

RECENT TRENDS IN WELFARE OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED PERSON'S IN INDIA

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Introduction

The Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 indicates that disabled persons should have access to education at all levels. Though service to disabled children in India is more than 100 years old, the coverage of these children in the formal school system is not even 5 per cent. The report of manpower development published by the Rehabilitation Council of India reveals that more than 1,00,000 teachers will be needed in the next ten years to cater to the educational needs of disabled children in schools. Bachelor's and master's level teacher programmes are needed for preparing teachers to help disabled children realise the objective of education for all. The University Grants Commission (UGC) will support selected university departments and colleges of education in the country to offer special education, with financial assistance available under the programme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, or within the available resources of the UGC.

Review

The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all including Person with Disabilities”.

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According to the India Census 2001, there are 2.19 crore people with Disabilities, who constitute 2.13 percent of the total population. According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 5% of our population of 102 crores is with disabilities, According to the 2001 census, there are 21,906,769 disabled persons in India and in Manipur alone there are about 28,376 out of which 15,456 are males and 12,920 are females. This was the only Census from which the category of 'differently abled' persons was added in the census of India. The Constitution of India declares that, all men are same in the eyes of the law and should be given equal opportunities irrespective of their caste, creed, sex or place of birth. In more specific terms, we have Article 41 of the Constitution which prescribes that "the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provisions for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of disablement".

According to a another conservative estimate, 6% of India's population is disabled, which when compared to other nations is one of the lowest. For example the disabled population of Australia, UK and USA is estimated at 18%, 14.2% and 9%, respectively. It is difficult to believe that India has lesser number of physically disabled persons given the size of its total population, which is estimated to be around 1.03 billion. Yet, in spite of the low number of figures, one would surely agree that the Indian state has not taken up enough measures for the welfare of this group of minority. At the same time, 'physical disability' is considered more as a 'social issue' rather than a 'medical one'. Stigma is attached upon a mentally retarded or physically challenged person. They are discriminated towards leading a dignified life in our society.

The law of Disability Act 1995 is entitled 'Employment'. Clause 41 categorically mandates incentives to employers, both in public and private sectors, who ensure that at least 5% of their work force is composed of persons with disabilities. However, on any given occasion, any survey conducted in any private or public sector will give a painfully low number of employees who are physically challenged. The figure is heartbreakingly low at only about 0.05% disabled employees. In spite of the existing scenario of inadequacies, we cannot altogether ignore the efforts of the State towards giving equal opportunities to this group of minorities. It has been felt that persons with disabilities need special arrangements in the

environment for their mobility and independent functioning. It is also a fact that many institutes have architectural barriers that disabled persons find difficult for their day-to-day functioning.

But, this casual acceptance or attitude of the society towards the physically challenged or deformed, gives them the much needed space/privacy, and consequently, a scope to make them feel that they are respected for their individuality and courage- that they are not an outcaste and to not let them succumb to a world of self pity and helplessness. Everyone should be insensitive to one's deformity/disability. No one should stare. Everyone should be brave enough to have the heart and level of tolerance to accept them just as a normal human being capable of living an independent and dignified life just like any one of us. This creates a belief that given the right opportunity and platform, they can be as good as any human beings.

The “inclusive growth” rings hollow when seen in relation to the rights, needs and requirements of the disabled or differently abled population in India. It is a shame that a disabled child in “high growth” India cannot expect even a tiny benefit of that growth to accrue to her, mainly because she is invisible to policy makers. Worse, in India there is an extremely backward approach to the disabled, who are often subjected to extreme forms of cruelty. No society can consider itself civilised which fails to respect the differently abled. Successive governments and mainstream political parties have utterly failed disabled citizens by ignoring and neglecting their issues. Today even the numbers of the differently abled are underestimated because the census methodology depends purely on self-reporting. Recent estimates have put the numbers at as much as 6 crore (6% of the population). 75% of persons with disabilities live in rural areas, compounding their misery further. Disabled women and girl children suffer from the added victimization of gender and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Disability is also a contributing factor for poverty, reduced access to education and health, exclusion and discrimination for both persons with disabilities and their families.

The welfare and advancement of the disabled or differently abled is crucially linked to the recognition of their rights as equal citizens, not as recipients of charity. Policies have to recognise the different needs and requirements of disabled persons. India has a law, The Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, which came about due to the struggle of disabled persons and their organisations, and provides a framework for a right based approach.

Persons with disabilities require special aids and appliances for their daily functioning. These aids are available via various schemes of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Availability of devices such as low-vision aids, scanners, mobility devices, etc., in the institutes would enrich the educational experiences of persons with disabilities.

However, it is necessary, on the basis of the experience of the working of the Act, to further strengthen it. The present overemphasis and dependence on NGOs and the private sector should be balanced with a greater responsibility for the government. At present, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal agency for the issues of the disabled. Apart from distributing funds to NGOs there is precious little that this ministry does. In any case, the whole approach is incorrect. Since the issues of the disabled include education, employment, etc., they have to be mainstreamed through special cells into the agendas of all ministries concerned with government schemes and projects like HRD, rural employment, other employment or self-employment schemes, urban development, etc. A central monitoring cell, preferably under the Prime Minister, is also essential, to ensure that it is taken seriously.

The Department for Rehabilitation of the Disabled was created by bifurcating the Department of Social Welfare during 1993 to deal exclusively with the Welfare of the Disabled. Subsequently, this Department was upgraded as the office of the State Commissioner for Disabled during 1999 as per the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. This Department aims to provide comprehensive welfare services, which include provisions of special education, vocational training, job placement, and assistance for self employment, free supply of aids and appliances with the ultimate objective of making differently abled persons self-reliant and economically independent. Persons with disabilities require special aids and appliances for their daily functioning. These aids are available via various schemes of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Availability of devices such as low-vision aids, scanners, mobility devices, etc., in the institutes would enrich the educational experiences of persons with disabilities This Department is headed by the State Commissioner for the Differently Abled who is assisted by Deputy Director and other officers in the Commissioner ate for the Welfare of the Differently Abled and by the District Differently Abled Welfare Officers in the Districts. Budget allocation from each of these ministries for empowering differently abled people has to be made.

Tamil Nadu has announced a series of welfare measures for the differently abled, including setting up a relief fund to help such persons affected by violence. The Department for the Welfare of Differently Abled portfolio, said 1000 self-help groups would be formed for the economic uplift of such persons. District-level committees under Collectors would disburse cash relief to differently abled persons affected by violence and setting up of physiotherapy centres to be run by NGOs to treat persons with muscular dystrophy. Some guide lines about the Various Welfare Schemes for differently abled persons Prevention of disabilities and early detection and intervention were among the thrust areas of Tamil Nadu Government, in the field of welfare of differently abled persons in the State,. S S Jawahar, Secretary, Differently Abled Welfare, Tourism and Culture, deliberated on different schemes initiated by the government for the persons with disabilities. Stating that a Department for the welfare of the differently abled persons was focusing the areas included rehabilitation measures, education and economic empowerment including self-employment and social security.

From aids and appliances, scholarships, awards and monetary benefits to reservations in government jobs and incentives for private employers, the government has rolled out various schemes/programmes to ensure development of the persons with disabilities. Under the scheme of National Scholarships for Personswith Disabilities every year 500 new scholarships are awarded for pursuing post-matric professional and technical courses of duration more than one year. However, in respect of students with cerebral palsy, mental retardation, multiple disabilities and profound or severe hearing impairment, scholarship are awarded for pursuing studies from IX Std. onwards.

Schemes

Scheme of Integrated Education

The centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (revised 1992) is being implemented in States and UTs in over 90,000 schools benefiting over 2,00,000 children with disabilities. The scheme was introduced with a view to providing

educational opportunities for children with disabilities in general schools, to facilitate their retention in the school system. It provides for facilities to students with disabilities including expenses on books and stationery, expenses on uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance, escort allowance, hostel accommodation and actual cost of equipment. The scheme also supports the appointment of special teachers, provision for resource rooms and removal of architectural barriers in schools.

Employment

Information on vocational rehabilitation centres, special employment exchanges for persons with disabilities, reservation in posts and services under the Government of India, etc is available. Vocational Rehabilitation Centres Seventeen Vocational Rehabilitation Centres for handicapped (VRCs) have been functioning in the country, one each at Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Jabalpur, Guwahati, Kanpur, Ludhiana, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Vadodara, Agartala and Patna. Out of these, Vocational Rehabilitation Centre at Vadodara has been set up exclusively for handicapped women. These Centres evaluate the residual capacities of the handicapped and provide them training, facilitating their early economic rehabilitation.

Special Employment Exchanges

Employment Exchange are generally responsible for the placement of physically handicapped. Besides they have also been set-up for their selective placement.

Reservation

Persons with disabilities (physically handicapped persons) can avail reservation in posts and services under the Government of India. In case of direct recruitment to Group A, B, C & D posts, 3% of the vacancies shall be reserved for persons with disabilities of which 1% each shall be reserved for persons suffering from (i) blindness or low vision, (ii) hearing impairment and (iii) locomotor disability or cerebral palsy in the posts identified for each disability. Three percent of the vacancies in case of promotion to Group D, and Group C posts in which the element of direct recruitment, if any, does not exceed 75%, shall be

reserved for persons with disabilities of which one per cent each shall be reserved for persons suffering from

- (i) blindness or low vision,
- (ii) hearing impairment and
- (iii) locomotor disability or cerebral palsy in the posts identified for each disability.

Scheme of Assistance for Purchase / Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP Scheme)

The main objective of the scheme is to assist the needy disabled persons in procuring durable, sophisticated and scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances that can promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation, by reducing the effects of disabilities and enhance their economic potential. The aids and appliances supplied under the scheme must be ISI.Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme. This scheme promotes voluntary action for persons with disabilities with the objectives to create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons its disabilities. The scheme encourages voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the People with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Protection of Rights) Act of 1995.

Scheme of National Awards for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

The Scheme for giving National Awards to the outstanding employers of persons with disabilities as well as the most outstanding employees was approved in 1969. The Government of India has been amending scope of the scheme whenever required keeping in view the changing scenario. Schemes arising out of the Implementation of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 Some of the Schemes are given below:

- Incentives to Employers in the Private Sector for Providing Regular Employment to Persons with Disabilities
- Models to promote awareness about accessibility features in public buildings

- Composite Regional Centres for Persons with Disabilities (CRCs)
- District Disability Rehabilitation Centers (DDRCs)

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