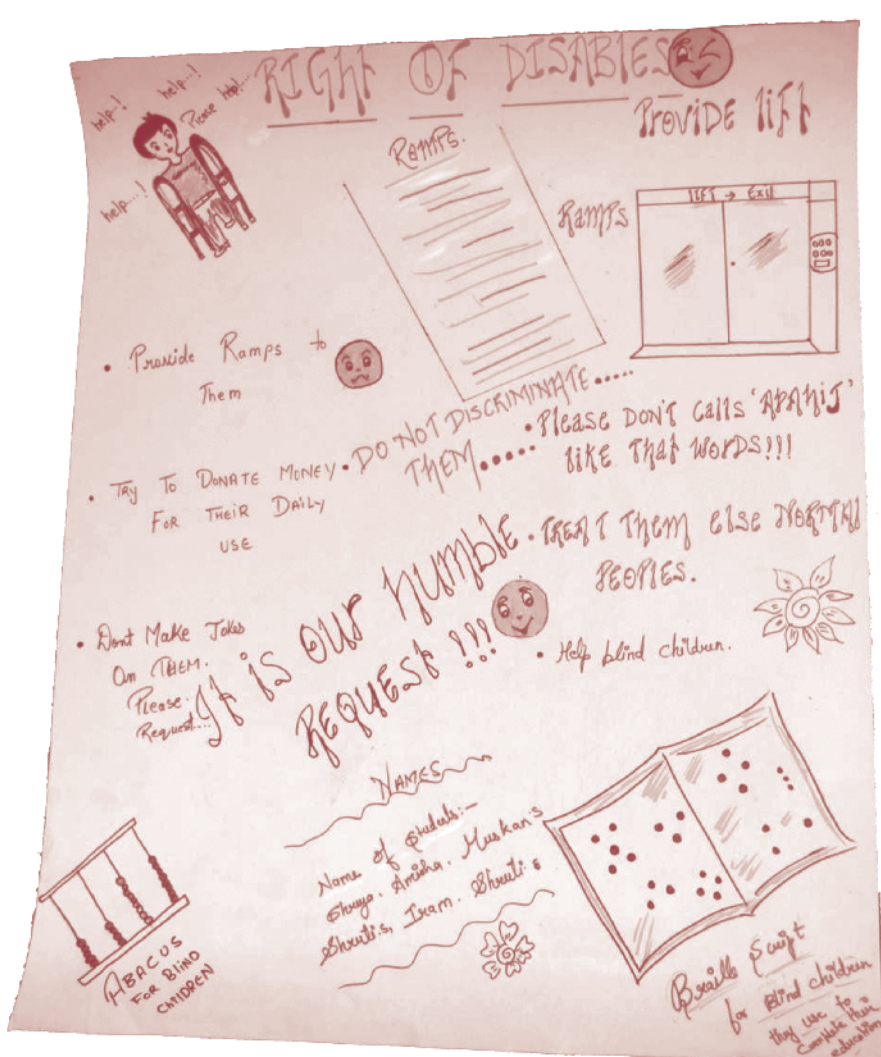
One of the girls pushed me. I fell on some bricks and became unconscious. I was later taken to a hospital, where the doctor told me that the fall had permanently damaged my eyesight -- and that I would never be able to see again in future.

Later, I joined Antaryoti -- a school for children like me. Now I am confident and think that even though I cannot see, I am second to none. I know I have the rights, and all the opportunities, to work with all.

While studying I have got associated with Kilkari, where I am learning creative arts. Now I am confident that I will be able to stand on my own feet -- and earn a name for myself.

(Translated from Hindi)

**Chandrawati Kumari**  
Class 8, Antaryoti School  
Patna, Bihar



A poster from BHOPAL

# I N T E R V I E W

## The missing group in our education system

*Inclusive education in India continues to be a major challenge. Without proper education facilities, a large number of children with disabilities are found 'missing' from any kind of educational facilities -- whether formal or non-formal, says Dr Rohit Trivedi, Assistant Professor in Sarojini Naidu Government Girls P.G. College - Bhopal, in an in-depth interview with Peace Gong reporter Kanupriya Gupta of Class 10, Carmel Convent School - BHEL (Bhopal).*

*Dr Trivedi is visually impaired and has been persistently working in the domain of disability.*

### What is the importance of inclusive education?

A World Bank study of 2007 says children with disability in India are five times more likely to be out of school, than children belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. A very large number of these children are missing from any form of education system -- formal or informal. Hence, inclusive education is important for children with disabilities. This gives them access to education.

A disabled child has to live in society -- with all her apprehensions, doubts and hesitations. And accepting this society becomes all the more difficult when she is made to study in a special school, where only disabled children study. But when a disabled child studies in a public or a private school -- not in a distinctive school -- she interacts with several types of people, and with different sorts of environment. This helps her feel that she is a part of this society. She gets to know how to interact with people.

A normal child also starts understanding the problems of such children. Their coordination improves. This works wonders when both of them step out of school. This unifies two entirely different worlds.

### Do we have inclusive education in India?

The government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign) talks of facilitating inclusive education, saying it will ensure that every child with special needs -- irrespective of the type, category and degree of disability -- is provided education in an appropriate environment. It promises a 'zero rejection' policy, so that no child is left out of the education system.

### Is it sufficient for a differently-abled child to go to a public or private school? Special facilities are, very often, not available in these schools.

Normally, we see even a normal child sometimes needing extra attention. So they go to tuition and coaching classes. Similarly, the children with disabilities too need additional attention from special educators as well as governmental and non-governmental organisations.

### How do the parents of other children react to this idea of inclusion?

In fact, objections arise only in situations where inclusion of other children is denied. The syllabus and environment selected for a particular class should be such that can be accepted by both. For instance, if a teacher is writing as well as speaking the thing written on the board, then it would definitely be an asset for a visually impaired child -- and not hinder the other children too. If a teacher gives a little extra time to these children, again it is not harmful to others. But it can be a problem if the number of such children increases in a particular class. And yes, sometimes the school also uses the excuse that parents may mind if they give admission to the differently abled.

### Are schools supportive?

Nowadays, the government-run schools have to admit these children with disabilities. There are laws for the education of the disabled. But private schools have many excuses to deny admission. Like, they often say no more seats left, or their teachers are not trained

to handle such children. Even when the students are enrolled, they are not given the right education -- and are promoted just for the sake of promotion. Their special needs are not taken care off. Very few schools give the appropriate education and environment to these children.

### How do teachers feel about inclusive education?

There are both positive and negative responses. They are apprehensive in the beginning. Some are even not aware. But gradually they become supportive. They talk to the special educators and organisations. These organisations give them guidance -- on how to interact with such children in the classroom. For example- they tell the teachers that for a child with low vision, they should make them sit on the front bench, narrate while writing, and write in bigger letters. For teaching a deaf and dumb child, they must learn the sign language.

### How can we, as students, encourage inclusion?

When you sit in your class with such a child, don't ignore him or her. Normally, there are some children in your class you don't like -- may be they have bad attitude, or they are short tempered. But once you get to know that person, they may become your best friend because of having the same type of thoughts and views. Same is the case with differently-abled. You must talk to them, understand them, help them and empower them. This helps them to become independent citizens. Another way is to create awareness in the society. Start with your own house. Tell your parents and relatives. It's true that a journey starts with a small step. Take that small step.

### Are there any legal provisions in India to educate the disabled children?

There is a law -- 'Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995' -- that ensures every child with a disability gets access to free education, in an appropriate environment, till he or she reaches the age of 18 years. They cannot be denied admission from any school. Then there is another law, the 'Right to Education' for persons with disabilities till 18 years of age. In context of education, these are the main laws. But in context with disability, there are more.



Dr. Rohit Trivedi (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) receiving National Award from the President of India Shri. Pranab Mukherjee

## CONSULTATIONS : IMPHAL - MANIPUR

# 'Social equality and justice mean providing equal opportunities'



Segregating children with disabilities from their families or communities is wrong, and separating such children was a violation of their rights. This was the general consensus of a consultation organised by The Peace Gong -- in association with the Welfare Association for Blind, Takyel, Imphal – on the topic 'Stepping up Protection of Children with Disabilities'.

Some 40 children and youth with visual impairment, along with their teachers, and 30 other children took part in the consultation. Introducing the theme of the programme, along with the key points to be discussed in the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) conference in Sri Lanka, Dr Oinam Sareeta Devi, Secretary - Kasturba Gandhi Institute for Development (KGID), Manipur, said that in most communities children with disabilities constituted an invisible population. "Social equality and justice means providing equal opportunities to children with disabilities," she added.

Urmila, a visually impaired girl, raised a very important issue when she talked about the problems of eve teasing. She said people generally took such girls for granted -- and they found it difficult to lodge complaints against the culprits. She felt girls with visual impairment were among the most vulnerable sections of the society, and mass awareness programme was essential in all schools and educational institutions.

The young participants came up with several recommendations after a detailed discussion:

- The visually impaired students should be part of inclusive education system in general schools – instead of concentrating on building separate schools. This would reduce prevailing discrimination between general students and the differently-abled.
- The 'Right to Education' Act is also for the differently-abled children, so they should not be deprived of these rights.
- For the visually challenged, their sense of hearing is the main help to explore the world. But increasing noise pollution – with rising number of vehicles and crowds – are hampering their ability. So there is a vital need to generate mass awareness to reduce all kinds of pollution.
- The white cane, the demonstrative symbol of persons with visual impairment, is a vital equipment that helps them to walk out of their homes – and they have a right to use it. But, very often, the families of such people are financially unsound -- thus depriving the visually challenged children and youth of proper education. So, the Government needs to focus on their necessities -- like providing Readers and Writers, along with proper educational aids.
- Three per cent of the total number of vacancies are reserved for the differently-abled in every educational institute and job sector. But unfortunately, very few students or persons of this category apply – proving there is a lack of awareness amongst them.

- To encourage the differently-abled persons to visit tourist spots and historical places, the Government should exempt them, and their guide, from paying any entrance fee.
- Promises of giving support and providing Rights and Facilities to students with disabilities should be converted into action by the Government -- meaning the senior officers and leaders.

Speaking at the consultation, Christina Khundrakpam of Class 11 said the aim should be to develop creative platforms like The Peace Gong where both differently-abled and other children can come together to work for the society. "We children should be consciously involving all our differently-abled friends in all our initiatives," said the Associate Editor of The Peace Gong.

Naocha said students like him generally faced problems in identifying suitable readers and writers especially during exams, But this problem could be solved if the Government distributed electronic gadgets like laptops with voice interactivity to the visually challenged students, he pointed out. Happyson, a low vision student, wanted the Government to enhance opportunities for students like him.

However, Ranbir Singh, another student with visual impairment, said people like him did not need sympathy but empathy. "We have all the rights as citizens of the country" he said – pointing out the quotas for students like him in jobs, education and accessible hostel facilities at the college and University level.

Lamenting the lack of availability of books and magazines in Braille in Manipur, despite the Government's promise, Kh. Premjit, Secretary to the Welfare Association for the Blind, invited participants and The Peace Gong team members to spare some time every week to volunteer for the visually impaired.

Hoping the children involved with The Peace Gong team would play an important role in helping their differently-abled friends, by reading books and becoming writers during exams, he added, "We want a society where all children, whether differently-abled or others, are able to study and grow together."

Expressing an interest to be part of The Peace Gong, the students of the School of Visual Impairment wanted to take part in reporting and interviewing too. Dr Sareeta Devi promised a proper orientation programme would be organised to involve the students with visual impairment with The Peace Gong team.

**The Peace Gong Bureau**  
Imphal, Manipur



# ‘Stepping Up Protection of

*Children with disabilities are likely to more vulnerable to different forms of violence than any other children.*

&

*Compared to others, differently-abled children face many types of social, environmental, psychological and physical discrimination and barriers.*

*Consultations with Students & Youth with Disabilities and other children held in Bhopal, Aligarh, Guwahati & Kolkata*

## Society needs to be more sensitive

Students taking part in the Bhopal round of Consultations, held on November 20 and organised by the voluntary organisation Arushi and The Peace Gong Bhopal team, stressed that the Government must strictly enforce the law against those using disabled children as beggars, and take action against those who badly treat them. The participants wanted the entire society to collectively work towards ensuring this.

Another vital point made was that children with disabilities – of any category -- should be given vocational training so that they have a livelihood, and the confidence and ability to go about in society with dignity. The participants stressed on the need to lobby at different forums to ensure availability of appropriate assistive devices for children with different disabilities as per their respective age groups.

The consultation focused on children with visual impairment — that is, the blind and persons with low vision -- who need to be provided text books and enriching learning material in appropriate accessible format like Braille, audio, and books with bigger printed letters. Children with low vision should also be trained on how to use their residual vision.

The children, mostly from Anand Vihar Higher Secondary School - Bhopal, also came up with the following suggestions to protect the rights of children with disability:

- We shall work towards ensuring Right to Education for children with disabilities;
- We shall create awareness in society regarding hidden potentials of children with disabilities – and ensure their different special needs are fulfilled; &
- We shall befriend children with disabilities -- and facilitate their inclusion.

Group discussions and different stimulating activities were organised during the day-long session, which helped the children realise that they have to understand that children with disabilities also have the right to get proper education, to play, and to have fun.

Another important point made was that people should not discriminate with the children with disabilities, and we must to treat them with the same sort dignity like we would with anyone else.

Amongst the many demands voiced by participants, the notable ones were about the Government making available talking books to help the visually impaired in their studies -- and for all categories of disabled students, the Government should train teachers who use appropriate tools and methods to teach in better, and more interesting, ways.

Many participants observed that the Government should be more concerned about the disabled – making policies that provide more jobs, and ensure fair treatment to the disabled child in school, hospitals and all public places.

Most of the participants agreed that our society is insensitive to the feelings of the disabled children – due to which they often lose their confidence. Many felt that people do not treat a disabled child as they treat a normal one.

The consensus of the Consultation was that everyone has the right to a good education, and that it is our responsibility to encourage all disabled children to go to school.

**The Peace Gong Bureau  
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**

## Confident, tech-savvy & smart

As part of The Peace Gong consultation, we went to the Aligarh Muslim University's Ahmadi School for the Blind for an interaction session on the topic: 'Stepping Up Protection of Children with Disabilities'. After a warm welcome, the first thing that grabbed our attention was the discipline the students with visual impairment maintained. Generally, such discipline we see in very strict schools. But to them, it came naturally.

The topic of discussion got a very good response from the students. Many of them, after listening us, showed interest about working with The Peace Gong. A girl of Class 7 asked us what all could she write about? When asked what she wants to write about, the answer was, "I want to write my autobiography."

Inviting the girl student to become a member of The Peace Gong team, our coordinator Mumtaz Ahmad Numani said to the girl, "We appreciate your vision. Do something great that makes all of us feel proud of you. At present, we are going to record your voice, and wish you all the very best."

The discussions were primarily based on the techniques and mechanisms these students used for study purposes. They have a different type of board for doing maths -- and to write they use an instrument that has a pin and a sheet, and a board on which the sheet is fixed.

The white cane is used as a walking stick that vibrates when it strikes with an uneven object, or detects an uneven object near them.



# Children with Disabilities'

Nowadays, the students have been provided with an electronic device which records their class lectures, and plays them back again later – when they can prepare detailed notes.

The students candidly revealed some problems they face because of being visually challenged. "One problem is understanding the geometrical proportions, which is related to visualising the question. Otherwise, we love to do the maths too," they said.

The school has been successfully training the students in all aspects of the curriculum. The students are aware about the new instruments now available to write or type in Braille, and showed a keen desire to use them one day for higher education.

Our visit made us realise that this school is amazing in its own way -- not only guiding the visually challenged students in study matters, but also providing love and affection to each – like a family.

All the children came forward to speak confidently. Their teachers have trained them well, so that they can walk with us side by side.

At the end of the consultation, we had learnt a lesson -- that seldom do we think how smart they really are, and it is high time the world comes to know this.

**The Peace Gong Bureau**  
Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh

## Girls with disabilities most vulnerable



**G**irls with disabilities face far greater exclusion from different opportunities in life than boys. The more the severity of the disability, the greater is the problem of the girl child. That was the consensus of the Guwahati (Assam) round of Consultation organised by Surovi Shishu Panchayat in collaboration with The Peace Gong at Hatisheela Ganesh Mandir, Guwahati on 14 November 2014.

The 30 young participants who took part in the consultation -- held to mark the Children's Day celebrated all over India -- agreed that the differently-abled girls were the most vulnerable.

They felt that girls whose safety and security are a matter of concern, are in a worse position if they have any type of disability. The discussions bought out the fact that the barriers are enormous for differently-abled girls.

According to Marjina Begum, a college student from Amgaon, Guwahati, there was less possibilities of girls with disabilities getting education than boys with disabilities. "We know of families who think

these girls are a curse. They don't have any rights in their families," she said.

Susila Das, a 15-year old girl from Ekbarbarhi, Panikhaiti said she knew a few girls in her area who were forced to stay in one corner of their own homes -- while the families pay no attention to their pitiable condition.

Dileep Subedi, a volunteer with Surovi, said this was due to poor awareness amongst parents and the community. "Girls who are disabled are likely to face greater challenges in getting livelihood opportunities than boys," added Tahura Khatun, a facilitator and mentor of Surovi.

The participants expressed concern about the need to help differently-abled girls to raise their voices against different forms of discrimination. Summing up the consultation, Rihan Ali, the coordinator of Surovi Shishu Panchayat, said there should be specific programmes to realise the rights of girls with disabilities.

To end the victimization of girls with disabilities, the following recommendations were made by the participants at the consultation:

- Awareness generation among parents on issues and concerns of these girls with disabilities;
- Support and protection from the neighbourhood and community;
- Encouragements and opportunities from all concerned;
- Equal rights, facilities and humanitarian assistance from the adults;
- Getting a cooperative atmosphere all the time; &
- Special schemes and policies.

**The Peace Gong Bureau**  
Guwahati, Assam

## Build more awareness initiatives on disabilities

**S**imple joys of life are not for these children! Every day, they face innumerable challenges and discriminations – from going to school, to just getting an opportunity to play. Another major concern is lack of appropriate chairs and desks in schools.

Like leprosy, malaria and polio awareness programmes, more initiatives should be taken to spread awareness on disabilities, felt the 21 children with disabilities from seven organisations, who took part in a consultation organised by Sanchar Arod of Kolkata.

Participants with hearing impairment said no one understood them when they visit hospitals and other public places – so there should be sign language interpreters in such public places. One participant narrated his ordeal of not being able to follow what was being taught in his village school, as it had no appropriate learning materials for children with hearing impairment.

A student with cerebral palsy, studying in Class 12, said that finding a writer during exams was a major difficulty. "Should this be the responsibility of the school," asked the student.

The participants also underlined on the need for awareness building and counselling facilities for parents and family members of children with disabilities. A major problem, according to the participants, was the issue of accessibility in public places and educational institutions.

The participants also discussed the issue of sexual violence on children with disabilities. They underlined the importance of child protection policies.

**Kolkata Bureau**  
Kolkata, West Bengal

# Let us not 'dis' the ability

EDITORIAL

When sunlight falls on budding flower, it does so without any bias. Some flowers are left in the shadows only because of objects blocking the gleam. But there are sunflowers which find their way to brightness by turning towards the sunbeams.

So let's stop a bit and think – why are we so prone to give tags like 'disabled', 'handicapped', 'blind' and what not? Go ahead and label, but bear in mind that labels are essentially for gifts. Do we even know the significance of these words? Let us not 'dis' the ability, because dissimilarity is beautiful in its own way. A child is not disabled, she is differently-abled.

Life, it's a wonderful thing isn't it! Then why are differently-abled children sometimes thrown into garbage bins or flushed down toilets? The most crucial right is the Right to Live. Do we rule some children out of this world just because of their physical impairment?

These special children think this whole world is special like them. The visually impaired are unaware of the sense of sight. That's because of the milieu provided to them. They are sent to 'special' schools – where they gain knowledge but are excluded from society. They are made to live in their own separate world.

But now the people have realised that these special children need to be included – not excluded from the mainstream. But when organisations try to get these children admitted to private schools, they are given lame excuses – like, all seats have been filled, or parents of other children complain, and so on. But no one admits that the real reason is their impairment.

These children are being deprived from their Right to Education – and more so, deprived of their Fundamental Right: the Right to Equality. Parity is missing from their lives. Either they are giving sympathy and condolences, or they are under-estimated.

Only by understanding their love for us, we realise these children are the real gifts of God on Earth. In this world full of social evil, only a fraction of the population is humane -- and we will recognise them only when we are truly concerned about what kind of society we need to build.

The Convention of Child Rights, 1989, gives the children all over the world many rights -- including the Right to Express their Opinion and Thought. But is this true for all? Are all children given these rights?

Talking about rights is like telling a story that never ends. But it is time when we really put end to it. Not because some say that it is our duty to help them. But because it is our responsibility to involve them and make them a part of the world. It is important to make them feel that we are like them, and they are like us.

The need of the hour is to change our mindset. Estrangement comes by saying "Keep away"; "You are the children of the lesser God". It's our obligation to say, "Hey, would you like to be my friend?"

Kate Bornstein has rightly said, "Let's stop tolerating or accepting difference, as if we're so much better for not being different in the first place. Instead, let's celebrate difference, because in this world it takes a lot of guts to be different."

**Kanupriya Gupta**

Class X - Carmel Convent School, BHEL (Bhopal)  
Volunteering with Arushi

## For a More Caring Country...



As part of National Action and Coordination Group in India, a series of consultations and programmes were organized across the country on the theme, Stepping up Protection of the Children with Disabilities. Here are some recommendations which emerged from these meetings:

### BIHAR

- Promote acceptance and caring
- Provide opportunities for social support
- Provide opportunities for equal participation in school/ society
- Right to Access to comprehensive Health Care of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities.
- Right to Full Legal Protection against Violence, Discrimination and Abuse of the Girl Child and Children with Differing Abilities
- Scholarship program for children with disability

### KERALA

- Sensitize the neighbourhoods, through self-help groups & awareness programs
- Sensitize the society through audio-visual media
- Counselling for the parents of the disabled bride/bridegrooms
- Protection of the disabled child / adult before and after marriage should be ensured through sensitization programs through print media, audio-visual programs and also through awareness classes
- Multi-disciplinary approach (comprising of all available systems such as medical, legal, police, local bodies etc) is required to deal with the problem
- Marriage (the reproductive health right) is a basic need of human beings and it should not be denied to anybody just because his/her disability. But proper medical and legal protection should be given to them so as to avoid any sort of exploitation and abuse
- Changes in the present educational system for the disabled, is urgently needed to make it more disabled friendly.
- Definition of a child "as a person who has not completed the age of 18", cannot be accepted in the case of mentally challenged persons. In many cases a mentally retarded (MR)/ mentally challenged adult may have the mental development as of a child only. And so denying the benefits available to a disabled child to an MR adult would be reckoned as doing injustice to the latter. In MR cases age shouldn't be a bar to avail facilities to all, equally.
- Educational benefits should be distributed equally to all disabled children irrespective of the income of the parent/s



**PUNJAB**

## Key Points:

- Rejection by Parents: of the children with disabilities, stigma and discrimination adds to the woes of disabled children. Mother of children with disability are divorced and mostly unable to support their children.
- Lack of awareness and sensitivity among all the stake holders including doctors, teachers, parents and others
- Lack of infrastructures in public places, viz; inaccessible toilets, lifts and ramps. This is applicable not only the institutions, this must also be available in homes
- Shortage of professionals and care givers. Training to parents to sensitize them, give them training for early detection, treatment & follow-up.
- Aids & appliances - These are expensive and need replacement as children are expected to grow –and the existing equipment's & aids would become replaceable and thus redundant. It is not a one time expenditure.
- Follow up of the children with disabilities at the community level is imperative. Services of ASHAs and other functionaries like the panchayat members in-charge of health services should be trained.
- Vocational Training should keep pace with the development in the various sectors. Besides the traditional trades, new professional training in computers, light engineering, office administration, teaching, TV & Radio announcers and such training components be added.

**TAMIL NADU**

- Disabled children need to be taught coping strategies or skills.
- Some Parents abuse children severely and have a negative attitude towards their disabled children. Therefore parents must be sensitized and educated about abuse and its legal implications.
- Parents should have a shared responsibility in looking after children. However bathing and toilet care for girl children should be done by the mother.
- There has to be communication charts for children to express their concern and problems for those children who are non-verbal especially to detect any form of abuse.
- There needs to be consistent and regular follow up of staff those working at the grass root level directly working with children.
- Parents and other care givers must be sensitized about abuses, and also be made aware of the reporting mechanism of such abuses and legal implications.
- Parents must be educated on dangers which children may come across in their life especially about the vulnerabilities of challenged children. There has to be various support services for parents.
- There must be specific programs for parents of disabled children on child protection and safety.
- Parents and teachers encourage children to have self-acceptance, a feeling that they are okay as this will not lead to deflated self-esteem. Also children should be allowed to express their view and to be listened to them as this can also pave way for many solutions.
- Children to be respected with dignity, love and care provided, elders must nurture their self-esteem. And promote equal opportunities in schools and institutions. There must be equal opportunity policy for the disabled.
- Children raised their view saying that they must have some individual to whom they can share anything and the receiver must merely listen and not be judgemental towards them.
- Children suggested that they could be taught self-defence techniques as a strategy to safeguard themselves.



Disabled wom b

Disabled wom b

I forgot to cut his nails,  
But it was too late.  
I put him in his harness,  
And ended up on the ground-  
For he hated it,  
He wanted freedom,

People knew right away,  
Something was wrong,  
Beneath those luscious thick eyelashes,  
The wild eyes narrated,  
A story of their own.  
A story too wild, too painful,  
For a nine-year old.

I finally managed to put him,  
In the harness and dragged him,  
While applying a Band Aid over  
My fingers, cursing myself,  
For not cutting his nails.  
I took good care of him,  
But there was only so much,  
That I could have done,

I mechanically entered the stone building,  
His teeth glued together,  
with chewy toffee,  
The dentist said it was bad for his teeth,  
But it was the only remedy,  
For all the snarling and growling,  
Times when he lost control.  
Please sign here,  
The matron said,  
I didnt know my name anymore.  
I could feel him stiffen beside me,  
And for the second time,  
I was again on the ground,  
For the second time,  
Those nails pierced me,  
And blood flowed again.

For once, his eyes,  
Werent wild. They were scared,  
His fingers quivered as he whispered,  
'Ma' over and over again,  
The matron seized him and ruffled his  
Glossy black hair,  
And I left, searching,  
For a Band Aid big enough,  
To heal my bleeding womb.

I returned home,  
Where the taps wouldn't turn on at 3 am,  
Where the knives wouldn't rest on my pillow,  
Where the walls wouldn't be lined with mattresses,  
Where no neighbour would ask again,  
Where no disabled child would laugh again,  
Where no one will know of my mishap,  
Where I wouldn't be a mother anymore,  
With a disabled womb.

**Syeda Rumana Mehdi**  
Outgoing Associate Editor, The Peace Gong

# FILMS PUSHED THE DISABILITY BARRIER

The new millennium is the age of ICT – Information and Communication Technology, and India has a primary role in pushing its boundaries. ‘From Exclusion to Empowerment’ – the theme of the International Conference on the Role of ICTs for Persons with Disabilities held in New Delhi from November 24 – 26 -- was organised by UNESCO in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Eminent speakers addressed the sessions on the topics like Accessibility of information and knowledge, Social inclusion, Assistive technologies, Sustainable development, Promoting self-reliance and livelihood for persons with disabilities, Implementing inclusive education etc.

The deliberations on these topics were later summed up as recommendations – with the hope that it would be later transformed into Government policies and programmes to benefit persons with different disabilities.

While all the sessions were quite relevant and enlightening, the We Care film festival was quite a hit amongst students and young people. The films shown in this festival are recognised as the “Ambassadors creating awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities across the globe” -- and a beacon for promoting a positive attitude towards disabilities.

Approximately 1000 people from around the world attended the film festival. Delegates, especially students, participated actively in the festival. The films on various issues surrounding disabilities were screened to create awareness on disability issues.

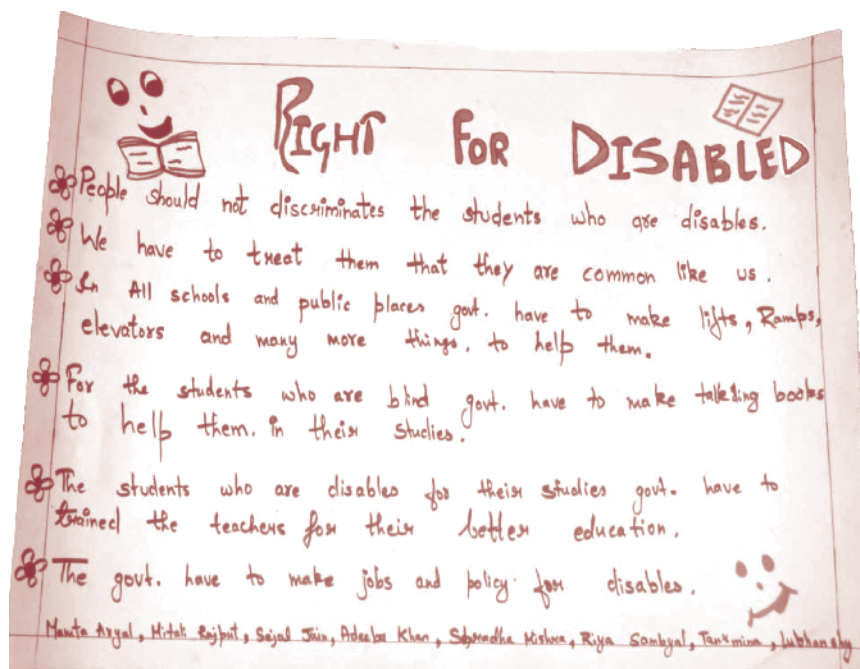
In addition, there was an exhibition of ICT and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities. A techno-camp was organised during

the conference, and disabled persons were trained on how to write scripts and produce video spots. Videos developed by them were screened during the valedictory session.

Interviews of those who made these videos showed how ICT can empower the people with disabilities -- and provide them with an opportunity to voice their opinion in the society.

**Kaustubh Yadav**

*Class X - The Air Force School, New Delhi*



## Volunteering for children with disabilities

One day, during a casual conversation with my English teacher, I discovered a way in which I could make a contribution to a few precious lives and make my life meaningful. I learnt about “Arushi” and the exceptional efforts it is taking to help and improve the lives of the differently abled. I was delighted and full of enthusiasm to get along, as this was consistent with my studies as a biology and psychology student.

As I started spending my afternoons after school in “Arushi” recording books for my friends, I realized that it is better to do as much good as one can today, for tomorrow the opportunity may be gone. The hours I spent in the studio became a source of joy as I completed books after books, praying that every person who uses my audio would be blessed. Every single day, I learnt something new and thought provoking that has also help me develop as a person.

Eventually, I have pleasant memories of getting together with like minded friends and the staff of “Arushi”. I have found that there are always listeners with willing hearts at any given place, whose compassionate hearts led them to respond and contribute in meaningful ways.

Without a doubt, no volunteer can go through such an experience and remain untouched. It was one of the most humbling experiences, to see the dignity and hope with which these children and their parents coped. I would definitely like to continue contributing and hope to magnify the light “Arushi” is bringing into the lives of some innocent lives.

**Tanya Prakash**  
*Delhi Public School, Bhopal*

Talking Textbooks – an innovative scheme for the visually impaired students has been developed by Arushi, a Bhopal-based voluntary organization, to help provide education to these children. But, so far, only 3500 such children across 11 states of India are getting the benefit of these books.

Audio-books have been made using DAISY (Digital Accessible Informative System) format – converting the text books of the National Council of Education Research and Technology (NCERT), and the Boards of Secondary Education in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. This format is internationally accepted and enables the visually impaired to get the benefit of the digitalized book -- exactly like a printed book.

These recorded text books cover syllabuses of Classes 1 to 12, Graduate and Post Graduate levels, and also of various competitive exams. Till date, 1537 titles have been recorded -- which include school books for the Madhya Pradesh Board, the Rajasthan Board, and the Madhya Pradesh Open School etc.

Other books for various competitive exams are also prepared -- which include the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), state PSC, NET and General Knowledge books. A new initiative of recording India Today (Hindi), and uploading it on the internet for circulation, has started over the last two years.

To develop the Talking Textbooks project, Arushi built an ‘audio-library’ of 30,000 hours of recorded study material for school and college students who are visually or print impaired. Textbooks, and instructional and supplementary materials, for various disciplines are available on compact discs. Volunteers record study materials in several languages for various subjects.

The audio-books have been distributed in the 11 states of West Bengal, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Assam.

**Gunjan Deolia**  
*Class 8 - St. Joseph's Co-Ed School  
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh*

# Include disability in teachers training



On November 20 The Peace Gong Kerala and the Academic Forum for Research & Communication (AFRC INDIA) jointly conducted a consultation on the Rights of Children with Disability. Both the children and teachers strongly felt that both needed orientation on issues and concerns of disability. The teachers felt there should be a section on disability in Teachers Training curriculum, so that they are able to work with children with disability.

The programme was attended by a 70-plus audience invited from different towns and villages of Wayanad.

Recommendation to support children with disability

★ **Shameer Machingal, Mathrubhumi News**

Media has a very important role to play to support disabled children. The State media as well as the private sector should come forward and inspire reporters and editors to carry special news stories on the violation of children's rights, as well as carry inspirational stories on children with disability who made it to the top by overcoming their limitations.

★ **Gouri (13), The Peace Gong Wayanad Bureau Chief**

Schools should be friendly for the disabled children. Special travelling facilities should be arranged for children with disability. Comfortable entrances and steps should be constructed to help such children's movement to classrooms and toilets.

★ **Ramya, Project officer, MS Swaminathan Foundation**

Disabled children need more empathetic approach from society. Specially trained teachers and volunteers should be encouraged to visit children who are bedridden. Recently a whole classroom of children with teachers regularly started visiting a child who was not able to go to school and helped her with studies. Can we make it a mandatory step to school students and teachers to make house visits for disabled children?

**The Peace Gong Bureau  
Wayanad, Kerala**

## NOSTALGIA

The Peace Gong, September 2012 Issue on Disability

### Children are the future: The Radijojo global experience

Children have the right to participation, child-friendly media, and free expression. But worldwide, we see that these rights are often violated. When it comes to children with disabilities, it is even worse. Radijojo World Children's Radio Network, is now trying to involve children with disabilities.

In Morocco, a workshop was recently conducted with marginalized kids who have multiple disabilities. Nobody expects these kids to contribute to a global exchange on ambitious issues like peace, education and sustainability. But in the workshop, they successfully cooperated with organisations like UNICEF and the Global Education Campaign. They met with peers at Radijojo headquarters in Berlin. Besides they contributed to the global children and youth network for peace and environment, "Roots and Shoots", by collecting garbage and turning it into art and planting trees and giving names to them. Here is the blog with the results and many more exciting contributions: [futur.edublogs.org](http://futur.edublogs.org)

Radijojo also worked with children with visual impairment in Berlin; some of them with multiple disabilities and mental problems. The initiative showed that the kids love radio since they are very good in working with sound and voice.

For instance, Yannick, a boy with the Asperger syndrom in Berlin, has cooperated with a girl from the Native American Cree people far away in Canada, exchanging about the value of nature for humankind via Internet. All children, with or without disabilities can their share ideas, thoughts, talents, hopes, plans with the global media network for children by children. Just join us on Facebook (Radijojo World Children's Radio Network) or send your media contribution to us: [redaktion@radijojo.de](mailto:redaktion@radijojo.de)

Zineb, Soukaina, Ahmed &  
The Radijojo kids crew from Ahli Children's Home Taroudannt,  
Morocco

**Braille An Introduction**

Do you know what is written here?  
It is: I want to be a lawyer.

Like dewanagari and Gurmukhi etc. Braille is also a script. Braille script is used by Blind persons to read and write. Braille was invented by Louis Braille in 1829. Braille script is based on six dots. These six dots are referred as the Braille cell. Each cell comprises of one Braille character. To write Braille script Blind person uses Stylus and Braille slate. Braille slate consist essentially of two metal or plastic plates hinged together. To permit a sheet of paper to be inserted between the two plates. While writing on a Braille sheet (drawing sheet) it is to be written from right to left and then reverse the normal numbering of the Braille cell. Blind person reads these raised (embossed) dots with the help of their finger tip.

① ④ Total 63 combinations are possible using these 6 dots.  
② ⑤ Some combination given below.  
③ ⑥

**Braille cell**

Braille Chart									
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y	z				
A Number sign (⠠) is used before the alphabets 'a' to 'j' to convert them to numbers.									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0

**If there are Hearing Impaired students in your class:**

- To understand, these students need to see the blackboard, teacher's face, mouth and hands. They learn the pronunciation by looking at the movement of lips so make sure that they sit in the front rows.
- All new words introduced in the classroom should be written on to the blackboard. If possible make pictures also. Ensure that such students wear their hearing aid at all times.
- Hearing impaired students generally also have speech related difficulties. Listen to them with patience and give them the opportunity to express themselves.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth and avoid eating or drinking while talking so that the child is able to observe you.

Information  
on disability  
in different  
School Text  
Books in  
Madhya  
Pradesh

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