

## Childlike innocence

---

“Vikram has always been such a playful child. From the moment he was born, he was always ready to grasp at things, play with people’s hair and quick to crawl. As I was enjoying the early days of motherhood, everything changed at the six month mark. He suffered an epileptic attack that compromised his neural function. He had difficulty carrying out basic tasks such as eating, sitting up right, walking. My child could no longer grasp things properly with his hand and no longer even attempted to. Crawling became difficult as he lost his sense of direction.

This drastic change left me distraught. My days were filled with taunts and insults hurled at me by my in laws as they blamed me for birthing a child like him and my nights crying and begging my lord to take this sickness away. They called him possessed and crazy. Never once held him or fed him or told him a bedtime story.

Soon we began his treatment. The treatment caused thousands. Thousands that I did not have. I had nowhere to turn to except my in laws. It took every ounce of courage and putting my pride aside to ask them for money, thinking I could appeal to the grandparent in them. I was wrong. They did not even bat an eye. That was the day I decided, I would never ask again. For anything.

Somehow, I was able to borrow enough from close friends and Vikram’s treatment began. We were in the hospital for ten days. The treatment was a lot for the both of us. My 7-month-old baby who should be lying in his own pram listening to lullabies, was being poked and prodded with needles all day and night.

The next 9 days, I was left all on my own. My husband was out there working as much as he could to scrounge up money for Vikram’s treatment. To my surprise, my in laws sent food for me the first day, but the next day I was told the burden of making food for another person was too much for my mother in law to handle. But in reality, my son and I were the burden that was too hard for her to handle.

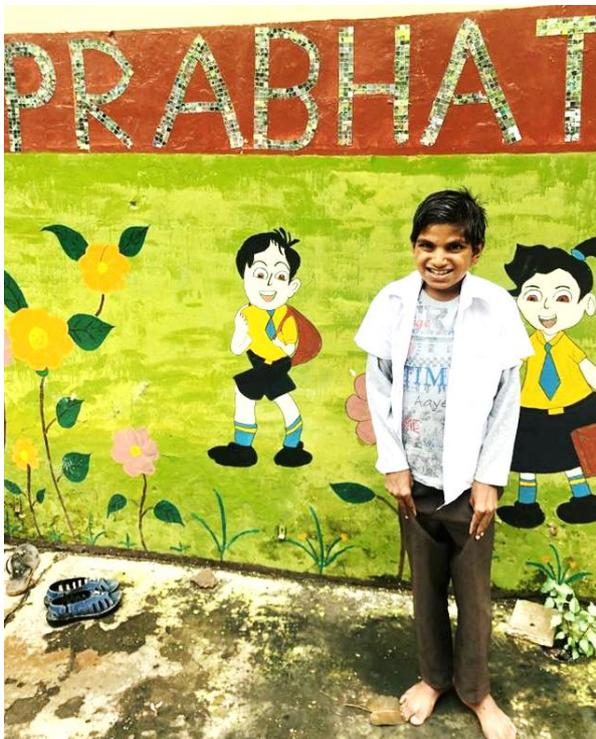
From that moment on, I decided to never be so dependent. Never to ask or to beg or to request. No longer would I memorise medical jargon to help make them understand. No longer would I dream about them accepting my child. No longer would I let my child be considered a freak of nature, by his own family.



So after those ten painful and tear jerking days, we moved into a different house. After all this pain, things were on the upward turn. The doctor had advised medicines and asked him to spend a lot of time around children. Each day, I would take him to our local anganwadi where kids who were his age would come to play.

I hesitated initially. The adverse response from my in laws had tainted my view of people. I went in, dreading the reaction of other children and their parents.

Our first day there, we began playing ball as Vikram whisked it over to another boy by mistake. Taking the opportunity, that boy was keen on playing a game of catch. As he rolled the ball towards Vikram, Vikram struggled to pick it up as he had a problem with grasping objects. Seeing this difficulty, the other boy came to him and said, "it's okay, we can play football!". Vikram was a natural.



This instance made me realise something important about the human race. We are all born with this child like innocence, but our society teaches us differently. Our society teaches us to marginalise the less fortunate, discriminate against minorities and stigmatise those who are different. If anything, our children could teach us a thing or two. That child made me realise that a special needs child does not need a separate school, education and livelihood, but he needs extra support and slight modifications to the current system. He needs a ramp in a regular school to get to class, changes to sports class to encourage their participation and a behavioral shift to consider special needs children - different not abnormal. He needs inclusion.

Soon after we were introduced to Prabhat. My first day there, I was overwhelmed.

Overwhelmed at the amount of support they had for both me and Vikram. It gave my child a platform to be himself, develop and get the right kind of therapy for his condition. It also gave me something. It gave me a safe space. A safe space to share my troubles, ask my questions and combat my anxieties about raising a special needs child.

Its been 1.5 years since I enrolled him into Prabhat and the before-after images are stark. My boy can do so much on his own. He helps out with groceries, helps clean the house, carries out his daily routine on his own (won't let me even touch his comb anymore). Prabhat has made my child independent. Prabhat has not only included my child but celebrated him.

Two weeks ago, today on teachers day, Vikram became the physiotherapy teacher. He wore a white lab coat, and pretend examined the kids with motor difficulties and carried out their daily exercises. Seeing my little boy help others kid out, filled my heart with joy. I am proud to say that I am the mother of a special needs child. And I am proud to say that my child is independent.”

- Vikram's mother Pushpa

**Blog by:** Yamini Mehra