

Mentoring mentors

CHAT Rendered to the wheelchair for life has not dented the spirit of Dilip Patro, he vows to mentor the disabled so that they can lead a normal life, writes **SUMIT BHATTACHARJEE**

It takes some real courage and determination to face the world and join the mainstream after being rendered to a wheelchair for life. For Dilip Patro a software engineer, "Falling down is not a defeat, defeat is when you refuse to get up and move on".

Dilip, a software engineer with Tata Elxsi was hit by a two-wheeler near Mumbai airport 14 years ago when he was on his way to the United States for an onsite assignment for TCS. In coma for about two days, and after multiple surgeries, the accident turned him to a quadriplegic for life, as he was diagnosed with cervical spine injury.

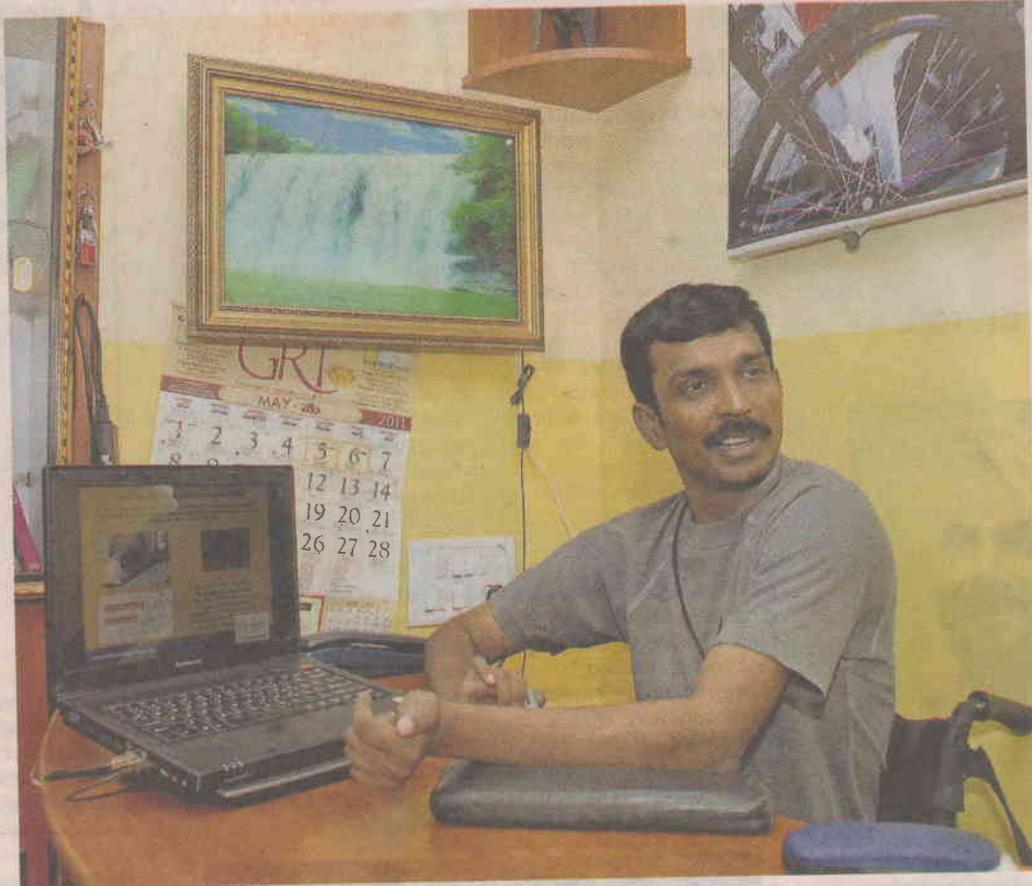
For about 11 years he was in and out of hospital for various post-accident complications, until he found a mentor in the form of Jonathan Sigworth, a quadriplegic himself. "It was he who taught me to become independent. It is the dream of every paralyzed person to be totally independent. I was motivated and trained by Jonathan, and ever since that exposure I found life to be easy and normal," says Dilip.

It is not that he has become independent today; the astonishing part is that he is now teaching people like him to be the same.

He has initiated a NGO by name The Ability People (TAP) in 2007 to facilitate, train and motivate quadriplegics, paraplegics and people suffering from cervical spine injuries.

His day starts early with a morning cruise in his wheelchair and after a quick bite he is at this office to take care of loads of work. Seeing his determination Tata Elxsi has put him back on roles as consultant and has given him the opportunity to work from home. After taking care of his official work, Dilip gets down to take up his NGO's work.

Talking of his NGO, he says, "Initially I started of by visiting hospitals as active rehab consultant. I felt others should not face the problems that I faced. The main motive of TAP is to convert



MOTIVATING THE DISABLED Dilip Patro PHOTO: C.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

every sufferer to a motivator. The goal of the Visakhapatnam centre is not just to help patients, but to turn them into helpers of patients themselves. Our centre is providing free help so that those who get free help can also give free help to others. Thus they can come out of depression, having found a purpose to help others."

He feels that every person with some sort of disability should be respected. "The fact is that a disabled person has a heart to feel, a brain to think and the desire to lead a normal and useful life like any other. If proper treatment is meted out to the handicapped, and if proper accessories and opportunities are offered to them, they can definitely rise above their impairment," he says.

TAP works with a number of Indian and international NGOs to help spinal cord patients from in and around areas of Visakhapatnam and other parts of southern India for finding cutting-edge physical therapy, and educational and vocational rehabilitation.

This apart Dilip stresses on get-together meets for SCI persons, organises various awareness camps, including on road safety, organises active wheelchair screening and distribution camp, organises awareness camps in schools to see that children develop respect for persons with physical and mental disability.

He feels that wheelchairs play an important role in the life of such persons. "Many organisa-

tions donate wheel chairs to disabled persons, but in reality the wheelchairs are of no use, as wheelchairs should be designed as per the disable condition and body measurement of the person. We undertake a screening test before designing a wheelchair," says Dilip.

He dreams of developing a full-fledged state-of-the-art post-hospital rehabilitation centre, which would include facilities such as sports, education and vocational rehabilitation. "We are negotiating with a few corporate houses, and hopefully it will materialise shortly,"

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