

Inclusive Design for Regaining Lost Identity: Accessible, Aesthetic and Effortless Clothing

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Abstract : Clothing is a need for all humans. Besides serving the commonly understood function of protection, it also is a means of self-expression and adornment. However, most clothing for people with disabilities is developed to respond to their functional needs merely. Such clothing aggravates feelings of inadequacy and lowers their self-esteem. Investigations into apparel-related barriers faced by women with disabilities and their expectations and desires about clothing pointed to a huge void in terms of well-designed inclusive clothing. The incredible stories and experiences shared by the participants in this research highlighted the fact that people with disabilities wanted to feel, dress, and look at how they wanted to look by wearing what they wanted to wear. Clothing should be about self-expression – reflecting their moods, taste, and style and not limited to fulfilling merely their functional needs. Inclusive Design for Regaining Lost Identity was undertaken to design and develop accessible clothing that is inclusive and fashionable to foster psycho-social well-being and to enhance the self-esteem of women with disabilities. The research explored inclusive design solutions for the saree – a traditional Indian garment for women. The saree is an elaborate garment that requires precise draping, which makes the saree complicated to wear and inconvenient to carry, particularly for women with physical disabilities. For many women in India, the saree remains the customary dress, especially for work and occasions, yet minimal advancement has been made to enhance its accessibility and ease of use. The project followed a qualitative research approach whilst incorporating a combination of methods, which consisted of a questionnaire, an interview, and co-creation workshops. The research adhered to the principles of applied research such that the designed products aim to solve a problem that is functional and purposeful. In order to reduce the complications and to simplify the wrapping of the garment fabric around the body, different combinations of pre-stitching of the layers of the saree were created to investigate the outcomes. The technology of 3D drawing and printing was employed to develop feasible fasteners keeping in mind the participants' movement limitations and to enhance their agency with these newly designed fasteners. The underlying principle of the project is that every individual should be able to access life the way they wish to and should not have to compromise their desires due to their disability.

Keywords : accessibility, co-creation, design ethics, inclusive

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