

University of Delhi
Connect to India Programme
A Short Term Course

Title: “Disability and Inclusion: Perceptions & Issues in Contemporary India”

1st Sept 2014- 10th Sept 2014



The short term course on **DISABILITY AND INCLUSION: PERCEPTION & ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA** conducted by University of Delhi in collaboration with University Grant Commission was designed keeping in view the concept of inclusion and understanding the needs and support systems for persons with disabilities. The course aimed at giving an overview of the various Acts and Policies, the inclusive setup and the various disabilities in the contemporary Indian environment. This short term course also highlights the various measures, initiatives and programmes undertaken by the Govt. of India and University of Delhi in particular. It also demonstrates the challenges and issues in the new millennium and envisions a prospect of development on shared experiential learning. The workshop also discussed the issues in assessments of students with Specific learning Disabilities as well as perceptions of Stakeholders of Students with disabilities at the University level. The short term course also aimed at providing a holistic view of the cultural and heritage richness of India.



The 'Connect to India', team of the University of Delhi had been working to get the programme together for a couple of months. The international news channels telling us about the much talked about Scotland voting did not make it easy for us. We were concerned about the possible issues that may arise if the students with disability from King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland were to rub shoulders together for an intensive course for a good 10 days in a new culture and environment. What were we to do? See that they stay in different guest house or in one guest house but in separate units. Ultimately it was decided as circumstances unfolded that they would all stay in one guest house at University of Delhi. According to us, eventually the best decision that we made. As some of them stated as they departed for the flight back home that, 'we had not planned to change, but we are going back changed'. We responded, 'if you have changed, you have also changed us.'

Inspite of being a teacher of a University of India wherein students to reach their classrooms on time, it was a little bit of astonishment to observe that if you said we are meeting at 8am tomorrow after a late night of social activities, the entire set of students would be there at 7.55am.

There acceptance of their disabilities and their insight into what are their limitations and strengths as well as their ability to explain their needs to others because of their disabilities was remarkable. If we had been brushing our knowledge of how disability is viewed in UK, it was interesting to note the effort put in by the two universities of UK to prepare their students about disability and disability issues. The faculty had been reading about University of Delhi, India and Indian culture. It used to be a pleasure sitting through the interactive sessions every day as the students from UK conversed and dialogued with the experts from the academia and the practitioners from the NGO's with the best practices in areas of disabilities in Delhi. The Braille library, activities and the students coming to the Equal Opportunity cell, researches done at the cluster innovation center, walking tour of the historical facets of University of Delhi, the disability friendly colleges of Delhi to the flora and fauna as well as the human-animal interface were found interesting and full of new and diverse lessons by the students of the, 'Connect to India', programme.

As you scan down this report you would find the photographs with the students from UK in Indian dress forms. There were evenings after a hard day in the conference halls when the *bindi* and *Mehndi*, the Indian *Juthi* and learning to cook 'Indian breads' took over. I would not be surprise if the grocery shops in the markets near University of Delhi ran short of stoke of , 'Indian masalas'. I definitely had never imaged that as a 'teaching faculty' of University of Delhi it would ever be my contentious function helping so many students from UK buy *sarees*.

1st Sep 2014 (Monday):





As the International guest house of the University of Delhi made its final touches to welcome the students with disabilities and their faculty from the King's college, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland, members from the Connect to India were at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. As the bus with the 29 students and faculty from the University of Edinburgh and King's College entered the guest house, the student's volunteers welcomed them with the traditional Indian style of welcome. Yes we were not able to do anything about the extreme change in weather conditions from UK and the ones the group found as they got down in Delhi.

Their, probably first real exposure to the fact that Delhi is a large, was the long drive from Indira Gandhi International Airport to the North campus of University of Delhi. They were obviously tired. After a hot Indian meal at the International Guest House and an hour of rest, they were really for a walk at the ridge and a quick shopping experience at an Indian market ie. Kamla Market. Here are some photos of the initial interactions and orientation to the programme ,ice breaking and introductions.





2nd Sep 2014 (Tuesday):

After breakfast, we started our, “walking tour”, of the University of Delhi, North campus. We started from the Gandhi’s Statue at the main University gate to the Vice Regal Lodge to the Convention centre. At the convention center the UK group from King’s College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland had an interactive session with the Prof Malashri Lal, Chairperson, Academic Council, Dean of Colleges and Dean Academic Activities and Projects; Prof. Pami Dua, Chairperson Connect to India programme, Prof Tarun Das, Registrar, Shri Z.V.S. Prasad, Dean Planning and Finance Officer as well as other officials of the University of Delhi.





Prof Malashri Lal appraised the students about the various academic and research activities of the University and highlighted the importance of evolving a holistic perspective of our interactions with each other and welcomed the group of students with disability and their accompanying faculty to their visit to the University and hoped that this would be a platform for many more exchanges in the further between University of Delhi and the two universities of UK namely King's college, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Prof. Pami Dua also welcomed the team to India and the University and expressed her wish to many more such platforms in the years to come. After a further interactions with Prof Tarun Das and Shri Z.V.S.Prasad, it was time to get to know a little about the historical associations of the University to the freedom struggle as well as the British Connection. Dr. Amrit Kaur Basra, Academic Secretary, ILL, introduced the group to the historical aspects of the University as she took us on a guided tour from the convocation Hall, to the Great Dungeons of the University of Delhi to the Art Gallery. After a quick tea break at the University Guest House, we continued our walk to the Sports Complex and to the barrier free, state of art Cluster Innovation Center . At the Cluster innovation Center (CIC) the group found the interactions about the met-college concept, wherein the students make their own combinations about their course content and decide what combinations they want to study and obtain their degrees in, very interesting. At the Cluster Innovation center we were informed by the faculty about the various interdisciplinary research being done by the different centers of the CIC. We had extensive interactions with the faculty at CIC which included Prof. M. M. Chaturvedi & Dr. Sukrita Paul Kumar





After lunch the group went visited St Stephen's College where the students from UK got an opportunity to interact with students of St. Stephen who are differently abled. The principal, Dr. Valson Thampu and the Equal Opportunity Cell in-charge, Dr. Sanjay provided insight into the activities of the college with reference to disability issues. Dr. Anil Aneja who is an alumni of St Stephen college spoke about his positive experiences when he was at college and at a time when awareness regarding disability issues was limited and how St. Stephen had gone out its way to see that he got the best possible facilities for learning. The students from UK gained insight to the talents and strengths of the differently abled students at St. Stephen.

Our next stop was at the Shri Ram College of commerce (SRCC). Dr. P. C. Jain, Principal and his faculty members interacted with the students. The students from UK had discussions upon issues related to commerce and also disability issues as well as challenges faced by the administration in making building barrier free. The students also got an opportunity to interact with students of SRCC who are wheelchair users.

After observing the unity in diversity of the university, we drove towards the Yamuna Biodiversity Park to observe and learn more about the flora and fauna. We however also managed to lose our way on the way, but it gave our UK guest a glimpse of the by-lanes of India. Prof C.R Babu, took the students and faculty through the biodiversity park spread over acres and explained in details about the different 'living beings' of the biodiversity park. This was followed further with a film show of the park and meal of the produces from the park. The group reach back to their guest house very exhausted but very content and joyful.

3rd Sep 2014 (Wednesday):

The day started with visit to the Equal Opportunity Cell of the University of Delhi.

Dr. Shikha Sharma, Assistant Prof, Ramanujan College, presented an insight into the perspectives and activities of the Equal Opportunity Cell. She spoke on the title Equal Opportunity Cell, University of Delhi : Perspectives & Activities. This was followed by highly insightful interactions supplemented by experiential examples by Dr. **Dr. Anil Aneja, Officer on Special Duty, Equal Opportunity Cell on Acts and Policy** with especial reference to India. With his almost 30 years of experience of working at disability issues, he was able to provide a deep insight into the acts and policies related to disabilities with their strengths and limitations as well as the processes which lead to their formation and why certain acts and policies are as yet not in place but in the process. His talk was followed by a visit around the Equal Opportunity Cell. **Dr Bipin Tiwary, Officer on Special Duty, Equal Opportunity Cell** has been associated with the Cell for over a decade in an official position and earlier as an active faculty volunteer of University of Delhi. He has been a driving force behind many implementation of resources for the diverse group of students with disability who are studying at University of Delhi. From his practical experiences of working is the area of disability issues and working towards finding solutions in the Indian context. Dr. Tiwary interacted with the students and faculty on, 'Issues and Challenges & Facilities in the Indian context'. The interactions with Dr. Aneja and Dr. Tiwary had left the students with desire to connect more with the Indian context. As some of them said that the visit was going beyond their expectations. They were now viewing disability issues from very different angles and different perspectives from what they had been accustomed to.

This was followed by a guided tour of the Braille library by Dr. Rajesh, Dy. Librarian Braille. The students found it amazing at the number of books that had been converted into Braille and into audio format. The entire process of auto-recording by the student volunteers of the University to the process of editing done by the trained staff at the library to its categorisation and distribution was explained. They also saw first hand the inclusive work environment wherein persons with physical and visual limitations were part of the process of developing the books both in Braille and audio format. Some of the students and faculty commented that they had not seen a similar place earlier. By now whatever misgivings they would have had about whether it was worth to, 'Connect with India', was now evaporating into thin air. They were not only interested in how disability is viewed in India but also about the way of life in India. During the in formal discussions through the day they would inquiry about the relationships as they viewed on the road amongst people. They were very intrigued by how in India the concept of self/individual overruled the concept of the ours/ collective. An incidence that stands out was of a discussion wherein one of us stated that if a particular person travels often by the same hand drawn rickshaw or any hired vehicle that person may start addressing that rickshaw as, 'my rickshaw'. They wanted to

know that would the rickshaw person whose rickshaw it actually was would not mind. The question came to me as surprise, for as an Indian I had not thought of it that way. I had think for a while and answer that no the rickshaw person would not mind, it actually remains his rickshaw and he may even in fact be happy to let it being addressed by the college student as their rickshaw. Joint family and extended family was again a source of many conversations.

This development actually set the stage for our next speaker, Prof. Anand Prakash. Dean, International Relations. Prof . Prakash provided an insight into the various possible means by which students from a foreign university could connect to India. Prof Prakash being an eminent psychologist was also able to answer many of the queries about Indian society and went to the extend trying to arrange a visit to a really large joint family living nearby the University. Although unfortunately we were not able to find time out of the hectic schedule to visit the family.

The students and faculty from from King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland, had obviously expressed a desire to meet the students who had visited UK, last year. The social event in the evening provided space for just that. Over game of *antrakshi* with the Indian group more interested in Indian songs and the UK group interested in singing their countries songs, it was nice mix which everyone seemed to enjoy. This also provided the students to show their other talents in a comfortable, informal environment and everyone enjoyed it to the hilt.

By the third day the students and faculty from UK had had a variety of , 'Indian Breads' for lunch and dinner. These included the usuals that we take for granted such as the *puries*, the *tawas chappaties*, the *phulkas*, the *baturas*, the *naans*, the *parathas* and so on. Well now guess what, there was a demand for a cooking class by ALL the 29 members of the UK group. Thus probably for the first time the Chefs and other kitchen staff of the International Guest house took practical lessons as Dr. Renu Malaviya and Dr. Shihka Sharma answered the non-stop question regarding the chemistry and biochemistry of the various textures of the Indian Bread as also the culture, history and everything possible about the unending list of, 'Indian Breads'. Dr. Renu Malaviya was able to also inform them that when Her Excellency, Queen Victoria had visited Lady Irwin College even she had been intrigued by the universally present but rarely given its due, the puffed Indian bread, the *phulka*.

4th Sept 2014 (Thursday):

By the beginning of the fourth day, the students from UK had a fairly good idea about University of Delhi, its various departments as well as its diverse student population. They had had an exposure of the scholaristic and co-scholaristic activities of the University as also its thrust upon equal opportunities for all its students. So now it was time to provide them experience of a few of the NGO's working with students with disability and disability issues. Hence after an Indian breakfast, we boarded the bus to go to Blind Relief Association. Wherein the group interacted with the blind and visually handicapped school children and also the teacher interns, preparing to become teachers of the children with special needs. Blind Relief Association has one of the oldest vocational training center for the blind and here the visitors from UK observed for themselves massive candle making unit which is a must visit for most Delhites during the Diwali season for buying candles and diyas. They also visited the computer center where the persons with blindness and visual impairment come to learn about computers if they want to join the computer job industry. With the growing demand for physiotherapy, the 'massage center' is the latest vocation activity at Blind Relief Association.

Although the persons at the International Guest House had informed us again and again that the foreigners who come to stay at the Guest House prefer Indian meals, but we were some how not very convinced. Now we could observe everyday, for ourselves that they did like the Indian cuisine a lot. So lunch was at the Sarvana Bhawan at Connaught place. It was quite a delight as we literary took over the 2nd floor of the

bhawan and also became voluntary 'menu advisors' helping them decide what to order. There were entertaining examples of someone wanting to order 4 sets of *thalli* for lunch only for himself least realizing the quantum of food that would arrive for him to eat and so on.

The next stop was the national Museum at Janpath. The guided tour by a very well informed and articulate guide provided an insight about the cultural heritage of the country in particular and the South Asian region at large. This was followed by the much awaited shopping round at Cottage Emporium, Janpath and *Nalli sari Shop*. The boys bought *kurta pajama* with jackets and the girls wanted to buy *saries* and *salwar kameej* suits.

5th Sept 2014 (Friday):

A percentage of the students from UK either had specific learning disabilities or were on the autism spectrum. Some had ADHD with a few who had issues with their vision or neurological issues. Hence with such a large percentage of the students with SLD, it was obvious that they wanted to know SLD in India. Dr. Nimesh Desai, Director, Institute of Human Behaviour & Applied Sciences (IHBAS) interacted with the students on Issues in Assessments of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities. He went on to explain the many factors which have delayed the appropriate assessments process for students with SLD. He went to explain as to how in the Indian socio-political scenario it has lead to more time consumptions in arriving at acts and policies related to recognizing SLD as a disability. This was followed by the much awaited interaction with the teachers and students with disabilities of the University of Delhi. The discussions spilled over to sumptuous lunch organized for the occasion.

For anyone coming from outside India to Delhi, a visit to Rashtrapati Bhawan would certainly be on the wish list. The permissions for the visit had been taken by the Dean of Planning, Shri Prasad. So with the socio-cultural-political discussions around disability studies still fresh in the minds of the participants of Connect to India programme, we boarded the bus to move towards the epicenter of the democracy of India, the Rashtrapati Bhawan. As we were moving in the bus, we were narrating that for us teachers of India, 5th Sept is an important significant day and it was initiated by our President who had been a teacher, Dr. Radhakrishnan. So the speculations started by the students from UK as it being teacher's day and it being such an important day in India could they probably manage a glimpse of the present President. It was interesting to note that the concept of '*guru-shisya*' was found to be intriguing for the students from UK and the faulty jokingly stating 'Oh! Wish we could have such a privilege back home'. Anyway the students from UK's wish to be able to meet the 'Rashtrapati' of India was to come true another day. Unfortunately there were no pictures that we could take as we were not permitted to take our camera and mobiles. As we moved through the spacious interiors of the Rashtrapati Bhawan, and the guide explained the architectural structure, its reasons and significance and the historical course of events, from the British Lords, to the Viceroy's of the British Empire to Mahatma Gandhi to the Rashtrapatis of free India we were left with so many absorbing thoughts in our minds. We were introduced to enormous dinning halls and conference halls some of which had been ball rooms in the era gone by. The kitchen museum was another appealing area that many of lingered on at, as it had displays of the type of equipments used over the eras for preparing state of art meals for the eminent guests who visit Rashtrapati Bhawan on various occasions. The 'women's touch' was visible in one of the major dinning halls wherein the entire interior had been redone from scenes of war across the walls and the roof with the various diverse textiles of India.

Whose history was in the walls and the very air of Rashtrapati Bhawan, the epicenter of Indian democracy?? We left the Rashtrapati Bhawan, with a mindful cognizant that UK and India had a shared past not only political but the two great civilizations had influenced each other socio- culturally as well.

We moved towards the exist of Rashtrapati Bhawan, collected our belongings and with our mobile phones, cameras and ipads back with us we felt more empowered.

Our next stop was the British Council, at Kasturba Gandhi Marg were we were invited to a reception hosted by and British Council followed by dinner. At the British Council Mr. Javid Abidi and experts spoke about the issues related to employments for the disabled. The Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Prof. Dinesh Singh of University of Delhi, welcomed the students and faculty from King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland and spoke about how India had always welcomed and assimilated knowledge from across the world and India has been a cradle for new knowledge development with Universities of International fame not today but in the ancient past as well. He spoke about his visits to King's College, London and University of Edinburgh, Scotland and the fond memories of the places and invited them to connect with India and learn from its rich past and emerging present . We had the privilege of meeting Prof . Roger Jeffery, the famous sociologist of the University of Edinburgh again.

6th Sep 2014 (Saturday):

Although the past week had seen a lot of activity and travelling, it was but natural that the UK group was tired but it goes to their credit that they wanted to see and learn more. At the decided time, the entire group was at the portico of the Guest house, ready to embark on the bus for a visit to Amar Jyoti Rehabilitation Centre, Karkardoma, Delhi. We were welcomed with a by now well known dance performance by the children with different abilities and the non-disabled students to the national song, *VandhaMatram*. A wonderful performace as usual by the students of Amar Jyoti Rehabilitation Centre. Dr. Uma Tulli, Director and Former Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities, told the group about the history and philosophy of the center and the concept of reverse inclusion for which it is now well known.

7th Sep 2014 (Sunday):

Sunday morning we got up early and were ready to board the bus to visit Agra, with plans to visit Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. It was a very hot day, yet the take back from the trip was definitely positive.

8th Sep 2014 (Monday):

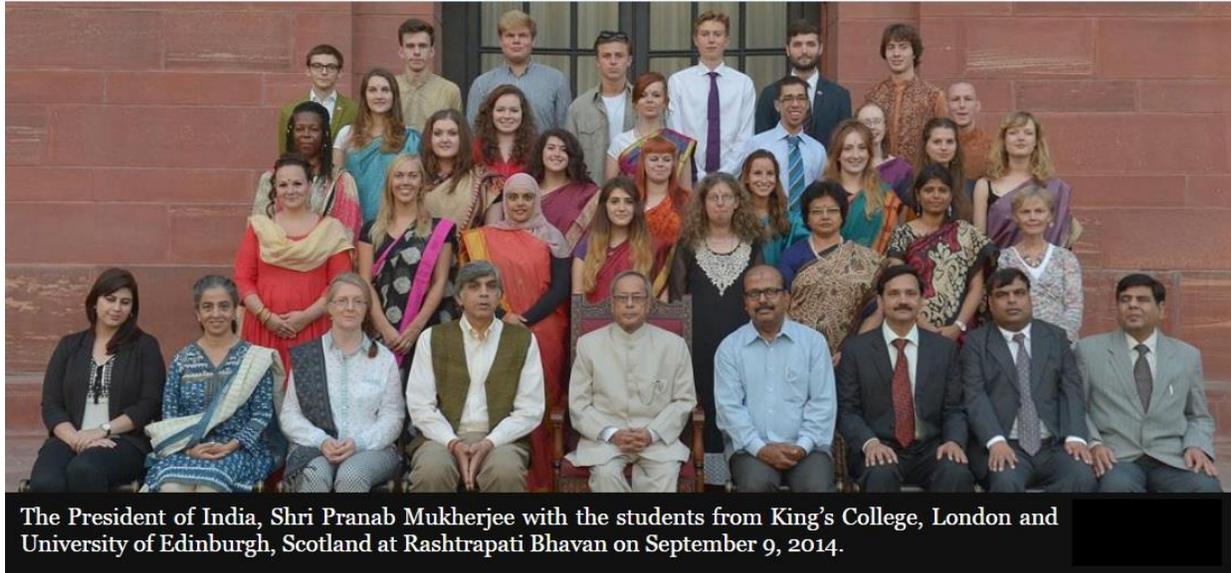
After a hectic but very informative and exciting trip to Agra, we started the next day a little late. At 10 am Dr. Renu Malaviya, Associate Professor, University of Delhi interacted with the UK group regarding her work in the area of specific learning disabilities. Her interactions were on the topic, 'Perceptions of Stakeholders of Students with Disabilities at the University level'. The group was pleasantly surprise at the amount of work done by the University of Delhi in the area of invisible disability inspite of the fact that the laws and policies considering specific learning disabilities as a disability have not been passed as yet. The limited awareness regarded the issues related to SLD were discussed.

After lunch, Ms.Mary Baruha, Director, Action for Autism and one of the pioneers working in the area of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). She discussed about the lack of public awareness and limited understanding of the issues related to ASD in India.

9th Sep 2014 (Tuesday):

It is a great pride to mention that the participants of the programme had an opportunity to meet the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee at Rashtrapati Bhawan. The Hon'ble President and the Vice

Chancellor of University of Delhi addressed the students at Rashtrapati Bhawan. The Hon'ble President stressed that through such programmes linkages that would emerge would result in an enhanced mutual understanding regarding the challenges and issues in the new millennium. Coming together of students from various academic interests and backgrounds for this purpose that too in a country different from their own, points to the global appeal of India's fresh educational endeavors. The Hon'ble President appreciated University Grants Commission and University of Delhi for initiating & organizing the Connect to India Programme. Prof. Tarun Das the coordinator of this programme proposed vote of thanks.



10th Sep 2014 (Wednesday):

We did not obviously have a formal guide, so Dr. Malaviya had taken over as the 'informal guide' of the group and would explain the various places of the city as we passed through them and it also was good connecting process with the group. She would be provided with interjections from Shri Z.VS Prasad, Dr. Tiwary, Dr Aneja and Dr Shikha Sharma. As the group bid their final farewell to the University of Delhi and the organising team, Dr Malaviya also 'signed off' to a lot of cheers from the UK group, with the hopes that we would meet again.