

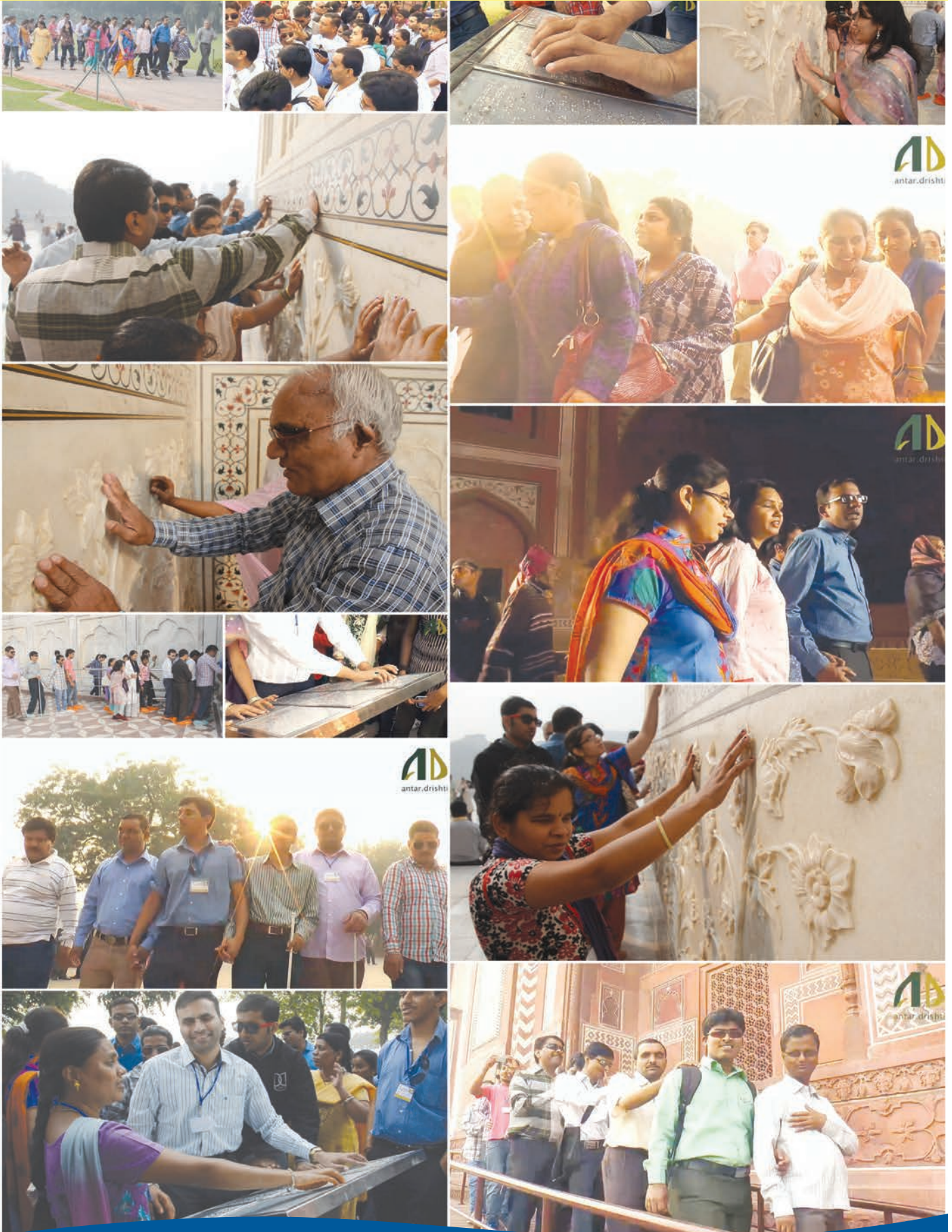


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**AGRA CONVENTION**  
**Blind Stars Beyond Facebook**  
**Bridging The Gap**

7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2014

# Glimpse of Taj Mahal Visit





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## **Agra Convention :**

### **Blind Stars Beyond Facebook – Bridging the Gap**

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### **Antardrishti**

- a social development organisation is committed to the cause of blind people in our society. Towards this we had made a humble beginning in 2006. It is registered as a Public Charitable Trust under Indian Trust Act, 1882.

Report written by  
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# From Antardrishti


**Agra Convention** was a huge success. It was a combined effort of the organizers, delegates, experts and local organizations. We are thankful to Smt. Sangeeta Bhatnagar, Chairperson, Akanksha Samiti, Agra for supporting us right from the beginning till the end. We are also thankful to Prof. Md. Muzamil, Vice Chancellor, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Agra for providing university premises to organize the convention. We extend our sincere thanks to Shri. D.P. Tripathy, Member of Parliament, for his inaugural address and whole hearted support.

Thanks is also due to Smt. V. Carville, Secretary, Diocese Education Board, Diocese of Agra and Smt. Alka Massey, Principal, St. John's Girls Inter College, Agra for organizing students and teachers interaction with visually impaired people.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Shri. Sudhir Sharma, Editor in chief, POOL Magazine for organizing plug-in event "Black Design". This was the first time that a convention for Blind people had observers from Design Fraternity supported by Pool Magazine.

We are also thankful to Shri Neeraj Tyagi for providing Quick Call Toll-Free Help Line Number : 1800-2000-215. It was a great help.

We would also like to thank Shri. Puran Dawar, Dawar Footwear Industry and President Agra Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Chamber (AFMEC), Agra for the financial support. Convention would not have been a success without the additional financial support provided by Kanwaljeet Khungar, Principal, Bharat National Public School Delhi, Captain Prabhanshu Srivastava, Secretary, ADA Agra, Brijesh Singh, Dr. Brijesh Sharma, Sharad Sinha, Shivraj Singh, Aloka Kumar, Dr. Pushpa Srivastava, Manohar Lal Gidwani, Amit Aaswani, Shahid Khan, Vijay, Puneet Sharma, Gajendra Sharma, Nehal Ahmad Siddiqui and Nitin Johari.



Many others, especially Dr. Diwakar Khare, Dr. Mukul Srivastava, Surendra Sharma, Amit Kapoor, Ajit K. Srivastava, Atul Gupta, Sunil C. Gupta, K.C. Jain, Debasish Bhowmik, Pradeep Oberoi, Dr. Shruti Kant Sharma, Yogendra Dube, Brij Khandelwal, Dr. Amar Prakash, Brij Mohan Srivastava, Brij Bhushan, Sanmay Prakash, Azhar Umri, Manshul Jain, Nitish Gaur, Mudita Sharma, Adil Khan, Varsha Yash, Sumiti Singh, Aanchal Sisodia, Sanchita Jain, Ajay Singh, Ashwani Solanki, Jeetendra Shakya, Amit Bhadauria, Vaibahv Khatana, Ankit Upadhyay, Aditya Gautam, Aarzo Gupta, Vinay Bansal, Yogesh Sharma, Shashi Shekhar Sharma, Vartika Gupta, Rekha Khare, T. Shriniwas Rao, Rocky, Danish Umri, Vikram Shukla, Rajesh Chauhan, Suhail Umri who contributed through various means to make this convention a success. We appreciate your efforts. Thank you.

Our sincere gratitude to Agra Development Authority (ADA), Agra, Regional Transport Office (RTO), Agra, Archeological Survey of India (ASI), Agra, Agra Traffic Police, Agra Police, Basic Shiksha Adhikari Agra, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Agra, Hotel Goverdhan, Hotel Shilaza, Hotel Ashoka, Hotel Pall and many other organizations for coming forward and providing support.

Iffat Siddiqui and Rachita Srivastava, we just wanted to say thanks for helping us out. Your contribution means a lot to us and it really helped a great cause. You were the pillar.

We would also like to acknowledge the significant role played by all the volunteers, specially YMCA Agra Green team and MSW Students, Department of Social Work, Institute of Social Sciences, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Agra. Friends, you were a huge support. Your support made this convention a huge success. Thanks is also due to Nikita Patil, Avinash Shahi, Md. Khalid, Kapil Mittal, Md. Misbah Ul, Maria Durrani, Divya Sharma, Pooja Mittal, Zainab Palana, Gokul Chand, Nishant Shah, Vinayak R Dhoot and the admin team of Blind Stars. Kudos to all of you.

Last but not least, our sincere gratitude to Agra media who covered the three day convention at length despite their busy schedule.



**I**t was nothing short of a milestone in the history of visually impaired people of India when more than a hundred of them from across the country stepped away from their routine lives to come all the way to Agra to take part in a groundbreaking event - '**Agra Convention : Blind Stars Beyond Facebook –Bridging the Gap**'. The event was the culmination of an initiative taken by some visually impaired people 2 years ago when they decided to create a network of such people on the social networking site Facebook and named it 'Blind Stars'. The group was formed on 25th October, 2012 and as of now has 4,000 members. The event was planned and organized by Antardrishti and Blind Stars in association with:

- Department of Social Work, Institute of Social Sciences, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar University, Agra
- YMCA, Agra
- Akansha Samiti, Agra
- POOL Magazine

The event took place in the Jubilee Hall of the Paliwal Park campus of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Agra and St. John's Girls Inter College, Agra over the course of three days – 7, 8 and 9 November 2014. It was attended by 160 visually impaired people from different states of the country like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Rajasthan. The delegates were provided accommodation in –Hotel Goverdhan, Hotel Shilaza, Hotel Ashoka and Hotel Pall.

The event witnessed discussions on issues relevant to the current status of a visually impaired person in today's society.

### **The broad theme/objective of the convention:**

To create and highlight discourses about the social and economic Inclusion of visually impaired people of our country. The discussions featured experts from various fields with experience and insights on the relevant issues.

- **Shattering myths about the visually impaired.**
- **Creating awareness in the society as to how people with disabilities could be an asset to the nation.**
- **Inspiring and guiding the visually impaired people who have yet not realized their own worth and potential and making them aware of their rights.**
- **Sensitization of the society towards the visually impaired.**
- **The position of a visually impaired girl and challenges faced by her due to gender discrimination.**
- **Blind people as a part of the nation's workforce.**

The discussions were divided into 9 brainstorming sessions spanning over 3 days.

On the last day of the event, the '*Agra Declaration*' was released taking cues from all the discussions held over the three days.







**The** first day began with the registration of the delegates by the volunteers. The poster entries for the 'Drishti Creative Contest' were at display at the entrance of the venue. A formal opening ceremony was held in the presence of the Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Prof. Muzammil, Mrs. Sangeeta Bhatnagar, Member of Parliament D.P. Tripathi, Member Trustee Antardrishti Mr. Anil Chaudhary, Director of Institute of Social Sciences Dr. Diwakar Khare, Dr. Mukul Srivastava and Mohd. Khalid.

- **D.P. Tripathi**, who is partially visually impaired himself, shed some light on how such an event could change the perception of the society towards the visually impaired. Recalling his own struggles as a visually impaired student who was denied the right to study, he spoke about how he overcame all the odds and emerged as a brilliant student, bagging various awards and gold medals.
- **The Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Prof. Muzammil** had some words of wisdom for the delegates and the students of the Institute alike. He pointed out that the university was the most appropriate place for this convention to take place as this is where imaginations and spirits are set free and have the liberty to soar high. He noted that a university stands for Humanism, tolerance and adventure of ideas that no physical disability could be a hindrance to.
- **Mohd. Khalid**, the founding member of the group 'Blind Stars' shed some light on the ideology behind such an initiative. He pointed out that people with disabilities are not a liability to the nation. They could as well be an asset if given a chance. All they need is an environment that promotes their growth and they could reach their full potential and contribute to nation building.
- **Mrs. Sangeeta Bhatnagar**, Chairperson of Akansha Samiti, put forward the proposal of aligning the standards of India's infrastructure for the visually impaired, to the standards of International Association for the Prevention of Blindness' Vision 2020.

## Session 1

### Beyond Facebook – Bridging the Gap: Challenges and Opportunity – Interaction with Delegates:-

The session began with an opening address by Dr. Mukul Srivastava, Senior Professor, Institute of Social Sciences. He pointed out the following areas of concern:-

- **Self Sustenance** – Dr. Mukul Srivastava noted that the very ideology of Social Work was embodied in this effort of ‘Blind Stars’ which is, that the groups with specific problems could be made self sufficient enough to solve their own problems. A group of visually challenged people working to achieve inclusion in all aspects of life for themselves and creating discourses to prevent marginalization of the lesser privileged people of the same group is a myth shattering example of self- sustenance.
- **Social Security** – Dr. Mukul Srivastava discussed the lack of Social Security provided by the state for people with disabilities. Marginalization of people with disabilities could not be checked unless there is a Social Security mechanism in place for them. Minimum survival conditions have to be ensured by the state for all.
- **Awareness** – Victimization and marginalization of a disabled person begins at home and that turns into a collective effort of the society to marginalize that person. This is because of lack of sensitization and awareness. The social sector catering to the needs of such people lacks the core competencies to deal with such issues. It is a topic of introspection if such state agencies and institutions are driven by conscious enlightenment to contribute to such issues or the mere availability of funds provided by the state. Lastly, the importance of networking was highlighted to bridge the gap between the various stakeholders.

There was a brief round of introduction after which the delegates were given a chance to put forward their suggestions and concerns. The following issues emerged as major concerns:

- The issue of discrimination against visually impaired women in matters of marriage.
- Absence of facility of providing scribes in various places for writing exams.
- The appointment of regional representatives by the group to conduct periodic meetings on various issues.



- The establishment of a helpline for the members of the Facebook group and other visually impaired people to seek help on various issues. A panel of experts in various fields would answer the queries in a stipulated time. The official phone line of Antardrishti was decided to be used as the helpline. It was decided to use the group as a platform for addressing all of the problems discussed by the delegates.

## Session 2

### Accessible Banking Services: Legal Provisions for Availing Rights by Visually Impaired Customers:-

The key speaker of the session was Mr. Rahul Gambheer, a visually challenged bank officer as well as activist working for the financial inclusion of the visually impaired. The session was moderated by Mohd. Khalid, the administrator and founding member of the group 'Blind Stars'.



It was pointed out that the aim of the nationalization of the banking sector was 'Financial Inclusion', which was considered the social responsibility of the banking sector. The recently flagged off 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana' was lauded for being a groundbreaking effort by the government to bring more and more people into the mainstream. But the question remains: Is Financial Inclusion really happening for the visually impaired?

A lot of work has been done in this sector due to the efforts of pioneers championing the cause of the visually impaired. Circulars, technologies, disability-friendly infrastructure like talking ATMs etc. have improved the statistics of visually impaired people availing the services of the banking sector. But a lot more needs to be done.

#### **Provisions for the blind – A brief history of banking services for the visually impaired was discussed.**

It was in 2005 that the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) issued a breakthrough judgment in *Singhania vs Banking Division* which was as follows:

- The visually impaired are legally competent to enter into a contract.
- Services like savings account, credit card, loan facility, lockers cannot be

denied to the visually impaired.

- Services cannot be denied on the pretext that fraud could be committed easily with the blind as the same could happen with a sighted person.

The same judgment was released as a guideline to banks in its circular by the Indian Banking Association (IBA) in 2005 December. After this, a lot of circulars were released by the Reserve Bank of India, the IBA, Banking Codes and Standards Boards of India (BCSBI) with guidelines for the provision of services to the visually impaired by the banks which could be summed up as follows:

- No bank could force a visually impaired person to open a joint account with a sighted person.
- No bank could deny a visually impaired person the right to open a joint account with another visually impaired person.
- A visually impaired person cannot be treated as illiterate based on the mere fact that he/she cannot put his/ her signatures on paper.
- When a visually impaired person withdraws cash, the bank cannot ask a person who is not an employee of the bank to be a witness.
- Cheques with thumb imprints can be cleared if they bear the signature of the bank's branch manager.
- Locker service cannot be denied to a visually impaired person.
- 33% of the ATMs installed have to be 'talking ATMs' which provide services like cash withdrawal, balance enquiry and Pin change.
- Braille labels have to be provided in ATMs.
- Magnifying lenses have to be provided for people with low vision.
- 5000 talking ATMs have been installed all over the country by the following banks – Union Bank of India, State Bank of India, Corporation Bank, Bank of Baroda, Citibank, and Grameen Bank. The location of such ATMs could be found out by logging on to [www.talkingatmindia.org](http://www.talkingatmindia.org).
- Internet banking services are going to be made available soon which would be accessible from mobile phones with screen reader software installed.

#### **Platform for grievance redressal:**

If a visually impaired person is denied any service by the bank, he/she could do the following:

- File a written complaint with the bank manager.
- If the problem is not solved within 5 days, a complaint could be made to the grievance redressal officer of the bank.
- A complaint could be made on the bank's site.
- If the problem is not addressed by any of the above, the Banking Ombudsman could be approached.



It was noted that the various authorities have made ample provisions for the visually impaired, but lacunae in the provision of services still exist because of lack of sensitization on the part of banking staff. Therefore, it is necessary for the visually impaired to educate themselves of their own rights so that they could stand up for themselves.

The Right to Information as well as media could be used as effective tools against any type of violation of rights by banking authorities.

## Session 3

### Role of Media: A Powerful Pillar to Empower Visually Impaired People:

Key speaker of this session was Mr. Ajai Srivastava, former journalist and presently activist working for people with disabilities. The session was moderated by Mr. Prashant Tandon, Senior broadcast Journalist.

- Various examples were cited by Mr. Ajai Srivastava where media served as an efficient tool in helping the visually impaired to avail their rights.
- A number of cases were discussed where the system had to stop discriminating against the visually impaired once the media was brought in. Media has always fought for the cause of the visually impaired.
- It was acknowledged by Mr. Prashant Tandon that the representation in media of the visually impaired is very less. It is necessary to bring about an increase in internal representation of the visually impaired in various platforms of media.
- The media could serve as an excellent instrument to change skewed perceptions about the visually impaired and hence break down a lot of barriers for them. But, for this to happen, sensitization of the media is important.
- Empowerment of the visually impaired could be possible by using different



platforms of media for communication, of which, the group 'Blind Stars' is an apt example.

- It was noted that the representation of the visually impaired in cinema is not appropriate. Since cinema plays a big role in shaping perceptions, appropriate representation of visually impaired people in cinema could be a tool to change discriminatory attitude towards them.
- People with visual impairment are either 'misrepresented' or 'under-represented' in media.
- There were some questions that were put forward by the delegates – If the vocabulary used by the media for addressing people with disabilities like 'differently-abled people' or 'specially-abled people' is justified? And how to increase readership amongst visually impaired people so that media starts catering to this section of the society too?
- It was stressed that interacting with media effectively to have them highlight the issues of the visually impaired requires certain communication skills. Some training modules should be developed to train people in this skill.
- The module would involve training on how to approach media houses, press rooms, press agencies effectively.
- It was felt that the media would take active interest in issues of the visually impaired if they are approached in such a way that their interest of publishing 'stories with high readership content'.



# Day II

(8<sup>th</sup> November 2014)

## Visit to St. John's Girls Inter College

**A** group of 6 visually impaired delegates paid a visit to St. John's Girls Inter College on the morning of the second day of the Convention. The session was attended by 100 odd students from the school. Mr. Akhil Srivastava, the Managing Trustee of Antardrishti made the opening remarks, introducing the students to the ideology and thought behind the initiative of 'Antardrishti' and 'Blind Stars'.



Mr. Sukh Sagar, a visually impaired senior government teacher, discussed with the students the concept of the Braille Script for reading and writing. Miss Mehzebeen Palana shared her experience of growing up as a visually challenged student among her sighted peers. She also talked about how sighted students could help their blind counterparts in making things accessible for them.

Miss Neelima, a visually impaired clerk in the famous Chetna College and Mr. Shailesh, a visually impaired computer instructor, introduced the students to the concept of screen reading technologies like the JAWS software. They spoke about how such revolutionary technologies have made it possible for the visually impaired to access computers and mobile phones like their sighted counterparts. The utility of simple tools like printers and scanners in making the work of a blind user easier were discussed. Innovative technologies like the 'currency identifiers' and 'color identifiers' were talked about. The challenges faced by a visually impaired student studying with sighted students were also touched upon by the delegates.

The purpose of this session with the students was to sensitize them towards people with disabilities and motivate them by introducing them to such people who are achievers in their life despite their disabilities. The purpose was well served as the students listened with utmost attention and displayed their curiosity in the form of questions which were well answered by the delegates.

## Session 4



### **Mainstreaming of Blind Child Specially the Girl Child – Role of the Family and Key Challenges:-**

The key speaker of this session was Mrs. Preeti Monga, renowned motivational speaker. Taking forwards the spirit of this session, a group of delegates was visiting schools educating blind girls to interact with them and motivate them.

‘Mainstreaming’ as a concept was discussed as being the very manifestation of a discriminatory attitude towards a specific group. ‘Marginalization’ begins with family and then it turns into a collective effort of the society to discriminate against anyone who is different. This leads to the visually impaired person to consider himself/herself as someone outside of the mainstream. Why is ‘mainstreaming of the blind girl child’ such an important issue? Because the society has always treated women as its ‘second class citizens’. Especially in a patriarchal society like India, a girl child is seldom welcome in majority of the sections, and to be a ‘blind girl child’ at that is something that the Indian society still does not understand how to deal with. The question of ‘who would marry a blind girl’ starts haunting the parents of such a girl from the day she is born. But who is responsible for this perception? Clearly, there has always been a wide gap between the various sections of the society that has given rise to this contempt. The visually impaired people have their doubts about sighted people and vice-versa, because that gap has never been bridged. This gap has led to an attitude of sympathy towards the visually impaired as well as people with other forms of disability. The gap could only be bridged





with effort from both the sides. Sensitization on the part of the able-bodied people as well as a sense of self-worth on the part of people with disabilities is what is required.

## Session 5

### School education for visually impaired: Rural and urban realities in Indian context:

The point of view of a visually impaired person regarding 'inclusive Education' was put forward. Is the government really doing enough for different sections of the society in the name of Inclusive Education?

- The government spends just about 3% of the country's GDP on education. The Kothari Commission, in 1966, recommended the model of inclusive education i.e. the same education system for all sections of the society. But, it has never been implemented. In fact, even in government run schools, the stratification is very visible according to the economic and social standing of the different sections. So, is the much talked about concept of Inclusive Education a reality?
- The special schools for children with visual impairment though provide satisfactory education, but do they help in shaping the children in such a way that they could be assimilate within the society as adults?
- Again, the concept of 'mainstreaming' entails denoting a group as 'main'. Who decides which group is the 'main' group? Isn't the concept of special schools just making the job of mainstreaming of visually impaired children even difficult? It also makes the task of sensitization even more complicated.
- One interesting suggestion given by a blind parent of a sighted child was that there are no discourses on 'Parents with special needs' i.e. the struggles faced by blind parents with sighted children.



## Session 6



### **Workshop with HR experts to make them understand the abilities and productivity of a visually challenged candidate:**

This session was conducted for Human Resource experts from various fields by Miss Neha Agarwal, a visually challenged Project Manager in IBM. Miss Neha Agarwal lost her vision at the age of 19. She struggled and overcame all the odds and is today nothing less

than an inspiration to others.

The purpose of this session was to demonstrate to the HR experts how a visually impaired person would not be a liability but an asset if they choose to recruit him/her. The workshop was attended by the likes of – Mr. Atul Gupta, Chairperson of National Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Pradeep Oberoi, HR head at Clark's Shiraz hotel. Miss Neha Agarwal shared her own story for this purpose:-

- Miss Neha Agarwal is an accomplished professional who performs her job equally well as her sighted colleagues.
- Her job profile involves extensive use of tools like Microsoft Excel, dealing with vast amounts of data.
- Apart from being a professional herself, she also helps other visually impaired people better their skills.
- According to her, her employers provided her with the environment where she could realize her full potential. Her employers understood that her needs and her way of working are different but that does not mean that she is any less than her sighted employees.
- She put forward her strengths, limitations and needs clearly in front of her employers and they invested in her in the form of their confidence, a friendly environment and patience.
- This helped her feel like a 'part of the team' and this also sensitized her team towards her.
- 'Client delivery excellence award' and 'Manager's choice' award are some of the accolades conferred on her for her achievements.
- Her employers and team members found out ways together with her to break down day to day barriers faced by her.



- The suitable environment provided by her employers included providing her with the infrastructure that she would require to perform her job like the screen reader software JAWS.
- She shattered myths regarding safety concerns about hiring a visually impaired candidate. She commutes to her office all by herself daily.
- In the end, Miss Neha demonstrated how she works on Microsoft Excel, which is the main tool used by her to perform her job, with the help of the screen reader software JAWS.
- Hence, she left no question answered about how visually impaired people, when given a chance, prove themselves to be productive and sincere employees and become an asset to the organization.

## Parallel session: Marriage of Blind Couples - varied experiences in perspective

This session was one of the most awaited and thought-provoking sessions of the Convention. Blind couples and blind-non blind couples shared their experiences of running household and shouldering responsibilities as couples. The highlights of the session are as follows:

- Vulnerability of blind girls in matters of finding a suitable groom emerged as the key concern.
- Many delegates brought to the fore the issue of well-settled blind men marrying sighted girls and facing hardships and compatibility problems at later stages.
- Blind couples shared their experiences of managing household and professional responsibilities with the aid of technological tools and determination.
- Delegates endorsed the fact that emotional compatibility and mutual understanding and respect should be the core criteria for choosing a life partner among the visually impaired rather than choosing on the basis of physical attributes of a person.



## Session 7

### Women with Blindness – Challenges and Expectations



The speaker of this session was Miss Shalini Khanna from the Centre for Blind Women in Delhi which was established after a study called 'Status of Blind Women in India'. The study painted a pathetic picture of the blind women in the rural areas. In many cases, the blind girl was married off to the same person as her sighted sister because the parents did not understand how to deal with her. A majority of the blind women could not perform the basic daily tasks like cooking etc. This led to their being considered as absolutely 'unwanted' by the society.

Miss Khanna trains blind women to become self- dependent in all walks of life- be it cooking for themselves, studying, finding employment. The following questions were raised by the speaker that the society needs to find answers to:

- Gender is a major issue for a visually impaired girl even today. 'Being a girl' and 'being a blind girl' at that is nothing short of an aberration in our society which it is struggling to accept.
- Why is a blind girl discriminated against in every aspect, be it the freedom to step out of their houses, residential facilities in Special Schools and Universities, employment and issues of marriage?
- What is the place of a girl who is blind in our society? Why are we not giving her a chance to break free of the burdens of misconceptions and misplaced fears that follow her from the day she is born?
- Aren't the doubts and fears of the parents of such a girl a mere projection of the society's sympathetic attitude towards them?
- Considering a visually impaired girl as one not capable of sensing the danger ahead and protecting herself from it leads to her isolation from the society, which ultimately chooses to forgets about her existence. Is this justified?
- Why don't visually impaired men want to marry visually impaired and instead seek sighted partners? Does this mean they are looking for someone to depend upon instead of a partner?
- A visually impaired girl could become educated, and self-dependent in



every aspect of life but still, she has to struggle to get accepted as a part of the society because it is still believed that the position and status of a woman is tied to the man she is married to.

**The speaker cited various instances of how, when given a chance, visually impaired women have set examples for others:-**

- A visually impaired girl who is the only literate person in her village started a school in her village.
- A visually impaired girl was invited to U.S.A. to raise funds for an organization by sharing her inspirational story.
- Various visually impaired girls who, when given employment, became the biggest motivational factors for the other employees in their organizations.

The visually impaired woman has taken the leap towards emancipation; it is the society that needs to come out of its skewed perceptions of such women. When the parents of a blind girl nurture dreams for her, she is instilled with the faith that she is capable of making those dreams come true. And that is the point where her life changes from a story of hopelessness to one with hope, accomplishment and the will to not get bogged down by the weight of the doubts and fears of the society.

## Session 8

### Employment Scenario in public and private sector for the Visually Impaired in India:

Public Sector Units have 3% reservation for People with Disabilities. Participation of visually impaired people in the workforce of state-owned companies is not unsatisfactory if not satisfactory. But, it is the private sector where the visually impaired are lagging behind. The following are the core reasons behind this by Mrs. Veena M Verma:-

- There are no legal provisions as to ensure employment for people with disabilities in the private sector.
- Lack of sensitization and infrastructure for the visually impaired.



- The private sector is a very competitive place and people with visual impairment do not get the required training to secure skilled to perform in such a competitive environment. There is no agency dedicatedly working for this cause.
- Lack of adaptability in visually impaired candidates which is a result of considering it the obligation of the organization to adapt to their needs. It has to be a two-way learning process.



Miss Neha Agarwal, a visually impaired Project Manager with IBM, addressed the question as to why, when a visually impaired person is employed in the private sector, they are often not retained by the organization for a long time. The candidate would have to take the first step towards adapting to the demands of the job if he/she wants the organization to adapt to their needs. She shared how she gained the trust of her employers and became an asset to her organization

- She made a lot of changes in her personality to adapt to the environment of her organization. Making small changes like updating her dressing sense, honing her communication skills made a big impact that she was trying to fit in.
- When she took some steps towards 'fitting in', her employers and colleagues took a step forward to accepting her too.
- She polished her communication skills and proved herself worthy of the responsibility given to her.
- She keeps updating her skills to keep up with her sighted colleagues.



Mr. Avinash Shahi shed some light on the question of PWD Act and how it impacted the Employment Scenario. The Persons with Disability Act was implemented in its full fledged form in the year 1995 after years and years of struggle. But still, there are a lot of hurdles in achieving that PWD candidates face. Getting a disability certificate is one of the biggest issues. According to a report published in a leading daily, 70% of PWD do not have a disability certificate. 'Identification' of suitable jobs for the visually impaired and other PWD is not fair and discriminatory. These challenges need to be addressed by the government.

## Musical evening



After 2 days of brainstorming sessions, the mood of the gathering was made lighter with a musical evening featuring an orchestra with some visually impaired musicians in it. The program was held in Hotel Goverdhan after dinner. It has been rightly said that 'without music, life would be a mistake'.



# Black | Design Conference

## A plugin event for Designers

Professional Design is a tool for change that can help create new products, and improve usability of existing products that are used to assist in living a better life. India now has a sizeable number of professional Designers involved in domains of engineering, aesthetics, usability etc. This was the first time that a convention for Blind people had observers from Design fraternity organised by Pool Magazine. Designers attending the event had eye opening revelations on to how such an event is organised for blind to how they count money, and what dominates their usual day. The interaction was valuable input for many initiatives that will happen over time.

More Designers intend to participate in the event next year. Such events need to happen all over the country to focus on issues and problems of the blind. Pool Magazine will be associated with the coming events.





# Day III

(9<sup>th</sup> November 2014)

## Taj Mahal Visit

On the morning of 9th November, the Blind Stars paid a visit to the Taj Mahal. Every visitor, be it from India or from some far away corner of the world would agree that Taj Mahal, the beautiful piece of poetry carved in white stone is meant to be 'felt' and not just to be seen. This is exactly what the Blind Stars did. They felt every nook and corner of this monument and absorbed in the serenity and beauty surrounding it.

The entry from the main gate was facilitated by the CISE. The guide shed some light on the history and architecture of this world famous monument. Miss Nikita Patil and Mohd. Raza Hassani read out the epitaphs engraved in Braille script in the main tomb area and also pointed out some mistakes in the text.

The Blind Stars saw the Taj Mahal from the eyes of the volunteers escorting them and felt the beauty of its architecture with their hands. They did not forget to capture those moments in photographs so that they could cherish them forever.

## Session 9



### **Assistive Technology and Education: Accessibility of Reading Materials in Multiple Indian Languages & Technology and Employment: Harnessing Technology in the Workplace**

The Speaker of the session, Mr. Prashant Verma spoke about the importance of technology in our lives. It is an integral part of every person's life,

whether disabled or able-bodied. Assistive technology is any type of technology either developed for people with disability or adapted to cater to their needs.

- Screen reading software has been a revolutionary innovation that has been nothing short of a boon for people with visual impairment. It makes it possible for a device like computer, mobile phone or a tablet to turn text into speech.
- But the challenge is that it is not available in most of the regional languages. Though, work is in progress in this dimension. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) with Hindi language scanning facility has now been developed.
- OCR technology, which reads text from a picture of printed material, has now been improvised to be used in stand-alone reading devices like the MBlaze reading machine and the KNFB reader for iPhone users.
- This technology has made a lot of routine tasks very easy for the visually challenged. Paying bills, online shopping etc. could be done easily.
- Identifying their own home by the blind when travelling alone has been made possible by the use of a technology 'remote call bell'.
- A currency identifier called 'Rupee Checker wallet' has been developed by Mr. Prashant himself which is quite affordable.
- Talking microwave machine is now being manufactured in India itself which makes cooking possible for the visually impaired.
- The use of 'sticking stones' for operating equipments like washing machines, treadmills and even for identifying containers in the kitchen has made the visually impaired quite independent of help.



- 'Audio labelers' could be used to identify files, clothes and various other things.
- A system has been developed by IIT Delhi which could be used to board buses by the visually impaired very easily with the help of a remote control.
- National Federation of the Blind, U.S.A has started a program in Baltimore called 'Blind Driver Challenge' which is still in the process of research. This has given hope to the blind community that one day they could learn to use of automobiles too.

Mrs. Veena Verma, an MBA and an accomplished professional shared her experience of successfully completing a demanding course like MBA with the help of assistive technology. She would read her books with the help of scanner and screen reader and also complete her assignments and presentations with the aid of assistive technology.

The main challenge that has emerged is the continual upgradation of technology used in organizations. Constant innovation is required in the field of assistive technologies to keep up with them.

The use of assistive technology had made life much easier for the visually challenged and has given them the confidence that they too can perform tasks that seemed impossible to them just a few years back.

# Agra Declaration 2014

After 3 days of wide-ranging discussions on the various issues concerning the visually impaired, the following declaration was adopted:-

Disability offers an opportunity to initiate technological innovations to build an equitable society.

Blind Stars delegates have exchanged exhilarating experiences of their varied lives in a three day convention in Agra. Key speakers in the convention have flagged several serious bottlenecks which hinder the inclusion of blind people in the mainstream society. Despite the statutory laws for ensuring their full participation and empowerment; exclusion and discrimination are a daily ordeal for majority of them. Basic rights, be it education, accessibility or employment, they receive tangential attention from the governments. The Convention has identified key challenges faced by blind people which need urgent attention from the government and the civil society.

Blind people are actively contributing to national and economic development in many spheres and they have a greater potential to contribute to nation-building, therefore society in general must overcome its inhibitions about their capabilities.

## Key findings of the Convention:

**Education:** Buzzwords such as ‘inclusive education’ are imported concepts from western countries which are unsuited to unequal Indian context. Discussions held in the Convention clearly reflect that Schools located in rural India are virtually inaccessible for blind students. Majority of teachers carry pre-conceived notions about disability and lack expertise and sensitivity in the classroom.

**Accessibility:** Despite several international/national guidelines for making websites accessible for blind/print-impaired people, government websites do not adhere to the rules. Burgeoning Electronic media in the country also design their programs in a manner that blind people are not considered as targeted consumers of news. In the absence of computers and internet facilities



in rural places, blind people do not get adequate information about their rights and government-run welfare schemes. Public broadcasters such as DD and All India Radio hardly give publicity to the schemes being run for the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

**Employment:** Lack of information about employment opportunities in the government sector is the biggest hurdle for blind people in rural India. And whatever technical training is imparted by the government agencies to the blind people, it is largely concentrated in urban cities. Thus majority of blind people who reside in the countryside are kept excluded from availing employment.

## Suggestions:-

- Sensitization of Ophthalmologists across the country about how to guide blind people
- Government needs to pay greater attention to rural India in spreading information about welfare schemes through mass media specially Radio and FM stations.
- Studies show that nearly 70 per cent people are still devoid of disability certificate which affects the life of blind people in many aspects be it education, employment and in availing the benefits of various government schemes. Disability certification for blind people has been a critical issue over the years and successive governments have not addressed the issue with sincerity.
- We demand that a special drive with a time bound completion target be launched to issue disability certificates to all blind people in the country.
- The landmark judgment delivered by the Supreme Court on fulfilling 3% reservation in government and public sector undertakings jobs provisioned under the PWD Act 1995 be implemented forthwith and in a time bound program. Government should announce a timetable for the implementation of the SC Judgment.
- The condition of blind women needs more attention. Government, both at the Centre and at the state level should facilitate residential accommodation/ hostels for them at least at the district level.
- The new Act replacing the existing PWD Act should be in consonance with the principles of UNCRPD ratified by the Government of India.
- There should be separate provisions in the law ensuring safety of blind women in the light of Justice JS Verma Commission recommendations.

- Government should institute a social audit by the targeted beneficiaries and monitoring of funds disbursed in various government schemes concerning the visually impaired. This should also be extended to NGOs receiving funds from government.
- Private sector today generates employment in a big way in various fields. But sadly private sector so far has not realized the true potential of talent pool of blind men/women. Therefore it is imperative that private sector also come out with a definite roadmap and transparent mechanism to absorb blind people in the workforce.
- Education: Education is the key to overall development of an individual including persons with blindness. But currently there is a huge lacuna in providing quality education to blind people especially in rural India. Government should make the appointment of a special educator in all schools mandatory.
- There is a provision of scholarship for overseas fellowship for the SC\ST candidates. This scheme should be extended to the visually impaired as well.
- As promised by the finance minister in the budget speech, all currency notes should be printed with Brail markings.
- Technology has become an enabler in all spheres of life for blind people. But its unavailability and high cost make technology inaccessible for the blind. Government should ensure that assistive technology is available to the poorest among the blind.
- The society and the government both should come forward in mainstreaming of blind people. The first step towards this would be inclusive education with visible implementation.

# Glimpse of Agra Convention



**AD**  
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**blind STAR-S**

**Agra Convention**  
**Blind Stars Beyond Facebook**  
**- Bridging the Gap**

Inauguration - 2:30 pm onwards  
by Shri. D.P. Tripathi (M.P. Rajya Sabha)  
**7 November 2014**  
Jubilee Hall, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Paliwal Park, Agra

Regrets only: 9412258575

Sangeeta Bhatnagar (Chairperson, Organizing Committee) / Akhil Srivastava (Managing Trustee, Antardrishti)

**Join us to support Blind People and promote Eye Donation**

www.antardrishti.org | www.drishiti.org.in | www.icarinfo.in | www.blindstars.org | drishiti@antardrishti.org

association with Dept. of Social Work, ISS, Dr. B R Ambedkar University, Agra | Akanksha Samiti | YMCA | POOL Magazine

Support...







## Glimpse of Agra Convention





# Day II Press Coverage

(9th November 2014)



antar.drishti



## आंखें नहीं होने के बाद भी इन्होंने पाया मुकाम

दूर भ्रमणों के बाद भी इन लोगों ने अपने जीवन में सफलता पाई। इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया।



## कोई आंखीय में तो कोई बैंक इलाकी

आंखों के अभाव में भी इन लोगों ने अपने जीवन में सफलता पाई। इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया।



## जो रहे हैं सुखी-सुखी जीवन

सुखी-सुखी जीवन जीने के लिए इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया। इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया।

## दृष्टिहीन युवतियां सफल तो हैं मगर 'मां' सूनी

आज के युवाओं में दृष्टिहीन युवतियों की संख्या बढ़ रही है। इन युवतियों को सफलता मिल रही है, लेकिन उनके माता-पिता को सफलता नहीं मिल रही है।

## Of love that needs no first sight

Agna: It was not love at first sight. But that's only because their eyes couldn't see. When 28-year-old Dinesh...

## दृष्टि नहीं जीवन साथी खोजें

आज के युवाओं में दृष्टिहीन युवतियों की संख्या बढ़ रही है। इन युवतियों को सफलता मिल रही है, लेकिन उनके माता-पिता को सफलता नहीं मिल रही है।

## More than equals at work, insist visually-impaired

Agna: Thirty-year-old visually-impaired Neha Agarwal, who works as a project coordinator in IBM Hyderabad...

## नेत्रहीनों ने बताई अपनी कहानी

नेत्रहीनों ने अपनी कहानी सुनाई। इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया। इन लोगों ने अपनी कमजोरी को अपनी ताकत बना लिया।

## Marry one like me or not, that's the question

Many, including Nikita Patil, a computer instructor at Kamla Mehta Institute of Blinds in Mumbai, did not agree with Shah. The 28-year-old woman who was one of the most confident at the event...

## नेत्रहीनों ने बताई अपनी कहानी

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## Blind Stars inspire visually impaired

AGRA: A discussion on 'problems faced by visually impaired people in obtaining employment and marriage' was held at the national convention organised by 'Blind Stars Beyond Facebook'...

# Day III Press Coverage

(10th November 2014)



## ब्लाइंड स्टार्स

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।



ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के सदस्यों के बीच में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।

## खुशी नेगी बनी मिस स्टार

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## 18 लघु फिल्मों का हुआ प्रदर्शन

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।

## रजा हसानी मिस्टर स्टार और खुशी नेगी बनी मिस स्टार

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## नतमस्तक

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# मन की आंखों से देखा तज

## अमर उजाला ब्यूरो

आगरा। ब्लाइंड स्टार्स और अंतरदृष्टि के बैनर तले आयोजित तीन दिवसीय सम्मेलन में रविवार को 150 दृष्टिहीन तजमहल पहुंचे और मन की आंखों से मोहब्बत का पीपाम देवली इस महान इमारत को देखने, छूकर महसूस करने की कोशिश की। सुबह सात बजे सभी तज पहुंचे थे। यहां रॉयल गेट पर स्थापित ब्रेललिपि में लिखा सूचना पट्टा देखा गया। राजा हसानी ने तो इस पट्टा में कुछ गलतियाँ भी निकाल दीं। बताया कि 'र' को गलती से 'ड' लिख दिया गया है। सभी ने हथेलियों से तज पर बनी

## 150 दृष्टिहीन पहुंचे तज को महसूस करने

दाईं घंटे तक रहे, फोटो भी खिंचाए। कैलोग्राफी को महसूस किया। फोटो खिंचाए। इनमें से कुछ लोग ऐसे भी थे जो जन्मांध नहीं थे और तज की खूबसूरती को समझते थे। वे दूसरों को इमारत की बुलंदी बता रहे थे। हाथ से छूकर तज की दीवारों पर खुदे संगमरमरी फूलों के बारे में बताया कि कौन सा गुलशन है। मुख्य गुंबद के नीचे कब्र के पास भी गये और इस तरह दाईं घंटे सभी ने तज में वितारा।

## 18 लघु फिल्मों का हुआ प्रदर्शन

सम्मेलन के आखिरी दिन नेत्रदाज को प्रस्तुतित करने वाली 18 लघु फिल्मों का प्रदर्शन किया गया। पुणे के माज काजमी की फिल्म अनोखी ने दृष्टि 2014 का गोल्डन आई अवार्ड जीता। नोड्डा के अध्यक्ष उधवाजी की फिल्म प्रीति को सिल्वर आई अवार्ड दिया गया। पोस्टर प्रतियोगिता में मुकेश शर्मा की गोल्डन आई अवार्ड मिला। ऑडियो जिगल श्रेणी में वेल्लूर की वी शारुमति ने गोल्डन आई अवार्ड जीता। वेस्ट ऑडियंस च्याइस अवार्ड बनारस के प्रखर दुबे की फिल्म सपने को मिला।

## रजा हसानी मिस्टर स्टार और खुशी नेगी बनी मिस स्टार

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।



Visually-impaired at the Taj Mahal on Sunday

**16 I am happy that the 'Blind Stars' visited Taj Mahal. Our efforts to make the monument disabled-friendly seem to have become successful.** said Navratan Pathak, ASI.

people voted for these two visually impaired people. To help physically challenged tourists in the complex, their trip was easy and they could emotionally connect with the memorial. "It is white like snow. I can feel it. It was a dream come true for me, that I actually 'viewed' Taj. Ask me to describe you everything about the monument," said Avinash Shahi, 27 student of JNU. Khushi Negi, a bank clerk from Dehradun, was ecstatic when she entered inside Taj Mahal complex. An elated Khushi said, "I am blind by birth and have never thought that I will ever be able to come to the city of the Taj and will be able to see it. That is too good that I am running short of words to express myself." Kapil Mittal, a member of Antardrishti, organized



दृष्टिहीन तजमहल पहुंचे और मन की आंखों से तज देखा।



रजा मिस्टर और खुशी मिस स्टार



छूकर देखी तजमहल की सुंदरता

## ब्लाइंड स्टार्स ने मन की आंखों से निहारा तज

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।

## कल्पतरु एक्सप्रेस

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## नायिनाईस आनी अमीमिस प्रोजेक्ट

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## आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन

आगरा में आयोजित कार्यक्रम का अंतिम दिन (10 नवंबर) को राजा तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।

# ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के राष्ट्रीय अधिवेशन का समापन, अंतिम दिन हुई अवार्ड सेरेमनी

## मन की आंखों से किया तज का दीदार

नेत्रहीनों ने तज की खूबसूरती को हाथों से छूकर पहसास किया। 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स ने तज के आसपास बने हुए 150 ब्लाइंड स्टार्स के लिए एक कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया गया। कार्यक्रम का उद्देश्य है कि अंध लोगों को आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में जानकारी देना और उन्हें आगरा के इतिहास के बारे में अधिक जानकारी देना। कार्यक्रम का आयोजन अंधों के लिए एक अवसर के रूप में किया गया है।



# Drishti 2014

## Movie Screening and interaction with audience:

Movies made by participants from all over the country portraying the same urgent need of '*Eye Donation*' were screened. These movies were the participant entries to the annual contest '*Drishti*'.

There was a discussion on the process of eye donation as well the challenges in this field. There is an urgent need to promote eye donation in our country. Often, people take a pledge to donate their eyes and complete various formalities like registration etc. But it is of no use if the family of that person does

not act judiciously after that person has passed away. The only tool of use in such a situation is 'awareness' that would shatter the many myths that hamper the progress of this cause. The government is not doing enough to promote eye donation or introspecting on the various related issues like rehabilitation of a person who gets a transplant. There have been instances where people wait for more than 10 years to get a transplant. In a country with the second largest population in the world, such an ironical situation could only be attributed to 'lack of awareness and sensitization'.



## Award Function:

The Drishti Creative Contest was started 4 years ago with the purpose of spreading awareness and involving the youth in this process. Every year, the contest witnesses enthusiastic participation from all over the country. This year, 400 entries were received in all. The candidates were shortlisted through online voting in which 50 thousand people voted.

The contest has 4 categories:

- **Short Film**
- **Audio Jingles**
- **Design**
- **Posters**



There are two prizes awarded in each category –

## The Golden Eye and The Silver Eye Award

The following were the winners in the different categories:

### Poster Category:

Presented by Dr. Mukul Srivastava

The Silver Eye Award: Mr. Rakshit Dubey

The Golden Eye Award: Mr. Mukesh Sharma

### Short Films Category:

Presented by Miss Neha Agarwal and Miss Nikita Patil

The Silver Eye Award: 'Preeti' by Akshay Kumar Upadhyay

The Golden Eye Award: 'Anokhi' by Mr. Kazmi

### Audio Jingle Category:

Presented by Mohd. Khalid

The Silver Eye Award – Mr. Raviraj Panchal

The Golden Eye Award- Miss V. Shirumati

## Best Audience Choice Award

### Poster:

Presented by Miss Neelima Surve

Title 'Donate Eyes- A gift of God' - won by Miss Surbhi Singh (1397 Vote)

### Short Films:

Presented by Miss Fatima

Won by "Sapne", Directed by Mr. Prakhar Dubey (5480 Vote)

### Design:

Presented by Mohd. Raza Hassani

Title "The Dedicated Morning" – Miss Sonali Mishra (447 Vote)

### Audio Jingle:

Presented by Mr. Avinash Shahi

Won by Mr. Raviraj Panchal for 'Aankhein' (2480 Vote)



## Volunteers Experience

### Department of Social Work, ISS, Agra

**When** our department was approached by Mr. Akhil Srivastava of the organization 'Drishti' in September, to ask for its co-operation in organizing the 'Agra Convention: Blind Stars beyond Facebook – Bridging the Gap' in our University Campus, we, being the students of Social Work, were delighted to have been chosen to be a part of such a noble cause. But, coming from a society that has apprehensions about anyone who is a bit different, we did not know what to expect. Not having spent a very long time with people with disabilities, we were apprehensive as to how our team of just 15-20 volunteers would manage a group of 100-odd blind people. But, after 3 days of being in the same auditorium as them, observing them, listening to them, our myths have been completely shattered.

### 6th NOVEMBER 2014

#### THE DAY BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE BLIND STARS

We spent the entire 6th of November adorning the walls of the university's auditorium with posters received by the organizers from all over the country. These were posters urging people to share this gift of sight with people who have been denied it. Having done the same task for 'Drishti' last December, we knew that people across the country participate in this poster contest with great enthusiasm. Some posters bore very amusing requests like "Teri maa ki aankh...kisi aur ki zindagi roshan kar sakti hai" while some made us think what it would be like to not know what color the sky is!

## 7th November 2014 DAY 1 OF THE CONVENTION



The 7th of November began with us preparing ourselves to greet the blind stars in our University. We stood in attention at the door to escort them inside. But, to our amusement, most of them did not need to be escorted at all. They found their way inside the hall by themselves. It was surprising to know that most of them had travelled from as far as Mumbai and Hyderabad to attend this convention.

When the founding members of the Facebook group spoke about the idea behind this unique initiative of connecting so many blind people through a Social Networking site, all of us were amazed. In a generation where youngsters waste most of their productive time on social media sites, a bunch of people who cannot see could begin something so productive was an enlightening thing for us. It was that small initiative taken by some 20- odd people on Facebook that culminated into this gathering of more than a 150 people from across the country. The introduction round was another eye opener for us because most of the blind stars were bank officers, Human Resource Managers, teachers, other government employees and most of all... inspirational!

### SESSIONS OF THE DAY

#### **Accessible Banking Services: Legal Provisions for availing rights by visually impaired customers:**

It was very disappointing to know that the very banking system that is meant to serve the citizens of this country, disregards the rights of a large chunk of it. It was appalling to hear about blind people being considered equivalent to an illiterate, no matter how educated they may be, because of their inability to sign documents. Stories of them being denied regular services like ATM and Credit cards, lockers etc. were equally shocking. But then, it was reassuring to know





that that the state has not completely let go of its responsibility towards the blind. The RBI and IBA release periodic circulars to banks to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities. But, the need for the banking staff to be sensitized was felt by one and all.

**Post lunch, there was an address by the Member of Parliament Dr. D.P. Tripathi, visually challenged himself, sharing his life life's struggles and how he never let his disability to take over his will to excel in life.**

### **Role of Media: A powerful Pillar to Empower Visually Impaired People**

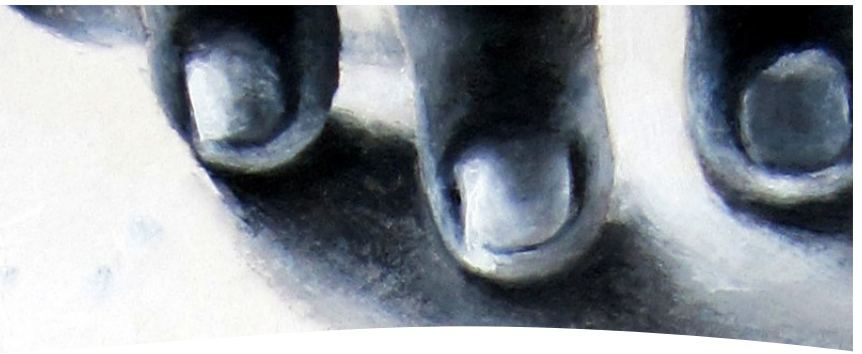
The media, if used correctly, could be the most powerful weapon to be used against injustice. Experts like Mr. Prashant Tandon and Mr. Ajay Srivastava enlightened everyone that when everything else fails, the media would always work to bring to light the discrimination against the visually impaired in the society. Many success stories were shared where the media helped the fight for the rights of the blind.

## **8th November 2014**

### **DAY 2 OF THE CONVENTION : SESSIONS OF THE DAY**

#### **Mainstreaming of Blind Child specially the Girl Child: Role of the family and key challenges**

The social issue of 'Gender based Discrimination' is something that everyone is aware of. But it was probably the first time that we were getting to know about the fate that awaits a girl child who is blind. Girl children are anyway considered a liability in most sections of our society even today, but to be a 'blind' girl child at that would be the worst nightmare of parents belonging to those sections of the society. The argument that a blind girl cannot see the danger looming ahead of her is used to justify this absurd attitude towards blind girls. But this is no justification to deny the blind girl the right to education and a normal life, the chance to realize her potential. Such views were put forward by the speakers of this session. As students of Social Work, we could very well identify the streak of 'dominant patriarchy' in this attitude towards blind girls. A solution would only be reached if the blind girls are motivated to take a stand for themselves rather than have someone else do it for them.



### **School Education for the Visually Impaired / Inclusive Education**

The Kothari Commission in 1966 recommended the same approach to education for every child. But has it been possible? Clearly not! How do we even think of 'main-streaming of blind children' when we have already termed a section as 'the main population.' The fact that school textbooks are never published from the point of view of a blind child is something we had never thought about prior to this. The process of Sensitization would have to start from childhood. We, as a society, would have to learn to respect diversity, be it of any kind. Writing off anyone who is different from us has already created an imbalance in our society, with people hating anyone who does not conform to their 'standards.'

### **Workshop with HR experts to make them understand the abilities and productivity of a visually challenged candidate**

Miss Neha Agarwal is a visually challenged lady who works as a Project Manager in IBM. Just hearing her introduction shattered a lot of myths for the people present in the room. A blind person working for an international

organization for the past so many years is nothing short of an inspirational story. Miss Neha described how people with visual impairment are no less than the sighted people when it takes to shouldering responsibilities in an organization. With the help of technology, like the software JAWS, everything has been made possible for the blind. It was reassuring to see the various HR experts present there appreciate her skills and confidence and promising to never overlook a blind candidate for a sighted one if he is capable enough.



### **Women with Blindness: Challenges and Expectations**

Miss Shalini Khanna, head of the Centre for Blind Women, delivered an excellent lecture enlightening us about the various challenges that blind women face in every aspect of life, be it in finding employment or finding a life partner. The fact that even some blind men don't want to get married to blind women was very disheartening. But then, as she recounted stories of her students at



the centre, who are excelling in all walks of life, the auditorium resonated with applause. It was once again established how important it is to make blind girls self-dependent.

### **Employment Opportunities for the Visually Impaired**

The two key speakers of this session – Miss Neha Agarwal and Mrs. Veena Verma are themselves the epitome of will power and perseverance. With their dedication, they have carved for themselves very successful careers. We, as budding HR managers, found this very motivating and inspiring. We were instilled with the faith that if we wish, we could accomplish anything we want with hard work and determination and turn our weaknesses into our assets.

### **9th November 2014 FINAL DAY OF THE CONVENTION : SESSIONS OF THE DAY**

#### **Movie Screening and Interaction with audience**

We were shown beautiful short movies with the same message of supporting the cause of 'Eye Donation'. The movies were so inspiring that every person watching them must have pledged to donate their eyes.

#### **Assistive Technology and Education:**

It was enriching to know that technologies are being developed to make life as normal as possible for the blind. There is no dearth of technologies to assist the blind in their day to day activities and hence they cannot be considered any less than their sighted counterparts in any aspect of life.





## What we are taking back from this experience:

It is easy for anyone who has not got the chance to interact with people with disabilities to doubt their capabilities. But when you delve deeper and encounter so many blind people who are success stories in themselves, all your myths and preconceived notions are shattered. These people represent what determination and perseverance could help you achieve. They are the very personification of the saying "You become what you believe". These people believed they are achievers, and there they are, inspiring hundreds of people wherever they go. Not only has each one of us pledged to donate their eyes, but we are also going to recount this experience whenever we feel that something could not be done. We, as students of Social Work, are taking back many positive lessons that are sure to help us and enrich our abilities to deal with people who are different from us in some way or the other. We will certainly do our part in sensitizing the society to deal with people with disabilities with the respect and appreciation they deserve.




## The EYE OPENER for everyone -



An eye opener and rich experienced program witnessed by the young leaders of YMCA AGRA (Young Men's Christian Association, Agra) Green Team from 7-9th November 2014 when Antardrishti organized the interactive workshop for the Blind Stars who came Agra from various parts of India.

Under the gracious presence of Dr. Sangeeta Bhatnagar – The Divisional President of Akansha Samiti who motivated the Team and supported the event full heartily. The team members Lawrence Masih, Niharika Srivastava, Abhishek Kapoor, Edward, Rohit Massey, Dolly William, Dorthy William, Yamini, Rinki, Aruna Benjamin, Mohit Lal, Lucky Massey serve the cause as volunteers and were blessed with the unique experiences.



Before the program the Volunteers were given training on how to walk with them, how to hold them and how they need to be understood as we were responsible for Hotel arrangements and hospitality.

*The team had surprising experiences when the friends from Mumbai asked to have photo clicked for facebook wall as a huge community of blinds have Facebook page and Accounts. The height of surprise when many of them immediately saved the numbers of volunteers and sent sms. Apart from regular sessions the most enjoying time was taking them to Taj Mahal. They were so excited as they can see the World's Famous Monument. As they reach Taj Mahal they touched it and felt the beauty of it.*

Three days with blind stars made our volunteers aware about the problems they undergo and how they come up with solutions which help them to face the situation.

Their unique sense of understanding made a bond between the green team and blind stars and now we are ready to host another program with Blind Stars "out from the Virtual World" Thank You Antardrishti for giving us chance to serve such nice and wonderful friends.



### **YMCA AGRA Green Team**

Amit Kapoor –The General Secretary YMCA, AGRA, Mrs. Amrita Charlotte Kapoor, Lawrence Masih, Niharika Srivastava, Abhishek Kapoor, Edward, Rohit Massey, Dolly William, Dorthy William, Yamini, Rinki, Aruna Benjamin, Mohit Lal, Lucky, Aaron, Amber Eva, Stuti Kerren.

# ...as i feel AGRA CONVENTION 2014



**First of all I would like to say a big “Thank You” for organising such an event & taking so much care of your unknown & non-inform guests.**

Akhil Ji, Agra visit to convention has been an enriching experience for me as It was my first visit that I done without my family members in my small life with blindness. Actually, I has lost my eye sight before 3 years only. I am working in a Finance Company as Manager-Operations in Jaipur for last 12 years.

I was informed about this convention many days before but I couldn't make my mind to visit it alone. Only 3 days before I managed to agree 2 another blind friends ( 6 month old friends) Mr. Chetan Sharma & Mr. Lokesh Soni. They both are Govt School Teacher & find 2 holidays on short notice. We some how got mobile number of Mr. Kapil Mittal & He was so nice to us that he took our request positively to attend the summit with late fees & given your mobile no. It's very tough to manage things on the last moments for arrangements & management with limited options. We really appreciate you & him for this kind of approach. (We have been not asked to deposit fee with late charges also later )

I understand that I am so fortunate to share with you all that I have spend an excellent and short period (approx. 2 days) in “AGRA” and I have so much enjoyed my entire time with excellent People. Let me share my entire journey with “Blind Starts”.....

I, Chetan, Lokesh & his 8 years old nephew Bunti. We took Bunti with us in the last moments before leaving house as all we three are blind & I specially was hesitating to travel with 2 persons like me. Actually, we were very much excited to go to Agra as we all are going first time there & we still haven't any confirm accommodation in the convention. We reached at venue at 1.30 p.m. & welcomed by Mr. Akhil on the entrance. It was most satisfactory for us that we got *khane ka Dabba* also just after sitting in the seminar hall (at least now our timing is good).

We missed 1st session of the convention & after lunch we got chance to listen Chief Guests. It was really amazing to listening MP of Rajya Sabha talking about Disability rights & his personal experiences. VC of the University & others speakers thoughts were also appreciable. Another session on Media & disability issues was presides by Mr. Prashant Tandon & Mr. Ajay Srivastav. There in the session we came to know little much about Mr. Akhil & his NGO “Antardrishti” & also listen about Mr. Khalid & his journey of this group. I really congratulate Mr. Khalid for this endeavor & his willingness to live life with so positivity.

After 1st day session we were informed to move out for sitting in buses to hotel. It was giving me very much confidence as I am thinking with family members. I was not very talkative there as I was very curious to listen people around me. All are blind

but live life as they are enjoying with life. No sorrow, no tension. It's was going to be a great learning experience for me.

We reached to hotel & soon got separate room for us. It was looking as we came to baarat & we were treated as baraati. We found many volunteers there to hold our hands softly & taking care so much like a friend. Their dedication to care for us was best part of till that time. It was understood that Akhil Ji has trained many things about blind people. I was really thrilled to know how is our room? How is washroom? How is bed? How is cleaning in room? How our baggages will secure etc... But all are vanished as we reached in the room & I checked the room walking all in & check everything. All arrangements were made to serve us with honour & respect. Perhaps that was the thing to mention first.

2nd day eventually was the day when we got to meet many distinguish persons. We listen Mrs. Preeti Monga & her speech on disabled women problems & their solutions was tremendous. She shared her experiences with life with blindness which inspired me a lot. After that we got to listen some couples about their marriage & relationships. I was moved with their bonding while facing day to day situations. I listen Kapil Mittal & wish to talk him later. After lunch we got to listen most interesting & experienced MS. Shalini Khanna on Women issues. Her devotion for empowerment of visually impaired women is matchless indeed. Her speech was showing her experiences & dedication towards them.

Next session was headed by MS Veena Mehta & MS Neha Agarwal With Avinash Shahi. This session was very informative as well as very inspiring also. They all are setting up examples for all in life. I had got chances to meet Neha previously & I feel blessed whenever I remember my conversations with her & her suggestion to move on. After that we went back to hotel & had dinner with live musical band (orchestras).

Next day we visited to Agra & that was the most thrilling part of my journey. As I mentioned, I lost my eyes sight before few years only & I got to see Taj-Mahal in photos thousands of time. But I visited Agra first time to see Taj without eyes. I thought I know Taj well as I have seen photos many times but that visit is a life time story for me. I will share it with another mail.

Well, Akhil Ji, I would like to appreciate your wonderful leadership & administrative skills while organising such a huge convention with so many blind participants. I would like to congratulate You & wish you all the best for your all future endeavours & will be pleased to serve you in future in any other events.

Thank You very much..  
Peeyush Bardia / Jaipur // Rajasthan



# Taj Mahal Visit

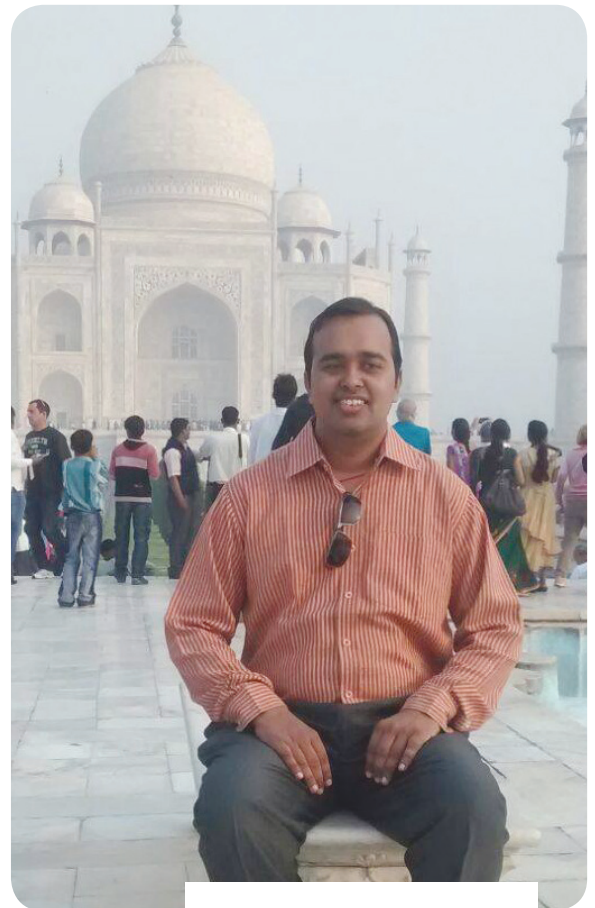
## a life time story for me

**Actually** on very first day only I came to know that all convention participants will go to visit Taj. It was my stupidity that I was thinking “what we will do to visit Taj?” I have seen photographs of Taj thousands of time in my sight days & believed that It’s specialty is it’s beauty. It is so beautiful that without seeing it’s counting in wonders of world can’t be justified. What will all people those can’t see see there? Why should I go there when I have already seen photographs of Taj? My mind was filled with prejudicialness towards visually impaired. Though, it is going to be my first tourist visit after loosing eye sight.


We four i.e. I, Chetan Lalit ji & our little guide Bunti get ready to leave hotel room at sharp 6.00 a.m. That day was special as it was our little wonder’s birthday also. He was exciting boy among us. We took our seats in buses standing near hotel to take away for Taj. Everything was managed well as was in last 2 days. We leaved buses before 1 k.m. near Taj, where we shifted in battery operated vehicles.

That was also a new experience for us to sit in a big capacity battery vehicle. We discussed it’s worthiness in contrast of security of Taj as well prevention from high city pollution. This kind of contaminated atmosphere surely dangerous to Taj. When our newly made buildings are being affected with this polluted environments than what can we say for approx. 400 years old Taj.

We arrived at a destination where we cleared security checks & I think got in Taj corridor. It was also a new thing for me when we were walking like a train. We all 5 people, we are also with us Mr. Aftab who is from Delhi & was seated in bus with me. Holding each other’s arm & walking back to back one with Bunti. Here is the time where we got to know desperately to need someone to guide us for further visit. Then, we were fortunate to meet Mr. Volunteer who was here to guide us on this trip. He took our hand & asked to follow him towards Taj. Then we nab him tightly & decided to not to leave till the visit end. Now our actual visit to Taj started.



**Peeyush Bardia**



All we are enthusiastic & our anxiety increasing step by step we are taking towards Taj. We all are cracking jokes on Taj history. Actually Lalit Ji is a History teacher by profession & he was very informative on it & all we are only enjoying cracking jokes on his informations. We reached at Big darwaza where we came to know it's specialties. We seen the door & it's Quran aayatein by touching & feeling with manifestation by our Mr. Volunteer. He construed us about the architecture & height. Here we came to know his name & he introduced to us as Adverd. There chetan cracked a remarkable joke. He said our group "Secular Group" as, Hindu, Muslim, Christian & Jain (that is Me). Adverd was a very polite, humble & soft spoken. We asked too many foolish things but he was very calm & serving us with full dignity. Then I asked him also the "Love Bench" where I have seen many celebrities posing for photographs. One of them I remember was Aishwarya Rai's picture & I asked him where is the bench where Aishwarya has been clicked. All make "lol" to me but I was curious to see. I know that was a great view for all except us. That was looking a Irony of Life that we want to click pictures but can't see ourselves.

Actually, that was only my interpretations but when we reach at that point I was astonished with pleasure of all our mates & people around us. Everyone asking volunteers to click their pictures in their own mobiles. All are crazy to get best poses & asking to get finest view for them. Than I also sat on love bench & got the chance to clicked in my own mobile by Adverd. There I realise & asked my self, am I a prejudice mentality man? Is it my habit to put "if & but" in all happenings? All are visually impaired but all are enjoying this & I am analysing it.

We were moving towards the Taj & I was listening endless smiles & joy among all visitors. I could listen many voices & can assume that visitors gathering is increasing minute by minute. Than we entered towards main tomb & there we offered to wear shoe covers. It was a well idea for all but we chosen to visit without shoes to enjoy the feeling of Taj. Adverd was taking care of our moves & giving us directions to walk safely. Than we reached at a point where he figure out a board to read. It was a board where history of Taj Written in Braille. It was a pleasant moment for all of us that administration has a good sense of responsibility to understand the need of Blind people. Perhaps I don't understand Braille language but still I was very happy to see this gesture. Our mates read all history detail on the board & I was making my mind to decide to learn Braille.

Adverd took us to near the tomb via wooden stairs, & also pointed out way of actual graves of Shahjahan & Noor Jahan which was prohibited to go. We all were listening & touching & feeling the creativity of that Golden era of Indian architecture. We must say Love can make you to do unexpected, beyond imaginations or to say Impossible. We got to know so many more things from Edward & our own "MasterJi" Lalit Ji.



We went to back side of Taj and listen, smell, feel & perceive presence of Yamuna. From Yamuna bank we proceed to near the pillar of Taj. Their construction was also a precious piece of the creativity. My imaginations of Taj which I have seen in photographs was very little in front of it's appearance. We all wants to spend some more time their but that can't be possible, I assume.

I would like to say that this beautiful mausoleum built by Shahjahan is the Identity of India in World. This visit of all visually impaired proved that beauty only can not be seen by eyes, it can be seen by touching, feelings, emotions, volition, enthusiasm, curiosity, perceptions & incisive tranquility. This trip started with so much thoughts but ended as overpowering, inspirational, pleasant & unbelievably peaceful.

I would like to congratulate Akhil Ji & Antardrishti once again for this special arrangements of Taj visit. It is indeed a privilege & honour for me to say on behalf of Chetan Ji & Lalit Ji also that only a single word of thanks can't express our emotions. We wish you best of the best in journey forward.

Health To You,  
Peeyush Bardia / Jaipur // Rajasthan



## ...as if i was holding the Taj in my hand...

Our experience of visiting the Taj Mahal with the Blind stars & Andadrishti Group during the Agra Convention in November 2014

Both of us had visited Taj Mahal much earlier and had been wanting to visit again. I had visited Taj Mahal in my childhood, when I had good vision. I still recall the photograph which my father had taken, it seemed as if I was holding the Taj in my hand. This must have been about 25 years ago and I wanted to know if anything had changed. I also now understood the history and significance of Taj in a better way and wanted to visit the Taj Mahal with new perspectives.

Veena has also visited Taj earlier but does not recall much. Being totally blind, she appreciates anything based on the verbal descriptions provided by the friends or guides whenever we are on tour. So, we try to make sure that we engage a very good guide whenever we visit any historical place.

This visit to the Taj with a large group of visually impaired turned out to be very enjoyable, very informative and brought new learnings. When we finally neared the main structure, we were required to take off our footwear. A new problem came up, how will the blind persons identify their shoes if all of them are kept together in a pile, it would have surely taken lot of time for each one. The shoe covers came as a rescue, we did not take off our shoes, we just put on the big socks-like covers. I am surely, we were looking very funny but it was



an interesting experience walking with those foot covers on. Many took photos and commented that it felt like Penguins.

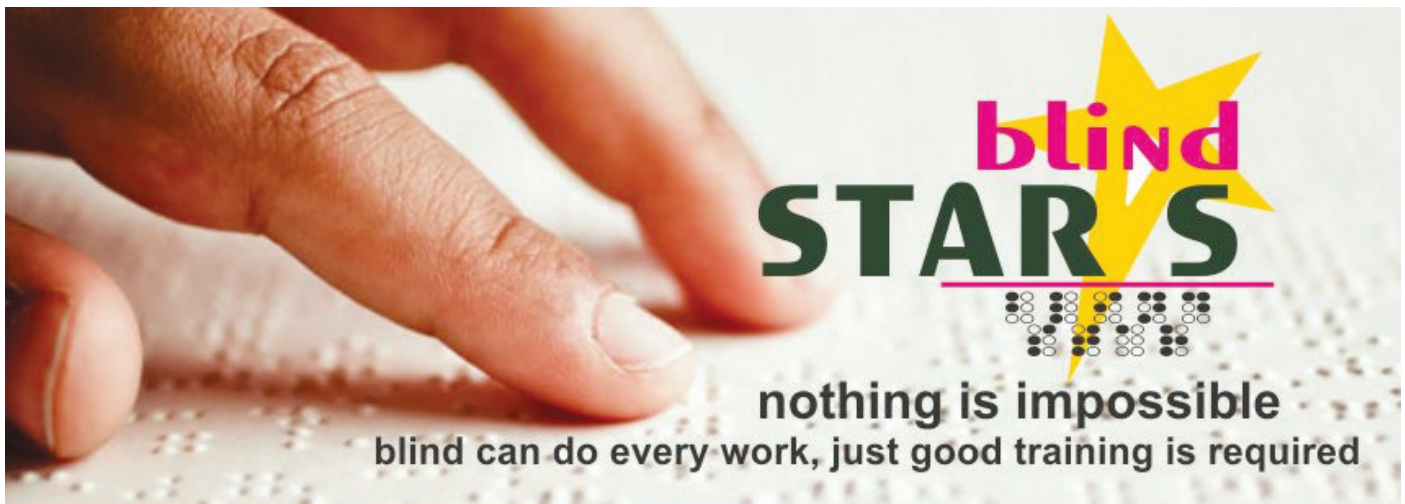
Mr. Prashant Tandon, Mr. Akhil and a guide explained each and every detail of the Taj Mahal and its surroundings in a very interesting way. They even let us touch and feel the carvings on the Taj walls. Blind people could appreciate the astonishing work done by artists hundreds of years ago, we could identify the Poppy flowers on some of the walls.

Since I am working in the field of accessibility for the disabled, I was also trying to judge if the Taj Mahal was accessible to people with different disabilities. I noticed that ramps had been created and lot of support was available everywhere. By and large, I felt that it is possible for even wheel chair users to visit the Taj Mahal.

We were however sad to see that so much security arrangements had to be made for the Taj. The area outside the Taj entrance did not seem to be very clean and well organized. It is a pity that we are not able to keep the jewel of India in a better condition than what it is today. The city of Agra should have been like a show piece since almost everyone who visits India does come to see the taj once. However, the city still lacks lot of infrastructure and needs to be made cleaner.



Thanks,  
Prashant & Veena / Delhi



# Blind Stars

The 'Blind Stars' group was initially launched on October 25 2012 as Facebook group to serve as meeting place of blind people from across the world. This group has grown exponentially in the short span of less than two years; its membership stands over 4000 till August 2014. 21 members' admin team looking after its activities. Blind Star is proud to have members from neighboring Pakistan to African country Kenya. It provides a mutual platform to both (blind and sighted) people to interact, mingle, — exchange information and knowledge to build an enlightened society. In the years to come, Blind Stars has a vision to make an inroads in the rural and semi-urban India where blind people in the absence of quality education and lack of employment opportunities languishing in abject poverty.

Blind Stars aims to have visually challenged individuals on-board; however, the stars with sight can also complete the galaxy by joining hands to make inclusive blind star family.

The vision behind forming this group is to offer an amicable forum for all the stakeholders to come over a common platform to encourage mutual learning, sharing optimistic ideas, challenging achievements and the things which can motivate others.

Join us on facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/blindstar/>

Web: [www.blindstars.org](http://www.blindstars.org)

# Antardrishti

## PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Name of Trust	Antardrishti	
Legal Status	Public Charitable Trust	
Registration number	106/4 of 28.08.2006	
Address	35, Ashoka Enclave, Dayal Bagh Agra 282 005 Uttar Pradesh, INDIA Tele: + 91 562 2800683 Mobile: + 91 94122 58575 Email: drishti@antardrishti.org Web: www.antardrishti.org	
Office Bearers	Akhil Kumar Srivastava Anil Kumar Chaudhary Vice Admiral H. Johnson, (retd)	Managing Trustee Member Trustee Member Trustee
Chief Functionary	Akhil Kumar Srivastava	
I.T. (Exemption) No	Dated 17.01.2007 12 AA (1-110) / Agra / 2006-07 / 3331 Dated 17.01.2007 CIT-II/AGRA/ Tech./80G/2013-14/25/55/3376 Dated 03.01.2014	
Bank Details	Account Holder Name: ANTARDRISHTI Account Number: 086010100238304 Customer ID: 086030793 Bank Name: AXIS Bank Ltd. Branch Name: Sanjay Place Branch Id: 086 MICR Code: 282211002 IFSC Code : UTIB0000086 SWIFT Code: AXISINBB086	

# Why Antardrishti ?

Looking at the current situation of visually challenged people (Blind People) we notice that even after so many years of independence, we have failed to integrate them in the mainstream society. More than 4 million Visually Challenged people live in urban areas. Rarely we do see them walking on the streets or participating in some meaningful social activities; excluding the students of specialized schools for the Blind. Do you often see visually challenged person in the schools, colleges, banks, post offices or have seen them using public facilities. What is the reason that these people are not seen despite living in urban centres? It looks like as if someone has cut them off from the mainstream. Even today they are looked upon with pity or even abhorrence.

Lack of access to information and resources is one of the reasons why a large section of visually challenged people are not deriving any benefits from government or non-government schemes and programmes. Despite their indefatigable efforts, the programmes for integrating them in the mainstream have not found much success. However, it is because of these efforts that of late some change has been observed in the overall situation.

So far, Visually Challenged People have been seen as a powerless category, fit only for pity and charity. But the fact is that the aspirations of visually challenged have not been properly understood either by the society or by the government. Society showered pity on them and government confined them to some kind of vocation only. But we at Antardrishti do not look at them as 'powerless poor' or with the view point of negligence. Like other ailment, blindness is also a disease which should not be neglected, pitied or ashamed; rather we should instil feelings of equality and co-operation in them.

Antardrishti believes that the awareness level of the society about blinds and blindness must be raised. They can be brought into the mainstream of society only by providing them with equal opportunities, helping them acquire skills and by linking them in the production process. Along with, it is also necessary that the mainstream society should not only accept their presence but also treat them with dignity and equality.

After a thorough analysis of our experiences of last six years, we felt the need of a platform where visually challenged persons, along with their family members, friends and people from different backgrounds can come together to exchange ideas, opinions and experiences; so that they can be enabled not only to cooperate and solve the problem of VCPs but also facilitate their integration in the mainstream of society.





# Antardrishti Profile

## The Scale

The estimated number of blind persons in India in 2000 was 18.7 million, of which 9.5 million were cataract related and 3 million refractive error related. If there is no change in the current trend of blindness, the number of blind persons in India would increase to 24.1 million in 2010 and to 31.6 million in 2020.



## Identity

The symbol represents lifting latch/barriers, opening gateway, welcoming to a world of equal learning opportunities, of acceptance as productive members of society, of dignity and economic empowerment.

Green colour signifies growth, gold colour is symbolic of children as valuable assets.

## Our Vision

Antardrishti aims at creating an inclusive society with equal and full participation of the blind or visually impaired people in conformity with the principles of equity, justice, participation and collective accountability of different stakeholders.

## Our Mission

Antardrishti's mission is to promote self-reliance among the visually impaired people by empowering them through education, skill building and mastering life skills.

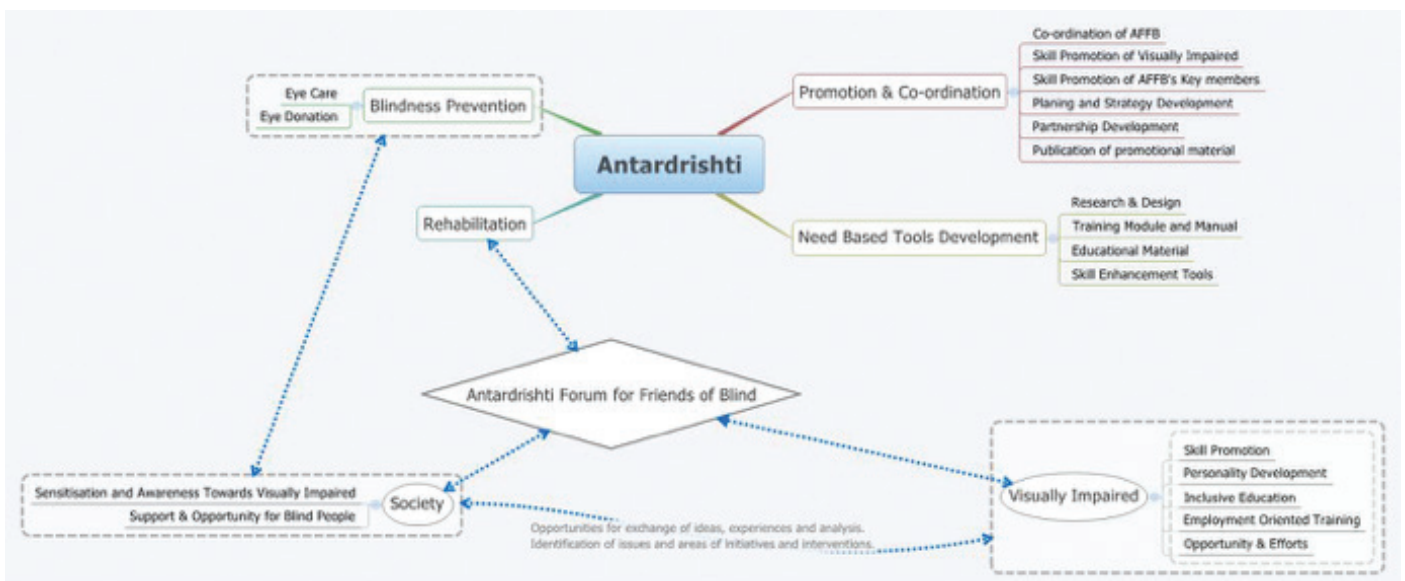
## Our belief

Antardrishti firmly believes that the visually impaired people do not constitute any social or personal liability- on the contrary, they are our valuable assets. They do not need sympathy but an enabling environment – an environment that promotes and translates their innate potential into creative and productive energy.

## Our Strategy

- Antardrishti work will be focused on the following priority areas in the next 3 years
- Role out and strengthen Antardrishti Forum for Friends of Blind across the Nation
- Promotion of Eye Donation & Childhood Blindness prevention through school intervention
- Collaborate with researchers and technology experts to enhance, adapt or develop low cost technologies and educational materials and making them accessible to blind and visually impaired people to be independent and maintain a productive lifestyle
- Partnership and joint actions with other organisations to maximise the effectiveness of our campaign

## Antardrishti Plan



## Blindness Prevention

### Eye care awareness

Lack of awareness is one of the main reason in preventing blindness.

Antardrishti addresses this issue by:

- Direct Intervention with school/college students and teachers
- Holding public lecture on eye care at clubs, NCC, NSS, corporate houses and other available platforms and gatherings in both urban and rural locations
- Community outreach through volunteers



- Eye care awareness by organising workshops, seminars, inter-school essay / poster / debate / drama competition, film shows and discussions and through involvement of mass media

### **Eye donation ([www.drishti.org.in](http://www.drishti.org.in))**

- There is a huge gap between the supply and demand of eyes - supply being 10% of demand! And in a country like India this gap is ever increasing.
- Recently Antardrishti launched a drive to promote eye donation in association with S.N. Medical College eye bank. Enrolment drive for eye donation has been put on fast track with the support of volunteers.

## **Rehabilitation**

### **Antardrishti Forum for Friends of Blind (AFFB)**

After a thorough analysis of our experiences of last six years, we felt the need of a platform where visually impaired persons, along with their family members, friends and people from different backgrounds can come together to exchange ideas, opinions and experiences; so that they can be enabled not only to cooperate and solve the problem of Visually Impaired but also facilitate their integration in the mainstream of society.

- Promote exchange of experiences, ideas, concerns and future programmes.
- Work as a pressure group for solving the problems of blindness.
- Identification of issues and areas of initiatives and interventions.

### **Key Components of Antardrishti Forum for Friends of Blind (AFFB)**

- Skill Building
- Personality Development of Visually Impaired
- Inclusive Education
- Employment Oriented Training of Visually Impaired
- Support, Opportunity & Efforts for Visually Impaired
- Sensitisation and Awareness of Society Towards Visually Impaired

### **Promotion & Co-ordination**

- Coordination of AFFB
- Skill Promotion of Visually Impaired
- Publication of Promotional Material
- Skill Promotion of AFFB's Key Members
- Planning & Strategy Development
- Partnership Development

### **Need Based Tool Development**

- Research & Design
- Training Modules and Manuals
- Educational Materials
- Skill Enhancement Tools

### **As of now...**

- We are collaborating with 160 schools.
- Directly supported 280 blind people in different parts of India.
- Organised more than 780 lectures/seminar on eye care and eye donation in corporate house, schools, NCC camps, LIC offices, NSS and colleges.
- More than 6500 people pledged for eye donation.
- Orientation of 620 volunteers including teachers, students, professionals on the issue of eye care/ eye donation.
- Started a helpdesk to facilitate People With Disabilities for obtaining jobs.
- We are connected with more then 16000 people across the world through internet.
- Hosting, updating and maintenance of a bi-lingual website, with facilities of upload and download of important information and materials. Approximately 4000 visitors per month.
- Every year we disseminate posters and flyers on Safe Diwali, Holi and Eye donation.
- Prepared Eye Care manual for school teachers.
- Our presence in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat.

### **Work in progress...**

- Community Radio for Visually Impaired
- Web based campaign to promote eye donation
- Manual for Personality Development of Visually Impaired children
- Hand Book for parents of Visually Impaired Children
- Manual for community worker on eye care
- Urdu Braille Hand book for parents and teachers of visually impaired

**Web: [www.antardrishti.org](http://www.antardrishti.org) | [www.drishti.org.in](http://www.drishti.org.in) | [www.icareinfo.in](http://www.icareinfo.in)  
email: [drishti@antardrishti.org](mailto:drishti@antardrishti.org)**



## Drishti Yatra to Promote Eye donation

After the enthusiastic response of Dishti 2011 Antardrishti has decided to organize Drishti Yatra - a multi-city campaign for the promotion of eye donation. Drishti Yatra has already been launched from Agra on 29th of January 2012. Through these “yatra” a very innovative awareness campaign is launched using tools of mass media and films.

### Objective:

- Prime objective of Drishti Yatra is to bring awareness and to clear misconceptions about eye donations through films and multimedia tools.
- To create nationwide network of volunteers for promotion of eye donation.
- To bring eye donation among people’s agenda through constructive discussion and participation.

### Concept:

Drishti Yatra will be conducted in over a dozen cities all across India. For these yatra a complete package for the promotion of eye donation is designed which is suited to various Target Groups. Total duration of each presentation is roughly 2 hours followed by a press conference at every station.

### Activity and Programmes:

The presentation includes following items:

- Formal opening of the programme by local stake holders.
- Brief audio-visual introduction to Drishti Yatra.
- Films Screening – Duration 40 minute. (Screening of short listed films from Drishti on the theme of eye donation)
- Presentation on eye donation.
- Question and answer session.
- On the spot Quiz Contest on eye donation.
- Distribution of forms and on the spot issuance of Eye Donation cards.
- Closing of programme with prize distribution.
- Tea and refreshment break.
- Press Conference



- a monthly news paper iCare Info which is devoted to the cause of eye care and visually impaired. iCare Info is the only news paper in India which is being published in English, Hindi and Urdu and focuses its content on various issues of eye care and blindness through write-ups by experts and news items. Besides medical issues concerning optical health we also dwell on social and empowerment aspects of patients so that they regain the confidence and live a meaningful life.

## Why iCare info?

- Approximately 285 million people worldwide live with low vision and blindness
- Of these, 39 million people are blind and 246 million have moderate or severe visual impairment
- 90% of blind people live in low-income countries
- Yet 80% of visual impairment is avoidable – i.e. readily treatable and/or preventable
- Restorations of sight, and blindness prevention strategies are among the most cost-effective interventions in health care
- The number of people blind from infectious causes has greatly reduced in the past 20 years
- An estimated 19 million children are visually impaired
- About 65 % of all people who are visually impaired are aged 50 and older, while this age group comprises only 20% of the world's population
- Increasing elderly populations in many countries mean that more people will be at risk of age-related visual impairment.

We at Antardrishti believe that the awareness level of the society about eye care, eye donation and blindness must be raised. After a thorough analysis of our experiences of last 8 years, we felt the need of a platform to -

- Bring awareness about eye care and health
- Create communities for people with vision deformity and visually impaired,
- Inform and bring awareness to parents and peer group of affected people
- Opinion building on issues related to eye health
- Generate content focused on empowerment of visually impaired

**[www.icareinfo.in](http://www.icareinfo.in)**

**Walking with a friend  
in the dark is  
better than walking alone  
in the light.**

- Helen Keller

As an organization AFMEC is working for whole footwear industry in Agra. We work upon Environment awareness, New technologies upgrade, information sharing, national & international fair support and support for them who are very new to this industry.

**President**

**Mr. Puran Dawar**

DAWAR FOOTWEAR IND.



**AFMEC**

AGRA FOOTWEAR MANUFACTURERS & EXPORTERS CHAMBER



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[www.blindstars.org](http://www.blindstars.org) | [www.icareinfo.in](http://www.icareinfo.in)

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