

Enabling disabled poor to become leaders - My Take by Dr Amitabh Mehrotra, founder of rural schools in Uttar Pradesh

In My Take this week, Dr Amitabh Mehrotra, talks about his experiences battling disability, that led him to found SPARC India in Uttar Pradesh, whose mission is to reach the disabled poor.



From getting admission into school to interacting with children my age, I grew up experiencing the discrimination and lack of opportunities that people with disabilities routinely face in India.

I was born in Maharajganj tehsil in Uttar Pradesh, which is a rural area. With great difficulty I got admission into school, and even after that I had a hard time writing notes. My parents and sisters would help me by copying notes but I always felt isolated as I would never be asked to join in the games.

These experiences made me determined to overcome such barriers, not just for myself but others, who were disabled like me.

I did my doctorate specifically in the topic of inclusion in a rural setting and this was the foundation of SPARC - School for Potential Advancement and Restoration of Confidence. I started this in 1996 at the old, walled city of Lucknow. Within a year we brought eight villages of Barabanki district under its scope.

I also wanted to reach out to them early, and with this specific aim, I started the SPARC India-Jyoti Kiran School in Lucknow. Here we have 60 odd students, and our focus is to equip them to battle their physical and psychological challenges.

Today SPARC India works in 30 districts of Uttar Pradesh, and we function through the Uttar Pradesh Viklang Manch, that is an organization at the local level. We focus on themes like education, health, skill development and accessing rights and entitlements.

In our village schools and rural slums, we also offer leadership training to the disabled, so they can become empowered, independent members of society, who can occupy an equal place in society like everyone.
