



JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

In every frame, we can challenge perceptions and celebrate the diverse narratives of gender and disability

NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP

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BACKGROUND

Deepak is a filmmaker whose work revolves around the themes of gender and disability. A graduate in mass communication from Jamia Millia Islamia, he is a passionate advocate for inclusive education and a staunch supporter of the rights of queer and transgender people with disabilities. His activism emanates from a deeply personal space, shaped by his own experiences growing up with a disability.

At the age of 12, Deepak lost his sight in a horrific accident. His journey to access quality education thereafter was filled with challenges. He spent nearly four years in and out of hospitals for treatment, which resulted in him missing out on the foundational years of learning. When he decided to resume his studies at the age of sixteen, he was at a significant disadvantage.

Motivated by his family, Deepak enrolled in an open school to pursue his studies and complete his 10th standard. Lacking knowledge of braille and having missed several critical years of education, it was a difficult start. He initially struggled to keep up with the lessons, often feeling left behind. However, with persistent help from his family and his introduction to audiobooks, Deepak found a breakthrough. He not only completed his 10th standard with flying colors but also secured admission into a regular school.

Deepak's decision to transition to a mainstream school for his 11th and 12th standards proved to be a turning point. At Father Agnel School in Noida, he was introduced to computers equipped with screen readers, which allowed him to realize his true potential. His two years at this school were among the best of his academic journey, preparing him for the future. After completing his 12th standard in the humanities stream, Deepak pursued both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in history. However, a major turning point came in 2019 when he enrolled at Jamia Millia Islamia to study mass communication.

During his two years at Jamia, Deepak became a fierce advocate for inclusive education. He founded the first student union for disabled students at the university, which remains active today. As a student, he honed his filmmaking skills and produced several fiction and non-fiction films that addressed issues of disability, gender, and caste identity. His time at university also exposed him to critical discourses around gender and caste identities, both in the classroom and through discussions with professors, laying the foundation for his future work.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

Half Year 1 (July 2023 – January 2024)

- Deepak conducted extensive literature review on his chosen research topic: “Access to Higher Education Faced by Women, Queer, and Transgender People with Disabilities in Delhi”. The literature review aimed to examine and synthesize existing research on the access to higher education faced by women, queer, and transgender people with disabilities in Delhi. By critically analyzing the available literature, it sought to identify the barriers and challenges that impede their access to higher education and explore potential strategies and initiatives to promote inclusivity in the educational system.
- A Problem Tree was designed to identify the primary issues and causes which exacerbate the issue and what the possible solutions are. Some of the root causes identified were:
 - 1.Higher education institutions lack comprehensive policies addressing the unique needs of transgender individuals with disabilities.
 - 2.Discriminatory attitudes contribute to reluctance in providing necessary accommodations.
 - 3.Lack of training programs to sensitize the campus community to these intersectional issues.
- A rudimentary survey design was prepared, chalking out the hypothesis, research design, methodologies and means of analysis. The expected outcome of this study plan was to generate valuable insights and actionable recommendations that can drive positive change and promote equitable access to higher education for women, queer, and transgender individuals with disabilities.

- Data was collected to identify the problems faced by the community. This was done in the form Google Forms and Qualitative Interviews. The following conclusions were drawn on the basis of the data obtained:
 1. Transgender individuals with disabilities may be discouraged from enrolling due to the perceived unwelcoming environment.
 2. Inadequate access to higher education leads to restricted career options for transgender individuals with disabilities.
 3. Limited access to education perpetuates a cycle of economic and social disadvantage for transgender people with disabilities.
 4. Excluding transgender individuals with disabilities from higher education hinders societal progress by not utilizing their unique perspectives and talents.
- Deepak wrote several case studies and carried out numerous Focus Group Discussions to obtain an in-depth review of the challenges and issues regarding access to higher education faced by women, queer, and transgender people with disabilities in Delhi. The link to access the case studies can be found here:
 - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ug8qWu-qoBT_hZMPguT6yXa7luswyE5mKpal7PVQUMo/edit?usp=sharing
- Deepak was the guest speaker at the International Day of People with Disabilities at UNESCO. It was an enriching experience that intricately explore, educated and delebrated the various nuances and perspectives underlying the discourse of disability.

Half year 2 (Jan'24 - June' 24)

- In order to proliferate awareness amongst the stakeholders, Deepak developed an advocacy plan which involved students from Universities, Community people and activists, Organizations working on the theme as well as Parents & Peers. Universities to be covered:

1. Jamia Milia Islamia
2. University of Delhi
3. Ambedkar University
4. Jawaharwal Nehru university
5. Other Private Colleges

The purpose of this plan was to advocate for setting up anti-harassment and anti-bullying specifically for women, queer and transgender people with disabilities across universities/colleges/corporate spaces.

- Deepak conducted several awareness sessions in colleges around Delhi with the perspective that dialogues will lead to a rough policy framework which could be used when engaging with the policy makers and will help in establishing Grievance Redressal Cells in the colleges. One such session was held on the topic "Gender and Disability" at Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute Of Professional Studies , IP University.
- Deepak also reached out to MLA & MP to share his survey analysis and baseline report. The objective of which was to establish at least 4 Grievance Redressal Cells in the Colleges around Delhi and prepare a rough policy draft similar to one adopted by the state of Maharashtra with respect to transgender people with disabilities.
- Deepak wrote and published an article on Medium on the topic "Unveiling the Invisible Barriers: How Gender and Disability Intersectionality Impact Education and Employment in India".

- Deepak carried out a strong social media campaign on Twitter and Instagram to spread awareness help build a more strong and robust community
- Deepak prepared his Baseline Report which states the following:

a) Intersection of gender and disability leads to significant social and economic exclusion of women, queer and transgender people with disabilities in India.

b) This exclusion is due to a combination of factors, including inadequate policy and legal frameworks, violence and abuse, limited access to education and employment, and discrimination in the workplace.

c) Addressing these issues will require a multifaceted approach that includes policy reforms, awareness-raising campaigns, and improved access to services and support. It is crucial to ensure that the specific needs of these groups are recognised and addressed in all efforts to promote inclusion and social justice in India. The complete Baseline Report can be accessed here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/18VRPmuvkKrTM_QaUY9N093F2ISW85pYr/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=114051733814894290348&rtpof=true&sd=true

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Successfully conducted policy consultations across 15 colleges.
- Shared with Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly.
- Currently working on drafting a policy framework based on these consultations.
- Invited as a guest speaker by UNESCO on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities to present on the alignment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with disability rights and inclusion.
- Participated in Purple Fest, Goa, where I delivered a talk on social inclusion for persons with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of accessibility and empowerment in all areas of life.



EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

In 2023, Deepak joined the Javed Abidi Fellowship with the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). As a Javed Abidi Fellow, Deepak focused on the socio-economic inclusion of women, queer, and transgender people with disabilities, with a particular emphasis on the barriers they face in accessing higher education. During his fellowship, Deepak collected data to build evidence for his research and compiled his findings into a baseline report. He actively engaged with various stakeholders to further his advocacy work. Reflecting on his experience, Deepak says, “It has been a transformative experience to be part of such a prestigious fellowship. It taught me how to work in the policy domain and at the grassroots level with different stakeholders.”

RESOURCES

Follow Deepak's work on their social media

