

Coverage Report

Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to foster inclusivity and accessibility

January 10, 2024

Online

The Hindu Business Line

[Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to foster inclusivity and accessibility](#)

Mphasis Ltd collaborated with AVAS for the 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0', to promote inclusivity and accessibility. The company informed that the 320-kilometer walk from Chennai to Bengaluru is to raise awareness about Universal Design, fostering environments accessible to all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

The initiative highlights the importance of architectural social responsibility, engaging communities and change along the route. It was supported by the Council of Architecture, India, the Indian Institute of Architects, the Indian Institute of Interior Designers, Vidya Sagar, and National Association for Students of Architecture.

Mphasis, collaborating under Project Uditā 2023-24, aims to contribute, educate, and raise awareness about universal design's impact on the lives of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Ayaskant Sarangi, CHRO, Mphasis, emphasised the goal of building a more inclusive future through thoughtful design.

The initiative focuses on Architectural Social Responsibility, with Gita engaging with local communities along the route, fostering meaningful interactions. Partners include Nippon Paint, TVS Ronin, Samarthyam, Wheeling Happiness, SPA Bhopal, and BVDU, Pune.

However, the shares were down by 2.66 per cent to ₹2,569 at 1:24 pm on the BSE.

Navjeevan Express

[Mphasis, AVAS tie-up to advocate Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for differently-abled](#)

Mphasis (F1 Foundation) in collaboration with AVAS announced the launch of 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0'. The 320-kilometer walk from Chennai to Bengaluru aims to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0' is the fourth edition in a series of explorative journeys of learning and exchanges on foot by Gita, an architect, following successful campaigns in 2022 and 2023.

The primary objective of this walk is to raise awareness about Universal Design and its transformative impact on fostering environments that are accessible and inclusive for everyone. The walk aims to highlight the importance of architectural social responsibility, engaging communities, and inspiring positive change along the route. Jayashree Muralidharan, IAS, Secretary for the Department of Welfare for the Differently Abled in Chennai, was present at the flag-off ceremony held at the Museum.

'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0' led by Gita Balakrishnan, champions the cause of Universal Design, promoting inclusive environments for all

The 320-kilometer walk from Chennai to Bengaluru aims to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds

I am grateful for this association between Mphasis and AVAS, and together, we envision a future where architecture catalyzes positive social change: Gita Balakrishnan, Trustee, AVAS and Ethos Foundation

This initiative is supported by the Council of Architecture, India, the Indian Institute of Architects, the Indian Institute of Interior Designers, Vidya Sagar and National Association for Students of Architecture.

Speaking on the launch of the initiative, Gita Balakrishnan, Trustee, AVAS and Ethos Foundation said, "As architects, we have a profound responsibility to shape environments that embrace everyone, regardless of their abilities. The Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause is not just a journey on foot; it's a stride towards creating a world where inclusivity is embedded in every structure and space. I am grateful for this association between Mphasis and AVAS, and together, we envision a future where architecture catalyzes positive social change."

"We are honored to collaborate with Project Udita 2023-24 and acknowledge the significant influence of universal design in fostering accessibility for all. Through this collaboration, our goal at Mphasis is to actively contribute, educate, and raise awareness about its impact on the lives of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), emphasizing the crucial importance of accessibility. Together, we hope to build a more inclusive future where everyone, irrespective of background or abilities, can thrive in a thoughtfully designed world," said Ayaskant Sarangi, CHRO, Mphasis.

The initiative underlines the importance of Architectural Social Responsibility, a cause close to Gita's heart. Gita, carrying presentations and flash cards, will engage with local communities along the route, fostering meaningful interactions and spontaneous exchanges.

Other partners of this initiative include Nippon Paint, TVS Ronin, Samarthyam, Wheeling Happiness, SPA Bhopal, and BVDU, Pune.

This Week India

[Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities](#)

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National Chronicle

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Equity Bulls

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Tradealone

[Mphasis and AVAS Spearhead 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk](#)

Mphasis, in collaboration with AVAS, has initiated the 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0,' a 320-kilometer trek from Chennai to Bengaluru. This impactful walk aims to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for people of all ages and abilities, fostering a more accessible world.

Championing Universal Design

Led by Gita Balakrishnan, an architect deeply committed to inclusivity, this walk champions the cause of Universal Design. It emphasizes the significance of architectural social responsibility, advocating for spaces that embrace everyone, irrespective of their background or abilities.

Promoting Positive Social Change

The walk's primary goal is to spotlight Universal Design's transformative impact on creating accessible environments. Further, by engaging local communities en route, Gita aims to foster meaningful interactions, spreading awareness, and driving spontaneous exchanges.

Collaborative Vision: Mphasis and AVAS

Ayaskant Sarangi, CHRO of Mphasis, expresses the collaborative vision, stating, "Through this initiative, Mphasis aims to contribute, educate, and raise awareness about universal design's vital role in the lives of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Our goal is to build a more inclusive future for everyone."

Support and Partnerships

Supported by various institutions like the Council of Architecture, India, and the Indian Institute of Architects, among others, this initiative involves partnerships with organizations like Nippon Paint, TVS Ronin, Samarthyam, and more.

Join the movement and be part of this transformative stride towards a more inclusive and accessible world!

The Hindu

[Disability is not in people but in the system, which does not allow opportunity and spaces'](#)

It was raining when architect Gita Balakrishnan began traversing the 300-odd km between Chennai and Bengaluru on January 7, seeking to raise awareness about universal architectural design and accessibility. On the second day of her walk, she noticed six visually-challenged girls walking in a line, trying to negotiate the potholes and puddles on a Chennai road.

“I was thinking to myself that if I found it difficult, what a challenge it must be for these girls,” said the 55-year-old at a closing ceremony to mark the end of this walk, held at the Museum of Art and Photography (MAP), Bengaluru, on Sunday. “It was almost like a sign reminding me that this is what I was walking for.”

The New Indian Express

[A walk to remember](#)

In 1987, when Punjab was grappling with chaos and violence, actor Sunil Dutt and his daughter Priya Dutt commenced a 2,000-kilometer, 76-day Mahashanti Padyatra (foot trip) from Bombay to Amritsar (Golden Temple) to promote communal unity. In 2017, when Gita Balakrishnan read about this walk, she was blown away by the crux of this concept of creating awareness. “I thought it would be lovely to discover India on foot. And it took me almost five years to do it. Initially, the idea was to explore the five climatic zones, along with students, but eventually, I zeroed in on a solo walk from Kolkata to Delhi. It was important for me to do it alone as it was also a personal journey. The images of all the migrant workers walking back during lockdown struck me very hard. So I committed to that first walk in July 2021,” shares the 55-year-old architect.

This year, Gita has set out on a walk from Chennai to Bengaluru in the Walk for Arcause 4.0. The 320-kilometer foot tour, hosted by Mphasis in collaboration with the AVAS Trust, aims to raise awareness among architects and the design community about how their work may promote inclusion and accessibility via social design.

A personal mission

Gita’s first walk was 1,700 km, the longest among all her walks. In October 2022, she set off to Dhaka. In September 2023, she ventured on a short walk from Konark to Puri and then to Bhubaneswar. The recent walk, she shares, provided a chance to connect with varied group of participants, including people with disabilities, architecture students, the elderly, and NGO representatives, along the way to find unique ideas for responsible design.

The walk that started from The Museum of Possibilities, Chennai, on January 7, is set to end on January 28 at the Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru. Gita says, “There is an empowerment corridor at the Marina beach which is made of wood by the Museum of Possibilities. It is the only place where people with disabilities can walk up to the water or wheel themselves in a wheelchair as walking on sand can be very difficult. The Museum of Possibilities demonstrates how common people can make small changes in their own homes to make things convenient for persons with disabilities. So starting the walk from a place like that was a fabulous experience.”

Inculcating empathy

Gita affirms that this walk is very different from the earlier walks where she was clocking a lot more in terms of mileage. She says, “I was doing 25 to 40 kilometers and the average was about 30 to 32 kilometers per day. So this time, there is a clear focus on universal design and its accessibility where every day a formal interaction is curated. I need about two and a half hours every day for the interaction itself. So the target of walking this time is not more than 20 kilometers a day.”

She wakes up early and leaves by 4.30 am, before sunrise. She says, “The south of India wakes up early. In certain locations where I have walked before, the first one and a half hours will be spent in contemplation and then you start meeting people. Here, I start meeting people very early. Even if there is a small group, I stop and chat. If kids are going to school, I sit and chat with them. I carry a laptop with presentations for the formal presentations where I

interact after the walk is over. For the informal ones, we carry flashcards, colourful ones that tell stories.” Narrating one interaction she had, Gita says, “I met Prabhakar, a wheelchair user, who’s playing in the Tamil Nadu Wheelchair Cricket Team. He has played in Odisha and other places. I asked him how the city and all the travelling are for him. He shared that he was quite comfortable because he had a motorised wheelchair. He is also a lab technician and the hospital is equipped to take care of his needs. However, he mentioned that getting on a train is a bit of a task. He has to get out of his wheelchair and crawl up the steps. Problems like these have to do with design, it’s just a matter of thinking. So all designers need to keep these things in mind when they are designing.”

On a parting note, Gita says that the walk is about bringing issues to the forefront and developing empathy in people.

Deccan Herald[Architect ends walk with 'purple hiring' plea](#)

The final lap of Gita Balakrishnan's universal accessibility walk, 'Mphasis AVAS Walk for Arcause 4.0,' spanning 335 km, ended on Sunday morning with the last 5 km stretch from Karnataka Spastics Society to Cubbon Park.

Balakrishnan, a 55-year-old architect, walked for the cause of inclusivity from Chennai to Bengaluru, accompanied by delegates from the field of architecture, institutes, students, and NGOs working towards the cause, as well as other avid runners from Bengaluru.

All those who participated in the walk gathered at the Museum of Art and Photography, a space designed for universal accessibility, for an interaction with Balakrishnan. The event began with song and dance performances and culminated in serious discussions on making the world more inclusive and accessible for all, especially persons with disabilities.

She mentioned that even though public places are becoming more inclusive in terms of accessibility, workplaces and organizations have a significant role to play in creating more inclusive spaces. She advocated for concepts like 'purple hiring' (creating roles exclusively for persons with disabilities) to become the norm rather than an exception. Delegates and experts from the architectural field also suggested that parks and playing areas should become more inclusive.

Balakrishnan emphasised how our society has failed in designing inclusive spaces that are accessible to people with disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments. During her presentation of the journey, she shared her experiences of walking through rain, sunshine, and both good and bad roads, which introduced her to places and people who showed an abundance of warmth and love.

South First

[Walk for change: This architect is walking from Chennai to Bengaluru to spread awareness on inclusive design](#)

There wasn't even a tad bit of tiredness in Gita Balakrishnan's voice as she got on a phone call from a hotel in Kolar, one of her last few pit stops before her final destination – Bengaluru. The architect-researcher-educator is currently on a 335 km walk, all the way from Chennai for the cause of Universal Design and Accessibility.

"I'm feeling well. But I will be really fine in the next couple of days as my destination is now just 40 kilometers away," she tells **South First**.

The campaign, Mphasis AVAS Walk for Arcause 4.0, is to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for all regardless of abilities and disabilities with no barriers of age, ability, and background. As the infrastructure around us is rarely conducive to people with disabilities, coming together to build a society that enables them to live an independent life is at the core of this initiative.

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Need for good design

The people she met on her first walk inspired her to work more in the field.

"On day 16 of my walk, in Ranchi, I went to a school for children with disabilities. There I met a young lady on a wheelchair who had lost her limbs. She was also the winner of the Miss India Wheelchair title. That got me thinking as to why she was Miss India Wheelchair and not just Miss India. Just because she was in a wheelchair, what's the need for a separate category?" she asks.

On day 51 of the walk she had an interaction with a visually challenged person, which made it all the more clear for her.

"I went to his home. There was a guy who met me at the door, ran up the steps, switched on the lights, opened the door, and got the harmonium out and offered to sing for me. As I was tired from a 28 km walk that day, I asked him if I could quickly meet with Harshvardhan Dube. To my surprise, he revealed that he, in fact, was Harshvardhan Dube, the visually challenged person I was there to meet," Balakrishnan recalls.

It shook her up that he was moving around so conveniently.

“He told me that in his house he could do just about anything but the minute he steps out, it is impossible for him to move around,” she adds.

After the two interactions, it became imperative to Balakrishnan that architects, designers and urban planners need to look at inclusive design as a very important matter. And that’s how the project UDita- Universal Design Is The Answer came about. She submitted the proposal to Mphasis for their CSR project and that was just the beginning.

Instilling empathy

It’s not just the walk but there are multiple projects that the team is doing alongside.

As part of this walk, Gita conducts talks and presentations at various institutions. (Supplied)

“We’re creating learning content. Architects may want to comply with universal design but they need information on what should be done differently, what materials to use, what persons with visual impairment need, and what people on wheelchairs need. We are not taught much of it in school. So we want to curate all the content in one place,” shares Balakrishnan about her vision.

There are also faculty development programs, grants to execute small projects – such as a building a ramp, putting up tactile tiles or using low-vision colours in spaces for those who need it.

“We are doing all this to instill empathy in people as well as designers. So when common people build a school or their own homes, they feel it’s important to make it accessible. I have met so many people who never imagined they would lose their vision or their limbs and when it did, they didn’t know how to cope. So we are telling people that it can happen to any of us and we need to prepare,” she says.

A learning experience

The walk so far has been a revelation, Balakrishnan tells **South First**.

“The first couple of walks were more about discoveries. I didn’t know what I was going to encounter. But here, we know that universal design is at the core of this walk. Everyday there are curated interactions at different places from schools, colleges, NGOs to railway stations and fire stations. We know what we are looking for and what questions to ask, how to probe and get responses,” she shares.

For more research, the team has visited the Anbalaya Foundation, National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), Schieffelin Institute of Health Research and Leprosy Center, Antharaganga Vidya Samsthe and Vishranthi Old Age Home.

“The sad part is that most of the time, people with disabilities have to change themselves to be accepted and be able to live a reasonably normal life. We wanted to learn how visually impaired people navigate and the challenges people with leprosy deal with. So we would ask doctors and learn about what kind of designs will help them,” she notes.

Prepping well

While on her first walk, Balakrishnan did 25-40 km at a stretch, this walk is at a much friendlier space.

“21 km has been the highest that I have done. There are around two hours of interaction that we are doing everyday. We also come across people as we go, like people on morning walks and children on school trips. I tell them what we are doing and when they show interest, we talk more.”

And how does she prepare for something so strenuous? The best way to prepare for a walk is to walk regularly, Balakrishnan says.

“I’m a runner. I don’t have a great pace but I have done four full marathons and many half ones. I started running when I was 45. Now it’s been 10 years,” she says adding that for this walk, she started training in November.

She started with a one-hour walk, then made it 1.5, 2, 3 and so on, no matter where she was.

“In between, I had to travel to the US and I walked everyday no matter how cold it got. I even walked for three hours during a layover at Singapore airport,” she says, adding that on alternate days, she works on strengthening her lower body with squats, lunges and other exercises.

Facing challenges

Being mentally fit is also important, she stresses.

“You are used to certain luxuries when you are home. You have to throw them out and accept what you have here, sleep on different beds, eat what you get. So mentally, you should be ready,” she says, adding that she takes protein supplements while on the walks, and carries dry fruits and hydration fluids on her.

While small discomforts like acidity are bound to occur, Balakrishnan says that due to the spirit of these walks, she’s managed without falling sick.

The real challenge on the other hand, she says, is to get government officials to speak.

“We are not asking them to reveal anything about their work. In fact, some of them are doing good work, but they are not willing to share anything on camera without prior permission. We have managed to get people at NGOs, and students to speak and it’s been amazing. If I have to write to people, wait a week for permission to talk, it becomes very difficult to interact with them at all. I think it’s important that they have permission to share freely,” she points out.

Supporting through it all

Her family, Balakrishnan says, is as excited for these initiatives as she is.

“Not once have they expressed any reservation. They are always looking forward to hearing my updates. My husband is also a runner. Because of his corporate job he’s not been able to come with me for my walks. But after this year, he’s retiring and for my next walk, I will have a walking companion,” she shares.

For her future walks, Balakrishnan has a few places in mind.

“There are a few sectors that I have in mind but I’m not walking for the sake of walking. I want to tie it up with something meaningful. I want to go to Maharashtra. I’m keen on doing Kochi-Calicut someday. Punjab would be nice too,” she adds.

In the run up to her arrival in Bengaluru, her team is conducting workshops for architecture students, and doing sign language classes at Mitti Cafe, among other activities. On 28 January, there will be a commemorative walk from Cubbon Park to the Museum of Art and Photography followed by a gathering there. And at the closure, she will share her experiences through PPT and interact with the participants.

Print

Dina Thodar

டிஸைன் மூலம் உள்ளடக்கம்: மாற்றுத்திறனாளிகளுக்கான அணுகலை மேம்படுத்தும் வகையில் யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் ஐ ஆதரிப்பதற்காக Mphasis, AVAS உடன் இணைந்து செயல்படுகிறது

கீதா பாலகிருஷ்ணன் ஏற்பாடு செய்த "யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் அண்ட் அக்ச்சிபிலிட்டி வாக் ஃபார் ஆர்காஸ் 4.0", அனைவருக்கும் உள்ளடக்கிய சூழலை மேம்படுத்தி யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் க்கான காரணத்தை ஊக்குவிக்கிறது

சென்னை : Mphasis (தி1 ஃபவுண்டேஷன்) AVAS உடன் இணைந்து 'யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் மற்றும் அக்ச்சிபிலிட்டி வாக் ஃபார் ஆர்காஸ் 4.0' இன் வெளியீட்டை இன்று அறிவித்தது. சென்னையில் இருந்து பெங்களூரு வரை செல்லும் இந்த 320 கிலோமீட்டர் நடைப்பயணம், அனைத்து வயது, திறன்கள் மற்றும் பின்னணியில் உள்ள தனிநபர்களுக்கு உள்ளடக்கிய சூழலை உருவாக்குவது பற்றிய விழிப்புணர்வை ஏற்படுத்த நோக்கம் கொண்டுள்ளது. இந்த 'யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் அண்ட் அக்ச்சிபிலிட்டி வாக் ஃபார் ஆர்காஸ் 4.0' ஆனது, 2022 மற்றும் 2023 ஆம் ஆண்டுகளில் வெற்றிகரமான பிரச்சாரங்களைத் தொடர்ந்து, கட்டிடக் கலைஞர் கீதாவின் கால் நடையில் கற்றல் மற்றும் பரிமாற்றங்களின் தொடர்ச்சியான ஆய்வுப்



பயணங்களின் ஒரு வரிசையில் நான்காவது நிகழ்வாகும்.

AVAS மற்றும் Ethos ஃபவுண்டேஷன் இன் அறங்காவலர் கீதா பாலகிருஷ்ணன் இந்த முயற்சியைத் துவக்கி வைத்துப் பேசுகையில், "கட்டிடக் கலைஞர்களாக, அவர்களின் திறன்களைப் பொருட்படுத்தாமல் அனைவரையும் அரவணக்கும்

சூழலை வடிவமைக்கும் ஒரு அளவிடற்கரிய பொறுப்பை நாங்கள் கொண்டுள்ளோம். இந்த யுனிவர்சல் டிஸைன் மற்றும் அக்ச்சிபிலிட்டி வாக் ஃபார் ஆர்காஸ் வெறும் ஒரு கால் நடைப் பயணம் மாத்திரம் அல்ல; இது ஒவ்வொரு கட்டமைப்பிலும் இடத்திலும் உள்ளடக்கிய ஒரு உலகத்தை உருவாக்குவதற்கான ஒரு நீண்ட முயற்சியாகும் . Mphasis மற்றும் AVAS ஆகியவற்றுக்கு இடையேயான இந்த கூட்டுமுயற்சிக்கு நான் நன்றியுள்ளவனாக இருக்கிறேன், மேலும் கட்டிடக்கலை நேர்மறையான சமூக மாற்றத்தை ஊக்குவிக்கும் ஒரு எதிர்காலத்தை நாங்கள் ஒன்றாக கற்பனை செய்கிறோம்." என்று கூறினார்.

Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities

CHENNAI: Mphasis (F1 Foundation) in collaboration with AVAS announced the launch of 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0'. The 320-kilometer walk from Chennai to Bengaluru aims to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0' is the fourth edition in a series of explorative journeys of learning and exchanges on foot by Gita, an architect, following successful campaigns in 2022 and 2023.

The primary objective of this walk is to raise awareness about Universal Design and its transformative impact on fostering environments that are accessible and inclusive for everyone. The walk aims to highlight the importance of architectural social responsibility, engaging communities, and inspiring positive change along the route. Jayashree Mu-



ralidharan, IAS, Secretary for the Department of Welfare for the Differently Abled in Chennai, was present at the flag-off ceremony held at the Museum.

This initiative is supported by the Council of Architecture, India, the Indian Institute of Architects, the Indian Institute of Interior Designers, Vidya Sagar and National Association for Students of Architecture.

Speaking on the launch of

the initiative, Gita Balakrishnan, Trustee, AVAS and Ethos Foundation said, "As architects, we have a profound responsibility to shape environments that embrace everyone, regardless of their abilities. The Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause is not just a journey on foot; it's a stride towards creating a world where inclusivity is embedded in every structure and space. I am grateful for this

association between Mphasis and AVAS, and together, we envision a future where architecture catalyzes positive social change."

"We are honored to collaborate with Project Uditā 2023-24 and acknowledge the significant influence of universal design in fostering accessibility for all. Through this collaboration, our goal at Mphasis is to actively contribute, educate, and raise awareness about

its impact on the lives of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), emphasizing the crucial importance of accessibility. Together, we hope to build a more inclusive future where everyone, irrespective of background or abilities, can thrive in a thoughtfully designed world," said Ayaskant Sarangi, CHRO, Mphasis.

The initiative underlines the importance of Architectural Social Responsibility, a cause close to Gita's heart. Gita, carrying presentations and flash cards, will engage with local communities along the route, fostering meaningful interactions and spontaneous exchanges.

Other partners of this initiative include Nippon Paint, TVS Ronin, Samarthyam, Wheeling Happiness, SPA Bhopal, and BVDU, Pune.

Mphasis' purpose is to be the "Driver in a Driverless Car" for global enterprises by applying next-generation design, architecture, and engi-

neering services, to deliver scalable and sustainable software and technology solutions. Customer-centricity is foundational to Mphasis, and it is reflected in Mphasis' Front2Back™ Transformation approach. Front2Back™ uses the exponential power of cloud and cognitive computing to provide a hyper-personalized (C=X2C2TM=1) digital experience to clients and their end customers. Mphasis' Service Transformation approach helps 'shrink the core' through the application of digital technologies across legacy environments within an enterprise, enabling businesses to stay ahead in a changing world. Mphasis' core reference architectures and tools, speed and innovation with domain expertise and specialization, combined with an integrated sustainability and purpose-led approach across its operations and solutions are key to building strong relationships with marquee clients.

Deccan Chronicle

Awareness walk from Chennai to Bengaluru

Chennai: A 320-kms walk from Chennai to Bengaluru to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, was flagged off over the weekend.

The walk aims to highlight the importance of architectural social responsibility, engaging communities, and inspiring positive change along the route. Jayashree Muralidharan, Secretary, Welfare for the Differently Abled in Chennai, was present at the flag-off ceremony held at the Museum.

The initiative is supported by the Council of Architecture, India, the Indian Institute of Architects, the Indian Institute of Interior Designers, Vidya Sagar and National Association for Students of Architecture.

Gita Balakrishnan, Trustee, AVAS and Ethos Foundation said, "As architects, we have a responsibility to shape environments that embrace everyone, regardless of their abilities. The Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause is not just a journey on foot; it's a stride towards creating a world where inclusivity is embedded in every structure and space."

Hello Madras

Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities



Chennai, Jan 10 2024: Mphasis (Mphasis Foundation) in collaboration with AVAS announced the launch of 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0'. The 320-kilometer walk from Chennai to Bengaluru aims to raise awareness about creating inclusive environments for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk for Arcause 4.0' is the fourth edition in a series of explorative journeys of learning and exchanges on foot by Gita, an architect, following successful campaigns in 2022 and 2023.

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Other partners of this initiative include Nippon Paint, TVS Ronin, Samarthyam, Wheeling Happiness, SPA Bhopal, and BVDU, Pune.

The Hindu

Disability is not in people but in the system: Gita Balakrishnan

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

It was raining when architect Gita Balakrishnan began traversing the 300-odd km between Chennai and Bengaluru on January 7, seeking to raise awareness about universal architectural design and accessibility.

On the second day of her walk, she noticed six visually-challenged girls walking in a line, trying to negotiate the potholes and puddles on a Chennai road.

“I was thinking to myself that if I found it difficult, what a challenge it must be for these girls,” said the 55-year-old at a closing ceremony to mark the end of this walk, held at the Museum of Art and Photography (MAP), Bengaluru, on Sunday.

“It was almost like a sign reminding me that this is what I was walking for.”

This walk is the fourth one that Ms. Balakrishnan has undergone to spread a message under the ‘Walk for Arcause’ initiative of the Ethos Foundation, of which she is the founder-trustee.

She has also previously undertaken a 98.8-kilometre trek from Konark to Bhubaneswar, a 1,700-kilometre journey from Kolkata to New Delhi, and a 306-kilometre walk from Kolkata to Dhaka, something she spoke about in brief at the session.

“I had some fantastic experiences,” she recalled at the MAP event, which followed her last lap of the journey – the 5-km stretch between the Spastics Society of Karnataka, Indiranagar, and Cubbon Park, where a commemorative walk was held.

The walk was followed by a session with Rama Krishnamachari, the accessibility auditor and con-

sultant at MAP, who took participants on a tour of the premises, pointing out the details that made the space an inclusive one.

At the closing ceremony, which followed these other sessions, Ms. Balakrishnan also shared anecdotes and experiences gleaned from this most recent walking experience.

“Disability is not in people but in the system, which does not allow opportunity and spaces,” said Ms. Balakrishnan, who has collaborated with Mphasis (F1 Foundation) and the AVAS Trust for ‘Walk for Arcause 4.0’.

“Are we designing spaces fairly for everyone ...(it) is something we need to ask ourselves,” she said, indicating that following a one-size-fits-all approach in design can be deeply problematic.

“Inclusivity is no longer an add-on,” Ms. Balakrishnan remarked.

Architect ends walk with 'purple hiring' plea

BENGALURU, DHNS

The final lap of Gita Balakrishnan's universal accessibility walk, 'Mphasis AVAS Walk for Arcause 4.0,' spanning 335 km, ended on Sunday morning with the last 5 km stretch from Karnataka Spastics Society to Cubbon Park.

Balakrishnan, a 55-year-old architect, walked for the cause of inclusivity from Chennai to Bengaluru, accompanied by delegates from the field of architecture, institutes, students, and NGOs working towards the cause, as well as other avid runners from Bengaluru.

All those who participated in the walk gathered at the Museum of Art and Photography,



Gita Balakrishnan, a 55-year-old architect, walked for the cause of inclusivity from Chennai to Bengaluru, accompanied by other activists. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

a space designed for universal accessibility, for an interaction with Balakrishnan. The event began with song and dance performances and culminated in serious discussions on making the world more inclusive and accessible for all, especially

persons with disabilities.

She mentioned that even though public places are becoming more inclusive in terms of accessibility, workplaces and organizations have a significant role to play in creating more inclusive spaces.

She advocated for concepts like 'purple hiring' (creating roles exclusively for persons with disabilities) to become the norm rather than an exception. Delegates and experts from the architectural field also suggested that parks and playing areas should become more inclusive.

Balakrishnan emphasised how our society has failed in designing inclusive spaces that are accessible to people with disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments. During her presentation of the journey, she shared her experiences of walking through rain, sunshine, and both good and bad roads, which introduced her to places and people who showed an abundance of warmth and love.

Architect Gita Balakrishnan embarks on a journey from Chennai to Bengaluru on foot to create awareness on inclusive architecture

DIYA MARIA GEORGE

IN 1987, when Punjab was grappling with chaos and violence, actor Sunil Dutt and his daughter Priya Dutt commenced a 2,000-kilometer, 76-day Mahashanti Padyatra (foot trip) from Bombay to Amritsar (Golden Temple) to promote communal unity. In 2017, when Gita Balakrishnan read about this walk, she was blown away by the crux of this concept of creating awareness. "I thought it would be lovely to discover India on foot. And it took me almost five years to do it. Initially, the idea was to explore the five climatic zones, along with students, but eventually, I zeroed in on a solo walk from Kolkata to Delhi. It was important for me to do it alone as it was also a personal journey. The images of all the migrant workers walking back during lockdown struck me very hard. So I committed to that first walk in July 2021," shares the 55-year-old architect.

This year, Gita has set out on a walk from Chennai to Bengaluru in the Walk for Arcasue 4.0. The 320-kilometer foot tour, hosted by Mphasis in collabora-



tion with the AVAS Trust, aims to raise awareness among architects and the design community about how their work may promote inclusion and accessi-

bility via social design.

A personal mission

Gita's first walk was 1,700 km, the longest among all her walks.

In October 2022, she set off to Dhaka. In September 2023, she ventured on a short walk from Konark to Puri and then to Bhubaneswar. The recent walk, she shares, provided a chance to connect with varied group of participants, including people with disabilities, architecture students, the elderly, and NGO representatives, along the way to find unique ideas for responsible design.

The walk that started from The Museum of Possibilities, Chennai, on January 7, is set to end on January 28 at the Museum of Art and Photography, Bengaluru. Gita says, "There is an empowerment corridor at the Marina beach which is made of wood by the Museum of Possibilities. It is the only place where people with disabilities can walk up to the wa-

ter or wheel themselves in a wheelchair as walking on sand can be very difficult. The Museum of Possibilities demonstrates how common people can make small changes in their own homes to make things convenient for persons with disabilities. So starting the walk from a place like that was a fabulous experience."

Inculcating empathy

Gita affirms that this walk is very different from the earlier walks where she was clocking a lot more in terms of mileage. She says, "I was going 25 to 40 kilometers and the average was about 30 to 32 kilometers per day. So this time, there is a clear focus on universal design and its accessibility where

every day a formal interaction is curated. I need about two and a half hours every day for the interaction itself. So the target of walking this time is not more than 20 kilometers a day."

She wakes up early and leaves by 4.30 am, before sunrise. She says, "The south of India wakes up early. In certain locations where I have walked before, the first one and a half hours will be spent in contemplation and then you start meeting people. Here, I start meeting people very early. Even if there is a small group, I stop and chat. If kids are going to school, I sit and chat with them. I carry a laptop with presentations for the formal presentations where I interact after the walk is over. For the informal ones, we carry flashcards, colourful ones that tell stories." Narrating one interaction she had, Gita says, "I

met Prabhakar, a wheelchair user, who's playing in the Tamil Nadu Wheelchair Cricket Team. He has played in Odisha and other places. I asked him how the city and all the travelling are for him. He shared that he was quite comfortable because he had a motorised wheelchair. He is also a lab technician and the hospital is equipped to take care of his needs. However, he mentioned that getting on a train is a bit of a task. He has to get out of his wheelchair and crawl up the steps. Problems like these have to do with design, it's just a matter of thinking. So all designers need to keep these things in mind when they are designing."

On a parting note, Gita says that the walk is about bringing issues to the forefront and developing empathy in people.



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Gita Balakrishnan, architect.

Online		
Date	Publication/ Portal	Headline
January 08, 2024	The Hindu Business Line	Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to foster inclusivity and accessibility
January 09, 2024	Navjeevan Express	Mphasis, AVAS tie-up to advocate Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for differently-abled
January 08, 2024	This Week India	Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities
January 08, 2024	National Chronicle	Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities
January 08, 2024	Equity Bulls	Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities
January 08, 2024	Tradealone	Mphasis and AVAS Spearhead 'Universal Design and Accessibility Walk
January 29, 2024	The Hindu	Disability is not in people but in the system, which does not allow opportunity and spaces'
January 27, 2024	The New Indian Express	A walk to remember
January 29, 2024	Deccan Chronicle	Architect ends walk with 'purple hiring' plea
January 28, 2024	South First	Walk for change: This architect is walking from Chennai to Bengaluru to spread awareness on inclusive design

Print			
Date	Publication	Edition	Headline
January 09, 2024	Dina Thodar	Chennai	Inclusion by Design: Mphasis works with AVAS to support Universal Design to improve accessibility for people with disabilities
January 09, 2024	Deccan Chronicle	Chennai	Awareness Walk from Chennai to Bangalore
January 10, 2024	Evening Tamilnadu	Chennai	Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities
January 10, 2024	Hello Madras	Chennai	Inclusivity through Design: Mphasis collaborates with AVAS to advocate for Universal Design, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities

January 29, 2024	The Hindu	Bengaluru	Disability is not in people but in the system: Gita Balakrishnan
January 29, 2024	Deccan Herald	Bengaluru	Architect ends walk with 'purple hiring' plea
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