

Padma Shri gives me more responsibility: Javaid Tak

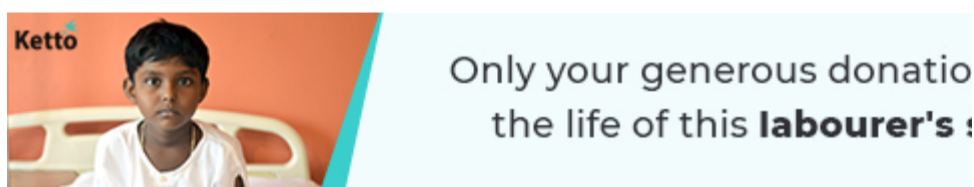
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Tribune News Service

Srinagar, January 27

Javaid Ahmad Tak, 46, remembers that 15 years ago when he met Javad Abidi, a renowned disability rights activist, at a conference in Srinagar, it sparked an inspiration in him that being disabled is not a shame but a greater responsibility to stand up for people like him.



A resident of Bijbehara in south Kashmir, who from the last two decades has been fighting for the rights of specially abled people in the conflict-torn region, Tak has now been among over hundred people in India to be conferred with Padma Shri—which is the fourth highest civilian award in India.

On January 25, Tak says he was sitting at his home in south Kashmir, where he received a call that he has been nominated for the award, which gave him joy and a more responsible task to be the voice of people like him. Tak says that during his difficult journey of more than two decades he expresses his gratitude to the people who have helped and encouraged him.

“Apart from Abidi, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir NN Vohra always kept the doors of Raj Bhavan open for people like me. I am very inspired by him as he would always listen to our issues and passed many ordinances in our support,” says Tak, adding that it has also been the support of his family and friends, who gave him strength, despite his physical disability.

“I realised that after my 25 years of struggle to get empowerment for people like me, who are wheelchair bound or face any other kind of disability, recognition is important,” he said.

“It gives you hope that your voice is being heard,” he said.

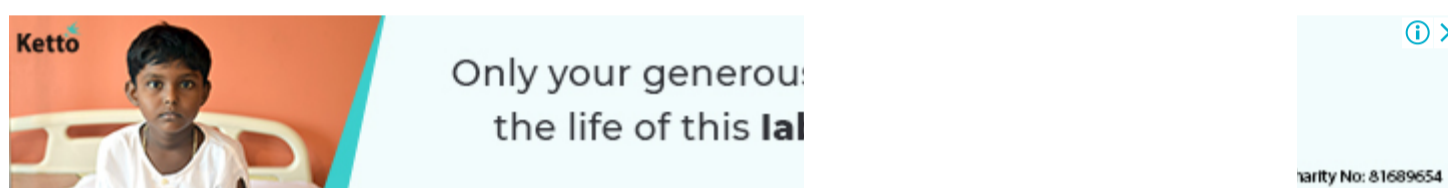
It was in March 21, 1997, when the conflict was at its peak in Kashmir that Tak's life changed forever as bullets pierced his spinal cord and made him permanently disabled. It was after that incident that Tak took upon himself to work for the cause of people like him and he founded the Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline.

Tak works for people with disabilities to rehabilitate them through education and employment. He also works for the implementation of laws for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Tak says that he has got his inspiration from people like famous disability activist Javaid Abidi, who was the director of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), based in Delhi, who died two years ago after illness.

“He taught me that people with disability deserve to live independently and need employment and education so that they can carry on their lives. What I saw him doing in Delhi, I tried to replicate in Kashmir where more than seven lakh people live with disability,” Tak said. “He has always been my inspiration. He was also himself wheelchair-bound,” he said.

Tak, who has secured his masters degree in social work, says, “There is still a lot to be done to bring change in legislations and policies.”



At present, Tak said, over a hundred people worked with him.

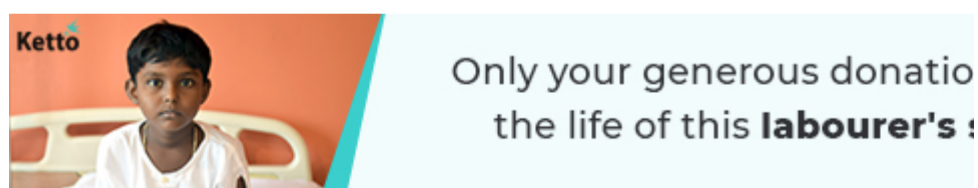
“I work on projects for child rights currently. Overall our organisation has benefitted thousands of people by providing them education and employment,” he said.

Another disability rights activist from Tamil Nadu S Ramakrishnan, founder of the Amar Seva Sangam, was also nominated for the award.

“There are still issues like accessibility. I have to continue working so that there is disability friendly atmosphere,” he said.

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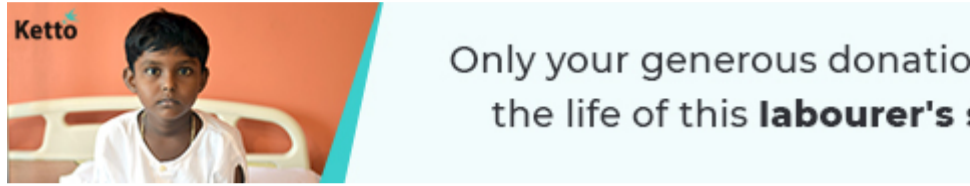
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