

## SAMBHAV 2009: A Report

Experiences from an International Event  
on Physically and Mentally Challenged Persons  
and Performing Arts

Published by  
A.L.P.A.N.A., New Delhi  
Mailing Address: D-II-61, Kaka Nagar, New Delhi 110003  
Website: [www.alpana.in](http://www.alpana.in)  
Email: [alpanasociety@gmail.com](mailto:alpanasociety@gmail.com)  
Telefax: 91-11-24356677 Mobile: +919818258551

## CONTENTS

Chapter	Title	Page
1.	Introduction	2
2.	Inaugural Event	2
3.	First Day of International Seminar	4
4.	Second Day of International Seminar	7
5.	First Day of International Performances	13
6.	Second Day of International Performances	15
7.	Recommendations	17

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Association for Learning Performing Arts and Normative Action (ALPANA) was set up in the year 2004. It has been registered with the Registrar of Societies, Govt. of N.C.T. of Delhi under the Societies Registration Act 1860. The mission of the Society is promotion of performing arts and facilitating holistic human development. The Society is also actively involved in teaching of Odissi dance to specially gifted (mentally and physically challenged) persons. Through its regular classes and stage events, ALPANA intends to contribute towards making society more inclusive towards the differently abled.
- 1.2 For the past five years, ALPANA has been holding an annual event called 'Sambhav' which showcases the abilities of the differently abled people in the field of the performing arts. It had its beginnings as a local event, but grew to become a national event. In 2008, ALPANA decided to expand Sambhav to include a few countries of South Asia - Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The success with which it was received encouraged ALPANA to hold a bigger event in 2009. This year, there were a total of ten countries participating in the event: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

# **2. THE INAUGURAL EVENT**

- 2.1 Sambhav 2009 was a two-day event, held on 14th and 15th November. The first half of both the days was dedicated to the international seminar, with participants from the invited countries. The seminar was held during the day at India International Centre on 14th and 15th November. Evenings of both days were full of performances by groups from the ten participating countries. The performance on 14th November was held at FICCI Auditorium, whereas the performance on 15th November was held at India Habitat Centre.
- 2.2 On 14th November, at IIC Main Auditorium, the inaugural function of Sambhav 2009 commenced a little after 10:00 a.m. The compère Dr. Anupama Singh welcomed the audience to Sambhav 2009. The Chief Guest for the occasion was the ex-Chief Information Commissioner, Mr. Wajahat Habibullah. Mr. B.K.Dash, the Vice-President of ALPANA accompanied Mr. Habibullah to the dais and assisted him in lighting the ceremonial lamp. Mr. Habibullah was felicitated with a bouquet by the founder-President of ALPANA, Ms. Alpana Nayak. Dr. Anupama Singh went on to thank the sponsors of Sambhav 2009 - ONGC Ltd., GAIL India Ltd., NTPC, Powergrid, REC, Coal India, State Bank of India, DSIIDC, Bureau of Energy Efficiency and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). She also thanked ALPANA's partners - India-Bhutan

Foundation, India-Sri Lanka Foundation, B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation and above all, Jeevan Jyoti Home of Holy Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.

- 2.3 Following this, a welcome song, "Swagatam, shubh swagatam" was sung by physically and mentally challenged children from ALPANA in order to welcome everyone to the event.
- 2.4 Dr. Anupama then went on to introduce the organization ALPANA to the audience. She gave a brief history of the organization and described its activities and concerns. She called upon the founder-President of the organization, Ms. Alpana Nayak, to deliver the welcome speech. Ms. Alpana Nayak came on to the stage and gave everyone a warm welcome. She thanked the Chief Guest, and also the audience for being present. She mentioned the hard work that the volunteers and the children had put into the event, and hoped that everyone would enjoy it. She invited Mr. Habibullah to deliver his speech.
- 2.5 Mr. Habibullah started by congratulating ALPANA on holding yet another event, and a bigger one this time, featuring disabled children. Mr. Habibullah charmed everyone by his humility and modesty, explaining how he happened to be the chief guest instead of Mr. Jairam Ramesh, the Minister of Environment, who was originally expected to be there. Mr. Jairam Ramesh was caught with deliberations with the American delegation discussing climate change, and had sent in his apologies.
- 2.6 Mr. Habibullah went on to say that India had always a strong family system, and it was this system which traditionally provided support to mentally and physically challenged people. However, in the past years, the joint family system has been increasingly vanishing, and thus the support that these challenged people had earlier received was also evaporating. He felt that 'challenged' was the right word to use, and 'handicapped' was not appropriate, since these people had many talents surpassing so-called 'normal' people. He went on to give the examples of Stephen Hawking, the famous physicist and his achievements. He stated that an event like Sambhav has great potential in unleashing the abilities in challenged people. Performing arts can be the means of opening the flower of the lives of challenged children. The right kind and amount of effort can help in making such people an asset to society, stated Mr. Habibullah.
- 2.7 Mr. B.K. Dash gave the vote of thanks. The team leaders of all the groups from the participating countries assembled on stage for a group photograph, and received enthusiastic applause from the audience.

### **3. FIRST DAY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR**

- 3.1 After the inaugural event, the seminar of Sambhav 2009 began at the same venue - the Main Auditorium of the India International Centre. The Chairperson of the first session, Session A, was Dr. G.N. Karna, President, Society For Disability and Rehabilitation Studies and faculty of Jawaharlal Nehru University. He came onto the stage on his wheelchair. The speakers were Deaconess Linda Olisa Middleton, CEO, Africa Theatre Project, Nigeria; Amila Indrajit, School of Blind, Sri Lanka; and Dr. Manjula Krippendorf, India.
- 3.2 Dr. Karna welcomed everyone to the session and gave a short history of how he was invited to the session by ALPANA office-bearers. He expressed his happiness at being able to attend the event. He reminded the audience that the situation of disabled people is very complex, and not something that can be solved easily. About 10% of India's population is affected by some kind of disability. Out of these, 80% are confined to rural and inaccessible areas. He said that what was really necessary was to change the mindset of the society towards disabled people. A programme like Sambhav would go a long way towards achieving this goal. Reverend Father Yanger Walling from Nagaland translated the speeches simultaneously into sign language.
- 3.3 Deaconess Linda Middleton gave her keynote address, referring to disabled people as 'their excellencies' because she felt that they were all gifted people. She stated that her country, Nigeria, has done nothing to tap the abilities of such people. Sections 42 and 43 of the Nigerian Constitution are exclusively dedicated to freedom from discrimination, but they are silent on disability. As a result, disabled people in Nigeria have no legal rights that they can claim. She went on to give some approximate figures of the proportion of disabled people in Nigeria. She claimed that though it has been scientifically proved that disabled people are more talented than 'normal' people, Nigeria was still struggling to integrate such people in its policies. A group of NGOs have come together in Nigeria, and they are working together for disabled people. One of the things needed most urgently was infrastructure for these people. In this respect, Deaconess Linda said that India is much better than Nigeria, and she was looking forward to learning from her experience here.
- 3.4 Dr. G.N. Karna thanked Deaconess Linda and proceeded to request the organisers to send him a report of the event, along with any recommendations that emerged. He said that as Chairman of Working Group on Empowering the Disabled Person for the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) constituted by the Planning Commission, he would bring it to the attention of the Planning Commission. He then invited Mr. Amila Indrajit from Sri Lanka to give his speech.

- 3.5 Mr. Amila Indrajit introduced himself as coming from the School of Blind, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka. He said that most of the students in the School like to do dancing and music. There are 200 students and 30 teachers in the School. He said that he would like to share the cultural experience of India.
- 3.6 Next, Dr. Manjula Krippendorf introduced herself and said that she wanted to share her experience as a paediatrician and child therapist in rehabilitating disabled people using performing arts. She gave an overview of her study and work on cerebral palsy, in India and abroad. She mentioned the experiences with her own daughter who was born affected with cerebral palsy. The most important lesson she learnt was "Focus on what the child can do, and improve upon it." Once back in Delhi, she focused on using art, music and dance as a diagnostic tool. In Stockholm, she had observed Professor Bergström's work in which he was using music with disabled people. He insisted on three things: that the music should be live music, it should be classical music, and that the personality of the musician should be such that he/she can form a close relationship with the patients. Dr. Krippendorf said that she has seen all these characteristics in Alpana's work. She spoke for some time about her own work with differently-abled children in different parts of the country. Her observations were that music and dance reduced the stereotypical behavior of mentally challenged children, and that it calms the mind, making the children more receptive. She went on to congratulate ALPANA on its process-oriented work and for having a consistent, warm relationship with the children. In response to a question from the audience, she recommended the 'Indian Adaptation of the Portage Guide to Early Education' as being a useful book in learning how to enhance motor skills and language in a mentally challenged child. Thus, session A of the seminar came to an end.
- 3.7 Dr. Anupama Singh welcomed the audience to Session B. The chairperson was Mr. Bhagaban Shankar, former director of North Central Zone Cultural Centre. The speakers were Gobinda Singh Dangol, Managing Director, Himalchuli Group, Nepal; Md. Nurul Islam, Deputy Director of SWID, Bangladesh; Mr Pema Gyalpo of Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan. Mr. Bhagaban Shankar welcomed everyone and said that he hoped to listen to and learn from the speakers. He requested Mr. Dangol to make his presentation. Mr. Dangol introduced himself and said that he had been working towards preserving Nepalese art and culture for many years. He said that he involved disabled people too in the work. He proceeded to give an overview of the situation of the disabled in Nepal. His suggestions were to conduct activities to raise awareness in families and community, to formulate new policies and implement current ones, and to include disability in school curriculum.
- 3.8 Next, Mr. Nurul Islam made his presentation. Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled (SWID) has been working for the mentally challenged since it was established in 1977. It was started by a group of parents and

teachers and now has 48 branches throughout Bangladesh. It has also started a Bachelor of Special Education course to build up a professional group of qualified personnel to work with the intellectually disabled. He said the Bangladesh government has ratified the Child Rights Convention and United Nations Disability Declaration.

- 3.9 Mr. Pema Gyalpo from Bhutan spoke next. His group, Tarayana Foundation, has been trying to reach disabled people in remote areas. They teach thirteen different kinds of arts and crafts at the Foundation - painting, sculpting etc. and they involve disabled people in these trainings. The institute teaches music and dance from the 19th century and earlier - working to preserve those forms. Bhutan has one private and one government school for disabled people. 3.5% of the 6 million population of Bhutan is affected by some kind of disability. Mr. Gyalpo said that though Bhutan has not yet signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, it will do so soon. He said the Bhutan government is preparing to pass an Act on the rights of the disabled.
- 3.10 Mr. Bhagaban Shankar invited questions from the audience. The questions and answers revealed that Nepal has no special schools for the disabled, but there are several NGOs working in the field, teaching them arts and crafts. Bangladesh government has the Pratibandhi Foundation which supervises government institutions working in the field of disability. The SWID works only in the field of intellectual disability. In response to a question about the existence of positive professional role models, Bhutan said that there are many in the country. Mr. Bhagaban Shankar mentioned famous examples like Beethoven, Soordas and Satish Gujral. Mr. Shankar then wrapped up the session, making concluding remarks about the need for more dialogue and give and take between all the countries about their work with the disabled. Mementoes were presented to all the speakers and lunch was announced.
- 3.11 After lunch, Dr. Anupama Singh welcomed the audience and introduced the speakers for the third session. Session C of the seminar was chaired by Advocate Coomaravel Pyaneandee, Advisor on Disability to the Government of Mauritius. The speakers were Ms. Mrinalini Padhi of SAHAY-Cuttack and Ms. Latha Manohar of Ramana Sunrityalaya (RASA), Chennai.
- 3.12 Mr. Coomaravel made some introductory remarks, emphasizing the need to preserve the dignity of disabled people. He himself is visually impaired, and bears himself with great dignity. He said that there was a need for everyone to believe in the capabilities of the disabled. He invited Ms. Latha of RASA to make her presentation.
- 3.13 Ms. Latha started with an activity. She asked two people from the audience to come up on stage, and follow her hand movements, while singing 'bhoom

bhoom shaka laka'. Next, she got the entire audience to follow the movements and sing along. After energising the audience in this manner, she went on to make her presentation. Theatre is a representation of life, she said. It helps one to explore his/her feelings and capacities. Theatre can provide all inputs required to develop the individual. It is possible to teach daily life skills to the disabled through theatre and dance. Ms. Ambika Kameshwar founded RASA in 1989 with that assumption. A child needs a multipronged approach to overcome developmental delays. RASA has a proper programme to develop these skills. There are three branches of RASA today. RASA uses music, storytelling, dance and theatre. Ms. Latha illustrated with video clips the different kinds of tools used at RASA.

3.14 The next presentation was from Sahay, Cuttack. Ms. Mrinalini Padhi mentioned that Sahay has been working for 18 years on the concept of drama as therapy for mentally challenged people. Learning theatre includes a process of assessing oneself, with respect to others. Dance has also been very helpful in their work. She mentioned that in her experience, she has seen a couple of deaf girls who made brilliant Odissi dancers. Their energy was such that they were able to bring other disabled people from the audience onto the stage. Peer learning is very helpful - for both the teacher and the taught. The traditional dance format in Orissa is outdoors, with loud music and lights. Traditional Oriya 'jatras' are successful with challenged people. One of the most important things Ms. Padhi has observed is that the applause of the audience is great feedback for the disabled performers. Sahaya holds an event every year in Cuttack for the disabled. She said that she has brought three autistic children from her group to Sambhav. She called one of them, Sahir, up to the stage for a demonstration of his musical ability. Sahir's eagerness and enthusiasm was refreshing, and the audience was amazed when Ms. Padhi shared that this boy was completely non-verbal when he first came to Sahay.

3.15 Questions from the audience were taken. Ms. Padhi said that they indeed have a full-time programme for the disabled - they are open all day, every day. They have a curriculum for special children. With this, the seminar sessions for the day came to an end.

## **4. SECOND DAY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR**

4.1 On 15th November, Dr. Anupama Singh welcomed the audience to the first session of the day, which was a networking session.

4.2 Mr. Debjit Rath chaired the session. He invited the group leaders from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Cambodia to join him on the dais. There was



a welcome song in Hindi by children of ALPANA - "itni shakti hamein dena daata, mann ka vishwas kamzor ho na..."

- 4.3 The group leader from Myanmar, Ms. Tutu, spoke about her institution, Mary Chapman School for the Deaf. It was established in 1920 by a British lady named Mary Chapman. Through the School, many deaf children have been rehabilitated and have been trained in vocational skills. The vision of the organization is to have a high school for deaf children. Currently, it gives two years of basic education. It has been able to equip some students with hearing aids. It holds vocational classes in skills like sewing, knitting, embroidery, basic computer operations etc. It also holds arts classes, as well as classes in traditional and modern dance. In Myanmar, there are two schools for the Deaf, one is the Mary Chapman, and the other is run by the government.
- 4.4 Mr. Nurul Islam, group leader from Bangladesh, spoke about SWID (Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled) which provides special education and training for intellectually disabled people. It has been working in the field since 1977 and now in 2009 has 46 special schools. There are more than 7000 students, and the Social Welfare Ministry gives some financial assistance to the Society. There is a National Forum of Organizations Working with Disabled people, which has more than 300 organizations as its members. They are trying to train teachers who are involved with the children. The NFOWD athletes participated in the World Special Olympics.
- 4.5 Ms. Hannah Stevens from Cambodia spoke about EPIC Arts (also stands for Every Person Is Counted). She has been living in Cambodia for six years. EPIC Arts focused primarily on physically disabled, but since 2009 has been working with intellectually disabled too. They train disabled people in different kinds of art forms - full time training to become professional dancers. They present them strong role models - the teachers themselves are disabled. Traditional dance in Cambodia is about perfection, hence it's difficult for the disabled. They have a Japanese choreographer working with them, who has been able to make a lot of progress with the dancers. The situation for the disabled in Cambodia is not supportive. There are very few people working in this field. It is culturally ingrained in society that the people who are disabled in any way must have committed some evil in their past lives. EPIC arts does not preach against such beliefs, instead, it believes in showing that the truth is different. It has developed its own dance company and holds shows with fully trained though disabled dancers. EPIC Arts believes that their performances are sufficient to challenge the beliefs held by people.
- 4.6 In response to a question, she said that EPIC pays a small stipend to the artists. They have tried to give sign language classes to the parents of deaf children, but have found that the parents are not interested.

- 4.7 Mr Pema Gyalpo from Bhutan said that now they have constitutional democracy in the country; however, a Disabled Act is yet to take shape. In Bhutan, television came only in 1990. This has actually changed the cultural scene in Bhutan. At Tarayana, they've started using many ordinary things like utensils as musical instruments. The disabled have made their own music and created CDs to sell. He said that his organization focuses on giving basic skills training to disabled, in order to make them financially independent. He said that his colleagues believe that GNH - Gross National Happiness - instead of GNP - Gross National Product - is the true measure of progress in the country.
- 4.8 Session D was chaired by Deaconess Linda Olisa Middleton, from Africa Theatre Project, Nigeria. The speakers were Vilas Janhve from Umang, Rajasthan and Rev Yanger Walling of Deaf Biblical Ministry, Nagaland.
- 4.9 Mr. Vilas Janhve from Umang, Rajasthan, is also a programme officer with the West Zone Cultural Centre. During his talk, he had a digital presentation running on the background screen. He spoke about Umang, which is an annual festival for the disabled with duration of five days in which 150 disabled children participate. This festival has been held regularly for the past 15 years. The government of India, Ministry of Culture, grants about INR 4 to 5 lakhs for the event. The children stay at Shilpgram during the festival. Umang invites different institutions to the festival. As part of the festival, Umang children along with some 'normal' children get together in groups and create and perform a five minute play. There is no competition, since everyone is considered equal. Prizes are given to everyone. He gave two examples of the achievements of disabled people - Kamlesh Patel, a dancer whose legs have been affected by paralysis, and 'My Mother' a film made by visually impaired kids from Mount Abu.
- 4.10 Deaconess Linda remarked that catching disabled children young was a great thing. She mentioned that in Nigeria they have a similar programme called Kaleidoscope, where they invite different countries to participate. Father Walling said that the children from Nagaland had participated in Umang ten years ago, and they had enjoyed it very much.
- 4.11 Father Walling from Nagaland congratulated ALPANA on organizing Sambhav. He related the story of how he got involved with the world of disabilities. One of his older sisters was affected by polio. This was in the 1960s when there was no awareness about handicaps, and his sister had no crutches. He had to carry her to school. She ended up being the first woman matriculate from the village, and went on to become a teacher. The Biblical Deaf Society has been working for 23 years with the hearing impaired. They have noticed that children love to sing in sign language. There is an Umang festival in the north east of India, funded by the North East Cultural Zone Centre. Father Walling

made a suggestion that at the next Sambhav, there could also be an exhibition of art and craft items made by the disabled from all the participating countries.

- 4.12 Session D came to an end, but there was some delay in starting Session E, as one of the speakers was yet to arrive. Advocate Coomaravel took the opportunity to make a short presentation on the policy of the state of Mauritius.
- 4.13 Mauritius has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to the Convention, the State has recognized a new definition of the disabled. It has also embarked on a massive sensitization programme, whose main focus is on valuing people with disabilities. Mauritius also accepts at the new definition of discrimination according to the Convention, and wants the disabled of the country to enjoy work and dignity. It is working to make public transport disabled-friendly. It has an Action Plan for 15 years, and is formulating a policy document in connection with the disabled. Over the past two years, there has been successful representation of the disabled. Advocate Coomaravel said that he admired the way India deals with arts and disability, and he expressed his determination to hold a similar event in Mauritius next year.
- 4.14 The chairperson and speakers were requested to come to the dais for Session E. The chairperson was Guru Dr. Saroja Vaidyanathan, and the speakers were Ms. Hannah Stevens from EPIC Arts, Cambodia, and Ms. Kanaka Sudhakar from Delhi. Guru Saroja welcomed the audience and introduced herself, revealing that as long as 15 years ago, she had organized a performance of the Hindu Indian epic Ramayana with blind artistes. She made the discovery that the blind are much more focused than 'normal' people. Guru Saroja started her own institution in 1974, but did not focus on any group. She congratulated Ms. Alpana Nayak and the group ALPANA for the great initiative and the good work.
- 4.15 Ms. Kanaka Sudhakar started her presentation by sharing with the audience that she was glad to be at Sambhav again after two years. She shared that she was working on the benefits and therapeutic effects of classical dance and music on the development of a learner. She has created a new movement system called Yogic Aerobics, taking movements from classical dance movements and yoga. It is focused to benefit people in middle age and old age. She presented a demonstration of four single mudras, which she said benefited chest muscles and prevented cervical problems associated with sedentary lifestyles.

- 4.16 Guru Saroja expressed her confidence that anyone who followed the Yogic Aerobic exercises would become more active and healthy. She invited Ms. Hannah Stevens to make her presentation.
- 4.17 Ms. Hannah Stevens represented EPIC Arts from Cambodia. She explained that EPIC also stood for 'Every Person Is Counted'. It was an organization started in the United Kingdom in 2001, and started working in Cambodia in 2004. Its vision is that people with any kind of disability are integrated into society, and respected for what they are. EPIC Arts conducts art training programs. It has an inclusive team where 70% are people with disabilities. It works in all different art forms. There are five main programs: EPIC Arts Cafe, EPIC Arts Centre, Vocational Training Programme, Community Outreach Programme, Spotlight. She described each of them in detail with illustrative images projected on a screen. The Cafe is a proper cafe, run by staff which is all disabled. The Arts Centre is specially designed for people with disabilities. Under the vocational training programme, they run a two year full time programme in performance and creative art facilitation. This is for 11 young people with disabilities, who are absorbed into EPIC as staff on completing the programme. Apart from this, there is an after-school workshop which is open to children with disabilities every day. They train and develop a professional integrated performance group to tour and perform in Cambodia. EPIC Arts is contemplating opening the vocational programme to other countries. A lot of EPIC's work is focused on integration - the performances have both 'normal' and disabled people. The Community Outreach Programme involves visiting the community to educate them about the rights of disabled people. Spotlight is an Asian Festival of Inclusive Arts. It started in 2008, and has eight days of events for the disabled.
- 4.18 Dr. Saroja Vaidyanathan applauded the work of EPIC Arts and emphasized the need for appropriate funds for such organizations - in the form of building grants, seminar sponsorships etc. Another point she made was that all the institutions working with the disabled should go in for therapy and spirituality.
- 4.19 Professor Girishwar Mishra, Delhi University chaired Session F, which had Dr. Rajeshwari Pillai Rajagopalan, Senior Fellow at Observer Research Foundation and Dr. Pankaj Jha, Senior Fellow at Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis as speakers.
- 4.20 Professor Mishra said that the seminar had tried to look at the experiences of integration of disabled people. It was gratifying that there are certain possibilities in this direction. Sambhav is a manifestation of these possibilities. He hoped that there would be a consensus amongst different stakeholders on the strategy to be pursued towards this end. Like many of the speakers had

said, it was not a matter of pitying the differently abled, but of working towards a dignified life for them.

- 4.21 The theme of Dr. Rajagopalan's presentation was using Indian culture as a soft power to influence other countries. She said that there is an impression that India's influence in the cultural field transforms into political clout. This impression is wrong, because there are countries where Indian culture is prominent, but politically, the countries are not on India's side. She gave the example of Afghanistan, where Hindi TV serials are popular. There is a need to follow up the impact of Indian soft power on international politics - with hard power and smart power.
- 4.22 Deaconess Middleton from Nigeria observed that it was very important for all countries to respect each other's heritage so as to ensure that there is no conflict. Any country should promote their heritage only with the aim of gaining respect, and not to use it as a force to influence others. Professor Mishra gave the example of the India saint poet Kabir, who, with his peace-loving poetry, managed to communicate to all sections of society.
- 4.23 Dr. Pankaj Jha's presentation was on Indian Diaspora and Promotion of Indic Heritage and Culture. He illustrated his talk with several photographs, showing the influence of Indian culture in the ancient and medieval architecture of many different places like Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Bali etc. He recommended that the 'Look East' policy should be revised. The Indian Diaspora was feeling alienated, and that needs to be addressed. Restoration of monuments which show Indian influences should be undertaken, and tourism to these places must be promoted. In conclusion, he said that culture alone cannot be a policy option; instead, it should act as bedrock to build upon.
- 4.24 Mr. B.K. Dash, vice president of ALPANA, gave the vote of thanks. After listening to the seminar discussions, he had some observations to make. First, there was a need for an interactive website for organizations working with disability. Here, organizations should be able to share their experiences and the problems they face in the course of their work. Second, there is no shortage of money - it just needs to be accessed. We need to pressurize policymakers to change their priorities enough to divert funds for such causes. There is a need to sensitize corporations too - so that they are more aware of how they spend the funds allocated for corporate social responsibility. With this, the seminar of Sambhav 2009 came to an end.

## **5. FIRST DAY OF INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCES**

- 5.1 The seminar by international speakers was complemented by live performances by mentally and physically challenged people in the evenings of both the days. The teams from different countries presented several items displaying their cultural talent.
- 5.2 For 14th evening performances the venue was the FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) Auditorium. The compères, Ms. Mridu Tripathi and Ms. Ayushi Nayak, welcomed the audience. The Chief Guest of the evening, Mr. Mukul Wasnik, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, inaugurated the function by lighting the ceremonial lamp. The compères gave an introduction to ALPANA and its activities, and thanked the sponsors of the event, namely, ONGC Ltd., GAIL India Ltd., NTPC, Powergrid, REC, Coal India, State Bank of India, DSIIDC, Bureau of Energy Efficiency and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Thanks were extended to ALPANA's partners - India Bhutan Foundation, India Sri Lanka Foundation, BP Koirala India Nepal Foundation and Jeevan Jyoti Home of Holy Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.
- 5.3 Students from ALPANA presented the first item, Unity in Diversity. This item gave a glimpse of India's rich cultural heritage by presenting vignettes of folk dances from different regions of the country. There was Bihu from Assam, Sambalpuri from Orissa, Kohli from Maharashtra, Horiya from Rajasthan, Rauf from Kashmir and Bhangra from Punjab. The item concluded with all the dancers coming together to sing the hindi song 'Hum Sab Bharatiy Hain...' ('We are all Indians'). The performers were: Swati, Rani, Sita, Preeti, Grace, Deepa, Pia, Meenu, Shipra, Pallavi, Krishnapriya, Tanisha, Sonia, Abhishek Rana, Parveen, Tanmay Arora, Gaurav, Badal, Divpreet, Mannu, Ira and Tanmay Aggarwal.
- 5.4 After this performance, the Chief Guest, Mr. Mukul Wasnik, was invited on to the stage to release the souvenir of Sambhav 2009. After releasing the souvenir, Mr. Wasnik gave a short speech, congratulating ALPANA on its wonderful work. He said that the performance had had a lasting impact on him. He thanked all the participating countries and felicitated each country's team leader with bouquets.
- 5.5 The next group to present was SWID, Bangladesh. They performed five items in quick succession. First was a group dance on the Bangla song 'Aaji Bangladesher Hridaya Hote Kokhon Aaponi'. The next was a folk dance called Shamporiya Nritto. This was followed by a patriotic Bangla song 'Shurjodoy tumi, Shurjasto tumi, O amar Bangladesh'. A solo song dedicated to the mother

figure 'Maer ektar dudher daam' was followed by a group folk dance from the hilly areas of Bangladesh to the song 'Rangamater pathe lo'. The performers were: Nipa Bose, Progya Paromita, Sultana Mshfica, Mohammad Amit Hussain, Farhana Tanjia Ethu, Sheuly Shathi, Rani Mala, Mohammad Nuruzzaman, F.R. Chowdhury, Hasina Hossein Momtuz and Sorreya Begum.

- 5.6 The Deaf Biblical Ministry, Nagaland presented the next two items. The first was a tribal thanksgiving Royangmi dance. There was no song accompanying it, just beats on a drum. The next item was a song presented in a unique manner - the performers 'sang' using sign language. The song was 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' and could be enjoyed by both kinds of people - hearing impaired and 'normal'. The performers were: Joil, Soran, Machi, Amit, Jirsong, Aghato, Esther, Aquina, Soroi, Khetoli, Aseno and Imolemla.
- 5.7 Professor Channarong's Art For All Group, Thailand, followed with four items. The first was a pantomime of the story 'Rabbit and Turtle'. The next were two dances on the songs 'Jang Wa Hua Jai' and 'Everybody Cha Cha'. Thailand ended its performance with a group dance on the song 'Oh la Nauw'. The performers were: Sakda Ridjan, Thianthong Tanfao and Chaywit Sucharitkul.
- 5.8 The next group was Tarayana Foundation, Bhutan. They impressed the audience with their repertoire ranging from very old pieces to modern ones. They first presented a folksong 'Zhungda' depicting the life of people in Bhutan before the 16th century. The next was a song called 'Bedra' which has been sung in Bhutan since the 17th century. It is a song about gender equality. The final song was a modern song about the life of a visually impaired girl in contemporary times. The performers were: Guptho Zangmo and Lhakpa Dorji.
- 5.9 Himalchuli Group from Nepal presented the next four dances. The first was a classical dance dedicated to Goddess Kumari. The second was a popular folk dance 'Jyaure', which was followed by a dance from the eastern region of Nepal - Maruni. Their last presentation was 'Newari', a dance of the Newar tribes of the Kathmandu Valley. The performers were: Rita Duwal, Mukesh Mahajan and Bidya Tamrakar.
- 5.10 The last group for the day was Mary Chapman School for the Deaf, Yangon, Myanmar. The first dance they presented was a solo traditional dance of Myanmar which spoke about the self-confidence of girls. The next was a traditional celebratory dance of Myanmar. The performers were: Leimee and Myonaing. Ms. Mridu Tripathi gave the vote of thanks and brought the events of the day to an end.

## **6. SECOND DAY OF INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCES**

- 6.1 The venue for the next day's performances was the Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre. Ms. Mridu Tripathi and Ms. Ayushi Nayak were the compères. Ms. Mridu welcomed the audience and the chief guest, Smt. Gursharan Kaur. She also welcomed the special guests of the day, Smt. Nirupama Rao, Foreign Secretary and Mr. Chewang Phunsog, Chairman, PESB (Public Enterprises Selection Board). Mr. B.K. Dash felicitated the guests and they lighted the ceremonial lamp. Ms. Mridu gave an introduction to ALPANA and thanked the sponsors of Sambhav 2009.
- 6.2 The first item was by students of ALPANA It was a performance which had song, dance and visuals projected on the background screen. The songs had been recorded by the challenged children themselves, and even the props had been made by them. The item represented the determination of today's children to fight the evils facing the country, and to restore India to its former glory. The performers were: Gaurav Aggarwal, Abhishek Rana, Rahul Singhal, Divpreet, Mannu, Tanmay Aggarwal, Swati, Rani, Sita, Preeti, Grace, Deepa, Pia, Meenu, Shipra, Pallavi, Krishnapriya, Tanisha, Sonia, Parveen, Ira and Tanmay Arora.
- 6.3 Ramana Sunrityalaya, Chennai (RASA, in short) presented a dance-drama on the life of the saint Meerabai, who was the forerunner of the Bhakti Movement. It covered the life of Meerabai from her childhood to her wedding to King Bhojraj. It included illustrations projected onto the background screen, bhajans and narration. The performers were: Revathy, Akshaya, Guru, Raghavan, Aravindam, Bharat, Varun, Munnuswamy, Sudhir and Jayashree.
- 6.4 Disability Unit, Mauritius presented 'Potpourri', an amalgamation of Indian and Mauritius rhythms and music played on the accordion. The performer was Coomaravel Pyaneandee.
- 6.5 Umang, Rajasthan presented a mime called 'Mela', showing the activities of a naughty child and his father when they visit a fair. The audience enjoyed themselves thoroughly, laughing at the antics of the child. The performers were: Shubham Sharma and Vikas Sharma. The music was performed by Rajneesh Sharma.
- 6.6 African Theatrical Project, Nigeria mesmerized the audience with the next performances. The first was the Niger Delta Dance in which the performers ask for a chance to live a good life despite their disabilities. The second item had a visually impaired person playing two instruments while two dancers danced to



that music. In the next item, 'Kakaki', a Nigerian flute was played by a performer, and the others danced to the tune. In both the items, the dancers' rhythmic and energetic body movements found a visceral response with the audience. The performers were: Sonday Odili, Fidelis and Joy.

- 6.7 After this performance, Smt. Gursharan Kaur was invited to the dais to share her views on Sambhav 2009. Smt. Kaur spoke a few lines, congratulating ALPANA on its endeavour and showcasing the abilities of the disabled. She stated that the performances have proved that if there is a coordinated effort, then nothing is impossible. The dancers she saw this evening were as good as anyone else she had seen, she said. She felicitated Ms. Alpana Nayak with a bouquet.
- 6.8 Vasant Kala Mandir, Udaipur, Rajasthan presented a mime called 'Mujhe Jeene Do'. This showed how a gardener's son who kills a butterfly later realises that every living being has a right to live. The performers were: Shubham Sharma and Vikas Sharma. The music was performed by Rajneesh Sharma.
- 6.9 The School for the Blind, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka, presented a folk song about the life of a woman in a rural area in Sri Lanka. The song was sung by two visually impaired women with extraordinarily melodious voices and who sang well with each other. The music was provided by other artistes. The performers were: Ishani, Roshani, Isuri, Nuanta and Amila.
- 6.10 The next group was Sahay, from Cuttack, Orissa. First, they presented an Oriya folk dance on the song 'Rangabati', and then presented a Sambalpuri folk dance on the song 'Jai Phula'. The performers were: Deepak Pradhan, Promila Sahu, Dipi Swain and Sagar Mishra.
- 6.11 Ms. Nirupama Rao, Foreign Secretary was invited to the stage to speak a few words. She said that the disabled performers have taught the audience a few lessons and showed that we all share a common humanity. The Creator speaks through us, whichever way we are abled, she said. She wished ALPANA all the best for its future activities.
- 6.12 Mr. Chewang Phunsog, Chairman, PESB came on to the dais and congratulated ALPANA on conducting Sambhav 2009. He said that the children's contribution to the event was indeed spectacular. All possible help should go out to such people, he affirmed. India had signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. Article 30 of this Convention protected the disabled people's right to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Sambhav was an event in keeping with the spirit of the Article.

6.13 Ms. Alpana Nayak, founder-president of ALPANA gave the vote of thanks and brought the event to a successful completion.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 Sambhav 2009, with its presentations and performances, speeches and action, had many lessons to offer. The most important one was that with dedication and commitment, a lot can be done. It also showed the way forward - areas in which there is need of some more effort.
- 7.2 One of the biggest successes of Sambhav 2009 was its increased visibility. It was a bigger event than it had been in the previous years, with important people as guests, speakers and audience. An increased visibility of the event can potentially mean increased visibility of the disabled and the need to protect their rights.
- 7.3 The fact that there were so many groups from several countries was evidence of the improved networking that ALPANA had been able to do, compared to previous years. Starting from a small localized effort, Sambhav has gone through a national phase and is now an international event. The situation of the disabled in different countries has been brought to the attention of each other.
- 7.4 An event like Sambhav 2009 also brought together differently-abled artists from diverse countries. Such opportunities are rare for the disabled to meet each other. Events like this help them in peer learning and give them encouragement and support.
- 7.5 To the audience, an event like Sambhav 2009 provided role models who were differently abled, yet were able to present their talents with great confidence and in a spectacular manner. The myth about differently abled people being unable to do anything competently was thus challenged.
- 7.6 On Sambhav 2009's platform, all ten countries could share State policy information. This was beneficial because it gave people ideas about useful ways to approach disability and to recognize what policy measures were needed. For example, it was unanimously put forward that signing the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was a first step for any country in taking care of its disabled. Similarly, many of the groups spoke about steps which needed to be taken by their governments. One of the most common complaints was the lack of a disabled-friendly mode of public transport in almost all the countries.

- 7.7 As a result of the advocacy and networking for Sambhav 2009, a strong possibility of influencing the Indian government's 11th Five Year Plan emerged. One of the chairpersons of the sessions, Mr. G.N. Karna, is the Chairman of the Working Group on Empowering the Disabled Person for the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) constituted by the Planning Commission of India. He offered to table any report or recommendations that emerged from Sambhav 2009.
- 7.8 Each of the organizations which participated in Sambhav 2009 had different strengths and weaknesses. The event gave them a chance to learn from each other, and complement each other's efforts. The fact that a full-time programme for disability trainers or for disabled artistes is not available everywhere need not mean that a country needs to suffer from this shortcoming. The organizations which do have such full time programs and have felt that there are not enough takers can extend the facility to those in other countries who need them.
- 7.9 Highlighting the disabled in front of a society, which by and large ignores their existence, was the biggest success of Sambhav 2009. It was able to identify more areas in which efforts can be focused in order to improve the situation.
- 7.10 One of the most important focus areas should be scientific research on the beneficial effects of dance and music on children with disabilities. In many conventions and seminars, many practitioners claim that they have observed the healing effect of practicing or listening to classical dance and music. If these were substantiated in a systematic and scientific manner, it would help spread their use as therapeutic tools.
- 7.11 More events like Sambhav need to be held, in different countries and different regions, so as to reach a larger and more diverse audience. There needs to be more networking between the different groups working with the disabled. For example, collaboration with Umang in Rajasthan could be helpful, as much as with Kanchan Sontakke's Nrityashala in Mumbai. From Sambhav 2009, a suggestion came up to have a website to bring together the work of all different groups in different countries which are working on disability. Such a website would be a useful tool to showcase their work, and to constantly learn from each other's experiences.
- 7.12 Sambhav is an event about the disabled. It would be ideal if the disabled could follow the deliberations of the seminar. This time, Rev Yanger Walling of Deaf Biblical Ministry, Nagaland, translated into sign language some of the presentations at the seminar. It would be highly desirable if such translations could be made a regular feature of Sambhav, with one member dedicated to this task.

- 7.13 The opportunity to influence the 11th Five Year Plan of the Government of India is one which should be made use of. Mr. G.N. Karna had offered to follow up with the Planning Commission any recommendations that ALPANA might want to make, and this should be taken up. If the State supports these efforts and contributes in its own way, it will go a long way in improving the situation for the disabled.
- 7.14 As a matter of fact, more such efforts need to be made in the field of advocacy and lobbying. More needs to be done for increasing awareness amongst the parents and close relatives of the disabled children. Most often, if children receive the right kind of support from parents, they can make a lot of progress. Parents also need support so that they don't feel helpless and fall into depression. There need to be workshops with such parents which address their needs.
- 7.15 More synchronized and coordinated efforts for the child need to be put in by the paediatrician, the therapist or psychiatrist and the dancer. Only with the collaborative efforts of all three of them can a disabled child receive the full benefit of any dance therapy. A disabled child should have the opportunity to undergo various types of treatments and therapies. Such a choice is only an extension of their rights.
- 7.16 There need to be more reliable statistics about the number and kind of disabled in each country. It is obvious from the discussions at Sambhav that there has been no proper detailed survey about the disabled in recent times in any of the countries which participated. Without such surveys, there are no real numbers to work with, and the magnitude of the issue is not revealed.
- 7.17 More full-time educational and vocational training programs for the disabled need to be created. Disabled children from all strata of society should have an institution to attend for their needs and interests. There should be a focus on both intellectual and physical enjoyment, as well as livelihood. The disabled children have a tough time once their parents or caretakers pass away. They need to feel more empowered and able to cope with daily tasks and the running of their own lives. Currently, the primary education programs for disabled
- 7.18 Children are not sufficient - most of them are part-time or after-school courses. The higher education needs of the disabled also need to be catered to in an effective manner.

7.19 One of the suggestions at Sambhav 2009 was to display the craft items created by the disabled in different organizations. This would display more talents than the performances alone.

7.20 Sambhav 2009 made progress in the aim of inclusion of disabled people into normal society, and if ALPANA continues to work hard like this, it will soon be in a position to make a difference to the lives of the disabled.