New law will help LD students get admission

15 Million Young People In India Have Autism

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Mumbai: When the Lok Sabha passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill on Friday, it marked the end of a 30-year-long effort for Vinay Shetty of the NGO Think Foundation.

Working for the rights of thalassemia patients, Shetty, along with representation of the Haemophilia Society's Mumbai Chapter, started writing to the Maharashtra government and politicians to recognise patients with any of these two blood disorders as "persons with disability".

"Thalassemia patients now live longer and need job opportunities. The new law will help them study, get jobs and avail of travel concessions," he said.

But it is not only the 3,000 odd thalassemia patients in Mumbai (of 1.25 lakh across the country) who will benefit here. The Delhi-based founder of the Disability Rights Group, Javed Abidi, who has been central in the struggle to get the government to recognize 21 types of disabilities as against seven so far, estimates it will empower 70-100 million Indians. Census 2011 had pegged the number of people with disabilities in India at 81 million.

"Every year, over 1,000 seats in Delhi University aren't filled. Yet, no student with dyslexia would be given a seat as the law didn't recognize it as a disability," said Abidi.

Merry Barua of the Delhi-based Action for Autism believes the law will provide a great opportunity for the 15 million youngsters with autism in India. "We always struggled to get entitlements or concessions for children with autism. When concessions were given to disabled children in board exams, we had to struggle separately for similar concessions," she said, adding that mainstreaming will now be easier.

"In smaller towns, children with autism would be labelled as mentally retarded as there was no law to explain their condition," she said.

Abidi said the bill is revolutionary as it increases the job quota for people with disabilities to 4%.