



JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

YOU WANT A MIRACLE? PLEASE FORGIVE YOURSELF AND LEAVE ME ON MY OWN



NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

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BACKGROUND

“She was born in 1998 and was the first child in her immediate family. It had been only two years since India had the first legislation on disability. When my parents were trying to get me admitted into the school, I remember my parents telling me that people used to say “Isko kya karoge padha ke?” (Does it even make sense to get her educated? Isn’t it useless?)” even the ones closest to the family.

The schools equally played a part in resonating that thought by denying her admission. She finally got admission into Apeejay School in New Delhi, for her parents were adamant that education would be crucial for her to come on an equal footing with the rest of the world around her. “My parents would then ensure that they facilitated the education like my father would drop me to school and mother used to stay with me the entire day”. In 2006, she had to change schools to Tagore International, which was in the vicinity of her home, so that her mother could take care of her younger sister at home. However, like the last school, challenges of accessibility grew manifold, given that the school had denied responsibility to take care of her movement, with her classes being on the first floor and labs being at different corners of the school. “My mother would visit my school multiple times to facilitate my movement for my needs and the entire approach used to feel so excruciating. Yet, it took two years of continuous appeals to the school authorities before they shifted my classes to the ground floor in 2008”. She would still miss her attendance in labs and library and could not access facilities on different floors. “I remember that few teachers like my Drawing teacher would come to the class to provide me assignments.” “It was only in standard XI that Ms. Maya Ray, my Political Science teacher came to me one day and said- I will push the principal to get the elevator in place since the next year would be the last in school. So, you better enjoy that with other students.” One elevator, installed by the authorities in 2014, changed her entire experience of schooling forever, and thankfully, she had the privilege to access transformation which she will always cherish.

All these years, the need for her accessibility started from her home itself. However, in 2016, her family decided to shift to a place that supports the business prospects and ensured that Kavya transitioned into a space that is not a step backward in an age when she would not only explore higher education but also be rightfully a teenage girl witnessing life.

She joined quite an accessible campus at IIS (deemed-to-be University), Jaipur. “Thankfully, the entrance of the ramp was reconstructed on our recommendation to the Principal, Dr. Raakhi Gupta, based on our visit to campus. It made the gradient better, and similar was her proactive outlook to make the library accessible through the construction of a ramp.” She completed her graduation in Psychology Honors in 2019. The same ensured that she was exploring her higher studies, but as far as life was concerned, it still came with its own barriers. “I remember that very year, I was visiting Birla Mandir with my family when my grandparents were in Jaipur. The security guards stopped me because they believed that my wheelchair would damage the flooring of the temple.” Her family ended up in a brawl, proving that a wheelchair was not as potent as a tank. It is unfortunate that one ends up being discriminated against in a space that must reverberate spirituality bestowed by the right of God to all. Once, a restaurant’s (Kanhaiya Lal Halwai) executive defended the place as not being wheelchair-accessible as it was not a hospital. All these years have not even changed the perspective of her closest relatives, with them still treating her as a poor child who would one day stand on her legs by the grace of God when the doors of the Creator still remain closed.

During her final year of Masters, Kavya stumbled upon the Fellowship program, largely because of her social media network. She acquainted herself with the prospects and deliverables that it offered and realised that she had an opportunity to immerse herself in the waves of change and leave an indelible mark on the history of the movement.

Kavya, in her prime, has completed her Master's in Applied Psychology in 2022 and has started to work as a Job Coach at v-shesh while gaining experience through fellowship. She is also exploring the joys of being alone at home. Thus, the only miracle she needs to indulge in life is accessibility and reasonable accommodation; beyond her home and workplace. Hence, she pursued her endeavour of Inclusive tourism toward persons with disabilities.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

Introduction

Pioneering the pathway to accessibility in public spaces in Jaipur.

NOVEMBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022

- Being a wheelchair user restricted her access in public space restricting public life which led her to be interested in working on accessibility in public spaces.
- She began her work by gaining an understanding of accessibility laid in the RPwD Act, Harmonised Guidelines and Space Standards for Universal Accessibility in India-2021, and Rajasthan Building By-laws 2020 that have been adopted in the state of Rajasthan.
- She realised that section 40 under the RPwD Act requires the Commissioner to make appropriate rules related to accessibility, and section 46 requires service providers to ensure universal design.
- Within 5 years of the implementation of the Act, public places have to be made accessible.
- The Harmonised Guidelines for Space Standards and Universal Design lay in great detail the requirements of accessibility. This helped her realise the provisions in place
- (gained technical knowledge which she thought was just a need as per her experience.)
- So, she visited the most visited places in Jaipur, starting with the Jaipur Chaupati in Mansarovar, Jaipur, on 9th December, and found that the staff was not sensitized to deal with people with disabilities and lacked an understanding of accessibility features. The same was reflected in terms of the state of accessibility in the seating area, lack of tactile pathways, inaccessible counters, and absence of labelling for navigation.

- She made an appointment with Mr. Shantnu Varshney, Social Media Manager, Rajasthan Housing Board on 9th Dec 2021. She submitted a report highlighting the Accessibility of the Jaipur Chaupati Complex. He was not aware of such provisions even when she submitted a detailed report.
- He did not have the authority to look into the matter. And, Kavya due to her lack of understanding of the administrative structure of the organisation, did not realise the same.
- She started to look into a literature review on the topic and realised global norms, which help in making tourist places accessible. This led her to realise the potential of inclusive tourism and global best practices that have emerged lately.
- This was a time when she also started to create her own network, which would be for community engagements, generating awareness, and using social media for better outreach.
- To make herself adapt with technical knowledge of accessibility and the National Building Code and the terms of accessibility, she attended a training on the same from January 24 to 26, 2022. It was organised by the Barrier Free Consultancy Cell, Department of Architecture, College of Engineering, Trivandrum, in collaboration with Enable Me Access.
- Online engagements began with a webinar on Know Disability on March 23, 2022, to make people aware of the concept of disability as per various definitions and information on various types of disabilities. 36 participants attended the event which also increased the number of people in her network.
- To understand the challenges, needs, and preferences of persons with disabilities for inclusive tourism, she started to work closely with guidance from a mentor, Prof. Gaurav Raheja, Head, Department of Architecture, IIT Roorkee, and using her understanding gained through literature review, finalised a **study design**. This made use of mixed methodology to gain insights into accessibility in tourism.

MAY 2022 TO OCTOBER 2022

- The time was used for collection of data and analysing insights received through the study.
- Comprehensive research was conducted to understand the perspective of [business owners](#) offering hospitality and recreational services in Jaipur and that of persons with disabilities. The survey gained insights on frequency of visits made by persons with disabilities, the business owners having employees with disabilities and their level of understanding on disability and offers of reasonable accommodation placed by them for consumers with disabilities.
- A [google form](#) that was used for PwD focussed on obtaining demographic details, insights on accessibility at their home, support from family for accessibility, reasons behind travelling, and their needs, preferences and challenges in accessibility during travel.
- [25 case studies](#) were also collected to attain qualitative insights on their experience of travel for understanding needs and challenges of people with disabilities.
- [2 RTI](#) were filed with DEPwD to understand how many public places were made accessible, how many have been audited and how much funds have been disbursed for retrofitting of public buildings to have accessible features in Jaipur as well as India. The response stated that 87 buildings had been audited in Jaipur but data on the kind of accessibility features introduced are not available given such records have not been shared by the state government. INR 22 lakhs was allotted for Jaipur and it was used for making government buildings accessible and not tourist places in Jaipur.
- She continued social media engagements with her network:- 1). [AMC Awareness Day](#) on 30th June, 2022, 2) Observing the [Disability Pride Month](#) in July 2022. AMC is a rare condition which leads to people understanding one of the many forms of locomotor disability generating awareness through an innovative medium of quiz. The latter lead her attendees to have first hand learning of experiences shared by persons with disabilities.

- A training was conducted in collaboration with PRAYAS for government school teachers on 16th Nov '22 in Jaipur to understand basics of disability, needs of accessibility and socioeconomic impact of inaccessibility. This helped in creating awareness with one of the stakeholders who may not directly impact accessible tourism but accessible schools providing recommendations to administration.
- She also started to look into Rajasthan Tourism Policy to understand the weightage provided towards inclusive policy as it had one line “To improve accessibility for specially abled persons, physical infrastructure like walkways, ramps, elevators, toilets etc. will be ensured at major tourist destinations” which demonstrates the lack of adaptation of well framed guidelines on Accessibility as mentioned earlier.
- To reach masses on accessibility, she also collaborated with Money control to use the relationship for writing articles and she was able to continuously contribute 8 articles till date.

NOVEMBER 2022 TO APRIL 2023

- Kavya started to look into flagship events happening in Jaipur leading to tourism like the Jaipur Literature Festival. She did an observational visit to the facilities available and shared a report on actionable points and suggestions with the Managing Director, Mr. Sanjoy K Roy. They have agreed to seek her proposal on the same and hopefully use her as knowledge consultant for making the upcoming festivals accessible. The partnership could not pan out due to the paucity of time. However, as a result of her report submitted in 2023, the Festival had Indian Sign Language interpretation at selected panel discussions, making the Festival accessible to Deaf visitors.
- She also got an opportunity to be a part of the consultation team for Rajasthan State Policy for Women on March 21, 2023. She led the group on health and education and proposed accessible health infrastructure. She urged that the teachers and the staff of schools should be sensitised towards students with disabilities.

- During that time, several follow ups were done with the commissioner of disability, Shri Umashankar Sharma for sharing a policy brief based on the insights obtained from the primary and secondary studies conducted. The appointment was made online which demonstrates the state of digitisation in governance.
- In her discussions with fellows from other regions of the country, Kavya realised that the masses do not have even a basic understanding of the disability inclusion movement and thus, in collaboration, the fellows started to use webinars as a platform to make people understand the discourse that evolved over time. Overall, the webinars were attended by 24 participants.
- A webinar was conducted on the 4th of March, 2023, paying ode to the memory of Judith Heumann, a trailblazer for the rights of PwDs. A second webinar on the Role of Innovations and Technology in the lives of women with disabilities and their caregivers took place on 08th March 2023. The collaborative event gained views of 13 participants.
- To have regular communication with her network, she created a WhatsApp group, Namastey Disability, which helped the cohort to share their own views on the discourse. This was also facilitated by regular monthly meetups with the group on themes like travel, accessibility, assistive technology, mental health, etc.
- She continued her [qualitative studies](#) as well to understand insights from travellers with disabilities who visited the city of Jaipur. Their experiences resonated a collective call for greater infrastructural and digital accessibility especially because the Pink City garnered international attention from travellers across the world.

MAY 2023 TO OCTOBER 2023

- She continued her research journey further to understand the [consumer behaviour of travellers](#) like the amount of money they spend on travel and leisure activities, the number of days for which they travel, their preferences of hospitality services and the like to understand consumer choice and preferences.
- Her work with Money Control also continued, enhancing the readership of the content with articles receiving wider readership. Her article titled '[International Day of Sign Languages: 7 essential signs to help break the ice with a deaf person](#)' was the Most Read of all her pieces on Money Control.
- She also developed a [proposal for Jaipur Literature Festival 2024](#), as a result of which, the Festival had Indian Sign Language interpretation at selected panel discussions, making the Festival accessible to Deaf visitors.
- Her continued interaction with her network also helped her in reaching out to disability activists like Mr. Hemantbhai Goel, who shared the contact number of Shri Haulianlal Guite, Commissioner & Joint Secretary, Directorate of Specially Abled Persons, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of Rajasthan and a [meeting](#) took place with them on October 31st 2023. She shared the [policy brief on implementation of RPwD Act \(2016\)](#) and Building Bye-Laws of Rajasthan (2022), pertaining to enhancing accessibility in public spaces. A proposal to share a directive was shared with the Commissioner followed by sensitization workshops. The Commissioner responded positively and also highlighted the ambit of his powers which do not allow him to penalise them for not following the directive.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Co-organised the [National Conference on Invisible Disabilities](#) at International Purple Fest Goa 2024.
- Panellist at the ***Purple Think Tank at the International Purple Fest*** Goa 2024 wherein I shared my experiences of discrimination while accessing health insurance.
- Member of the Disability, Equity, and Justice Working Group at the [C20 India Summit](#) held in Jaipur from 29-31 July 2023 during India's G20 presidency, where spoke about the challenges faced by employees with disabilities and the need for an equitable workplace ecosystem.
- Delegate at the [State Consultation on Rajasthan State Policy for Women](#) held on March 21, 2023 in Jaipur.
- Represented India at the [Global Disability Summit \(GDS\) Youth](#) in February 2022, where she was a panellist in the discussion on 'Stigma and Discrimination as Barriers to Education'.
- Delegate from India at the [16th Conference of State Parties \(CoSP\)](#) in June 2022, representing Disabled People's International (DPI-India).
- Panellist at the [panel discussion](#) titled 'Amplifying the Voices of Missing Millions: Perspectives from Persons with Disabilities' organised at the launch of the Missing Millions Campaign on December 03, 2021.



EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.” Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, once remarked. This is what the fellowship has helped me achieve, even though in minuscule quantities. Through this fellowship, I have upskilled myself, engaged with other people with disabilities, including industry experts from various fields and gained a deeper understanding of disability rights. The experience has been transformational. The variety of in-person workshops have equipped me with the nuances of advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, including a firm understanding of the numerous legislations backing disability rights in India, deeper understanding of media campaigns and a strong foundation in research analysis. The cohort has made me realise the power of networking and how it has become a powerful tool, aligning people with their goals and helping them accomplish common objectives. Throughout, the mentor's support - one of the key features of the fellowship - has been instrumental in guiding me plan my path and achieve the objectives of the fellowship.

RESOURCES

Follow Kavya's work on their social media

