

'The idea is to gain respect, not sympathy'

AMARJOT KAUR

Sometimes, a crippled mind can be more incapacitating than any form of physical disability. For those, whose thoughts are blind to the suffering of others never see the beautiful light of compassion! In conversation with Sminu Jindal of Jindal Saw Ltd, a member of the Core Committee on Accessible Tourism, constituted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, on her second visit to the city shares her views on the accessibility issue in India. "The issue is not only restricted to the disabled; overall growth of the nation cannot take place if needs of the physically challenged are not taken care of," she says.

As she criticises Modi Government's Swacchh Bharat Abhiyaan and Beti Padhaso campaign for excluding the disabled, she says, "It is true that every girl has a right to education, but what about those who are physically challenged? There is no facility for them in schools, be it the lack of restrooms for the disabled or the absence of ramps. So, the handicapped have no right to be educated?" she questions.

Talking about her work with Swayam, she says, "I am a member of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, 2009-10, under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, stressing on the need for having a barrier-free environment. "I remember when we were asked to construct a disabled-friendly infrastructure at Qutub Minar, it's revenue and

NOBLE CAUSE:
Sminu Jindal



Sminu Jindal, founder of the NGO Swayam, believes for the overall growth of the nation the physically challenged need to be taken care of

footfall was twice the total sum of those who visited The Red Fort and Humayun's Tomb," she says while adding that the infrastructure does not only help those who are physically challenged, but also those who are old and have difficulty in walking.

Sminu, along with Vivasatta, will conduct a workshop for over 250 youth leaders from over 36 nations as part of the 10th Global Youth Peace Fest (GYPF 2015). "The idea is to sensitise the youth. I feel that there is a need to change the mindset of people more than anything else," Sminu informs that the administration has given her a nod to modify some parts of PGI and GMCH, Sector 16, under the access audit. "In Chandigarh, my focus this time will be on the hospitals and in Delhi we are looking at modifying schools, col-

leges and universities in a way that they are accessible to women, children, elderly and even disabled." Sminu, who is also a member of the Young Global Leaders (YGL), World Economic Forum and is on the Committee on Functional Requirements in Buildings of Bureau of Indian Standards, Government of India, says, "All it takes from the administration and society in general is to widen the width of the doors to 900 mm and build ramps along with making restrooms for the physically challenged." She strongly criticizes the idea of having a separate compartment for the handicapped. "If you have a bunch of physically challenged or elderly people in a compartment, they will be bullied by the goons."

She also shares that most of the time people have mental barriers that restrict them from using accessible infrastructure. "People show off their jewels that make them look pretty, but they will hide their hearing aid. I feel it's easier to be dependent on a walker or a wheelchair than being dependent on people. The idea is to gain respect, not sympathy. Remember that time when glasses were looked down upon—girls with glasses don't get passes—and now they have become a fashion symbol. I believe that with effort, things will change," she signs off.

amajk@tribuneindia.com

05/10/2015