OUR CITY ACCESSIBLE CITY

WHAT IF BEING PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED, WAS A CHALLENGE TO THE
WORD IMPOSSIBLE?

"I don't know how you do this."
"I cannot imagine the hardships you face"
"How do you cope up? It must be so difficult."

According to the provisional reports released in 2016, about 2.68 Crore people, that accounts for over 2% percent of the total population, have some or the other form of disability. According to a broad definition of disability. It is any condition that restricts a person's mental, sensory or mobility functions. It may be caused by accident, trauma, genetics or disease. It may be temporary or permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired, visible or invisible.

Like a broken record they hear testimony of the fact that they no longer fit in the definition of "normal" on an almost daily basis, and while what strikes me the most about this is, we all are guilty of doing this prior to stepping into their shoes, prior to becoming so helpless, prior to getting somewhere where there is no turning back, prior to not being able to do tasks which are considered simple and easy. Prior to crossing the bridge between a "**person**" and a "**person with disability**".

The Indian population is growing at a rapid pace. Majority of the specially-abled population resides in rural areas, that is 1.86 Cr and 0.81 Cr in urban areas. But since cities are known to have large concentration of resources and facilities. Such environment attracts people from rural areas. However, unprecedented attraction has now become an overwhelming issue for city governance. The enormous pressure towards efficient city management and development has triggered both government

and private sector to come up with plans, and ideas to make the cities more efficient and accessible for all. Dialectic debates about the future of urban development in many states have been progressively influenced by discussions of something called "smart cities". Yet despite numerous efforts and examples of this "smart" labelling cities, we know surprisingly little about them, particularly in terms of how accessible they turn out to be for the ones who lack basic ability to walk, talk, hear, and convey, the much neglected lot in society. Are they able to get access to basic public utilities in the evolving 'smart cities' in India?

Nobody really knows more about specially-abled person than a specially-abled person.

Hence we all fail in helping them everyday, hence despite the consistent efforts of government we fail in making them feel like they are not any different, hence we all fail to provide the basic accessibility rights, hence we all fail to understand that they need a lot more than our sympathy and solace and words. They need change. They need the world, the space, the time, the and of course the mental outlook, which metamorphoses those people into confident individuals before the eleventh-hour.

The field of computing, engineering, artificial intelligence, human–computer interaction, embedded systems and what not has also gained significant attention over the past decades. It connects and opens a billion doors for the specially abled ones in our society and tends to provide the exposure they lack, exposure to build a smart and accessible city, an urban model designed on the major objectives of **Accessible India Campaign**, such as building intelligent environments, transportation system accessibility and information-communication eco-system accessibility. Navigating the bustling maze of a city can pose all sorts of challenges. People with disabilities would often like to be more mobile and independent, so are there better ways to design cities so they are more accessible for everybody?

Hopefully the answer is yes. Imagine a world.

Imagine a world, where there was a way that help can **mothers with physical disability to carry around their children** easily, where there was an affordable,

dependable and comfortable way to help **people with confined hand movement to independently have their meals**, where there was a way for **artificial mental mapping of spaces** for the development of efficient mobility skills using smartphones, where there were **accessible entrance**: level or via ramp, where there was a way for visually impaired people to have cheap and affordable **Braille display** in their smartphones and tabs, where there was a way for **audio description narration** of visual aspects of live theatre, shows and movies for people who are blind or are have vision impairment, where there was a way for **people using any type of walking aid to safely carry their drinks without spilling** them, where there was an assistive device that **helped children on wheelchairs to play** using a button so that they can engage in sports with their friends, where there was a way for **specially abled people to be able to open doors** for themselves without having to rely on others for help or assistance, where there was a way for **people with hearing impairment to communicate and express** easily, where there was a solution for **specially-abled female wheelchair users to pee,** safely and comfortably without any help or assistance, where there was an assistive device that made it comfortable and safe to **get in and out of a wheelchair independently** so wheelchair users can be more self-reliable, where there was an adaptive technology that could allow people with disabilities or deformities to **safely participate in adventure sports** and what not.

Just Imagine...

An accessible built environment provides citizens means to pursue an active, social and economic life. Although the right to access the built environment is universal, the opportunity to access the built environment is not. Many people with disabilities are faced with barriers that range from l**ack of wheelchair ramps**, to **buildings without lifts**, to **inaccessible toilets**, to **places without step-free access**. These barriers can be overcome by changing the city layout such as **handrails of staircases carved with Braille directions**. It provides tactile

guidance and easy-to-read pictographs add up more to help the visually impaired. The standard toilets can be replaced by **accessible toilets that have adjustable height changing bench, adjustable sink**. People with visual impairment have a hard time crossing roads, and finding ways, **accredited assistance animals** (guide dogs) can help enable a person with a disability locate places and cross paths. All metropolitan trains should have **wheelchair-accessible ramps** for easy boarding and disembarking. **Accessible unisex toilet** with automatic door, room for a walking aid and grab-rails on both sides. On-street disability access parking for the specially abled ones.

Meanwhile, for learning specially abled people or those on the autistic spectrum disorder, the cluttered and hectic metropolitan environment can be a sensory minefield.

We, in INDIA has a very big young population consisting people from different academic disciplines,
whether we are from engineering/design background or a regular social media user, we all have to take an initiative to create an accessible city for all.