

**PWD AMBASSADORS TO DRIVE INCLUSION AND INSPIRE AT
INTERNATIONAL PURPLE FEST GOA 2025**

(21 Ambassadors, including Goa's Sadiya Bandodkar, Sakshi Kale and Xerif Shaik,
to Champion International Purple Fest 2025)

Panaji : October 07, 2025

The International Purple Fest, Goa 2025, to be held from October 9 to 12, 2025 is set to spotlight Inclusion like never before, with 21 Purple Ambassadors representing each disability recognised under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, alongwith a special focus on spinal cord injury. These ambassadors will champion accessibility and advocacy on a global stage. Among them are three from Goa—Sadiya Bandodkar, Sakshi Kale and Xerif Shaik—bringing local voices to this international platform.

Minister for Social Welfare Shri.Subhash Phal Dessai stated that “The selection of 21 Purple Ambassadors, including three inspiring leaders from Goa, reflects the true spirit of International Purple Fest 2025. Their journeys, from sport to fashion, education to advocacy show us that inclusion is empowerment. Goa is proud to see its own voices alongwith others who carry the message of accessibility onto the world stage.”

Echoing the similar sentiment, State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities Shir.Guruprasad Pawaskar adds that each Purple Ambassador embodies inspiration and leadership, proving that persons with disabilities are not just participants but change-makers. By bringing together diverse live experiences, International Purple Fest has so far and continues to demonstrate how accessibility can be implemented in every village, town and create positive reforms for the country.”

The Purple Ambassadors for the International Purple Fest 2025 embody resilience, leadership, and innovation across diverse fields. Each ambassador carries a unique story of lived experience, professional achievement, and advocacy, collectively making the Purple Fest a truly inclusive celebration.

From Goa, Sadiya Bandodkar, an entrepreneur with a hearing impairment, leads the way in fashion, livelihood and leadership. Founder of Sadiya Fashions and Earrings, she was the first deaf woman to run a fashion stall in Goa and a 2nd runner-up at the Mrs. India Deaf Fashion Contest 2023. She also serves on the Goa Sports Council of the Deaf, making her a strong voice for accessible design and visual communication.

Xerif Shaik, who has severe Haemophilia, brings 25 years of expertise in electronics, IT and university administration. Overseeing postgraduate examinations at Goa University, he is also joint treasurer of the Haemophilia Society Panaji Chapter, actively connecting communities through educational outreach.

Sakshi Kale, a low-vision T12 para-athlete from Khandepar, Ponda, has represented India at international championships, including the World Para Athletics Championships, Paris 2025. Alongside her computer science degree, she advocates adaptive coaching and inclusive sports infrastructure that bridges rural talent with national opportunities.

Beyond Goa, 19 other Purple Ambassadors represent disability leadership across India—spanning art, sport, health, advocacy, policy, and entrepreneurship.

From Punjab, Danish Mahajan is a visually impaired broadcaster and storyteller who has amplified disability rights through Radio Udaan, India's first disability-led community radio. He has produced and hosted over 1,500 episodes of Badalta Daur, a programme that explains rights, accessibility and legal provisions such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act for everyday listeners. He was conferred the National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in 2024 and will shape communications, media literacy workshops and civic education threads at the fest.

Suvarna Raj is a Delhi-based international para-athlete with a 90% locomotor disability (F- 54 category para-athlete) and disability rights activist. Representing India for 15 years and winning medals internationally, she is the first woman with a disability to receive the UNSDG Action Award (2024). She has founded the Para Sports Excellence Center in Greater Noida which provides free training, physiotherapy and specialised equipment to para- athletes. Additionally, she is a certified access auditor who has audited 600+ government buildings and is also the Election Commission's Brand Ambassador for Accessible Elections (and the first woman with a disability to contest local elections in Delhi). She currently serves as an IGNOU academic counsellor.

Pramodini Roul of Odisha turned trauma into advocacy after surviving an acid attack. A classical dancer, counsellor and campaigner against acid sales, she currently works with Sheroes Hangout and fights against child sexual abuse. She has won several awards for her work till date.

A known face at International Purple Fest, Mark Dharmai is an international para-athlete based in Mumbai. He won India a gold medal at the World Dwarf Games 2016 and was awarded the Eklavya State Award in 2018. He plays a foundational role in mentoring, identifying and man-powering persons with dwarfism across India.

From Bihar, Jyoti Sinha with muscular dystrophy is a self-taught Madhubani artist and disability rights activist who combines cultural preservation with disability advocacy. A recipient of the Bihar Kala Puruskar and National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), she trains young women in traditional art, linking craft livelihoods to rural inclusion strategies.

Dr. Aditya Lohiya's journey from lived experience of cerebral palsy to MBBS and clinical practice exemplifies how medical careers can include professionals with

disabilities. A recipient of awards for his work in the field of disability and empowerment, he is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree in respiratory medicine. Lohiya offers a clinical voice on inclusive medical education, workplace adjustments in healthcare and accessible primary care for PwDs.

Delhi-based Jharna Mallick, living with 85% Thalassemia major, founded 'Thalassemia Disabled and Warriors,' working across states to improve access for blood transfusion and safe practices. Currently serving as director at Sarveshram Mangalam Foundation that leads blood camps and champions quality treatment.

Khushi Ganatra from Mumbai who navigates life with spina bifida and scoliosis, has won over 35 national medals in powerlifting, wheelchair lawn tennis and wheelchair basketball. She founded Walk N Wheels Foundation and organises inclusive events delivering vocational training to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Representing India at the World Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Conference in Malaysia, she was the first wheelchair user and youngest woman from Mumbai's Kutchi Lohana community to be elected to the Youth Forum, securing the highest votes.

Dr. Meenakshi Venkataraman from Tamil Nadu, who has chronic neurological conditions and atypical Parkinson's, works for environmental action. At the fest she will connect climate adaptation with disability-inclusive environmental policy and community resilience planning.

Rusha Choudhrey, a scholar with a speech disability, contributes to storytelling craft through comics and animation. An editor and PhD aspirant, she will champion accessible narrative tools and creative literacy as methods of rights education.

N. Sai Balaji, who lives with a specific learning disability, is well versed in international relations whose experience in diplomacy will inform the festival's policy roundtables and international engagement, especially where India's commitments to disability rights intersect with UN frameworks.

Girish Dongre, a young artist living with sickle cell disease, uses portraiture and art to raise awareness. His creative campaigns against stigma will inform the festival's public-facing awareness drives. Srinidhi Raghavan, with psychosocial disability, uses feminism and her educational lens to design safe, inclusive online spaces and community responses for youth mental health and disability support systems.

Gauri Gadgil, an international swimming champion with an intellectual disability and an actress best known for her role in the film Yellow, represents the power of sports and culture to change narratives about ability. Her awards and international achievements will feature in sessions celebrating representation.

India's first model with autism, Pranav Bakhshi brings creative media representation, photography and public speaking to the table. A four-time TEDx

speaker and published author, he will help the festival explore inclusive media, modelling and employment.

Leprosy-cured Jayshree P.K. is currently a CEO of iBAS Glob. Her experience in ethical storytelling, research and policy will be central to discussions on neglected tropical diseases, mental-health integration and inclusion. Living with multiple sclerosis, Swarnalata J is the founder of the Swarga Foundation NGO. She blends motivational speaking, art and NGO leadership to explore rehab, women's leadership and creative livelihoods for persons with chronic illness.

Dr. Preethi Shrinivasan, a spinal cord injury survivor and founder of Soulfree, a public charitable trust, is the first woman with quadriplegia to complete her PhD in history of India from IIT Madras. She designed India's first integrated spinal rehabilitation centre and is a TedX speaker and winner of the prestigious Kalpana Chawla award.

With 21 remarkable ambassadors, the festival promises to demonstrate how accessibility can be built, taught and implemented in Goa's towns and villages so that inclusion become an everyday practice rather than a one-time promise.

The Purple Ambassadors are more than representatives—they are torchbearers of change, proving that accessibility, equality and dignity can transform societies. By bringing their lived experiences, achievements, and visions to the International Purple Fest 2025, they help chart a roadmap where persons with disabilities are not just included but are leaders shaping the future of our communities, policies and shared humanity.

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Pranav Bakhshi
Person with Autism



Rusha Chowdhury
Person with Speech Disability



Xerif Shaikh
Person with Hemophilia



Swarnalatha J
Person with Multiple Sclerosis



Suvarna Raj
Person with Locomotor Disability



Sadiya Bandodkar
Person with Hearing Impairment



Mark Dharmai
Person with Dwarfism



Khushi Ganatra
Person with Multiple Disabilities



N. Sai Balaji
Person with Specific Learning Disability



Jyoti Sinha
Person with Muscular Dystrophy



Jayashree P K
Leprosy Cured Person



Girish Dongre
Person with Sickle Cell Disease



Gauri Gadgil
Person with Intellectual Disability



Dr. Meenakshi Venkatraman
Person with Parkinson's Disease



Dr. Preethi Srinivasan
Person with Spinal Cord Injury



Danish Mahajan
Person with Blindness



Dr. Aditya Lohiya
Person with Cerebral Palsy



Sakshi Kale
Person with Low Vision



Jharana Mallick
Person with Thalassemia



Pramodini Roul
Acid Attack Survivor



Shrinidhi Raghavan
Person with Psycho-Social Disability