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### "Socially Excluded and Ignored"—The Disabled

#### ABSTRACT

There are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypes about people with disability. These include that they are a danger, a burden, and a threat. It is not uncommon to hear people express the view that people with a disability would be better off in institutions with people of their own kind. There also appears to be a common belief that people with disability are not able to make significant contribution to the community, and that they are somehow not of equal value as human beings and members of the community. Many people have low expectations of people with disability, believing that they cannot learn or are not able to do anything useful. They are often denied opportunities to experience life, to explore their potential and achieve success, because it is assumed that their potential is limited. It is often stated that people with disability are tolerated in the community, but tolerance is not acceptance and genuine inclusion.

In a society where the values that predominate are power and wealth, physical prowess and beauty, intelligence, competition, autonomy and self-control, many people with disability are marginalized and devalued. It could well be that many people are fearful about engaging with and including people who live with disability as a result of lack of knowledge, and that people with disability are treated as 'the other' rather than involved.

Key Words: Disabled, Marginalized, Devalued, Inclusion

## PAPER

Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairment's, activity limitations and participation instructions. It is an impairment that may be cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, physical, and sensory or combination of these. It substantially affects persons' life activities and may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime. It is a complex phenomenon, constructed by social expectations and institutions. The social construction of disability is the idea that disability is constructed as a social response to deviance from the normal. Persons with disabilities often face stigma. People frequently react to disabled presence with fear, pity, patronization, intrusive gaze, revulsion or disregard. These reactions can and often do, exclude persons with disabilities from accessing social spaces along with the benefits and resources these spaces provide. This stigma functions to marginalize persons with disabilities. Additionally, facing stigma can cause harm to psycho - emotional well-being of the person being stigmatized.

People living with disability are among the most marginalized and disadvantaged social groups in most societies. They experience two broad types of discriminations: The first dimension relates to social attitudes that privileges difference and reflects intolerance of the conditions of impairments. The second dimension relates to inadequate built environment which makes it difficult for disabled people to access a range of services and participate in a number of social and economic activities. Many disabled people often experience discrimination and encounter barrier to participation in all aspects of society, including access to education, transportation economic opportunities, health care systems etc.

Mahatma Gandhi notes that "the measure of civilization is how it treats its weakest members". Society has incapacitated people with disability through a combination of discrimination, intolerance and lack of attention. Disability has been interrupted to reside in society, rather than in impaired bodies. Disability resides in society because of the social constraints and physical restrictions that are imposed on people with impairments.

## ISSUES RELATED TO THE DISABLED

In the fast developing world, lot of favorable things have happened and are still happening in a much faster pace. Aesthetics and Technology has come hand in hand, creating beautiful barriers in the environment around. In addition to this is the disability insensitive attitude, which promotes the barriers first hand.

The barriers in the society are mainly classified into two: the environmental & attitudinal barriers. The major environmental barriers are of two types: Architectural and Communication. Lack of information is another major barrier faced by disabled People.

Architectural barriers in buildings include lack of Ramps, Railings, Signage, Braille Print, Adequate Spacing, Slip Resistant Flooring, Accessible Toilets and Chairs, Switches, Shelves, Wash Basins, Taps & Telephone at an accessible height. This kind of infrastructure help disabled people to be at ease and do their routines with minimum or no support. Apart from becoming self-reliant, such an internal atmosphere boosts their self-confidence and avoids unnecessary delay.

In Public places also, there is a need for Ramps & Hand Rails, Kerb Ramps in Pavements; Seats, Taps, Telephone Booths, Wash Basins – at an accessible height, Braille Print, Road Signals with adequate timing, Audio Visual Announcements and usage of bright colors, Space For Wheel Chair Users, Accessible Parking Space, Sign Language, Slip Resistant Grab Bars & Flooring, Modified Play Area / Equipments and Rules. After all it is the right of disabled people to be included in all walks of life and is not possible without an accessible / barrier free environment. The Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 provides for a barrier free environment in all public places and a barrier free transport system.

It is interesting to note that making a building disabled friendly costs just 2 percent of the total building costs. A lot of cost effective adaptations can be made within and outside buildings to make them exclusively barrier free. Mr.S.Ramakrishnan, President of Amar Seva Sangam, an NGO working for disabled People, is using a lift working on pulleys at his residence. This lift is very simple, easy to manipulate as well as cost effective. Such innovative and simple techniques

can be adapted to suit the needs of disabled people as well as to implement the appropriate provisions of the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995.

Most accessibility structures/designs have specific standards/measurements that have been accepted universally.

Ramps should have a gradient of ratio 1:12, Parking Space for disabled people to be within 30 Meters of main entrance, Handrails to be Circular and 40-45mm in diameter, Doors to have 900 mm Clear Opening, Toilets should have 1750 x 2000 mm (minimum) Clear Floor Space and Wash Basins should be provided with a Knee Space of 760 mm Width; 200 mm depth and 650 - 680 mm height.

Communication is another area where there is not enough focus paid upon. People having communication barriers are the ones who face lot of hardships in socialization. At present, Communication is bound within language and speech. In reality, much more communication can happen in silence. There is an inappropriate school of thought stating that people with communication disabilities cannot communicate or don't know to communicate. The fact is reverse. Any one and every one communicates in a day-to-day living. But, the society that claims to be communicative or communicable doesn't bother to receive or understand what the disabled person is communicating. It is the society's responsibility to remove the barriers in communication, so that any person can communicate in the way he/she wants and is comfortable with; it is just the right to expression that any person would enjoy.

Major communication barriers in the society include lack of Readers, Braille Material / Manuals / Magazines / Government Orders/ Gazette / News Papers and Scribe Facility for people with Visual Impairment, lack of Sign Language & Sign Language Interpreters for People with Hearing Impairment, lack of Communication Aids and technical devices for people with severe disabilities and a lack of importance to research on Alternative & Augmentative Communication, which hinders a huge amount of human resource in contributing towards the development of the country. Apart from these, there is an immense need for disabled friendly curriculum and examination system, which involve a variety of options and adaptations.

The areas that get affected due to these barriers include Education and Information leading to intellectual disability, Employment leading to financial disability, Play, Leisure and Health

leading to Health issues, all the above affecting the Rights and Contribution of disabled people leading to isolation from society, affecting their Self Esteem, Social Respect and Dignity of Life leading to an emotional disability; an all round life of disability.

The real issue behind these barriers is the disability insensitive attitude of the society. Even a stringent law can do very less unless there is a change in the mindset of people and a willingness to accept and respect disabled people. There is an attitude of relating a disabled person with his or her disability and not to his/her abilities. The society should be dynamic enough to accept all differences, as the world exists only because of its differences and the natural balance among them. It also becomes the duty of each member of the society to respect individuality and mutual rights of disabled members of the society. The society should develop a natural tendency to provide equal opportunities to disabled people, whereby they can enjoy their rights as well as contribute to the society. All citizens should have the attitude to value the contribution of disabled people as they do their own. For such an attitudinal shift to happen the society should believe in disabled people that they are like anybody else.

By creating special schools and by creating special teachers in the country - in the world in fact - a big mistake has been committed. If there were no special schools, no special teachers, probably the society would have learnt over the years to cater to different disabilities. By segregating them, somewhere, the main stream schools have never felt it to be their responsibility to include all children.

It is a well known fact that enrollment in mainstream school alone is not the answer. It is important for the education system to respond to the needs of disabled people. Even the integrated education system is catering only to mildly disabled people. Whoever receives special education never gets standardized curriculum; and a very few reach up to college education or even 11th or 12th class.

Least priority has been given to the education of disabled children, due to the following reasons:

- (1) The attitude of the parents, family members and the community is that, there is no use of a disabled child being educated and it is a wastage of time, money and other

resources, as they think that a disabled child / adult is not productive in any way. The capitalist mentality of the society also prevents the disabled child from enjoying the Right to Education as conferred by the Constitution of India.

- (2) When there are other siblings for a disabled child, the disabled child gets the least priority in education compared to his/her siblings, either due to poverty of parents or the attitudinal barriers in the society. Poverty and disability is a vicious circle. Due to poverty, education is denied for children. Even if parents from the economically weaker sections of the society want to educate their children, the opportunity of a disabled child going to school is a rarity, as the cost involved in educating a disabled child is more when compared to a non- disabled child, due to the architectural barriers in the society.
- (3) The prevalence of architectural and environmental barriers such as inaccessible built environment, school buildings, roads, transport and so on. Many times parents will have to carry their disabled child due to the architectural and environmental barriers. They cannot use public transport and private transport is too expensive for them. Thus as the child grows older their environment is restricted to their home.
- (4) The education system is also inaccessible for many disabled students, as the teaching methods, learning aids, the curriculum itself and the evaluation system is not disabled friendly. Braille books and materials, readers for students with visual impairment, sign language interpretation and teaching are not available in most schools. Even when alternative teaching methods are used, the same methods are not used for evaluation. For example if a child is taught using the Picture Communication System they are not evaluated using this system. This allows little opportunity for disabled people to continue with their education. Augmentative and Alternative Communication Techniques are confined to few special schools.

- (5) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) talks of Education for all. The fact remains that many disabled people are not enrolled under this scheme due to the severity of disability. Also teachers are not trained in inclusive education.
  
- (6) The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 does not speak of reservations in Higher Educational Institutions and only talks about open universities. Many disabled People are denied entry into professional courses like MBA, Engineering and Medicine due to their disability.

Disability is cultural and ideological in creation. It is the society that needs to change the mindset for the disabled people and create tolerance and acceptance for them. “The Disabled People” are not "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social segregation but "Humans" with rights, capable of claiming those rights, taking decisions for their own lives based on their free and informed consent and becoming active members of the society.

FAME India, school for children with special needs aims to improve the access to schools for all such children regardless of their background. The curriculum aims at teaching each child to live a life of dignity with a belief that their small little way will contribute to make them self-reliant. They are striving to “make each child’s life count”.

Like Fame India there are many organizations running for the cause of making the life of people with special needs fulfilling. We just need to embrace them with open arms and minds.

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