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Let there be RAMPS

Making Delhi accessible to the differently abled

Namya Sinha

I had started as a portal that gave information about institutions catering to the needs of the handicapped people. But now, it has evolved into a full-fledged NGO — Svayam which works towards making the city accessible to the physically challenged.

Sminu Jindal, the founder of Svayam, says, "Initially when we were just a portal, our task was to gather information on institutes that serve the physically challenged and provide it to users. A matrimonial site was also included in the portal. But it has now extended its scope."

Svayam has been working closely with NDMC, ASI, DTC and Education Ministry of Delhi to make Public Conveniences Units, historical monuments, bus shelters and government schools acces-

sible to all, from the physically impaired to the very old. However, to understand the story of this NGO, it is essential to know the life of its founder.

Sminu Jindal became wheelchair-ridden when she met with an accident at the age of 12. Delhi, she soon discovered, was a remarkably disabled-unfriendly city. Jindal faced all the usual problems that a person bound to a wheelchair would face: no disabled-friendly rest rooms, no disabled-friendly bus stops, and no disabled-friendly theatres.

Jindal was doubly handicapped by the lack of facilities in schools and colleges. There was no way she could enter the school on her own — there were no ramps. Fortunately, being from a privileged family, Jindal's parents got a ramp built in the school at their own expense. She was

then able to maneuver her way through. But once it was time to move to a college, there was again the same problem.

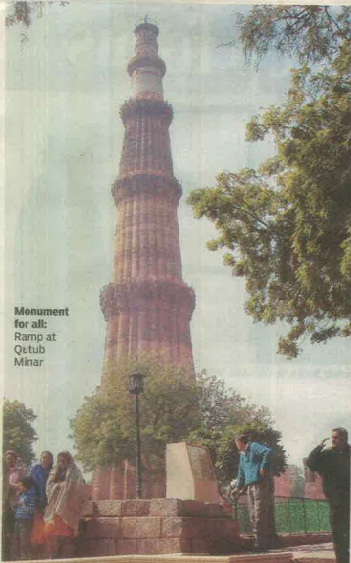
It was then that Jindal realised that there were simply no public facilities for people with impairment. "I realised that if people with resources had to face so many problems, then what about those physically challenged who don't have much money with them," she says.

Once Jindal was refused entry to a shop in Connaught Place because the shopkeeper told her that her wheelchair would carry dust inside the showroom. All these episodes triggered inside Jindal a need to work for the needs of those who are handicapped in one way or the other. And so in 2001, she launched her website that aimed to help people with disabilities.

"Impairment doesn't just mean being handicapped from the birth. We need to help those too who are very old and cannot climb stairs, or someone who has broken his spectacles and can't see anything," Jindal says.

Today her NGO assists the government in making public infrastructure accessible to the handicapped. It offers designs, suggestions and audit reports with details like what can be done and where to make the city more navigable. "We can't condemn the Government for not providing with facilities," Jindal says. "We also need to tell them what has to be done."

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Monument for all: Ramp at Qutub Minar



Ramp needed: in a city monument



An ideal rest room: A disabled-friendly loo



A necessary addition: Ramp in a city monument



A stroll for all: The ramp makes the monument accessible to all

LOCAL NGOs

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