Attitude towards Disabled People

Firoz Hasan
Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

Abstract:
Article 41, of Indian Constitution deals with the issue of disability, in the context of right to work and education. The Government has also moved away from the welfare oriented policies on disability towards a right base approach. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Protection of Rights and Full participation) Act, 1995 is changed with The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014.
A person suffering from any form of impairment, be it physical, mental, intellectual or psychological, may or may not identify as a person with disability. Impairment is human diversity. If a person with impairment faces restriction when it comes to experiencing equal participation in the spheres of life due to certain barriers, it is that then he or she may be disabled. Disabled people continue to face challenges in many areas of their lives and many of these challenges involve people's attitudes. Public attitudes have an impact on the material and non-material aspects of everyone's living standards, and disabled people in particular.
Research on attitudes towards disability and disabled people is steadily increasing, but there's still much more that can be done to understand the issues involved. There is no doubt that the dream for a discrimination free and equal life for the disabled may require a comprehensive change in the institutional arrangements and legal provisions but the most important change has to come in our minds, in our thinking and attitude towards the disabled persons. Rightly has been said, 'If you have to judge people, judge them based on what they can do, not on what they cannot. Judge them based on who they are, not who they aren't. Otherwise you're judging based on your own shortcomings'. The change would perhaps come faster if we could really feel that disabled one may be, but he can as capable as anyone else in this world.

1. Introduction

Many famous personalities, who were either born with disability or they met tragic incidents, have made a place for themselves in the world. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi salutes the spirit of disabled persons, calling them 'heroes' and insisted on using 'Divyaang' word in place of 'Viklaang'. Divyaang means a person born with special divine abilities (Divya Shakti). The never- say-die attitude of many such peoples has served as an undying inspiration and motivation for those who have to battle with disabilities. Many of them are legendary scientists, authors, social activist, politicians, actors, sportspersons, musicians, athletes, artists etc. They have chosen a challenging public life with dignity, by defying all odds and turning the spotlight on themselves. Here, let's look into the lives of some of the brave and extraordinary people, who are the living legends in their own way and deserve a salute for their indomitable spirit

- ➢ Albert Einstein: The mathematician/Physicist who had a learning disability and did not speak until age of 3. He had a very difficult time doing Maths in school. It was also very hard for him to express himself through writing.
- ➢ Thomas Edison: Inventor of electric light bulb who had over 1,000 patents to his name had a learning disability and he could not read till he was twelve and later he himself admitted that he became deaf after pulling up to a train car by his ears.
- ➢ Goerge Washington: First president of United States, was suffering from learning disabilty.
- ➢ Franklin D. Roosvelt: He was suffering from polio, and was governor of New York, then elected as only President of the United States to serve country for 4 terms.
- ➢ Stephen Hawkings: World famous Mathematician, is considered as the greatest scientist after Einstein, suffers from a rare motor neuron disease and speaks with the help of voice synthesiser and currently he is wheel-chair bound and is totally paralysed.
- ➢ Helen Keller: Author, political activist and lecturer who travelled at least 39 countries campaigning for women's suffrage and other social causes, was born as blind, deaf and mute.
- ➢ Sudha Chandran: The renowned Indian classical dancer and TV actress who had performed all over the world, met an accident at the age of 17 years and lost her left leg that had to be amputated.

> ➢ Nawab Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi: one of the finest cricketer and former captain of India, played with one of his eye severely affected.
> ➢ Tom Cruise: Famous Hollywood superstar has a learning disability that alters the way brain process written material.
> ➢ Abhishek Bachchan: Bollywood actor was dyslexic in his childhood and attended a special school.

The list would be endless. Disability affected their bodies but their spirit triumphed against all odds to achieve success for themselves and enabled them to contribute for the betterment of world. Indeed, disability is less bodily deprivation and more of a social-psychological construct that denies a person, the human right to realize his full potential.

The list would be endless. Disability affected their bodies but their spirit triumphed against all odds to achieve success for themselves and enabled them to contribute for the betterment of world. Indeed, disability is less bodily deprivation and more of a social-psychological construct that denies a person, the human right to realize his full potential.

India has the proud history of great musicians, rulers and philosophers with disabilities. To cite a few, king Dridharshtra, in the famous epic Mahabharata was Blind. So was the one of the greatest Indian poet Surdas who was said to have composed more than 1,25,000 songs. Ashtavakra, who had multiple disabilities, was a respected philosopher .Various religions in India, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity preach and practice respect and service to people with disabilities. Generally, people in India show sympathy and compassion to persons with disabilities. But some of the questions are always there to be thinking upon.

- Is that enough?
- Do people with disabilities have a respectable place in the society with equal opportunities and rights?
- What are the perceptions of the peoples and their expectations from peoples suffering from disabilities?

Attitude towards and treatment of persons with any disability can be traced back to ancient civilization (including Egypt, Spain, Rome, China and the early Christian world). The care, treatment and education of disabled children have been cy-clinical, alternating between compassionate concern and neglect and ridicule. Society's early treatment of the disabled children was rooted in superstition rather than scientific knowledge. Gandhi and Aggarwal (1969), Char (1970) as well as Majoo (1970) found that the attitude of the general public towards the disabled children is one characterized by ignorance and superstition. If we traced the history of the society towards disabled children, we have to pass through 3 stages:-

  i.   Pre historic era
  ii. Christian era
  iii. And recent trends

2. Pre Historic Era

Children with defects were not cared in the pre-historic era. In the Pre-historic era, the elimination of the disability was achieved by nature, through the operation of law of 'survival of the fittest'. In such a society disabled people were considered as unfit in the struggle for existence. Defects and any type of deformity or illness were considered as the result of some kind of sin in earlier life. Centuries of isolation and contempt for the disabled resulted in a sort of prejudice against these "cursed souls" who were regarded as disgrace to humanity. They were viewed assaulted in assort visitation of the Devil and were subjected to extremism and torture by the family and society. In the Greek and the Roman Era, they used to be often drowned or killed soon after they were born (Apton, 1959). Among the early Romans, the father had the right to destroy a deformed child. Beginning in the latter years and continuing through the time period, many individuals having disability were punished, persecuted and executed in very cruel manner. It is clear from these expressions that there existed in the society, an unfavorably biased and unkind attitude towards the disabled children. However, some physicians and scholars in the ancient Greek and Roman societies made efforts to treat and preserve the lives of the disabled and provided asylums for them.

3. Christian Era

With the spread of Christian ideals in the west and Buddhism in the east, these practices were gradually abandoned and many hospitals were set up for their treatment and care, but still the disabled were socially looking down upon. The Christian Era, for e.g witnessed the emergence of a new phase of a more sympathetic outlook towards the disabled persons. Robert Burton (1577-1640) declared that the disabled should be comforted since 'imperfections of the body do not blemish the personality'. But latter in the 18th and 19th centuries people and educators changed their approach towards disability. It was realized that the treatment of the disabled would be a burden on society of and supporting them will affect their whole life. Disabled were pitied, protected and were viewed as 'Innocents of God'. They were provided humane care either at home or in monasteries. A more rational and scientific attitude started but most educational services for disabled students took place in residential institutions where such students were kept separated from rest of the society.

4. Recent Trends

Article 45 of the directive principles of the Constitution of India urged all states to provide 'free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'. This directive has now been made a fundamental right by the 93rd Amendment Bill of the Constitution.

In 2001 the first Indian census to include disability as a category reported that there were 78 million people with disabilities in India (Murdick, 2004). The World Health Organization placed this number at a higher, but still conservative, estimate of 98 million or 10% of the population. Fifty percent of all people with disabilities in India are children. The country's disabled population has increased by 22.4% between 2001 and 2011. The number of disabled, which was 2.19 crore in 2001, rose in 2011 to 2.68crore, 1.5 croremales and 1.18 crore females

The term handicapped and disability are often used synonymously and interchangeably. The confusion over the meaning of these terms seems to be have been precipitated when various authors used the terms disabled in apparently the same way that others used the term handicap. Some authors, reports Bates (1965) have used these terms interchangeably even in the same article. Hamilton and Kesseler (Bates, 1965) have been insistent on the distinction between the terms handicapped and disabled .Hamilton (Coft and Tindal, 1974) referred to disability as a condition of impairment, physical or mental, having an objective aspect that can be usually described by a physician. A Handicap, on the other hand, is a total effect or a cumulative result of the hindrances or obstacles which the disability interposes between the individual and his maximum functional level.

In this sense, every handicapped person will have a disability but not every disability will be handicapping. It may be pointed out, however, that the severity of disability and the extent of any handicap are relative. So long as the disability does not interpose an obstruction between the person and his desired goal, it may not be considered severely or even mildly handicapping.

Which type of disability or deformity will be considered a handicap or impairment is strictly relative to the expectations of the culture in which the person lives and the attitude of the society towards them. What may seem to be natural and normal in one culture may be viewed otherwise in another culture. Children with low IQ are considered mentally retarded in rural or educationally and socially backward society. In other words, before attaching any meaning or the label of disability to any condition of the physique, one should take into consideration the socio-cultural context.

Oxford dictionary defines a handicapped person as one who is placed at a disadvantage as a result of some shortcomings or infirmity which deters him from functioning as a normal human being. Apparently some of these definitions are intended to screen the disabled people and determine their eligibility for rehabilitation benefits.

Disability is an umbrella term for impairment, activity limitations and participation restrictions' which is caused by an interaction between the health conditions of an individual and contextual factors reflected in the social-economic environment of the day. The understanding about disability has moved away from a biological perspective to questions of accessibility, inclusion and empowerment. Civil Society activists and policy makers have started thinking about the issue of disability in terms of rights based and inclusive paradigm.

Here can't we say that to some extent, the commonly looking normal human beings are also handicapped in one or the other way.

➢ Can every normal person run fast?
➢ Can every normal person swim, climb a tree or mountain?
➢ Can every normal person jump from a certain height?

The answer is certainly 'No'. Since, every person has his own limitations. Same, is the case with disabled persons, they are also born with certain limitations along with enormous other talents and capabilities which if properly utilized, can be very useful for the individual itself and for the society as a whole.

There is no doubt that the dream for a discrimination free and equal life for the disabled may require a comprehensive change in the institutional arrangements and legal provisions but the most important change has to come in our minds, in our thinking and attitude towards the disabled persons.

5. Factors Affecting Attitude towards Persons with Disabilities
There are different factors, which affect the attitude of persons towards disabilities in general, and blindness in particular. These are
➢ Culture.
➢ Religion.
➢ Knowledge concerning disability and others.

6. Culture and Beliefs
The way people treat disabled persons with disability differs from family to family, community to community and country to country. It is related with the culture of the society (Werner, 1994). This means the culture of the society has an impact on the attitude of that society towards persons with disabilities which in turn affect their way of treatment. Caul Crick (1979) pointed out in Nigeria, the presence of different ethnic cultural beliefs regarding the cause for disability. These are curse from God, breaking laws and family sins, offences against gods, witches and wizards, adultery, misfortune, God's representatives, misdeed in a previous life, illegal or unapproved marriage, shows the omnipotence of God, evil spirit, killing certain forbidden animals, a warning from God and fighting elders during harvest. Werner (1994) also described that in some part of the world, people think a child is blind as a punishment for something the parents have done. According to him in Latin America, villagers believe that blindness occurs when a bat's urine fell in the baby's eyes, or a 'black witch moth' flew by the baby's face.

Generally, the beliefs held by different cultural groups determine the degree of acceptance or rejection of persons with disabilities in that society.

7. Religion

Different studies have indicated that religion has a powerful role in influencing the attitude of persons towards disabilities. Barker, Wright, and Gonich (1946) cited by Tirussew et al (1995) stated that, in Greek, the Christian doctrine introduced the view that disabling disease is not a disgrace nor a punishment for sin, instead a means of purification and a way of grace. This ideology shows suffering perfects the sufferer. The sick has a preferential position, and it is a privilege for the healthy to minister them where as Hull (2001:13) stated that, in Britain, the biblical and Christian tradition tends actually to encourage and authorize negative attitudes to disability. Fritzon (2001) tried to show the meanings of disabilities in the bible by mentioning different scripture and the way people interpret. According to the bible, every human being is created in God's will and knowledge regardless of their physical or mental capacities. The love that God has for every being also applies to people with different kind of disabilities. Even if, the meanings given for disabilities in the bible is positive, people interpret in different way. According to him, the disciples' questions to Jesus when they meet the man who was blind from birth; (John 9:2) "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answer is clear: "It was not that this man sinned or his parents." This answers should have prevented any interpretation that the bible teaches as that disabilities is a punishment from God for sins. Yet we meet such interpretations among Christians all over the world.

8. Metaphoric Expression

The terms used by the society, the mass media, newspaper etc. to address different types of disabilities and persons with disabilities has an effect on the development of either positive or negative attitude towards disability. According to Hallahan and Kauffan (1988) earlier the mass media have been representing persons with disabilities in stereotypic and inaccurate ways. This creates negative attitude for non-disabled person towards persons with disabilities and in turn creates low self esteem for disabled persons. Hull (2001) identified different words used to express disability from the 'guardian' British newspaper. These are disability as indifference, disability as insensitivity, disability as uncritical, disability as undiscriminating, and as violent.

Rightly has been said, 'If you have to judge people, judge them based on what they can do, not on what they cannot. Judge them based on who they are, not who they aren't. Otherwise you're judging based on your own shortcomings'. The change would perhaps come faster if we could really feel that disabled one may be, but he can as capable as anyone else in this world.

9. References

i.   Adams, F.(Eds.)(1986).Special Education. Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, Guilford and Kings Lynn.
ii.   Aggarwal, J.C.(1998).Teachers role, status, service conditions and education in India. (1st edition). A reference manual with special reference to committees and commissions (1st edition).Delhi DOABA House.
iii. Aggarwal,J.C.(1988). 'Educational, Vocational Guidance and Counseling. With special reference to New Pattern of Education 10+2+3, National Policy on education 1986 and Ramamurti Report 1990.'(8th edu). DOABA House, Booksellers and Publishers 1688. Delhi.
iv.   Aggarwal, J.C (1995). 'Educational policy in India: 1992 and review 2000 and 2005. Delhi: Shipra.
v.   Aggarwal, Rashmi.(2006).Educational, vocational guidance and counseling: Principles, Techniques and Programmes. Delhi. Shipra Publications 2006.
vi.   Ballast, D. K. (1988). Design for the physically disabled. Monticello, Ill.: Vance Bibliographies.
vii. Baker ,H.J., (1953). Introduction to exceptional children. The Macmilan Company New York.1953. ecological validity in attitude research. 'American journal of Mental Deficiency(1987)
viii. Barnes, C. (1999). A working social model? Disability and work in the 21st country. A Paper Presented at the Disability Studies Conference and Seminar.
ix.   Barnes, C. (2001). 'Emancipatory' disability research: project or process? Public Lecture at City Chambers, Glasgow.
x.   Bednar, M.J. (Edt.) (1977). Barrier-Free Environments. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross Inc.
xi.   Bharat Singh, (2004). 'Modern Teaching of Exceptional children'. Anmal Publications. ISBN 81-261-1928-4.
xii. Bhargava,M(1994). Introduction to exceptional children. Their nature and educational provisions. Sterling Publishers Pvt ltd.
xiii. Bjarnason,D.S.(2002). 'Parents and adult children: juggling supporters and choices in time and space. 'disability and Society(2002). Vol.17
xiv. Blackhurst. A.E and Berdine, W.H.(1981). An Introduction to special education. Little Brown and Company, Inc., printed in the U.S.A
xv.   Brett J. (2002). 'The experience of disability from the perspective of parents of children with profound impairment is it time for an alternative model of disability.' Disabilty and Society (2002). Vol 17
xvi. Bunh, G and Caleo A()2004 . 'Students attitudes toward peer with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools.' Disability and Society (2004) Vol.10
xvii. Casey, S.M. (1978). Cognitive mapping by the blind. Journal of Vision Impairment and Blindness. 72(8), pp: 297-301.
xviii. Chouinard, V. (1997). Making space for disabling differences: challenging ableist geographies. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. 15, pp: 379-387.
xix. Church, R.C. & Marston, J.R. (2003). Measuring accessibility for people with disability. Geographical Analysis. 35(1), pp: 83.
xx.   Currie, R.F., Trute, B., Tefft, B. & Segall A. (1989). Maybe on my street: the politics of community placement of the mentally disabled. Urban AffairsQuarterly. 25(2). pp: 298-321.

xxi.   Dodd, L.W.(2004), 'Supporting the siblings of young children with disabilities.' British journal of Special Education (2004)
xxii. Dowling, M. & Dolan, L. (2001). Families with children with disabilities- inequalities and the social model. Disability and Society. 16(1), pp: 21-35.
xxiii. Emanuel, J. & Ackroyd, D. (1996). Breaking down barriers. In C. Barnes & G. Mercer (Edt.). Exploring the Divide. pp: 173 – 193. Leeds: The Disability Press.
xxiv. Greval, I., Joy S. Lewis, J., Swales K. & Woodfield K. (2001). Disabled for life? Attitudes towards, and experiences of disability in Britain. www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep173.pdf. (Last accessed 04.08.2008).197
xxv.   Imrie, R. (1998). Oppression, disability, and access in the built environment. In T. Shakespeare (Edt.). The Disability Reader. London: Cassell.
xxvi. Ingstad, B. & Whyte, S.R. (Edt.) (1995). Disability and culture. Berkeley: University of California Press.
xxvii. Judith, A. (1998). Social exclusion in European cities: processes, experiences, and respresentation. London: Philade.
xxviii. Keates, S. & Clarkson, P. J. (2003). Countering design exclusion through inclusive design. CUU. pp:69-76.
xxix. Keith, M. & Pile, S. (1993). Introduction part 2: the place of politics. In M. Keith & S. Pile. Place and the Politics of Identity. (pp: 22-40). London, New York: Routledge.
xxx.   Kirby, M. (1999). Stratification & differentiation. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, London: Macmillan Press Ltd.
xxxi. Koenig, J. (2003). Event accessibility fact sheets. Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness. 97(4), pp: 248.
xxxii. Kose, S. (2003). The Japanese experience. In R. Coleman, C. Lebbon, J. Clarkson & S. Keates (Edt). Inclusive Design. pp: 309-316. Springer: London.
xxxiii. Lutz, B. J. & Bowers, B. J. (2005). Disability in Everyday life. Qualitative Health Research. 15(8), pp:1037-1054.
xxxiv. Maat, K & Louw, E. (1999). Mind the gap: pitfalls and travel reduction mechanism. Built Environment. 25(2), pp: 151-161.
xxxv. Mabbett, D. (2003). Disability and social exclusion in Europe. A Paper of Workshop on "Social Exclusion and Europe".
xxxvi. McNeil, J.M. (1992). Americans with disabilities. US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics, Bureau of the Census. Washington, DC.
xxxvii. Meyerson, L. (1988). The social psychology of physical disability: 1948 and 1988.Journal of Social Issues. 44(1), pp: 173-188.
xxxviii. O'Brien, L.G. & McFetridge, M. (1991). Mapping geographical space for the disabled. In K. Rybaczuk & M. Blakemore (Edt.). Mapping the Nations. pp: 149-156. London: International Cartographic Association.
xxxix. Peloquin, A.A. (1994). Barrier-free residential design. New York: Mc Graw-Hill. Percy-Smith, J. (Edt.) (2000). Policy responses to social exclusion: towards inclusion? Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press. 206
xl.   Rizzo, T. & Faison-Hodge, J. (2003). Are public facilities accessible to individuals with disabling conditions? Adapted Physical Quarterly, 20(3), pp: 319.
xli.   Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) (1985) Access for disabled people. London: RTPI. Revised 1988 as Planning Advice Note (PAN) No. 3.
xlii. Stark, S. (2001). Creating disability in the home: the role of environmental barriers in the United States. Disability & Society. 16(1). pp: 37-49.
xliii. Environments. pp: 156-172. Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross Inc.
xliv. Tengman, S. (2001). Accessibility review from a user perspective. Towards a Barrier-Free Europe for People with Mobility Handicaps Conference Paper. Sweden-Linköping.
xlv.   Urban Development Act (No. 3194) (1985). Official Gazette date: 09.05.1985 No: 18749.
xlvi. Williams, G.H. (1999). Review article: bodies on a battlefield; the dialectics of disability. Sociology of Health and Illness. 21(2), pp: 242-252.
xlvii. Woodward, A.E. (2001). Inclusions and exclusions in European societies. London: Routledge.
xlviii. World Health Organisation (WHO) (1980) International classification of impairments, disabilities and handicaps. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
xlix. World Health Organisation (WHO) (2001). ICIDH-2: International classification of functioning, disability and health. Final Draft, Full version. Geneva: WHO.