WOMEN WITH DISABILITY: UNDERSTANDING THEIR INCLUSION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to study the social, political, economic rights and inclusion of disabled women in Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu and Kashmir empowerment of disabled persons, especially women with disabilities remain very ineffectual. So far as women with disabilities are concerned in Jammu and Kashmir, there is a dearth of qualitative research and relevant literature written by social scientists, social activists, feminists challenging gender hierarchy within the disabled peoples. An attempt has been made in this paper to speak and focus on how disabled women’s inclusion contributes to the developmental agenda for both state and non-state actors. The research attempts to study some case studies which have their origin in Jammu and Kashmir. These case studies will demonstrate explicitly how they imagine the outside world existence and what kind of empowerment they need for social inclusion from their point of view. These case studies also exhibit how without empowering practice disabled women’s agenda for empowerment and social development remains a hollow concept.

KEY WORDS: Disability, Social Inclusion and Exclusion, Empowerment, women with disabilities.

Introduction

Right from the beginning of this world, disability is a universal feature and is found in all societies irrespective of colour, creed, religion, caste, religion and region. There is no hesitation to say that historically disability remain a continuous detached site for social science research. But in 21st century scholars from different part of the world make some sincere and positive efforts for the inclusion of disability research in academia.

The occurrence of disability is an indispensable part of the human involvements and cannot be detached from the social setting where it is produced. It cannot exist outside the periphery of social structure (Karna, 2001:25). Persons with disabilities are facing the twin discrimination of cultural apathy as well as socio-economic negligence. It has not been understood one of the most burning problems of contemporary India (Sing & Kachhap, 2008:12). Person with disabilities especially women with disabilities experience a disenfranchisement of social and economic opportunities due to the combined impact of income deprivation, social segregation, isolation, cultural marginalization, non-participation in political activities, educational backwardness, economic dependence, health negligence and individual dehumanization generates a cycle of exclusion which locates her social location beyond definition (Addlakha, 2010:17).

Conceptual Understanding of Disability

Disability is a broad term with different meanings for different people. Type and degree of disability vary from society to society as well as country to country because attitudes towards disability are deeply rooted in socio-cultural values; the term 'disability' has been defined in many ways. There is no universally agreed definition of disability. UN declaration on the rights of disabled persons defines a disabled “as any person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of the normal individual and or social life, as a result of a deficiency, either congenital or not, in his/her physical or mental capabilities. The world programme of Action for Disabled Persons and the standard rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disabilities emphasized that disability is a socially created problem and not an attribute of an individual. Disablement results from a dynamic interaction between health conditions and other personal factors (such as age, sex, personality or level of education) on the one hand, and social, physical and...
environmental factors on the other hand. The persons with disabilities (PWDs) in India are defined as people who are suffering from not less than forty percent of any ability as certificated by a medical authority. 

Ali Baquer (2006) many definitions have been advanced founded on diverse values of theoretical underpinnings. The biomedical approach focuses on functional impairments. The psychological approach defines disability from the point of view of social stigma and adjustment. The economic vocational approach considers the employment problem of the disabled. System Analysis approach considers the problem of social vacuum and also advocates the planning management and evaluation of service with changing of development needs. Minority group approach compares disabled persons with minority group because they also face similar problems as encountered by religious and ethnic minority such as social discrimination, segregation, isolation etc. Human right approach considers disability emanates primarily from the failure of the structured social environment.

**Theoretical Understanding of Disability**

Common sense takes disability as a simple natural fact, but the sociology of disability emphasizes disability has to be differentiated from impairment. Not even chronic health condition is acknowledged as disability. There are cultures in which the social fact of disability does not exist. Disability as a social problem has evolved as a product of modern welfare state, with the beginning of modernity and above all, during the period of industrialization. Disability becomes a horizontal category of social stratification (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 2007: 1169).

From conflict perspectives, person with a disability are members of a subordinate group in conflict with persons in position of power in the government, health care industry, and in rehabilitation business, all of whom are trying to control their destinies (Kendall, 2007:472). Those in positions of power have created policies and artificial barriers that keep persons with disabilities in a subservient position. Moreover, in a capitalist economy, disability is treated as a business and person with disability are identified through the prism of charity. From this perspectives person with disabilities are objectified. They have an economic value as consumers of goods and services that will allegedly make them developed.

According to Symbolic Interactionist perspectives people with disability experience role ambiguity because many people equate disability with deviance. Person with disability are is considered deviant people treat them as outside because they lost old roles and statuses and are labeled as “disabled” person (Kendall, 2007:473). Erving Goffman’s (1963) ‘Stigma theory’ has been dominated in the sociology of disability. This micro-sociological approach views disability as constituted in social interaction (Encyclopedia of sociology, 2007:1171). If a person has a highly visible bodily feature or behaves in a particular way and is therefore negatively valued by interaction partners, she or he becomes stigmatized. This stigma will result in social distance from any social participation or social interaction in mainstream society, but the same time interaction rules demand “quasi normalcy” to be maintained. For this reason, “mixed” social situation are typically characterized by feeling of ambivalence and insecurity about how to act. Stigma theory makes it possible to analyze disability not as an inner personal characteristic, but as a product of social relation.

**Women with disabilities Global Status**

In human history there are many groups and communities who are historically one way or another way excluded, discriminated, subjugated, suppressed and there is a small group within the groups who are strongly excluded that is women with disabilities. They are overtly and covertly disenfranchised in globally as well as locally; they are left out from family interactions and community activities. Because of practical social stigma they feel isolated, ashamed and marginalized. They are facing discrimination, domestic violence, and economic dependence, violation of right, inequality, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. This provoked structure, cultural violence and other vulnerability and finally left in the cycle of social exclusion. Historically women with disabilities appearance numerous discriminations and have lived experiences distinct from those of non-disabled women and of other persons with disability. Women with disability rights have been overlooked; their voices have been neglected; they are viewed negatively; and their opportunities for survival have been threatened. Thus, this has negatively affected their chance to lead a better life and to participate in society. Negative perceptions towards women with disabilities have always been a barrier to their integration in society and a key to their marginalization (Hamdy, Auter, Humphrey, Ba, 2011). Women with disabilities are confronted with additional discrimination; they are disadvantaged economically, socially and psychologically extensively more than other men with disabilities or abled women (Westhaver, 2000).

About 650 million people in the world or 10 per cent of the world’s population lives with disabilities, and often encounter an uncountable of physical and social difficulties. They often lack the opportunities of the mainstream population and are usually among the most marginalised in society. Women face obstacles to full equality and development because of such factors as race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability. Perseverance of convincing cultural, legal and institutional barriers makes women and girls with disabilities the victims of two-fold discrimination: as women and as persons with disabilities (IANWGA, 2011). Disabled women, compared with other marginalised groups, participate less often in the workforce, are less likely to be enrolled in educational institutions (Gmelch, 1998), and have less social relations in general. Certain barriers restrict with the opportunities of disabled women to develop social relationships. For example, lack of accessibility blocks the forming of relationships which may result in isolation and physical segregation. Individuals may reject disabled women because they appear not visually attractive. (Diane E. Taub, Penelope A. McLorg, April K. Bartnick, 2009).

**Methodology of the Study**

The research is fully based on empirical data because the researcher applies sociological methods for in depth understanding. Researcher has collected case studies for deeper understanding of the socio-economic conditions and how women with disabilities themselves understand Inclusion and other empowerments in their social milieu. Each case study has debated important issues and challenges faced by the women with disabilities in Jammu and Kashmir. The study was carried out in Anantnag district between March and June 2012. The researcher has collected data from Anantnag District. The rationale behind the selection of the universe is the awareness about the area, accessibility and availability of data and also the presence of some NGOs working in that area.
Disabled Women in Jammu and Kashmir

In the traditional Kashmir society, women generally cramped to or around the family. Their world of activities was confined within the borders of their party-local household. While not reflected identical exclusive as well as external their families, they were usually oppressed, assaulted, discriminated and maltreated in social life. They could not cultivate their individual personality or to be autonomous from the males (Dabla, 2007:43).

Women in the Kashmir society are still being subject to discrimination. Being a disabled woman further aggravates the situation. Women with disabilities embody one of the most marginalized groups in Jammu and Kashmir society, and are subject to multiple discriminations finally fall into the exclusionary zones. Unfortunately, little or almost nothing has been whispered about the reality of women with disabilities in Jammu and Kashmir by social scientist, feminist and as well as civil society activists about historical and contemporary marginalization and discrimination. The state policy framework so far has failed to include, treat or provide solutions to the elimination multiple discriminations of women with disabilities. Women with disabilities are deprived in the areas of education, access, transportation, housing, employment opportunities, recreation, cultural opportunities, etc. Women with disabilities face numerous barriers in realising equal opportunities. These include environmental barriers that make access to buildings difficult, legal and institutional barriers which control their vigorous social privileges, and perhaps the most difficult to overcome, attitudinal barriers which lead social exclusion from participation in social and community activities in a bigger context. Disabled women are oppressed and can be regarded as a group whose members are in an inferior location as compare to the men with disabilities as well as non-disabled women because they are powerless and informally omitted from conventional society. According to Renu Addlakha “disabled woman in India is a victim of triple discrimination being women being disabled and being poor” but disabled women in Kashmir is victim of tetra discrimination because of conflict which made their life more despondent. According to census 2001 there are 130850 lakhs women with disabilities existing in Jammu and Kashmir, making up 43% of the total disabled population. Despite the numbers, their voices remain unheard and the existing legal framework fails to address specific problems faced by women with disabilities. They remained continuing to be one of the most excluded, neglected and isolated groups in Jammu and Kashmir society, experiencing widespread and serious violations of their human rights, as well as state and so-called rehabilitation is unable to promote and fulfill them.

Women with Disabilities who live in institutions are the most vulnerable to abuse because they are dependent upon a still larger number of people and less able to get away. An empirical study estimated that women with disability are 1.5 to 10 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled women. Women with Disabilities are most marginalized in Indian society, they are deprived of political, economic and health opportunities. The problems of Women with Disabilities become very complex with other factors such social stigma and poverty (Rao 2005). According to the conservative estimate derived from the 2001 Indian Census, 1.8 to 2.1 percent of the population, of 1.2 billion suffers from some form of disability, which is approximately 18.49 to 21.91, million persons. The world health organization (WHO) estimates that 6 to 10 percent of the population suffers from identifiable physical or mental disability that comes over to seven million persons in India.

The 2001 census estimates that there are over 9 million women with disabilities in India, constituting around 1.87 percent of the population. Some researchers put the number of the women with disabilities over 35 million. Others put the figure at 20 million, 98 per cent of them being illiterates less than 1 per cent can avail of health care and rehabilitation services. The violation of rights of person with disabilities through multiple physical, economic, health, educational, legal and attitudinal barriers are too well known to be repeated. However, it will suffice to accept in mind that the impact of these barriers is overstated various when it comes to measuring the level of negligence, isolation, stigma and deprivation that characterise the lives of women with disabilities (Addlakha, 2008:193).

In Jammu and Kashmir the situation is not different. In Jammu and Kashmir according to the 2001 census had a total disabled population of 302, 670 among them 130850 are females; according to estimates the number has increased 605,340 among them 261708 are females (Dabla, 2010). The Jammu and Kashmir Persons with disability Act 1998 guarantee equal opportunity, Protection of rights and full participation. The Act emphasizes to promote various methods of preventing disabilities and provide facilities for training centers, education and full inclusion in employment, appropriate environment to fight violations of disability rights and equality for every disabled person. But the ground reality is different: they are routinely excluded from every aspect of society, including education, employment, access of health service, physical infrastructure. There is not any non-government organisation (NGO) working exclusively for disabled women.

Recently Government of India has started composite Regional Centre (CRC) for Person with disabilities, which is insufficient, due to limited resources and manpower (Iqbal, 2010). Now I am going to present three case studies which articulate the real position of disabled women in Jammu and Kashmir. These three case studies are conducted during my field work from M.phil dissertation. These three case studies of visually challenged women from different economic and educational backgrounds would help in substituting the picture and to illustrate where disabled women are standing in Jammu and Kashmir. These case studies are from rural areas of district Anantnag.

Case: i Josy Jan, a visually challenged young lady from Brakapora village of district Anantnag, is inborn visually challenged. She could not find access to formal education due to the absence of special school for visually challenged persons in the district. She said that skill development training and employment can play a pivotal role in the transformation of her life. She believes that she does not need doles but need training so that she can do something productive with her own hands. She concludes by saying “I want to be self-dependent and believes that training centers and special school can only ensure that”.

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Sobia Jan, a visually challenged young lady from Chee village of District Anantnag, was born sightless. She couldn’t continue her education due to non-availability of special school. She narrated the negative behaviour of people towards disabled people. It is common here to call a disabled person “pannaih buthi chue gomut” (you deserve it). Said said, “When I am going health centre for treatment then due to lack of expert doctors we are not getting satisfactory treatment”. She also said that persons with vision problem continue to face barriers in the participation as equal members of society amounting to violation of their rights in all parts of Jamnu and Kashmir. She concluded with statement that she is still waiting for the government training centers that will sustain us for livelihood.

Case: iii

Kulsum Jan, a 27 year’s old disabled young woman from Dalgham village of district Anantnag, was born with a low vision. She faced non-availability of health service resulted in her blindness and no arrangement was done for treatment. Regarding education she was shocked to listen this that a blind can read and write. “She replies is it possible! But how?”. She has no idea even about employment for people with vision problem. The civil societies can aware them about education and employment and their rehabilitation process. Before launching any rehabilitative policies they should have knowledge about the impact of these policies on disables persons and whether they are aware regarding any schemes or programs.

These case studies illustrate explicitly women with disabilities in Jammu and Kashmir are ignored in welfare measures and ignored in academic pursuits as well studies have not been conducted to document their problems. The women with disability face discrimination in every sphere of welfare rehabilitation, health, education, training, employment, recreation, family and social life, participation in decision making, process and social security. They are neglected by the parents and family members which robs them of all opportunities in life, thereby hindering their overall social development. They are one of the most excluded, neglected, discriminated, isolate, powerless group in Kashmir society. The concept of an inclusive society for example policies and schemes by and large remains on papers, which means they continue to live in structural and cultural violence which increases day by day. This issue becomes the one of the social oppression, in which societal structures needed to change so that women with disabilities could function as a full member of society. Disability in Jammu and Kashmir has been invisible as compare to other marginal groups in society, lack of attention from the academicians, administrative and activities. Disability is largely confined to the domain of rehabilitation professionals and therapeutic institutions functioning under the bureaucratic regime. Understanding medical model of disability in Kashmir society it needed to revamp because of geographical location, conflict, accidents, and land mines which made disability more crucial issue than the rest of India, so there is need to rethink the medical model of disability definition.

Inclusion of Women with Disabilities in Jamnu and Kashmir

Empowerment is a much contested term there are many definitions and empowerment has different meanings in different sociocultural and political contexts. But Empowerment is now increasingly used and connected to social development groups such as poor people, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized people. Persons with disabilities experience a denial of social and economic opportunities due to the combined impact of income deprivation, social isolation, cultural marginalisation, political neglect and individual dehumanization. Their isolation has occurred in various forms all over the world, ranging from segregation within institutions.

Empowerment and social Inclusion are any such activity which not only aims to ensure access to essential facilities and growth opportunities but also strives to reduce the social, political, economic, technological, psychological and also environmental disparities present among the members of a society. Thus social sector initiatives are not confined to the initiatives taken by the government only but encompass, the efforts made by the private sector, the extra government voluntary sector and even the efforts made at the level of the individual.

Social inclusion and empowerment had been also defined as a process which ensures that those at risk of discriminations, exclusion and other vulnerability gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy the standards of living and well-being.

- Social inclusion and empowerment ensure right to security, health, education, favorable employment and parenthood for women with disabilities. Gender mainstreaming in programme development, research and advocacy is the need of the hour.
- Empowerment should provide safeguard to individuals and families the confidence that their standard of living will not decline by any eventuality; provide medical care and income security; protect against unemployment by maintenance; promote job creation; But most of these programmes be it in design, implementation or evaluation - have paid little attention to disabled people.
- Awareness among disabled people regarding sophisticated and scientifically manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances to people with disabilities in order to promote their physical, social and psychological rehabilitation. Provisions should be made to explore the possibilities through vocational training and skill development process of persons with disabilities which would help them for inclusion in economic development. Provisions should be made for them to secure employment in the competitive labor market which would be very innovative to improve the self-esteem and confidence.
- Effort should be made to make all public buildings and facilities such as schools, hospitals, public transport, and so on, compliant with the requirements of a barrier-free built environment. Towards this end, the building byelaws, municipal and civic regulations, relevant codes for construction and design should incorporate the requirements of a barrier-free environment. Similarly, all shops/malls and similar places open to public, should be insisted upon to provide the facilities
required for the disabled. In the Eleventh Plan, a National Centre to facilitate and support the development of universal design and barrier-free built environment will be established.

- Women with disability can and should become productive contributors in the development process of the country. Favorable Job should be available in the formal sector and also non formal sector.

- Women with disability are quite often excluded from the gender equity programmes. They should be included not only as beneficiaries but also a fieldworker and project facilitators, survey designers and field investigator in projects with disability components. This will enhance their visibility in highly positive roles and challenge negative attitudes that reduce them to objects of pity and helplessness.

- Various levels of state administration and the NGO sector dealing with the welfare of women need to be oriented to the problems of women with disabilities. This would ensure that the diversity of women’s experience is part of the agenda of the women’s movement and the structure within the state that focus on women and child development.

- Health care staff should also be trained to respond to the needs of women and girls with disabilities and similarly police and judiciary should also be trained to handle cases involving women with disabilities in a sensitive manner.

- Negative media representations of women with disabilities further reinforce their negative public perception as women with defects. There is need to develop and propagate more realistic and positive images of women with disabilities as capable and more productive person in mass media especially radio and television.

- There is a need to develop support services for families with a member with a disability.

- Technology is also a path to empowerment. Government policies in the disability sector encourage development of innovative, adaptive technologies.

- Separate department for person with disability should be established in J&K state.

- State should have an independent disability department and disability commissioner.

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