

Attitudes

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ROSES AND THORNS

Ruma Kirtikar



The
Spastics
Society
of India

REFERENCE



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RUMA KIRTIKAR

It is embarrassing to be talking about oneself to such an educated, enlightened and distinguished audience, where most of the people have done remarkably well and something creditable in their professions.

However, since the theme of our discussion is community attitudes, achievements and difficulties encountered by the disabled in their normal daily life, I have no alternative but to focus on the same from this platform.

Looking backwards, I had a desire to go to school like my elder sister, but no schools would give me admission because of my disability. My sister's teacher who used to come home to give tuition to her, had stopped teaching her after 5th. standard. My uncle requested her to teach me and she readily agreed. It was she who helped me in

making my left hand useful and taught me at home, upto the 3rd. standard. My quest for education had begun. However, there was no appropriate school around which fulfilled my needs.

The day I met Mithu-mashi and Malini at the Children's Orthopaedic Hospital proved to be a turning point in my life. We took a joint decision that I join the Centre for Special Education, the Founder-Chairperson of which was Mrs. Mithu Alur. This is how I joined the Spastics Society of India. I did my schooling, speech, occupational and physio-therapy all under one roof. There, I got care, love and trust from the staff. When I was in the 8th. Standard, one of my fellow mates encouraged me to go alone by the B.E.S.T. Bus. That was another landmark in my life.

The S.S.C. Examination was an important event in my life. For the first time, I was tested with able-bodied students. I had to struggle hard for success, but came out with flying colours and I was thrilled. At that moment, I thought that I could do it. My family and friends encouraged me to go ahead in my search for further learning.

College life offered newer vistas for me. It put me in contact with a larger world, bigger than my school. Reaching out to my classmates and teachers who did not know a thing about disability, was something I felt was an achievement by itself. Travelling independently by train over long distances was also a barrier I broke while in college, a thing which I had never dreamt about earlier.

My stint at the Nirmala Niketan College for a six months course in embroidery and flower arrangement, furthered my ambitions to get on with my talents and develop them to the fullest extent possible. Later, in my career life at the Spastics Society of India and National Job Development Centre, I decided to plunge into tasks which were to demand a lot of my physical

energy and mental strength. There were people who questioned me, "How will you do filing with disobedient hands?" "Computers and you?" "Ruma, do you think you will manage?" If not to me, to others around me, it did seem an uphill task. Today, when I move the keys on the computer keyboard with ease, enjoying myself in the task of entering data of important subjects, I wonder whether this question had ever come up at all. Its an achievement, not only for me, but for all those who have struggled to coordinate tasks with special and different abilities.

Well, to begin with there were the attitudes of significant family members, neighbours and the general public - sometimes overprotective sometimes insensitive and sometimes inquisitive and probing. Speaking of impediments around the environment, well, they are endless, as you can see in the film.

Look what happens in this film. First of all, there is no zebra crossing, so it can be quite a scary exercise. If people weren't as bold as me, they would be petrified of being hit by a car. The people don't understand my speech, so they pas

me by. Though there are good strangers, who are many and who will stand and help.

Travelling is a big difficulty even today, because of lack of meaningful measures like separate compartments for people with disabilities, escortless fare concession and special bus stops for the disabled. The facility of bus pass, would have lessened our difficulty of fishing out money everytime to buy a ticket in a crowded bus. Zebra crossings, parking lights and symbols showing handicapped people crossing would certainly make the task easier.

There have been physical limitations due to cerebral palsy. They sometimes do come in the way of our rising ambitions, as a result of which we do feel frustrated that our physical abilities do not keep pace with our mental/intellectual capacities. There is a certain sorrow which we do feel at times on account of this.

Our female role is always put to test, especially in the Indian context, where girls are supposed to be looked after by their parents in their young age

and when they grow older, it is their husbands who have to take care of them. "Having disability means that girls need more of the looking after" is the general attitude of families in this context. Marriage may not always be an option for us. But we are not allowed to stay on our own, being of the female gender.

Sometimes, I feel that our handicaps seem to loom large in every direction we set our eyes. In a difficult situation this is really.

In conclusion, I would like to say that being basically an optimistic person, I feel that I am very young and have a long way to go. I am very grateful to all, particularly Mrs. Alur, for her support, special care and love showered on me at the right time which has enriched my life and made it meaningful.

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