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Social status of women with disability

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Abstract

India is a vast country with a population of more than one billion. While estimates vary, there is growing evidence that people with disabilities comprise between 5 and 8 percent of the Indian population (around 55-90 million individuals). About 48 percent of them are women. The disabled are deprived of all opportunities for social and economic development. The basic facilities like health, education and employment are generally denied to them. In spite of several international and national pronouncements, the rights of the disabled have remained on paper. Both disability and gender are physical constructs that totally ignore the personhood. To be a disabled person is to fail to measure up to the general cultural definition of masculinity as strength, physical ability and autonomy. To be a disabled woman is to be considered unable to fulfil the role of homemaker, wife as also mother, and unable to conform to the stereotype of beauty and femininity in terms of physical appearance. But being a disabled woman also fits well into the stereotype of passivity and dependency.

Keywords: Disabled women, Deprived Women, Discrimination of disabled women

Introduction

“Being disabled should not mean being disqualified from having access to every aspect of life”

-Emma Thompson

According to an article of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) “Persons with Disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Persons with Disability Act 1995 in India defined as a person suffering from not less than forty percent of any disability as certified by Competent Medical Authority with some other privileges.

As regards the status of women, the worth of women of civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society. One of the several factors that justify the greatness of Indian’s ancient culture is the honoured place granted to women. Manu, the great law giver, said long-ago “where women are honoured there resides the God”. According to ancient Hindu Scriptures no religious rite can be performed with perfection by a man without the participation of his wife. Wife’s participation is essential to any religious rites, wives thus befittingly called “Ardhanari” (better half). They were given not only importance but also equal position with men. After the arrivals of various invasions influenced and changed the attitude of the Indian society towards women. They were deprived of their rights of equality with men. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started a movement against this inequality and subjugation. The contact of Indian culture with that of British also brought improvement in the status of women.

The other important factor in the revival of women’s position was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who induced women to participate in the Freedom Movement. As a result of this retrieval of freedom, women in India distinguished themselves as teachers, nurses, air-hostesses, booking-clerks, receptionists, engineers, doctors and others of varying socio-economical status.

They have been given equality with men in shaping their future and sharing responsibilities for themselves, their family and their country. They put heart and soul together in whatever they undertake. There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in the last fifty years but yet they have to struggle against many handicaps and

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social evils. There is ample data on discrimination against female sex starting even before birth and going on till the grave and after grave. There are alarming reports about women in disadvantaged circumstances.

Importance of the study

Women and Disability is a growing concern and seems to be increasing rapidly. According to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru "When women move forward, the family moves forward, the family moves, the village moves". But disabled women are suffering with triple discrimination. Though the world celebrated International year of the Women in 1975 and year of disabled in 1981 they are deprived of many opening available in the family and society, especially women with disability deprived of access to many facilities.

Disability and Women

Disabled women are the most vulnerable in Indian society. This vulnerability exists across class and caste. They suffer because of the triple jeopardy because they are women, on the account of being disabled and most of the times because of poverty. Deeper insight into the scenario reveals the fact that, though men and women suffer equally because of disability, some problems are exclusively women's problems. In a patriarchal society if disability affects boys and girls in almost identical fashions, female child faces the humiliation more than a boy. In India usually birth of a son is always celebrated; the birth of a girl never has such celebration. And the birth of a disabled girl always considered as a curse. A disabled boy is more acceptable than a disabled girl. If a family has a disabled boy they will do their best to make him a productive male which is not so when it comes to girl.

Considering special schools, there are residential schools, mostly for the visually impaired girls. Otherwise girls are with their families, but what happens if that they are left unattended, without due care and respect? If the parents can afford one education they would rather educate the boy. In India disabled women constitute around 48 percent of the total disabled population. They are most marginalized in terms of their social, economic, political and health status.

They are not considered as a priority group in any kind of research, state policies and programs, mass movements and rehabilitation programs. They are further isolated from social and political participation due to the stigma and discrimination attached to disability. As Irene Feika puts it "due to numerous societal standards, they continue to be left out of the decision making processes. This reality is specifically true of women with disabilities in the cultures where the role of wife and mother is considered as a primary role for a female." The story of entitlement failure continues as we move up the 'value chain' the disability certificates, access to skills, the wage/self-employment opportunity thereof, aids and appliances, health check-up, the security aspects and the decision making. Lack of awareness owing to lack of information appears to be the first and the major bottleneck. Beyond this, it is an uphill task for the WWD (Women with Disability) to get their entitlement. There are of course challenges too.

When the researcher intends to study 'Locomotor Disability' which means orthopedically handicapped who have a physical defect or deformity which causes an interference with the normal functioning of the bones, muscles and joints, the researcher was determined to take up women with

locomotor disability. Those women with 40% disability and above would be eligible for Government benefits/concessions and they have been chosen for the study. Several studies showed how the disabled women are the worst victims of social exclusion. Stigma and discrimination attached to disability deprive these women from enjoying their social and cultural rights.

Marriages for disabled persons are a difficult proposition particularly for women in the midst of social acceptability and social status come only through marriage. Here again stigma and discrimination prevent families from making marital relations with disabled persons. To analyse this issue from the same wave length, women with locomotor disability inspire the researcher much and so an attempt is taken up to study this topic.

"Social Status of Women with Disability" The researcher concentrated on the Madurai City, Tamil Nadu, to collect the data from the women with disability especially to the orthopedically disabled women. The data was collected from the camp organised by the Government for the benefit of the Women with Disability. The Camp was conducted in the Madurai Corporation School. In the Camp all types of disabled persons are gathered to avail the benefits offered by the Government. It includes persons with Locomotor Disabled (Orthopedically), Blind, Crippled, Mentally Retarded, Deaf and Dumb. Out of 220 members in the camp only 35 member are women with locomotor disability. The researcher has chosen them for the study. This helped to gather information regarding their social status of the orthopedically disabled women. Marital status of women shows her original social status of women especially women with disability.

Research Methodology

Based on this category the information was collected from the respondents., Madurai district of Tamilnadu. The respondents with age of 18 and above 18 have been selected for the data collection.

The present study is an attempt to analyze the status of women with disability in the urban scenario. Madurai Corporation is the universe of the study; Arappalayam area has been selected for the research. There are 35 disabled women are residing at the area of Arappalayam. Researcher has been collected primary information regarding the status of the disabled women from selected research area. The study was conducted by both qualitative and quantitative methods using by census method. The major findings of the study are presented below.

Major finding of the study

Socio-economic lives of the respondents have a great impact on the life of disabled women associated with their stigma and psycho-social problems. This part explains the status of women with disability and how they encountered the problems in their day to day life.

As far as the age group 59 per cent of the respondents belong to the age group of 30-39. Religion status shows that 77.7 per cent of the respondents belong to the Hindus. Caste wise classification shows that 56 per cent of the respondents belong to the BC.

Inference drawn from the educational status of the respondents is majority of 28 per cent completed primary education, and next majority 19.0 per cent completed high Secondary school education. 17.7 per cent of the respondents

are graduates. 13.7 per cent of the respondents are completed middle school education. 9.0 per cent of the respondents are literates. 4.7 per cent of the respondents are illiterates.

Economical Dependency of the Respondents shows that majority (70 per cent) of the respondents are economically dependent. In this present scenario nothing can be done without money. So this economical dependence plays a significant role on psychological dependency also. Only (30 per cent) of the respondents are economically independent. Even though economically independent, they are also dependent on other aspects like Physical dependence, Psychological dependence, Social dependence.

Disabled women are the worst victims of social exclusion. Stigma and discrimination attached to disability deprives these women from enjoying and executing their social and cultural rights. In India where marriage is a conventional and near-universal institution, it is also considered as a mean to provide social acceptability and status to women. Marriages for disabled persons are a difficult proposition, more so for disabled women. Here again, stigma and discrimination prevents families from entering into marital relations with disabled.

Marriage is one of the universal social institutions. It can have widely different implications in different cultures. Good family is the result of proper marriage. Especially in the Indian context marriage is a very important ceremony for man and woman. Even in the modern world marital bond is strongly believed in the country like India. Marriage is not an easier task to be achieved among Indians. Each and every family has their own expectations for bride and bridegroom. Majority of the Indian family is patriarchal family. This plays a vital role in the life of the disabled women.

In this regards the study has been analysed about marital status of the respondents in the study area. There was 15 respondent are single. 5 of the respondents are married and living with their husband. 6 of the respondents are unmarried. 6 of the respondents are deserted and 3 of the respondents are widow.

This shows greater way of discrimination towards the disabled women. Especially in the social status. Marriage and family is the basic unit of the society. In the country like India marriage is consider to be a sacred ritual for each and every individual. Marriages for disabled persons are a difficult proposition particularly for disabled women. Here again stigma and discrimination prevents families from making marital relations with disabled persons. Most of the respondents say for the man with disability could able to get the physically normal bride. But in the case of woman with disability found marriage as a more difficult task. No normal bridegroom is willing to marry the woman with disability. Even though it happens there is the question of genuineness of the bridegroom. The respondents comes under the category of deserted says after few days of their marriage they lost their property or money to their husband. The respondents under the category of marriage say they face so many problems in their in laws home even though they get the support from their husband.

The major decision making is also one of the significant aspect shows the status of women in the society. The married respondents of the study invariably said the major decision will be taken by their counterpart. The unmarried respondents say major decision will taken by their parents or brothers. Only few respondents in single, widow, deserted said that they will take the major decision in their family.

Conclusion

The study concludes that how the social status of the Women with disability is discriminated. This possession has to change and it is the need of the hour. Most of the topics are now a day's gives more important to other general problems. But in the case of Women with Disability are out of mind and out sight of the society. This can be changed only through proper awareness among public and the enhancement of Governmental support towards the Women with Disability.

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