

संवाद

WHERE EVERY MIND RESONATES

Volume I | Issue II



A CHRDS INITIATIVE

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CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISABILITY STUDIES
HIMACHAL PRADESH NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, SHIMLA



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FOREWORD

PROF. (DR.) PRITI SAXENA



I am filled with pride to celebrate the release of second edition of Samvaad, the magazine from the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies at HPNLU, Shimla. Each issue reaffirms our commitment to providing a platform for often overlooked voices. I am filled with pride to celebrate the release of another edition of Samvaad, the magazine from the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies at HPNLU, Shimla.

Each issue reaffirms our commitment to providing a platform for often overlooked voices. This edition showcases remarkable courage and creativity, reminding us that mental health and disability are lived realities that shape our identities. Through poetry, storytelling, and art, it inspires empathy and action. I commend the CHRDS team, faculty coordinators, student members, and contributors for their dedication in bringing this edition to life. Their commitment has ensured that Samvaad grows not only as a publication but also as a movement of compassion, inclusivity, and dialogue. As an institution, we have a duty to foster understanding, where awareness leads to empathy and meaningful change.

Congratulations to the entire CHRDS family! I wish Samvaad continued growth and impact in the years ahead. With aspiration and solidarity, Prof. (Dr.) Priti Saxena Vice Chancellor Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla

With aspiration and solidarity,
Prof. (Dr.) Priti Saxena
Vice Chancellor
Himachal Pradesh National Law
University, Shimla

“When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. Life’s meaning is found not in comfort, but in courage and purpose.”

— Viktor E. Frankl



MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

DR. AKSHITA DHIMAN

Mental health is not merely the absence of illness; it is the art of living with awareness, meaning, and balance. The human mind carries infinite potential, yet it is also fragile. When society places undue weight on achievement, perfection, and comparison, the mind often falters—not because it is weak, but because it is human.

Sigmund Freud once observed that “Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.” His words remind us that silence, repression, or denial of inner conflicts cannot bring peace. Healing begins when we give space to expression—when the unconscious finds voice and when unspoken struggles meet empathy.

Carl Rogers also emphasised, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” This acceptance of our vulnerabilities, emotions, and imperfections is the foundation of well-being. But acceptance cannot exist in isolation; it needs a climate of empathy, freedom, and dialogue.

Mental health is, therefore, not only a personal journey but also a collective responsibility. As Viktor Frankl reminded us, even in suffering, we retain the freedom to choose our response and discover meaning.



To nurture minds, we must create environments where silence is not stigmatized, where struggle is not hidden, and where every voice resonates with dignity. *संवाद* embodies this spirit. It is not just a magazine, but a mirror—reflecting resilience, amplifying unheard narratives, and reminding us that the mind’s strength lies not in suppression, but in expression. In a world that often forgets to pause, *संवाद* invites us to listen—to ourselves, to each other, and to the deeper truths of being human.

At the end I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the CHRDS team on bringing out the second issue of *संवाद*. May this journey of dialogue and reflection continue to inspire and grow stronger with every edition.

Faculty Coordinator

“मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः।”

“The mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation.” — Amṛtabindu Upaniṣad



MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

ASHPINDER KAUR



I still remember one evening when I was completely stressed and broke down crying. In that moment, one of my closest friends said something that has stayed with me ever since: “Shed your tears only for those who value them, not for the things or people that don’t.” Those words felt like a gentle reminder that my emotions are precious and deserve to be respected.

That reminder also made me realize how much the people around me have shaped my journey. As the Convenor of the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies, people often expect me to lead with strength and clarity, but behind every role and responsibility, there is also a student who has her own struggles, doubts, and moments of weakness. For me, the only reason I have been able to walk this journey with confidence is because of the people who have always stood by me -my family and friends. They have been my real strength, the ones who quietly held me up when I felt like giving in.

In the end, I have come to see mental health not as a destination, but as a journey of gentle balance—of listening to ourselves with the same patience and kindness we so readily offer others. Strength is not the absence of struggle, but the courage to honor our emotions, to rest when we are weary, and to rise again when we are ready. If there is one lesson this path has etched into my heart, it is that healing begins the moment we allow ourselves to be human. And perhaps, in embracing that humanity with grace, we discover a strength far greater than perfection—the strength to keep moving forward with hope.

Student Convenor

“Life doesn’t always give us what we deserve, but rather, what we demand. And so you must continue to push harder than any other person in the room.”

—Wadi Ben-Hirki



POEMS

*“A poem should not mean,
But be.”*

– Archibald MacLeish ‘Ars Poetica’



सुना है अंग्रेज़ी में इसे *Anxiety* कहते हैं।

Kanak Dubey

2024-29

कुछ दब्बी-दब्बी सी साँस होती है
कुछ काँपते से होते हैं हाथ
धड़कनें दिल की तेज़ होती हैं
बेक्राबू से होते हैं हालात
जिस्म कुछ पराया सा मालूम होता है
एक नया सा डर दिखता है
जगती हैं निगाहें, मन भी नहीं सोता है
कुछ अंजाना सा डर है
पहले कभी तो नहीं हुआ ये अहसास
रुक जाता है वक्रत, आती नहीं साँस
तूफ़ान से पहले का सन्नाटा जैसे भर गया हो दिल में
जैसे कैद हो गई हो रूह अँधेरे से एक बिल में
या कहीं कोई जिन्न तो नहीं जो बना रहा आशियाना शरीर में

सूरज की रोशनी में भी उम्मीद कहाँ दिखती है
राख-राख हो रहा ज़मीर है
घबराहट है या है ये वहम
पर सवाल है ये खुदगर्जी
अंग्रेज़ी में कहते हैं इसे Anxiety



भीड़ में खोया चेहरा

Ritika Jain

2025-30

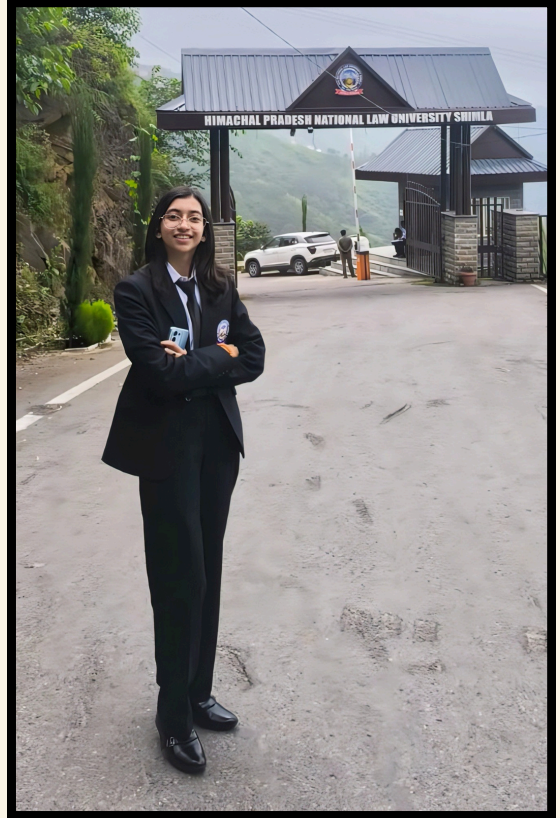
क्या इस भीड़ में मैं चल पाऊंगी,
क्या मैं अपनी कोई जगह बना पाऊंगी...
ना अब भागने की हिम्मत है,
ना वापस जाने की मंज़िल है।

दुनिया ने साथ छोड़ दिया,
खुद ने खुद को अपनाना छोड़ दिया।
सपने तो बहुत थे मेरे,
मगर अब बस अँधेरे हैं गहरे।

मेरी जीत पर मेरे सर पे ताज था,
पर क्यों मेरी हार पे किसी का साथ ना था?
बहुत नाज़ था मुझे मेरी काबिलियत पर,
पर अब सब बोझ लगता है मुझे मेरे ऊपर।

हाँ लड़ना तो था अपने लिए दुनिया से,
पर अब ये आँखें भर चुकी हैं आँसुओं से।
मुझे अपनी खुशी के लिए थम जाना भी मनज़ूर है,
पर उनकी नज़रों से गिर जाने का डर मुझे बहुत है।

दम घुट रहा है मेरा, मुझको भागना है,
पर क्यों इन चीखों को सुना नहीं जाता है?
सोचा आज फिर हँस के लड़ना है,
पर अब ये चेहरा भी झूठ बोलने लगा है।





امید کا چراغ

(Umeed ka Chiraagh)

Sami Iqbal

2025-30

بوجھ تعلیم نے شانے کو گراں بار کیا ہے
 اہل خانہ کی نظر نے بھی طلبگار کیا ہے
 کارواں سب تیز گام، اور وہ آہستہ مزاج
 رفتہ رفتہ وقت نے اس کو شرمسار کیا ہے
 کوششوں کے بیچ میں ٹھوکر پہ ٹھوکر ملی
 ناکامی نے اس کے دل کو گنہگار کیا ہے
 پچھتاوے کی راہ میں جلتی ہے اک دھیمی آگ
 یاد ماضی نے وجود کو بیمار کیا ہے
 ہنسی کے پردے میں چھپا ہے دل کا دکھتا زخم
 مزاح نے ہی اس کو سہم گوار کیا ہے
 فرار کی راہیں کبھی نیند، کبھی آوازیں
 بے پرواہی نے اسے بے قرار کیا ہے
 مگر اندھیروں میں بھی باقی ہے چراغ جستجو
 حوصلے کی جھلک نے ہی امید بیدار کیا ہے
 یہی پیغام ہے کہ سن لو دل کے زخموں کی صدا
 ذہن کے بوجھ نے انسان کو بیدار کیا ہے
 اب نہ شکست سے گھبراؤ، نہ اندھیروں سے ڈروں
 ایمان نے دل کو فولاد سا بنا دیا ہے
 سفر اگرچہ طویل ہے اور راستے لکھن
 حوصلے نے امید کا دیپ جلا دیا ہے
 جان لیا ہے کہ روشنی سوچ میں ہے اور قوت عمل
 میں خودی نے مجھے زمانے سے بلند کر دیا ہے

Bojh-e taleem ne shaane ko giraan-baar kiya hai,
 Ahl-e khana ki nazar ne bhi talabgaar kiya hai.
 Karwan sab teez gaam, aur woh aahista mizaaj,
 Rafta rafta waqt ne usko sharmsaar kiya hai.
 Koshishon ke beech mein thokar pe thokar mili,
 Nakaami ne uske dil ko gunahgaar kiya hai.
 Pachtawe ki raakh mein jalti hai ek dheemi aag,
 Yaad-e maazi ne wajood ko beemaar kiya hai.
 Hansi ke parde mein chhupa hai dil ka dukhta zakhm,
 Mazah ne hi usko sogwaar kiya hai.
 Faraar ki rahein kabhi neend, kabhi aawaaz mein,
 Beparwahi ne usey beqarar kiya hai.
 Magar andheron mein bhi baaqi hai chiraagh-e justuju,
 Hosle ki jhalak ne hi umeed bedaar kiya hai.
 Yehi paighaam hai ke sun lo dil ke zakhmon ki sada,
 Zehn ke bojh ne insaan ko bedaar kiya hai.
 Ab na shikast se ghubraao, na andheron se daroon,
 Imaan ne dil ko folaad sa bana diya hai.
 Safar agar che taweel hai aur raaste kathin,
 Hosle ne umeed ka deep jala diya hai.
 Jaan liya hai ke roshni soch mein hai aur quwwat amal
 mein,
 Khudi ne mujhe zamaane se buland kar diya hai.



Hope

Shriya Awasthi

2025-30



Will I do justice to my hopes and dreams?
Counting every second till I can't breathe
Darkness prevailing, clouding my mind
Yet something to share and something to find
Running over the edges till I stumble
But I know I will rise and shine
So, show me the light and I promise to fight
Sometimes drowning in the bottomless pain
I feel a surge of vigor, wondering if I have something to gain
All these whispers telling me abysmal lies
"What a splendid day it is", someone told me
I looked at the sky and felt those warm sun rays upon me
Distant echoes and daunting dreams
But I can win and surely breathe
You can be victorious too, but only if you believe
So, fight with those demons that chase your dreams.





Inspired by O Henry, The last leaf

Rimjim Kheda

2022-27

They said hope was fragile,
Yet I watched it cling to the branch every
night,
When dusk and dawn spiralled into a
storm,
Endings were whispered, and mirages
were drawn.

As I sulked in nothingness,
It would not tether.
It bathed in grief, yet it would not
shatter.
It refused to fall, and I kept to wonder-
Was it so strong that it would not
surrender?

I called it cruel, for it would not fall.
As it kept bleeding, it stood tall
The voices screamed louder,
But it stood there prouder-
Was it so strong that it would not
surrender?

With the first of dawn, the bleeding had
stopped.

I rushed to the window as my heartbeat
throbbed.

It had fallen in the weather, but it was
never there-

The voices were lies,
Did it die in despair?

For what I, saw with my bare eyes,
Was the pinch of hope that met my vice,
The pinch of hope that braved the
thunder,
The pinch of hope that would not
surrender.

I met myself at the end of the tunnel
The wounds had healed, and the scars
were subtle

I wondered once, and I wonder still,
Was it so strong that it would not
surrender?

Or was I so blind
That I could not see the light?





PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Living with the Unseen

Vanshika Sharma
(2022-27)



I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes back in 2008, at the age of 7, when children are usually worried about homework, playtime, or maybe their favourite cartoon. For me, things were a little different. Along with books and toys, I also had needles, sugar checks, and constant reminders of what I could or couldn't eat. But I never openly spoke about it. I thought if people knew, they would start treating me differently, maybe with sympathy, maybe with pity, and I didn't want either. So, I learned to hide it from my friends, teachers, and peers, even when I was battling low sugar at midnight or struggling to keep my energy up during school.

But hiding wasn't easy. It was like carrying a bag no one else could see, but one that never left my shoulders. I often told myself, "It's better to stay silent than to be misunderstood." Yet, somewhere inside, I wished for a space where I didn't have to pretend that my condition wasn't seen as a weakness but simply as a part of me.

That space opened up when I joined the HPNLU and made friends who didn't see me as "different," but simply as me with all my quirks, struggles, and strengths. With them, I didn't have to explain or hide; they just understood.

Joining the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies (CHRDS) added another layer of acceptance. It was the first space where invisible conditions like mine were openly acknowledged and respected. Over time, I began to see my diabetes differently. It wasn't something to hide; it was something that had shaped my patience, resilience, and empathy. Injecting insulin before exams, pushing through fatigue in internships, and juggling the pace of law school with sugar swings, these weren't weaknesses. They were small victories.

This is the first time I am choosing to share my story. For a long while, I felt diabetes was something best kept in the background, but over time, I have come to see it as a part of who I am. So, if I leave you with one thought, it would be this: "Unseen battles are still battles and hiding them won't make them disappear, but embracing them just might make us stronger. And when life feels too heavy to carry alone, remember your own story, your own courage, is already waiting to lift you up."





Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Law School

Parul Bhalla
(2022-27)

The term ‘sonder’ is used for the realisation that everyone has a story. Navigating through law school is overwhelming, especially when it seems that every other person is better than you. But we often tend to forget that each of those smiling faces have a struggle of their own behind it. While balancing academics and co-curriculars, one often forgets to cater the needs of his physical health, let alone his mental well-being. However, after three years of law school, I have lately come to realise how important is it to look after your mental health. Back-to-back exams, assignments and deadlines have an adverse effect on the already rising stress levels. It is often difficult to find leisure time. Each break comes with a guilt of not doing something. In the first semester, I was enthusiastic to not only be a part of every activity but also excel at them. I nearly took law school to be a marathon. But what nobody actually prepared me for was, that if the strategy is not right, I could sprint for a while, but will eventually exhaust. And that exhaustion came in the form of all-nighters before the exam week, sleepy mornings where I felt heavy before the day even started, and instances of people finding me taking naps in the library.

Since all the students were sailing in the same boat, it felt pretty normal and a part of the process. The notion of “you are not working hard enough if you aren’t drained” settled within me. I, however, learnt the hard way that how carefully we all wear our masks. Everyone seemed so confident with clarity in their minds, but on a closer look, there were the same signs of anxious thoughts, tired eyes, and the hunger to win an unending race.

The real turning point came during my third year when I overworked myself with co-curriculars along with the pressure of excelling in academics. The weight of my own expectations pulled me towards a sudden breakdown. I was hit hard by the realisation that I hadn’t eaten a proper meal all day and had barely stepped outside my room except to attend classes in the week. Even though my body functioned, my mind was shut.

It was then that I realised that pushing myself to the edge does not make me a better student, nor does it guarantee success. What it does is rob me of the joy of learning. Mental health is not an accessory but a foundation to success.



When I visited Rishikesh recently, I expected the usual-mountains, the calm Ganga, and the spiritual hum of the city. But amidst the beauty, I encountered something that stayed with me far longer than the trip itself: the double discrimination faced by people with disabilities. It happened one evening near Lakshman Jhula, where the narrow lanes were packed with tourists, vendors, and honking scooters. In the crowd, I noticed a young man in a wheelchair, guided by his brother. When I visited Rishikesh recently, I expected the usual-mountains, the calm Ganga, and the spiritual hum of the city. But amidst the beauty, I encountered something that stayed with me far longer than the trip itself: the double discrimination faced by people with disabilities. It happened one evening near Lakshman Jhula, where the narrow lanes were packed with tourists, vendors, and honking scooters. In the crowd, I noticed a young man in a wheelchair, guided by his brother. Their struggle was immediate the steep steps, uneven roads, and shop entrances without ramps made every movement an obstacle.

Personal Experience

Naina Upadhyay (2024-29)



Instead of help, what they received were impatient stares, sighs of annoyance, and even a remark from a passerby: "Why bring him here if it's so difficult?" The unspoken message was clear-spaces of leisure, faith, and exploration were seen as the privilege of the able-bodied. But the discrimination didn't stop at the physical barriers. The young man also had a cognitive disability. His laughter was loud, his words unclear, and his excitement drew curious, sometimes mocking looks. Some people stared as though his presence disturbed their idea of a peaceful holiday; others quickly looked away, uncomfortable with his difference. Here was the second layer of exclusion: social stigma. He was not only battling inaccessible infrastructure but also the weight of society's impatience and prejudice.

Standing there, I realized how harsh reality can be for people like him. We often speak about "inclusive India," yet in places like Rishikesh, neither the facilities nor the attitudes matched those words. The irony struck me-this was a city known for spirituality and compassion, yet it faltered at the most basic act of empathy.

Later that night, by the banks of the Ganga, I reflected on what I had witnessed. My trip, meant to be a simple escape, had become a mirror to society's indifference. Double discrimination is not an abstract term-it is lived every day by those who are pushed to the margins both physically and socially. That evening in Rishikesh left me with more than scenic memories. It reminded me of the responsibility we carry: to speak up, to notice, and to ensure dignity and joy are not denied to anyone, regardless of ability.



Walking Through Challenges, Standing in Resilience

Ava Rey

I was just 10 years old when my life began to feel different from others. I was diagnosed with valgus knock knees, but for a long time, I kept it a secret. I was scared that if people found out, no one would accept me or want to be my friend. At first, I thought everything was fine, but slowly my mother noticed that something wasn't right.

We went to many doctors, and almost all of them said the same thing that I might end up in a wheelchair in the coming years. Hearing this was frightening, but my family never gave up on me. They always reminded me that I was loved, that I was strong, and that I was more than my condition. They tried their best to make me feel comfortable and confident.

But the world was not always kind. Many people treated me as if I was not good enough, as if I didn't belong. The feeling of being left out was painful. I often asked myself why I was different and why I couldn't be "normal" like everyone else. Over time, I realized something important. If the world doesn't accept me, that doesn't mean I have to stop accepting myself. My worth is not decided by how I walk, look, or appear to others. I may not fit into society's definition of "normal," but that is okay. What matters is the strength to live, the courage to dream, and the determination to prove that my life is just as meaningful as anyone else's.

Yes, my journey is not easy. There are challenges every day both physical and emotional. But today, I stand with the belief that my difference does not make me less. Instead, it makes me unique, it makes me resilient, and it teaches me empathy in ways that others may never understand.

This is my story of learning to accept myself, even when the world does not.

The motive is to inspire acceptance of oneself despite disability, and to challenge the way society looks at difference.



Nothingness to Clarity: Reclaim Your Childlike Presence

Ronit

(2021-26)

Nothingness is the source of everything, yet it continuously transforms into a seemingly new reality, one that eventually fades into oblivion. In this process, we forget that these are merely layers built over time, not the true reality itself. These layers are the core of Maya that meant to teach us that nothingness is the foundation of all things, and even the most artificial realities arise from it. When one starts seeking the Ultimate truth whether you call it God or Supreme consciousness or Primal Energy Maya intensifies its hold, not to punish but to test. The illusions, desires, fears, and distraction it creates serve as challenges, pushing the seeker to refine their awareness. The mind, in its conditional state, is prone to falling into these traps, but the very act of recognising them is the key to live like you should.

The Innocence of Childhood: Free from Maya's Layers

As children, we were naturally aligned with life's flow, unburdened by the layers of external conditioning. Our joy came from living fully in the moment, giving our all to every experience without fear of failure or desire for grand achievements. Whether it was playing, exploring, or simply being, we poured our entire being into the present, untouched by the illusions of Maya.

A Personal Lesson: The Weight of Overthinking

In my younger years, I practiced extreme calisthenics without even knowing it was extreme. I'd push myself daily more push-ups, pull-ups, and challenging variations until I could effortlessly perform feats like 20 muscle-ups. I wasn't chasing goals or comparing myself; I was simply immersed in the process, driven by curiosity and joy. But as I grew older and consumed more content social media, fitness advice, worldly pressures my mind became crowded with thoughts.



Doubts, ambitions, and comparisons turned every task into a two-step process: first, I had to battle mental noise, and only then could I focus on the task. These thoughts drained my energy, reducing my efficiency and dimming the effortless flow I once had. This taught me that Maya's illusions our self-imposed thoughts sap our vitality, but recognising them is the first step toward clarity.

Breaking Free: Reclaim Your Childhood Strength

Try this simple exercise:

Reflect: Close your eyes for 2 3 minutes. Recall a childhood moment when you felt alive.

Write: Jot down what made you succeed. Were you free from fear, fully present, or unburdened by expectations?

Realise: Understand that living in the moment makes you unstoppable. Reclaim your childlike focus, let go of mental clutter, and embrace the nothingness that underlies all.

About the Author

Law student by day, seeker of truth
by life. Exploring spirituality,
shredding guitar riffs, and mastering
calisthenics to find balance and
purpose.





PAINTINGS

“Vibrant colors and bold textures converge to create a powerful visual narrative, challenging societal norms and celebrating the diversity of human experience in ‘Breaking Barriers Together: A Tribute to the Strength of Individuals Empowered with Disabilities.’ The Inspiring acronym D.I.S.A.B.I.L.I.T.Y. embodies a profound message: “Dare to dream big and inspire others to do the same. Recognise and nurture your ability to make a difference. Strive for a barrier-free world where everyone has equal opportunities. Innovate and find creative solutions to challenges. Aim for limitless possibilities and never give up on your aspirations. Foster inclusion and accessibility in all aspects of life. Celebrate your triumphs and those of others, and always remember that you have the power to make a positive impact – you!”



Mehakpreet Kaur
(2025-30)

The artwork features a person in a wheelchair, whose life may seem like a “black night,” but still radiates a sunlight of hope. This individual envisions a future where they are accepted and supported as a normal human being. On that day, they will be able to fulfill their dreams of traveling, independence, receiving love, and participating in every activity of their choice. The artwork incorporates various symbols, each representing a different aspect of disability:- D – with a walking stick , I – with a white cane, S – using hearing machine , A – getting support from two walking sticks , B – representing Braille language , L – A person on a wheelchair and lastly a person with one leg stretching arms to form letter E .Together, these symbols form a powerful statement about inclusivity, empowerment, and the celebration of human diversity.” All the letters with the support of assistive tools and through mutual encouragement, everyone was able to express and represent their authentic selves.”





INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW

Ms. Neha Khanvani

Pravah Counseling -

<https://www.instagram.com/pravahcounseling/>
with **Aastha Mahesh Saboo**.



Ms. Neha Khanvani is an eminently effectual consultant, counseling psychologist, story teller and trainer with an experience of 16+ years in the education sector.

Her adeptness has given her immense exposure and opportunities to train 3500+ teachers across Gujarat since 2018. She has conducted sessions for various age group settings which includes educators, parents and children.

During these years she has performed different roles such as early years' expert, teacher, principal, trainer, blogger, counsellor and content head. She has also played the role of Territory Head of ECA (Early Childhood Association India) - for many years.

Her forte is early years' education and child psychology. She believes in the power of mindfulness and kindness integrating these values in the teaching-learning process in multiple ways.

Mindful School Approach is one of her best module which is appreciated a lot. She strongly advocates safe and memorable learning experiences in a coherent environment to receive the utmost benefit from it.

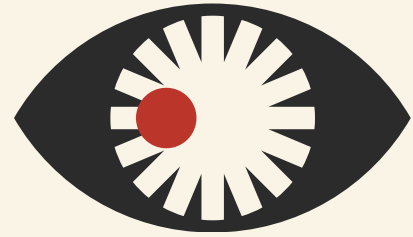
She is also founder of Pravah Counseling. You can learn about her work through Instagram page.

She believes that **"Every Story Matters"**.

Interviewer



Aastha Mahesh Saboo (2021-26) is a final year student at HPNLU, Shimla and the Student Advisor at the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies

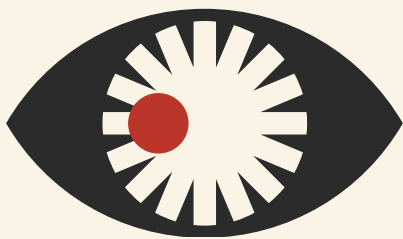


Q. Can you share an overview of your professional background and how your expertise in mental health has shaped your role as an educator/teacher?

A. I was born and brought up in Gujarat, and for the last 16 years, I have been working with different age groups of children, as well as training teachers. I completed my masters in Psychology and started my career as a teacher in 2009, dealing with children on a daily basis. Today, I head an institution and have worked in various cities across Gujarat, currently based in Ahmedabad for academic work. Alongside, I offer my own freelancing services providing therapy. As a teacher trainer, I've trained more than 3,500 teachers across Gujarat, and I'm also a storyteller. My academic background and experience as a teacher trainer have allowed me to work with diverse stakeholders i.e., teachers, school management, children which helps me support children more effectively through stories, counselling sessions, and best practices in the classroom for holistic development. I am also associated with several publication houses as a training and content head, such as HarperCollins and Pearson India, and this year, I've been appointed as a resource person by CBSE as well.

Q. Have you observed any notable changes in the mental health of Generation Z students compared to previous generations, and what are the factors you believe are driving these differences?

A. Having worked in schools for 16 years and with different age groups, I have observed significant changes over less than two decades. Children today are much smarter in the way they adopt technology and handle situations, and there is even a big shift in parental understanding from the 90s to now. This is reflected in the children too. Gen Z has a lot of information available with them through the devices in hands, but when it comes to mental health, they are emotionally disconnected. They have devices in their hands but do not know how to differentiate between emotions. They are unaware of what anger, sadness, or frustration truly mean, they just feel like or dislike things, unable to understand what bothers them. They have access to everything but lack the vocabulary and skills to explain what they are experiencing or even how to ask for help. Effective communication and emotional connection are missing, and basic social skills like making friends or asking for a chair are lacking in many of them.



Q. How do you tailor your teaching methods and mental health support strategies to address the evolving needs of today's students?

A. There was a time when children were more obedient toward teachers and parents. Now, this generation has not just social media access, but platforms like AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) they cross-check and verify information given by teachers. Traditional “chalk and talk” method will not work; especially other ways are needed to nurture them.

I focus on mindfulness and age-appropriate approaches, like using bells in schools to help younger children sit quietly and breathe for a few minutes, or introducing sensorial activities such as observing their bellies or watching glitter jars settle when they are hyper. Teachers are not permitted to shout or threaten students. There is also a morning ‘circle time’, 10 minutes for open discussion between teachers and students about sensitive topics.

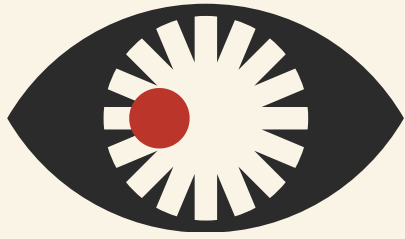
Recently, there was a shocking incident where a grade 8 student stabbed another after a casual taunt “kya hee kr legaa tu” this shows the impulsivity and dangerous trends in this generation. It is vital that we teach students to respond instead of react and that teachers create environments where children feel safe to open up.

Q. With the increasing accessibility of AI technologies to students, how do you see these tools influencing their mental health, both positively and negatively?

A. Every coin has two sides. On the positive side, teaching has become easier, and some children use these tools for research and come up with good questions to us. AI tools enable discussion, cultural exchange, and openness among children from different backgrounds. However, some negative impacts include students not writing correctly due to autocorrect features, they're not learning proper expression, grammar, or vocabulary. Reels and shorts (20-second videos) reduce attention spans, while school periods last 40 minutes, making students restless and less patient. Tools teach them to be “self-centred” they say my score, my partner, my race, that's it for them. For them it has all become that it is all I & me. Impulsivity has increased, and some basic life skills like patience, resilience, and helping others are lacking.

Q. What impact have you observed on social media having on the mental health of school-aged students?

A. The impact of social media is huge. I have come across Grade 8 students who have been seen abusing and bullying each other on Instagram, which leads to chaos and lowers the self-esteem of the targeted child. Children make fun of each other's physical appearances without sensitivity, which worsens mental health for many



Q. How do you collaborate with parents and guardians to create a supportive mental health environment for students?

A. Parent engagement programs and special sessions are organised. I believe parents grow with their children, so if there are issues at home, children are affected. About 30-40% of parents are in denial about the impact of family issues. In some cases, we are bound and cannot help beyond an extent.

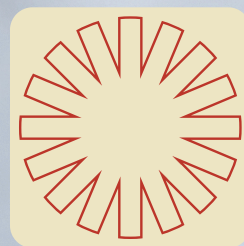
But there are instances where we worked and it made a difference ultimately. In a case, the child strangled throat of another child in school. Because he was not used of listening to a NO. Then I called his father and got to know that he lost his mother in covid. Family started pampering the child giving everything. Post covid child came to school and as a family/school we supported. We worked with both the school and the family through counselling, explained options to the child instead of forcing decisions, and after more than a year, there was a huge positive change. He found friends, and his communication and behaviour improved.

Q. Any incidents that you would like to share with Samvaad?

A. An 11-year-old new admission remained withdrawn and used inappropriate words, which other students reported. On calling the parents, the mother said to tell the father, and the father said he was not available, showing a communication gap at home. The child was very attached to his brother who was sent to hostel, while the disturbed family was moving towards separation. With no emotional connect at home, he sought attention from peers, picked up bad words, and struggled academically, unable to write even a few sentences. After friendly counselling and exam support, he now comes to school with a smile, though still underconfident and avoiding eye contact.

When we co-relate these things, we understand that there is no sound atmosphere at home, he had trauma of missing his elder brother emotionally no one was available at home. Eventually, he tried to get attention from friends. After many friendly counselling sessions, in exams we give a person with him who reads the exam paper to him he answers to those questions – that much support we gave to that child and now when he comes to school, he comes with a smile. He still doesn't have eye – contact with the teacher because he feels underconfident that he is not good enough. Thus, as a parent it is important to give emotional attachment and warmth to the child. Only social media and AI cannot be blamed. Human to human connection is more important. Good conversations, meals together at home are important.

Finally, I conclude by saying that “Stories and heartfelt communication have the power to bridge the gap and strengthen the bond.”



To access the 10 winning blogs of the Blog Writing Competition conducted by the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Rights - Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla on the theme “Mental Health, Disability and Rights”, scan the QR code!

AFTERWORD

Hesham Ahsan
(2024-29)

As we close this second issue of the first volume of Samvaad, I wish to convey my own thoughts regarding this magazine, which is perhaps one of my proudest achievements.

While editing this magazine, both the first and the second issue, it was imperative upon me to find the right mindset with which to undertake such an important project. Dealing with the subject matter that is covered by this magazine, I could not half-heart it.

At first, what I wished was to become irrelevant. All that is required from me, I thought, would be to become a platform that hosts the voices of others, the voices of true change as compared to my echoing. The sign of a great social worker would be that of true irrelevance, what abrahamic religions phrase as “Giving with the right hand, while the left is unaware”.

However, I have since realised that such a view is narcissistic in its own. It is equivalent to sitting on the moral high horse, and excusing oneself from actual realities. That feeling comes from pure selfishness. When wanting to become irrelevant, paradoxically what weighs on the heart is still the want of recognition, so that people may praise us as great and kind persons, who gave up recognition. Oh so great helper of the helpers.

The true direction, that heart and mind must face is Introspection. The very core of this magazine deals with the same. The kind contributors of this magazine both teach as well as introspect at the same time, when talking about important topics such as mental health, human rights and disability.

Therefore, moving forward, my approach to this great step taken by the Centre would be introspection as well.

While I edit and myself contribute to this communal effort, I shall constantly refresh my views and think about what I can take away from this magazine, in every issue of every volume. Doing otherwise, in my opinion, would be disrespecting everything that is encapsulated in this magazine. And this shall be my mindset throughout the short tenure I have left, the most of which I wish to be involved and tied to this magazine.

Editor-In-Chief





Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in this magazine Samvaad are solely those of the individual authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies, HPNLU or Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla.

The content is intended for awareness and informational purposes only and should not be considered as professional mental health advice. The primary aim of this publication is to foster dialogue and raise awareness around mental health issues within the academic and broader community.



संवाद

WHERE EVERY MIND RESONATES

Volume I | Issue II