

**“SPACE IS A 3D CONTINUUM
THAT HAS TO BE VISUALISED
AND NOT NECESSARILY BE
SEEN”**



NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

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BACKGROUND

“Before applying to the fellowship I was nowhere near this sector and was undergoing rehabilitation and it was that group where I started to learn about disability inclusion and advocacy being taken and came to know about fellowship through the peer group; One peculiar aspect that I picked up in the conversation about the fellowship was that you can choose a topic of intervention on your own. This was a time when I was blocked on what should I do with my future given that I want to use my education in the field of architecture; also i was surrounded by the perspective from society that in this stage I should not get worried about future and instead do whatever i like at home like art and craft and things like that. But, I wanted to go beyond that but was unclear as to how I could achieve it. Then I came to know about the fellowship and looked into the life of Mr. Javed Abidi which further supported me to look further into it.

It was also the time when I had already initiated the first support group of IIH and as a group, we were not aware of the policy, laws and even people with IIH which surprisingly now has 100 members. So, even though I was new to the domain I was already into working for the patient group and post fellowship I got introduced to the technicalities involved in the aspect of inclusion.

Another thing that I mentioned in my statement of motivation while applying for fellowship was my childhood memories of the experience and relentless work of my grandfather to work for the community of Srikakulam; to introduce establishments like blood banks and habitation of leprosy-affected people by establishing relationships with organisations like Red Cross, Johnson and Johnson etc.

I also got reminded of the time when I had fractured legs and I had to hop around places and jump through stairs in absence of ramps and elevators which made me question the architectural design even before I acquired my disability. I questioned the intent of design where it is not the part of the core design but an afterthought because of necessity. With me acquiring disability I started to realise even more strongly the flaws in architectural design which is not user friendly for diverse user groups like, people with reduced mobility, elderly, pregnant women, children. I used to debate as well with my professors and barrier free design was only considered as an elective subject which is likewise an afterthought for architecture curriculum; and thus never considered a core design concept. Even when I started to work, I had self doubt knowing that other fellows have much vivid experience related to disability inclusion but when I received feedback to why not give it a try I decided to give it a shot. Thus, I started to work on Universal Design against the wise advice of my professors to start teaching music and art which will be suitable for me as I could not see any space to pursue architecture". But, as defined in Physics, space is a three dimensional continuum containing positions and directions which has to be mostly visualised in human capacity and not necessarily seen to realise it. And, Kavya embodies that definition to work ahead in the endeavour.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

Introduction

Universal Accessibility in Leisure, Recreational, and Cultural Spaces (Rushikonda Blue Flag Beach) and Mandatory Inclusion of Universal Design in the Architecture Curriculum.

NOVEMBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022

- “I felt more encouraged after having Mr. Gaurav Raheja as my mentor which was going well at the beginning but eventually led me to a situation where I could not receive timely feedback and felt blocked and pushed myself to go ahead on my own.” She then realised that to promote universal design as an essential subject it would be a more effective strategy to have the architecture fraternity as her primary stakeholders rather than the disability community. Also, it was reasonable to work ahead in the direction than make vast on-ground interventions realising her effectiveness in such roles given the nature of her disability.
- She was conducting an online survey with Architecture faculty and students. The design of primary study was prepared after receiving an extensive 3-day session on Accessibility through standards and legal frameworks in India from Ms. Amvalika Senapati. “It was quite fruitful and further engagement with her in the absence of regular communication with my mentor helped me design my survey as well as have pointers to look at secondary study in a specific direction”.

- She was proportionally placing her work towards accessibility in public spaces and did a short study on the accessibility quotient of public places in Visakhapatnam, to understand the ground realities of government interventions through their annual reports, news, and letters to departments.
- She also reached out to the Assistant Director, Andhra Pradesh Welfare of Differently-abled, Transgender, and Senior Citizens, Visakhapatnam in January 2022. In the meeting, she inquired about the status of the Accessible India Campaign, given the inaccessibility of websites and could not receive any concrete insights. Thus, she also filed RTI Applications for data collection and information gathering.
- She also trained herself further on laws and policies to further her learning on accessibility standards with Barrier Free Consultancy Cell, College of Trivandrum and Enable her Access in January 2022 and received certification on the same.
- To have good outreach for surveys and to also establish relationships with fraternity she began having seminars with the College of architecture. “ I reached out to colleges and the Indian association of architecture, Andhra Pradesh chapter because the primary onus of design and accessibility is on them. I started to receive feedback from their faculty that they are aware of universal design and admire its aspects but they have not looked into it as an essential subject.” She received first further interaction from Varaha College of Architecture and Planning, Vizag and they invited her to conduct a seminar on Universal Design and accessibility on December 29, 2021.
- It was observed that her intent of making universal design a core subject was misperceived as making the entire curriculum framework accessible at the onset and even the students of architecture had limited understanding of the concept as for them provisioning accessibility features that enabled only the persons with locomotor disability like installation of ramps was all about it. The observations further pushed her to look at it in a much more concentrated manner.

- “My efforts gained global traction through participation in GDS(Global Disability Summit) through NCPEDP”. Her work started to gain outreach as she shared her videos of GDS on her social media handles and started collaboration/networking with other organisations and individuals.
- Similar outreach was experienced by other colleges and then she was also reached out by L.V. Prasad Eye Institute to conduct a similar seminar in March. And NILERD on February 4, 2022, Delhi to conduct a webinar on this subject.
- It was in March that she re-established connection with her mentor and was invited for a webinar (A journey of 3 Dots.) being organised by IIT Roorkee where she spoke on Universal design, accessibility bringing into light my lived experience to highlight the lack of user experience based product augmentation which is hard to improvise if a structure is in place, unlike FMCG products.
- She also collaborated with her peer fellows Kavya Mukhija and Sakshi Chauhan to organise her own webinar to stay connected with her network and extend it further. It was on ‘Know Disability’ held in March.
- To equally extend her focus towards working on accessibility of public spaces she started to prepare a list of spaces that have the highest footfall which must be accessible for all. She followed articles, travel blogs, vlogs and consumer interest of tourists and realised that Rushikonda Beach comes on the top. She also researched on identifying authorities and executives responsible towards it. “I started by interacting with the Tourism Department with a meeting in February’ 22 to understand their understanding of accessibility and quotients being utilised by the department. Her first greeting was with the people shouting at me that this was not the disability department but the tourism department as if she did not belong here, carrying white cane. She was then directed rudely to submit her letter of demand and leave. She firstly reached the wrong place as they had not updated the address and then she was asked to leave with them showcasing their authority.

- She still chose to demand the manager of the department be responsible towards their duty and reached back over the call stating her purpose of visiting earlier and the welcome received by a citizen in his office. “
- She demanded permission to conduct a study and clarified her intention that the purpose was to document the findings and not to blame the government. He outrightly rejected that we cannot give such permission and you being blind should not be even talking about architecture.
- This blocked her path to do a formal accessibility audit on Rushikonda Beach and chose a strategy to instead do an assessment and publish the findings.
- She did extensive field visits to the beach and documented her findings. She followed up to check her findings by further 4 meetings to ensure that the released findings are not incorrect for she was already receiving flak from the government.

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- A final visit was then made a moment before publishing the same on Medium followed by Youth Ki Awaaz to extend outreach after a month.
- To continue her engagement with the cross-disability network, she apprised her cohort on important days like Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) with the fact sheet on the status of the Accessible India campaign and with the findings of NFHS data released in the month of June. In addition, she was promoting her report on the beach through social media platforms which were also picked by local channels of Vizag and was also shared by a list of journalists. Her findings and recommendations were used by the local disability organizations in their proposal to the Andhra’s Ministry of Tourism. Later on, she established direct contact with the concerned government officials based upon her Field Report on the Rushikonda Blue Flag Beach.

- In the perusal of her intent of mainstreaming the use of the Sugamya Bharat App as the tool of advocacy for universal accessibility in public places, she filed complaints on the inaccessibility of Canara Bank and other public places. She disseminated information and created awareness about 'Sugamya Bharat App - a Crowdsourcing Mobile Application' based on the principle of Jan-Bhagidari (citizen participation) by bringing attention to the accessibility-related issues that require redressal.
- The same was forwarded to the District Disability welfare officer who upon obtaining evidence from Kavya reached to bank to direct them to make accessible provisions or shift their premise to ground floor. During each stage of the process the concerned executives did reach Kavya but were later informed to close the complaint that due to issues of lease they would not be able to make such changes as suggested. Thus, they would stick a notice informing the number and name of a dedicated executive who would attend to persons with disabilities in need of services at ground floor. Surprisingly, the half-willed notice was pasted on midlanding of the staircase providing no access to the information.
- In continuation she filed a complaint for another branch and apparently it turned out that she was the only one filing a complaint "I received a call from Superintendent that again you have raised a complaint? Are you the only one visiting all the places? You file a complaint and then we have to find a resolution visiting here and there; please do not raise complaints"
- She was part of "Facilitating Capacity Building through Public Education and Action with Sugamya Bharat App," organised by the Inclusive Divyangjan Entrepreneur Association (IDEA) and Enable Me Access Association. She participated as a speaker to promote public participation in accelerating the Accessible India Campaign.
- Interestingly, it was found that 39 public buildings were targeted under the Accessible India campaign for transforming them to accessibility standards but zero was the actual outcome till April 2022. This was the finding of the RTI she had filed earlier and the same was turned into a fact sheet and shared across social media platforms.

- Her engagement with disability events continued and she presented herself in a roundtable of UN-NIUA on the theme of Gender and Disability Inclusion in Urban Development On June 10, 2022.
- She also collaborated with her co fellows to work on a week long campaign on invisible disabilities “Believe in the Invisible” in the month of October.
- As part of being an active advocate in legislation demanding stakeholder suggestion, she had submitted recommendations on National Policy for Persons with Disabilities. The full list of recommendations can be accessed here.
- To equip herself with soft skills required for sharpening her advocacy efforts she also became part of a workshop organised by BBC and attained training in documentation.
- She also reached out to the GVMC commissioner while she was invited as a guest of honour during the Paralympics event. It came as a surprise when he said that he had also gone through her report about Rushikonda beaches and they discussed other beaches under authority of GVMC and he agreed to invite her to be part of study to improve accessibility. Unfortunately, his position was soon occupied by different executives derailing further development.
- She participated in the 'Experts Roundtable Consultation and Validation Workshop' and contributed to the Policy Brief prepared by the UN India and NIUA on "Gender and Disability Inclusion in Urban Development". [10th June, 2022]

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- Her publication was selected as the Editor’s pick by Youth ki Awaaz and included in pieces which make an impact and her stories were awarded with the highest viewership in the year as well.

- AP Tourism Department did take cognizance of her detailed report after much promotion and they honoured the article to provide their explanation of such a status. The Assistant Director, Capacity Building, added a feather to that effort by reaching out to Kavya for collaboration and invited her to beach with her for proper understanding of the issues in a mutual manner. She also informed her about the development that took place taking her report seriously and requested her to do further assessment to help their department get the beach up to standards. She and the Divisional Manager also visited her to take her to the beach for her to witness the changes based on the recommendations herself. She was also made to establish relationships with the architecture team of the beach for them as well to realise the infrastructural gaps in the beach. Kavya continued the efforts until she met the Assistant Director to realise issues on the other end as well. It was efficient engagement given that early certification audit was pending for Blue Flag certification and standards had to be met for it was scheduled in the year, post covid times. The efforts made turned fruitful for the department as well to highlight the inclusive development made.
- She then followed up the developments on her own with two further visits to beach to ensure that the developments were not a face wash and released a third report in the series to showcase developments over a timeline. [Click here](#) to know more about the efforts made by the Tourism Department.
- The collaboration unfolded to also look at public places of recreational and cultural importance like places of worship. She requested a list of places which are being managed by APTDC to realise the levels of accessibility. She did a case study of a person in her network who visited Statue of Equality, Hyderabad and documented the same.
- She furthered her collaboration with other fellows for promoting her work as well as that of the cohort.

- In upcoming months she also continued apprising her network by providing concepts of accessibility, timeline of laws and acts related to disability introduced in India and yearly progress made on accessibility of public spaces filling a second RTI on the number of public spaces made accessible.
- She was also reached out by GVMC to further the relationship built previously. Smart City Operation who wanted her to understand the beach stretch and advancements that can be made for accessibility as a preparation for Global Investor Summit.
- This was a period when she also met the new Disability Commissioner and posted a detailed discussion. She admired her efforts and requested to share those with her which can help them realise future activities and such interaction were acknowledged in the form of making her part of the District Disability Committee as a subject matter expert on Disability and Accessibility.
- Her advocacy gave the much needed push as well during this time for the Council of Architecture signing an MoU with DEPwD for making Universal Design core subject of the curriculum across colleges.
- She was actively checking the G20 discussions under the umbrella of Civil 20 and started to engage with the G20 proceeding early to place the demands of disability inclusion on the global stage.
- The participation helped her become panellists in Chaupal and made her a part of a working committee meeting that happened in Bhubaneswar. She used the time to also do a comparative study of Puri Beach which follows gold flag standards and is also on Bay of Bengal's coastline. The comparative study of the beaches helped her also look at certifications standards closely and share her recommendation with the Director of Blue Flag International.

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- The mass outreach was made by her through efforts on imminent days like on Women's Day, World Seniors Citizens Day in collaboration with Blue Flag India and AP Tourism Department, and Children's Day in collaboration with schools, local CSOs and government bodies, by promoting them online as well as offline by curating events which help in sensitising people that Universal Design enables access for wider user groups.
- She initiated the [#LearnYourConcepts](#) Series to disseminate information and create awareness concerning the themes surrounding Architecture, Environment, and Disability. She also collaborated with The Sangyan on the 'Shades of Disability' [infographic](#) and [video content](#) to raise awareness about the diversity within the disability spectrum. Additionally, she also wrote on the impact of the built environment on mental health to apprise the community of intersectionalities of accessibility beyond only physical barriers widely highlighted.
- Her work kept getting traction and her recommendation for a policy brief was accepted and acknowledged towards Gender and Disability Inclusion, by [NIUA](#) in her continued engagements with the institutions. NIUA in partnership with Youth ki Awaaz had also invited her as a [panellist](#) for [Creating a Youth-led engagement Framework for Urban Climate Action](#). She raised her opinion on how youth can strategically play a significant role in policy transformation.
- She recorded her podcast with Radio Udaan for the [podcast series Badalta Daur](#) on 'Universal Accessibility' covering her theme of work and activities under the fellowship. She further spoke as a guest speaker at the "[Been There Done That – Biweekly Talk Series Forum](#)" at the Andhra University, Visakhapatnam - covering her fellowship journey, research findings, and advocacy endeavours.

- She also made a Written Submission in collaboration with her co-fellow to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities's General Comment on Persons with Disabilities in Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies [OHCHR took cognizance of it and uploaded the recommendation on its official website - Search for submission by the name of National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)].
- Her efforts in writing articles made her receive international recognition under Harvard Law School Project on Disability and McGill University in their collaborative forum published article "Climate Resilient and Accessible Architecture" co-authored with her co-fellow. She delivered a guest lecture at the Jindal Global Business School on the theme of "Adding Universality to Accessibility" exploring the profound intersection of architecture, the built environment, and diverse user groups, including Persons with Disabilities.
- She ideated and curated the 'Sanketam | संकेतम् | సంకేతం — All About Access Series' - an endeavour to disseminate information and creating awareness about architecture and accessibility-related elements, features, signages, symbols, etc.
- She co-curated and drafted 'Charter of Demands: Call to Action for Disability Justice' as a joint initiative, for the concerned public authorities and other relevant stakeholders (governments, political parties, civil societies, etc.) to take cognizance of the prominent issues of the larger interest and asks of the disability community. Moreover, she ideated and co-curated the 'Ink For Inclusion' Initiative as a joint initiative, towards a Sustainable, Climate-Resilient, Universally Accessible, and Inclusive - Elections and India (Bharat).

- On the occasion of 'Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2024' - a day to create awareness and action to protect our environment, she shared her Baseline Report on "Universal Accessibility in Leisure, Recreational, and Cultural Spaces (Rushikonda Blue Flag Beach) and the Mandatory Inclusion of Universal Design in the Architecture Curriculum", as a part of the data-driven and evidence-based research, advocacy, and campaign endeavours, aimed at achieving logical conclusions concerning law and policy formulation and their effective implementation.
- She organized "Embracing Wisdom Celebrating Life – #ItsOurBeachToo" event in observance of the World Senior Citizen's Day) in collaboration with Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation and Blue Flag India.
- She further presented on the "Climate Anxiety, Role of Universal Accessibility in Disability-inclusive Climate Justice and Vernacular Architecture" at the Webinar on 'Climate Justice and Disability: Why We Need to Build Forward Better?' and at the Roundtable Discussion on "Creating a Youth-Led Engagement Framework for Urban Climate Action", organized by NIUA India and Youth Ki Awaaz with support from GVMC, Visakhapatnam. She completed an online training on the 'Role of Disaster Management Plans to Enhance the Resilience of Educational Institution Buildings' by National Institute of Disaster Management.

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- At the International Purple Fest 2024 in Goa, she engaged in NCPEDP's Purple Think Tank panel discussions on “Promoting New Leadership” and “Reforming Advocacy Strategies”. She also contributed as a discussant in an Experts’ Roundtable on Youth Participation for the Youth-Led Engagement Framework for Urban Climate Action, organized by NIUA and Youth Ki Awaaz. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate her commitment to disability justice, universal accessibility, and fostering inclusive development across sectors.
- She also co-curated the “Charter of Demands: Call to Action for Disability Justice” campaign, including the Signature Campaign petition on Change(dot)org, advocating for disability-inclusive policies through representations submitted to the Government of India, States, Union Territories, political parties, and other stakeholders. Notably, some demands were adopted in election manifestos, and the Social Justice and Empowerment Minister, Dr Virendra Kumar, included our key demand for Accessible India 2.0 in the Modi Government 3.0’s 100-Day Plan announced in June 2024.
- Later on, she organized impactful events, including the South Regional Consultation on Disabled People in Politics, in partnership with the Network of Persons with Disability Organizations (NPdO) and supported by NCPEDP, and Feel the Rare, a Rare Disease Day sensitization session co-hosted with Yi Vizag's Accessibility Chapter, Poornamidam, and IIH Warriors India - demonstrating her collective approach for social change. She also organized United in Action: Promoting Universality of Accessibility, collaborating with Yi Vizag Accessibility, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), and Blue Flag India for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

- Furthering accessibility advocacy, she co-curated the [Ink for Inclusion initiative](#), focusing on sustainable, climate-resilient, universally accessible, and all-inclusive elections, and co-drafted [A Comprehensive Toolkit for Inclusive and Accessible Elections](#) in April 2024. Additionally, she also co-curates ongoing campaigns such as “We All Belong” and “It’s Our Beach Too”.
- As a guest speaker and panellist, she contributed to discussions on topics such as universal accessibility and disability advocacy, including at the [Navigating Disability Advocacy with NCPEDP Fellows](#) series by the Multiple Sclerosis Society of India, the [Deconstructing Accessibility Podcast](#), and [Inspire Inclusion](#) by CREDAI Women’s Wing Visakhapatnam. She also delivered a guest lecture on [“Rethinking Business:](#)

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Co-authored “[Climate-Resilient and Accessible Architecture](#)”, Bill of Health parent blog via Harvard Law School Project on Disability (HPOD), the Petrie-Flom Center for Health Law Policy, Biotechnology, and Bioethics at Harvard Law School, and the Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme (DICARP) at McGill Law Faculty.
- Contributed to the Policy Brief on ‘[Gender and Disability Inclusion in Urban Development](#)’, UN India-NIUA
- Access Audit of Sports Facilities for providing inputs into the Centre for Disability Studies Report — “[FINDING SIZES FOR ALL: A Report on the Status of the Right to Accessibility in India](#),” on Access Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Supreme Court of India.

Please click on [Impact and Policy Change](#) for details



EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

One of the key learnings during my NCPEDP-Javed Abidi Fellowship on Disability was gaining a deeper understanding of disability as a diverse and multifaceted identity. Disability is not a homogeneous identity; it encompasses a wide spectrum of intersectional identities within itself. Through various interactions during the fellowship, I engaged with individuals with a range of disabilities, both among my co-fellows and beyond, each with unique needs and aspirations. This experience highlighted the importance of universal accessibility, which extends beyond physical infrastructure to include digital spheres, social attitudes, policies, and universal design practices.

These experiences furthered my advocacy strategies, emphasising that universal accessibility, by catering to wider user groups, creates a domino effect in improving all aspects of life. This approach not only empowers individuals with disabilities to fully participate in society but also enhances the overall quality of life for all while reducing societal costs. Since my transition with disability, the fellowship has been a stepping stone, marking my humble beginning and offering exposure to the disability sector and broader development realms. It has provided a platform where I could execute my ideas and strategies with freedom and flexibility.

RESOURCES

Follow Kavya's work on their social media

