

Report on the International Day of Sign Language Celebration 2022

Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvarur

23.09.2022

The International Day of Sign Language celebration organised by the Enabling Unit for Persons with Disabilities of the Central University of Tamil Nadu took place in the seminar hall of Academic Building 1 on 23/09/2022. The theme of this year's Sign Language Day was "Sign languages Unite Us". The U.N General assembly has proclaimed 23rd September as the International Day of Sign languages to raise awareness of the sign languages that are recognised for the human rights of the deaf people and to make the world more inclusive for them. Prof. M. Krishnan, Vice-chancellor, CUTN, Prof. Sulochana Shekhar, Registrar (i/c), CUTN, Prof. S. Nagarajan, Controller of Examinations (i/c), CUTN, Prof. A. Selvam, Dean Students Welfare, CUTN, Ms. Jaishini S, Sign Language Interpreter and Trainer, Mr. Selvam, Special Educator (Maths Teacher) at Government Special School for the Deaf, Erode, Tamil Nadu, faculty members, research scholars and students from various departments of CUTN participated in the program.

The Programme commenced with the invocation (Tamil Thai Valthu) sung by the students of Music Department. The welcome address and introduction to the theme of celebration was delivered by Dr. Boopathi P, Coordinator, Enabling Unit, Central University of Tamil Nadu. He thanked and acknowledged the Vice-chancellor of CUTN and other dignitaries for participating in the program and providing financial and other support to organize the celebration. He emphasised upon the need for conducting programs like this to make the university campuses more inclusive and disabled-friendly. As part of making the campus more inclusive, he told how the university has arranged various facilities like transportation facilities, Assistive Technology Centre, circular for the conduct of written exam for disabled students and others. He talked about the need to recognise sign language as one of the natural languages and told that hearing impaired people consider themselves as a linguistic minority and not as disabled people. He mentioned the need to spread awareness about learning sign language to make our world a more inclusive place.

Dr. Boopathi thanked ministry of Home Affairs, GOI for deciding to celebrate International Day of Sign Languages as part of "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav". He acknowledged

and appreciated the countless efforts taken by the Government of India in establishing inclusive society for people with disabilities. He mentioned that “Accessible India” campaign by GOI for making India accessible for people with disabilities is a significant initiative towards such end. Dr. Boopathi concluded his address by stating that acknowledging the sign language is the only way to restore human rights for the deaf people as emphasized by World Deaf Federation. After Dr. Boopathi’s welcome address, the invitees were honoured: the Vice-chancellor had honoured Mr. Selvam for his valuable 20 years of service in educating deaf students and for being a role model teacher in special education for the deaf children. The keynote speaker of the day, Ms. Jaishini S was honoured by Prof. Sulochana Shekhar, Registrar (i/c), CUTN for her service in teaching sign language to many hearing people.

In her Felicitation Address, Prof. Sulochana Shekhar, Registrar (i/c), CUTN, congratulated the organising committee of the enabling unit for conducting such a wonderful program in such a short period. She said that we should all work together for creating an inclusive society for disabled individuals. She further said that CUTN is very much committed in maintaining inclusivity in all its activities. Prof. S. Nagarajan, Controller of Examination (i/c), in his Felicitation Address, told that since the people who use the sign language are a linguistic minority, it is very important to support them. He told about various training programs and diploma courses in sign language conducted by Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC). He also encouraged students to opt for any of the courses in sign language. Prof. A. Selvam, Dean Students Welfare, CUTN in his Felicitation Address articulated the dire need for spreading awareness about sign language as our knowledge of sign language is very limited. He also appreciated Dr. Boopathi P for taking the initiative to conduct such an inspiring program.

The Presidential Address of the program was delivered by Prof. M. Krishnan, Vice-chancellor, CUTN. He began his speech by teaching some basic signs to the audience. He articulated that around 70 million people are using sign language and out of which eighty percent of people are from developing countries. He talked about the need to celebrate International Sign Language day to provide quality education to the sign language users, to unite the sign language users in the mainstream society, and to spread awareness about how they can be independent in their everyday lives. He also appreciated the organising team for conducting such an informative program. He further said that we as the educational institution should play a major role in promoting sign language by having periodical workshops and

training sessions on sign language. This is the only way to integrate hearing impaired people to our mainstream society.

The keynote address titled “Introduction to Indian Sign Language” was delivered by the resource person Ms. Jaishini S, Sign Language Interpreter and Trainer. She began her keynote address with the thought-provoking words that it is not Tamil but sign language is her mother tongue, since both her parents are deaf and thus it has become her mother tongue. She told how sign language is a visual language and unlike other languages, its grammatical structure is quite different: instead of the subject-object-verb structure of English language, sign language usually has the subject-verb-object structure. She explained about the various components of Indian Sign Language like gestures, fingerspelling, facial expression, body language, mime, and lip movement. She told that just like any other natural language, for sign language, sign/ gestures are the vocabulary of sign language. Each word uttered in a spoken language would usually have a counterpart in sign language. Then she demonstrated the different features of sign language like handshapes, location, and hand movement. She also corrected the numerous misconceptions revolving around deaf people like the deaf people cannot drive, sign language is universal, all deaf people sign, medicines and surgeries can restore hearing, writing notes are adequate means of communication and deaf people are not as intelligent as Hearing people. With specific examples, she was able to correct all such false myths surrounding deaf people.

Then an interactive session titled “Against All Odds” with Mr. Goby, Senior Client Partner, Access Health Care Private Limited, Bangalore was conducted to know the experience of deaf people in workspace. Mr. Goby does not consider his deafness as any kind of limitation. On a day-to-day basis, he meets lots of clients in his professional life. He urged the need for sign language interpreters in important places like hospitals, courtrooms, government offices, banks and others. In the interactive session, Dr. Boopathi posed the question about how he deals with customers and how he interacts with them. For that, Mr. Goby replied that since he did not have much knowledge in English, he had requested the H.R for an interpreter, and with the help of the interpreter he manages customers quite well. There was yet another interactive session with the managing team of Deaffodils Kitchen, Chennai. It is a restaurant that is fully managed by deaf people. An interpreter helped them in dealing with the customers in the initial period. They told their struggles in their initial days how it was even difficult to speak with the customers, but within ten days they were very clearly able to speak and serve them to their

satisfaction. If there are some things they could not understand, they will write and show them. These days they no longer require any interpreters.

Then the award-winning short film titled *The Silent Child* was screened to create awareness about deaf education. It was a 20 minutes brilliant movie about a four-year-old deaf Libby who lived in a world of silence until a caring social worker came and taught her to use sign language to communicate. The deaf child Libby had a very bad time in her home where she felt herself to be a misfit, as none of her family members took care of her needs. The movie provides a powerful message about how the needs of deaf children are denied or how our mainstream schools are inadequate in providing proper facilities for deaf children.

The morning session ended with the vote of thanks proposed by Dr. Poornachandra Gugulothu, Placement Officer, Enabling Unit, CUTN.

In the afternoon session, Ms. Jaishini conducted a workshop on Indian Sign Language Communication. It was a two hours fun and interactive session where she taught the audience the alphabet, numbers, colours, greetings and family relations in Indian sign language. She randomly picked participants from the audience and made them pronounce their names in sign language.

The concluding note of the workshop was delivered by Dr. Boopathi P, Coordinator, Enabling Unit, CUTN. He once again reminded us that sign language should unite us. He emphasized that by learning sign language we are making the world a more inclusive place for hearing impaired people. About 120 participants including students, research scholars and faculty members got benefited from the workshop on Indian sign language communication.