

## Illustrious company of my fellow Dyslexics!

I have always enjoyed well written literature and have had a strong desire to write myself. Unfortunately, I have found it hard in mastering any one of the two languages I can claim to know, Hindi and English. I also find myself acutely short of detail, but the beauty of rhythm and depth in literature has always moved me immensely. I have struggled with difficulty in spelling, reading, memorizing, and summarizing; but the reassurance of normal intelligence has kept me going. As a medical doctor, I am convinced that I live with at least a mild state of dyslexia.

Throughout my childhood, at home and in school, I was considered slow and remained an abysmal student. My father had made up his mind that I was good for nothing and the best future for his son would be to conscript him into army as a soldier after finishing school. Challenged by this smear, I was determined to succeed and soon learnt to cope with my situation; without realizing that it was my dyslexia.

Agatha Christie, a known dyslexic, reportedly once said, "I, myself, was always recognized...as the 'slow one' in the family. It was quite true, and I knew it and accepted it. Writing and spelling were always terribly difficult for me. My letters were without originality. I was...an extraordinarily bad speller and have remained so until this day." In collage days in Punjab, as I could speak English a bit better than most of my classmates, (*as an Indian saying goes, one eyed man is a king among blind*), I was selected to participate in a paper reading contest. Even after practicing a lot, I know I did a bad job. Very early in professional life, I recall failing miserably when my wife had insisted upon that I write up my speech and read it for a function about the project I was directing. That was the first and the last time I wrote up my speech. I have had no problem in public speaking, referring to scribbled notes or bullet points from a power point presentation.

Searching for famous personalities with dyslexia, and discovering people like Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Steven Spielberg, Tom Cruise, Agatha Christie, Whoopi Goldberg, Robin William, Richard Branson and many others known to be dyslexic, gives me reassurance as I share some of their experiences. Richard Branson once said in an interview, "Being dyslexic can actually help in the outside world. I see some things clearer than other people do because I have to simplify things to help me and that has helped others." Another successful dyslexic Keanu Reeves, actor, musician, film producer and director explains, "Because I had trouble reading, I wasn't a good student. I didn't finish high school. I did a lot of pretending as a child. It was my way of coping with the fact that I didn't really feel like I fit in."

It is still difficult for many to be identified as an acceptable dyslexic rather than daft or simply stupid. Famous Bollywood film '*Tare Zameen Par*' (Stars on the Ground) starring Amir Khan, the film revolves around a young dyslexic boy who is misunderstood by his family and sent to boarding school to be disciplined, where a teacher takes it upon himself to teach those around him about dyslexia.

Estimates of ten percent of the population being dyslexic, is generally accepted and about 4% have sever dyslexia. Dyslexics also have the inability to relate the sounds of words with the letters that create the words. It is considered a learning disability, but it has no relation to intelligence. It also has no relation to vision problems. There is no cure for dyslexia. Realisation followed by acceptance of the condition is the first step. Help in diagnosis and right support with

teaching, dyslexics can overcome their difficulties and achieve great things.

Dyslexia should be perceived as a different learning ability rather than as a disability. Some adults have known about their dyslexia for years and most of them, as they are generally intelligent, find ways to get around their problems. There are still some who continue to feel unable to cope with their difficulties. Looking at the dyslexic personalities mentioned earlier, it should be seen as an advantage and gift. People with dyslexia think and learn differently and they sometimes feel as if their mind is 'differently wired'. Dyslexics find it difficult to write better reports, especially lacking detail and they are slow readers but quick to think. Writing with hand is difficult and spellings are a real problem for them. They are generally good at finding ways to hide their problems, but underneath they have to struggle for it.

Many dyslexic people learn to cope with their difficulties, to make good use of their areas of strength and to become successful and fulfilled individuals. Invariably, they develop strategies which compensate for areas of weakness, and use their strengths. They tend to develop their own individual learning style and pattern of strengths and weaknesses. That way, they can study and work in a way which is most likely to be successful.

Dyslexic people often find it helpful to use technology, such as computer packages, digital recorders and smart phones, many excelling in the use. Word processing, especially spellchecker, has been a redeeming factor for most dyslexics. This frees them from some of the effort involved in written work and routine organisation, and allows them to concentrate on the parts of their work they do best.