




Our message celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Bhargavi V.

We are heartbroken and express profound sadness at the passing on of our beloved leader and guide, Dr. Bhargavi V. She fought a long tough battle with stage four lung cancer and passed away on the morning of May 22, 2024 at her home in Pune. She is survived by her daughter, Netra Prabha Davar.

As we mourn this shattering loss and keep her memory in our prayers, we take this opportunity to celebrate the life and legacy of our dearest Bhargavi.

Bhargavi was a fearless soul and a trailblazer, who left an indelible mark on the disability and human rights movement and touched many lives. This has been so evident in the outpouring of memories, messages of support, love and kindness we have received from her friends and peers. Bhargavi often said 'who wants to be just one self for a whole lifetime?' and she definitely lived by it. She wore many hats; she was a visionary, a thought leader, a mentor, a teacher, an academic, an author, a philosopher and an activist. She dedicated her life to advance the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities and promote inclusion, in its truest sense. Bhargavi was an adult survivor of childhood exposure to colonial mental asylums in India and she made it her mission to make the most invisible, visible: those who had been hidden away, locked up, were not heard or seen and had been historically oppressed.


Always championing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Bhargavi established the first Organization of Persons with Psychosocial Disabilities (OPD) in India, Bapu Trust for Research on Mind & Discourse (1999) and developed first of its kind, community of practice, Seher, to demonstrate that a zero coercion, CRPD compliant community inclusion model is possible. She founded the Trust to honour the memory and legacy of Bapu, her mother, who had been subjected to the horrors of psychiatric institutionalization. Bhargavi was also instrumental in setting up of Bapu Trust's sister organization, the Bapu Foundation. Taking the grassroots learnings from Bapu Trust and inspired by the strong legacy of senior leaders, movements of users and survivors of psychiatry, ex-patients' liberation movements and mad pride movements, Bhargavi founded a post CRPD movement aptly named as Transforming Communities for Inclusion (2012) to advance advocacy at the global level.

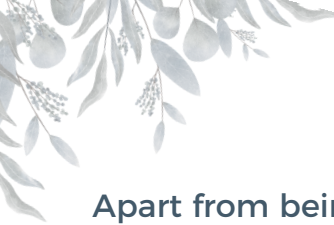


As part of World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUSP), Bhargavi played a key role in the years leading to the development of the CRPD and more recently was engaged in drafting of the UN Guidelines on Deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies, as part of Global Coalition on Deinstitutionalization. She was one of the first CRPD trainers in India and with her academic prowess, published numerous books and academic papers.

Her extraordinary vision, relentless commitment towards the CRPD and an unwavering faith in the potential of communities and power of human connection guided her advocacy on developing strong community support systems to facilitate an inclusive world. Bhargavi firmly believed and upheld that the world should be inclusive, open and equally accessible for everyone, with or without disability. Always challenging the colonial underpinnings of the medical model and mental health systems, Bhargavi was never scared to look the system in the eye and spoke truth to power. She demonstrated this by implementing programs, initiatives, campaigns, often unheard of or ridiculed by the dominant forces. In the face of constant struggles and opposition, she never let her value base be corrupted and rallied on. She transferred the same value base, among all her peers and her colleagues, both at Bapu Trust and TCI. Bhargavi always said that 'as a movement, we move together' and enshrined this principle in the vision and mission of her organizations, building bridges and solidarity within the disability movement. She was also an arts-based therapy trainer, a role she immensely enjoyed and one she believed aligned with the traditional and cultural ways of being and healing in the Global South.

We also remember and honour Bhargavi as a compassionate mentor. She believed in the potential of every individual and ensured the nurturing of present and emerging leaders of the movement. Bhargavi taught us the importance of remembering and honouring the senior leaders of the movement. She created spaces for engagement, opened opportunities and doors for everyone, held equity and equal opportunities as core values at TCI and Bapu Trust. For someone who had stellar achievements to her name and was a known face everywhere, Bhargavi was immensely humble. You will always see her standing at the sides as part of group pictures and taking a quiet corner in a room. She always communicated to us the importance of humility and being a part of the larger movement, not centring the movement on ourselves. Her vision reached far and beyond the contours of TCI and Bapu Trust and set a benchmark for advocacy and works on inclusion globally.





Apart from being everything else, Bhargavi was an avid gardener or an urban farmer, as she called herself. She maintained a beautiful, lush terrace garden in her Pune flat and grew her own food. She said gardening was her self-care, where she tended to her plants and meditated alongside. Through her sharing, she also taught us the importance of self-care, resilience, and solidarity, values which all of us will always carry with us. Bhargavi also loved to sing, and would often share short, recorded songs to encourage us and keep us going. She was always so calm and gentle with her words, and we always found a peer in her, inspite of the position she occupied.

Her passing on is a monumental loss not just for everyone who knew her, but for the human rights and disability movement worldwide. Bhargavi, who was always traveling, buzzing with new ideas and stream of thoughts, connecting with people across the globe, and always being present for her teams, has finally chosen to rest. We all thought she will be with us forever. We are heartbroken with her passing on, but we know Bhargavi will always be with us, through her words, works, and values. We will always celebrate her legacy and her life, it will continue to inspire us and we will take it forward in everything that we do.

Rest in peace and power, dearest Bhargavi. We hope you are happy and healthy, in your own sky garden, growing pumpkins and squashes, talking to your earthworms, smiling and cracking jokes, like you always did, and laughing in that way, like you always did. We love you and treasure you. We will always miss you and we are very thankful that you chose to spend your time with all of us. Thank you for everything you are and will always be.

With heart bursting at its seams with love, adoration, and respect for you,

TCI and Bapu Trust family

