



Editor's Desk

Dear friends,

This election month has seen so many people working simultaneously with one motto -"Equal rights to all " . Some efforts succeeded while some haven't , let's not forget that "The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it".

Happy Reading!!

Regards,

Bhavna Botta

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AT-The need for an user-centric approach

A conversation with Akila Surendran, Senior Engineer (Assistive Technology), National Institute of Speech & Hearing (NISH)

Assistive technology development is the new and growing field in our country ,are we going in the right direction.

Assistive Technologies (AT) address diverse areas to improve the well-being of Persons with Disability (PwDs), who often lack the means to solve pressing challenges in leading a dignified and fulfilling life. AT directly impacts lives of PwDs and hence has to be effective as well as ethical.

A human-centric approach is needed when designing and deploying the technologies. Technologists and engineers have to be open and creative in adopting design-thinking principles and collaborating with multiple stakeholders to address the challenges using technology.

In our experience at the Centre for Assistive Technology & Innovation (CATI) at the National Institute of Speech & Hearing (NISH), Trivandrum, we meet several student teams from engineering colleges who develop prototypes, before even doing their initial research properly. The gloves that translate sign language to speech is a good example to drive home this point. This gadget, in the current technology

scenario, cannot accurately capture sign language in its full complexity as used by a native signer (the Deaf person) because facial expressions and movement of the entire body are as crucial as finger movements in sign language. Moreover, expecting the user to wear these gloves to communicate also shows lack of understanding of the user psychology.

Can you explain User Centric approach in AT development

Students make their first visit to institutes like NISH with the prototype in their hand, for the final testing phase with the users. If the team developing the technology had users as well as implementation specialists from the beginning to help them identify the problem statement and to participate in every stage of development, there would be better chances for the product to succeed. This is the 'user-centric approach' which CATI has been promoting through various events, a couple of which are mentioned below.

Tell us about TENCON 2019

The track on 'User-centric Assistive Technology' at TENCON 2019 will consist of paper and poster presentations focused on projects that were co-designed by 'techies' with the user community and implemented by practitioners with an evidence-based approach. We aim to create a platform for technologists to meet the practitioners as well as users and be exposed to successful stories of how interdisciplinary

collaboration is key to solve the needs of PwDs. The deadline to apply to present at this session is June 30, 2019.

http://www.tencon2019.org/special_sessions.html .

What are the challenges in AT in India

Product availability is just the beginning and a lot of difficulties in AT lie in implementation. Rehabilitation professionals have to be creative in matching the right technology with the person and also giving them the right training to adapt to the product. Several free and open-source technologies are available and we want to empower rehabilitation professionals to make their own solutions for their clients.

Towards this, CATI is conducting the six-month 'Certificate course in Assistive Technology' at NISH from July to December, 2019. It would be an online course, with some face-to-face sessions with expert AT practitioners from India and abroad. We hope that these initiatives would bring a change in the mind-set of the society and bridge the existing gaps between technology and the end users. nishcati@nish.ac.in

Meet **SriPadmini Chennapragada** ,whose ambition is to make adapted sports a reality in India

Tell us about you ,your interest in Adapted sports

I was born and raised in Hyderabad. I am a Doctoral Candidate in Texas Woman's University's (TWU), Adapted Physical Activity/Education (APA/E) program at Denton, Texas, USA.



My research major is Adapted Physical Education while minor specializations are Educational Leadership and Sport Management. I have done my Masters in Kinesiology (APA) from TWU and Bachelor of Physiotherapy (B.P.T) from Dr. NTRUHS in India.

The goal of my doctoral research is to identify barriers (including healthcare and educational) that are affecting sport or physical activity opportunities for persons with disabilities (PwD) in India.

A chance exposure to TWU's Sherrill Teaching and Research (STAR) Lab lead me into the world of physical education and sports for PwD. The exposure to services that are provided to PwD in the United States is a major inspiration behind my interest to take APE into schools and communities of developing countries.

While India continues to grow as a Paralympic nation because of the recent successes in the Rio2016Paralympic Games, grass root realities in the country regarding accessibility, inclusion and financial empowerment of PwD continue to be neglected. My life goal is to guide India out of its Paralympics crisis using research and education programs as tools for development.

So what does this translate to reality

To create world class training opportunities for Indian Paralympic athletes and PwD through athlete empowerment programs, I am currently engaged in raising awareness through AdaptedSportsIndia movement on social media.

Since Spring 2018, I am also conducting the *Charcha* series, a small-group conversation platform where the intersection of disability and education rights of Indians with disabilities is discussed. I am currently a US Paralympics Classifier Trainee for Track & Field (Class of 2017).

Adapted Sports is an umbrella term I chose to introduce into my conversations here in India when I first started my field work. Over the time it allowed Indians who I conversed with to 'Google' the word and to read up more about what is happening in other countries. In my view the term 'adapted' sports is a unifying term that is inter-continental knowledge exchange more and more possible.

However, if you ask me, to be inclusive of all Indians who want to be participative in this movement from the confines of their own communities (considering the linguistic differences), we must keep the 'sports and physical education for persons with disabilities' term around. This is because the words used in this phrase have literal translations in most of our major Indian languages. On the contrary, the term 'adapted' could erroneously limit the term's scope.

What is the current situation of Adapted sports in India:

The simplest form of explaining this is by classifying Adapted Sports opportunities based on the level of competitiveness that one can experience by participating in them. Ideally for a sports ecosystem to exist, the most basic format anywhere in the world would be: recreational/local community level, club level, district level, state level, region and national levels. With this type of classification, Indian adapted sports scene has almost no ecosystem existing in a true sense. There are registered societies that are recognized at National level by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. However, the pathways leading to a national level scene are so convoluted and barrier filled that often times, persons with disabilities in India are ending up stuck in a broken system. This is primarily because within this ecosystem, the grassroots level organizations and local bodies all the way up to the State association practically don't exist. Or if they do, they exist only on the paper. And many local citizens are not aware of these gaps within the system.

What are Your concerns

There is a grave absence of knowledge about the system and its functioning among persons with disabilities in India. There is a critical need for promoting education and awareness programs.

The Government must be willing to look at Adapted Sport or Disability Sport from a rights-based advocacy angle. Then much can change within this world and sports can be a great enabler to push for development.

From your experience what do you think should be done and do we have specialized coaches for PWDs in sports

The answer is a Yes and No. Out of over a billion people there may be about 50 committed Indians who really know what coaching persons with disabilities is all about. There are hundreds of volunteers but in a true sense there are not many coaches who can train us. We have a long way to go before we can dream of this as a reality.

Accessible Eco-Friendly Destination

Originally featured at [-Access and Inclusion through Technology](http://globalaccessibilitynews.com/2019/04/23/in-kerala-society-works-to-promote-accessibility-in-eco-friendly-destination/)

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The Thenmala Eco-tourism Promotion Society is an effort to encourage the visually – impaired and hearing-impaired to visit Thenmala and make the state 100 per cent disabled-friendly.

Away from the chaos of the city lies Thenmala, the eco-tourism destination which is also one of the first eco-tourism destinations to have introduced the braille brochure for the visually challenged and the video brochure for the deaf.



The Thenmala Eco-tourism Promotion Society (TEPS) introduced the disabled-friendly facilities to make it easier for the differently-abled to enjoy the destination and read up on the biodiversity of the place. The 16-page braille brochure was voluntarily prepared by the students of the Government School for the Blind, Vazhuthacaud. Around 275 video brochures in sign language has been created with the help of the Government VHSS for Deaf, Jagathy.

The initiative is an effort to encourage the visually – impaired and hearing-impaired to visit Thenmala. TEPS is planning to introduce more initiatives which are both disabled-friendly and informative. “As it is the objective of the Tourism Directorate to make all the tourism centers disabled friendly, soon all the tourist spots in the city will be made disabled-friendly,” said a tourism official. The tourism department is also planning to include other facilities such as ramps, wheelchairs and toilets an all tourist spots

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