

## Do ATMs have to have steps?

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How is this for a classic Catch-22 situation? My unfortunate friend who was at the receiving end of it obviously cannot see much humour in it! She had had the misfortune of having been affected by Polio as a kid, and has been using such assistive devices as crutches and braces on her legs for most of her life. She continues to gamely try and lead a normal life - having had the fortune of getting married to a good and caring man, and of having found a job in the face of numerous forms of resistance. She goes to work on a three-wheeled scooter - after having mastered the non-trivial mechanics of hobbling on her crutch to her scooter in the parking lot, and getting the scooter moving after having stowed the crutch away, taking care not to fall at any step of the process.

Having to negotiate steps (going down or up) is akin to torture for such people, and steps without any supporting rails on the sides are tantamount to a blueprint for disaster. To her unalloyed happiness, she discovered that the branch of her bank (Indian Bank) which was near her home had a 'drive-in ATM'. She lived happily for a while with this lifeline which elevated at least one necessary periodic chore from yet another painful exercise to a pleasant diversion. Then, 'progress and modernisation' struck: her ATM was torn down, and she was told that the Headquarters Office was moving to her branch, which was being accordingly refurbished. She dashed off a distress mail to the HQO asking them what was to become of her friendly drive-in ATM. To her surprised satisfaction she received a politely worded and prompt response from their IT division head assuring her that the Drive In ATM facility would be restored the minute the new building was ready. Her faith in IT - as well as the human face of commerce - received a nasty blow when the construction was complete, and the old drive-in ATM had been replaced by the unfriendly older model, replete with steps, and the attendant glass swing door was the hair on the camel's back!

Unfortunately, this kind of thoughtless idiocy continues to torment the lives of a large number of people, on a daily - **and painful** - basis. If you want a good laugh, you should peruse the trite solecisms mouthed in the 'National Policy for Persons with Disabilities' drafted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment of the Govern-

ment of India (see <http://www.disabilityindia.org/nationalpolicyfordisable.cfm>). For instance, the first paragraph announces that:

*The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all including persons with disabilities. In the recent years, there have been vast and positive changes in the perception of the society towards persons with disabilities. It has been realized that a majority of persons with disabilities can lead a better quality of life if they have equal opportunities and effective access to rehabilitation measures.*

‘Vast and positive changes in the perception of the society towards persons with disabilities’! Hah! I would like to see some of these avowed perceptions and realisations (that *a majority of persons with disabilities can lead a better quality of life if they have equal opportunities*) manifested, for instance, in an enforced requirement that at least every fifth branch of each nationalised bank should host an ATM with a drive-in facility, and a ramp of acceptable slope in all their ATMs!