



# Antarchakshu® 2017

## To Inclusion and Beyond!



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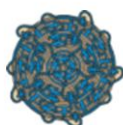
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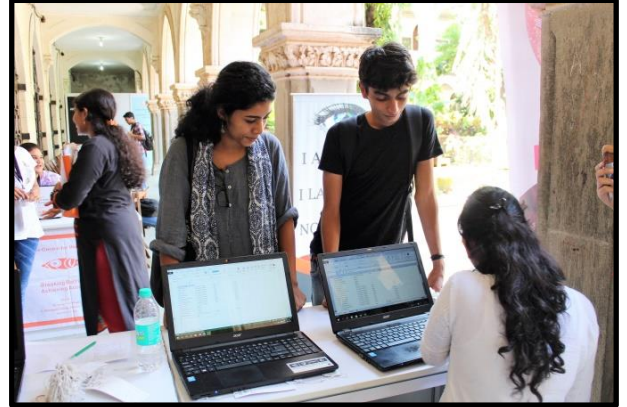
A.S.K. ([ASK@yashcharitabletrust.org](mailto:ASK@yashcharitabletrust.org)) in collaboration with Forum for Autism ([forumforautism.org](http://forumforautism.org))



# To Inclusion and Beyond!

(A report on Antarchakshu® 2017)

**Compiled by XRCVC**



The registration zone



A protractor with tactile markings, which is used by visually impaired students



A participant walking blindfolded through a college passageway



Antarchakshu<sup>®</sup> – The Eye Within, a one-of-a-kind awareness and sensitisation event on the lives of persons with disability, was held at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai on September 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The event was conceptualised and conducted by the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC).

There were 1220 participants at the two-day event, which was held in neatly partitioned zones inside the college's cavernous hall. Some additional interactive workshops related to Antarchakshu were also conducted across different venues inside the college campus.

The XRCVC is a support and advocacy centre that works towards the holistic development of people with disabilities, with a specialised focus on those with visual impairment. Antarchakshu, an experiential workshop, is part of the XRCVC's endeavour at building a more inclusive social, educational, professional, and financial milieu for such persons.

While past editions of this mega event have focused on themes related to visual impairment, the scope was expanded this year to include diverse conditions like autism and learning disabilities as well. In keeping with this, the theme for this year's Antarchakshu was 'To Inclusion and Beyond'.

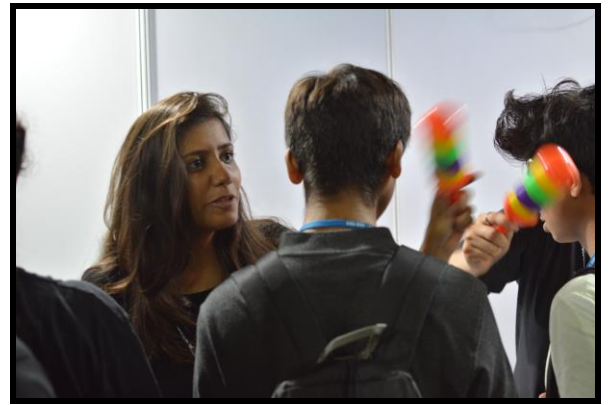
The event was powered by Tech Mahindra Foundation and also powered by Tata Capital, Dhun Pestonji Parakh Discretionary Trust, Godrej, SBI Mutual Fund, BPCL, Tata Sons, and Sightsavers. Antarchakshu also had four Knowledge Partners this year — Adult Support Kendra (ASK), Forum for Autism, Maharashtra Dyslexia Association, and JinShiksha.

Dr Sam Taraporevala, Director, XRCVC, explained the thought behind Antarchakshu. "Persons with disability are a part of society. They do everything that others do, they just do it differently! They have the potential to achieve excellence but the society that they are a part of needs to recognise this and know how. This year, therefore, the simulated environment at Antarchakshu included insights into the world of persons with autism, learning disabilities, and visual impairment. The event stimulated participants to reflect on what they can do to promote inclusion. Antarchakshu also ran a number of workshops like Braille, Treasure Hunt with a Twist, and a Photography workshop — 'The Blind Way'.

Dr Agnelo Menezes, Principal, St Xavier's College, said, "As teachers, we need to educate ourselves more about how to handle learning disabilities in a sensitive and an effective manner. I was touched when one of our colleagues came to me after participating in Antarchakshu and requested if he / she could reset the exam question paper that had just been handed over to the Head of Department — and I most promptly said yes."



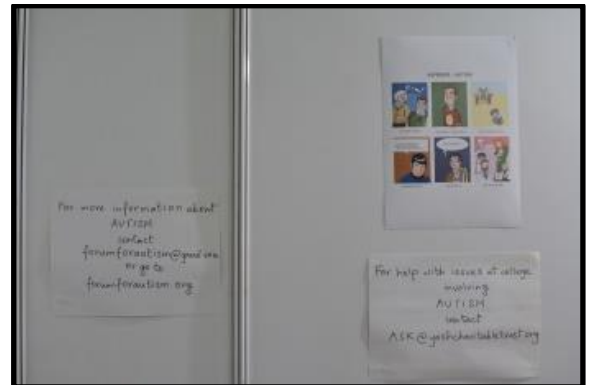
The autism zone



Participants being distracted by the sound of a rattle



Printed material at the venue describing various disabilities



Using language to explain a concept related to autism



Participants at a debriefing after one of the activities



Dr Taraporevala added, “Providing an inclusive environment in all walks of life to persons with disability should not be seen as the responsibility of just one sector. Inclusion should be a universal obligation. Through the Antarchakshu experience, our aim was to demystify the concept of inclusion and make sure that its basic principles are easily understood and made practical to one and all. As in previous years, an important aspect of Antarchakshu was to bridge the awareness gap concerning blindness. This was just one part, however. This year, we focused more on the human interface rather than technology. As an academic institution, St Xavier’s College advocates inclusive education and our aim was to sensitise people about this. By focusing on areas concerning education, financial services, and employment opportunities, we realise the shortcomings of our systems, which are often taken for granted. It is high time we focus on and promote inclusive education, at least around us.”

Said Ms Parul Kumtha, President, Forum for Autism, “Antarchakshu has been a pioneering event for awareness on persons with visual impairment. As a parent, I’m glad to be a part of their broadening to autism awareness as also awareness for learning disability. I hope we take the event to other colleges as well.”

Over 180 staff and volunteers, largely students of St Xavier’s College, worked tirelessly over many days to make this event a unique and unforgettable experience for the participants.

Appended below is a description of some of the activities — which were designed to give the participants an insight into the lives of persons with autism, learning disabilities, and visual impairment.

## **Autism**

Participants in this zone were first given a brief description about autism, with special emphasis on how the spectrum is so vast that no two persons with this condition are alike. Participants were then shown images that could be interpreted differently depending on which way you looked at the image. The aim of the exercise was to create awareness that people perceive the same thing differently. Sometimes they just do not see the other picture, and even when they see the other side, another way of looking, it disappears. This is especially significant in the way we view persons who are different from us, such as those on the autism spectrum.

In one activity, two volunteers carried out a conversation in a language that was unfamiliar to most listeners, after which the participants were asked to share what they had understood from the conversation or whether they could understand the tone and mood in which it had been conducted. The learning from this activity was that even if you cannot comprehend a language you can still pick up cues on whether people are being nice to you or not. Though some students with autism might come across as people who do not understand because they may “look” distracted, they are able to sense what is going on. Just because they may not be able to express what they understand, one should not assume that they know nothing of what is going on.



Posters describing learning disabilities



Another debriefing session in progress



An activity based on the Stroop Effect



Participants attempting to write with their non-dominant hand



Reading a simple sentence backwards



Further down the experience, a group of participants were made to stand in a circle holding hands while one person was kept outside the circle. The person outside was then told to penetrate the circle. The idea was to make participants realise how people with disability feel when they are left out of social spheres. Persons with autism want to belong. It is a misconception to think that they like to be left to themselves and isolated. They often do not know how to belong and hence may display what may seem inappropriate or challenging behaviours. They need space and they need acceptance and patience from the group. They are able to sense acceptance and rejection too.

In a third activity, participants were asked to first stare at a torch light for 30 seconds and then attempt to thread a needle. Following this, they were asked to carefully listen to a sentence from a volunteer while a rattle was being played near their ear to distract them. The lessons from both these activities were that these are simple tasks that we are equipped to do but struggled with because of other sensory challenges before us. Persons with autism have enormous sensory challenges. They are oversensitive to loud noises or visual stimuli, may develop anxiety, and subsequently not be able to perform even the simplest of tasks. Some examples of what might throw them off are fluorescent lighting, strobe lights, soap bubbles, flickering lights or those that change colour. Some persons have a very difficult time with sudden loud noises, confusion in a market place where there is a lot of chatter, weddings, big parties, etc. Before moving to the next zone, the participants were also shown a few audio visual clips on day-to-day experiences of persons with autism.

In the final session on autism, participants got a chance to interact with experts in the field in order to get a better idea about the challenges experienced in connection with the condition.

## **Learning Disabilities**

In the learning disabilities zone, participants were first asked to read certain words in English which persons with learning disabilities would misread. There are many inconsistencies in the English language, and this tends to make the reading difficulty more pronounced for persons with dyslexia, because their brain is trying to process the sounds.

Participants were then asked to write a sentence with their non-dominant hand — which gave them an idea about the difficulties faced by individuals with dysgraphia.

In the activity that followed, flashcards with words of colour were shown to participants using the Stroop Effect, which makes processing conflicts in the mind extremely difficult.

Participants were then asked to read a simple sentence backwards, the aim being to highlight how anxieties are magnified in persons with learning disabilities, which makes it challenging to focus on the assignment at hand.

In the final activity in this zone, participants were asked to play the 'Buzz Game' where they had to call out numbers with different levels of difficulty thrown in. The main learning from this activity was that organising content becomes difficult for students with learning disabilities.

Like in the autism zone, participants also got a chance to interact with experts in the field before moving on to the zone designed to create awareness on blindness and low vision.



Blindfolded participants walking to their classrooms



The 'Economics' classroom



An experiment being conducted in a Chemistry laboratory



The photography workshop (The Blind Way)



During the 'Treasure Hunt', the participants learnt to use a wheelchair

## Visual Impairment

In this zone, participants were first blindfolded and given a white cane, and then told to make their way through a typical college passageway to an Economics classroom where they were introduced to tactile graphs and other such accessible educational aids. They were also encouraged to attempt experiments in a science laboratory and a mathematics class, using simple principles of inclusion and accessibility.

Finally, they were escorted to an exhibition area where they were given a demonstration of software like screen readers and screen magnifiers which help visually impaired persons access technology. The demonstration also provided ideas about how blind and low vision persons use smart phones and can read and write subjects such as mathematics. They then interacted with persons with visual impairment just before making their way out of the event.

The Treasure Hunt was a thought-provoking fun-filled experience for the participants, which provided insights into conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), locomotor disability, visual impairment, speech and hearing impairment, and discalcula. Around 20 teams participated in this activity.

At the photography workshop (The Blind Way), conducted by Mr Partho Bhowmick of 'Blind with Camera', 35 participants were blindfolded and then taught to use their mobile phones to take photographs on the basis of either their sense of smell, sound, touch — or a combination of these.

At the braille workshop, 10 participants were given insights into the basics of braille.

Here's what some of the participants said:

**Prof Rajendra Shinde:** Learnt a lot about Learning Disabilities and Autism. Excellent!

**Mahesh Shetty:** Great learning — XRCVC is doing a fantastic job.

**Damian Gonsalves:** Amazing activities. The most important part and purpose of this workshop was to question ourselves whether people with disability really need our help.

**Jennifer Daniel:** I was actually introduced to the world of people with disabilities and will now consider them equal to us.

**Aliyaban Hamza:** I'm leaving this event with a lot of questions and ideas. I hope to come up with answers that might make me a better person.

**Prof Maya Murdeshwar:** An eye-opener, as always. Thanks for clearing a lot of misconceptions.

**Karishma Katpitia:** Thank you for making me understand that we are all unique in our own ways.

**Lakshmi:** I always thought that persons with disability need help, but now I have a different perspective.





Demonstrating the use of a Braille



Demonstrating the use of an Abacus



Demonstrating a tactile diagram



Demonstrating a talking calculator



The chat zone, where participants interacted with disabled persons



The feedback zone

**Muskaan Purohit:** I'm so grateful that St Xavier's College promotes something like this. By closing my eyes, they opened my eyes.

**Prof Shyamala Bodhane:** It helped me understand what I observe with my students. Thanks!

**Prarthana Kudtarkar:** It's a world and experience of its own. Helps us see things differently.

**Anthea Lobo:** I was told to attend this event and I'm so glad that I did. This is such a great opportunity to all Xavierites.

**Ruchira Sarma:** After attending this event I felt like I've got brand new eyes!

**Chetan Kapoor:** Fascinating experience!

**Jerin Joy:** Antarchakshu's message was simple and effective: Put the person before the disability!

**Jiniya C:** One of the most enlightening and enriching experiences of my life. It gave me a lot of scope for critical analysis of myself and the people around me.

**Vaishnavi Menon:** The activities did not fail to evoke in us a sense of empathy towards the differently abled and change our mindset from being more than a helping hand to them. The one takeaway message would be that instead of constantly trying to extend our help to such individuals one should think of including them and considering them as an equal.

**Ira Vashisht:** It was a moment of realisation...like a life-changing experience.

**Lavanya Varadrajan:** An extremely important endeavour to sensitise people towards the differently abled.

**Baishali Das:** An experience of a lifetime. I'm walking away with a different vision.

In the past, Antarchakshu has been held at diverse venues like IIT Bombay, the World Book Fair in Pragati Maidan (Delhi), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Gurgaon (Epicentre), Viviana Mall (Thane), etc.

As a build-up activity to promote Antarchakshu, five students of St Xavier's College conducted an awareness event at Bombay to Barcelona Library Café on September 9

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