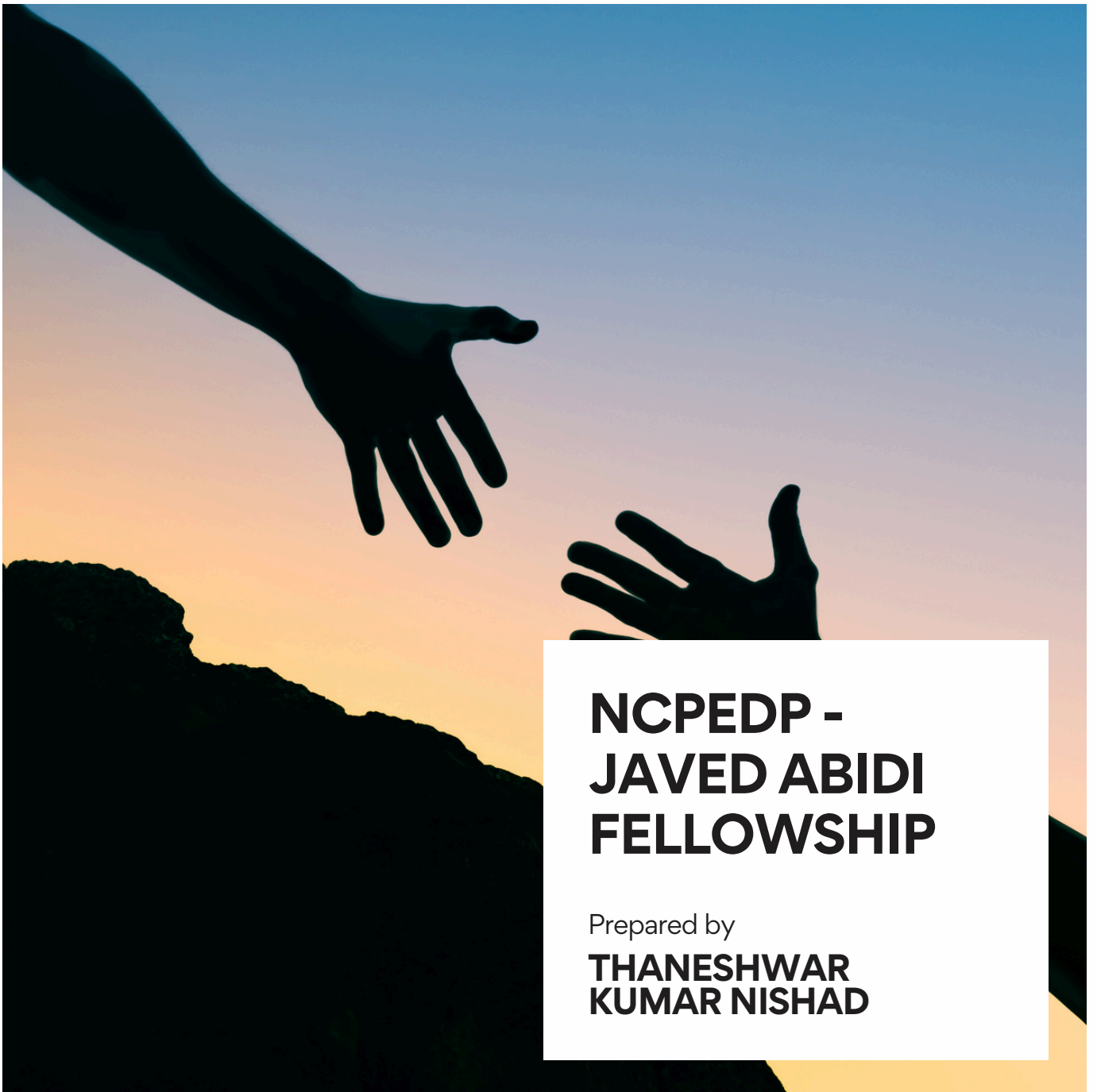




# TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY



## **NCPEDP - JAVED ABIDI FELLOWSHIP**

Prepared by

**THANESHWAR  
KUMAR NISHAD**

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# Table of Contents

Background	2
Progress Overview	5
• November 2021 to April 2022	5
• May 2022 to October 2022	6
• November 2022 to April 2023	8
• May 2023 to October 2023	9
Achievements	12
Experience in the Fellowship	13
Resources	14



# BACKGROUND

Thaneshwar was born in Thakurain Tola, a district in Chhattisgarh. At around one year old, he began to experience the effects of polio, which caused a wound below his left hand. This injury led to nerve damage, affecting his right leg. To assist him in walking, his father created a wooden device. He often used to ask his mother about his condition and why God made him this way.

When he was in 5th grade, Thaneshwar was sent to a hostel for further studies. Despite facing significant challenges, Thaneshwar continued his education with support from a local organization, Viklang Sanstha. During this period, he discovered he was a Person with Disability (PWD) and obtained a government certificate. This realization prompted him to question his situation and feel inferior to others. Faced with the lack of educational support, he had to balance working and studying.

After completing 10th grade, he was discharged from the hostel. Torn between continuing his education and finding work, he sought employment to support his studies. He worked with a cooler company, managing to continue his education with minimal government support. Despite the challenges of farming in Chhattisgarh, where work is limited to the rainy season, Thaneshwar felt the need to support his family financially. He remained positive and managed to complete his first year of college. Thaneshwar pursued a Bachelor's degree at Chhattisgarh University in Ranchi, using a tricycle for transportation. He initially lived with relatives but soon opted for rented accommodation due to the discomfort of living with family.

In Raipur, he joined a local NGO that worked with PWDs, gaining insights through field visits. A small NGO offered him a job, which he accepted after several interviews. He left his previous job at Magneto Mall and joined a new organization as a cluster monitor. His role involved visiting blocks to assess the needs of PWDs, including evaluating the effectiveness of government programs, availability of wheelchairs, assisting devices, scholarships, and knowledge of legal rights. Although he was initially fearful of criticism or hostility, he faced a lot of deception and distrust from others. This experience made him feel inadequate and despondent. Despite his fears and the initial setbacks, he was determined to help PWDs. Thaneshwar's tenure with the organization lasted six months before he was let go due to perceived deficiencies in his communication skills. Feeling disheartened, he contemplated returning to his previous job.

However, the team leader of the NGO for PWDs reached out to him, encouraging him to take on a supervisory role in a new project. Initially hesitant due to his previous experiences, Thaneshwar sought advice from other PWDs in the NGO who motivated him to take the risk. Thaneshwar accepted the challenge and worked on the project for three years. He established a Sahita Samuh, a self-help group for PWDs at the rural level. He facilitated the production and marketing of various products, such as phenyl and agarbatti, and trained PWDs in gram panchayats on product creation and marketing. His successful completion of the project helped many PWDs become self-reliant and financially independent.

Thaneshwar faced significant challenges throughout his journey, but his persistence allowed him to learn and grow. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he worked with an NGO to support vaccination efforts. It was through this networking that he learned about the fellowship opportunity. Initially, he was apprehensive, fearing his lack of formal education might hinder his chances. However, his mentor encouraged him by highlighting his numerous achievements. Despite his self-doubt, he completed the fellowship application with support from his mentor.

Upon joining the fellowship, Thaneshwar encountered language barriers that made it difficult for him to follow discussions conducted in English. He hesitated to express his difficulties but received invaluable support from the NCPEDP team. Despite his initial fears and frequent thoughts of quitting, he persevered through the first six months of the fellowship. For his research topic, Thaneshwar inquired about MGNREGA and its provisions for PWD. He found that existing provisions were insufficient and chose to focus on MGNREGA due to its ground-level impact. Through the fellowship, he successfully established a Viklang Sangathan network and simultaneously managed a panipuri shop.

Thaneshwar is driven by a desire to develop rural areas and support PWD. He aims to become a "samaj sevak" (social worker) and continue his advocacy. With upcoming panchayat elections, he plans to run for the position of panch and is actively working on his agenda to achieve this goal.

# PROGRESS OVERVIEW

## ***NOVEMBER 2021 TO APRIL 2022***

- Pertaining to the research intervention, guidelines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act' 2005 were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed to detect dissonances and subtle nuances.
- Information was obtained about the employment status of PwDs at the rural level
- Meeting with organized with Institutional Executives i.e. Chief Executive Officer and Panchayat Sarpanch to inform them about the purpose of the project and receive a copy of approval letter to pursue field work.
- Letter of Support was submitted to the Chief Executive Officer at the District as well as the Block level to seek their permission for field visits in gram panchayat areas under their jurisdiction.
- Regular meetings were held with the community members and PwDs of the following panchayats: Datrenga, Doma Kanthathi and Kandul on 23rd and 24th December 2021 to inform them about the discourse of disability and provide information about the Disability Rights Act 2016.
- Thaneshwars had a meeting with Dr. Wassim, Assistant President of the District Hospital on 17th December' 21. The meeting was regarding making provisions for the post of lift operators for PwDs using elevators. Dr. Wasim wrote a letter to the Health Minister to forward the issue.
- Door to door surveys were conducted to collect data on gram panchayat levels to identify the number of PwDs in particular gram panchayats. The following observations were made:
  - Ration is being received by all the handicapped people.
  - PwDwho are less than 18 years and not being named in the survey list of 2002 and pension is not being given to them.
  - Disabled people are working in SHG and joining NRLM, selling market contracts, making food in Gauthan, making phenyl nirma etc.

## **MAY 2022 TO OCTOBER 2022**

- A preliminary Baseline Report was conceptualized and formulated. Following were the primary conclusions drawn:
- Special employment "guidance" camps are organized by government departments for PwD, but camps are not organized to include the PwDs in employment.
- At the rural level in Dharsiwan block, irregular work is being done like disability wages for the handicapped and deaf.
- PwDs in the surveyed gram panchayats have neither knowledge of nor accessibility to governmental schemes, skill development programs or employment opportunities.
- There is a lack of investment in the community at the rural panchayat level which does not support the employment/self-employment means of persons with disabilities.
- An in-person meeting was held with the Social Welfare Department officials on 3rd May'2022. Mr. Sinha, the senior officer, discussed the rule change regarding government guarantors for loans provided for the self-employment of PwDs.
- During the visit to the PwDs of Gram Panchayat Kathathiha and Datrenga, the Identity Card forms were filled out, submitted to the Social Welfare Department, printed, and shared with the disabled persons. Through this work, new connections were made with different people, and new disabled individuals were identified through the existing disabled persons.
- Meeting with the Block Officer, Mr. Sanju Dahariya, on 24th June 2022 regarding the collection of secondary data at the block level. The discussion centered around the data of disabled persons, specifically focusing on which types of disabilities are associated with employment. Mr. Dahariya mentioned that there is no specific data on disabled persons connected to employment, but physically handicapped and hearing-impaired individuals have been observed working in industrial areas.

- Another Survey was conducted to collect information at the rural level related to employment and self-employment of Persons with Disabilities.
- Cross disability training was organized on 24th May, 8th July, 8th August and 8th September 2022 in which PwDs and their parents from three Gram Panchayats: Kandul, Kath Thih and Datarenga participated and got introduced to each other. Information was shared with all disabled persons about their rights, laws, schemes, and the 21 types of disabilities. Detailed information was provided about self-employment related schemes. The workshop provided insights into the self-employment, employment, and skill status of disabled persons at the rural level. The disabled persons mentioned that they received information about self-employment schemes from this organization. They also expressed that they would need resources to continue working and were encouraged to stay connected with the network to benefit from the organization's plans.
- Assistance was provided in obtaining disability certificates for disabled persons in Gram Panchayats Kanta and Kandul on 20th July 2022. The effort was successful, but due to lack of cooperation from the families of some disabled persons, the certificates for the remaining disabled individuals could not be made.
- Thaneshwar assisted in facilitating employment by providing battery-operated tricycles. He applied continuously for funding, followed by consistent coordination with the government administration to procure battery-operated tricycles.



## **NOVEMBER 2022 TO APRIL 2023**

- Conducted a cross-disability training workshop with the Disabled Organization, where officials of the organization and disabled members were present on 26th Nov'22, 25th Jan'2023, 13th Feb'2023 and 10th April 2023. Thaneshwar provided detailed information about NCPEDP Javed Abidi Fellowship to all the attendees. This entailed raising awareness about their work plan, followed by informing them about rights, laws, schemes, and 21 types of disabilities. Also informed about the inclusion of disabled individuals in rural employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.
- Thaneshwar organized community meetings on 27th Nov '22 in which PwD, their parents and Panchayat representatives were present. Issues related to employment and self-employment were discussed. Everyone mentioned different issues related to employment, such as being unable to work due to disability, lack of information, and lack of funds in disabled families. The representatives of the Panchayat were suggested solutions to these problems. They mentioned that the Panchayat will include disabled individuals in employment under MGNREGA, provide guidance on self-employment, and inform about any schemes for disabled individuals.
- A job placement camp was organized at the Employment Office on 29th November 2022, where Thaneshwar facilitated the inclusion of disabled individuals. This placement camp was organized by the Doctor Reddy Foundation, a voluntary organization. He gathered information about disabled individuals involved in voluntary work, including those with physical disabilities and hearing impairments, and provided information about their inclusion in private jobs. Thaneshwar ensured the participation of disabled individuals from rural areas.

- He met with Ms. Preeti Puraina from the New Initiative NGO on 3rd July 2023 regarding the inclusion of disabled individuals in MGNREGA works under the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act 2005. He highlighted that the government has not considered national autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities in this context. Thaneshwar mentioned that applications have been submitted from the Panchayat to the state level, but full priority is still not given to disabled individuals. He sought Ms. Puraina's advice on this issue, and she suggested continuously submitting applications from the Panchayat to the state level.
- Thaneshwar held a meeting with the Panchayat representatives in Gram Panchayat Mujgahan on 27th June 2023. The meeting included the Sarpanch, Secretary, and 11 ward members. He began by introducing himself and providing detailed information about his organization and action plans. In the first phase, Thaneshwar discussed the government schemes for disabled individuals and how they could benefit from them. He then provided detailed information about the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and the 21 types of disabilities it covers. He also gave an overview of various government schemes. The representatives suggested launching an awareness campaign for disabled individuals in Mujgahan Gram Panchayat and agreed to include those who want to work according to their abilities. Other representatives also supported this initiative

Thaneshwar wrote several case studies during this period:

- Shalik Vishkarma
- Sarita Dheevar
- Khorb Hareen
- Digumbar Dhruv
- Bhajchant Sahu

- Thaneshwar met with Ms. Preeti Puraina, the president of Pehel Samaj, a non-profit organization, on 4th and 18th Jan 2023. He inquired about the work of her organization, and she explained in detail that the organization has been registered since 1995 and is active in all areas, including rural sanitation, education, and awareness about the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. She mentioned that they continuously work on these issues. Thaneshwar suggested Ms. Puraina about the possibility of inviting disabled individuals for training and supporting them in employment and self-employment opportunities. She consented and offered her cooperation.
- As part of the Social Media Campaign, content was uploaded and updated on the channels of Facebook and Instagram to proliferate awareness among the general masses.
- Communication was facilitated between various NGOs to connect disability groups with self-employment opportunities in coordination with district panchayat officials. Additionally, awareness about self-employment was raised during meetings with disability groups (SHGs) at the urban level. With the support of the district authority and district panchayat, an SHG was facilitated to open a tea stall shop at the National Court in Raipur. The department has been providing continuous training to activate this group.

### **MAY 2023 TO OCTOBER 2023**

- Thaneshwar met with Minister Ravindra Choubey of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department on 27th May 2023 to discuss including disabled individuals from Chhattisgarh in MGNREGA work under the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act 2005. He was apprised of the issue of disabled individuals not being included in MGNREGA across 29 districts in Chhattisgarh. Thaneshwar requested that this problem be resolved.

1. On July 31, 2023, He contacted the Assistant Program Officer at the MGNREGA office in the district panchayat regarding a reminder letter to include disabled individuals in MGNREGA work.
  2. Thaneshwar met with the new Program Officer, Mrs. Rupali, at the Janpad Panchayat office in Dharsiwa on 8th July 2023. He submitted a reminder letter, explaining that over the past year and a half of research, it was found that disabled individuals should be included in MGNREGA work according to their abilities. However, data shows that out of 128 registrations in the Dharsiwa block, only 11 people are included in the work, leaving many disabled individuals excluded from MGNREGA activities.
  3. He held a meeting with the parents of disabled individuals and women's groups at the village panchayat of Mujagahan, where only women were present on 17th August 2023. The women's group members mentioned that in their village, disabled individuals are still deprived of government schemes, and apart from pensions, they do not receive any other benefits from the scheme.
  4. A workshop for disabled individuals was organized on 23rd September 2023 at the panchayat level in the village of Dhaneli, attended by the disabled individuals' guardians, panchayat members, and village youth.
  5. Thaneshwar attended a one-day state-level electoral seminar on 17th October 2023 where mentors and partner organizations participated. The event was attended by officials from disabled organizations across 20 districts and representatives from NCPEDP.
- Following the state-level seminar workshop held on 17/10/2023, the action plan involved meeting with mentors and partner organizations to discuss key points for the upcoming election manifestos concerning disabled individuals. Meetings were held with Pankaj from the BJP office and Akbar Mohammad from the Congress office to present the application. The application highlighted key issues for disabled individuals. The link to the application is as follows:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W4TkIEDIZ59n-Yb0Ch5oEcWVxperCn97/view?usp=drivesdk>

# ACHIEVEMENTS

- Disabled individuals at the rural level were not included in MGNREGA work, nor were they aware of it. Through Thaneshwar's advocacy, they were able to secure a stable livelihood for themselves via MGNREGA in the following Gram Panchayats:
  - [Datrenga](#)
  - [Dhaneli](#)

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



# EXPERIENCE IN THE FELLOWSHIP

In the fellowship, the hesitation I used to feel dissipated, making it easier to advocate. I also learned about technology, such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. The fellowship offered me the opportunity to learn more about persons with disabilities and their problems, how they suffer, and the grassroots issues they face. It taught me how to implement programs and policies at the grassroots level. I learned how to conduct baseline surveys in rural areas, compile reports, and analyze data. The fellowship provided the opportunity to properly prepare presentations. It offered multiple platforms and forums to present myself and voice my issues. Before the fellowship, I never traveled outside Chhattisgarh alone. After joining, I gained travel experience.

# RESOURCES

**Follow Thaneshwar's work  
on their social media**

