

# Telangana's Congress Government Faces Financial Challenges in Fulfilling Guarantees

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News

## The need to make space for neurodiversity

Neurotypicals have no awareness of neurodiversity except the idea that these people are 'different'. This makes us categorise them as 'person with disability', a term that may be an improvement upon 'disabled', but is still patronising.



Illustration of the brain

Written by:

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During the opening of our two-week-long *Forests of Life* festival on campus, a student entered the seminar hall, taking the door next to the podium. He just stood there without moving, facing the hundreds who looked towards him. Our seminar halls are round on the outside, not differentiating the entry points meant for performers from those for the audience. Many people enter to find themselves facing the audience and quickly leap into the nearest vacant seat, hoping their apparent lateness has gone unnoticed, or turn around and leave.

This student kept standing and looking at everyone. It is distracting when sub-action starts to play out next to the main action one is looking at. My neurotypical mind was on the verge of irritation – “Come on, sit down somewhere!” I was mentally mouthing.

This was until it dawned on me that the person could have been suddenly gripped with anxiety on seeing so many faces, all looking at him. Or perhaps, he was slowly and systematically moving his eyes from row to row to see where he could go and sit without disturbing or obstructing the view. Indeed, neurotypicals (NTs) have no awareness of neurodiversity (ND) except the idea that these people are ‘different’. This makes us categorise them as ‘person with disability’, a term that may be an improvement upon ‘disabled’, but is still patronising, and betraying the NT's sense of superiority.

Why do NTs have so little exposure to or awareness of neurodiversity? This is because many people who are neurodiverse were, until recently, put under one general class of ‘disability’ and sent to special schools, if at all. Many of them were and still are not taken out to malls, cinemas, fairs, and other public places by their families because the family members do not fully equip themselves with an understanding of neurodiversity spectrum (ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, Down’s syndrome), nor do they empower themselves to deal with unpredictable situations, such as a mall or restaurant denying them entry. Secondly, the family does not want to make this reality of having a person with disability public, due to prevalent social stigmas around mental health.

This is why most NTs have grown up and lived their lives without getting to know or having to interact with any person with a disability. If faced with a situation where they have to do so, they find themselves lacking the knowledge or skill to respond.

Most NTs also operate from a place of care and sympathy, ending up being over-protective, and over-attentive, causing discomfort to both parties.

In the same Seminar Hall, we cheered for and applauded a young intern, a person with dyslexia, for his research on forests. So, it is heartening to learn that ‘Dyslexic Thinking’, has recently been recognised as a ‘skill’, and now employers can seek persons with this skill on LinkedIn. This is thanks to the efforts of *Made by Dyslexia*, a global charity led by successful persons with dyslexia and championed by Richard Branson, himself a person with dyslexia.

According to John Chambers, past CEO of Cisco, and a person with dyslexia, 25% of CEOs have dyslexia. So, while someone with dyslexia may struggle at school with the pace of learning – reading and writing – and lag on the standardised development milestones in addition to being unable to ‘adjust’ in social settings, that is in no way an indication of their worth as individuals. Besides, they may have exceptional problem-solving and situational analysis skills, which, if tapped adequately, make them sought after by employers.

While activists and experts try to bring about these changes long overdue, it is incumbent upon each one of us too to educate ourselves in neurodiversity; allow more space for people with neurodiverse minds around us to be themselves; and stop judging them on the norms and standards of NT behaviour.

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*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the organisation they represent.*

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