Unit 7 - A visit to Cambridge- Handout

By Indira Chaterjee

Firdaus Kanga a differently-abled Mumbai-based writer cum journalist met Stephan Hawking at Cambridge. Both the men shared the confinement to the wheelchair. But Stephan Hawkings was completely paralysed. He communicated only with a button of a computer.

Inspite of this, he was one of the most brilliant minds of the world. He had been chosen as the successor to Sir Issac Newton’s chair at Cambridge.

When Firdaus Kanga was on a walking tour through Cambridge, he came to know about the great astrophysicist from the tour guide. He immediately phoned him and took an appointment. Hawkings agreed to give him thiirty minutes.

Kanga felt weak all over. But he felt stronger, when he realised that he was meeting somebody like himself who was very hugely successful. He is the author of one of the biggest bestsellers, ` A Brief History of Time.’

When Kanga met Hawking, he told him, `` I haven’t been brave. I only had no choice.” He was pressing a button on the computer which spoke for him to the visitor. That was the only movement left with him. Otherwise his entire body was paralysed.

Kanga wanted to tell him that he could live creatively. But he felt guilty because every time he was forcing him to respond. Hawking was full of anguish but his mind was buoyant with thoughts which came out in the form to stiff and frozen sentences.

Kanga asked him if he was often laughing inside when people seemed to think that disabled people are chronically unhappy? After about three minutes he responded that he felt amusing when people patronise him. He also felt disturbed if someone like Kanga came in and disturbed him in his work.

When Kanga asked him if there was anything good in being disabled, Hawking replied there was nothing. When the body is a claustrophobic room getting narrower day by day it doesn’t do any good to know that there are people outside smiling with admiration to see you breathing still.

When Kanga asked him what advice he could give to the disabled, Hawking said they should concentrate on what they are good at. The Disabled Olympics is a waste of time.

When it was time for Kanga to go, Hawking asked him to stay for some tea. He also showed him the garden. When the moment of parting came Kanga could not kiss him or cry. He just touched him on the shoulder and wheeled out