



Dansk Blindesamfund

Landsforening af blinde og
svagsynede i Danmark

FROM SHADOWS TO SUNSHINE



Edited by
Prof. Anil K. Aneja

ABOUT AICB

All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) is a 43-year-old premier self-help national organisation of the blind, having 21 affiliates across the country. Its areas of work for the visually impaired include education, vocational training, employment, women empowerment, advocacy, community-based rehabilitation in rural areas and research. The organisation has received the National Award from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India three times– 2006, 2009 and 2012.

ABOUT DAB

Danish Association of the Blind (DAB) is an interest organization of people with visual impairments and it offers rehabilitation, advice, courses, networking and support to ensure equal participation and contribution of blind and partially sighted in the society. The organization is rights based and works to improve frameworks and rights for visual impaired persons as well as for mobilizing public and private sectors, civil society and others in promoting understanding and opportunities for the blind and partially sighted. DAB is committed to supporting organizations of the blind in developing countries and contributes to prevention, rehabilitation and political change for the benefit of the blind and partially sighted in Asia and Africa.



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Prof. Anil Kumar Aneja

All India Confederation of the Blind



First Published 2024

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ISBN: 978-81-957833-4-2

Published by

All India Confederation of the Blind

Braille Bhawan, Near Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Hospital,

Sector-5, Rohini, Delhi-110085



FOREWORD

When a child is born blind or partially sighted, he or she embarks on a life trajectory where very often those around him or her will have very few, if any, expectations. When a person loses their eyesight, it will often feel as if dreams and hopes for the future are shattered. For both children and adults what is then required is someone or something which can help carve out a path. Someone who can serve as role model showing that life with a visual impairment can be rich, meaningful and independent.

Through its projects, AICB is providing such pathways, led by strong and dedicated role models who, right from the establishment of the organization up till the present, have worked to secure education, rehabilitation and employment of blind and partially sighted persons in India. In this book we meet many blind and partially sighted who, in their own unique ways, have altered their life trajectories and become role models and strong examples of how blind and partially sighted persons wish and can be educated, contribute and be part of the society. Through the 40 empowering stories, we get a glimpse into the everyday life in rural India but this could exemplify lives anywhere around the world as the message is quite clear. We need strong and committed organizations of the



blind and partially sighted persons to support empowered life trajectories where we are actively engaging and taking charge in our lives wherever we may live in the world. At the same time, it is important to share our experiences with the world, helping others understand that a life without eyesight can still be rich with joy, dreams, and hope for the future.

Dr. Diana Stentoft

Vice President,

Danish Association of the Blind (DAB)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we present this book of forty real-life stories of visually impaired persons living in rural areas of two districts of Uttar Pradesh, we are filled with a sense of gratitude for all those who made this work possible.

At the outset, we are indebted to the Danish Association of the Blind (DAB) for their support of financial and beyond, over a period of nearly five years to change the lives of hundreds of BPS persons in India. In particular, we are extremely grateful to Dr. Diana Stentoft, Secretary General, World Blind Union and Vice President, Danish Association of the Blind and Mr. Thomas Skielboe, Head of Team, International Development, Danish Association of the Blind for their constant guidance and support in the project and also towards the preparation of this book.

We are thankful to the office bearers of AICB, particularly Mr. J.L. Kaul (Padma Shri), Secretary General, AICB and Ms. Manjula Rath, Secretary, AICB for their positive encouragement. We are also thankful to Ms. Gauri Sen, CEC member, AICB and Mr. Sudhanshu Shukla, officiating Project Manager of AICB-DAB project for promptly providing



information and documents whenever required for the purposes of this volume.

Heartfelt thanks are due to Ms. Aanchal Awasthi, Ms. Aishwarya Jha and Ms. Geetanjali Sachdeva for their continuous involvement in the writing, translation and editing of this book and for their numerous valuable suggestions.

Last but not the least, we acknowledge the support provided by the AICB office staff in various ways.



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INTRODUCTION

While narratives of astonishing achievements are amply available and no doubt highly motivating, we seldom pay attention to the stories created at the micro level of society, of persons from the margins, whose life accounts, though inspiring, are hardly taken note of. This book is an attempt to celebrate forty such Blind and Partially Sighted (BPS) persons belonging to two districts of Uttar Pradesh in India, whose lives have seen the sunshine due to the joint efforts of two major NGOs – the Danish Association of the Blind and All India Confederation of the Blind.

The roots of the accounts that follow go back to as early as 1980 when ten visually impaired visionaries established an organisation with a difference – the All-India Confederation of the Blind. Led by Mr. J.L. Kaul (Padma Shri) and Late A.K. Mittal, the ten founders of this organization responded to the pressing demand in the country to empower visually impaired persons as well as their organizations at the grassroots levels. Over a period of more than forty-three years, the All-India Confederation of the Blind (popularly known as AICB) has carved a niche for itself through its multifaceted activities and diverse interventions, particularly in the areas of education, employment, accessibility of reading materials in Braille and



other formats, women empowerment, advocacy, assistive technology and research. As the majority of BPS persons live in the rural areas, community-based rehabilitation, that is, reaching such persons in their own families and communities has been a key priority area of this organization resulting, in community-based rehabilitation programmes in a number of districts over the years.

In 2019, the Danish Association of the Blind (popularly known as DAB), having programme interventions in a number of developing countries, came forward to partner with AICB to further intensify its commitment to empower the BPS persons in the rural areas. However, the objectives and strategies this time were quite different. The partnership aimed towards a holistic approach encompassing capacity building of AICB and its affiliates, training and rehabilitating BPS persons in the rural areas and also making them strong enough to advocate for their rights, sensitizing government officials and other duty bearers of the community and forging a strong connect between visually impaired persons in the rural areas and AICB affiliates working in the region.

After a pilot project for one year, a comprehensive three-year project titled “AICB Full Circle – Right of Way” was implemented by AICB with support from DAB particularly in



the two districts of Uttar Pradesh – Jalaun and Pratapgarh. Going beyond the expectations of the project, as many as 4500 persons were reached, 892 visually impaired persons were trained and nearly 500 persons were rehabilitated through setting up of small business ventures for them owing to the seed money of rupees fifteen thousand each provided by DAB in the form of grant.

The present volume contains forty real-life stories of visually impaired persons – twenty-one female and nineteen male whose lives have undergone a turnaround due to the above interventions. These are stories of individuals whose lives, in most cases were in a state of utter hopelessness and despair before the AICB-DAB project team came to hold their hand and empowered them in competencies such as daily living skills, orientation and mobility, household chores, animal husbandry, accounting, arithmetic and running small businesses.

While many of them were visually impaired since childhood, some of them lost their sight later in life. Devender, for instance, became blind at the age of sixteen, which led to his slipping into a state of total despair. His father lost all expectations of him and viewed him with dismay till the AICB project team met Devender and changed his life by training and setting up a small business for him. Shabnam, who was visually impaired



since birth had never stepped out of her house for nearly twenty-five years and was completely dependent on her mother. AICB held her hand and showed her the world around making her self-dependent and gainfully employed.

Maiku Lal, who was blind since birth was leading a life full of dejection after losing his wife, remarrying and then losing his second wife also. To add to this tragedy, the responsibility of all his children fell on his shoulders without any steady source of income. With AICB's training and support, he now has a regular income and is able to live a life of dignity. Urmila suffered a double tragedy. She lost her sight at the age of five and when married, her husband also started losing his vision. Living with abusive in-laws was becoming a daunting task for the couple until AICB helped her start her own business and begin a new life.

These are separate individuals living in different locations and under different circumstances. Nonetheless, a strong thread binds them all together – the thread of darkness, suffering and despair followed by a present dawn and sunshine in their lives owing to the interventions of AICB and the Danish Association of the Blind.

We hope that this volume will sensitize the readers about the issues and challenges faced by visually impaired individuals,



particularly in rural areas and bring home to them the urgency of attention required to be paid to this critical segment of society. One must never forget the fact that challenges and difficulties are a part of everyone's life and all lives must be viewed with empathy. This book is also a testimony of the sea change that can be brought about by holding hands of the visually impaired through individual and organizational interventions. The stories also strongly emphasise the point that one should never write off the life of any individual and no person should be deprived of the right to independence, employment and dignity.

Prof. Anil K. Aneja
Editor

1.

Wishes Become Real

Urmila



(Urmila selling cookies to a child at her shop)

At an age when children spend most of their time playing and enjoying their childhood, Urmila was learning to live a life without eyesight. At the age of five, she lost her vision in her fight against chicken pox. Her parents made all possible efforts to get her sight back but the medical facilities were limited in their village. When doctors failed to treat their daughter, her



parents turned to practising rituals dictated by old beliefs and superstitions. But Urmila's eyes couldn't see any light.

At the young age of thirteen, Urmila's parents got her married to a partially-sighted boy. However, because of her tender age, she continued to live with her parents even after marriage.

Seven years later, Urmila bid farewell to her maternal home and reached her husband's house. She took with her many dreams and hoped for a happy future. Little did she know that her happiness would be a nine-day dream. In only a few days, she met with the harsh reality of her life as her in-laws began torturing her. The entire family looked down upon her because of her disability. Her husband too did not intervene and let his mother and sister treat Urmila brutally.

With all her dreams shattered, Urmila felt as if she was living in a cage. She never got the status of the elder daughter-in-law and was made to toil day and night like a bonded labourer. She had to wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning to finish all the household chores, including grinding wheat, cleaning the house, taking care of her sister-in-law's babies, feeding animals and so on. She wasn't even provided enough food and had to survive on stale chapatis twice a day due to which her health began deteriorating. There was no one whom she could rely upon even for her basic needs.

As soon as Urmila's parents got to know of her situation, they came to rescue her. But Urmila refused to go with her parents. She was adamant about staying with her husband even at the risk of her life. Disappointed by their daughter's decision, they went back but made sure to provide her with financial support. After some time, her mother-in-law passed away which was followed by Urmila giving birth to a girlchild. Her situation improved a bit after the demise of her mother-in-law. Finally, her father-in-law intervened in the household affairs and asked his younger son to move to another house. He also asked his elder son -- Urmila's husband to share his earnings with Urmila. Now that the house was under Urmila's control, she took proper care of herself as well as her children.

However, Urmila's suffering didn't end there as a few years later, her husband's vision also began dwindling towards darkness. Since she was on good terms with her neighbours, they came forward and helped in getting her daughter married.

When AICB team approached Urmila, she was left with her husband and a nine-year-old son as her father-in-law had also passed away five years ago. Urmila is a smart and intelligent woman. In no time, she understood the benefits of the training programme offered by AICB and also encouraged her husband, Dinesh to participate. She quickly learnt all the skills taught



during the training, including recognising currency, accounting and weighing groceries on the scale, etc.

After the completion of her training, Urmila received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish her shop. During her training, she also filled forms for acquiring her disability certificate, railway concession certificate and request for pension. The first day, when she made a sale of three hundred rupees, one of AICB's field staff was present with her and he could perceive the sense of satisfaction on Urmila's face. Now, Urmila's husband, Dinesh also helps her in running the shop and together they earn six hundred to seven hundred rupees per day.

Urmila has now started weaving the dream of sending her son to a private school for better education. Her decision to stay back at her in-laws' despite an ocean of troubles speaks of her firm determination and a never-give-up attitude. Although her wishes as a newlywed bride could not turn into reality, she never gave up and ensured the fulfilment of her dreams.

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

— *Eleanor Roosevelt*

2. *Beyond the Shadows*

Maiku Lal



(Maiku working in his farm)

Self-doubt always overshadows one's capabilities and strength. Maiku's inspiring story outlines the road from self-doubt to self-confidence despite his visual impairment. His life has seen several ups and downs.

His happy married life was suddenly struck by a thunderstorm when his wife passed away. As they didn't have any child, Maiku felt totally alone in this world. This incident turned his life upside down as he felt helpless and started losing all the



hope. As time went by, Maiku's life seemed to be coming on track once again, as he remarried and also had two children. However, destiny didn't mean to be so kind to him. When finally he felt settled, fate struck the hand of cruelty once again, and his second wife also passed away, leaving behind a son and a daughter.

Dejected by life, Maiku spent most of his time in the fields in solitude. His financial situation became worse day by day. His son, who worked as a labourer in the city, gradually became the only source of income for the family. The loss of Maiku's wife and the inability to contribute to the family income, made him depressed and hopeless. It is at this point when the AICB team approached him and gave him information about the training programme for visually impaired persons. However, Maiku replied in disbelief, "Why would anyone do so much for free? So many people had come and deceived us on the pretext of helping." He had completely lost faith in his destiny as well as in people around him. AICB team tried to encourage him by sharing the story of one of his acquaintances from another village who got rehabilitated with help from the organization. Although Maiku wasn't completely convinced, he agreed to think about the training.



After a few days, when the field staff visited him again, he was unwilling to participate and kept reiterating that since he couldn't see, how would he learn. It took a lot of effort to motivate him and make him believe in himself. Project officers visited him regularly and provided guidance. Slowly, he started showing interest in the training programme. Eventually, he successfully completed the training, which included activities such as mobility, identification of currency notes, agricultural training, walking with a stick, self-care, and vocational training related to his occupation.

Presently, under the rehabilitation programme of the project, Maiku has started agricultural activities with a financial grant of fifteen thousand rupees. He works hard at his farm with skill and dedication. Now, he has an income of around five thousand to seven thousand rupees per month, which supports the family's livelihood.

He is once again happy and satisfied with his life. For this happy turn of events, Maiku is grateful to AICB for their unending belief in him when he himself had lost it.

*Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win,
by fearing to attempt.*

— *William Shakespeare*

3.

When One Door Closes, Another Opens

Janak Kumari



(Janak Kumari selling grocery to a customer at her shop)

Fifty-year-old Janak Kumari lost her eyesight at the age of fifteen. It was extremely difficult for her to cope up with changes after losing her sight at such a young age. She could only complete her studies till class eight when this incident took place. The biggest concern for her parents was who would marry their blind daughter and what would happen to her after their death. The reason for their worry was a lack of awareness. Even today, there is hardly any information available in the rural areas that blind children can read and write or become self-dependent; one can imagine how worse the situation



would have been nearly four decades ago. Since marriage was the biggest cause of worry for Janak's parents, they married her off early with a poor labourer.

When she came to her in-laws' house, she got to know that her husband had two brothers and a sister-in-law. Janak's mother-in-law passed away a year before their marriage. There, she had to immediately get into household chores, especially cooking. Whatever little food she had learned to cook from her mother, she would prepare it with the help of her husband early in the morning. After her husband left for work, she would close the doors and just lie around all day long. At times she wondered, "Whether this was life at all?" She often remembered her childhood when she could see and wished that those days could return. But then she realised that thinking in this way was useless as those days can never come back now.

Many years passed as she continued to live within the four walls of her house and with the passage of time, she became the mother of four children. Gradually, the children grew up and the expenses also increased, which were managed by her husband and his elder brother.

Janak received a further jolt as one day, her husband suddenly fell ill and died before he could be rushed to the hospital. While recalling the incident, she says that it was as like losing an arm



and a leg along with her sight. Her brother-in-law reassured her that everything would be fine and asked her not to worry. After some time she was able to get her elder daughter married, but soon another tragedy struck her as her brother-in-law fell ill and passed away.

Since both the earning members of the family were no more, she and her children felt completely destitute. The groceries in the house were insufficient to fill their bellies for long and even the neighbours stopped coming after a few days. Janak's apprehension grew as she had very few choices left, either she had to stop the education of her three children and get them to work as daily wage labourers or start begging on the streets with her children.

But it was at this juncture that the AICB project team reached her house and told her about the training and the rehabilitation programme. This provided to her a ray of hope. Janak and her children were elated when they learnt about AICB's scheme. She instantly accepted to undergo training. After three months of hard work and dedication, she learned many things, including orientation and mobility, accounting, and identification of currency notes etc. After completion of her training, Janak got a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB and the organization also helped her open a small



wooden shop at the door of her house. The faces of her family were brimming with happiness as she was able to sell goods worth four hundred rupees on the very first day itself. In addition, she has also obtained Disability Pension and has access to other government schemes such as a free bus pass.

Janak feels grateful and indebted to AICB and says, “I have been able to achieve this happiness only with the help of AICB and believes that those who design such a training and rehabilitation programme are no less than angels sent by god.”

When opportunity knocks, don't let fear hold you back. Open the door and embrace the possibility that comes with it.

— *Catherine Pulsifer*

4.

Those Who Don't Give Up, Never Lose

Chhedalal



(Chhedalal selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Since birth, Chhedalal had been a happy and healthy child. His life seemed to be running at a steady pace until the age of nine when a tragedy struck, and he lost his father. The family was filled with grief as his father wasn't just the head of the household, but also the sole earning member of the family.

Thereafter, his elder brother and mother toiled hard to sustain the family, but there weren't regular opportunities in their village which made their sustenance even more difficult and



bleak. As the family was already under a financial crisis, the education of the children was out of question.

At the age of nineteen, Chhedalal left his village for Ahmedabad with a friend in search of new and better opportunities where he began selling snacks. His small business was running fine and after some time, he even called his younger brother to join him. Gradually, the financial condition of the family improved and in five years, he saved enough money to get his sister married. He was finally happy and content with his situation but little did he know that a volcano of sorrow was waiting to erupt and engulf him.

One year later, Chhedalal felt some issues in his eyes and consulted a doctor. He only received limited and momentary relief and in no time, despite taking regular medication, the issue aggravated. Worried about the future due to his eye problem, Chhedalal returned to his village and consulted a doctor at the government hospital. The world around him was shattered when the doctor informed him that the nerves in his brain which kept the eyes healthy were getting weaker and his vision would eventually fade away. The day he dreaded the most finally knocked at his door and he lost his sight at the age of thirty six.



His younger brother had got married and had a daughter and his mother had also become old. As two sources of income ceased, there were two additional mouths to feed. It seemed as if they had circled back to where they started from.

Despite his visual impairment, Chhedalal managed to work as a labourer in his village. However, one fine day, when he was returning from work, he met with an accident and got severely injured. From that day onwards, going out and working was no longer possible and for the first time in life, Chhedalal felt completely disabled and hopeless.

Life came to a halt for Chhedalal, but difficulties didn't. He tried to obtain disability certificate for himself with the help of his fellow villagers but his attempts were in vain. His health also began deteriorating because of extreme stress. On the other hand, the wife of his younger brother died due to utter poverty. The remaining four members of the family were somehow surviving in scarcity.

It was at this point of his life, when one day, his niece told him that some people were looking for persons with visual impairment. Chhedalal asked her to bring them to their house. After they visited him, they informed him that they were a part of the All India Confederation of the Blind and worked towards the upliftment of visually impaired persons. For Chhedalal,

this opportunity was nothing less than a blessing and after he was made aware of their programme, he immediately agreed to undergo the training. Initially, he faced difficulty in understanding and implementing the tasks, but because of his prior work experience, he finally made his way through all the obstacles. He already had accounting and related knowledge required to run a business and over time, he also learned to recognize currency. AICB helped him to acquire his disability certificate and apply for pension.

During this period, Chhedalal's lost self-confidence began springing up again and he was also made to listen to many motivational audios which instilled courage and a positive spirit in him. After the completion of his training, Chhedalal received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish his shop.

He started earning around eight hundred to thousand rupees per day.

With this new wave of hope and optimism, he has put aside all his miseries of the past and now looks forward to a better and happy future. He had never imagined that the lost light in his life could ever return, but AICB made this possible.



During one of the conversations, his mother turned emotional and said, “I am highly grateful to the organization for teaching my son to rebuild his life”.

The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack in will.

— **Vince Lombardi**

5. *Threads of Strength*

Rani



(Rani transacting a sale with a customer at her shop)

When time is against you, maintaining a positive outlook seems like moving mountains. Rani lost her eyesight when she was only ten months old due to trachoma disease. A stream of multiple challenges continued to flow in her life. She was not



very old when she lost all her family members, including her parents and brother. After her father's demise, his shop was also shut down, leaving her without any source of income. She felt alone in this dark world and had nowhere to go. However, her cousin brothers lent a helping hand and tried to make her feel safe and secure. Her affinity with her cousins gave her the power to survive in this unfair world.

While they constantly tried to provide for her as much as possible, Rani had a hard time managing two meals a day. To earn her livelihood, she sold tobacco packets on roads which fulfilled her day-to-day needs to some extent. She kept her pain and sorrow hidden in her heart and continued fighting with fate every single day.

When the AICB project team approached Rani and shared with her about their mission and project, she refused to believe them. She said that no organization has made any attempt in making her situation better. They have come and gone making false promises and paperwork which never proceeded. Eventually, after much convincing, she agreed to fill the survey form for the programme.

As the training started, seeing a ray of hope with this initiative, Rani was filled with utmost excitement and joy. Initially, she was made familiar with the outside environment and given



lessons on mobility. There were times when she felt demotivated and questioned her own efforts. Sometimes she believed in herself, and at others she considered her training futile, thinking it would not lead to any life-changing consequences. However, AICB trainers kept motivating her by asking her to mingle with the neighbours and think positively. During her training period, she learned counting notes, basic mathematics, weighing groceries and recognising things.

One of her helpers bought her a small mobile phone and AICB team members taught her how to use it so that she can keep in touch with people. Her intelligence and good memory made the sessions quite smooth. As she kept learning new things, her confidence also boosted. She eagerly looked forward to a better future and a contented life.

As she received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees after her training, she instantly knew what to do with it – she opened a small grocery shop. Today, she earns a decent amount of eight hundred to thousand rupees per day and has a small amount of money with her all the time. Earlier, even for a single penny, she used to depend on her cousins, but now she feels independent. She feels much more confident and says that she can continue to live her life in a better state.



Rani thanked the organization for changing her life as not even in her dreams, she could imagine a life full of self-dependence and happiness.

You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.

— *Maya Angelou*

6. *From Despair to Fulfilment*

Mangal Saroj



(Mangal sitting in his wooden shop, interacting with a customer)

When life hits hard, it doesn't show mercy. Mangal Saroj was living peacefully with his family when a series of events turned his life topsy-turvy. His wife died leaving behind their one-year-old daughter. While he was dealing with this tragedy, his eyesight began dwindling due to Glaucoma and soon he lost his complete vision. Before losing his eyesight, Mangal used to earn handsomely by working in metropolitan areas of Delhi and Punjab but he had to come back to his village after he



suffered from blindness. Since there was no source of income left for him, he began living with his elder brother's family, where apart from himself, his brother, brother's wife and their five children lived. His economic condition was weak as his family ran only on the wages of his brother and brother's wife.

Mangal was already in despair after his wife's death and the loss of his eyesight. But this was not the end of his troubles, destiny had more hurdles strewn on his way. While Mangal was struggling with his deplorable state, his wife's parents took away his daughter, the last symbol of his connect with his wife. After this, he felt that there was nothing left in his life, and many times even the thought of suicide passed through his mind. He felt defeated and the only place that gave him some repose was temple. Mangal would spend his entire day sitting in the temple, chanting the name of Lord Ram.

When AICB field staff approached him for training, he was not quite convinced. The reason behind his pessimistic thinking was not just his lost sight, but also that he couldn't let go of the sorrows caused by the past tragedies in his life. He kept repeating, "When I can't see through my eyes, what will I be able to learn, what will I be able to do". However, after much effort and encouragement, the training work started and as it progressed, his courage also got a boost and he started taking



interest in the process. It was then that the AICB staff was able to successfully complete his training, which consisted of orientation and mobility, identification of notes, measurement and weighing, self-care and other business-related training. During the training period the field staff also worked towards his getting, his disability certificate, UDID card and Disability Pension.

After receiving a financial grant of fifteen thousand rupees under the rehabilitation programme of the project, Mangal started a grocery shop. Today, with hard work and dedication, he earns five hundred to seven hundred rupees per day which helps in the maintenance of the family. He has also become a member of one of the project chapters, and now, helps other visually impaired persons in bringing about a change in their lives. Mangal is now mentally fit and happy for which he is grateful to AICB.

*Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time
we fall.*

— *Confucius*

7

Dreams Got Wings

Shabnam



(Shabnam receiving a loan cheque from the regional bank for her shop)

The determination to work hard every day can turn the impossible into possible. Shabnam stepped into this world but never saw light. Although her parents were not financially stable, they consulted several doctors for her treatment but only got disappointment. Shabnam has four sisters who all are married now and a younger brother. Her parents lived in

constant worry of what would happen to her after they were no more. In a small village such as theirs, finding a suitable match for a visually impaired girl seemed nearly impossible.

Shabnam had never stepped out of the house in twenty five years. She required help even in walking. Although she was clever enough to identify among the family members with her sense of smell, she could not do any household or personal work. She was totally dependent on her mother for using the washroom and every other little thing. This drained her mother so much that she sometimes denied her any help out of frustration. Such a state was rather painful for Shabnam and she cursed her destiny for her predicament, sometimes even thinking that death would be better than living in this helpless condition.

As it's often said, nothing remains constant – neither your joys nor sorrows. AICB's initiative brought a new sun in Shabnam's life. After the field staff approached her on getting information from the neighbours, her father curiously asked many questions that primarily revolved around the self-dependence of girls and women. The responses of the field staff to all their queries generated a sense of confidence in Rani's father. This resulted in Shabnam consenting to undergo the training.



It was heartening to see Shabnam pick up everything which was imparted to her during the training. Despite being illiterate, she began to settle accounts quickly and with ease. She learned to walk and began to wander around with the help of her stick without any hesitation.

After the training, when she showed interest in opening a shop, a grant of fifteen thousand rupees was given to her by the organization. In a short span of time, Shabnam became completely self-dependent in all aspects. Her family members and even the neighbours were shocked to see such a drastic change in her personality as nobody would have thought that this day could come in her life. Everybody praised the AICB field staff and the organization and thanked them from the core of their hearts. Even Shabnam's neighbours invited the field staff for tea as their worries about her seemed to be now getting over. Gradually, her shop started to progress and she started making sales of rupees fifteen hundred to two thousand per day. The situation was such that several times a day his father had to go to the market to buy goods as due to lack of funds, she couldn't buy things at large scale. One day, during the AICB follow-up, she asked the field staff, "Can you arrange more capital, because we want to expand our shop?" Seeing her dedication and hard work, a loan was made available to her



from the bank through the NHFDC scheme. She used this amount efficiently and also bought a freezer for the shop. At present Shabnam's shop is the most successful shop in her village. Every day she wakes up at six in the morning with the same zeal and excitement, gets ready and stays in the shop till nine in the evening.

Shabnam's parents also assist her in the shop. It seems as if her dreams have got wings – a feeling that gives her joy throughout. The organization also helped her in obtaining all the relevant government documents such as disability certificate, pension, railway pass etc. during the training. She also goes to deposit the bank instalments herself. Seeing her commitment, she was honoured in the regional office of the bank and the manager assured her that whenever there was a need upto two lakh rupees, the bank would give a loan again on her first application.

*Keep your face always toward the sunshine—and shadows will fall
behind you.*

— **Walt Whitman**

8

Determination Overcomes Adversities

Laxmi



(Laxmi selling grocery to a customer at her shop)

When situations are continually unfavourable, even the most undeterred person may alter his/her principles. But Laxmi's life presents a departure from this generalisation.



At her birth, she was medically diagnosed to have been born with impaired sight and was advised an eye surgery. In the hope that his daughter would be able to see the world, Laxmi's father, who was in the army, got her eyes operated within 6 months of her birth. Though there was a slight improvement in her eyesight after the operation, the doctor warned that if she studied or strained her eyes in any manner, she might lose her residual vision.

Being the firstborn child of her parents, Laxmi was immensely loved by them and her three younger brothers. She was treated like a queen in the family and was never asked to do any household chores. However, she realised the need of being self-dependent and from the age of six itself, she began helping in household chores.

As time passed, Laxmi grew up to be a well-mannered and cultured girl. Although she could never attend school or read books, her parents made sure to give her the best upbringing as they read to her many inspirational and motivating stories to ensure that she experienced a full-fledged familial as well as social life. They also ensured that her life was comfortable and healthy. Eventually, her self-confidence grew stronger and she believed that she could deal with any obstacle that might come

her way. Little did she know that a storm was knocking at her door, waiting for her to step out.

At the age of sixteen, a marriage proposal came for Laxmi and they put forth the condition that if she was able to put a thread in the needle, they would agree to the match. She was given a thread and a needle and was asked to complete the task in a dark room in front of everyone. Laxmi passed this test unaware of the harder challenges that lay before her. When she got married, she realised that her in-laws' financial condition was not good and they needed to work hard on a daily basis to make two ends meet. Due to her visual impairment, she was not considered a part of the family for a long time and would often had to bear with taunts and sarcastic comments from her sisters-in-law. She was not even allowed to step outside the house because of her impairment. Under such circumstances, it was her good upbringing that constantly gave her strength and hope. She believed that if it was God's wish, then she was no one to go against it.

In no time, her skills and hard work in contributing towards the day-to-day chores of the house won the hearts of her in-laws. Despite living a comfortable life at her parents' home, Laxmi very quickly adapted to a life of scarcity at her in-laws' without any complaints. She now has two children, one of



whom is dealing with issues of low vision. Despite her struggles and problems, Laxmi is determined to give her children a good upbringing, just like her parents did. Although she never read a book, she encourages her children to be regular at school and study hard. She believes that she can strive to instil strong principles and good manners in her children so that they can taste the sweetness of a successful life.

Laxmi got to know about AICB through a neighbour who introduced her to two persons from the organization. They informed her about the purpose and vision of AICB and asked her if she would like to be a part of its training programme. She was immediately convinced of the benefits of the programme and happily agreed to be a part of it. During the three months of her training, the instructor taught her subjects of her choice and interest and she quickly learnt all the lessons given during the training, including recognition of currency, accounting, and weighing groceries on the scale.

Laxmi believes that this programme by AICB was nothing less than a blessing for her as she was able to bring back her lost self-confidence and the courage to start afresh. She also filled application forms for her disability certificate, railway concession certificate and Disability Pension during this period. After the completion of her training, Laxmi received a



grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish her shop and today, she earns around thousand to twelve hundred rupees and also saves hundred to two hundred rupees. Laxmi states that she is surprised, that even today there are such organizations and their people who are so kind and encouraging. She is certain that she can now give her children a complete education and contribute to managing the financial condition of her house.

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

– Peter Drucker

9

Rising Above the Heap of Sorrows

Bablu



(Bablu selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

The story of forty-seven-year-old Bablu from Jalaun district of Uttar Pradesh is that of resilience. He always believed in hard work and toiled day and night to support his family, built a house for them and later got married. But after marriage, his

elder brother parted ways with him, leaving their old parents with Bablu. He felt the ground slipping away from his feet as he was left with only one month of ration and also had to deal with his emotional turmoil. Bablu was solely responsible for sustaining his family for which he had to start afresh.

His belief in himself gave Bablu the hope to overcome his difficulties. He knew that he was capable enough and hardworking to beat all odds and take care of his wife as well as his parents.

Bablu worked in a factory that made candies, for which sugar syrup was produced in a fire furnace. Being an expert in making sugar syrup, he used to work incessantly at the furnace. Bablu finally managed to sustain his family with his earnings. Little did he know that he was going to face the biggest hurdle of his life. Over time, due to long exposure to smoke, Bablu lost his eyesight at the age of thirty-three. Despite treatment, he couldn't get his vision back. Consequently, earning for two meals a day for a large family consisting of his parents, wife and four children became a difficult task for him. In these circumstances, Bablu's health began deteriorating.

One year after losing his eyesight, his father passed away and his mother's demise followed the year after. At this lowest point of his life, Bablu came to know about AICB which gave



him a ray of hope. Describing the unfortunate instances of his life, he says, “I am thankful to AICB for rehabilitating my devastated life.” Within three months, Bablu completed the training provided by the field workers of the organization and also received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees to start his own business. He was also made aware of various schemes and facilities provided by the government. For Bablu, who was completely shattered and disappointed with life, this opportunity was nothing less than a miracle. The training process boosted his lost confidence and spirit to reshape his life and to mould a better future. Though he lost his job on becoming visually impaired, due to AICB’s support, today, Bablu is able to feed his family. AICB also aided him in applying for Disability Pension, his UDID, bus pass and train pass.

Bablu applauds the efforts of AICB and says, “The organization has fulfilled everything that a blind person like me would wish for himself and for his family’s maintenance.”

In those who persevere, there is no defeat.

— *Jawaharlal Nehru*

10. *The Fruits of Resolve*

Lali



(Lali selling grocery to a child at her shop)

When life throws boulders at you, use them as stepping stones to rise even higher. The story of twenty-eight-year-old Lali is that of self-belief and strength.

Lali lost her mother at an early age. Due to the lack of awareness and resources, Lali and her sister could study only



till the eighth standard. Soon after, a tragedy struck her life. During Lali's last year in school, her eyesight began deteriorating due to measles. Her father, who worked as a labourer, sought treatment for her as much as he could, but there was no improvement and soon she lost her eyesight completely. However, the attitude of her parents towards Lali remained the same. She was deeply loved and pampered by everyone due to which she never learned much household work until she was married.

Lali and her sister got married to two brothers in the same family. Lali's husband, Komal also had weak eyesight since childhood.

Like any other girl, Lali expected happiness in marriage, but her expectations were soon shattered as the love and care that she was used to was totally absent in her in-laws' house. They made her do all household chores throughout the day and on top of it, she was not even provided with sufficient food. As a result of living in such a deplorable state, Lali's health started deteriorating. Seeing this situation, her husband decided to live separately, and they left the house. After shifting to a new house, Lali gave birth to a boy. As much as they were happy, their worry also grew stronger. The couple was concerned about raising the child properly because they couldn't even



afford basic necessities for him. So far, Lali only had to deal with her own issues which she managed very gracefully, but this is where the real struggle of her life began.

Since Lali was a pampered child at home, she hadn't learned cooking and now that she was living only with her husband and their newborn, it was becoming difficult for her to cook for her husband. But with his support, she managed to prepare meals. Life went on and they had their second child – a girl this time. With constant hard work, Lali's husband managed to buy a buffalo through which they were able to augment their income a little. Life was going smooth as time passed by. But, sometime later, due to her husband's prolonged illness and significant expenses incurred in treatment, they had to sell the buffalo to repay debts. It seemed as if the struggles in Lali's life would never end. She and her husband were always concerned about the education and well-being of their children. Seeing the children of their neighbours, they desired quality education for their children for a brighter future. They wanted their children to accomplish a lot which now seemed to be just a dream for them.

When life seemed to come to a standstill, the ACIB team went to meet the couple during a survey. Upon learning the rehabilitation programme of the organization, both Komal and



Lali agreed without much apprehension. The training started immediately. Since Lali had studied till the eighth grade, she quickly learned everything. The trainer provided training in household chores, accounts keeping, identifying currency and weighing, etc.

After the completion of her training, Lali received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from the organization in her account which she used to open her own shop with excitement. Now, the sales at Lali's shop range between six hundred to eight hundred rupees per day and she constantly works hard to increase her income. She is extremely happy and grateful to the organization and cheerfully tells her customers about AICB and its initiatives which have been instrumental in giving her a new life.

Believe in yourself and all that you are. Know that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle.

— *Christian D. Larson*

11. *Every Night Has a Morning*

Ajay Patel



(Ajay selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Ajay Patel had just begun to understand the colours of the world around him when a deadly conjunctivitis infection robbed him of his sight. It not only took his vision but also the hope to lead an independent life.



After Ajay lost his eyesight at the tender age of three, his family seemed to resign to fate. They accepted the fact that he could do nothing in life without seeing. Due to a lack of awareness, enrolling him in school or even thinking about a future when he could earn, was out of the question for Ajay's father. While his family, including his father, mother and younger brother worked at a brick kiln, Ajay had nothing to do other than dillydallying the entire day. Since he could not contribute to the daily-earnings of the family, he was just another mouth to feed.

Time passed by and he got married. Although marriage is supposed to be a new chapter in a person's life, things did not change for Ajay. Rather, his difficulties increased manifold. Since his father was the primary source of income for the family and Ajay didn't have any income of his own, he could not fulfil his wife's wishes. She often complained and vented her frustration on Ajay, which strained their relationship.

Day by day, it was becoming difficult for Ajay to fight the challenges of his life. He was in utter despair when the AICB team met him. As he was under a lot of stress, he could not respond to the offer of training which was made to him. But after persistent efforts by the AICB field staff, he agreed for the same.



Ajay faced many hindrances during this period as the situation kept worsening at home. He stopped coming for the training after divorce with his wife. Not completing his training would imply that whatever he had learned so far might not be of much use to him. Hence, the AICB team members endeavoured to bring him back. They finally succeeded after much effort.

Gradually, Ajay realised the importance of the course offered by AICB and started participating actively. He finally decided to run a small grocery shop, for which he began taking lessons. Since Ajay was not literate, it was extremely difficult for him to understand the nitty-gritties of accounting.

But he didn't lose hope. After much struggle, he passed the training with flying colours.

Ajay received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish his shop. He now runs his business independently and earns around five hundred to seven hundred rupees daily.

This process reformed his life as now, he is not only financially independent but has also gained importance and respect in his family. He had never imagined that one day he would be an earning member of the household.



Today, Ajay is independent and does not require anyone's support for his day-to-day needs. On the contrary, he now supports his siblings with the money he earns.

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

— *E.E. Cummings*

12

Triumph Over Trials

Sushma Devi



(Sushma Devi selling grocery to a customer at her shop)

As it is sometimes said, change is the only constant in life. Sushma Devi's life is a clear amplification of such a saying.

Like most parents living in the rural parts of India, Sushma's parents were deeply worried about their daughter, particularly because now she was of marriageable age – more worried because she was visually impaired. They often wondered who



would marry such a girl. As all their attempts to find a good match for her yielded no results, they took recourse to marrying Sushma to a man who was mentally unstable and incapable of understanding familial responsibilities. Her life turned upside down as even her in-laws continuously mistreated her. Due to her miserable condition, she was certain that she was never going to experience happiness again. However, once her parents were made aware of her situation, they immediately brought her back to their house. Despite the love and care of her parents, the ghosts of the past were still haunting her.

When Sushma thought that there was nothing to look forward to, an unexpected turn of events took place. While she was healing her past wounds, her cousin passed away during childbirth. After some time, Sushma's parents approached her late cousin's husband Ramkishore with a proposal to marry Sushma. They explained to him that the lives of both of them could take a better path. Although their marriage took place under challenging circumstances, Sushma found peace and happiness with Ramkishore. With her marriage, she became a mother of her late cousin's child and now has a child of her own with Ramkishore. However, she bestows equal love on both the children making no distinction whatsoever. Though this love



had strengthened their marriage, the financial crisis haunted their happiness.

It was at this point, that the couple came to know about the AICB rehabilitation programme. While Ramkishore was excited to know about the training process, Sushma was highly sceptical. It was hard for her to sit and interact with others. She even did not talk to the AICB volunteers without her husband's presence. Perhaps the incidents that had occurred in her past life had left a deep impact on her personality which led to difficulties in the training and rehabilitation work. With the support of the project officer, the training was eventually initiated. The project officer explained to Ramkishore all the aspects of the training in a detailed manner and informed him that if Sushma successfully completed the training, they would provide assistance to improve their financial situation. These discussions proved effective and her husband immensely supported her in completing the training. Initially, it was difficult to keep the training going at a regular and steady pace as sometimes she participated while other times she refused. However, with her sharp mind, she easily grasped all aspects related to the training. Due to this, she was successful in completing the training which included activities like mobility, daily living skills, household chores, currency identification,



measurements, and accounting, along with other vocational training. Additionally, her disability certificate, UDID. card and pension-related documents were also acquired.

After her training and through the rehabilitation scheme of the project, Sushma received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees which she utilized to start her own tailoring shop at home. She manages the shop with full capability and hard work, earning approximately seven hundred to thousand rupees daily and supporting her family's livelihood. Today, Sushma and her family, as well as the community around them, are truly happy with the rising of a new sun in their life.

Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it.

— **Tori Amos**

13.

The Strong-Willed Are Never Defeated

Ram Kumar Patel



(Ram Kumar happily posing from his shop)

Ram Kumar Patel was living happily seeing the colours and vibrance of the world. Not even in his distant dreams had he imagined that these colours were going to fade away and leave darkness ahead.

He lives in the Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh with his wife and four children. At the age of forty four, he felt that his eyesight was getting weaker day by day. After consulting the doctor, he came to know that he had Glaucoma which will eventually result in visual impairment. Despite knowing his condition, Ram Kumar continued working as a rickshaw puller, but after he completely lost his sight, he had no other option than to remain at home.

He had already spent almost all his savings on his medical treatment and there was little source of income left for the family. As his two sons and a daughter, already married, were living independently, Ram Kumar had only his wife and the youngest son – the only earning member in the family to fall back upon.

This change in his circumstances turned his life upside down, particularly because losing his sight caused him immense financial challenges due to his two elder sons not coming forward to help him.

It was at this crucial moment that AICB field staff approached him and were moved to see him in a miserable state. Tears came rolling down his eyes several times as he told his tale of woes to the AICB team. His self-doubt in his abilities was so frugal that no amount of effort on the part of the project officer

and the field staff seemed convincing enough to make him understand the prospects of a better future.

Even when he was persuaded to commence his training, it was not an easy task as he felt utterly hopeless. He was not ready to step out of his house as he had begun fearing the world. He would easily give up after one or two attempts of trying, but as time passed and with some encouragement, things began to improve.

As he learnt to walk using a cane, he was able to travel more distance. This gave him confidence to learn more. During the period of the training programme, AICB also helped Ram Kumar to obtain his UDID card, bus pass and railway pass and opened his personal bank account. He also filed a request for pension.

After the completion of his training, Ram Kumar received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish his shop. Today, he easily makes an average sale of six hundred to seven hundred rupees per day and more importantly, he does not feel alone anymore.

Ram Kumar states that he is highly grateful to the organization for lending him a helping hand and pulling him out of a life of misery and dejection.



He feels that after this training, his lost confidence has come back and he is sure that now he can live his life with dignity and freedom.

Strength does not come from the body. It comes from the will.

— *Arnold Schwarzenegger*

14. *Resilience Unveiled*

Ramkali



(Ramkali in her shop selling grocery to a customer)

When life gives too many lemons, it becomes difficult to make lemonades. Ramkali had come across so many obstacles in her journey of life that after a point, she stopped counting. She was born in a small village of Pratapgarh district in Uttar Pradesh. Since she was the only child of her parents, she was deeply loved in the family. Despite the lack of money, she was

provided with ample care and nutritious food. However, at the age of 12, Ramkali suffered from conjunctivitis, as a result of which, she lost her eyesight. Her family was heartbroken as due to monetary paucity, they couldn't afford the required medical treatment.

When she grew up, her parents got her married to an able-bodied man. Initially, everything seemed fine and Ramkali felt that her future was secure and pleasant. Little did she know that it was a mirage on which she was weaving her dreams of a happy life. As time passed by, her in-laws started mistreating her and during this period she also gave birth to a girl child. Her situation did not improve and, in the end, she had to come to her parents with her daughter. Since her father was the sole earning member of the family, he could not provide enough for his granddaughter's education and eventually, she was married off.

Another roadblock in Ramkali's life came when her father fell ill, due to which they faced a major financial crunch. After this, her daughter and son-in-law began living with them and took care of the family with whatever money the son-in-law was earning. This made Ramkali yearn for being self-dependent.

During AICB's survey in the village, the organization came to know about Ramkali and went to meet her. When she was



asked about her details for filling the survey form, she became sceptical and refused to talk saying that her daughter wasn't at home. Fortunately, a school teacher in the village explained to her that the team had come to help her and there was nothing suspicious about the programme. Owing to the struggles in her life, Ramkali was unable to trust anyone easily.

Though she consented for the training, in the initial phase she did not participate with full conviction. Ramkali's rehabilitation process was a bit tricky as she often tried to escape from completing the tasks given in the training process. However, eventually, she understood the intentions of the organization with the help of people she trusted and began taking her tasks seriously. Since she was a quick learner, she finally completed her training. She got trained in mobility, domestic work, accounting, recognition of currency and other day-to-day activities of her interest. She also obtained the UDID card, bus and railway pass with the help of AICB and it was ensured that she got her pension which was stuck for a long time.

After the completion of her training, Ramkali received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees from AICB to establish a small shop that would make her financially independent. Today, with hard work and dedication, she earns six hundred to eight



hundred rupees per day. Ramkali feels content and happy that she no longer has to depend on her son-in-law for survival and at the same time, people of the village have started appreciating and respecting her.

She is highly grateful to the organization for giving her the opportunity and training with which she can lead the rest of her life with her head held high.

Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow know what you truly want to become.

— *Steve Jobs*

15. *A Fearless Journey*

Bahadur



(Bahadur selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Those who have the courage to embrace new paths despite the fear of failure, ultimately reach their destination.

Bahadur, which in English means 'Courage' is truly a courageous forty-five-year-old man. At the age of seven, he contracted smallpox and lost his eyesight. Despite this, his



desire to educate himself took him to several places in the country. Reminiscing about the beginning of his journey, he said, “My travels and quest for a good life took me to Banda, a small town where I enrolled in a chair re-caning course. We received no stipend or payment for chairs re-caned, but only lodging and food.” He left the course, disappointed at the poor living conditions and opportunities. He then went to Gorakhpur, an important town on the Indo-Nepal border. There he learnt the art of making cardboard boxes for sweets. However, the place didn’t interest Bahadur as he was looking for education. He then moved to the capital city of Uttar Pradesh,

Lucknow, but he failed to secure admission there as well. His quest for education led him northwards to the holy city of Haridwar, where he secured admission in a school for the blind. However, he alleged, they were always kept hungry, and not served adequate food. “So, then I travelled to another holy city, Mathura where Braille was taught. This time a fellow student was severely beaten by a teacher to which I protested and even fought with the teacher.” The next day he ran away for fear of receiving a thrashing himself. “I returned after a few days, but was denied admission on grounds of being over-age.”



Despite making several repeated efforts, he couldn't learn Braille and remained uneducated.

After all his endeavours were unsuccessful, he returned home where he had a loving mother. His mother looked after him and ensured that he got good food and clean, washed clothes to wear. He was happy under the care of his mother, but his happiness was short-lived. His mother passed away leaving him rather shattered. His father was also caring, but old.

As Bahadur lived aimlessly with his father and two elder brothers, he wondered what life had in store for him. As the family had lost all hopes for him, they were sceptical when they came to know about AICB's training project to rehabilitate visually impaired persons in the villages. With tears in his eyes, Bahadur confessed that he was worried about his future. He even mentioned that he had not been able to earn respect in society; "Children throw sand at me, laugh and run away." His voice quivered with fear when he asked if he had to pay for the training. After assuring him that the training was completely free of cost, he took a sigh of relief and got ready for a new journey.

Initially, he found the rigour of training difficult, having been free-spirited all his life. Soon, however, he got into the rhythm of training and started enjoying it as he learnt to look after his



own clothes, light the fire, thread a needle, recognise different weights and distinguish between various currency notes. “I am now ready to run a shop,” he declared two months after the training started.

Today, he successfully runs his small shop. During the course of the training, he was also facilitated with bus and rail pass and applied for other government welfare schemes. “I want to work really hard, earn money and then help other blind persons. Only a blind can really help another blind.” He profusely thanks AICB for giving a direction to his life. Today, Bahadur has a good position, is cheerful, well-liked in the community and is also an invitee to all community functions. He has a small land holding and also receives the Disability Pension.

Life is an adventure, and it's about overcoming obstacles to achieve happiness.

– Richard Branson

16. *Overcoming Life's Trials*

Sridevi



(Sridevi selling grocery to a customer at her shop)

Sometimes, life keeps its colours hidden from some people for a long time to test their patience. Sridevi's family experienced such circumstances for decades. Sridevi was born with low vision and as time progressed, her eyesight diminished. Soon she became blind. Sridevi's late father worked as a small broker



in the local agricultural produce and grain market. Her two brothers are also afflicted with low vision. One of the remaining two brothers worked as a local push-cart vendor and was the sole earner. His small income somehow sustained the entire family. Although they were economically poor, they did not lack warmth and love and stood together holding each other's hands in the worst of times.

When AICB approached Sridevi, she asked them to discuss with her sighted brother who would guide her and decide on further action. During the discussion with her brother, he was informed about some successfully rehabilitated visually impaired persons which gave him confidence resulting in Sridevi and her two low-vision brothers wanting to join the training. During the course of the training, all three siblings continuously cooperated and supported each other which made the process quite smooth. Initially, Sridevi was hesitant to use a white cane for fear of being ridiculed but her brothers encouraged her to participate in all the aspects of the training for an independent future. Her attentiveness to the training given by the field officers was reflected in her well-thought answers.

Seeing the progress and improvement in the personalities of Sridevi and her brothers, even their neighbours, who earlier



dismissed them due to their lack of vision, showered them with compliments. Sridevi's efforts, diligence and skills stood out for the organization which got her selected for becoming a beneficiary of the rehabilitation grant scheme.

She received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees which she used to open a small shop. Presently, she has daily savings of over hundred rupees on sales between five hundred to seven hundred rupees. Content with her success, she now looks forward to a better future. Her brothers' consistent support keeps her spirits high and as she plans to expand her business.

Difficulties in life are intended to make us better, not bitter.

— *Dan Reeves*

17. *A Journey of Discovery*

Shiv Singh



(Shiv selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Your passion and hard work can make your dreams fulfilled. Shiv Singh's desire to learn and achieve something in life gave him wings to fly. Shiv's life had been strewn with difficulties because of his visual impairment. He never got a chance to see the face of a school, as in a small village of Jalaun there was no awareness of special schools. Education for children who had



lost eyesight was a far-fetched dream. Moreover, poverty in the family further tied his hands to even reach out for any opportunities.

Shiv's old father and two elder brothers worked as full-time labourers. Seeing them toil day and night while he remained at home made his heart throb in pain. He considered himself useless for not earning a single penny to support his family. After his mother's demise, Shiv slipped into despair and the fear of losing his father as well, overpowered his thoughts.

When AICB approached him, he was sitting outside the house, engrossed in the tapestry of thoughts. When the team informed him about the organization and its programme, he asked them to talk about this with his father and brothers. A positive nod from his family ignited the light of hope in his heart.

Shiv Singh, a dedicated and intelligent person who wanted to showcase himself started his training. He tackled every difficulty with grace and didn't lose any hope, even if he faced a few failures during the training. His passion and curious mind made him learn things at a good pace. The training included self-help chores like walking with the help of a stick, identifying various currency notes and coins, threading the needle, addition, subtraction and basic accounting, etc. After



Shiv expressed interest in starting a shop, the AICB team trained him regarding that as well.

Soon he learned how to manage a small business and received a grant of fifteen thousand rupees with the help of which he opened a shop at the roadside. Now he spends most of his time at the shop with a decent earning of rupees twelve hundred to fifteen hundred per day. Shiv's interest in the business grew more as time passed and when he wanted to increase his efforts towards his work, he received a loan of forty thousand rupees from a bank under lower interests under the NHFDC scheme. Now that he earns a daily wage of around two thousand rupees, his motivation level has increased manifolds.

Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.

— *Oprah Winfrey*

18. *Perseverance Pays*

Manju



(Manju selling chips to a child at her shop)

Individuals with disabilities may sometimes become introverts as a result of self-doubt. However, unlocking a fulfilling social life for them merely requires an initiative to awaken their confidence.



Manju's self-confidence took a heavy toll after she lost her eyesight. At the age of four, when children enjoy a carefree life, a heap of sorrow fell over her when she suffered from smallpox leading to the loss of her sight. With time, Manju adapted to the ways of the world and even got married and had two sons and a daughter. Her husband worked as a daily wage labourer and didn't have adequate skills to provide a comfortable life to the family. Her family lived in penury, barely able to survive on her husband's earnings.

Manju's family was in a financial crisis when AICB field staff found her. However, due to her visual impairment, she was quite sceptical of strangers and refused to even engage in any conversation with them. The next day, when they returned along with one of her relatives, she was more receptive but clearly denied to join the programme. However, after much persistence and convincing by her relatives, she gave in and joined the training. After a week she informed us that her brother had objected to any male member being near her. Some village people intervened on the organization's behalf, and with a host of conditions, the trainer resumed visits to her house.

During the course of her training, Manju exhibited a strange characteristic of swinging emotions – either totally believing or



disbelieving other people. It was important to handle her with patience and give time to build trust. Often, she refused to cooperate with the trainer, declining to participate in the learning sessions. Intervention from her neighbours and other villagers helped AICB field staff to eventually impart training in orientation and mobility and daily living skills. Gradually, as the sessions progressed, her self-confidence got a boost and she showed interest in opening a small shop. Since she was found fit during the training to be a petty shop owner, she received lessons on basic accounting skills, understanding of weighing balance and recognizing currency.

Today she is successfully running a small shop with great diligence. She is delighted with her daily sales of five hundred to seven hundred rupees and now happily contributes to her husband's earnings. "I am extremely happy and grateful to AICB for bringing this transformative change in my life," she says.

Patience, persistence, and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success.

— *Napoleon Hill*

19. *Awakening Mind, Transforming Life*

Devendra Kushwaha



(Devendra selling grocery to a child at his shop)

As Devendra was happily enjoying his childhood, the clouds of darkness spread over his fate. At the age of sixteen, he lost his sight due to vein drying. In a family where Devendra used to live with his parents and two elder brothers, poverty didn't give him an opportunity to get proper treatment. By the time they were able to reach out for medical help, he had lost all his vision and even the doctors gave up.



In the initial days, when Devendra could see with blurred vision, his neighbours used to take him to graze cattle. Leaving home in the morning and returning in the evening made him totally disconnected from society and he started living a life full of solitude. Soon, his brothers got married and started living separately. As time passed, his parents became older which led to further problems. As all the income sources faded away, his father felt disappointed with Devendra which made him sadder.

When the AICB team tried meeting Devendra, he wasn't available at his house, however, after three days he finally met the field team. When the AICB team informed him about the rehabilitation programme, he readily agreed, but put forth a condition that the training sessions would take place only in the morning so that he could graze the cattle in the afternoon. He soon learned basic household chores after which he expressed his desire to start a shop. The trainer began giving him lessons on counting notes, basic accounting, weighing things etc. Seeing his dedication towards his passion, the organization granted him a sum of fifteen thousand rupees with the help of which he opened a shop.

Although Devendra inaugurated his shop with great excitement, it didn't work as expected. However, he continued



the business with patience and as the sale increased, so did his interest towards his work. Now that he had earned a decent income, he wanted to expand his business, for which he received a loan of twenty thousand rupees from a bank under lower interest with the support of AICB.

His daily earnings have now increased to twelve hundred to fifteen hundred rupees per day, which has made him a self-motivated person. Earlier he felt that his life was worse than that of animals, but now he holds his head high with dignity as he is able to run his family with his earnings. He says, “a small shop has changed my entire life. My brothers now see me with a changed attitude and my father too is proud of me. How I wish I had known about this programme earlier to better my life and support my family.”

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.

— *Kofi Annan*

20. *The Power Within*

Archana



(Archana feeding her goats)

A moment is enough to turn one's life upside down. Archana was a bubbly, energetic child till the age of ten when she was stricken with smallpox. The disease left her with lost eyesight. Suddenly, her high spirit turned into despondency. She was married off at an early age as education was not an option for

a blind girl child in the village. With time, she bore four daughters and a son and her family slipped into a vicious cycle of poverty. Her husband worked as a daily wage earner, but it was becoming difficult for him to feed his family alone.

During AICB's survey, the family treated the team with much suspicion and scepticism. They mentioned that many NGOs had come, charged them hundred to two hundred rupees, made false promises and left without delivering anything. However, after much convincing by giving examples of success stories from neighbouring villages, Archana and her husband started believing in AICB's rehabilitation project. Her husband consented to enrol her in the training programme.

Due to her state of despondency, initially, Archana was unable to focus on her training. She used to remain lost in herself. Once, she shared her concern about the education of her children so that they did not end up as manual labourers. This became a motivational point – that if she could earn money, she would be able to educate her children. Constant persistence and encouragement from the field staff resulted in sparking her interest in leading a superior life, as she learnt to thread a needle, light the fire and do some elementary cooking. This ignited her enthusiasm and she began to actively participate in



her training and would eagerly await her trainer, full of queries about difficulties faced during the previous day.

Archana was availing the benefit of the Disability Pension, but she wasn't aware of other schemes and benefits. The team members helped her in understanding her rights. Her love for animals was quite evident, hence she was facilitated the purchase of three goats, which she happily tended to throughout the day. "I will sell the offspring and save the money to buy a buffalo", she says. Most of the villagers take pride in owning a cow/buffalo and earn a good income from selling milk. Archana's aspiration and dedication, at the age of thirty-two, demonstrate that she will surely fulfil her dreams.

*You have within you right now, everything you need to deal with
whatever the world can throw at you.*

— **Brian Tracy**

21. *Defying Adversities*

Ramlakhan



(Ramlakhan doing household chores with his wife)

The mystery of destiny and fate is incomprehensible to humans. Ramlakhan was living a happy life with his wife, a son and a daughter when at the age of thirty-five, a chronic disease took away his vision. Due to this occurrence, he needed to come back to his village with his family and began living with his old parents.



With each passing day, all his savings went into medicines and eventually, their family slipped into extreme poverty. They somehow survived by doing manual labour and working in fields owned by others. Their financial situation deteriorated and they became totally incapable of arranging money for medicines.

When Ramlakhan was approached by AICB for training, it gave him only a thin hope as he wasn't confident if this could change his life and future. However, he agreed to undergo the training and promised to work hard. During the three month training, though Ramlakhan remained positive, he was often troubled by his present dismal situation. He was trained in various activities such as, identifying currency notes, accounting, threading a needle, walking with a stick and animal husbandry. During the course of the training, he was provided with CMO certificate, UDID card and railway pass. Not only that, training was imparted to him to do all the daily routine chores by himself like washing clothes, shaving and cooking. He was introduced to the surrounding environment and he completed the training with hard work and utmost dedication.

After the successful completion of the three-month training, a lot of changes were seen in him. The organization granted him



a sum of fifteen thousand rupees which he used to buy a buffalo. The buffalo costed thirty-five rupees, and hence, he borrowed rupees twenty thousand rupees from a friend. He says that it would have been impossible for him to collect this much amount to buy a buffalo. He feels grateful and extends his thanks to the employees and office bearers of the organization and also says that he had never heard of such a programme earlier. The family is now happy and the most important thing is that his self-confidence has reached new heights.

*After the darkest hour, there is a sunrise. After the deepest despair,
there is a glimmer of hope.*

— *Haruki Murakami*

22. *Believe and Achieve*

Vidya Devi



(Vidya feeding her goats)

Believing in oneself is important to overcome the hurdles of life. Vidya Devi's journey to stability was strewn with obstacles, yet she dealt with them, with utmost patience and positivity. Thirty-nine years old Vidya was born almost blind.

At the age of twenty-two, she was married off to a sighted man. She hoped to fulfil several dreams for a better future in

marriage, but little did she know that the man whom she thought would bring her happiness of the world, would actually push her into misery. Within a year, he started misbehaving with her, even accusing her of infidelity. Neighbours believed that he wanted dowry and therefore wanted to quietly remarry for money, which he probably did by moving to a distant big town, Bhopal.

After Vidya returned home, her heartbroken father died of a cardiac arrest. She has two brothers, both married, who stay separately with their families. Therefore, for sixteen years now, Vidya and her mother have been each other's only support in both penury and grief.

Vidya, whose name means education, remained uneducated herself due to lack of resources and her disability. She has very little vision, due to which she used to accompany her widowed mother who would work as daily wage labourer in the fields adjacent to her village. Despite her hard work and numerous efforts, getting work had been uncertain. Often, they returned with no luck at daily wage employment and sometimes did not get paid in time even after getting employment. Over a period of time, both the mother and daughter were filled with despondency. Earning a pittance as daily wage labourers, both carried on with their unhappy existence.



When the AICB team met her, she requested them to speak to her mother. Her mother's reaction was filled with scepticism and suspicion. As AICB staff has faced this situation several times earlier, they very calmly responded to her doubts by sharing success stories from neighbouring villages, some of whom she had a passing acquaintance with. She finally agreed to have her daughter undergo the training.

Vidya was hesitant but a willing learner. Her self-confidence grew and she started blossoming. She would eagerly await her trainer and would have a list of queries ready every day. The milestones of her evolving into a self-confident person including, recognizing currency, threading a needle and lighting the stove to prepare food, all of which she quickly learnt. Meanwhile, the team ensured her obtaining UDID card and relevant documents, which entitled her to a Disability Pension. By then, she started sharing her dream of owning some goats.

Vidya was selected by the Grants Committee and given the seed money to buy three goats, which she now tends to independently. She also trained herself by volunteering to look after her neighbour's goats. She now owns three goats. "I want to sell their babies and make enough money to buy a buffalo and make more money by selling milk," mentioned Vidya. She



remained cheerful throughout the training process and even interacted positively with her neighbours.

Her determination and inner wisdom are true examples of how one can pass through tests of life with such qualities.

*What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters
compared to what lies within us.*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

23.

Small Steps Immense Milestones

Ramesh Babu



(Ramesh selling snacks to a customer at his shop)

It seemed to be all going well for Ramesh, when suddenly he was struck by small pox which left him completely blind at the age of eight. Nonetheless, he continued to persevere, got married, and lived with his five children and aged mother. The family was completely dependent on his wife's meagre income



as a daily wage labourer. This led to the continuous deterioration of their financial condition.

The AICB team came to know about Ramesh during a survey conducted in his village. However, when approached, he was rather sceptical and unwilling to communicate. He complained that many NGOs had come and promised several enticing things but delivered nothing. He was assured by one of the NGOs that they would get him a disability certificate which was also used for bus travels, but they never showed up again.

AICB field staff tried to convince him by sharing success stories of visually impaired persons from adjoining villages. Those references gave him some confidence and eventually, he paid attention to the project. AICB field members motivated him to join the programme and soon his training began.

Ramesh proved to be a diligent learner, often ahead of the schedule. He was delighted when he was taught to do his personal work and he shaved himself successfully. He learnt to recognise and identify currency notes and coins. He was overjoyed when he learnt to light incense sticks to perform daily prayer rituals by himself. AICB also helped him obtain his disability certificate for Disability Pension and educated him about various schemes run by the government. Ramesh was overwhelmed after the completion of his three-month



training and expressed his gratitude for the organization saying, “You are different. You deliver what you promise. You have given a new direction and dimension to my life.”

After the training, he decided to open a small stall. It is encased in an expanded metal wire mesh mounted on a cart. He sits atop/ inside and his wife pushes the cart to the desired location. Currently, he makes daily sales between five hundred to seven hundred rupees with savings of one hundred to one hundred and fifty rupees. Moreover, he plans to add a line of cosmetic products to his shop. Ramesh is now happy and works hard daily to earn his livelihood.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

— Lao Tzu

24. *Tough Times Never Last*

Narendra Kumar Pandey



(Narendra happily interacting with AICB representative Ms. Gauri Sen at his shop)

The Covid-19 pandemic made everyone's life topsy-turvy. Narendra Kumar was also hard hit by the pandemic and was left with no employment.

He was born with micro-cornea and had low vision. However, he did not let his diminished eyesight hamper his spirits. He



had a regular job as a gardener in the state-run National Thermal Power Corporation in the city of Unchahar where he lived with his wife, a son and a daughter. He was living a happy and peaceful life until the advent of the pandemic and lockdown. Due to the complete shutdown of the country, he was laid off from his job and became unemployed. Devastated, Narendra had to return to his home village in March 2020, as he was left with no resources to sustain his family.

Facing difficult situations was not new for Narendra; he had a survivor's spirit. His family in the village welcomed him back with open arms, looked after his wife and children and wholeheartedly supported him in such an adverse situation. When Narendra was informed about the training programme of AICB, he readily agreed to join. However, he still had few reservations regarding the intentions of the organization because of uncertain times. Some more forward-thinking villagers motivated him to believe in the intentions of AICB. Finally, he started cooperating and in no time, picked up all the skills necessary for reasonable independence in his chosen vocation of running a tea stall. He felt he would be more successful in doing so rather than running a petty shop.



Today, Narendra successfully runs his tea stall, making sales between eight hundred to one thousand rupees. He has also equipped a refrigerator in his shop.

From a job as a gardener at a state-run power plant and its attendant job security to an unemployed due to the pandemic, to a self-employed owner of a micro business, life has come full circle for Narendra Kumar Pandey.

Tough times never last, but tough people do.

— **Robert H. Schuller**

25. *In Darkness, She Shines*

Rashmi



(Rashmi selling grocery to customers at her shop)

Being born a girl is viewed with dismay in many Indian families, especially in rural areas. But Rashmi's parents were of a different kind and believed in treating all the children equally. Their filial affection wasn't aware of the fact that life would drastically change very soon.

Rashmi had swelling in her eyes at the time of her birth which her parents were initially unaware of, and which became the cause of losing her sight. Even this didn't make any difference

in the love and care provided by her parents. Rashmi has two brothers and a sister and her parents work as labourers. They made her self-dependent at an early age and taught her basic household chores like sweeping, cleaning and fetching water from the handpump outside the house. As they were afraid that Rashmi might damage herself if she came near the fire, they kept her away from cooking.

At the age of seventeen, her father arranged the marriages of both sisters in the same household. Rashmi felt quite comfortable in her in-laws' house due to the presence of her sister. She continued contributing to the daily chores of the house.

Life went on smoothly for two years when a major change struck her life due to the separation between her husband and his brother. One outcome of this development was the need for Rashmi to now take on the responsibility of cooking along with other household chores. Initially, her husband supported her by kneading the dough and tending to the stove while she cooked. As time passed, with practice, she herself started cooking, making rice, boiling milk, and doing other tasks independently. During this time, she had two children. The four of them made a happy household.

Rashmi's husband managed household expenses through his earnings as a labourer. Although he had a steady income, it was not enough to support the family and their children's education suffered due to the lack of sufficient resources. This pained Rashmi to the core as she wanted a secure and stable future for her children which was possible only through education. Therefore, she expressed her desire to work as a labourer alongside her husband. Due to her visual impairment, Rashmi's husband didn't want her to work as a labourer and on top of that, nobody was willing to offer work to a visually impaired woman.

While Rashmi and her family struggled with managing their expenses, AICB surveyors visited her house with a ray of hope. They explained to her the rehabilitation project of the organization and motivated her to receive training. Rashmi immediately refused their offer as she was convinced that even after the training, she would not be able to improve her life due to her visual impairment. However, the trainer did not get discouraged and once again explained about the training in detail, gave examples of rehabilitated clients and showed her AICB documentary which finally motivated Rashmi to receive the training. Gradually, she started learning all the tasks and even became adept at identifying currency notes.



Impressed by her capabilities, AICB provided a grant of fifteen thousand rupees, which she used to open a shop at her home. Rashmi always yearned for the time when she could share her husband's financial burden and through AICB's training programme her dream finally came true. Today, she is satisfied and manages all the work at the shop, from bookkeeping to other tasks, independently. Through her shop, Rashmi earns around five hundred to seven hundred rupees per day.

Her dream of a bright future for her children by giving them quality education is on its way to become a reality.

*Your value and worth are not determined by your physical abilities
but by the strength of your spirit and the depth of your
determination.*

— *Loris Malaguzzi*

26. *Holding Hands Towards Happiness*

Rishu Devi



(Rishu selling cosmetics to a customer at her shop)

When there is a supportive family behind you, one can achieve whatever one aspires to. Rishu Devi's life exemplifies this saying.

She was born in one of the marginalised classes of society and soon after her birth, her parents realised that she was visually impaired. At the age of twenty-three, she got married to a blind man. Her in-laws' family was large and poor. They survived on

the earnings of the male members who worked as daily wage labourers.

When during a survey, the AICB team met Rishu, she refused to talk to them and suggested that they talk to her husband and her mother-in-law. Although her mother-in-law was quite supportive, she had her reservations. She said, “How can I let my newly-wed daughter-in-law start participating in any programme?” However, when they convinced her stating the benefits of the programme and how it would enhance the quality of life for the whole family, she agreed.

Being from a socially backward family, Rishu had almost no access to education. People from such families, often have limited access to education, particularly in the rural parts of the country. On top of that, her visual impairment obliterated whatever little chances she might have had of education. Hence, the concept of disciplined and systematic training was unknown to her. Further, as a new bride, she was often easy-going and timid but had a hard time building trust. She also showed resistance to using a white cane for movement. However, concerted efforts, especially of the project officer, resulted in her acceptance of all the elements of the training – orientation and mobility and daily living skills, including recognition of currency notes and coins.



Being a young bride, Rishu was fascinated by cosmetic items. She mentioned that she wanted to run a cosmetics store with few general items of everyday use. She received appropriate training to fulfil her dream. Today, her shop is flourishing and she registers sales of about five hundred rupees every day. Her earnings from it have led to a comfortable life not only for her husband and herself but for the whole family. The newlywed couple thank AICB from the core of their heart for making their far-fetched dream come true.

Don't be pushed around by the fears in your mind. Be led by the dreams in your heart.

— **Roy T. Bennett**

27. *Against all Odds*

Tularam



(Tularam selling chips to a customer at his shop)

Tularam was living a happy and peaceful life until the age of forty-three when he contracted glaucoma and lost his eyesight. At the time, he held a coveted and respectable position as a village chowkidar (guard), a decent job in the local community hierarchy. Due to his position, he was often consulted by the

villagers to advise on, adjudicate and resolve disputes. He was invited to community functions and participated in them enthusiastically.

Tularam's life turned topsy-turvy after he was hard hit by the tragedy and the local doctors failed to deal with it. To compound his miseries, his wife died two years later. In no time, he lost his vision, his job and his wife, after which he became dependent on his son who worked as a tailor in the village. His other son, who has a physical disability lives with his wife and children in faraway city – Surat. As time passed, his loving son and daughter-in-law, who provided for him metamorphosed into an irritable couple who started taunting him for his uselessness and for being a financial burden on them. "I wish God punishes no one the way he has punished me," Tularam expressed his grief.

His reputation as a respected village elder, by virtue of his erstwhile position as the village guard, however, sustained his social position in the community and he continued to be consulted on local and family issues and was invited to community functions. "But my life was in despair and I would think about my future with sadness," he lamented.

He was in a state of utter despair when the AICB team went to meet him. Engulfed in his sadness, he did not react very



positively. However, after a lot of persuasion, he agreed to join the training programme.

As he learned various skills such as threading a needle, his former confidence seemed to be returning. This resulted in him coming out of his self-imposed languidness and enthusiastically participating in the training. His social stature in the community convinced the organization that he was a good candidate to run a petty shop, hence he was imparted specialized training, focusing on activities related to shopkeeping.

He is now a proud shopkeeper and has daily sales between six hundred to eight hundred rupees consistently. “Thanks to AICB, I have received another innings in my life,” says Tularam.

Against all odds, man can surpass himself.

— *André Gide*

28. *From Discord to Harmony*

Ved Ram



(Ved Ram selling chips to a customer at his shop)

It becomes difficult to overcome difficulties when there is no harmony and peace in the family. Ved Ram never saw the sun since he was born. Eventually, as he grew up, he got married and had four children – two daughters and two sons. His wife, who is a daily wage earner as a farm labourer is the only source



of income for the family. Fortunately, he inherited a brick-and-mortar home but there was no toilet built in the house.

Through a twist of fate when the AICB team reached his residence, his wife and he were in a loud, angry and accusatory argument with each other about money, rather than the lack of it. This gave the AICB members a point to break the ice with him and the following day, they counselled him and gave him a beam of hope for the betterment of his family's condition. He patiently listened about the organization and the rehabilitation programme. After understanding about the training process and its possible outcomes, he readily agreed to join.

His learnings were impeded by his illiteracy and lack of discipline. The field staff, habitual of such lack of attentiveness in clients, soon motivated him. He was delighted that he was able to recognize currency and even more elated when he learnt to thread a needle. Moreover, the team enabled him to get a toilet constructed in his house, under the Prime Minister's 'Swachh Bharat' (Clean India) scheme, which boosted his self-esteem.

His house is strategically situated near main road. With the grant money, he was facilitated with the construction of a small wooden shed and shop at the crossroads. Being well situated, he now gets a constant stream of buyers. He makes an average



sale of about seven hundred rupees every day and is now happily living with his family. His wife is pleased too. Finally, with AICB's support, calm and peace were restored in the household.

Where harmony dwells, there will God reside.

— *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*

29. *Turning Tides of Destiny*

Anita Devi



(Anita Devi selling chips to a customer at his shop)

Seclusion and isolation for persons with disabilities push them further into despair and gloominess. Twenty-year-old Anita, who was born blind, felt cornered and isolated within her own house which made her life full of misery.

AICB's team got the information about Anita from the local village Pradhan – leader of a local governing body in Indian villages, as the organization has gained much popularity



through their work. Anita's family consists of her parents, two elder brothers and a sister who stay together, but the brothers do not contribute to the family income. Therefore, their family income was limited to what the father earned as a daily wage labourer. As a result, the family was trapped in the shackles of poverty.

After the AICB team reached her house, she refused to talk and asked them to discuss their proposal with her father, who was difficult to find at home. Five days later, one of the field staff located him in a nearby agricultural farm where he was then working. He discussed about the organization, its training and rehabilitation programme with him. In the hope to get a better life for her daughter and an additional income for the household that was living in penury, he agreed.

Anita had never been through any disciplined learning, as school education for visually impaired girls in most of the villages in India was out of the question. Thus, initially, she was unorganized and unable to prepare herself for any sort of training.

Still, the persistence of AICB staff prevailed and soon she was responding to the joys of her newfound ability to do things on her own. She enjoyed learning to recognize currency and her mobility which was making her independent. The



psychological boost of being able to thread a needle made her excited.

After she made considerable progress in her training sessions, she was ready to start an income-generating activity. The organization facilitated the establishment of a small shop which she now runs effectively, making sales averaging about five hundred rupees every day. The family has started eating better and Anita is cheerful that she is not only happily occupied but is helping her family. Since she is only twenty and unmarried, her shop and consequent income should enable her to find a good match.

Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change.

— **Jim Rohn**

30. *A Road to Leadership*

Priya



*(Priya happily showing her shop items to AICB Secretary,
Ms. Gauri Sen)*

Twenty-year-old Priya was born blind. Caste plays a visible and tiresome role in Indian culture, and more so in the villages. Priya's family are high-class Brahmins and thus, the birth of a blind daughter was a great social disappointment. Being brought up in a gloomy environment and in a large family consisting of an elder brother, a second married elder brother with his wife and a married elder sister who lives in her

husband's home left her in despair. Since she was the only person with a disability in the family, her attitude towards life turned morose.

Priya's parents had heard about AICB and its initiative to lend a helping hand to visually impaired persons in villages to make their lives financially stable. It was quite uncommon to see parents of a blind girl approach AICB for advice and guidance. After understanding the programme, they immediately enrolled their daughter. Priya had never been to school as the possibility of education of a blind girl never crossed her parent's mind.

Although Priya's family was positive about her progress, she wasn't convinced. However, AICB's field staff influenced her and encouraged her to change into a positive and forward-looking person. The team had understood her potential and thus, constantly made efforts to keep her motivated.

After initial uncertainty, she picked up the training syllabus very well. Most importantly, she started appreciating the importance and worth of being well-groomed and dressing up to look attractive. Simultaneously, she picked up household skills and started participating in all activities in the home. She got attracted to kitchen activities too and wanted to learn the essentials of cooking. Due to illiteracy, she had no idea of how



to count. The field staff taught her. It was difficult, but the combined persistence of both the trainer and Priya resulted in success. She even started sharing her desire to open a ladies' 'Beauty & Cosmetics' shop.

All the male members of Priya's family were agricultural workers; hence, beauty and make-up were mere words in her dictionary. The AICB team encouraged her to think aloud and soon started the preparation for her becoming a shop owner. She was confident enough to pass the strict scrutiny of the Grant Selection Committee and received grant of fifteen thousand rupees. With this, she took a step towards her empowerment; and in an outside room of her house, her family facilitated the opening of a ladies' cosmetic and general grocery store for everyday home needs. Today, Priya has daily sales of approximately four hundred to five hundred rupees. She uses the profits to contribute to the family's expenses. "I am thankful for this opportunity and I want to work towards making other people aware of education and empowerment", she says. She has also been elected as an office bearer in their local chapter. Indeed, Priya has come a long way!

It always seems impossible until it's done.

— *Nelson Mandela*

31. *A Transformational Journey*

Sanjay



(Sanjay selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Sanjay, a young man of twenty-eight had been living in a state of hopelessness since he lost his sight, probably due to glaucoma. After he turned blind a few years ago, for a very long time, he could not accept his condition, which led his family into penury. He lives with his wife, two daughters and a son -- a toddler who was born after he lost his vision. His wife was

the sole bread-earner of the family and worked as a casual daily wage worker. She was compelled to work to feed the children, her husband and herself. Their existence was literally hand-to-mouth.

When the AICB team approached Sanjay, he questioned, “Why should I take training meant for the blind? I am temporarily unwell, with loss of sight. Continuing my treatment will restore my vision”. His unacceptance became a roadblock and the field staff had to take assistance from his neighbours. It required much persuasion for him to take a chance with the training. Although he agreed to join since the training was free of cost and at his doorstep, he was an unwilling trainee. After a week, he withdrew his consent and insisted that he would become well post-treatment and then he would lead a life of a sighted person, as he earlier used to do.

With experience, the field staff counselled him again and finally convinced him to restart the training.

Psychologically, he was an unwilling student. According to him, becoming a good trainee meant an acceptance that he was blind. It was with great persistence, that the trainer, often assisted by neighbours, was able to start teaching him how to do things for himself, which began with mobility lessons. Soon his inherent intelligence came to his assistance and he became



a quick learner. Thereafter, he rapidly learnt 'Daily Living Skills'. He was identified as a suitable person to run a shop by the organization.

The latter part of the training focussed on skills necessary to be a successful shopkeeper which included, recognising currency notes; the ability to do simple calculations to receive money and return the balance and understanding how to place things in a particular manner to facilitate easy identification and retrieval. He had a small space within his dwelling unit to convert into a shop. AICB team helped him with the essential renovations, and now Sanjay is the proud owner of a small village grocery shop.

He enjoys spending time in his shop. He makes an average sale of about five hundred rupees every day and on good days, he shares, his sales have topped to seven hundred rupees.

"AICB has changed my life as also the life of my family", he exults. With the profits from the shop, he and his family are leading a contented life. Sanjay's has truly been a most difficult case -- first acceptance of the reality of the loss of vision, then battling his own demons and finally acceptance of reality.



With this, he really triumphed over his inner strength and determination to make his life meaningful and look after his children and wife.

Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory.

— ***George S. Patton***

32. *A Road to Freedom*

Kushma



(Kushma feeding her goat)

It took more than half a century for sunlight to enter into the ‘dark-since-birth’ world of fifty-two-year-old Kushma. Poverty, blindness, illiteracy, and non-implementation of any family planning, made Kushma, a mother of seven children, 6 daughters and one son, who is the youngest and in school. With an unskilled manual labourer husband, Kushma was walking



the fine edge between hopelessness and a belief that maybe her life would change.

During the survey, AICB field staff was guided by fellow villagers to Kushma's house. They were fond of her because of her cheerfulness despite her own extreme poverty and hopeless situation in life and wished her well. Her husband was aggressively sceptical when they reached their thatched hut. He mentioned that several NGOs had come and promised a lot but did nothing to improve their situation.

The team was used to such negative responses and hence, countered his doubts with success stories of those from neighbouring villages. After understanding AICB's intentions, Kushma and her husband agreed for the training.

Along with the commencement of the training, she was helped in getting her UDID card and consequent benefits, including disability pension. During the initial phase of her training, Kushma spent most of her time ventilating her sorrow. She wept and talked about God's unkindness to make her blind, poor and riddled with six daughters before the elusive seventh male child.

It seemed that in her life of fifty-odd years, she had finally got a shoulder to cry on, which was probably unavailable to her for

so long. As time passed, she became relaxed and comfortable and an enthusiastic learner. Lighting the fire, cooking, threading a needle, and recognising currency, all fascinated her. She had started walking the road to independent living.

She recalled how four of the elder daughters were married in a community mass wedding (which is often organised by philanthropists or NGOs) and the fifth by the village community; every household donated a small amount of money. The two youngest – a daughter and son, were in school. She praised her daughters for being dutiful and constantly helping with household chores and cooking while at home.

Having never gone to school, Kushma wanted an income-generating activity where her illiteracy would not be an impediment. Goatkeeping was her desired activity.

She was trained in various aspects of goat-keeping– grooming, keeping them tethered, preparing their feed etc. Eventually, the Grant selection committee chose her for the seed money and she is now totally occupied and happy in looking after her goats. After fifty-two years, Kushma is finally basking in the light of expected freedom from poverty, acquiring an activity that gives her pride and occupies her time gainfully.



Her once-sceptical husband now sings praises of AICB and DAB for giving meaning to Kushma's life.

To find yourself, think for yourself.

— *Socrates*

33.

Those Who Make Efforts Never Face Defeat

Santosh Kumar



(Santosh selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Forty-one-year-old Santosh Kumar was living a hopeless and lonely life, supported by his old mother who made ends meet by working as a domestic help in neighbouring homes. At the age of ten, he lost his eyesight, ostensibly due to glaucoma. He had no medical records in his possession. He has three brothers, two of whom are married and live away with their families. To add to his woes, he was diagnosed with cancer, for



which he is undergoing treatment at a government hospital free of cost.

The AICB team found him sitting disheartened and counting his days. However, his spirit to live a cheerful life amazed them as he became extremely excited, the moment he was given information about the organization and its initiatives. He asked if he could be included in the programme. He became a passionate trainee, enjoying his new learnings of self-care, mobility and enhanced understanding about his surroundings.

Santosh quickly picked up all that he was being taught – including recognition of currency, and recognising items in a shop while improving his mobility at the same time. It was as if three decades of his light-less world were finally seeing some sunshine.

During the course of the training, his UDID card and all associated benefits like Disability Pension, bus and railway pass, ration card and other relevant certificates were made available to Santosh. With sudden changes in his life, he felt that he was on a joyride. His self-confidence grew, his general outlook towards life also improved, and he was certain that his life was changing for the better.



Santosh was trained to run a small shop as the Selection Committee found him suitable for the grant. He now runs his shop and earns a profit of about hundred rupees every day. “Finally, I can buy whatever I feel like eating,” is how he sums up, the change in his life.

Santosh feels indebted to the organization and says, “I never imagined three months would turn my life around. I wonder, how can I can thank God for bringing AICB into my life”. He is no longer dependent on his mother and in fact, gifts her small sums of money for her expenses on a regular basis.

Don't watch the clock; do what it does. Keep going.

— *Sam Levenson*

34. *A Promising Future*

Rita Saroj



(Rita happily interacting with an AICB team member at her shop)

Rita was born sighted but lack of vaccination led to an illness and loss of vision when she was mere five years old. She lives with her old mother, sister-in-law and two nieces. Her brother is employed outside the village and comes home only on holidays. Her sister-in-law works as a cook in a primary school



in the village and manages the household. Rita never got an opportunity to receive an education, however, she is quite fluent in conversation and her thoughts seem precise and well-reasoned.

Upon reaching Rita's house, the AICB team found her cheerfully sitting and interacting with her nieces who are teenagers. When they informed her about the training programme and the organization, she became elated and immediately showed excitement to join. However, there were apprehensions about a male field worker/trainer in the absence of the sister-in-law who was the guardian of Rita. Encountering such gender-related issues were not alien to the field staff and hence, they came up with a simple solution where training was to take place after her sister-in-law returned home from her work.

Since Rita was a willing and quick learner, there were not many obstacles in her training. Rita had full support of her sister-in-law, which made the process even smoother. Soon, Rita's mobility and ability to carry out tasks around the house improved. The field staff felt that even though she was young and uneducated, she could be groomed to become a possible leader.



Meanwhile, she was selected for the Grant and was assisted in opening a shop in the courtyard of her house. Appreciating the importance of being well groomed, she wanted to run a shop selling ladies' cosmetics and to be supplemented by stocking and selling other items of everyday needs.

Today, Rita maintains her business and has sales of about five hundred to seven hundred rupees every day. Her leadership qualities came to the fore when she was unanimously elected as the Treasurer of the new Pratapgarh chapter, elections for which were held on 28th November, 2021. Rita has a promising future ahead. Her hard work and dedication are exemplary to that.

*Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue
that counts.*

— *Winston Churchill*

35. *A Lady of Substance*

Tulsi Devi



(Tulsi happily interacting with an AICB team member at her shop)

Tulsi's major part of life had been like a blank paper as she had nothing to do other than killing time. She lives with her father, a married elder brother, his wife and a younger unmarried brother. All her family members, including her, are illiterate and unskilled. The earnings of the two brothers as labourers were what kept the fire in the kitchen burning.



When AICB’s survey team reached Tulsi’s residence, she was sitting outside her hut, killing time along with her father. When the team tried addressing their difficulties and the organization’s initiatives, her father refused to interact. He directed them to speak to his daughter-in-law. While she heard us attentively and understood the mission to rehabilitate the BPS persons, she expressed her lack of authority to make any important decisions like enrolling her sister-in-law in a training course. She stated, “Only my husband can decide”. Hence, the field staff arranged a meeting with her daily-wage earner husband the following day.

After encountering the usual scepticism about the organization’s intentions, he finally agreed after he was informed of the other successful rehabilitated clients in neighbouring villages. Finally, Tulsi was enrolled in the programme and her training started in a helpful but totally illiterate environment, where everything had to be first explained to other family members before they would permit Tulsi to even start lessons.

Due to cultural issues linked to their low caste (their lower status in the social pecking order), the field staff faced severe opposition to mobility lessons and the use of the white cane. “We don’t encourage our young unmarried women to move

around; so why does she need mobility?” the family said in objection. A patient field worker explained the advantages of independence in moving around, which ultimately convinced her elder brother.

Tulsi was a willing learner. Lessons on mobility, daily living tasks, personal grooming, cooking, and recognising notes and coins were imparted to her and she quickly grasped everything. She was like a new kid in school, excited to learn things which were all fresh to her. Despite her illiteracy, she was drawn to the radio and Hindi film songs about good looks and looking pretty. All her life, she wove her dreams and imaginations based on what she heard and thus, she was quite sure that given an opportunity, she would like to open a cosmetic shop for the village ladies—to be well groomed and pretty.

Simultaneously, the AICB team facilitated her UDID card and began the process of getting her the disability pension and other facilities which the state provided. Soon her training was successfully completed and Tulsi was granted seed money for her business by the Selection Team.

Today, Tulsi effectively runs her small shop, in which she has also added groceries and other items of everyday use like crispies and snacks for kids and household needs like soap and



shampoo along with cosmetic products. She makes an average daily sales of about four hundred to five hundred rupees every day.

Tulsi has overcome both her socially backward status and illiteracy to become a lady of substance. Initially, there was an apprehension that higher caste people may not patronise her shop but her pleasant nature and smiling countenance have won people over. “I bless AICB for this change in my life,” she exults.

The only way to do great work is to love what you do.

— *Steve Jobs*

36. *Never Lose Faith*

Harilal



(Harilal selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

At the age when most children live a carefree life, Harilal received the biggest jolt. He lost his eyesight at the age of five due to a corneal disease. As time passed, he was coerced by fate to deal with more unfortunate incidents. He lost both his parents who were his only support. After their death, he inherited their house/hut. His elder sister was married earlier and lived separately with his husband and two children. Living

alone in despondency got to his head and he started slipping into depression. Hence, he invited his sister and her family to share the village home. Shockingly, the husband went out on his daily chores one day and never returned, abandoning his family. His whereabouts are still not known. To run the family, his sister began working as a daily wage labourer. Her meagre earnings somehow managed to feed the family of four.

When Harilal was approached by the AICB team, he was sitting alone and isolated in the house unhappy with his fate and ruining his life. The ongoing poverty had led him into a state of despair and depression, yet when he was informed about the initiative of the organization, he immediately agreed to make the efforts both physically and mentally to change his life, if at all possible. He was like a drowning man who would have held to a piece of straw to save his life.

His motivation levels grew when he learnt that his neighbour, Ms. Tulsi Devi was our beneficiary and is now successfully rehabilitated and earning a steady income because of the training provided by AICB. Whatever resistance remained, melted away. Initially, he was slow at picking up the tasks and activities because of his illiteracy, which made the training difficult and strenuous for both teacher and student. He had no idea of arithmetic as he had never seen the face of school. The



team's persistence and his diligence together made utmost efforts and soon, he became adept at simple maths. He was taught orientation and mobility and daily living skills and his self-grooming improved. He started moving out of the house using the white cane and for the first time, started enjoying the joy of independently moving around. He was keen to start a shop, like Tulsi. Soon, his understanding of the nuances of being a shopkeeper increased. The Selection Committee found him fit for a seed money grant and he was facilitated with opening a shop.

Now, thirty six-year-old Harilal enjoys his new role of being a shopkeeper. He has daily sales of between four hundred to five hundred rupees and saves at least ten per cent of it. He is no longer dependent on his sister to keep the fire in the hearth burning. "AICB has brought quality into my life. I could have never imagined that such a miracle would happen and will change my life forever", says Harilal gratefully.

*Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into
the light.*

— *Helen Keller*

37.

From Bleak Past to a Bright Future

Huma



(Huma selling grocery to an AICB executive at her shop)

Eighteen-year-old Huma was born blind into a family where her three sisters and a brother are all visually impaired. Her father died early, thus leaving all responsibilities to Huma's sighted mother. The kind of struggle her family has seen is truly heart-wrenching. Her mother made a small pittance by ironing neighbours' clothes. There were days when the entire



family went to bed empty stomach. Their struggle for existence had been continuing for a long time and they all had lost any hope for improvement.

When the AICB team approached Huma's mother, she greeted them with scepticism and disbelief. Since it was not an unusual encounter, the team began their convincing by sharing the names of their neighbouring BPS persons who had been rehabilitated. This gave her some sigh of relief and a scope of belief in the organization. Still, she was highly doubtful of her daughter's capabilities of being independent, both in mobility and earning.

After much persistence, Huma's mother agreed for her to join the training programme. The first few days were spent by the Field Worker listening to Huma ventilating her disappointments, her anger with the almighty, her hopelessness, at the futility of wanting to lead an independent life and so on. Her sense of isolation was probably compounded by the fact that she belonged to the minority Muslim community in a largely pre-dominant Hindu majority area.

However, Huma had her fighting spirit left inside and soon she became an eager learner. Her excitement at learning to thread a needle, light the fire, make chapatis (the local bread) and use

the white cane to move around made all efforts meaningful. The sheer joy on her face felt like nothing less than small accomplishments to the field staff. Soon, Huma learned to distinguish currency notes and coins and exhibited a desire to run a shop. She was hopeful that the days of hunger, missed meals and living on neighbours' goodwill and food gifts to supplement her mother's income would become stories of their past. Her self-driven motivation continued to grow.

Huma's selection for seed money was vetted by the Gram Pradhan (village leader) and consequently, she was supported to open her shop. She diligently works at her shop and supports her family with a monthly income of approximately three thousand rupees. With Huma's newfound confidence and desire to learn more, the AICB Vice President and project affiliate member, Mr. Shankar Lal Gupta felt that she would be a fit candidate for the Home Management Course that they run at their NGO, Drishti. Another chapter in Huma's life opened with the bold and unusual step of selecting her for the three-month course. Meanwhile, her sighted mother undertook the responsibility of temporarily running her shop in the interim. The mother's scepticism has vanished. Moreover, she has now become an Honorary Brand Ambassador of AICB – spreading awareness not only about the organization but more



importantly, about the abilities of her blind daughter and thus, by extension, all blind persons to become independent and earn a living.

When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what the storm is all about.

— *Haruki Murakami*

38. *Rising from the Ashes*

Arjun



(Arjun selling grocery to a customer at his shop)

Arjun's story is a labyrinth of fate and unforeseen events. Just like the warrior Arjuna from the Hindu mythology, *Mahabharata*, Arjun has also faced unexpected challenges in life for which he had to make some hard decisions.

At a young age, Arjun had to leave his home and move to Delhi to support his family due to his father's illness. He joined his

elder brother in the scrap business and from there started his struggle for survival. Arjun had just started earning money when in an unfortunate accident, a sudden pull of a thread, he lost his vision, a hand and fingers. This incident left him helpless, yet his fighting spirit refused to give up. He began coming to terms with his new reality and the challenges ahead. Since he could not go back to work, he felt like a burden on his brother. At home, his mother was extremely worried about his well-being and hence, she called him back home so that she could take care of him. Although Arjun managed some essential daily activities, he spent most of his time lying down, listening to songs on the radio. He succumbed to his condition and believed that his life had lost utility and on top of that, constant expressions of pity and sympathy from the villagers added to his diminishing confidence.

Days, months, and years passed in complete inactivity. He was completely isolated from the society as he wasn't taken outside for any festivities or events, and his presence at family functions seemed unnecessary. Slowly, he started preferring lying down all day without stepping outside because whenever he went out, children ran away in fear upon seeing him and women started their gossip as if he couldn't hear them.



When the AICB team reached the village for a survey, people informed them about Arjun. When the team approached his mother, she pleaded, “Make our son worthy, sir. His youth has been wasted in a futile life.” The project head assured her of a better future for her son. Although trusting organizations from the city was not easy, his mother had no other option than to believe him. As the training began, Arjun felt a sudden spark that ignited the flickering darkness of his life. His confidence and self-belief also grew during the course of the training, particularly when he learned to use his disabled hands. The day when he made his first bread after the accident, he felt an unusual joy and excitement in a long time. Meanwhile, the AICB team also applied for his disability certificate.

As the training was coming to an end, he was suggested the option of opening a shop to which he happily agreed. They also ensured a suitable location for his shop – right in front of the village temple. He was provided with a grant of fifteen thousand rupees to start his self-employment venture. Towards the end of his training, he learned practical aspects of running, managing, and maintaining a shop.

Four years have passed since Arjun is running his shop. The perspective of the villagers towards him has completely changed. He has regained his position as a respected person in



the village and is invited to all events and celebrations. When Arjun put forth his desire to extend the shop, he was facilitated with an interest-free loan from the organization, with which he managed to buy a refrigerator for selling cold drinks, fruit juices, and more during the summers.

Today, Arjun makes sales of around thousand to twelve hundred rupees every day. He is living a comfortable life now and is also seeking marriage proposals. He feels grateful towards the organization for coming into his life and changing it for good.

*The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom
from fear.*

— *Aung San Suu Kyi*

39. *Lifeline of the Family*

Rekha



(Rekha selling grocery to a customer at her shop)

Rekha's journey is truly inspiring. She lives in a small village in Uttar Pradesh with her parents and a younger sister; her three elder sisters have been married. The turning point in her life

came when her father, who was a daily wage worker suffered from a stroke and their only source of income came to a halt. The family slipped into penury. Earlier, her father used to wander off in search of work and somehow, they managed to make their ends meet. He got his three daughters married by taking loans. Rekha's father had always been a physically weak person and after the heart attack, his condition deteriorated even more.

While the family was on the verge of starvation, AICB approached her. When they informed Rekha and her parents about their initiative and intentions, they immediately agreed to enrol her in the training programme. She took it as an opportunity to secure the present as well as the future of her family. Rekha was a willing and enthusiastic learner and in no time, she learned 'Daily Living Skills'. In the final phase of the programme, she voiced her desire to open cosmetics shop to support her family. Since Rekha was a keen and diligent learner, she was given a grant of fifteen thousand rupees as seed money for her business.

Rekha is a hard-working business owner and she manages it quite well. After the three months training, her self-confidence gained an immense boost. She wished to expand her shop to sell women's clothing items. She received wholehearted



support from the organization. Today, she earns a handsome amount of money from her business and manages her household, as well as takes care of her father's treatment. Her father no longer has to roam around to find work as she strictly asks her parents to take rest. In a conversation with her mother, Rekha said, "Amma, let the younger sister get married first, then you can think about my marriage". Gracefully, she has taken complete responsibility of her family.

After meeting AICB, Rekha's dreams got wings and with the training, she recognised her full potential. Although her business is running smoothly, she wants to expand it even more as she feels the space is cramped for her dreams. She thanks AICB and the field staff for making her skilled enough to manage her household expenses and give a comfortable life to her parents and sister. She has truly proven to be the lifeline of her family.

*The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover
the core of strength within you that survives all hurt.*

— **Max Lerner**

40. *Flight of Courage*

Puran Lal



(Puran Lal at his shop)

Fifteen-year-old Puran Lal had lost his eyesight at the age of thirty nine, due to glaucoma. He was married and had three daughters at that time. Although he was leading an unspectacular life, still there was a steady income at home. His life fell apart after his doctor informed him, “Your nerves have dried out”. Earlier, Puran used to work in his small field and



also as a manual labourer working on adjoining farms. But, with the loss of his vision, the family's source of income also vanished. The burden of being the bread earner shifted to his wife's shoulders, and she responded with valour. Along the way, due to poor family planning, he had another daughter. Gradually, he married off his elder three daughters and only the youngest was at home, assisting the mother in daily chores.

When AICB team reached Puran's home, he was sitting by himself, despondent and lost. He was sallow-complexioned and clothes were hanging on him as if he had shrunk inside them. While conversing with him, the team found him alert, attentive to others and pensively thinking about lost opportunities in life due to his late blindness. His excitement was clearly visible when he was informed about the organization and the training programme for facilitating self-reliance amongst persons with visual impairment.

Though ready and willing to undergo orientation and mobility and daily living skills training, his self-confidence had hit rock bottom and he had hard time believing that he could become independent and move around freely. During the training, his self-belief blossomed and he grasped all the lessons quickly. He was thrilled at his ability to move around, again. Though uneducated, he understood numbers and currency, having



dealt with them earlier. His long-buried memories returned. He was soon engaged in conversations with his trainer on the nuances of being a successful shopkeeper, including placing things in an exact sequence and meticulously returning unsold stuff to the same place.

In ten to eleven weeks, he was ready to take on the world again. He was selected for the seed money grant and the village Pradhan (village leader/head) seconded his selection. He takes pride in his new vocation and sits for long hours at his shop tending to the needs of his customers. "I am so happy that today I can purchase and eat whatever I feel like. I thank AICB and DAB for rescuing me from where I was and giving me my self-confidence and self-esteem back," exults Puran Lal.

Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.

— *Ambrose Redmoon*



ABOUT THE BOOK

The book comprises forty real-life stories of visually impaired individuals whose lives have been transformed by interventions and critical support provided by two major NGOs, AICB and DAB. Often overlooked despite their inspiring stories, these individuals have found hope and transformation, highlighting the importance of recognizing narratives from marginalized communities. Before the assistance of the AICB-DAB project team, many faced despair, but they were empowered in various skills such as daily living, mobility, and entrepreneurship. The hope is that these stories will raise awareness about the challenges faced by visually impaired persons, especially in the rural areas, emphasizing the need for attention and support for persons with disabilities.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Prof. Anil K. Aneja has tirelessly advocated and championed the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired, for more than 32 years now. For his contributions to this sector he was conferred the National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with disabilities by the Hon'ble President of India in 2014 as well as the State Award in the Category 'Best Individual Working in the field of Social Work' by the Govt. of NCT of Delhi in 2019. Presently the Head in the Department of English, University of Delhi and the President of All India Confederation of the Blind, Prof. Aneja's achievements have been a source of inspiration for many. He has, to his credit, several books, multiple publications and numerous conference presentations in India and abroad.

ISBN: 978-81-957833-4-2



M.R.P: 325/-