



## SPECIAL ABILITIES

# A Bend In The Road

A disability is no longer reason enough to put your career dreams on hold. There is a will and there are ways, says **Santana Fell**

It's a weekday morning and a buzz up for Ajai Raper. Armed with a cup of coffee, he is doing some online editing work on his computer while making calls and preparing for a meeting scheduled later in the day. Just a day in the life of another busy, busy urban professional. Pretty much, except that, unlike most of us, Ajai uses a motorised wheelchair to get around. He had polio as a child. And it left its mark on his left leg.

The last leg, however, has not impeded his life dreams. Ajai has built a company in Gurugram that provides production and location services to overseas clients wanting to shoot films in India.

## Tried and tested

Bhali Dee Gera and Bhaskar Hansa, are both teachers. Bhali went to a blind school herself – the Dr Bhanu Prasad Blind School, Gurugram. According to her, with some help from the school principal, she landed a job in Delhi's Kirti's High School in Durgam Chauri, Durgam. Now, Delhi's Kirti's High is now headed by Bhali. She tells she has never faced any problems in communicating with her students. "My students are very cooperative and put a lot of attention to what I teach," she says.

While Bhali teaches the junior school students, Manas teaches History at Sankar Mahabir Institute of Higher Secondary, a free



**YOURS SINCERELY** - (Clockwise from) of Colabator's Cafe I Can Fly with owners, Manas and Praveen, Delhi

Research has shown that professionals with disability have higher rates of retention and lower costs of personal health and safety issues.

## The Gift

According to the 2011 Census, 60 to 70 per cent of India's 1.1 billion population is differently abled.

Studies by consultancy firms such as DuPont show that employees with disabilities in an average, regular better attendance. A survey of 181 employees with disabilities found that 70 per cent rated average or better job performance compared to 60 per cent for employees without disabilities.

And that is why, many companies are hiring them. About 60 per cent of the staff at the KFC outlet in New Market, Calcutta, are hearing and speech impaired.

"The hearing impaired can work well even in a noisy environ-

## Package Deal

- **Dependable:** Independent research has shown that the differently-abled are more likely to keep the trust and live up to job expectations.

- **Efficient:** They are less distractible and more motivated. Also, they don't job-hop as much as their non-disabled counterparts. Their compensation packet is also high, thus creating a favorable work environment.

- **Sincere:** In a supportive environment, a differently-abled employee is most likely to quit and most likely to meet tight deadlines.

- **Less prone to absenteeism:** A survey has revealed that the physically challenged take fewer leaves.

- **Diversity:** They bring to the job a unique point of view. If harnessed well, this can translate into a wealth of workplace innovations.

ment. They are also good at data entry, where they are faster and more accurate," says Ramesh NAG, founder of Sincere, an IIT Bombay graduate handicrafts made by a team of differently-abled people.

Cafe I Can Fly in the Ridgeprague area of Calcutta is another example of an inclusive work environment. The cafe crew comprises people with Down Syndrome, Intellectual Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and autism.

Shikara Cakes in Delhi, which makes and sells authentic French baked goods, is another inclusive employer. "Our bakery product is made by young people with disabilities. Two of them have Cerebral Palsy and three of them are deaf and dumb. They communicate through sign language and manage everything in the bakery," says manager Sumanth Kumar.

As if to make a case for a restaurant in Hyderabad, the dialogue in the book is trying something. The meeting area has no lights. Guests are not to carry anything that sees. "I am not asked by visually-impaired staff. Most of the food is..." each of the women for what it is. — S.