



# TESTIMONIES OF SUCCESS

## Stories of Empowerment of Visually Impaired Women



*Edited by*  
**Anil K. Aneja**

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Visually Impaired Women**

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**1 India Confederation of the Blind**

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## Foreword

**E**mpowering young women with visual impairment: the numbers speak for themselves. One thousand eight hundred and ninety-five young women with visual impairment in higher education; over twenty-two million rupees disbursed as scholarships!

CBM and AICB, with funding from the Marga Schulze Foundation, Germany, have been in partnership from the year 2000 to promote the higher education of young women with visual impairment. Starting from 20 scholarships a year at the outset, this increased to 162 merit scholarships in 2019 for women from ten states of India.

Beyond the figures, we need to understand the impact these scholarships have had on the lives of women and girls. Stories can be more powerful than figures—while facts and figures are easily glossed over, all of us relate to narratives. These powerful stories relate the changes in lives through this initiative. They will also serve as an inspiration to thousands of other visually impaired girls who are facing similar circumstances.

This volume commemorates 35 years of partnership between AICB and CBM. CBM has worked for over 50 years in India to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Girls and women with disabilities, especially from economically weaker communities are particularly

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excluded due to social, cultural and financial barriers, and specific attention is needed to ensure their inclusion.

**The All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB), established in 1980, is a premier national self-help organization of the visually impaired with twenty-five affiliates across the country. CBM has been in partnership with AICB since 1985. CBM supported a national conference of the blind held in Chennai which focused on the issues of direct concern to visually impaired women. This led to the establishment of the AICB National Forum of Blind Women. Later, CBM also supported the intensive training course for visually impaired women with hostel and other facilities including provision of over 155 laptops in the last few years. Around 400 visually impaired women from 15 states of North and North-East India have undergone this course.**

**CBM is grateful to all those involved in documenting these testimonies. We hope that these would be widely used to break the prejudices, negativity, resistance and discrimination existing in the society towards girls and women with visual impairment in India.**

**Dr. Sara Varughese  
Country Director & Managing Trustee, CBM**

## Acknowledgements

**A**s we present this book to you, we owe our gratitude to all those who have been instrumental in various ways in making this project a reality.

First and foremost, we are thankful to CBM, in particular to its Country Director, Dr. Sara Varughese, for introducing the idea of such a book and also providing financial support for the same through CBM. We are also thankful to Marga Schulze Foundation, Germany and CBM for their constant support to the Merit Scholarship Scheme, the Intensive Training Course and the Laptop Scheme which have been game-changers in the lives of hundreds of visually impaired women and therefore, made possible, the content of this book.

We are also thankful to the hundred beneficiaries who extended their full co-operation for the interview and the twenty visually impaired women whose first-person narratives are included in the book. We are obliged to our President, Mr. A.K. Mittal, for his constant guidance throughout the project.

Our gratitude is also due to our Vice-President, Prof. Anil K. Aneja, for agreeing to undertake a comprehensive editing of the book along with writing the Introduction for it, at a very short notice, despite his busy schedule. In this task, he has been very efficiently and diligently supported

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by his two editorial assistants, Ms. Aishwarya Jha and Ms. Aanchal Awasthi —both research scholars at the Department of English, University of Delhi. We are deeply indebted to them for their commitment and hard work. We are also thankful to Ms. Mukta Aneja for providing her expert support and inputs at various stages.

We acknowledge the contribution of our two investigators, Mr. Shivam Sharma and Ms. Pooja Das, who have worked hard to conduct hundred quantitative and twenty qualitative interviews and have also helped in the preparation of this book in various ways. We are also thankful to the AICB office staff, particularly to Ms. Neeru and Ms. Neha for helping with the data and communication for this book.

**Mr. J.L. Kaul**  
Secretary General, AICB

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## Introduction

Seeing visually impaired persons, particularly women with visual impairment in public spaces such as colleges, offices, bus stops, markets, etc. is not an uncommon phenomenon in many cities. However, most of us, even while looking at them, fail to acknowledge their existence. And few of us who may have the desire and time to spare a thought about their presence, view them with a sense of otherness—at best with sympathy but rarely with empathy. Very few may go so far as to wonder at the level of confidence and independence with which visually impaired persons, especially women conduct themselves. Instead of accepting their behavior under the normative, their abilities are subscribed to a divine marvel or an unnatural sixth sense. Hardly does the mainstream society care to consider visually impaired persons as individuals in their own rights.

Countering the above patterns, this book is an attempt to foreground the life-narratives of twenty visually impaired women with the view to throw light on their traumatic struggles and painful experiences, caused due to unacceptance at the hands of a society which normalizes perfection and disregards any alternative from its set standards. The book also aims to demonstrate the resistances and disabling barriers often caused for the visually impaired by their own families and/or the community around them.

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It is also an endeavor to establish, through first-person narratives, that the difficult circumstances delineated above can be mitigated to a substantial extent, through the support systems provided to such individuals which can make the visually impaired women champions of success.

Although the stories presented in the following pages have been recently written, the genesis of this work rests in a long-term commitment and partnership of two major organizations devoted to the cause of empowerment of the visually impaired. Established in 1980, the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) is a premier national self-help organization of the visually impaired with twenty-five affiliates across the country and running around twenty projects in various spheres such as education, employment, rehabilitation, technology, advocacy, etc. Since the inception of AICB, women empowerment has been one of the prime focus areas of Confederation. In fact, one of the early projects undertaken by AICB with CBM support was intended, among others, towards the empowerment of visually impaired women.

Presently, AICB runs a number of activities for visually impaired women such as, providing hostel facility for college going girls, equal representation in training courses in Technology and Stenography, substantial representation of blind women in AICB's decision-making bodies, etc. The three activities which have perhaps been most sought-after by visually impaired girls are the Merit Scholarship Scheme, the Laptop Scheme and the Intensive Training Course.

For a long time now, in these activities, AICB has been supported by CBM, a premier global NGO. Committed to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the poorest communities of the world, CBM was founded in 1908 by German Pastor Ernst Jakob Christoffel. It is one of the world's oldest and largest organizations working in the field of disability. Currently, CBM has its operations in more than hundred countries worldwide.

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The partnership between CBM and AICB in the area of women empowerment goes back to 1985. In the year 2001, the Margha Schulzes Foundation, a Germany based organization, offered to channelize its funds to AICB through CBM for the Merit Scholarship Scheme. Later, CBM also started supporting the Intensive Training Course for visually impaired women. Approximately, 3500 scholarships have so far been awarded through the AICB-CBM partnership. Around 500 visually impaired women have undergone the Intensive Training course. The partnership is also designed to provide meritorious visually impaired girls and women with laptops.

During a discussion nearly a year ago, it was felt that the above three schemes had been running for a long time and there was a need to conduct an impact assessment of these schemes by involving a representative number of the beneficiaries. Consequently, an activity was designed under which hundred visually impaired girls and women beneficiaries of the schemes from fifteen states of India would be interviewed through a prepared questionnaire and based on their responses, twenty of them would be asked to document their stories of struggles and successes. While one of the purposes of this exercise was for the partner organizations to understand the efficacy of the support provided by them under the above schemes, the volume of success stories prepared through the above activity would also serve as a symbol of the marking of the 35 years of partnership between the two organizations. An equally important intention was that such stories would serve as inspiration to thousands of other visually impaired girls/women who were facing similar circumstances.

Accordingly, a research team was constituted and a questionnaire was prepared. The results of the interviews (quantitative survey) of hundred visually impaired girls left CBM and AICB in no doubt that the critical support provided by them in partnership had been a game-changer in the lives of most of these visually impaired girls/women.

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Out of the 100 girls interviewed-76 received merit scholarships, 23 girls received laptop and training and 1 received only laptop. The figure of 76 scholarship holders also includes 15 students who received scholarship, laptop, and training, 9 students who were granted merit scholarship and training and 23 students who were granted laptop and scholarship. Therefore, the total number of girls who received scholarship was 76, laptops were provided to 43 and 47 were beneficiaries of the training from the organisation.

The impact of the merit scholarship can be seen in the fact that 51 out of 76 girls who received scholarship were able to buy books to support their education, 69 out of 76 girls stated that the scholarship from the organisation reduced their financial dependency over their families, 38 students could afford accommodation charges at hostels and another 35 students could commute easily. 45 of the 76 merit scholarship beneficiaries believed that they would not have been able to continue higher education without the support of the scholarship and 72 students revealed that the scholarship improved their academic performance.

Out of the 44 students receiving the laptops, 39 informed that the laptop was instrumental in improving their academic performances and reduced dependency upon others, 27 students responded that the laptop also helped them to improve their social life as they were able to connect with their friends on social media. Similarly, all the 47 girls who received training from AICB revealed that it brought a drastic change in their lives. 41 out of these 47 students also stated that the training significantly improved their mobility and empowered them to commute on their own. 37 girls also learned basic life-skills such as stitching, self-defence, cooking, operating computers, etc. under the training.

Clearly, the above statistics validate the philosophy of empowerment behind the support provided by CBM and AICB. These figures also emphasize upon the need to extend

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such support to others under similar circumstances. The twenty first-person narratives out of the hundred beneficiaries of the above partnership schemes strongly demonstrate the ways in which the life quality, dignity and human rights can be protected through a little extension of supporting hands. To our knowledge and information, this is perhaps the first published collection of its kind, where the personal narratives of as many as twenty visually impaired girls have come together. To treat the stories that follow as narratives of only these twenty beneficiaries would be a partial reading. These can be the stories of anyone who receives the kind of support which was made available to the ones, whose accounts we are about to read.

In a sense, more than the stories of these visually impaired girls and women, these are our stories—the stories of those, who treat visually impaired persons with prejudices, negativity, stigma, resistance and disregard. It is important to realize through these stories how those who consider themselves 'able' or 'sighted' are at times more in need of correction and support than the so-called 'disabled' or 'visually impaired'.

While on one hand the narratives are personal in nature, these are also strong statements of how CBM and AICB have been able to impact the lives of so many people at grassroots level over such a long period of time. Going beyond the personal, the stories also foreground and interrogate many disability-specific generic issues requiring further examination.

**Prof. Anil K. Aneja**  
Vice President, AICB  
(EDITOR)

# 1

## Resurrected Hopes

*Salina R17111*

**T**he story of the phoenix's rebirth from its ashes had always fascinated me as a child. Little did I know that one day, my life would so closely relate to this story. Born in a conservative household among seven sisters in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, I lost my father at an early age. Father's death had shaken our lives, however, my family continued to be a constant support to each other.

Hardly had we picked up the broken pieces of our lives, when we received another major blow —I lost my eyesight. The future seemed even more uncertain and bleak now. As I grew up, I wanted to go to school like my sisters, but to my disbelief, everyone around me opposed the idea. I understood then that life was not going to be easy. My mother and I stood against every person who tried to stop me. We didn't resign to what others decided for me and I got enrolled in one of the primary schools nearby.

On one hand, I felt ecstatic after getting admission in school, on the other, I was quite nervous. Used to a cocooned life till now, it was time to leave my shell

and come face-to-face with the world. In school, I learnt to read and write in Braille which added much to my confidence and also made me even more determined to study further.

Although I learned the Braille script, there was a dearth of Braille books and readers as I was the only visually impaired student in the school and the authorities didn't consider it necessary to make extra efforts for one student. My sisters took great pains to find reading material for me. They also read and recorded whatever printed material was available. My way was paved with thousands of hurdles. On crossing one, many more appeared on the next step, but with constant familial support, I went on to complete my post-graduation degree in Sanskrit from Gandhinagar Government College. Thereafter, I decided to pursue B.Ed.

It was during my interactions with the Blind People's Association, Ahmedabad while pursuing my Masters, that I first came to know about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) and the merit scholarship offered by them to college-going visually impaired female students.

In 2018, in the second year of my B.Ed., I approached AICB and applied for the scholarship and was happy on being selected for the same despite stiff competition. The financial aid helped me in accessing expensive books required during B.Ed., buying my college uniform and also for travelling back and forth from the college to my hometown. I wonder and also regret somewhere that my life would have been much easier had I known about AICB and its scholarship sooner. Lack of awareness and prejudices against

blindness are two major hindrances in small towns like mine, which obstruct the road to success.

I am truly grateful to AICB for coming to my rescue at a time when I needed the support desperately. It came like a positive force amidst all the negativity that had enveloped around me. Today, I have completed my B.Ed. and I am preparing to qualify NET. In future, I wish to pursue Ph.D. in Sanskrit. This firm resolution and conviction to set bigger goals in life has been possible only because of AICB.

Life is indeed not a bed of roses for anyone, but the quantity of thorns which visually impaired students, especially girls living in small towns face, is more than others. What one has to remember is to keep fighting until the hurdles in your way give up. It is also important to connect to institutions like AICB which come forward to lend their support and spread awareness.

*The phoenix hope, can wing her way through the desert  
skies, and still defying fortune's spite; revive from ashes  
and rise*

—Miguel de Cervantes

## 2

### Paving Way for Others

*Chhaya*

**N**aughtiness in kids is not uncommon, but my naughtiness was my identity. Beginning life as a sighted child, I was one of the most notorious and playful kids in the entire hamlet. Ask anyone "who is Chhaya?" and the entire village could tell you tales about my pranks. Running, jumping, falling—this summed up my everyday schedule. Growing up, like other children, I had just started to take note of and admire the enormous beauty of nature—all the scenic experiences offered by the complicated yet bedazzling physical world. Never did I imagine, even in my worst nightmares, how one could live a life of darkness, devoid of the aesthetic pleasures which were provided by the eyesight.

When I was still lost in the imaginative realm of a child, I fell ill with high fever and was bed-ridden for a long time. Moreover, the fever reached internal organs of my body, completely damaging my eyesight. Even before I could grasp the reality of it, darkness had deeply intruded into my life. Gripped with immense fear on not being able to see anything, it took me a lot of time to accept the state of affairs. Initially,

not realizing the crisis which had befallen me, I complained about the dim lighting and constant darkness around me. Later on, I was told the painful truth—I had lost my vision.

In a moment, my world turned upside down, the world whose beauty I would no longer be able to appreciate. The feeling of fear led to self-isolation and the village which once looked upon me as one of the most jovial kids with a bright future, now became a cage for me where everyone expressed concerns to my family that I would have no future in life. The villagers collectively gave their opinion to my father that nothing fruitful could ever be done by me in my lifetime. They even went to the extent of questioning his rationale behind spending money on the education of a lost cause such as me. From sympathy to pity to dismissal, my village was no longer a place of comfort for me and constantly pulled me down due to my blindness.

As time went by, my anxiety about career and livelihood increased. Perturbed by the opinions around, I was desperate to put an end to the criticism and doubts. Therefore, as soon as I finished my post-graduation, the realization came to me that I wanted to receive training in operating computers. Earlier, the different activities for the visually impaired by the All India Confederation of the Blind had been introduced to me by one of the classmates who had appreciated the training and encouraged me as well to enrol at the Confederation for the same. Grasping the opportunity, as soon as I could manage to, I registered myself for the Intensive Training facility at the AICB. The training introduced me to the basics of computer—I learned Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and all about the shortcut keys.

At the completion of the training, I even obtained a laptop from the Confederation which was an added feather to the cap. I now had a device to practice the skills learnt at AICB on a regular basis. I worked day and night to improve my typing speed, find new material on the internet and also learned to access newspapers through the laptop.

Immediately after the training, in search of a job, I moved to Mumbai. With all the hard work and blessings, I passed in one of the job interviews and obtained a job at a computer teaching institute. For a year now, I am gainfully employed in providing computer training to other visually impaired students, much like myself, enrolled in the institute. My contentment comes from the fact that I can empower more and more blind students each day through this job.

This feeling of immense satisfaction in distributing knowledge is all credited to the values inculcated within me at AICB. If it was not for them, I would not have been able to hope. The training offered at the Confederation was a turning point in my life. Not only did it boost my self-confidence, it made me realize that I am just as capable as anyone else. Earlier, I was made to believe that I am less than others but my time in the AICB taught me that visually impaired students are as smart as any other student. The teachers in the Confederation strove hard to make me realize my potential. AICB brought out my potential and also taught me to bring out the best in others. There are many students in different corners of Maharashtra who face humiliation in their day-to-day lives just like I did in my childhood. However, not all of them can go

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to Delhi for the training. Therefore, I do my best to ensure that these students learn basic computer and become self-dependent.

*We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone.*

— Ronald Reagan

### 3

## Lighting Up Young Minds

*Koli Shilpa*

I was born in Mumbai in a middle-class family where education was accorded topmost priority. Interested in studies from an early age, people always called me a bright student. As I made my way from one class to another, I started to weave big plans for my career. But life doesn't work on anyone's plans; it has its own schemes. By the time I turned 10, I lost my sight completely. The sudden darkness felt like a traumatic shock that shattered my world of dreams.

This new situation had to be dealt with a fresh approach which I was not aware of. I could see the long road ahead, full of obstacles which had to be crossed to reach to a destination that was not visible. My parents admitted me to a special school, where I learnt Braille and completed my studies. After completing my school and college studies, I decided to learn computers as it was a necessary step to be undertaken to match the pace of this fast-moving world. To remain more equipped with knowledge and updates, I also approached a federation in Mumbai that helped blind students. From there I got to know

about the 45-day training course at the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB). Without dallying for a moment, I gathered all the necessary information about AICB and registered for the training.

Coming to Delhi was a turning point in my life. Till now, I had been looking at my situation from a very personal and one-dimensional lens, but AICB taught me the importance of objectivity in life. I felt more empowered and zealous to set bigger goals for myself. The Organization gave me the exposure I had always wanted. I became quite engrossed in the training as it touched all aspects of my life. I also got a chance to train myself in operating computers. At the culmination of the course, I received a laptop from AICB for my meritorious performance.

During my stay at the AICB hostel, I met other visually impaired students from all over the country and closely came to know about their life struggles. This was a life-changing experience for me. I realized that there are many students like myself, who seek help from organizations such as AICB. But what about those who remain unaware of such institutions and never get an opportunity to explore their lives? Despite the wide outreach of AICB, limited seats and stiff competition prevents a number of students from availing this cherished experience. In this thought process, I was inspired by Mr. J.L. Kaul, the Secretary General of AICB, who is an icon in the visual impairment sector with significant contributions over a period of fifty years. I too determined to do my bit, by enhancing the condition of visually impaired persons in society by helping in providing basic education to blind children.

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It was time to go back after the training and turn my knowledge and experience into action. After coming back to Mumbai, I got a job in a private company where I was expected to work on computers. Now that I had a secure job in hand, I wanted to take a step forward towards providing support to visually impaired students. I approached a prominent school for the blind in Mumbai and expressed my intention of teaching on a voluntary basis. On the very first day, I realized that many students were facing difficulties in studies only because their basics were not clear. I arranged extra classes for them every day to serve the same purpose and saw substantially positive results.

Today, I have the confidence and determination to manage both working in office as well as teaching blind students till class fifth after returning from work, only because of AICB. I also teach Braille script to the students. Guiding someone through the path you have already traversed, not only smoothens your own journey but also, the gratification you get in the process often changes your perspective of looking at life. All I want is that no child should feel any less due to the loss of sight.

*Just as one candle lights another and can light  
thousands of other candles, so one heart  
illuminates another heart and can illuminate  
thousands of others.*

— Leo Tolstoy

## 4

### The Silver Lining

*Rupa*

**W**hen you are lost in the maze of life, a single ray of hope ignites back the courage to find a way out. In my life, AICB became that ray of hope—the motivation behind my spirit to fight. Blind by birth, I was born in a middle-class family where there was a shortage of money but love was present in abundance. My father was the rock-solid support for us. He worked really hard to provide us everything to the best of his capacities.

While my relatives and neighbours pitied me for my blindness, my family never made me feel that way. We lived in a small town of UP, where there were no provisions for educating a visually impaired child. But this was no excuse for my parents and they arranged home tuitions for me when I was only three years old. Seeing my hunger for knowledge, my parents decided to send me to a special school in Kanpur, where I studied till class seventh, and thereafter, I came to Delhi to continue my studies further.

After two years in Delhi, I learned about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) when a friend

**informed me about the organization and its Intensive Training Course. After I completed my senior secondary and enrolled in Miranda House, University of Delhi, I decided to join AICB's Intensive Training program, however, due to limited number of seats and stiff competition, I could not get through. But to my utter happiness, AICB offered me its hostel facility and also the esteemed merit scholarship.**

**The financial support provided through the scholarship made me access many things which wouldn't have been possible without it. I lived in the AICB hostel for six years, during which I graduated with a bachelor's degree, completed a year of training in Stenography and two years of B.Ed. In the second year of graduation, I also received a laptop from the organization after passing an examination conducted by AICB.**

**After my interaction with AICB, I was filled with a new sense of purpose. But, as it is said, life is unpredictable. I had just finished my training in Stenography and was looking for a job. The news of my father's accident came as a major setback to me. Getting a job was extremely important as I wanted to support my family financially, but with this news, I felt as if the ground slipped from under my feet. I went back home for a year to offer emotional support to my father.**

**When it appeared as if my life had come to a halt, AICB again came to my rescue. Not only did it provide me with financial assistance, it also became my emotional support. Although I was not in Delhi, the teachers at the Organization kept updating me with information about various job opportunities.**

**I came back to Delhi with a new found belief in myself and enrolled in the B.Ed. program. My Stenography course had suffered heavily due to the absence of one year, but the teachers pushed me to sit for the Government competitive examination for employment (Staff Selection Commission examination), even after I had made up my mind to pursue B.Ed. To my surprise and happiness, I got a job in the Ministry of Defense as a Stenographer while I was in the second year of B.Ed.**

**My journey still continues to reach to the destination that could give me the contentment I need in life. I have completed my post-graduation in Hindi and I am currently preparing for NET. I want to pursue teaching as a profession. I don't want any charity—I am capable enough of establishing an identity through my own efforts.**

*We could never learn to be brave and patient, if  
there were only joy in the world.*

– **Helen Keller**

## 5

### Learn to Let Go

*| 1e111111 | 1'11/014111*

**L**ife's uncertainty doesn't follow any patterns. One moment it can take you to experience new heights and the next moment you find yourself on ground. A seven-year-old doesn't understand the philosophy of life but I was different in this respect. I had just begun exploring the vibrancy of life when I was inflicted with a rare eye condition that displaced my retina, causing my eyesight to fade away. Before the condition was acknowledged by my parents, the disease had already damaged one of my eyes beyond cure. The doctors assured that they could save the other eye, but despite undergoing three operations, my sight could not be restored. All of a sudden, everything turned dark and all the colours were lost.

I had to cope up with this new experience, knowing that my life will never be the same as it was. It was hard to understand why I could not go and play with my friends anymore. The four walls of isolation suffocated me. I didn't know who to talk to regarding my feelings—I was confused and angry all the time.

Even my parents had no answers to my condition. Working as a gardener at the Humayun Tomb, my father neither had much financial stability, nor sufficient awareness to help me in this situation.

Two years passed but nothing changed. Then, one day, my uncle came in contact with the MI India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) and sought help. AICB recommended that I should join a good school in Delhi to continue my studies. Viewing this opportunity as a way out from my constant suffering, I immediately consented to join the school.

The early months of separation from the family were emotionally draining but there was no turning back to the same world of isolation. I remained strong and gave my best in academics for the next eleven years. After completing my schooling, I enrolled in the B.A. Political Science (Honours) course in Lady Shri Ram College. While the college fee was still manageable, the living expenses were *a* challenge that stood like a mountain before me. Although my father would have pushed his limits to the most possible extent, I didn't wish to put him in such a situation. I was trying my best to come up with a solution and this is when I came to know about the Merit Scholarship Scheme offered by AICB for college-going visually impaired girls. Without wasting a single moment in thought, I straightaway applied for the scholarship.

After securing the scholarship, I could afford to stay in the LSR hostel. This not only solved my problem of accommodation but it also helped in accessing the readers for recording even during late evenings. Availing such facilities was extremely helpful in improving my academic knowledge. When I look

back to my college days, I always remember that without AICB's help, it would not have been possible to complete my bachelors in a stress-free environment. I no longer had to think about the finances required for my studies.

Today, I work in Allahabad Bank and am also pursuing Masters in Political Science from the School of Open Learning (SOL). I want to be a teacher in future and spread happiness and awareness around. I have closely seen the struggle of people who do not get any financial as well as emotional support from their families or those who do not have a family to begin with. AICB has made a remarkable difference in their lives.

Today, I see life in a completely different light. I no longer sob for what I have lost, but feel happy about all the things I have achieved so far. I feel that everything happens for a reason. All the struggles and obstacles you face in life make you the person you are. Sometimes bruises make you feel more content than having a perfect life. Acceptance of one's strength as well as weakness is the key to a happy life.

*There is no formula for success, except perhaps an unconditional acceptance of life and what it brings.*

— Arthur Rubinstein

## From Disbelief to Confidence

was born in the small town of Buxar, where neither the health nor the educational facilities were adequate. The level of awareness was also lacking. I had developed Glaucoma right after my birth but due to lack of financial stability at home, my parents could not arrange for immediate medical treatment. When they finally took me to the doctor, they were told that the Glaucoma had reached its final stage and there was no hope left. As time passed by, my sight became weaker and weaker. Staying at home all the time felt like an eternal wait for some miracle to happen. For five years, I could not go to school as my parents had no clue about what they should do.

The long wait came to an end when I was approached by the Bihar Blind Peoples' Care Society, which was looking for visually impaired students in northern Bihar area to teach them Braille. They encouraged my parents to send me to a nearby mainstream school where I studied till class fifth. Realizing that my education might be better taken care of in a special school, my parents sent me to Delhi to

enrol in the Rashtriya Virjanand Andh Kanya Senior Secondary School in order to complete further studies.

Coming to Delhi gave me new hopes for a better future. Eventually, the pace of life became steady and my interest in learning new things kept me going. Year after year, this interest grew stronger and in class tenth, after I attained first position in my class, I got the golden chance to meet Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. I still consider it as my first and biggest achievement as the meeting and his words inspired me to achieve all that I have till now.

After completing my Senior Secondary, I enrolled in Miranda House to pursue Bachelor's in History. Here too, challenges welcomed me at every step. Two of the major obstacles that hindered my way were accessibility and language barrier. After I graduated from Miranda House and completed my B.Ed., I enrolled in the Master's program. Now I desperately wanted to finance my studies on my own. This is when I came to know about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) and their merit scholarship for college going visually impaired girls. My happiness knew no bounds when I was selected to avail the scholarship. It unburdened me from financial pressures.

I had been associated with AICB for three years now. The scholarship that I received helped me pay my hostel fees and it also made many expensive books accessible. I also received a laptop during masters that I helped me a lot during studies. In 2016, I enrolled in the Intensive Training Program offered by the Confederation. This training of 45 days was a new experience which was quite different from academics and added multiple skills to my life. After the completion of this training, I was offered another laptop

for excelling in the course, but I decided to return it, as I thought that it should go to someone who needed it more than me. I also registered in the one-year Stenography Training Course of AICB.

While I was improving my other skills, I kept in touch with academics. I cleared JRF in Education and also tried to pursue M.Phil., but due to reasons beyond my control, I could not be selected.

One day, my mentor during the Stenography Training at AICB, Mukesh Sir, asked me to appear in the exam for the post of Junior Judicial Assistant. I was taken aback and refused to fill the form since the job required fluency in English. While I excelled in Hindi Typing, I never learned typing in English. But he didn't leave hope and convinced me until I gave in and applied for the position. To my utter surprise, I got the job and also, the much needed self-confidence as well.

Today, I am working as a Junior Judicial Assistant in a prestigious District Court in Delhi and I give maximum credit of this to AICB and its teachers. I would not have been here, had I not come in contact with the Organization. I will always be grateful to AICB for seeing my potential and pushing me to the extremes of my limits. Today, I believe in myself and stand with beaming self-confidence to face any challenge come what may.

*Believe in yourself and the world will be at your feet*

—Swami Vivekanand

## 7

### Triumph Over Fate

*loll I )litvi di Pal*

**B**elieve in yourself, even if the world stands against you. My fate made incessant efforts to make me feel unwanted and disabled, but my willpower stood as iron to take down all its attempts. After the birth of my brothers, when my mother was pregnant the third time, my parents decided not to bring me in this world. So, my mother popped in a pill to stop me from taking even my first breath. However, it seems that I was too eager to be a part of this world, so I came anyway. While they were adjusting to my undesired birth, they got to know that as a result of a side effect of the pill, I was born with an eyesight defect that would become worse with age.

I never felt unwanted as I always got the major portion of love and attention from my parents. I was walking in a wonderland where my every wish came true until I stumbled upon the rock of reality and fell flat on my face. As I grew up, I realized that too much sweetness could be dangerous. I was indeed the apple of my parents' eyes but their love slowly became restrictive as they failed to see me beyond my losing

sight. They tried to bind me to their 'blindness' while I wished to fly in the light of the open sky.

My parents provided career guidance to my brothers at every step, but they never expressed any interest in my education. I had to give account for every penny spent, while my brothers were allowed to spend money without any inhibition. I always wondered why they did not have faith in my calibre—why I had to prove my potential to them every time I asked for money, even if that was for paying my school fees.

During the growing years, I discovered my interest in playing chess. My school was quite supportive in polishing my talent and I got a chance to represent my school in Athens Chess Championship. I proved my competency at every step and finally convinced my parents to send me to Delhi to continue my schooling. After coming to Delhi in 2006, I came to know about the All India Confederation of the Blind and its contributions to the field of visual impairment. My curiosity led me to visit the Organization and apply for the hostel, but due to stiff competition and limited number of seats, I could not get through. It was disappointing as I thought that this would unburden me from asking financial help from my parents.

The regret did not last long though—I was selected for a merit scholarship offered by AICB. It came to me as a saviour and helped in taking care of my financial needs throughout graduation and further. Now that I was no longer dependent on my parents for financial support, I did not have to stress about their reluctance regarding my education. Without seeking any aid from them, I went on to pursue Masters and during the same time, I also joined the Intensive Training Course

at AICB. I can't thank the organization enough for helping me as it would have been impossible to continue with my studies without the scholarship.

As I was losing sight with every passing day, it was extremely important for me to perform daily chores on my own. The 45-day training at AICB helped me to learn cooking, stitching, sewing, mobility, and operating computers. At the culmination of the course, I sat for an exam and received a laptop for my good performance. The laptop and the computer training proved quite enabling, especially when I was pursuing B.Ed., as it enabled me to prepare my assignments without putting up with the tantrums of the people, who I earlier would go to, to seek help from.

I had always known my calibre, but due to the haze of mistrust around me, I had begun doubting myself. When I came to Delhi, I could barely speak to people due to extremely low self-esteem and confidence, but all these years with AICB have taught me to see the beauty of life. AICB has been a constant support in my life as it made me believe in myself when my own parents did not. Today, I am a telecom operator at the Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi. Time and again, I have had to prove my worth before others in order for them to see beyond my blindness. I have come a long way and with AICB's unceasing support, I work and earn independently. My hesitation has disappeared, making me confident enough to take on the world.

*Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that is it stupid.*

—Albert Einstein

## 8

### The Boon of Scholarship

Neel,

If I were\_ to sum up my life struggles in one line, I would say- giving up is simply not an option for those, whose family offers them their constant support. Visually impaired since the age of seven, my last memory of being able to see was the concerned face of my mother before I lost my vision. Hailing from a small town in Madhya Pradesh, my parents and other family members have been a constant source of motivation and courage. Their care and concern for me manifested in my being admitted to one of the best schools of Indore.

Being a fairly bright student, I always performed well. Although, studying in an inclusive school, I needed constant help from one or the other classmates for notes. One of my friends used to provide me with the class notes to copy so that I could study. However, once it so happened that my friend could not pass the examination, while I managed to score the highest in the class. On seeing such results, my friend's parents and even other classmates advised her not to provide

any such help to me in future. Heeding to their advice, my dear friend started ignoring me and declined to offer any support.

Disheartened to the core, I now had to depend on other people who would barely help. Nonetheless, without any major help from anyone, I once again managed to score the highest in class. While my former friend and other classmates later apologized to me, I had realized by now that I should never again depend upon anyone if I have to achieve success in life.

After completing the school education, I got enrolled at a college in Indore. Again, I was put up against similar situations when other students of the college turned their backs on me and perceived me as their competition. Since I lacked technological knowledge, I suffered a setback in college studies. Realizing the potential role of technology in making myself academically self-dependent, I began to look for financial support to acquire a personal computer.

My father had always ensured that anything that was needed for my studies—notes, books, paid writers, and paid readers—were immediately provided to me. But I did not want to put excessive pressure on him. However, the need for a computer, a voice recorder and a few accessible softwares to support my education could not be curbed anymore. Realizing the immense possibilities offered through the use of a personal computer, I was eager to buy one. At this critical time, one of my teachers informed me about the scholarship program for college-going visually impaired girls offered by the All India Confederation of the Blind.

While applying for the scholarship, I was anxious yet excited as it would solve my study problems. I was nervous, thinking whether I would get the scholarship

*The Boon of Scholarship*

and excited because I knew that my life would become a lot easier if I could afford a personal computer. Finally, when the list of students was released, I could not control the happiness on seeing my name on it. Ecstatic after finding my name in the list, my dream of being able to afford a personal computer was finally fulfilled.

I bought myself a computer and a printer-scanner. The computer was a basic need for me as I was entering the arena of higher education. I was able to save money on books because I could find books on the internet. With the scholarship of AICB which continued for five years, I also purchased a good quality recording device to store the recordings. It was easier to save the lecture recordings in the computer and listen to them at a time of my choice.

I completed my post-graduation and enrolled for the M.Phil. course. All through my research, the computer became a priceless possession. I even secured a software to convert the scanned files into editable version of PDF which then could be read on the computer.

My joy on account of this academic fulfilment is all due to the scholarship offered by AICB which enabled me to afford several gadgets, fulfilling my dream of becoming independent. No longer did I need to ask other people for notes or any accessibility support. It is not my story only but the experiences of so many visually impaired women whose lives have been positively affected by AICB's Merit Scholarship Scheme.

*Encourage, lift and strengthen one another. For the positive energy spread to one will be felt by us all. For we are connected, one and all.*

— Deborah Dey

## 9

# Flight of Dreams

*Nishu Rai*

**S**itting beside the bank of Ganges, in my hometown Varanasi, I often counted airplanes crossing over and would sink deep into imagining a world beyond this. I would picture myself steering through the clouds and flying high to touch the zenith. Oblivious to the short validity of this dream, I was painting on the canvas of a fantasy world.

Chirpy and bubbly, as everyone called me, I believed in enjoying every moment of life. Everything was going smooth until one day, when I was in class eighth, I encountered difficulty in reading from the blackboard; it felt as if a thin translucent sheet was placed in between. Even after wiping my glasses several times, everything appeared hazy. It was quite strange as it had never happened to me before. I chose to continue without sharing this with my parents for a few days, but soon my teacher noticed that I was copying incorrectly from the board and brought this to the attention of my parents.

Life is uncertain, and if we think that we are control its reins, then we are certainly living under an illusion.

Life's unpredictability hit me hard when my parents took me to the doctor and we were informed that my eyesight was fading. It took us a while to absorb this bitter truth. "Why?", "How?", "What next?", "How can I stop it?" were few among the millions of questions which crowded my mind. The world around me began to crumble and darkness prevailed upon me with each passing day. Soon, the sun ceased to rise for me. This new world was quite uncanny; my search for an escape began. My parents' attempts to get my vision restored through a surgery at AIIMS, Delhi was only partially successful.

Despondent and dejected, I returned to Varanasi to continue studies in my old school. Due to this sudden change in my life, I had anticipated that things would not be the same, but had no idea that everything would change so drastically and I would not feel welcomed in my own school. It is still not clear to me, whether the acceptance of my visual impairment was difficult for me or for the people around. Relying upon my friends and teachers for mobility and reading became a routine. The vicissitude from being one of them to the feeling of otherness pushed me towards isolation. Soon, I slipped into depression as the state of negativity had turned into a suffocating cage.

It is a universal truth that every night brings a new morning, so it happened in my life as well. A ray of sunshine peeped inside my window when one of my relatives informed us about a special school for visually impaired in Delhi. My parents decided to send me there—we were not ready to surrender to fate.

On my way to Delhi, I could feel butterflies in my stomach. All sorts of mixed emotions and thoughts crowded my head. The previous visit to Delhi had

resulted in the shattering of my hopes, so I decided not to keep them high this time. After reaching the school, I met my fellow classmates who were going through similar or even worse conditions and, for the first time in life, I felt that I was not the only one who had been chosen to deal with this. I realized that I was not alone.

While I was becoming a part of this new world, increasing awareness opened several doors of opportunities for me. I came to know about the All India Confederation for the Blind (AICB) through my friends, who also introduced me to its path-breaking work for the visually impaired community. I passed my senior secondary examination with decent marks and got admitted in the B.A. Program of Miranda House, University of Delhi.

After I enrolled in the college, I got in touch with AICB and received its prestigious merit scholarship for visually impaired college going girls. This three-year scholarship equipped me with much needed confidence and independence. It gave me new wings to fly. I must admit that without this aid from AICB, it would have been difficult for me to pursue further studies. It was not just the matter of money, but the freedom and independence which I got, would not have been possible, had I solely relied upon my parents for financial needs.

During the period of three years, while I was studying in Miranda House, I stayed with my friends in a private hostel in Burari. The day-to-day struggles of commuting to and fro the college were aggravated by the absence of a hygienic environment due to unavailability of clean water in a hostel which was exclusively for females. That period was extremely

perplexing but somehow three years passed and I graduated from the college. A new situation awaited me now as I didn't want to continue under the adverse environment of that hostel anymore. AICB again came to my rescue and facilitated me with its hostel. The day I stepped in the new hostel, I was overwhelmed with its warmth and positivity.

Life seemed to be back on track as now I could devote all my time to studies without worrying about anything else. Apart from providing the hostel facility, AICB also opened up several opportunities for me. The organization offered a 45-day Intensive Training Program which made me competent to do my daily chores independently. I could now cook my own meals and travel back and forth from Delhi to Varanasi by myself.

After the completion of this training, I was also awarded with a laptop for performing exceedingly well. This added another feather to my cap. The laptop immensely facilitated my learning process as I could now read my textbooks, research more information on the internet and write on my own.

AICB has made me independent in most possible aspects of life. It gives me immense pleasure to see that my parents are proud of me. The relatives who once doubted my capabilities and questioned if I could ever be independent, now look at me as the individual I am, beyond my disability. AICB has guided me to regain a positive outlook towards life which was once lost.

I want to spread this positivity as much as I can. I am currently in the second year of my B.Ed. training in Sarvodaya Vidyalaya Co-ed. School in Pitampura. Being passionate about teaching, it is my motive to

**guide young and tender minds in making the society a better place to live. I have covered a long journey so far. The road was paved with many hurdles that I dodged on my way. Bruises have prepared me for all the challenges that await me in future and I know that I can handle them. No matter what, I will never give up.**

*The will to never give up and to be fearless.  
That's what I have.*

**—Christina Milian**



**1.SALMA BANU**



**2.CHHAYA**



3.KOLI SHILPA



4. RUPALI TIWARI



5.HEMA PRAJAPATI



6.PREMLATA



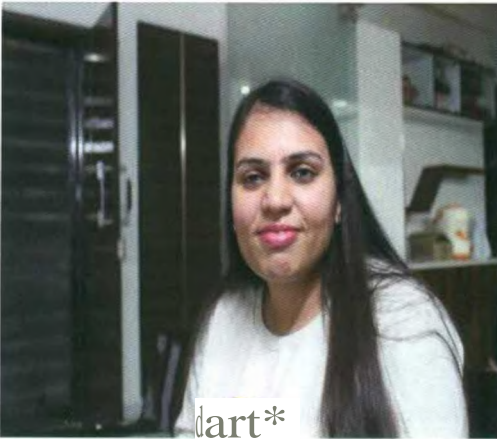
7. INDIRA DHEERAJ PAL



8. NEELU SHAH



9. NISHU RAI

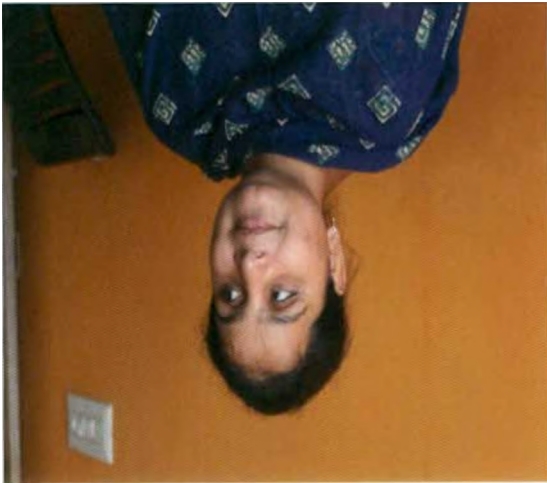


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16. TEJAL VYAS



17. ANKITA SINGH



18. RANI PATAIT



19.LATA BHARTIYA



20. DR.ANJALI BENNET

## 10

### Finding the Diamond Within

*Pand Goya!*

**Green** trees, blue sky and the shining sun, all of them look so beautiful, but have you ever **circled** wondered before sleeping, if you would be able to see these colours of nature the next day? I have. Every day and night, for six years I asked this question to myself. The fear of losing my sight everyday felt as if a sword was hanging over my head. In third grade, I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa. Quite a hefty term for a seven-year-old child! I didn't know what this disease was, all I could understand was, something unfortunate had happened as my mother's eyes were always brimmed with tears and my father was no longer cheerful. The doctor had prescribed me tons of medicines and some eye drops which I detested. After a few months, we all got back to the routine life, only in my case, it was modified with these tablets and drops.

I came face to face with my worst nightmare when I sat for my final exams in the ninth grade. It was the last day of exams and I was quite excited for the holidays. As I got the question paper, it seemed as if

someone had smeared ink all over it—nothing was clear. My mouth went dry, I knew the dreaded moment had arrived. The disease was going to take away my sight. I continued with the same school the following year as well, but day by day it was getting difficult for me to deal with the pressure of studies. I completed my high school, but the future appeared clouded with darkness.

My determination to study further was crumbling with this incurable disease and lack of awareness about visual impairment pushed me further into the darkness. Dealing with the lost sight became more difficult as time passed. Unwanted sympathy and whispers of relatives pierced my ears. Turning my back from everyone seemed to be the only option remaining. For the next three years, I confined myself to a self-imposed cage as meeting friends and family members only made me recall the pain of darkness. This step pushed me deeper towards the gloomy labyrinth of my mind. Those three years at home stripped me of the last piece of confidence I ever had and it demoralized me to the extent that I began living in despair.

While I had accepted my fate, life had different plans for me. One thing that life has taught me is that time keeps changing, and with time, changes destiny. One of my tuition teachers had relocated to Rohini and came to know about an institution for the visually impaired in that area. The very next day, she informed us about this special school, the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) and insisted that I visit the organization. But by then, the walls around me had grown stronger and stepping out of that cocoon was out of question.

## *Finding the Diamond Within*

After consistent efforts, my teacher finally convinced me and took me to AICB. I could clearly hear the chime of a new beginning, the moment I reached the organization and interacted with other people like myself. They were living independent lives and their aspirations for future infused me with hope. With an intention of giving meaning to my life, I enrolled in the Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) as well as the Intensive Training course for visually impaired women. Coming to AICB made me realize that my identity goes much beyond my visual impairment.

The three and a half months' CIU training made me confident enough to sit for an exam, excelling in which, I was rewarded with a laptop. I was on top of the world as this was my first achievement and now the sky was the limit. I felt as if no one in the world (including myself) could make me feel that I lacked anything. There was no stopping me.

After completing the course, I got enrolled for my undergraduate studies in Political Science (Honours) in Hindu College, University of Delhi. In this pursuit as well, AICB was my knight in shining armour. It provided me with the much needed merit scholarship. The dreams which were once lost in darkness, got their lustre back. My parents' happiness and pride knew no bounds as they too never expected that things could get this better. The scholarship kept me going through the three years of graduation resulting in my obtaining a first division in the final examination.

The next goal was to get a job. Who could have said that the girl who escaped from the world to live in isolation for three years would look for a job one day? Getting a job was not a piece of cake, but I was prepared for all the hard work that it required. Once

again, AICB's support came to my aid. The organization facilitated me with training in Mathematics and aptitude, which helped me in getting a job as a Probationary Officer in the State Bank of India. But my struggle didn't stop here. Even after crossing several obstacles to come so far, I still had to fight against the mentality that perceives that visually impaired persons cannot do a job perfectly, just because they are not able to see printed words.

Many people consider me as a "free-rider" or a charity case but things like these do not bother me anymore. Nobody has lived my life-1 have emerged as a strong person because of my experiences. The only way to tackle such negativity is to believe in yourself, know your worth and ignore the baseless judgments which people pass against you.

AICB has taught me many life lessons, one of which is to keep learning and keep moving ahead because there are endless possibilities to inspire and be inspired.

*Diamonds are to be found only in the darkness  
of the earth, and truth in the darkness of the  
mind.*

—Victor Hugo

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## 11

### I am One of You

~ 11r11 Uhl

**W**hat does the world look like? How does it feel to be like everyone and not being cornered because of a difference? Who decides what is normal and what is not?

These questions haunt me every time I am treated as different. I was born blind. The first time I felt that I was different was, when my sister went to school while I stayed at home. The meaning of blindness and its repercussions were unclear to me, but life was ready with its hard-hitting reality.

The curiosity and hunger for knowledge developed in me when I was just three years old. Though I didn't get a chance to study in a school at that age like my sister, the desire never extinguished. At the age of 5, my parents sent me away to stay in the Andh Kanya Prakash Gruh in Memnagar and study in an environment which was considered conducive for visually impaired children. While the opportunity excited me, my expectations soon turned into disappointment as I had to live away from my parents. Initially, everything seemed too confusing but

gradually, I adapted to the environment and kept myself busy in studies.

Whenever I visited home, I asked my grandfather to tell me stories from Mahabharata and Ramayana. I wondered what impact they would have, if they were narrated in Gujarati. During my school days itself, I had a burning desire to translate these great Indian epics in Gujarati. I have always been close to my culture and the richness of Gujarati and Sanskrit language enticed me the most. My affinity with these languages made it easier for me to choose a subject for higher studies.

While I was pursuing graduation in Sanskrit from L.D. Arts College, Gujarat University, one of my teachers informed me about the Merit Scholarship Scheme of the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) for college going visually impaired girls. Hesitant and sceptical, I opened the website of the organization and learnt about its path-breaking efforts and achievements in the field of visual impairment. Without any delay, I wrote to AICB and, to my surprise, the organization responded within a day and my journey with AICB began.

The award of the AICB merit scholarship brought about a sea-change in my life. Up till now everything was moving at a monotonous pace, but now with the financial support from this scholarship, the dynamics of my life took a sudden leap and so did my dreams. I could foresee myself getting closer to my goal of entering into the education sector. The scholarship made me independent and more confident than ever as I didn't have to ask anyone for money to access more books. For a long time, I had wanted to buy an Orbit Reader (a Braille display), but the high price made it

an impossible purchase—the scholarship made my wish come true. This opened a new way of reading multiple books in Braille.

After associating with AICB, my awareness about visual impairment and different aspects of life increased manifold. In the second year of graduation, I decided to apply for its 45-day Intensive Training Course for visually impaired women. While looking forward to this new experience, where the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds would be available, I packed my bags for Delhi. Apart from training on day-to-day aspects of life, the computer learning lessons which were provided were extremely helpful as before this, my education had not exposed me too much to technology. I also received a laptop after the completion of this training for my good performance. The 45-day experience at AICB cleared my vision for future. I returned from Delhi with more hopes and a desire to make my mark in life.

After graduating, I studied further and obtained a post-graduate degree in Sanskrit from the same college, and thereafter, I went on to enrol in Vaidshree M.M. Patel College of Education to pursue B.Ed. A new challenge awaited me here as I was the only blind student in the college and not everyone was as supportive as I had expected. Despite my passion and hard work, I had to prove myself time and again. The best defeat you can give to someone is not by reacting aggressively but by refusing to bow down to their negative attitude. One such achievement came my way, after I completed an eleven-week internship in a sighted school for teaching Sanskrit as well as Gujarati to ninth and tenth grade students.

*Testimonies of Success*

The experiences of my life have taught me several lessons. The journey from being denied education in a sighted school to teaching in one has been filled with many ups and downs. Coming down the long road, what AICB has made me realize is that I am a simple girl with aspirations and goals which any girl in my age can possess. The discrimination that many have tried to impose upon me has failed to push me back. In fact, it has pushed me so forward in life that I believe nothing is impossible for me.

*There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.*

— Robert M. Hensel

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## 12

### From Darkness to Light

*Rosluzi*

**T**here is something unique in the misty air of Uttarakhand; it makes you dream better. My dreams were no less than the magnitude of the mountains. My father has been my biggest support system in life—not for a moment did he make me feel that I was any different. He often took me to short treks, to the waterfall, where we talked about the beauty of nature for hours. If someone says that eyes are the only gateway to experience nature, they are wrong because though visually impaired since birth, I never felt lacking in anything as far as experiencing my surroundings was concerned.

When it came to my education, there were real challenges. We had no schools for the blind near my hometown, but my father made sure that I had access to early education at home. As time passed by, the need for schooling grew more intense and therefore at the age of nine, I was sent to a special school in Delhi. A new journey began from there—an expedition to success. The experience was completely different in

Delhi as there were no mountains and rivers to be with, so I sought friendship in books.

Coming to Delhi not only enhanced my knowledge, but also opened a gateway to awareness. I came to know about a number of institutions of and for the blind, the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) being one of them. After completing my senior secondary, I secured admission in Miranda House, University of Delhi, to pursue graduation in Hindi Hons. I knew that AICB helped visually impaired students with scholarships, study material, stationery and hostel facilities, therefore I reached out to the organization for the merit scholarship. I was lucky to receive this scholarship due to my academic performance in class twelfth.

The scholarship that I received for three years, while I stayed in the college hostel helped me to access the reading material and also to pay my hostel fee. Besides, it also made me independent and gave me the courage to go on with my studies. I still remember the day when I went to AICB with my father to receive the scholarship. The pride that I felt in his voice made me ecstatic. With a moist voice he patted my back and said, "I sent you to Delhi to find your wings and I am proud that you are finally ready to fly."

After graduation, I decided to study further and enrolled myself in Maharishi Valmiki College of Education to pursue B.Ed. In the second year of this course, I shifted to the AICB hostel. Since the age of nine, I had been living in hostels and I must admit that AICB's hostel facilities were the best of what I had come across so far. I had all the time in the world to focus on my studies as there was no other stress. After I moved to the hostel, I also began preparing for

competitive banking examinations along with my B.Ed. AICB helped me with study material needed to prepare for the exams and backed up my every other need. Within a year, I cleared one of the banking exams and got a job as a Probationary Officer in the Union Bank of India.

Coming to Delhi was the first life changing decision that my father took for me, and associating with AICB was the second important decision that I took for myself and it changed my life for good. I have gained a lot from the institution. The financial support that I got from here enabled me to build a good career. The best thing that I took from here was the key to happiness, that is, never to doubt my capabilities.

From the hills of Uttarakhand to the plains of Delhi, I have covered a long journey, a journey that had many obstacles on the way. The two constants that stayed with me in this exploration of self were darkness and light. I had been aware of the presence of darkness in my life, but it never stopped me from reaching out to the light.

*There are darkneses in life and there are lights,  
and you are one of the lights, the light of all  
lights.*

—Bram Stoker

## 13

### Envisioning a Bright Future

*Somti Antrute*

As kids we are told that fairy tales are fiction. **Aa** But I have lived one. The journey of my life and my struggles—from a small village of Madhya Pradesh to an employee in Canara Bank, Indore—is no less than a fairy tale. Blindness since birth was perhaps a silver lining for me as I never knew the aesthetic pleasures of vision and therefore never missed a memory of the same. I was lucky to be blessed with supportive parents who enrolled me at a special school for the visually impaired with the hope that I could receive proper training from the school before facing the harsh realities of the world. Even though the expenses for an inclusive school were difficult for my father to afford, it never deterred him from spending as much on me as was needed.

The only way for me as a child to return my parents' love and efforts was to excel in studies. Therefore, fulfilling their expectations, I performed much better than other children all through my school. Even when I was faced with the accessibility issue of reading material, I tried my best to gather as much information

as possible from whatever material was available to furnish my knowledge. But soon it became clear to me that in the ever-changing tech-savvy world, if I did not match my steps with the new and trending, my knowledge would be obsolete in comparison to the vast amount of information available around me.

At the moment of this critical realization, I got to know about a special competition organized at my school. The winner of this competition was to be given the opportunity to be sent to the All India Confederation of the Blind, where, on winning another competition, they would be awarded with an accessible laptop. This was the first time I heard about AICB. Bursting with hope and excitement of having a chance at receiving a laptop, I immediately applied for participating in this competition. Unfortunately, I could not win the competition, but this was not the end of my relationship with AICB. In fact, it was the beginning of my bond with the organization.

My father's struggles to financially support me and my other siblings had worried and disturbed me for a long time. Due to my visual impairment, excessive additional expenditure needed to be incurred upon me. Since I could not write my own exam papers, paid writers were required for my examinations and assignments. To make matters worse, the college I was studying in, did not provide much reading facilities to the visually impaired students. Since there were limited number of books available in the Braille script, money had to be spent on hiring readers in order to complete my readings.

After completing my graduation, I took admission in Masters in Political Science. In order to share my father's burden while not compromising with my

education, I looked for a way to fund my studies on my own. Having heard about the scholarship program offered by AICB back in graduation, with a lot of hope and positivity, I immediately applied for the scholarship. Since my academic record in graduation was fairly good, I received the scholarship from the organization comfortably.

The award of this scholarship was a life-changing moment for me as it made higher education and my life in totality, a lot easier. The constant added stress of expenditure which had bothered me during graduation days was no longer there. The timely scholarship from AICB was more than enough to pay for my studies. Also, no longer did I need to worry about the affordability of paid readers and writers. I was ecstatic because now any book that was required could be afforded by me without asking father for the same.

The scholarship offered me relief from the mental stress, and also, it brought financial ease to my father. My father is a simple man and has never complained despite facing hardships on my account. His overwhelmed expression at realizing what his daughter had achieved is unforgettable till today. He could not hold back his emotions on recognizing that without his expressing it, his daughter had been mature enough to not only comprehend his problems but find solutions for the same. For this, I shall always remain indebted to AICB.

By nature, I am a futuristic person who likes to plan well in advance. Even though the scholarship money was utilized in fulfilling all my basic requirements, I also ensured that the amount was utilized sensibly. Gradually, adequate money was saved from the scholarship fund to buy a laptop—the laptop

which completely transformed my life. I had been desperate to acquire a laptop ever since graduation but due to financial glitches, had not been able to afford one. Now was the time when, with the saved money from the AICB scholarship, I fulfilled this dream.

The laptop opened a vast expanse of knowledge which was earlier inaccessible to me. There was an unending availability of material online to study. Naturally, the laptop also increased my reach as a reader since more sources to read could be found on the internet which did not require the help of paid readers. With consistent practice over a period of two years, I was able to solve questions of bank examinations and reasoning sample papers on the laptop. It was an outcome of this hard work and dedication that I managed to clear the bank examination and receive the job letter from one of the major Indian banks, the Canara Bank.

The expression of my gratitude towards AICB could never be bound in words. All because of the scholarship offered by the Confederation, today I am financially independent and also capable enough to share the burden of my father. I cannot even imagine the state I would be in, had I not received the timely support and comfort from the Organization. I owe all my achievements—the call letter received from the bank, the educational gain through online study material, my Master's degree, the overall opportunities, and a better way of living—to the AICB scholarship. It was a guiding light which paved the path for me towards success and empowerment.

*Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality  
to be experienced.*

—Soren Kierkegaard

## 14

### **Breaking the Cobwebs Around**

*Pinki*

If asked to define my life in two words, I would say—"courage" and "determination". I still remember the day when, at a very young age, my parents had shared with me, the fact of my visual impairment—perhaps a difficult thing for them to do, but once done, they seemed to be rather relieved. Hailing from an agricultural family of Haryana, I have been fighting against the demeaning attitude of the society since childhood. The desire to break away from this cobweb around me as soon as possible has been of prime importance to me.

Since facilities for the education of visually impaired children were not available in my district, I was admitted in Tagore International School, Delhi. While studying in the third standard, when I was told that visually impaired students were not allowed to opt for theatre as an extracurricular activity, my dejection was not as much as my shock at the 'normative' practice of the school. Not being able to resist my angst, I expressed my discontent against the

**forced discriminatory rules. Having the spine to fight for the right, my iron-willed determination overcame the pertinacious norms of the school and I was finally able to opt for theatre. For next few years of school life, I remained highly active in the theatre, relishing the joy of being able to constantly defy all the odds and obstacles and make my own way in the haze.**

**The confidence that I had attained in my childhood gave me immense courage to strive for complete independence in my adulthood. I fiercely wanted to debunk the idea that visually impaired persons can never be self-dependent. My father was a farmer and even though he owned land, I was mature enough to comprehend the difficulties in the life of a farmer. Therefore, not only did I want to subvert the narrow mindset of the society but also desired to become financially independent so that my father no longer had to bear the burden of my expenses. This heartfelt desire was finally fulfilled when I came in contact with the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB).**

**I learned about the scholarships offered by AICB from my batchmates in the Miranda House College, University of Delhi. The organization not only enabled me to become financially independent but also provided me with constant support and guidance in choosing a right path for myself. Intensifying my attention towards studies after learning about the scholarship, I was desperate to receive the financial aid. Hard work and determination brought me to the desired path and I managed to score good marks in the college, as a result of which I was able to receive the scholarship from AICB.**

**The scholarship continued for next few years during which I was able to bear my own expenditure**

in Delhi with the help of financial aid. One of the biggest challenges for us blind students is the unavailability of the books and I was faced with the same problem when I got admitted in the University of Delhi. The dearth of Braille books forced me to buy expensive books to support my education. It was impossible to request my father to spare such hefty amount of money on my education because he had already done all that he could. In such desolate times, I looked towards AICB for support. Since I was a bright student who had performed well throughout graduation, I could comfortably receive the scholarship from AICB. This scholarship aid allowed me to buy as many books for myself as I could, to read to my heart's content. However, I did not stop at buying books but instead scanned those books and ensured that other visually impaired students like myself could have access to these books.

Continuing on my journey towards success, I enrolled in the post-graduate English course at University of Delhi. I have read literature more than anything and this is perhaps what stopped me from quitting education which I would have, had it not been for the financial support of AICB. The merit scholarship ensured that I was not forced to depend on any one to achieve my dreams. If not for this scholarship, never would I have been able to pursue and complete post-graduation. With the backing of financial aid, I could focus stress-free towards my academics. Owing to my dedication and hard work, and the financial aid acquired from the Confederation, I was able to perform well in Masters and soon, also able to crack the UGC-NET examination.

Today, I am gainfully employed as a teacher of

English literature at the Kurukshetra University of Haryana. All these blessings would never have been possible without the support of AICB. It would have been extremely difficult for me to become self-dependent and achieve success under the earlier financial stress. Today, I am content with my job and hope to continue as a lecturer in university. Meanwhile, I also want to continue my research and enrol for the PhD course. AICB has been a great helping hand to me and I hope they continue to fulfil the desires of all blind students who dream.

*Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.  
Nothing can be done without hope and  
confidence.*

— Helen Keller

## 15

### A Flight Just Begun

*Soni Tomo r*

**T**enth July, 2015 was one of the most exciting days of my life. Like every other student aspiring to get admitted to a prestigious university, my struggle had finally paid off and I was on my way to the Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi—my first day of college life. Alone but determined, I made my way through the heavy July showers. It was my first experience venturing out without any help, away from the warmth and familiarity of home, to reach the college on my own.

As I walked on, my thoughts wandered, reminiscing how I had lost my vision when I was hardly two years old due to jaundice. My family tried all that was possible to get my eyesight restored, but finally decided to reconcile with the unchangeable state of affairs. Gradually, I learnt to accept my visual impairment as a part of my being. Early moments of this new way of my life are still fresh in my memory.

As facilities for visually impaired children are usually absent in rural areas, a small village of Hapur district, where I lived, was no exception to this scenario. Hearing that there were good institutions in Delhi

which helped provide quality education to visually impaired children, my family decided to admit me in one such institution in Delhi. Thanks to my elder sister, we were able to move to Delhi in 2013 and I could carry forward my studies at DAV Public School, Vasant Kunj. Despite the limited availability of accessible reading material and other hindrances, I was determined to persevere through my struggles, as a consequence of which, I passed class twelfth board examinations with 87 per cent marks.

As I entered IP College for my orientation day, I looked forward to a new and exciting life. However, the path through graduation was also full of challenges. Without the supporting hand of my father, it was my elder sister who took on the responsibility of meeting my financial requirements. Motivated by her kind gesture, I tried my best to not only excel in academics but also in other constructive activities. An expression of this resolve was my active involvement as the Secretary and later, as the President of the College Students' Union of the Blind.

However, as time went by, my desire to become financially independent, and if possible, to be a support to my family as my sister had been to me, became stronger. It was at this point that I came to know about the merit scholarship scheme for visually impaired college-going female students offered by the All India Confederation of the Blind. A bit uncertain, I applied for this scholarship and to my extreme joy, was selected for it.

The award of this scholarship became a turning point during my graduation years as it helped me, among other things, in availing the college hostel facility, thereby overcoming the difficulty of commuting every day to the college. Through this, I

was able to devote more time for my studies. My graduation degree with honours from University of Delhi brought immense happiness to me, especially because I became the first female in my family and first visually impaired female of my village community to reach this level of education.

**My relationship with AICB** was further strengthened when, in January 2016, it conducted an examination for visually impaired college going girls with a view to provide them with laptops. I participated in the same and my hard work paid off once again—I was invited by AICB to be honoured with a laptop. The laptop has been one of the highest honours I have ever received. It was a momentous day for me when I went to AICB to receive the laptop. I was happy that my sister, who had been a great support and had shared my struggles, was on the stage with me at the time of receiving the laptop. The laptop was not only a great source of joy, but also opened new vistas of learning and information. Now I could read the textbooks on my own without taking the help of any reader. I could also access the internet and find new material there.

The bond between AICB and myself deepened even further, when, after graduation, I got enrolled in the **Short-hand Training course** offered by the Confederation. Proficiency in Hindi typing was never my virtue, unlike my other visually impaired friends and I wanted to change this situation. Therefore, with a lot of enthusiasm and expectations of learning something new and challenging, I went ahead with the training in Stenography and Hindi typing. When I look back today, I realize that without doing the Stenography course, I would not have been even capable of filling any of my job application forms at the first place, let alone get employment.

During my training period at AICB, I was also able to receive a comfortable lodging facility at the AICB hostel along with the warmth of my fellow hosteliars. The encouraging ambience of the hostel and the Confederation motivated me to prepare for important open competitive examinations of the Government sector, such as the Staff Selection Commission (SSC). As I await the results of my third level SSC examination, I am positive that my lucky charm, AICB, which has been my life-changer, will work for me again.

Coming from a financially unstable background myself, I can identify with the plight of the deprived classes at a personal level and therefore take deep interest in social work. However, my family is my priority and I want to make them financially secure. I hope that my education and job will be a source of inspiration for the whole family as well as for the entire community. I should also confess, that if I was not visually impaired, then I might not even have had the opportunity to study after Senior Secondary. I am extremely grateful to my sister for taking the responsibility to take me to Delhi and to AICB without which, I would not have attained success. In AICB, I found a home away from home that let me forge a path forward, whether it was through the much-needed scholarship, the assistive laptop or the stenography course. But this is just the beginning of my flight.

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
but I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
and miles to go before I sleep.*

—Robert Frost

## 16

### The Melody of Life

*leo tyas*

People have always questioned my abilities, despite my best efforts to adapt according to the surroundings. Many times I found myself questioning my existence but life is all about moving on and fighting your fears. The struggle continues.

Due to my visual impairment, I was separated from my family at an early age for twelve long years as I had to study in a special school for education. Being a shy and soft-spoken girl who was not confident enough to make friends, often I was bullied by my classmates. They refused to help me whenever I needed any help in studies. The only source of relief for me during such moments of agony was music. I discovered my talent of singing at a very early age and began taking lessons through whatever sources which were available in the school.

While I attempted to gain confidence with my new found talent by performing at various school functions, the mockery I received for being on stage by my peers pushed me further. No matter how hard I tried, I could

not be one of them. I was always made to feel as an outsider.

In the final term of senior secondary, I first heard about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) from a friend who had enrolled in the 45-day training program. Although life had made me sceptical about almost everything, I decided to take the life-changing decision of enrolling myself in this program. Previously being exposed to unjust and prejudiced treatment, my self-confidence had dropped down to zero and I surely did not want to continue like that.

My primary motive of coming to AICB was to build upon my capabilities. The 45-day training helped me in acquiring new knowledge in many fields such as computers, mobility, daily living skills and home management. For the first time in life, I felt that I was a part of my surroundings. I also found many good friends at the Confederation who encouraged me at every step. I still remember the day, when they motivated me to perform at the Cultural Program of AICB. The applause that I received that day not only increased my confidence, but also made me believe that I had the fire within me.

At the culmination of the training program, I sat for an exam conducted by the organization. Upon scoring well in the same, I won myself a laptop. Through the laptop, I could now listen to varieties of musical compositions, record and save my own compositions and search for new techniques of improving musical proficiency online. The motivation that I received through this, as well as my entire stay at AICB—not only from my friends and teachers, but from everyone who was a part of the organization, reinvigorated my passion to pursue music. The girl,

who had been ridiculed at social functions all her life, was finally getting the appreciation she deserved.

I had known that coming to Delhi was a bold step but had no idea that these forty-five days would entirely change my perspective towards life. After coming back to Mumbai, feeling more determined than ever, I decided to follow my passion and completed my graduation and post-graduation in music. After completing my Masters, I have been taking lessons to improve my vocals. The performances rendered by me in various shows and competitions have been much appreciated.

Presently, I am preparing for government jobs for financial security. The experience at AICB has redefined my limits and has also taught me to keep fighting for what I deserve. It gave me the sense of inclusion that I craved for all my life. I can no longer sit back and let the society judge me. And this is just my beginning.

*Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.*

—Helen Keller

## 17

### Opening Vistas of Possibilities

*Ankita Singh*

**I**t is true that hard work pays off, but sometimes working hard and firm determination fail to pave a smooth way for you. No matter how many obstacles come your way, holding on to the belief of surpassing them all, does make you meet your destination some day.

Born in Lucknow, I was around one and a half years old and had just begun to understand forms of colours and shapes of nature around me. But fate decided to push me into an abyss of darkness, when I lost my sight due to chickenpox. I don't remember how much pain I had felt but the disappearance of colours from life was surely incomprehensible. Every effort was made by my parents to have my sight restored but every time we met a different doctor, we got the same answer.

When science failed to return my sight, taking recourse to religion remained the only option. Visiting temples and meeting faith healers became a daily routine. But nothing made my condition any better and finally my parents were resigned to my condition.

Thereafter, all their focus shifted to giving me the best education in their reach and they sent me to Dehradun to pursue my studies.

After completing my senior secondary, I scored enough marks to secure a seat in Miranda House, University of Delhi. This was the first step towards my dream of living a successful and independent life. I was ecstatic on getting admission in one of the top colleges of Delhi. I dedicated myself to studying hard and scored well in the first year of graduation. After I completed the first semester and went back home, I realized that living in Delhi was expensive and since my father was the sole earner of the family, he would find it difficult to financially support my studies. It appeared to me that I would have to find ways to meet my education and living expenses myself if I wanted to stay in Delhi and continue higher education. As I looked for a way out, a ray of hope came into my life when one of my teachers in college informed me about the merit scholarship, offered to visually impaired college going girls by the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB). I instantly applied for the scholarship and my situation eased when I got selected for the scholarship.

Life again seemed to be coming back on track. The financial aid from AICB helped me to pay my hostel fees for the next two years of graduation. Even for my subsequent studies, I continued receiving the scholarship for a total of 7 years, as I completed B.Ed and Masters. The scholarship not only solved my financial troubles but also boosted my self-confidence.

I sat for a computer exam organized by AICB and received a laptop for performing well. The laptop helped me a lot throughout my studies as I could access plethora of e-books. Studying on laptop also enhanced

my reading speed. After the completion of my graduation, I registered for the Intensive Training Program at the organization and closely learned the intricacies of day-to-day life. During the 45-day training period, I was taught stenography and computer operation as well. The main aim of the training was to make visually impaired girls independent and confident. The mobility course was also a part of the program and now I am confident enough to commute alone, without any hesitation. The program also gave me exposure to develop leadership qualities. Today, I am able to cook, stitch, sew and perform other chores easily, only because of AICB.

As a child, I loved playing cricket and I remained active in sports during my schooling as well. It has been two years now that I am a part of Delhi's Blind Women's Cricket Team. Seeing my leadership skills, I was named the captain of the team, soon after joining. I aim to play for the national team someday. I have been recently appointed as a Hindi teacher in a Delhi government school and I hope to continue my passion of playing cricket along with my teaching career.

Crossing many barriers, I have come so far in life and hope to continue living with the same spirit. The contribution of AICB in my life has been like a backbone. It wouldn't have been possible to achieve all that I have, without the support of AICB. I look forward to a time when I would be able to get involved in its activities so that, in my own small way, I can do for others what AICB has done for me.

*We have more possibilities available in each moment than we realize.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

## 18

### **Holding on to the Spirit of Life**

*Rani Patait*

I can't see what the world looks like, but that never stops me from experiencing the exuberance of life. My father taught me to start each day with happiness and hopefulness. But life is not all about sunshine and rainbows, one has to deal with it even when storms hit. My life has also been a concoction of mirth and grief.

I lost my eyesight at the age of 3, but I didn't stop appreciating life's beauties. My happy and jaunty attitude kept me and my family optimistic. My father was the biggest support for me and he was the reason that my blindness couldn't overpower my positive outlook. I was indeed a mischievous kid, but was also a dedicated and hard working student. After I completed my schooling, I came to know about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB). I knew that my father toiled day and night to fulfill our necessities as well as desires and I wanted to share some of his responsibilities by becoming financially independent.

Life changed after I completed my senior secondary as till then, my school made all the course books available in Braille, but now I had to arrange most of them on my own. The mere expenses of Braille books and notes were equivalent to the college fees. It pained me every time I had to ask my father for money; I wanted to share his financial burden. While I was looking for a way out, a new path opened before me in the form of the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB). I succeeded in availing the merit scholarship offered by the organization, on the basis of my marks in class 12th. Finally, my worries seemed to be ending as I could pay my hostel fees and also afford a paid reader for all the books which were not available in Braille. My interest as well as performance in academics improved substantially.

I began walking on the path lit with sunshine, unaware of the darkness that awaited on the next turn. One day, after I woke up and continued with my daily routine with all the cheerfulness as I always had, the shocking news of my father's demise turned my world upside down. Everything turned black and gloomy; there was no hope left in me. The strongest support of my life was gone forever and I was left alone. For the next two years, I locked myself up in the house enveloped in negativity. Life had lost its purpose without him.

I was buried under the debris of my shattered hopes, until my brother and mother coerced me to start afresh and find a purpose again. But when I looked around, I found nothing but darkness. It was then that AICB again came to my rescue. I enrolled in its Intensive Training Program as the first thing that I wished to learn, was to be independent. All my life, I

had been dependent on my father and now it was time to manage everything on my own. I learned to commute without anyone's help. The training also allowed me to perform daily chores such as cooking, stitching, and sewing. Had AICB not lent its support, I would still have been locked up within the walls.

At the end of the training program, I was awarded with the laptop by AICB for my dedication and good performance. The laptop opened up several doors of opportunities for me; even if I couldn't find a job, I could have earned my living by working from home. By the end of the training, I got a job at the Indian Academy of Highway Engineers.

The void inside me after my father's death can never be filled, but I have learned to live my life again. Today, I have a job security and have also become confident and independent enough to be on my own. AICB became my support after my father. It was during the training period that I discovered my passion to become a Radio Jockey. I do have a stable government job that pays me well, but I want to get out of this comfort zone and chase my ambition. Life has taught me many lessons; holding on to the inner spirit being the most important one. I aspire to become the first blind female Radio Jockey of India and I believe that my dream will come true some day.

*There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.*

—Napoleon Bonaparte

## 19

### **A Journey Towards Self-dependency**

*Lata Bhartiya*

**E**qual treatment is not just a right of every human being; but also an emotional and social need. Discrimination doesn't always have to mean ill-treatment, sometimes extra care and attention also makes you feel unwanted and a burden.

At the age of 2, I became blind due to chickenpox. For a long time, I couldn't differentiate between other kids and myself. Oblivious of my visual impairment, I continued playing with my friends as before. The only times I had a realization of my condition was when I used to get injured while others would easily escape bruises and pain. As time passed and I grew older, I discerned that I felt different from others not just because I couldn't see, but also because of the 'special' treatment everyone gave me. My family tried to keep me inside a feathered cocoon, where I was not given any responsibilities, while my siblings shared them equally. They assumed that they were trying to protect me from any mishap, but this had a totally negative impact on me. I was losing self-confidence with every act of 'generosity'.

## *Testimonies of Success*

I became conscious of my blindness with every passing day and turned out to be heavily dependent on others for everything. The protective attitude of my family, relatives, neighbors and even friends made me feel worse and suppressed my confidence to the extent that each day appeared to be a challenge for me. I was a reluctant recipient of sympathy, but I knew that I neither needed nor deserved this unequal treatment. I was as smart as anyone else around me. At every step in life, I was struggling to prove my worth to everyone who doubted my capabilities.

Being good at studies from the beginning, I found refuge in books as these never discriminated against me. In school, I had heard much about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) as the founder of the organization, Mr. J.L. Kaul, frequently visited there. His words always inspired me and charged me with positivity to live life to the fullest. I began spinning dreams of associating with AICB and living in its hostel since class 6th. As it is said that if you wish for something from your heart, it does come true; my wish too came true.

After completing my schooling, I moved to Delhi for graduation and received the merit scholarship offered by AICB. This became the first milestone in my journey towards success. I also began living in the hostel as soon as I completed first year of my graduation. My parents felt extremely elated after hearing about my first big achievement and this further pushed my determination to strive for more.

While on one hand, things were getting easier due to AICB, on the other hand, new challenges popped up every day. One of the biggest hurdles was my dependence on others for mobility and daily chores. The need for assistance to move from one class to

another was a major problem. Though I had a close friend who helped me in mobility, I could never make peace with my reliance on others. Moreover, there was no one to guide me when she was absent. It was then, when I came face to face with the negative attitude of society towards persons with disabilities. Sometimes, I wondered if my efforts were of any use as people would continue seeing me with their biased and prejudiced lens, no matter how many times I proved that I was one of them. My classmates would often ignore me and evade taking any responsibility. This was when I realized that the first thing I needed to overcome was my dependence.

With firm determination, I joined the Intensive Training Course offered by AICB. The program helped me in becoming self-reliant by imparting mobility training as well as teaching me skills about various day-to-day activities, such as cooking, sewing, stitching and soon. By the end of the training, I felt confident enough to step outside the premises of AICB, walk on the road and even travel from one place to another, without anybody's help. I had never felt so enabled and ecstatic before. That day I understood that believing in oneself was the most important lesson one should learn in life; it makes everything possible.

With AICB's constant support, I graduated with excellent marks and was selected to work at the Home Ministry. Today, I am content with my job, but stagnation has never been an option for me. I want to keep moving ahead in life and try and help to make our society a better place to live.

*Courage and strength is not the absence of fear -  
it's refusing to assume the role of a victim.*

— Anne Wafula Strike

## Liberating from the Snares of Life

*Dr. Anjali Bennette*

**W**hen life brings you face to face with your biggest fear, you are left with two options—to look into its eyes and challenge for a tough fight, or to bow down and surrender to the fate. Your choice will decide what you become.

At the age of 7, I felt my eyes deceiving me for the first time. I wondered why my teacher smeared chalk on the blackboard. But when I saw my other classmates not objecting and copying from the board, I was dumbstruck. I ran towards the washroom to rinse my eyes and came back, but, to my horror, nothing changed. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. As soon as I got back home, I informed my parents, who took me to the doctor. After a series of tests, we were told that I was suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic disorder of the eyes that led to loss of sight over time. The disease had no cure; the doctor informed us after taking a long pause. I moved aside and pinched myself to come back to the real world, but alas, it was right in front of me. My parents didn't believe what the doctor said and we kept visiting

doctors and lived in denial, until the reality of life grabbed us from the collar. While we were making every possible effort to fight back, my sight was diminishing with every passing day. Finally, at the age of 23, I met with my worst nightmare. The world turned lightless to me.

I was pursuing masters when I completely lost my sight. Up until now, I had difficulty in recognizing colours, reading and writing, but nevertheless, I was functionally independent. I did not need to rely on anyone for my daily chores and had made peace with whatever I could do on my own. But, this change turned my life completely upside down. My lost sight made me dependent on others for every trivial task which took away my self-confidence. Realizing that I had to take support even for mobility, I felt suffocated.

However, my blindness couldn't stop me from moving ahead. With the determination to study further, I enrolled in B.Ed. The struggle of juggling between my daily life and career continued to grow more intense with time. This was when I heard about the All India Confederation of the Blind (AICB) from my two classmates, who were associated with the organization. I was enticed to learn about the Intensive Training Program that AICB offered and expressed my wish to join the program to my parents. But, every time I decided to apply for it, something or the other came in the way. Soon, I was married and also joined Ph.D. course which made it next to impossible to enroll in the program. While a new journey started, there was still something lacking that made me dissatisfied with life. The next year, I came to know that both my friends had got jobs in bank as P.O. They told me about

their experiences at AICB and how the training program changed their lives. I realized the emptiness of my life and that very moment, decided to enroll in AICB's Intensive Training Course.

My husband supported me to come to Delhi and register for the program. I had a gut feeling from the beginning that things would change by the end of this training. Dependency on others had always been one of the worst after-effects of my blindness and despite having a good career, I couldn't get rid of it. The training program was a golden chance to achieve what I had wanted for so long and I didn't want to miss it. The next 45 days, I dedicated myself to discover the unexplored side of my personality. After the end of the program, I was awarded a laptop for my excellent performance. My gut feeling was true; I was no more the same person I was before. I emerged out to be a confident and independent person, who could achieve anything with the new found confidence.

Today, I can cover any distance to reach the destination on my own. I am no more hesitant in going out. The biggest hurdle of my life has been removed by AICB and I'll be indebted to the organization for this, all my life.

Associating with AICB was a life-changing decision. Had I not joined the program, I wouldn't have found this self-confidence. After the training program, I joined as Assistant Professor (Ad-Hoc) in Ramjas College, University of Delhi. I couldn't even have imagined reaching this far a few years ago, but AICB taught me to dream and to believe that I could achieve it, no matter how many obstacles life places on my way. I have finally broken the chain and am prepared for what may come.

*Liberating from the Snares of Life*

*Happy is the man who has broken the chains  
which hurt the mind, and has given up  
worrying once and for all.*

—Ovid

## About the Book

In a world that generally tends to marginalise the visually impaired, this collection, perhaps a first of its kind, is a refreshing read offering first-person experiential narratives of twenty visually impaired girls and women who have achieved significant milestones by their tenacious resistance through perseverance and the critical support provided by two major organizations-CBM and AICB. These stories of struggles and successes, each unique in its own way, take the readers on a roller coaster ride of their trauma, pain, resistance, hope and finally their emergence as champions of victory. These heart-warming stories will hopefully inspire all those in similar situations and/or in need of hope.

## About the Editor

Anil K. Aneja has tirelessly worked as a champion for the rights of persons with disabilities in general and the visually impaired in particular for more than 25 years. For his contributions to this sector, he was conferred the National Award for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities by the President of India in 2014. Presently a Professor in the Department of English, University of Delhi and the Vice President of All India Confederation of the Blind, his achievements have been a source of inspiration for many. He has, to his credit, four books, several papers and numerous conference presentations in India and abroad.



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