DIGITAL NARI INITIATIVE

In the rapidly evolving digital age, technology has emerged not only as a tool for innovation and connectivity but also as a powerful catalyst for social transformation. Among the most impactful initiatives championing inclusivity and empowerment in recent times is the Digital Nari Initiative-a forward-thinking program aimed at bridging the gender digital divide and equipping women with the skills, tools, and opportunities they need to thrive in a digital-

Launched under the broader umbrella of Digital India, the Digital Nari Initiative seeks to empower women-particularly from rural and underserved areas-by enabling their access to digital resources, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering participation in the digital economy. The initiative recognizes a fundamental truth: when women are digitally empowered, entire communities benefit. From enhancing financial inclusion and entrepreneurship to improving access to education and healthcare, the ripple effects of digital empowerment for women are profound and far-reaching.

At the heart of this initiative lies the vision of creating a digitally literate, self-reliant, and confident woman-a "Digital Nari" who is not just a passive consumer of technology but an active contributor to digital society. Through targeted training programs, access to mobile technology, internet connectivity, and digital platforms, women are being encouraged to become entrepreneurs, educators, content creators, and serv-

Importantly, the Digital Nari platform also brings together a host of resources, from e-governance services and financial tools to online learning and skilling opportunities. It connects women to government schemes, digital payment systems, health services, and even legal assistance-thereby addressing both their practical needs and long-term aspirations.

One of the most commendable aspects of the initiative is its grassroots approach. By involving Self Help Groups (SHGs), Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and local digital champions, the program ensures that empowerment reaches the last mile. Digital Nari does not merely teach women how to use a smartphone-it transforms that smartphone into a gateway to financial independence, personal growth, and social

However, the success of Digital Nari should not lead to complacency. While the initiative marks a critical milestone, several challenges remain. Digital infrastructure in many rural areas is still underdeveloped. Affordability of devices and internet data remains a barrier. Most importantly, social and cultural norms** often restrict women from using technology freely. Therefore, alongside technical support, we must also push for behavioral change and sensitization at the family and community levels. Private sector involvement, civil society partnerships, and local government engagement are crucial to scaling the impact of Digital Nari. Corporate CSR initiatives and NGOs can play a vital role in supporting training programs, providing devices, and conducting awareness campaigns. Education institutions and startups should be encouraged to develop women-centric digital content and

Let every woman become a Digital Nari-empowered, aware, connected, and confident to lead the nation forward.

From Welfare to Rights: How the Disability Act transform lives

MOHAMMAD HANIEF

In India's journey towards inclusivity and social justice, few laws have carried as much promise as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Enacted to replace the earlier 1995 legislation, it was a long-awaited reform aimed at expanding protections, enhancing opportunities, and bringing dignity to millions of specially abled citizens. Nearly a decade on, the Act continues to shape the way the nation understands disability-not as a personal limitation, but as a social responsibility to remove barriers and ensure

One of the most significant achievements of the Act was its expansion of the definition of disability. The older law recognized only a handful of conditions, leaving many individuals outside the purview of state support. The 2016 legislation widened this recognition to include 21 categories, covering conditions such as cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, thalassemia, hemophilia, and several others. This step was more than just technical-it was an acknowledgment that disability takes many forms, and that every individual facing barriers to participation deserves protection, rights, and opportunities.

Education has been at the heart of this framework, as it is universally seen as the most powerful tool of empowerment. The Act guarantees free education for children with benchmark disabilities between the ages of six and eighteen, and reserves five percent of seats in higher educational institutions for students with such conditions. For the first time, children who might once have been confined to the margins were assured of both inclusion and institutional support. Many universities and schools have since adopted scholarships, special learning aids, and supportive environments that enable specially abled children to participate in mainstream education alongside their peers.

Employment is another pillar of empowerment under the law. By reserving four percent of government jobs for persons with benchmark disabilities, the Act has created opportunities for qualified individuals to contribute meaningfully to the workforce. Alongside this, vocational training and skill development programmes have opened avenues for selfemployment and economic independence. Tax incentives for families and employers have further reinforced this support, recognizing



with disability. These measures are not just about income-they are about affirming the dignity of work and the right of every citizen to participate in building the nation.

The Act also recognizes that social security and healthcare are essential for sustaining quality of life. Insurance schemes covering health and rehabilitation, state-level pensions, grants for mobility aids, and concessions in public transport are among the benefits that have flowed from it. Families with specially abled members often bear the financial strain of medical care and assistive devices; provisions under this law ease some of that burden. By including disability-related conditions within the scope of mainstream health insurance, the Act has begun to bridge the gap between aspiration and affordability.

Perhaps the most transformative vision embedded in the law is its emphasis on accessibility. From ramps in schools and offices to low-floor buses, tactile paving, accessible washrooms, and digital platforms that can be navigated by screen readers, the Act has mandated that public life must become barrierfree. Importantly, it extends this responsibility to private establishments that provide essential services, such as banks, hospitals, and schools, signaling that inclusion is not just the government's duty but society's shared responsibility.

Equally significant are the rights and protections guaranteed by the Act. It firmly prohibits discrimination in education, employment, and healthcare, while laving down special safeguards for women and children with disabilities, who are often at greater risk of abuse and exploitation. Special courts were established for speedy trials of cases involving persons with disabilities, while state commissioners and a central commissioner were appointed to monitor compliance and address grievances. Another progressive step was the introduction of limited guardianship, a system that balances support with autonomy by enabling joint decision-making rather than imposing blanket control.

Yet, the true strength of the law lies not only in its provisions but in its vision. It reframes disability as a human rights issue, asserting that the dignity of specially abled persons is inseparable from the dignity of society itself. By aligning India's domestic laws with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Act places the country firmly within a global movement for inclusion and equality.

However, challenges remain in its implementation. While the law mandates accessi

bility, many public buildings and transport systems continue to be out of reach for those with mobility impairments. Job reservations are not always filled, either due to lack of awareness or inadequate enforcement. Disability pensions and welfare benefits are often delayed, particularly in rural areas where administrative hurdles are greater. Inclusive education is still hampered by a shortage of trained special educators and resources, and digital accessibility remains uneven despite advances in technology. Beyond these structural gaps, social stigma continues to be one of the heaviest barriers. Too often, persons with disabilities are treated as objects of pity rather than as capable individuals with aspirations and potential.

For the Act to fulfill its promise, there must be greater commitment at every level of governance. Adequate funding, stricter monitoring, and widespread awareness are crucial, as is the responsibility of private institutions to embrace inclusion as a moral as well as legal obligation. Civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and the media also have an important role in amplifying voices, sharing success stories, and challenging prejudices. Technology, too, can be a transformative ally-whether through assistive devices, inclusive digital platforms, or innovations in healthcare and mobility.

Ultimately, the Disability Act is more than a set of entitlements. It is a vision of an inclusive India, one where barriers are dismantled and diversity is celebrated. It reminds us that a nation is not judged by how it treats its strongest but by how it empowers its most vulnerable. For India's specially abled citizens, it offers not just legal recognition but a foundation of dignity, opportunity, and hope. Yet, the work of building an inclusive society does not end with the passing of a law. It continues every day, in every school that admits a disabled child, every office that hires a disabled professional, and every neighbourhood that welcomes diversity without prejudice.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is, at its core, a promise. Its fulfilment depends not only on government action but on collective will. By upholding its spirit in our policies, institutions, and communities, India can truly become a society where every individual, regardless of ability, has the right to dream, to strive, and to belong.

(The author is a senior analyst

Basohli Ramleela/Basohli Utsav

■ SHIV KUMAR PADHA

ove and interest of the people in the fine arts, miniature art, music, dance, drama and the intangible aesthetic sense is transmitted from generations to generations. Perhaps it is the legacy which the people of Basohli are inherited from the Rajas of Pal dynasty, who ruled Basohli state for 1500 years. It is said that the virtues and the vices of the rulers of a state are reflected in the behavior of their future generations even hundreds of years after their rule. Pal Rajas durbars were adorned by the Nav Rattans, noble men of excellence taken from all walks of life of life of the contemporary society. Rang Mahal of the Basohli Palaces echoed with the high notes of the classical singers, rhythm of Dholkies and

Having inherited with the traits of music and drama, the natives of the Basohli have been nurturing the valuable art of music, dance and drama for the last two centuries. They have been playing theater and drama since the time when the developed towns of the state were in infancy. According to the verbal and the written record available, the celebrations of Basohli Ramleela dates back to the early 20thcentury, when the local artists called Ras Dhariye from the neighboring towns of Punjab and Himachal Pardesh used to play Ras Leela in an open cordoned arena. Inspired by the

the rattling of the gungroos of the dancers.

Ras mandlies, the artists started staging Ramleela in a hall called Mandua, a kind of theater of that time. During those days there was neither the facility of lights nor of public address system, as we have today. The pitch of the artists was so high that one could listen the dialogues of the artist even from a long distance.

The use of Latest innovation in the celebrations of the Ramleela revolutionized the concept of its presentation in the country. Inspired by the innovations in the field of presentation, the management committee started staging it in the vast open ground having a capacity to accommodate large gatherings. Instead of one stage, Ramleela was now staged on five different stages, Avodhva Lanka Mareech Saroonnakha SumeruParbhat for Hanuman and Sugreeb and a vast space for the battles between the kings. The entry and the departure of the actors to and from the performing ground were signaled by the brass band deployed. The decoration of the whole arena gives a brides look.

The presentation of the life like scenes during the celebrations glorifies the functions which attract large number of viewers from the adjacent states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Sita janam, Sita swayambar. Falling of seven Taad trees by Lord Rama with one arrow, Sita haran, coming down of Lord Hanuman from Akash Marg are the most charming and the mesmerizing attractions of the celebrations. The characters performing the role of Ram, Sita, Ravan and others remain on ten days fast. Great emphasis is given on the maintenance of sanctity of the adjoin-

Like the sacred festivals of Eid Mubark, Diwali the family members of the town, irrespective of the religion, hold their breath till the celebrations start in the town. The children from all the communities get new clothes stitched specially for the celebrations. Harmony and brotherhood between different communities mark the Ram Leela celebrations.

In order to commemorate and transmit to the next generations, the exemplary life history of Bhaowan Ram as an ideal son. brother, king, disciple and philanthropist is shown in the Ramleela. Ramleela is celebrated not only in India but in many other parts of the world every year. Like Sindhu Darshan festival of Leh, week long mega festival of Ladakh, KheerBhawani of Kashmir, Bawa Jito and Ram Navami of Jammu, Basohli Ramleela celebrations are famous and unique in respect of its life like presentation, dialogue delivery, sanctity, religious harmony, and discipline. The countdown for the preparations of the Ramleela celebrations starts from the Raksha Bandan poornima with the hoisting of the traditional Mahavir Pataka in the premises of Ramleela ground. The cel-

ebrations of the Basohli Ramleela dates back to the early twentieth century viz.1911 when the Ramleela was used to be staged in a small tin roofed theater called 'Mandwa' for all the ten days. Due to the non-availability of the lighting facilities and public address system, the Ramleela episode used to start early in the evening and culminate before the night fall. Later on, the staging of Ramleela was started in the wide open ground with different Palace like wooden durbars, namely Ram durbar, Janak durbar, Ravan durbar, Ashok vatika, Panchvati, SumerooParvat and sufficient space for depicting different battles. The decoration of durbars and that of the arena mesmerizes every viewer.

Every episode of the Raml great enthusiasm. The jhankies of Ram janam, appearance of Sita from beneath the ground, decoration of Dhanushyagya arena and exchange of dialogues, felling of seven Taarbriksh (trees) by Ram with one arrow in order to exhibit his capability of killing the evil forces, flight of Hanuman with sanjeevanibooti, glowing of Lakshmanrekha every time Ravan dared to cross it and Ram vanvas are worth seeing. The costumes, the crowns and the tiaras worn by the characters add to the beauty of the presentation. Thousands of the spectators from within and outside the state throng Basohli town during the celebrations. Due to the observance of self-dis-

cipline by the spectators no case of theft, pick pocketing, quarreling, eve teasing or of any untoward incident is reported during the ten day festival. The sanctity of the Ramleela mandup is maintained both by the management and the spectators as a result of which no case of smoking/drinking is reported during the presentation. There is strict restriction imposed on the entry into the mandup wearing the leather shoes or any leather made article. The management and the persons playing the roles of characters observe fast during the celebrations. There is equal participation of Hindus and Muslims in the management and celebration of the Ramleela which is a rare example of religious harmony seen in

Basohli Ram Leela is the first in the state which has been recognized by the state cultural academy No.ADM-70/66-67/3789 dated 10-12-1966. The Ramleela committee has got good assets in the shape of accommodation, costumes, sophisticated electronic gadgets and the hard cash which is donated by the people with smiling face. Basohli Ramleela is lucky enough to have Sh. PremSagar Aziz, ex minister of Jammu and Kashmir, as president of the committee who has revolutionized and overhauled the whole system by his experience and dedication. He has steered the committee in the direction of progress and has added many new dimensions to the

existing set up.

With the inauguration of Atal Setu bridge over river Ravi, Ramleela committee is experiencing a big boost due to the influx of large number of viewers from the adjoining states. In order to nees and songs by different organizations every year. In order to make the celebrations a success the state and the district authorities lend their fullest cooperation in the matters of security, maintenance of law and order during the Navratras. The different TV channels also cover and telecast the Ramleela every day. It is worth mentioning here that the Basohli Ramleela has been adjudged at number one among the Ramleelas staged in metros of the country. It is worth menoning here that Basohli Ram aleel been clubbed with the Basohli Utsav which have been celebrated simultaneously since the year 2023. The Basohli Utsav will be marked as the celebrations of the state as well of the entire N. India. The Utsav showcases a bonanza of social, cultural sports and other activities which have been enthralling the audiences during the festival. No doubt it is a new feather in the cap of Basohli and that of entire UT. But for the interest and vision of His Excellency this would have never been possible. For all this, Posterity of Basohli will remain indebted to Hon. LG. Forever

(The writer is Basohli a social activist)

Movement Swachhata Jampai

■ DR. BANARSI LAL s a part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Swachhata Hi Seva -2025 campaign has been geared up to conduct a series of activities from 17th of September 2025 and to 2nd of October 2025. The theme of this year is "Swachhotsav" focusing on clean and green festivities and zero-waste community celebrations, rejuvenating public spaces, safeguarding Dafai Mitras, promoting advocacy for Sawchhata. The Swachh Bharat Mission is a mass movement for a clean, healthy and sustainable India. This mission lays the foundation for a long-term vision, addressing waste management in both urban and rural areas, which has been made possible through the action various organisations. This campaign lays the foundation for a long-term vision, addressing the waste management in both urban and rural areas which is possible through a collaborative efforts by all the sections of society. Swachhata Hi Seva has played a major role in achieving the targets which enables the mass level participation. Presently the population of India is about 1.43 billion and around 65 per cent of its population is below 35 years of age. There are 780 districts, 7309 blocks and 6.71 lakh villages in India. Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Sh. Narinder Modi on October 2, 2014 with the objective to eradicate open defecation. It is a pivotal component which enables mass participation towards this mission. It is not an ordinary campaign. It calls to citizens to actively engage in 'shramdhan' through voluntary activities aimed at fostering a sense of shared responsibility and to reinforce the message that sanitation is everybody duty. Like earlier years the spirit of cleanliness activities is voluntarism/shramdaan. This particular mission has received cooperation from the states/UTs, on-states agencies and most importantly from the people. There is need of more strenuous efforts on the waste management and garbage shouldn't be considered as the waste but wealth. Swachhata has become a national movement and many people are coming forward in this national campaign. Swachh Bharat Mission aims to end the open

defection, build more toilets and effectively manage the waste products across the nation. It has attracted the attention of each and every one not only in India but in abroad also. About 1.5 billion people across the globe do not have access to basic sanitation of which 419 million people still go for open defecation. Open defecation is mostly practiced in the countries where there is high level of undernutrition, poverty and wealth disparity. The mission is urgently needed not only in India but for the whole world. The main objective of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is to improve the quality of life among the people by promoting the cleanliness, hygiene, eradicate the open defecation, motivating the different communities and Panchayati Raj institutions to adopt the sanitation practices, encouraging the appropriate technologies for ecologically safe and sustainable sanitation, scientific solid and liquid waste management for overall cleanliness. The mission also focuses on the healthy environment. Swachh Bharat Mission is helpful for strengthening the federal structure of the country. The mission also provides functional toilets for elementary and secondary schools of the country. Some states/UTs have really shown remarkable results while others are on the verge of open defecation free. In order to make a strong working force India needs to adopt good sanitation practices across the nation. Health status of the nation directly influences its economic development. In order to achieve the desired results, there is need to change the behaviour of the people. Still in some areas open defecation is practiced because of the attitude of the people as that has become a habit of the people. There is need to create awareness among the people to stop the open defecation. People should come to know the disadvantages of open defecation and understand the importance of toilets. The schools should have separate toilets for the boys and girls.

The Government of India is making strenuous efforts to make Swachh Bharat Mission a nationwide movement by involving the prominent ambassadors, NGOs, media, corporate sectors etc. There are various success stories of the mission and many social workers, children, teachers, people with disabilities etc. who have motivated the different communities in this positive direction. They are considered as the Swachhta champions in the movement. UN Environment Programme awarded environmentalist Afroz Shah with the "Champion of the Earth" Award. He is the first Indian to receive this honour. Some villages have kept particular day in the week for cleaning their vicinities while some villages have nominated Swachhta agents. Local authorities are cooperating in the movement. The village Sarpanches and Panches guide the people for the construction of toilets in their respective homes. All this is possible when we will make the efforts with full dedication and commitment at all levels. Social media can play a pivotal role for the dissemination of information regarding the mission. We need to seek support of every citizen of the country to clean up our nation. It can be made sustainable for the future generations. The open defecation practice poses some ill effects on our health which ultimately have a cascading effect on the economic well-being of the nation. Only the construction of toilets will not work on but there is need to change the behaviour of the people to use them. There is need of coordination, capacity building, finance etc. for the mission. Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin has strived to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas by solid and liquid waste management and making villages Open Defecation Free (ODF). Special guidelines, strategies and steps have been put by the government to get Open Defecation Free status for all the villages

Sanitation is a state subject and state governments can decide their implementation mechanism and policies. The states are required to develop a framework with a roadmap of activities comprising planning, implementation and sustainability phases. The central government is complementing the state government to achieve the goals. This particular mission is different from earlier sanitation initiatives as it seeks proactive engagement with the corporate sector leveraging corporate responsibility opportunities. In 2014 Independence Day speech Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh.

Narinder Modi spoke "Has it pained us that our mothers and sisters have to defecate in open? Poor womenfolk of the village wait for the night; until darkness descends, they can't go out to defecate. What bodily torture they must be feeling". Can't we just make arrangements for toilets for the dignity of our mothers and sisters? "The sanitary disposal of human waste is sewerage in the developed countries. But in India due to the financial constraints and maintenance and operational costs sewerage is not possible. Neither the government nor the beneficiaries can bear the total expenditures, maintenance and operation of sewerage system. Also it requires skilled persons and good management for operation. Septic tank system is expensive and it requires large quantity of water for flushing. Periodic cleaning and disposal are another problems. Mismanagement of the disposal can cause mosquitoes breeding, foul smell and health hazards. In 1968 a revolutionary technology was innovated -the two pit pour flush toilet. Sulabh flush compost toilet is eco-friendly, technically appropriate, socially and economically acceptable. It is popularly known as Sulabh Shauchalaya and has been accepted by not only the Indian government but bymany other countries also. It does not require the scavengers to clean the pits. Sulabh flush compost toilets does not cause water pollution. It will be a centrally sponsored scheme through the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. Sulabh approach has substantially improved environment quality and is based on the partnership of local governments and local communities. Toilets under this approach can be easily made and maintained. Sulabh organization has also introduced pay and use public toilets. The public toilets include bathing facilities and other free services for the children, poor and disabled. Sulabh campaigns provide health education to millions of people. The organization's trains the people to construct more and more toilets by themselves. Let us to join our hands together to make India clean and green.

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