



Persons With Disabilities

This article is based on [“A Failure to Enable”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 03/12/2020. It talks about the issues pertaining to persons with disabilities in India.

Any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in a manner or within the range considered normal for human beings, resulting from impairment is termed as a disability. Disability is an important public health problem especially in developing countries like India.

In order to sensitise the matter of disability, December 3 has been marked as the [International Day of Persons with Disabilities by the United Nations](#). It envisages promotion of the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

In India, many laws and schemes strive to achieve equality of opportunity and accessibility for persons with disabilities (PwDs). However, India still lags behind in a big way when it comes to removing infrastructural, institutional and attitudinal barriers for the PwDs.

Disability in India

- **Significant Proportion of Population:** The population with disabilities constitutes the world’s largest ‘unrecognised minority’ group.
 - In India, according to the 2011 population census, the population with disabilities is around 26.8 million, constituting 2.21% of India’s total population.
- **Lack of Political Representation:** Despite the vast population of people with disabilities in India, in our seven decades of independence we have had just four parliamentarians and six state assembly members who suffer from visible disabilities.
- **Added Roadblocks In India:** Indians with disabilities are far more likely to suffer from poor social and economic development. Shockingly, 45% of this population is illiterate, making it difficult for them to build better, more fulfilled lives.
- **Poverty & Disability Correlation:** Data on disability points to a correlation between ‘disability’ and ‘poverty’. A large number of people with disabilities are born into poor households.
 - This is due to the fact that pregnant mothers in poor families lack care, these systemic fallacies lead to medical complications during pregnancy leading to the birth of children with disabilities in many cases.
 - The population census data 2011 also points out similar trends when it says that 69% of the total population of persons with disabilities in India resided in rural areas.

Issues Faced By The PwDs

- **Institutional Bottlenecks:** There is a lack of awareness, lack of care, and lack of good and accessible medical facilities. Further, there is a lack of accessibility, availability, and utilization of rehabilitation services.
 - These factors affect the preventive and curative framework for PwDs.
- **Lax Implementation:** The government has had some admirable initiatives to improve the condition of PwDs.

- However, even now, most buildings in India are not disability-friendly, despite the government of India, under the [Accessible India Campaign](#), instructing all ministries to make their buildings accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Similarly, the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act](#) has provided for a quota of reservation for persons with disabilities in government jobs and higher education institutions, but the majority of these posts are vacant.
- **Societal Attitude:** A significant proportion of people see a person with disabilities as an object of 'sympathy' and 'pity' thereby leading to their 'othering' and their treatment as a third-class citizen in the country.
 - Also, another main problem lies in the psyche of a significant mass which considers persons with disabilities a liability, and this leads to discrimination and harassment against them and their isolation from the mainstream.

Way Forward

- **Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Approach:** CBR is a comprehensive approach at the primary health care level used for situations where resources for rehabilitation are available in the community.
 - CBR approach is needed to ensure that people with disabilities are able to maximize their physical and mental abilities, have access to regular services and opportunities, and achieve full integration within their communities
- **Increasing Public Awareness and Understanding of Disability:** Governments, voluntary organizations, and professional associations should consider running social marketing campaigns that change attitudes on stigmatized issues related to PwDs.
 - In this context, mainstream media has taken the right path by increasingly started showing positive representations of people with disabilities, from Taare Zameen Par to Barfi.
- **Collaboration With States:** Awareness regarding care to pregnant mothers and good and accessible medical facilities across the rural heartland are the important pillars for addressing the occurrence of disabilities.
 - For facilitation of both these factors, the state governments should be actively supported but union government to invest heavily in their health sector as health comes under the 'state subject' in our constitution.
- **Need for Genuine Intent:** Since the inception of Rights to Persons With Disabilities Act, 2016, there have been many instances of faulty implementation of disability reservation.
 - The new act can only be successful if there is a genuine 'intent' to recruit persons with disabilities.
 - There is a need for a culture to be developed in India, where the needs of the population with disabilities are kept in mind while building any infrastructure.

Conclusion

Merely using the word 'divyang' or 'differently-abled' won't change the psyche of the masses towards persons with disabilities. It is critical that the government work with civil society and individuals with disabilities to craft an India where everyone feels welcome and treated with respect, regardless of their disabilities.

Drishti Mains Question

"Merely using the word 'divyang' or 'differently-abled' won't change the psyche of the masses towards persons with disabilities." Discuss the statement in light of problems faced by persons with disabilities in India.

This editorial is based on ["Afghan Challenge for President-Elect Biden"](#) which was published in The Economic Times on December 2nd, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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