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JOBS & CAREERS

THE JOB SITUATION FOR THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED IS SLOWLY IMPROVING. HERE ARE THE RESOURCES TO USE

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

BY ANAGH PAL

**A**shwin Karthik S.N., a software engineer at Mphasis, and Chidambar Vishnu Joshi, senior delivery manager at IBM India, have something in common. Both are heroes in their own right. Twenty-four-year-old Karthik is the first BE graduate in India who has a condition of Cerebral Palsy-Quadriplegic, the severest form that affects all four limbs. Joshi, 38, who is unable to use his left leg due to polio, received the National Award for Life Time Professional Achievements in 2006.

They have made a place for themselves in corporate India, which has not been very receptive to the differently abled.

### GROUND REALITY

The Persons With Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 recognises blindness, low vision, leprosy-cured, hearing impairment, loco motor disability, mental retardation and mental illness.

Though the Act encourages the industry to employ 5 per cent of the differently abled, and the public sector has a 3 per cent reservation since 2003, the reality is not promising. The last authentic study by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) involving top 100 Indian firms in 1999 puts the figure at a mere 0.5 per cent for the public sector and 0.2 per cent for private. This, when the differently abled constitute 7 per cent of India's population.

The reason behind such a poor record is lack of awareness and the mistaken notion that the differently abled are not fit for mainstream jobs. "Attitude remains an issue. Stereotypes of what a disabled person can or can't do still persist," says Javed Abidi, honorary director, NCPEDP.

### WINDS OF CHANGE

Positive changes have come about over the last decade, but slowly. Some factors that brought about these changes.

**Corporate social responsibility (CSR).** "For companies that have not hired the differently abled in the past, the changes due to increase in awareness and the importance of CSR," says Shanti Raghavan, founder and managing trustee, EnAble India, Bangalore, an organisation with a mission to empower the differently abled. Such initiatives improve the public image of a company as it shows that apart from economic benefits, the company has social objectives too. Companies, especially MNCs, may also have diversity targets.

**Skilled manpower shortage.** This is making companies look at alternate resource pools, especially in IT, retail and hospitality. "We are in a talent-driven market and look for it wherever it is available including diverse employable groups," says Amitabh Hajela, vice-president and global head of HR, EXL Service, a Noida-based BPO, which has different abled employees.

**Performance and loyalty.** It has also been seen that the differently abled generally have better attendance records and are less likely to shift jobs. So, it makes business sense to employ them.



Photo by M. GEELESHIVU

### INHERENT CHALLENGES

A shift in HR policy is not enough to bring about substantial change. Other challenges abound.

**Access to education.** In most cases, conventional educational systems are not accessible to the differently abled. "This is coupled with the lack of teachers who may be able to communicate effectively with people with sensory disabilities," says Shivani Gupta, director, AccessAbility, a disability employment specialist.

**Assistive aids.** Many buildings are not even equipped with basic amenities like ramps or elevators that are wide enough for wheelchairs. Companies also need to



## ASHWIN K. S.N. 24

SOFTWARE ENGINEER, MPHASIS

All four of his limbs have been affected by cerebral palsy

**"My superiors and colleagues are very supportive... I will be proud if somebody is inspired by me."**

provide for assistive aids like software and equipment that enable the differently abled to perform specific tasks. "Most of the solutions have to be customised to the individual's needs; it is not possible to have a standard one-size-fits-all solution," says Elango R., chief HR officer, Mphasis:

### BUILDING A CAREER

For one who is differently abled, getting a job would require acquiring specific skills and approaching the employers through the right avenues.

**Job functions.** Back-end job functions that do not involve a lot of traveling or customer interaction are more suitable (see *Suitable Roles*). At a more specific level, the job profiles could depend on the nature and extent of the disability.

HR consultants specialising in employing the differently abled have researched on

job mapping, helping companies understand specific jobs that suit a person with a certain disability. "It is just about following the HR principle of having the right person in the right job," says Anubhuti Mittal, founder, Anubhuti-Diversity Solutions, an HR consultancy designed exclusively for employable diverse profiles. "Just like qualifications and work experience, the type of disability should be an assessment criterion instead of blanket rejection," she says.

Technology has also broadened the reach of the differently abled. With the help of screen reading software like Microsoft Jaws, the visually impaired can work efficiently on the computer.

"Employing Persons With Disabilities", an ITC-AccessAbility study that provides the skills matching for the hospitality industry as an example, can give an idea (see *Skill Matching: Identifying Suitable Jobs*).

**Acquiring skills.** "Apart from education, the method of which would vary depending on the type of disability, the differently abled might have to equip themselves with required software and other soft skills that are job specific," says Aapna Keshav, senior principal consultant, Honeybee HR Solutions, which places the disabled.

**Getting in.** As very few companies are open to hiring the differently abled, it is not easy to get a job through regular channels like newspaper advertisements. Most of the companies prefer candidates referred by a disability employment specialist. These specialists work in tandem with NGOs and employers to enable the differently abled to take up mainstream jobs. It is best to approach them as they will also help identify the candidate's potential. There are also a few job portals that cater exclusively to the differently abled (see *Enablers*).



## CHIDAMBAR VISHNU JOSHI 38

SENIOR DELIVERY MANAGER, IBM INDIA

He can't use his left leg due to polio

"One needs to have a positive attitude and commit oneself to succeed in life."

### SETTING BENCHMARKS

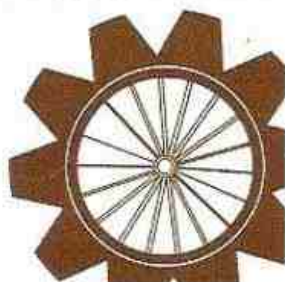
Some companies have a reputation for employing differently abled people. Some of the trendsetters are Infosys BPO, Intel Technology India, TTC Welcome Group, NTPC and Tata Motors. A few others deserve special mention.

**IBM.** It had its first differently abled employee in 1914. Since then, it has taken several initiatives in this regard, such as organising roundtables with the differently abled to understand and address their needs and setting up IT camps for differently abled children. Prathima V. Shetty, lead (India diversity), IBM India/South Africa, says, "We have also made improvements, such as ramps, Braille signage in elevators and wide doors, in our new locations and are upgrading the old facilities." **Titan.** The differently abled constitute about 4 per cent of Titan's present employee strength. Says Manoj Chakravarti, senior advisor (corporate), Titan Industries: "Titan's recruitment strategy involves combing the countryside for candidates aged between 18 and 24 and adopt appropriate selection processes, depending on the disability. Steps are also taken to address their special needs and provide training to enhance technical competence and computer literacy. Titan has realised with time that the differently abled are more loyal and far more focused on the job."

**Mphasis.** Apart from providing infra-structural facilities, it has set up a long-cycle training program called 'Project Communicate' to select differently abled persons from small towns and rural districts and train them to be IT-FTEs professionals. Karthik got placed at Mphasis through EnAble India.

"I will be proud if people are inspired by me," he says. With corporate India waking up to the huge talent pool it has hitherto ignored, we can expect that he will have many reasons to be proud of in future. **ii**

[anagiyal@outlookindia.com](mailto:anagiyal@outlookindia.com)



## SUITABLE ROLES

### BACK-END FUNCTIONS

Programmer  
Trainer  
Data entry operator  
Telemarketing executive  
Customer service executive  
Medical transcriber

### SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

HR executive  
Service management executive  
Finance executive  
Source: EnAble India

## THE ENABLERS

### AccessAbility

111/2, Aruna Asaf Ali Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi  
Pin: 110070; Contact No. **011-3266-0862**  
[www.accessability.co.in](http://www.accessability.co.in); [employability.co.in](http://employability.co.in) (job portal)

### Anubhuti-Diversity Solutions

Post Box: 3619, Lajpat Nagar Post Office, New Delhi  
Pin: 110024; Contact No. **0-93116-07754**  
[www.anubhuti.biz](http://www.anubhuti.biz)

### Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC), Bangalore

1615, 1st B Cross, 3rd Main, GF, Chandra Layout  
Pin: 560040; Contact No. **080-3221-7588**

### EnAble India

694, 6A Cross, Koramangala, 3rd Block, Bangalore  
Pin: 560034; Contact No. **080-4110-1390**  
[www.ENABLE-india.org](http://www.ENABLE-india.org)

### Honeybee HR Solutions

#354, 1st floor, 19th 'F' Main Road, 1st 'N' Block,  
Rajajinagar, Bangalore  
Pin: 560010; Contact No. **080-4094-6174**  
[www.honeybeets.com](http://www.honeybeets.com)

### Jobs4Disabled

174, Street No. 1, Gandhipuram, Coimbatore  
Pin: 641012; Contact No. **0422-249-0262**  
[www.jobs4disabled.com](http://www.jobs4disabled.com) (job portal)

## SKILL MATCHING: IDENTIFYING SUITABLE JOBS\*

Profile	Physical disability		Speech & hearing disability		Vision impaired	
	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe
Team leader/manager	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Cashier	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Receptionist	✓	✓	✓			
Front office/PR manager	✓				✓	
Restaurant manager	✓				✓	
Travel and tour incharge	✓				✓	
Reservations (non-voiced-based)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*For the hospitality industry