

Against all odds

Armed with a passion to convert adversity into opportunity, Sminu Jindal dreams of making India accessible to those with reduced mobility

Mini Pant Zachariah

HER NAME means one who smiles a lot and Sminu Jindal, managing director of Jindal SAW Ltd, lives up to it. She has a lot to smile about. At 22, she took Swastik Foil, a sick unit of the multi million-dollar Jindal group, and turned it into a success story.

Jindal reworked the marketing and put good systems in place surprising her father P R Jindal who did not think his daughter could revamp an ailing unit.

Jindal was one of the first women to break the glass ceiling in the steel, oil and gas sector in India. And as the managing director of Jindal SAW Ltd, a part of the fourth largest industrial house in India - the Jindal Group, she brings professionalism to every level of operation.

Being the Jindal offspring, one assumes it would have been easy for her to walk into the job. But she had to fight her battles too. "One had to fight mindsets from the family members and from outsiders. People assume that when a woman works she is just biding her time before she gets married and has children."

She did both. Married and had two children — Anav (6) and Arjan (2) Before long she was back on the plant floor.

"I'm a hands-on person. I need to at least make one trip a day to the plant. I love to be surrounded by the machinery," Jindal laughs her tinkling laugh. Nothing seems to deter her. Nothing ever did. Not even a car accident at the tender age of 11 that made her wheelchair-bound for life.

Jindal turned that adversity into an opportunity. From her

how i made it happen

wheelchair, she realised that the facilities for the disabled in India were woefully inadequate.

"There was very little information available for people with disabilities. There were individual organisations talking about what they were doing but there was no one place where one could source information," she says.

So, Jindal founded Svayam, a one-stop information portal for people with disabilities. It works towards making public infrastructure accessible to all including people with reduced mobility. In the first month of its launch, Svayam received one lakh hits.

"Once you get people access to

public transport and places you increase their opportunity to livelihood and their self esteem. Infrastructure should empower all including the disabled," Jindal believes.

Svayam also offers consultancy in access auditing, appraisal and implementing of access strategies, focused training to equip organisations integrate the disabled into the mainstream, and workshops on communicating with the disabled.

Jindal's efforts paid off. Within six months of its operation, project Svayam undertook the responsibility to make the heritage site of Qutub Minar disable friendly. "This winter, I am going with my boys for a picnic to the Qutub Minar," says a Jindal, with her trademark laugh.

Apart from being on the advisory board of India Tourism Corporation to make its properties friendly for people with reduced mobility, Svayam works closely with the Delhi Transport Corporation and has already made 240 DTC bus shelters disabled friendly. It has also joined hands with Reliance and BPCL to make the petrol stations reachable by all.

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SMINU JINDAL MD, Jindal SAW Ltd

a pipe dream when people do not have food to eat. I argue that it does not cost very much and it makes a person a productive individual," she says.

And if Svayam's initiatives pay off, as they have at the Qutub Minar, India will be accessible to

all for the Commonwealth Games in 2010. But Jindal's sight reaches beyond. "Making Mumbai accessible to all will be challenging. Svayam will be happy to partner with genuine parties in this," she says.

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Qutab Minar to go disabled-friendly with ramps and braille signs

NAMITA KOHLI

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

THE Qutab Minar is set to become the city's first physically challenged-friendly heritage monument with ramps and Braille signages available for those who need them. The monument will soon have more facilities as well as cleaner environs.

"We are working with the NGO, Swayam, on this project that will probably come up in the next two months. This will ensure that the handicapped have better access to the site," says C Babu Rajeev, Di-

rector-General at ASI.

It is also proposed to close the roundabout right opposite the Qutab Minar to traffic and set up a souvenir shop near the new ticket counter. Traffic would be diverted to the road that leads to the village which will be made wider and two-way. "The Delhi administration has okayed the plan only recently. Even the DTC has given us the go-ahead. We are now working with the traffic police in this regard," says Rajeev. He adds that the Tourism Ministry is providing Rs 2 crore.

Some of the changes that the

ASI had envisaged as part of a wider plan to improve various ASI monuments have already started. The greening of the two patches at the entrance (earlier used as parking) is in progress and signages to indicate washrooms are also being installed.

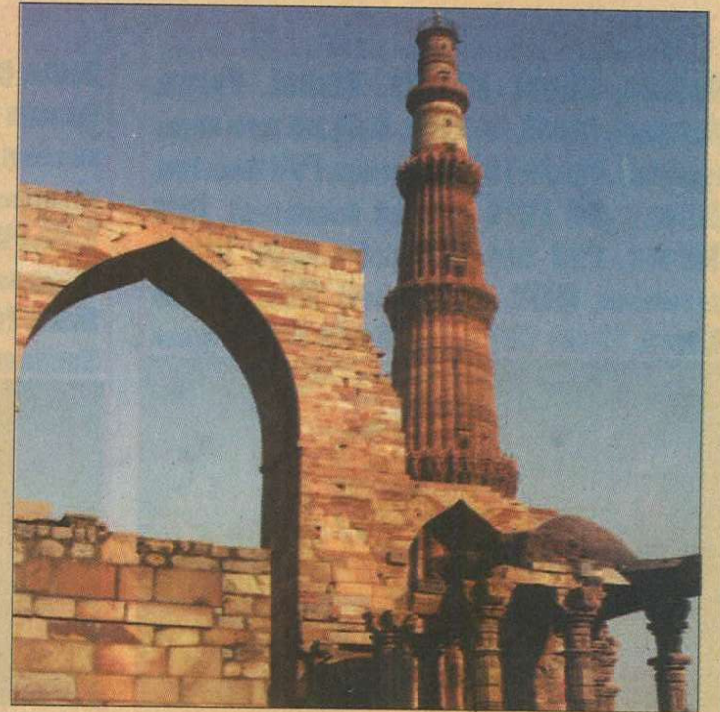
Also, a bookshop at the entrance is being restored, benches are being installed inside the monument and a water dispenser will be set up by Friends of Heritage, a non-profit organisation that was started two years ago for conservation of heritage.

"The tourist should be able to

enjoy the whole experience and not just come to see the monument," says Sanjeev Batra, the developer for nearby properties like One Style Mile. He has been working with ASI for a couple of years to improve the ambience.

The ASI is also working on audio guides to provide information about the sites and associated trivia. "We would install such audio guides at other heritage monuments like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal also," Rajeev says.

Traffic diversions planned around the monument



EXPRESS NEWSLINE . INDIAN EXPRESS - 8/03/07