

Changing Face of Disability Movement: From Charity to Empowerment

By

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“Over 600 million people, or approximately 10 per cent of the world’s population, have a disability of one form or another. Over two thirds of them live in developing countries. Only 2 per cent of disabled children in the developing world receive any education or rehabilitation. The link between disability and poverty and social exclusion is direct and strong throughout the world”

- Human Rights and Disability (United Nations)

Introduction:

The problem of disability and movement for disability is as old as mankind. Holy epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata have reference the issue of disability in terms of negative characters of Mnthara, Dhutrastra, and Sakuni. This has created negative impact on the mindset of people about persons with disabilities. During ancient times, persons with disabilities were seen as sin or punishment by God for wrong thing done in last life. This perception has changed over a period of time and persons with disabilities were looked at

with pity and charity. But today they have proved themselves as normal citizens. It has been proved that disability lies in the social system and not within persons with disabilities themselves. They need their rights and equal opportunities instead of pity and charity. Disability movement worldwide and within India has a greater role to play in this transformation. This needs to strengthen further. Paper focuses on the changing face of disability movement from looking at persons with disability as a sin to charity mode and towards giving them their rights and equal opportunities. Attempt here is on understand the path of disability movement and its relevance for Indian social work. This will provide an important input for voluntary organizations, government, and the social work professionals working in the area of disability.

Disability Models:

Different people conceptualize the phenomenon of disability differently. Accordingly each person will have different meaning for the term disability and rehabilitation strategy to be followed. Accordingly conceptions regarding disability have undergone changes from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person. The meaning of disability for a doctor is different from that of psychologist, economists, and social worker. Accordingly we have different models of disability evolving from disability movement worldwide.

1. Moral Model

The oldest model of disability was moral model. Under this model person with disability were seen as sin. Disability was considered as punishment from God for the wrong Karma done in the past. Thus persons with disabilities were treated as alien. They have no right to live in the mainstream society. They are not entitled for any right to education, social life and employment available other members of the society. They themselves are responsible for what they are. The family with disabled member was seen with suspicious. To avoid this disabled member were generally hided by their family. Neither government nor society was concerned with the problems faced by them.

2. Charity Model

Charity model is driven largely by the emotive appeals of charity. This model treats people with disabilities as helpless victims needing care and protections. This model relies heavily on the charity and benevolence rather than justice and equality. This model

accepts the act of exclusion of persons with disabilities from social arrangements and services in public domain. Charity model justifies the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream education and employment. Entitlement rights are substituted by relief measures creating an army of powerless individuals, without any control or bargaining power, depending either on the state allocated fund or benevolent individuals. This model asks for social support mechanism for the benefit of person with disability. Initial efforts of the government and individuals were based on this model. Government was allocating large chunk of fund for the welfare of persons with disabilities as direct benefit or support to voluntary organizations. At the same time army of non-governmental organisations working for the benefit of persons with disabilities also relies on the donations and government grants.

3. Medical Model

Medical model of disability is based on the postulate that the problems and difficulties experienced by person with disabilities are directly related to their physical, sensory or intellectual impairments. This model defines disability in the clinical framework as diseases state, thus providing for major role for the medical and paramedical professionals to cure this problems in such a way as to make them as normal as possible. Medical model support the postulate that persons with disabilities are biologically and psychologically inferior to other able bodied counterparts. So they are not treated as fully human because they lack the competence to decide for themselves. This model reduces disability to impairment and sought to locate it within the body or mind of the individual while the power to define, control and treat disabled individual was located within the medical and paramedical professionals. This model restricts the rehabilitation efforts to medical treatment in terms of protection and cure.

4. Social Model

In contrast to medical model, which locates disability within the person with disabilities, social model postulates that persons is disabled because of architectural, attitudinal and social barriers created by the society. The social model presents disability as a consequence of oppression, prejudice and discrimination by the society against disabled people. It is the society, which constructs economic, social, health, architectural, legal, and cultural and other barriers in order to deliberately prevent people with impairments

enjoying full benefits of social life. The social model shifts the emphasis from a disabled individual to the society and its disabling attitudes and environment. People who believe on social model are of the view that handicap is made and not acquired. So the solution lies in social management by all necessary environmental modification.

5. Economic Model

The economic model tries to establish the linkages between the individual and society in terms of their contribution to productive capabilities of the society. The emphasis here is on health related limitations on the amount and kind of work performed by person with disabilities. This approach suggests that the employment problems of person with disabilities stem from faulty economic system and deficiencies on the part of such disadvantaged individuals. The vocational rehabilitation programmes or income generation programmes are principle solutions to the problems faced by persons with disabilities. Existing policies play a greater role in condemning the disabled man and women to a life of perpetual dependency thus providing low pay work and limited opportunities for all around development. Unlike other models, economic model suggest that the modifications in the persons in the form of education, training and employability, rather than changing the environment and worksite changes or changes in the perception of employees is the most desirable means of fulfilling the social and economic needs of the disadvantaged strata of the society.

6. Human Rights Model

Over the past two decades, dramatic shift in the perspective has taken place from an approach motivated by charity towards persons with disabilities to one based on rights. Disability is positioned as an important dimension of human culture by human rights model. According to human rights model all human beings irrespective of their disabilities have certain rights, which are unchallengeable. By emphasizing that the disabled are equally entitled to rights as others, this model builds upon the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, according to which, 'all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity'. This model emphasis on viewing persons with disabilities as subjects and not as objects thus locating the problem outside the disabled persons and addresses the manners in which the economic and social processes accommodate the differences of disability or not, as the case may be.

Indian Scenario

In all countries of the world, persons with disabilities are the largest minority group starved of services and facilities available to their non-disabled counterparts. As a result they are least nourished, least healthy, least educated and least employed. They are subject to the long history of neglect, isolation, poverty, deprivation, charity and pity. The situation of persons with disabilities in India is not significantly different. The responsibility of care of persons with disabilities is generally left to their families and few institutions managed by voluntary organisations and government. Disabled in India is mostly ignored by the society because they do not have economic, political or media power. Census of India, for the first time, enumerated persons with disabilities in 2001 according to which more than 2 crore people are facing the problem of disability. In comparison to United Nations figure of 10 percent, Census of India figure is very small. The reason lies in the different approaches and definitions. Within India results of National Sample Survey Organisation and Census of India shows contradictory results. This speaks about the lack of sensitivity on the issue of disability.

The legal framework adequately addresses the issue of disability. Constitution of India, guarantees a right of justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief and worship and equality of status and of opportunities for all citizens including person with disabilities. Apart from constitutional provisions the collective struggle of all disabled and their advocates resulted in 'Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Bill, passed in 1995. This Act is a comprehensive and far-reaching legislation with promise of liberating mankind of its prejudices and of removing barriers that have crippled the disabled for centuries. By granting full equality, independence and freedom, act has opened doors to people with disabilities so that they can become an integral part of the mainstream society. Apart from PWD Act, we have other legislative provisions like The Mental Health Act 1987, Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992, and The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act 1999 are also available to safeguard the interest of person with Disabilities. Government of Gujarat has passed Gujarat Physically Handicapped Persons (Employment in Factories) Act 1982 which provide for the reservation for person with disabilities in private sector factories. The

fruits of these legislative provisions are not percolating to persons with disabilities because of lack of awareness. Even voluntary organisations working for persons with disabilities themselves are not aware about the legal provisions. Overlapping of functions of judicial machinery makes things more complicated.

Large numbers of voluntary organisations are operating in India, especially for the welfare of person with disabilities. Sincere and dedicated efforts on the part of government and voluntary organisations have resulted in high level of literacy among person with disabilities and increased awareness among persons with disabilities and their parents about their rights and capabilities. But the dark side is that, many of voluntary organisations believe on charity model. These organisations are not professionally managed. They are depending on government and other donors for financial support. Only a few of them are providing vocational training and employment services for person with disabilities. Vocational trainings provided by voluntary organisations are not professionally designed lacking in marketability and employability. So even after getting training person with disabilities are not suitably employed. Secondly more than 75 percent of persons with disabilities are living in rural areas where as voluntary efforts are concentrated in urban locations. Very few organisations are working for rural disabled. Voluntary organisations have to extend their operations in rural areas as well.

Employment is really a problem for person with disabilities. Unemployment rate among person with disabilities is more than double the unemployment rate among their non-disabled counterparts. The reasons lie in the suspicions of the employers who believe on medical model and consider them inferior to their non-disabled counterparts. They prefer to donate for the welfare of persons with disabilities rather than giving them employment opportunities. Physical and mental impairment is more visible to them compared to their abilities. A Three percent reservation as provided by PWD Act has remained on paper even after more than a decade of passage of legislation.

The policies and schemes of government are guided by medical model rather than human rights model. Major efforts on the part of government are limited to physical rehabilitation in the form of preventive action, provision for aids and appliances etc.

Efforts in the direction of human rights model has remain on paper because of the ignorance on the part of persons with disabilities, and voluntary organisations.

Conclusion:

Disability movement in India has succeeded in changing the approach towards disability from moral model to charity model but limited has been achieved in the direction of human rights model. Collective efforts on the part of person with disabilities, their advocates, voluntary organisations, government and society at large are required to create real world where abilities and disabilities are not seen on the basis of physical or mental impairment but disability is seen as diverse abilities.

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