

Success &

ABILITY

India's Cross-disability Magazine

March 2018



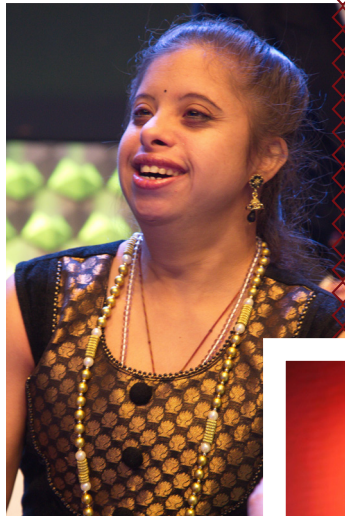
CHIN KARE
ABILITY
AWARDS

2018

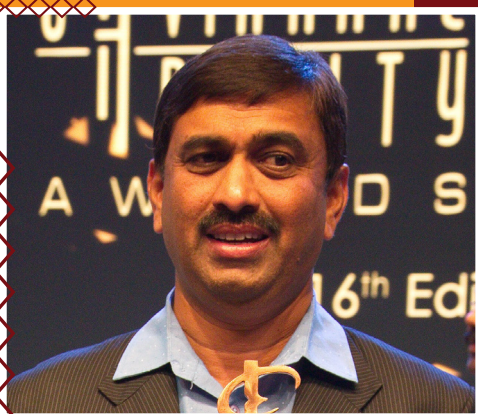


Spl Recognition

MASTERY



Eminence



From the Editor's Desk



Friends,

I write this, not as my usual editorial, but as a tribute to a friend, colleague in the disability sector, partner in several directions, a soldier in arms. I must confess I found it difficult to write this page this time. Thoughts fly by, memories race. Where does one begin to write when one is still in a state of shock? I stare at the empty page, knowing that I must write about him, yet unable to do so.

All I see – as if a picture were in front of me – is his questioning gaze and a flicker of a smile and the unspoken word that conveyed that we were on the same page. Yes, I refer to Javed Abidi, Executive Director, NCEPDP & former Chair, Disabled Persons' International.

Javed... so much has been written and spoken about you in the recent past. Eulogies spelt out, personal experiences cited, and some ending in words of prayer, about how tough you were, how kind, how much of a visionary and so on. So much, and so unending that I decided to keep silent... and just treasure our association and muse on the way (back in – was it 1996?) that we spent in mulling over DRG & DPI. We became friends from the word go. You gamely participated in my inclusive fashion show "Samara" in 1997, which had Aishwarya Rai participating too! Oh... of course you wanted to share the catwalk with her, but didn't get to doing so... no thanks to the choreographer who put the show together! I wish I could sequence events in my head... Our trip to Laos, Vientiane – you, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra & I... putting out a combination of work and fun. So many other memories that cannot be erased. Some sweet, some sour. But all so unforgettable.

I think we can partition the disability scene in three phases for the purpose of this page: (A) The pre 1996 phase, when nothing was happening... people with disabilities: who were they anyway, other than those who attended schools for the deaf, schools for the blind, spastic societies, schools for the mentally retarded and so on. (B) The 1997 to 2007 phase, when we were able to create a semblance of a path in the formidable woods; when the 2001 General Population Census of India for the first time included two questions on disability; and when in 2007, India ratified the UNCRPD! Hurrah! Oh, how jubilant were we! We had finally arrived! (C) And finally the 2007 to 2017 phase when a lot happened and did not happen as well. But at least the path of yore had turned to a concrete road – albeit a road with potholes galore, but nevertheless a road!

And now, so many bright-eyed and competent activists have entered the scene... gladdening our hearts... And you, Javed, having done your duty and handed over a legacy to the advocates and campaigners of tomorrow, you bid everyone bye. As Sruti Mohapatra put it: "a true karma yogi," active unto the last. Javed Abidi... may your tribe increase.

Jayshree Raveendran



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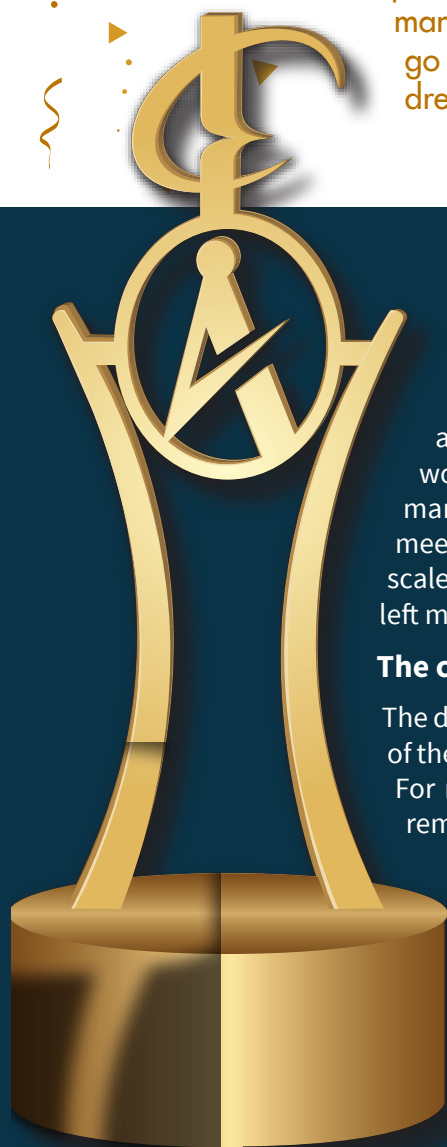
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AN EVENING TO REMEMBER

The 2018 CAVINKARE ABILITY AWARDS night was a mix of inspiring and overwhelming moments that left many teary eyed and everyone inspired to go out into the world and achieve their dreams, recounts SRUTHI S RAGHAVAN.



Sruthi
S Raghavan



Lights, laughter, love and warmth are four words that would best surmise the 16th CavinKare Ability Awards held on 3rd February 2018. It was a first time experience for me to witness an entire auditorium coming alive to celebrate six outstanding achievers with disabilities.

The CKA Awards night was just my third day at Ability Foundation as a volunteer and I couldn't have asked for a better start to, what I believe would be, a rewarding and inspiring journey. It was also my first time on many different levels: meeting and interacting with disabled individuals, meeting the entire team behind such an event and attending an event of such scale and grandeur. By the end of the night, it also became the first event that left me inspired, spellbound and speechless.

The calm before the storm

The day began with the Ability Team going to and fro to receive the six recipients of the awards, who had flown down from various parts of India to be in Chennai. For many, it was their first time in the city, while for others it was all about reminiscing about their previous visits. A well organised meet-and-greet session in the morning for the recipients ensured every one of us eased into the big night. It was particularly useful for me and also to other first timers in the team before the grand evening. The only brief for the team was to ensure that we create cherished memories for the awardees, and the team went all out to do just that. There was so much positivity, excitement and enthusiasm in the air that any ounce of nervousness amongst the recipients or the first timers just melted away even before the tree lights came on!

Celebration galore

The evening began with a soothing rendition of “Shanthi nilava vendum (let’s bring peace)” sung by renowned singer Anuradha Sriram against a gorgeous floral backdrop. The colourful stage was then further emblazoned by Blaaze’s

rap on ability and humanity which, he himself also interpreted by using sign language. His diligence in learning and practising sign language for hours before his performance reflected not only in his flawless rendition but also his commitment to the inclusivity of the evening, taking his music to each and every individual in the audience.

“Ability walks hand-in-hand with a strong will and spirit in the path towards achieving one’s goals”, said C.K.Ranganathan, Chairman and Managing Director of CavinKare in his welcome address. Looking back at their 16-year journey, Jayshree Raveendran, Founder Director of Ability Foundation expressed excitement and enthusiasm for the future on the inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The first award of the evening was the Special Recognition Award given to Dr. Sruti



ANURADHA SRIRAM

VINEETH

Mohapatra from Odisha. One could not ignore her infectious smile and the excitement in her eyes was palpable. Founder and CEO of Swabhiman, a disability information and resource centre, Dr. Mohapatra is a quadriplegic who continues to remain unstoppable in her pursuit of creating and striving for an inclusive world.

Then followed a divine and graceful performance by acclaimed actor/dancer Vineeth whose conceptual dance performance on ‘karma’ and ‘life of ignorance’ complemented the overall theme of the awards. Vineeth has been associated with Ability Foundation for many years now and in his address, he hoped to

CONVINCARE ABILITY AWARDS



Standing L/R: Ishwar Achanta, Andal Damodaran, R. Srikanth, Vinod Surana, B. Srinivasan, C.K. Ranganathan, Jayshree Raveendran, Mariazeena Johnson
Sitting L/R: Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh, Gauri Shekar Gadgil, Jasmina Khanna, Sruti Mohapatra, Mahantesh G. K., Raju Rameshwar Upgrade

What makes these achievers different, when there are plenty of success stories all around? It is their ability to view what's extraordinary as ordinary and what's impossible as possible, every time they are told otherwise, not only for themselves, but for the rest of the world.

continue to take this relationship forward in the future as well.

The next four awards, the Mastery Awards, were conferred on individuals with disability who had achieved their dreams against all odds. The recipients of the Mastery Awards, this year, were Raju Rameshwar Upgrade from Pune, Gauri Shekar Gadgil from Pune, Jasmina Khanna and Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh from Mumbai. What distinguishes them from other achievers that the world has known is not their disability, but their courage to dream, persevere and emerge victorious despite all the odds they had to overcome.

Congenital achondroplasia may have rendered Raju short statured, but his courage and dreams stood taller than most people on this planet. His journey from accepting the various complications

of achondroplasia and finding his way through a maze sprinkled generously with physical pain, financial constraints and rejections can awaken even the most ignorant minds. He dedicated his award to his mother and spoke about how her faith in him gave him the courage to fight back during his darkest hours.

Gauri Shekar Gadgil did not let Down's Syndrome interfere with her zest for life. She found her calling in the unlikelyst of places – her therapy sessions! Swimming and dancing were suggested as therapy to a young Gauri who began enjoying the activities so much that she went on to become a multiple Special Olympics Award winner and a national level swimmer across disciplines. She is also a trained Bharatanatyam dancer and a sociology graduate.

Jasmina Khanna's exuberant smile is something everyone will always remember. Cerebral palsy did not stop Jasmina from living her life the way she wanted to, and with her smile that could light up even the darkest of rooms, as she sailed past hurdles with the grace of a swan. With a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in sociology, Jasmina is also a software professional who works with a leading IT company, while also nurturing a passion for writing.

Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh is grace and elegance personified. One could see it in her eyes, her posture, her compassion for fellow human beings and empathy, qualities that are characteristic of doctors who want to create an impact on society. Like most people, I was surprised to learn that she underwent bilateral amputation of her legs as a result of a ghastly train accident. She did not let her disability deter her from earning a distinction in her MBBS programme and her dreams of becoming a surgeon in the near future. The highlight of the evening was Dr. Roshan's moving two-line *sher* (urdu poetry) on her mother which warranted a standing ovation and left many in the auditorium teary eyed.

The last award of the evening, the Award for Eminence went to a transformational leader, Mahantesh G. K. Through his NGO Samarthanam, he had paved the way for countless visually impaired persons to be educated and had created an environment that was inclusive and accessible. Visually impaired himself, he enjoys cricket a little too much and promotes blind cricket. He is the president of the Cricket Association for the Blind in India and World Blind Cricket Limited too.

These six recipients were selected from over 200 nominations from across the country, as cited by Terry Thomas, Innovation Centre Leader and Partner – Operations, Advisory Services, Ernst Young, who validate the nomination process.

The 16th CavinKare Ability Awards night was a mix of inspiring and overwhelming moments that left many teary eyed and everyone inspired to go out into the world and achieve their dreams. All six recipients were celebrated with innumerable rounds of applause and standing ovations in a packed auditorium. By the end of the evening, I was left wondering what success actually means and how it applies to each individual. If success is in one's own hands, then why do we view the success of disabled individuals differently?

Immovable courage, patience and faith are some of the common traits of achievers across the globe. There are plenty of stories of success and failure that one can read to draw inspiration from, yet there is something in these awardees that is different. Is it their steely grit, or zest for life or the drive to achieve their dreams? Being a part of the 16th CKA Awards night gave me the answer, which is their ability to view what's extraordinary as ordinary and what's impossible as possible, everytime they are told otherwise, not only for themselves, but for the rest of the world.



CÄVINKARE
ABILITY
AWARDS
2018

Special Recognition Award

COVER FEATURE



Dr. Sruti Mohapatra

Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Disability rights activist, Founder and CEO of Swabhiman, a disability information and resource centre, noted academic and a member of many important committees in government and society, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra is not one to rest on her laurels. Fired by a passion to “enjoy and create joy” she continues to dream up and execute projects that promise more spectacular strides towards inclusion.

“This year’s resolution is to take a back seat, sit down and write. Once the next rung of leaders come up, one has to let go and let them take over”, voices Dr. Sruti Mohapatra, one of India’s most effective disability activists. But then, writing is only one of her resolutions. As always, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra has a billion new ideas and action plans buzzing in her head.

No surprises then that Sruti has her next project planned out. “The second resolution for the year is to work with the Orissa State Disability Network and take the message of inclusion to the last person in every village,” she says. This includes the new RPD law, the Accessible India campaign and sustainable development goals. The messages would also throw the spotlight on existing social biases in the form of stereotypes and prejudices against disabled persons and raise awareness on the capability and abilities of disabled persons.

Planned along spectacular lines, an “Awareness Chariot”, plastered with such images and messages will be flagged off from the state capital Bhubaneswar and travel across Orissa, halting at every district and block headquarter on the route. The second part, happening simultaneously,

CIVIL ABILITY

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD

given to

Dr. Sruti Mohapatra

**on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

A well known figure in India’s disability circles
An applauded and celebrated personality, inspiring one and all
With her philosophies of life as well her successes
Was a time when, as a sprightly young woman, she sought
to achieve a life of full responsibility and duty to the country
As an officer of the Indian civil Services,
When something as random as a car accident, involving a drunken driver
Caused all sensations of limb to vanish, leaving her
A quadriplegic – paralysed shoulder down
Overpowering all odds, she rose to be
The quintessence of all that a human being could rise to be
While a position at India’s august government offices evaded her
Thanks only to the indifferent attitudes of the people at the helm
She went on to establish a centre to
Coach other IAS aspirants realize their dreams
Also initiating Swabhiman, a nonprofit, cross disability organization,
Advocating for, and serving persons with disabilities in India and South Asia.
Campaigning for rights-based approach to disability for several policy changes,
Impacting the lives of all persons with disabilities.
Not for a moment allowing her condition to
Prove detrimental to anything she wanted to achieve
Surrounded by love and admiration all round,
She spreads out her net of accomplishments
Far & wide as the world knows her.

will be programmes at the rest of the block headquarters, panchayats and gram sabhas.

At every halt, sensitisation sessions have been planned to draw in the local populace, which would include hundreds of disabled persons and representatives of NGOs, government, civil society and media. A strong visual message on inclusion will be emblazoned on a village wall to ensure the message is reinforced in the minds of the locals. Public meetings, audio-visual shows, photo exhibitions, distribution of leaflets and posters, talent shows by persons with disabilities and press meets are the key activities to be held at these locations. Meetings with representatives are also planned at the block and district headquarters, who will plan and implement sensitisation programmes for that area.

Sruti's third resolution for the year is to ensure that the polling booths in Orissa for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections are made accessible. She is in the process of creating an election observers group. That's quite a handful of targets for someone who has decided just to sit back, and write, but that's Dr. Sruti Mohapatra for you.

Sruti is not just a crusader but a leader in the disability sector. She is the founder of Swabhiman, that works for the empowerment of people with disabilities, founder member of SHARE (Shared Entertainment and Recreation) that organises street plays, treks, fashion shows and other activities for disabled persons, member of the Women's Cell of Disabled People's International (WCDPI) with consultative status in the United Nations; member of the State Coordination Committee for People with Disability, the eastern zone coordinator for the National Council for Promotion of Employment of People with Disability, and the coordinator of the Disability Resource Centre in Utkal University... and all this apart, she also runs a counselling centre for people with disabilities from her residence.

It is said, experiences in life can make one bitter or better. In Sruti's case, her experiences created a better life for not just herself, but for countless disabled people across the country. An accident in April '87 turned her world upside down. She

was 24 years old, a university gold medalist and a national level basketball player who had qualified for the Group A Allied Services of the Indian Civil Services. On the personal front, she was engaged to be married to the man she loved. Picture perfect. Then followed the devastating accident, leaving her a quadriplegic.

Her fiancée deserted her. The UPSC offered her a position of reduced rank and salary. When she questioned this, even that 'offer' was withdrawn. The bureaucratic apathy stunned her, but spurred her to move on. She began training civil service aspirants, who are now working in various positions in the government, banks, research institutes, universities and other services.

Side by side, Sruti pursued academics and went on to win a fellowship and a National Young Scientist Award in 1993. She did her doctorate in 1994 and published scores of research papers on disability, besides popular articles, poems and short stories. Her advocacy inspired corporates in Bhubaneswar to recruit disabled persons and enabled wheelchair access into Puri's Jagannath Temple.

Meanwhile Anjali, Swabhiman's annual festival for children with disabilities, now includes non-disabled students as well. As one of the biggest festivals of its kind (with attendance of over 40,000 children in its 16-year journey) it seeks to subtly establish inclusion in the mindspace of generation next. Swabhiman has also collaborated with Vodafone Foundation to release audio book recordings of syllabi prescribed by Utkal University. Swabhiman's Leadership Training and Empowerment Program for youth with disabilities (YLTEP) trains higher secondary and college students with disability in becoming leaders in their college and communities. Swabhiman's Saksham provides holistic support to children with disabilities living in Bhubaneswar slums to complete their high school education, and cultivate a hobby or skill that could perhaps evolve into a profession someday.

Clearly, Sruti Mohapatra is someone who thinks big...and her remarkable journey continues. She smiles and says "I can accept failure, but I cannot accept not trying".

Glimpses



Team Ability



Ishwar Achanta



Vinod Surana



Andal Damodaran



Mariazeena Johnson



B. Srinivasan



A section of the audience



C.K. Ranganathan



Blaaze

Anuradha Sriram and Vijaya Baskaran



Janaki Pillai



Vineeth

Mastery Award



Raju Rameshwar Upgrade, Pune, Maharashtra

Not letting disability, financial constraints or rejections impede him, Raju Rameshwar Upgrade is living out his dreams as an engineer at the forefront of science, working on the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

The calm and serenity that emanates from 35-year-old Raju's demeanour conveys the wisdom and intellect he has gained from his incredible journey towards his dreams. His willingness to share his story several times during the course of the evening conveys his eagerness to inspire and motivate everyone around him. His positive nature is one trait that is consistently highlighted by his colleagues, friends and family.

Born into a large family, with his knees on the back of his legs, Raju spent several years undergoing surgeries, treatments and medical care. However, when doctors could no longer provide a specific diagnosis, his distraught parents eventually decided to rest his recovery on God.

Achondroplasia, weak lungs, general deterioration due to his various deformities, spine compression that resulted in a lumbar compression surgery, aortic valve disease and mild aortic stenosis are some of the conditions he continues to battle. Yet, none of these has stopped him from marching ahead. He completed his B.E. in Information Technology from Gondia, Maharashtra, through a Dhirubhai Ambani Scholarship. Armed with a fighting spirit, perseverance and smile on his face, he overcame challenges and emerged a university topper, even though holding sheets of engineering drawing in his hand was a challenge for him. Today, he works with the Tata



MASTERY AWARD

given to

Raju Rameshwar Upgrade

**on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

Being a person with dwarfism notwithstanding,
Allowing neither the associated multiple disabilities
Nor the negative mindsets, condescending attitudes and
Inaccessible spaces to prove hindrances
Revealing a spirit indomitable to life's uncertainties...

With perseverance and fortitude, he has
Made himself a go-getter, setting an example
to many others with similar disability

Forging ahead through rampant discrimination
Throughout not just school and also as a scholarship student
In engineering college but also in his employment at the
GMRT-NCRA-Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

An engineer, a poet and writer – all in one
Living independently with fortitude
Demonstrating the saying
“Where there is a will, there is a way”



Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) on the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) set up by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics. He is a winner of the Godfrey Phillips Mind of Steel Award. It is to his credit that he has been living independently for the past 17 years, despite the huge challenges posed by the many complications of achondroplasia. He credits his strength and energy to his family's love and support, especially his mother's deep conviction in his abilities and talents.

Even now, some of his colleagues remember how he surprised everyone by arriving at the institute, alone, carrying two bags, after spending the night on the train floor (due to unconfirmed reservation). This gives, but a glimpse of his steely resolve to learn and accomplish. During the initial years he had to overcome several obstacles in the form of walking long distances to and from the office to his hostel, using toilets that were located

in different buildings and communication hurdles within the campus due to the isolated location of the institute. With his growing seniority within the institute, he was able to afford facilities that made his life a tad easier and focus more on his work. Raju is so passionate about his work that he could spend hours talking about it. So great is his love for his work that he has even delayed his surgeries in order to complete his projects that could take even upto two years. For someone who initially aspired to be a geneticist, he has built an illustrious career as a research scientist at TIFR. His work apart, Raju loves reading and writing romantic poetry.

Raju's various skills and abilities are lauded by his teammates and colleagues. In him, they see all the qualities of an inspiring leader. When asked how he found the clarity to make the right career choices, and where he drew his strength from, he mentions two things: his family, and his fervour to prove himself in this world.

Mastery Award

Gauri Shekar Gadgil

Pune, Maharashtra

Champion swimmer, national award winning actress, Bharatanatyam danceuse and more... Gauri Shekar Gadgil lets nothing stop her from dreaming big and making them come true.

One might mistake Gauri's mannerism as apprehensiveness due to being in a new environment, but within a few minutes this disappears. She is a young woman who loves to meet people, spread warmth through her words. One cannot miss the twinkle in her eyes when she talks about swimming and her dancing as well as her long list of achievements including a national award for best actress for her stellar performance in the movie 'Yellow' in which she played herself.

Gauri has Down's syndrome and her penchant for swimming drove her to win multiple swimming competitions regionally, nationally and internationally. What began as therapy soon turned into a passion that she fiercely dedicated herself to, and soon applause worthy performances just followed. Winning local competitions in dancing and swimming soon motivated her to participate in a number of competitions that exposed her to various cultures, people and societies.

Along the way, Gauri has notched up umpteen medals and laurels, including silver medal (800m freestyle) and bronze medals (400m freestyle and 450m freestyle relay) at the Special Olympic Asia Pacific Regional Games (2013), silver medal for 25m Butterfly event and 4th Position Ribbon for 50m Backstroke at the Shanghai Special Olympics (2007), Gold medal at the Open Water long distance swimming race (2014),

CITATION

CAVINKARE
ABILITY

MASTERY AWARD

Gauri Shekar Gadgil

given to

**on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

A dancer, a solo performer,

A champion swimmer with

Silver & Gold medals at various championships

A graduate in Sociology from a mainstream college

Of the University of Pune

And, as an actor, playing the role of a protagonist

In her very first film "Yellow" she effortlessly won
National Award as Best Actress and a Jury Special Mention

Does it matter that Gauri Shekhar Gadgil

Is a person with Down's Syndrome?

With a constant striving for fresh challenges

Gauri is proof of the fact that talent transcends disability,

And that given the right opportunities

At the right time, there are more role models amongst

Persons with disabilities than anywhere else in the conventional world.



Gold medal at the UPIM Biathle World Tour 2016, and Gold medals at the Modern Pentathlon National Championships, to name some.

Today, Gauri aspires to become a swimming coach. She is also preparing for Bharatanatyam classical dance examinations, has completed a computer course and has a degree in Sociology from S.P. College, Pune.

At the crux of Gauri's success is the resolve and dedication of her parents, Shekar and Sneha Gagdil. Had it not been for their brave choices and support, Gauri's intelligence and skills would have remained unnoticed and India would have missed an international swimming champion. When asked, "What according to you is your daughter's biggest success?", Shekar answers, "All we wanted for her is to live independently in society and take care of herself. Today, she has achieved everything and more than we could ask of her.

Her mother and I regard her independence as her biggest success".

Gauri's determination and confidence to achieve what she sets her mind to has often left her parents astounded. For instance, when she decided she wanted to pursue graduation, just like her sister, her parents were reluctant and worried if she would be accepted by her peers at college. Gauri proved them wrong by not only completing her B.A. in 2016 but by also socialising and forming a large group of friends. Her father reminisced about the days when he left her at the college gate and watched her walk towards her campus building independently, with a bounce in her legs, anticipating an exciting day ahead with her friends. He realised that his daughter had finally tasted the independence she craved for, and nothing could stop her from dreaming big and achieving her dreams.

Mastery Award

Jasmina Khanna

Mumbai, Maharashtra



Jasmina Khanna didn't let the challenges of cerebral palsy stop her from pursuing academic achievements or let repeated rejections deter her from a spectacular career. At the heart of it is her determination to prove herself.

The sparkle in Jasmina's eyes is infectious and childlike. Her happy face reveals nothing of the complications brought forth by cerebral palsy, nor the arduous journey she has travelled to reach where she is today. It reveals nothing of her eight-year struggle, despite her amazing credentials, to get a job in the software industry.

Jasmina completed SCRUM MASTER, with a 92% from the International Scrum Institute. She obtained a CSTE Certification with 75.50% in September 2008 from Quality Assurance International (QAI). She finished a course in Oracle Version 7 and D2K, FoxPro Programming, MS Office. She learnt Web designing (HTML DHTML JavaScript, VB Script and ASP), PageMaker, Corel Draw and Photoshop. She did all of this using just the index finger of her left hand. Jasmina works on the computer by using accessibility options available in Windows operating system like the sticky keys option and a special track ball mouse.

All this notwithstanding, the job she ached for stayed elusive. "I would clear the technical interviews, the telephonic interviews. But when people met me and saw my disability, they rejected me", she reveals. The rejection hit her all the more since, academically, she was an achiever. She had completed SSC with a score of 72.71% including a 100% in Mathematics, followed by 66.67% in HSC. She then graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from



MASTERY AWARD

given to

Jasmina Khanna

**on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

Unfazed by her severe disabilities

On account of Cerebral Palsy

Her indomitable fighting spirit and unceasing optimism

Took her on the path that she designed for herself

Allowing neither disability nor other trials and tribulations

To stand in the way of achievement,

Choosing her own subjects of study in a mainstream college

As well as computer applications and software development

Having faced rejection, stereotypical attitudes and discrimination

From day one, today she rides the crest of success

As a bona fide and valued employee of a global IT company

Earning for herself the mention of being in the Top Five

Inspiring Role Models with Cerebral Palsy

Emphasising that it is attitude

That determines inclusion, not a disability

She's surely an icon for all who endeavour

To be masters of their own destiny

St. Xavier's College and did her M.A. in Sociology from the Mumbai University.

However, finding a job was a huge challenge. In 2005, she eventually got a data entry job with Rheal Software. Five years later, she cleared Syntel India's technical interviews as well as their HR Interviews, but was rejected once more because of her disability. Like a ray of sunshine through the window, she finally got a job with Syntel India on contract basis, thanks to someone's reference. Within eight months of her joining the company, her good performance found her a position on the company's payroll, at double the salary. Today, Jasmina has been working at Syntel India for over eight years. "I have proved myself. My company understands my potential now", she says with assurance.

"It's a tough job, a fun job, an exciting job", says Jasmina, speaking of her latest assignment. After quality testing software for Fortune 500 banking and finance firms for the past several years, she is now in a new, exciting phase. Today, she is developing web applications for a major health care firm. "I did have a guide to help me to learn web applications", she says. "When I started work, I was apprehensive of how people would react and interact with me. I discovered that once they started working with me, they became comfortable after just about a week or so. And then, it has all been great fun".

Jasmina's day is full now. She is so busy that she finds no time for writing anymore. Jasmina had started out as a content writer, and had excelled at it too. She wrote web reviews for the weekly magazine DQChannelsIndia of Cyber Media Limited. She prepared an Indian Hotel Guide for Rediff Communications. She wrote a cover feature for The Competition Master in May 2002 and over 90 general knowledge articles for children for the American firm Webschooling. Inc before she switched her focus to the software industry.

There was a time when her protective parents weren't ready to let her go out and work, because of which Jasmina tried to get assignments that could be done from home. Today, her workday



JASMINA KHANNA
Mumbai, Maharashtra



stretches till 10 at night and she commutes on her own by cab, using Easy Move, Mumbai's accessible car service. Recently, her name was listed among the Top 5 Inspiring Role Models with cerebral palsy in India by the online news portal Newzhook.

While Jasmina says, "People around me inspire me", Devendra Khanna, her proud brother states, "We are proud of her achievements and she totally supports herself financially". Quick to pass on credit when accolades are thrown at her, Jasmina quips, "I would be nowhere without the support of my family...now I want to conquer the world".

Looking ahead, inclusion has to have a multipronged approach, feels Jasmina. She suggests, "Corporates should become more open to recruiting persons with disabilities. We need to create more awareness and this can be done in ever so many ways. Even just a little more visibility of disabled people in public spaces can bring about more awareness for accessibility and inclusion. In this regard, inaccessible infrastructure is a major issue that begs to be addressed".

Mastery Award

Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh

Mumbai, Maharashtra



Nothing can stop this young woman who took the PIL route to secure her rightful place in medical college. Beating bilateral amputation following a ghastly train accident, poverty and bureaucratic hurdles, Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh is now all set to take up her post graduation in medical science.



MASTERY AWARD

given to

Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh

**on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai
in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds**

The daughter of a vegetable vendor,
Despite losing both her lower limbs
In a most gruesome train accident,
And having to see her own legs being
Severed off by a moving train

Allowing neither disability nor other trials and tribulations
To stand in the way of achievement.

Displaying a strong resolve that revealed
A spirit indomitable to obstacles, she resolutely
Pursued her dream of becoming a doctor,
Fighting her way through the Medical Council, who
Disqualified her, on grounds of disability
Winning the judgment in her favour and triumphantly
Entering the medical college several months late, but
nevertheless

Securing a distinction in her medical exams,
Amongst the several laurels that she has gained,
She has also been mentioned in the
Maharashtra State Board Class VII Question Paper
Today, she interns at the KEM Hospital, Mumbai,
Even while preparing for the NEET Common Entrance
Exam

She remains the epitome of that rare never-say-die spirit and
Leads the life of an extremely successful
woman of substance.



“Whenever I heard someone say I wouldn’t be able to do something, it only made me more determined to accomplish it and prove myself”, says Dr. Roshan Jawad Shaikh. Roshan’s sweet looks hide a steely resolve that surfaces over and over again...everytime she is confronted by a challenge – small or big. There is an added sparkle in her eyes when she speaks of the career she aspires for. Having cleared the NEET Common Entrance Test, now, she is all set to take up her post graduation in medical science.

Eight years back, this didn’t seem possible. The sprightly sixteen-year-old’s legs had been amputated following a gruesome train accident on 7 October 2008. While taking the 10km journey home from college on a Mumbai local train after giving the first term exams of her 11th grade at the Anjuman Islam College, Roshan was pushed out and run over by a speeding train. No one came forward to help the young girl as she lay bleeding on the tracks for 45 minutes. In the absence of appropriate treatment at the hospital she was taken to, gangrene had set in. Her family could not afford the treatment, and so her school and college came forward to meet her expenses, as Roshan was a meritorious student. She lost both her legs (right leg above knee and left leg below knee amounting to 86% disability). Coming from a non-affluent background (her father is a vegetable vendor), her future looked bleak.

Nevertheless, Roshan completed her 11th standard using a wheelchair. When she was doing her 12th standard, she started



using an artificial prosthetic leg braving the pain that it caused her, and completed her HSC scoring 75%. “During those dark days, my mother was a huge support and inspiration for me. She encouraged me to take the accident in my stride and move on in life”, she reveals.

Though Roshan’s family stood by her and encouraged her to follow her dream of becoming a doctor, many discouraged her, saying that she “wouldn’t be able to take on the demanding MBBS course”. But she continued to pursue her goal with zeal.

Her hard work paid off as she stood third among handicapped students in Maharashtra’s Common Entrance Test (CET) 2011. However, counsellors at JJ Hospital dissuaded her from taking up medical education, telling her that she wouldn’t be able to handle the strenuous requirements of an MBBS degree which would include climbing up and down stairs, constant visits to check on patients, standing for hours in labs, etc. Eventually, she was disqualified on grounds of her disability being 86% – an unfair decision, considering that the disability

cut off for admission at that time was just between 40% and 70%.

Not one to be discouraged, with the encouragement of her orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Sanjay Kanthariya and her physiotherapists, and under the guidance of Advocate V.P. Patil, Roshan filed a PIL against the Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER), Maharashtra in the Bombay High Court seeking quashing of her disqualification. The court eventually ruled in her favour, deriding the DMER for its negativity. Roshan was granted admission into the reputed Seth G. S. Medical College and KEM Hospital in 2011, albeit two months late – when classes had already begun for the rest of the students. She scored 1st class in her first year MBBS exams and 75% with Distinction in her second year.

In college, every one of her fellow students and faculty welcomed her with open arms and hearts, encouraged her throughout in handling her medical education independently, just like everyone else. Her professor Dr. Yuaraj Bhosale remarks that he has never seen her reach for a seat even during the most strenuous and lengthiest laboratory sessions.

In February 2016, eight years after the accident, Roshan cleared her MBBS exams, becoming the first in her extended family to become a doctor. Today, she continues to travel by the Mumbai local trains, supporting herself on prosthetics and living independently in her college hostel.

Due to the benchmark judgment, she has been felicitated at many events. Roshan was conferred a Bravery Award by the Urdu Sahitya Academy, and a Bharat Ratan Award by Ample Mission.

In spite of the demands of her medical education, Dr. Roshan makes time to give motivational speeches and shares her story to inspire others. Some of these videos are available on YouTube and have been featured on TV channels. “My ultimate desire is to clear the hurdles in the path of disabled students towards their goals”.

Award for Eminence

Mahantesh G. K.

Bengaluru, Karnataka



The founding and rise of Samarthanam that works to empower disabled and marginalised persons is just one of his many stupendous contributions to society. Mahantesh G. K. is a visionary who inspires.

ABILITY

AWARD FOR EMINENCE

given to

Mahantesh G.K.

on the 3rd day of February 2018 in Chennai

in recognition of excellence achieved against all odds

A person with visual impairment, he triumphed over his odds
To make them his strengths... losing his vision at six months
He has fought discrimination from the time he can remember
Refused admission in schools on grounds of disability
His persistence finally led to his being condescendingly

Allowed to sit on the last bench

Learning solely by listening, he went on to solve
Mathematics problems orally

Eventually going on to complete M.Phil to boot
Not content with a job as a lecturer and being Captain
Of Indian Cricket Team for the Blind, he
Went on to establish Samarathanam

An organization that assists persons with disabilities
Live a life of dignity and contribute seamlessly to society
Providing free & accessible education to about 11000 children
And technical education to 9550 youth with disabilities
Samarathanam also aids in dry & E-waste management
Training and promoting about 100 artists in various dance forms,
Providing food free of cost to 50 government schools,
Giving shelter to 2567 distressed women with disabilities...

Today, not only enjoying a pan-Indian presence, but
Also centres in US & UK and a consultative status with the UN as well

Thus has Mahantesh charted out his dreams
To lead others with visual impairment and other disabilities,
To improve upon the quality of their lives

Continuing to work in various capacities,
Making it his life's mission to bring dignity to others
His is a story of true grit and determination

The long list of achievements of Mahantesh G.K. cannot be covered in a few pages. This visually impaired (100%) individual is the visionary that every society needs. His modesty, radiant smile and good natured curiosity about people and life resonates every time he tirelessly shares his story. He hopes to inspire, awaken the passion, and motivate everyone around him.

Mahantesh lost his eyesight to typhoid when he was six months old. He completed his schooling in Bangalore at Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind, where he also played cricket and broke many a glass window. He went on to pursue M.A. and M.Phil. in Bangalore before he began teaching at the University Law College.

Along with his school senior Nagesh, Mahantesh founded Samarathanam in 1997 that works to empower the visually impaired, disabled and marginalised people in India. The two member team complemented each other in their work towards achieving their dreams. While the latter was the visionary, the former was the go-getter. Together, they shared vision for a brighter future for the disabled that is growing bigger by the day and reaching every corner of India.

Mahantesh talks about Samarathanam as would a



50 different government schools in Bangalore. It has a dedicated infrastructure to provide professional training and skill development for disabled individuals and takes pride in the fact that women constitute around 45% of its workforce. So far, Samarthanam has trained close to 9550 youths with disabilities and has provided free education to nearly 1100 children. Mahantesh is also the Founder Director of B care that works to prevent AIDS and rehabilitate people living with HIV/AIDS.

Mahantesh is also a self-confessed cricket fanatic. Samarthanam's initiative, the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI) has taken India to many world championships including the T20 World Cup 2012 and 2017 as well as ODI World Championship in 2014 and Asia Cup 2016. Currently serving as the Vice President of the World Blind Cricket Council, and the President of the Cricket Association for the Blind in India, Mahantesh dreams of having one blind cricketer in the Indian team from every state in India.

parent who dreams big for his child. Samarthanam began with educating three blind students in 1997. Today, it has a pan-Indian presence besides offices in the U.K. and the U.S. The school in Bangalore not only provides education and resources for the visually disabled, but also runs rescue homes for women who have been victims of violence. Samarthanam provides free food to children across

His colleague Kumar's words best describe Mahantesh's personality. "Mahantesh may be visually blind, but his vision is for an inclusive society not only for the blind but for all disabled individuals. He is a visionary leader who thinks ahead of the times and is a man with the right strategies in place to achieve his goals". ■

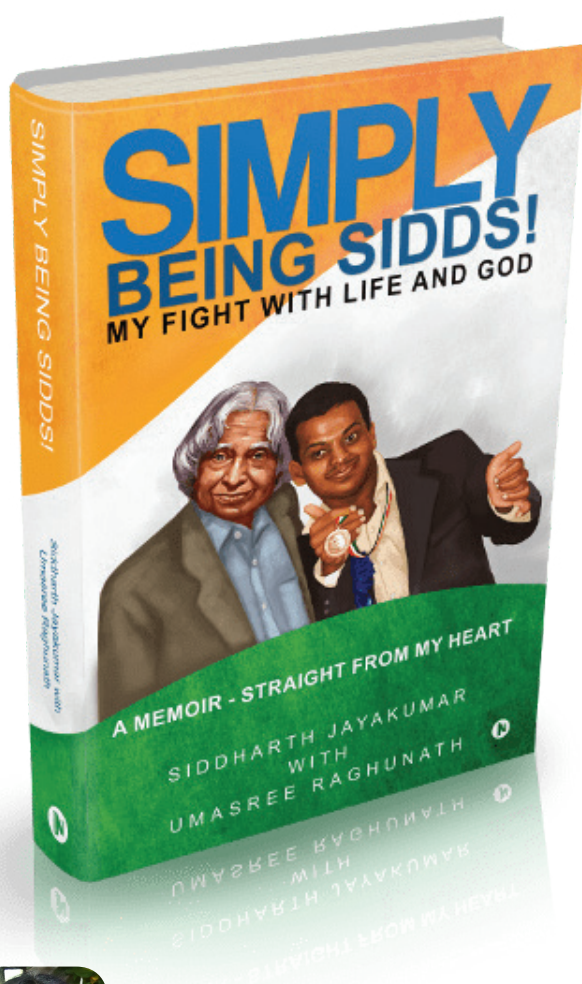
— Profiles by Hema Vijay and Sruthi S Raghavan

16 வகை அனைத்தும் சிறந்த சுவை

உங்கள் உணவை மேலும் சிறப்பாக்க,
நாங்கள் ஆவக்காய், தொக்கு, எலுமிச்சம்,
பூண்டு, தக்காளி, இஞ்சி போன்ற 16
சிறந்த ஊறுகாய் வகைகள் தருகிறோம்.
அத்தனையும் ருசித்திடுங்கள்.



A CONFLUENCE OF NARRATIVES



Authors : Siddharth Jayakumar & Umasree Raghunath
 Publishers : Notion Press 2017
 Price : Rs. 249

‘Simply Being Sidds! My fight with Life and God’ is a personal narrative, a lesson on everyday courage and persistence that can turn around any situation. It is also one that weaves in a broader social perspective on what it takes to tackle disability, writes HEMA VIJAY.



Hema
Vijay

The charm of ‘Simply Being Sidds! My fight with Life and God’ lies in how diverse narratives converge to retain the reader’s attention. An autobiography of Siddharth Jayakumar, who refused to let cerebral palsy come in the way of a “happening” personal life and a spectacular professional life, this book enthruses the reader to view life’s challenges in a totally positive perspective.

With a healthy mix of anecdotes and reflections, the book is smoothly co-authored by Siddharth and his friend Umasree Raghunath. The narrative includes stories about Siddharth shared by those close to him – his mother, Komala Jayakumar; Dipti Bhatia, his teacher and Deputy Director, Vidya Sagar, where he did his early schooling; Vasantha Jairam, Principal of Boston Matriculation Higher Secondary School where Siddharth was mainstreamed to complete his schooling; his brother-in-law Amit Kumar Rathi; his friend Prasanna Jeer; the various corporate heads he worked under, and of course, our beloved former President, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, who inspired Siddharth to write this book. These multiple perspectives give the reader a fascinating take on Siddharth. Photographs and pencil sketches by AR Suganthi Manoharan and Bhagyashri Kulkarni give the reader a closer insight on the protagonist and the people in his life.

Narrating his life's journey on the personal, professional and philosophical fronts, Siddharth also highlights issues that need to be addressed in order for persons with disabilities to have a level playing field. For instance, while writing about his higher secondary schooling, he recalls how he had no option but to take up accounts, though his passion was for science, since he could not handle practical exams and diagrams. Other areas he dwells on include the paucity in the availability of scribes and the difficult transition from special to mainstream schools.

Describing his experiences, Siddharth goes on to lead the reader through the educational milestones that culminated in a career in finance such as his college education, his first job interview, his becoming the first Indian with cerebral palsy to qualify as a Certified Documentary Credit Specialist (CDCS) from the Institute of Financial Services, U.K. and other accomplishments.

Nowhere is there an attempt to take cover and make excuses. Siddharth faces life head on, chin up. He describes his experiences with cerebral palsy as “the struggle and the joy of dealing with an ever shaking body”. The challenges of cerebral palsy notwithstanding, he brings out the normalcy of his dreams and fears, his strengths and vulnerabilities, his desires and hopes. Siddharth Jayakumar conveys that CP needn't be the frightening predicament it is made out to be, if these children are given a fair chance to succeed in life. For institutions, caregivers, parents and friends of those with disabilities, Siddharth's autobiography seems to proclaim, ‘I did it, you can do it too!’ In the end, his resolute spirit and positive attitude comes through... to deal with whatever life has to offer... in style. ■

The challenges of cerebral palsy notwithstanding, in bringing out the normalcy of his dreams and fears, his strengths and vulnerabilities, his desires and hopes, Siddharth Jayakumar conveys that CP needn't be the frightening predicament it is made out to be, if these children are given a fair chance to succeed in life.

FOOTPATHS ARE FOR WALKING!



Meera
Balachander

Tongue-in-cheek, MEERA BALACHANDER muses on the obstacle courses that footpaths have become.



Come again? I rub my eyes and peer at that neatly done board again.

Since that moment of enlightenment, the pavements of Chennai have become the cynosure of my eyes, my passion, my obsession... and that is how I noticed that they don't only come in all sizes, shapes, textures, heights and depths, but that, catlike, they have nine or so lives, very purposeful ones at that!

A compulsive walker used to the seamless pavements along the Marine Drive, I was flummoxed when I first came across a two-storeyed

one, step et al, in Chennai. It added to the calorie-burning, I thought, and took it in my stride(s). But a decade later, when my knees started viewing Chennai's pavements with raised eyebrows and a pained "aah", I still did not know.

The aforesaid board rekindled the 'why' with renewed observations.

Some pavements begin with a healthy and respectable width and taper off, like a woman's 22" waist or a size 0. Some come in colour-coordinated tiles, some are zebra-bordered. Some are smooth like a baby's cheeks, others are pock-marked and uneven.

But pavements only for walking? Repeatedly declared every 15 steps? Must be in Mars! We are the *jugaad* nation, drunk on inventiveness and utility. The cobbler, anonymous till some hours ago, has created a tent for himself on the pavement below, stringing the plastic sheet to our compound wall and an electric pole. He rules underneath, sleeps there, displays a dozen footwear and attracts company while we descend the pavement respectfully and merge with the traffic. The belt seller, the fruit seller, the flower seller, the plant nursery, the tea stall, all find a place on the footpath... all it needs is an eye for the right spot under the sun and a sideways-looking buddy cop, and lo! You can 'sell in India'.

Near a busy bus stop, a scarf seller has neatly spread his wares from the edge of the pavement to the whole width of it, and also hung more on the tree alongside. As I reach this impasse, I stand still, look deep into the vendor's eyes and declare, "Footpaths are for walking" like a mantra, hoping the pavement will empty itself for me. But no. The guy blinks at this inauspiciousness and I tell him to shift his goods a little inside and leave me some walking space near the road. He thinks the edge of the road is better exhibition ground. Then he gives in to my stubborn command and offers me a half an inch of crossing space before pushing back his wares to the edge. And then suddenly, in a flurry of activity, a storm-water drain is built parallel to the pavement. It is then covered with gleaming red tiles and lo! A promenade, ending in an elegant curve is born! The scarf seller, now my friend, declares this pavement has been built for me! It is indeed a pleasure to take a leisurely stroll on this red carpet, while the world goes honking crazily a few feet away!



But this is ancient history. Today, the new pavement and the old one are in deep distress. Or high misery. For mountains of dug-up soil cover the whole length. The vendors are in gloom, the bus stop is no more. Two brown doggies are happily chasing each other over the mounds of soil. I envy their nimbleness while walking on the super busy highway, surprised that nothing has hit me from behind till date.

Eateries extend themselves at leisure on pavements, providing drive-in facilities to famished Chennaiites, while we pedestrians risk the driven-over option and gingerly step down on roads. A lone Ganesha, quarantined in a wayside temple on the pavement, sniffs the appetising flavours of Asife Biryani next door, its huge tempting containers neatly parked on the pavement. No cow or dog seems to value the wasted food, literally left on a platter, when the luscious looking, overflowing



*All it needs is
an eye for the
right spot under
the sun and a
sideways-looking
buddy cop, and
lo! You can 'sell
in India'*

garbage bin is a few feet away! Topple it on the road and take in the wholesomeness! The smart bovine, who has been walking very purposefully alongside me, is a pro at this game. She knows which bin offers the best bargains and heads straight there. She leaves an autographed heap by way of gratitude... where else on the pavement!

Huge hoardings mushroom on pavements at regular intervals announcing some political big/small wig's wedding or birthday. Sometimes they leave us with the spine-friendly option to bend low under them and continue, while at other times they order us to face the onslaught of traffic head-on.

Trees grow happier on pavements, I have discovered. Junction boxes, bearing promises of magic potions for sex problems and piles, nestle cosily on pavements. The 'panchar' shop has punctured the road neatly with its stack of tyres on the pavement and its tools strewn about. Little Murugan and his brother Shaktivel have literally been conceived, born and brought up on a pavement. While their mother cooks there in a

blackened pot on an improvised brick-and-twigs burner and their drunkard father sprawls carefree nearby, the kids, in various stages of undress, roam about, quite at home on this piece of home. A small plastic doll lies on the pavement. Some days, the family's washing occupies the whole pavement, on others, the folded laundry hangs from the trees. Scientists are about to declare that natural probiotics ingested by the babies, the liberal doses of vitamin D they get for free, and the family's stress-free lifestyle explain their round cheeks and sunny disposition!

It is rush hour and as my eyes once again scour the pavement from my bus window, I see two wheelers race on it while we are stuck in traffic. Swiftly they climb, scare a few pedestrians away and at will, join mainstream traffic.

So much for 'Footpaths are for walking'! The need is, I think, not to straitjacket this bristling ecosystem, but to word the boards differently. Just 'Path all yours'? Who reads anyway? Leave the board and the pole to another resourceful business brain! ■

MOST PEOPLE DON'T REALISE THAT PUMPS ARE EVERYWHERE

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