Emerging Prospect of the Disabled: Striding towards All - Inclusive Future

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Abstract

The curious, adventurous and innovative attitude of the humankind has propelled it to achieve excellence in all realms of lives. The human society has collectively marched towards a better future for itself despite facing hardships. Amidst these developments there has been a segment of the society which has historically been cornered from the mainstream development – the disabled. The topic of the disabled has been a subject of much discussion and debate in recent years. With advancements in technology and an increased focus on inclusivity, there is a growing awareness of the needs and potential of the disabled community. For them, these hardships and difficulties are more frequent and have a greater impact in their lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) has termed these difficulties as 'barriers' that are far beyond than just being physical. The most common ones are attitudinal, social, and non-inclusive. Often there can be multiple barriers that can make situations extremely demanding for the disabled people which makes it challenging for them to function. A common question which therefore arise is, can't we innovate a future that could have inclusion of disabled people into day-to-day activities that involve practices and policies especially formed to remove barriers that hinder their progress and ability to participate in the society? Yes, an inclusive future can be made and people with disability can be guided and helped. This research paper aims to explore the emerging future of the disabled and how it is shaping the way we think about inclusivity, accessibility, and empowerment. Through an examination of current trends and developments, this

paper will provide insight into the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for the disabled community.

Introduction:

Albert Einstein, despite having learning difficulties, was able to develop the Theory of Relativity which greatly influenced the way the world is viewed today. Similarly, Thomas Edison, who had a hearing impairment, invented electricity which is responsible for creating the modern world we live in. Louis Braille, who was visually impaired, created Braille, which allows blind individuals to read and write. These individuals have shown that it is not one's disability, but their abilities that truly matter.

In the past, disabilities were seen as a curse on both the person and their family, and were believed to be a punishment for past sins. However, modern science has helped to dispel these misconceptions and disabilities are now seen as curable medical conditions. Science and innovation have also provided tools to assist those with disabilities, such as Braille and the Jaipur foot. There is now greater awareness and responsiveness to the needs of those with mental disabilities as well.

There is also a growing belief that those with disabilities should be integrated into regular schools, rather than being placed in special schools, in order to create a more inclusive environment. While social and cultural integration is still an issue, it is expected to improve in the future. Information and communication technology has also empowered those with disabilities to actively participate in nation-building. The government's Accessible India Campaign aims to provide equal opportunities and access for the growth and development of those with disabilities.

The employment rate of individuals with disabilities has also been increasing, marking a shift towards financial inclusion of this population. Better skill opportunities have resulted in a more qualified and competent workforce, which in turn has increased employer confidence in the capabilities of those with disabilities. The government has also provided scholarships and funding for innovative ideas to support their livelihood. Today, those with disabilities can be found in various fields such as government employment, entertainment, and sports.

Every life has a purpose and value, regardless of location, age, gender, or disability. It is important to recognize that those with disabilities are often the most inspiring individuals. They can prove to be stronger and more capable than others when given equal

opportunities. If society can adopt this mindset, it is possible to see a change in attitudes and perceptions towards those with disabilities.

Deciphering Disability: Challenging misconceptions and embracing diversity

Disability is a global phenomenon that affects people of all ages, genders, and cultures. It is a diverse and multi-faceted concept that encompasses a wide range of physical, cognitive, and mental impairments. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 15% of the world's population, or over 1 billion people, live with some form of disability. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the pressing need for inclusive and accessible societies, which are essential for the well-being of all citizens, including those with disabilities. Disability can be defined as any impairment that limits an individual's ability to perform activities of daily living, or to participate in society on an equal footing with others.

There are many different types of disabilities, each of which can have a significant impact on an individual's life. Some of the most common types of disabilities include:

- Physical disabilities: These are impairments that affect an individual's mobility, such as those caused by spinal cord injuries, amputations, or cerebral palsy. Physical disabilities can make it difficult for an individual to move around, perform activities of daily living, or access certain environments.

- Sensory disabilities: These are impairments that affect an individual's ability to see, hear, or feel, such as those caused by blindness, deafness, or loss of touch. Sensory disabilities can make it difficult for an individual to access information, communicate, or navigate their environment.

- Cognitive disabilities: These are impairments that affect an individual's ability to think, learn, or remember, such as those caused by autism, Down syndrome, or dementia. Cognitive disabilities can make it difficult for an individual to understand and process information, make decisions, or function independently.

- Mental health disabilities: These are impairments that affect an individual's emotional or psychological well-being, such as those caused by depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia. Mental health disabilities can make it difficult for an individual to manage their emotions, form relationships, or function in society.

- Intellectual disabilities: These are impairments that affect an individual's ability to learn, think, and understand things, such as those caused by Down syndrome, Fragile X, or other genetic conditions.

- Multiple disabilities: Some people may have more than one type of disability, such as a person who is both blind and has a mobility impairment.

Disability: a social phenomenon

Disability is not only a health issue, but also a social and human rights issue. People with disabilities often face discrimination and exclusion in many aspects of their lives, such as education, employment, and healthcare. This can lead to poverty, social isolation, and lack of opportunities to participate fully in society. The social model of disability, which emerged in the 1970s, views disability as a socially constructed experience rather than an inherent characteristic of an individual.

This model emphasizes the role of societal barriers and discrimination in creating and exacerbating disability, rather than viewing it as a personal problem or tragedy. It also highlights the importance of accessibility and accommodations in enabling people with disabilities to fully participate in society.

One of the key societal barriers faced by people with disabilities is lack of accessibility. This includes physical barriers, such as buildings without ramps or elevators, as well as barriers in the form of policies and attitudes that exclude or marginalize people with disabilities. For example, a lack of captioning or audio description in media can make it difficult for people with visual or auditory impairments to access information and entertainment.

Discrimination also plays a major role in shaping the experiences of people with disabilities. This can take many forms, such as discrimination in the workplace, lack of representation in media and politics, and negative stereotypes and attitudes in society at large. These forms of discrimination can limit opportunities and access to resources for people with disabilities, and contribute to feelings of isolation and marginalization.

Therefore, people with such disabilities have a wide range of needs. Also, two people with the same disability might be affected in different ways and some disabilities might be hidden. Disability has further three dimensions according to the World Health Organization. These dimensions are:

1. Impairment
2. Activity limitation
3. Participation restrictions

Where impairment is caused due to conditions that were present at birth, associated with developmental conditions, related to injury or related to longstanding conditions (e.g.,

diabetes), activity limitation would be due to inability to execute a task or action by an individual. Participation restriction on the other hand is slightly different from activity limitation.

Empowering the Disabled: The Role of Inclusivity

Inclusivity is the practice of creating a culture, environment, or system that welcomes and accommodates a diverse group of individuals, including people with disabilities. Disability refers to any physical or mental condition that affects a person's ability to perform certain activities, and can include conditions such as mobility impairments, sensory impairments, cognitive impairments, and mental health conditions.

Inclusivity in the context of disabled people is important because it ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and succeed. This includes having access to the same opportunities, resources, and support as non-disabled individuals. However, in many cases, people with disabilities face barriers and discrimination that prevent them from fully participating in society.

One key source of information on inclusivity for disabled people is the work of disability rights organizations and advocates. These groups work to ensure that the rights and needs of people with disabilities are recognized and met. For example, the Disability Rights Education and Defence Fund (DREDF) is a national civil rights law and policy centre that advances the rights of people with disabilities through legal advocacy, education, and policy analysis. Another example is the National Council on Disability (NCD), an independent federal agency that provides advice to the President, Congress, and other federal agencies on disability policy.

Another important source of information on inclusivity for disabled people is research on the topic. Studies have shown that people with disabilities often face significant barriers to accessing education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. For example, a study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that people with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion, and have less access to education and employment opportunities. Other research has shown that people with disabilities are often not included in disaster preparedness and response planning, which can put them at increased risk during emergencies.

To create an inclusive environment for disabled people, it is important to take a holistic approach that addresses both individual attitudes and systemic barriers. This can include

things like providing accessibility accommodations, such as wheelchair ramps, accessible parking, and alternative format materials, implementing policies and practices that promote disability inclusion, and creating opportunities for disabled individuals to participate and lead.

One important aspect of creating an inclusive culture for disabled people is actively working to dismantle systems of ableism. Ableism is the discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities, and can take many forms, including physical barriers, negative attitudes, and stereotypes. For example, in education, this could include addressing the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students or the underrepresentation of disabled students in advanced classes.

Another important aspect of inclusivity for disabled people is creating a sense of belonging for all members of a community, including those with disabilities. This can be done through intentional efforts to build relationships and connections between people with disabilities and non-disabled individuals. For example, in the workplace, this could include employee resource groups for employees with disabilities or mentorship programs that connect disabled individuals with non-disabled mentors.

Inclusivity also involves being open to and actively seeking out the perspectives and ideas of people with disabilities. This means creating space for disabled individuals to share their experiences and perspectives, and actively listening and learning from them. This could include providing sign language interpreters or captioning at events, providing audio descriptions for visual materials or providing material in alternative format.

WHO and ICF: Unravelling the disability dimensions

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) was published by WHO in 2001. This classification explained that participation restrictions only differed from activity limitations in a way that activities of an individual meant at a personal level whereas participation meant all situations that involved the individual in life roles such as employment, education and relationships. Therefore, participation meant for any individual to engage in social roles. According to various surveys and reports disabled people suffer unnecessary difficulties with participation due to which they suffer participation restrictions. These difficulties are termed as barriers. The main goal of this paper is to identify the most common and most ignored 'barrier' faced by the people who are disabled. The paper will also discuss on developing practical strategies that can help address the

disadvantages and discouragement that people with disabilities experience while living their lives.

The ICF framework has two main components:

1. Body functions and structures: This component includes the physiological and anatomical aspects of functioning, such as sensory, motor, and cognitive functions.

2. Activities and participation: This component include the ability to perform daily activities, such as self-care, communication, and mobility, as well as the ability to participate in the community and society.

The ICF framework also includes environmental and personal factors that can influence functioning and disability. These include things like the physical environment, social and economic conditions, and personal attitudes and beliefs.

One of the key strengths of the ICF framework is that it recognizes the dynamic and multidimensional nature of disability. It acknowledges that disability is not just a medical condition, but also a social construct that is shaped by the interaction between an individual's impairments, the environment, and societal attitudes and barriers.

The ICF approach has been widely adopted in the field of disability and rehabilitation, and it is used to guide the development of policies, programs, and interventions to promote inclusion and participation for people with disabilities. Furthermore, it is also useful for healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers as a tool for measuring and monitoring the impact of policies and interventions on the lives of people with disabilities.

Additionally, the ICF approach allows for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of disability, as it takes into account not only the impairments, but also the impact of the environment and societal factors on the functioning and participation of individuals with disabilities. This allows for the development of targeted and effective interventions that address not only the medical aspect of the disability, but also the social and environmental barriers that may be preventing full inclusion and participation.

Furthermore, the ICF framework also promotes the use of person-centred and strengths-based approaches, by shifting the focus from the deficits and limitations of the individual to their abilities, strengths, and potential for growth and development.

In order to overcome these barriers and to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the

United Nations in 2006. It calls for the rights of people with disabilities to be protected and for them to be able to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.

ICF and approaches to disability

The social model of disability, which emerged in the 1970s, views disability as a socially constructed experience rather than an individual characteristic. It argues that the barriers and discrimination faced by people with disabilities are the result of societal attitudes and the physical and social environment, rather than the individual's impairments or medical conditions. According to this model, disability is not an inherent characteristic of an individual, but rather a relationship between the individual and their environment.

The social model of disability approach has two main ideologies that are closely related, the attitudinal approach, and the ideological approach.

The Attitudinal approach focuses on the negative attitudes and stereotypes that people with disabilities face in society, and the need to change these attitudes in order to promote inclusion and participation. This approach argues that the barriers that people with disabilities face are not just physical, but also social, and that these social barriers are rooted in negative attitudes and stereotypes. The attitudinal approach calls for the need to change these attitudes through education, awareness, and campaigns to promote positive images of people with disabilities, and to increase understanding and acceptance of diversity.

The Ideological approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for a fundamental shift in the way society views disability, from a medical model to a social model. It calls for the need to move away from the traditional understanding of disability as an individual characteristic and towards an understanding of disability as a socially constructed experience. The ideological approach stresses the need to change the social and political systems, policies, and practices that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion of people with disabilities. It calls for the need to create a more inclusive and equitable society that recognizes the rights and needs of people with disabilities, and promotes their full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

The bio-psycho-social model of disability takes into account the biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to the experience of disability. This model recognizes that disability is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by an interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. It acknowledges that an individual's impairments or

medical conditions are only one aspect of their experience of disability, and that environmental and societal factors also play a significant role.

The medical model of disability views disability as a medical condition that needs to be diagnosed, treated, and cured. It defines disability as an individual's impairments or medical conditions, and focuses on addressing these impairments to improve the individual's functioning. This model tends to view disability as a problem that needs to be fixed, rather than as a societal issue that needs to be addressed.

Disability and Pedagogy: A New Perspective on Teaching and Learning

According to the 2011 population census, the number of individuals with disabilities in India has risen by 22.4% between 2001 and 2011. In 2001, there were 2.19 crore disabled individuals, and this number increased to 2.68 crore in 2011, with 1.5 crore being males and 1.18 crore being females. The growth rate for disabled populations is higher in urban areas and among urban females, with a decadal growth of 48.2% in urban areas and 55% among urban females. Additionally, among scheduled castes, the growth rate is 2.45%.

Despite the increase in the number of disabled individuals, India still has a long way to go in terms of ensuring the educational rights of children with special needs. There is a lack of data on inclusion of children with special needs in the 0-6 age group and in higher education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Inclusive Education Scheme has included 10.71 lakh children with special needs, but this still falls short of the estimated number of individuals with special needs in the 0-29 age group who need access to education (1.23 crores as per 2011 census data). Furthermore, it is estimated that only 20 lakhs persons with special needs are currently studying in primary, secondary, and special schools. The challenge ahead is how to ensure educational access to the remaining children and persons with special and diverse needs. Despite the presence of legislation such as the Right to Education since 2005 and the guarantee of compulsory and free education to all children in the Indian Constitution, India has not yet been able to reach even 20% of its children and persons with special needs.

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) specifically addresses education and requires governments to Provide education to children and youth with disabilities on an equal basis with other children, and ensure that education is provided within an inclusive system.

The current state of education for children and youth with disabilities in India is inadequate. There are multiple reasons for this, despite India's commitment to providing access to education without discrimination. However, commitment alone is not enough to ensure that children and girls with disabilities have access to education in a disability-friendly, barrier-free, and accessible environment. There is a need for a clear understanding of inclusive education, which should be reflected in vision, mission, policies, action plans, legal provisions, and resource allocations. Historically, the education of children with special needs has not been considered an integral part of the education system, and general education systems have not been prepared to make schools and universities truly inclusive.

A comprehensive policy on education is necessary to turn political will and vision into action. Inclusion of disadvantaged groups in mainstream education and development is a process that requires identifying and systematically removing socio-economic, cultural, political, administrative, and other barriers. The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2015, for the first time, adopted an Indian perspective on inclusive education that reflects global concerns and commitments to which India is a participant or signatory.

The key factors that may exclude children and persons with special needs from mainstream education include:

1. Policies that ignore education for all and fail to include children and youth with disabilities.

2. A lack of framework for monitoring progress in achieving Education for All for children and youth with disabilities.

3. Failure to identify and remove systemic barriers to inclusive education at planning, administration, monitoring, and implementation levels.

4. Lack of recognition of the factors that affect inclusive education, such as social gaps within the education of children and youth with disabilities among SC/ST/Minorities/Gender discrepancies.

5. Disability being a state subject/PRI subject and education being a concurrent subject leading to gaps in access to education for children and young persons with disabilities across different states in India.

6. Education of differently-abled children being the responsibility of two ministries resulting in conflicting policies and practices in the education of children with special needs.

7. Failing to understand that inclusive education can serve as a starting point to improve the overall education system, which would benefit all learners, has led to inclusive education being perceived as an additional component rather than a core component of the education system.

8. Women and girls with disabilities require rehabilitation strategies that are appropriate to our socio-cultural conditions. It is crucial to raise awareness about the rights and needs of women with disabilities as they are among the most affected in the modern world, which still fails to value and respect women for their inherent worth rather than the images presented in the media and fashion industry.

The need of the hour is to recognizes the importance of inclusive education as an integral part of the education system. It shall be taken care that every teacher should be able to meet the diverse needs of all learners, and that the education administration at all levels should have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of persons with special needs. The need for adequate support such as e-learning, ICT, and teacher training to address the special and diverse needs of students has constantly been emphasized by disabled individuals, families and NGOs working in the disability sector. The urban-rural divide has emerged as a key challenge in reaching unreached children and youth with disabilities.

NEP 2020 addresses disability concerns in all components of the education system, including admission policies, teacher training, curriculum development, teaching strategies, learning materials, evaluation system, and virtual learning platforms. The policy adopts an educational view of inclusion, rather than a disability view, and aims to move away from labelling and isolating children with disabilities in segregated environments. NEP 2020 has the potential to be a major game-changer in promoting inclusive education when it is implemented at the grass-root level. It includes measures such as flexible education system, e-learning facilities, online learning, inclusive teacher training program, National skill development program, and capacity building for existing teachers to make education for all a reality in India.

Conclusion

The demands for social inclusion are a call for an end to the oppression that society has been exercising on people with disabilities. It is important to put an end to the victimization and exploitation that people with disabilities have been facing. The key to empowering people with disabilities is to remove the various barriers that prevent them from exercising their

responsibilities as citizens, whether it be at home, in the community, or in the workplace. It is time to move away from the culture of dependency and low expectations, and instead invest in and empower people with disabilities to participate and be included in society.

Tackling these barriers is not a task that falls solely on the government, but rather a responsibility shared by many stakeholders including people with disabilities themselves, employers, health professionals, educators, local communities, and providers of goods and services. Improving the life chances and promoting social inclusion for people with disabilities requires a collaborative effort.

To achieve this, it is important to have a carefully planned and well-resourced approach. Sensitization and awareness programs for different stakeholders about the different types of disabilities, their needs, and their capabilities are necessary. In-service training for different stakeholders, including medical professionals, teachers, civil servants, lawyers, employers, employment officers, and local community leaders, can increase knowledge about disabilities, develop skills for working with PwD and infuse a positive attitude towards them.

Additionally, there is a need to focus on the strengths, perspectives, and abilities of people with disabilities and empower them to take control of their own lives. Incorporating a course on disability and pedagogy of teaching for children with different types of disabilities in the curriculum for B.Ed and M.Ed teachers training is necessary. People with disabilities must have access to opportunities to contribute to society, supported by both specialist and mainstream policy, which will help them to be a part of social inclusion.

It is important for the needs of individuals with disabilities to be taken into account and included at the beginning of the creation and implementation of policies for all members of society. The experience of government support and services for people with disabilities needs to change, with a need for more active dialogue between them. Lastly, it is important to adopt universal design for barrier-free and inclusive environments.

The situation in India is ripe for persons with disabilities (PwD) to be part of the economic workforce. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disability (DePWD), within the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has helped to create focus on the ecosystem for PwD by launching the National Action Plan for PwD and the Accessible India Campaign. The Skill Council for Persons with Disability (ScPWD) has been established to develop and advance skill policy. Comprehensive support systems need to be expanded to

offer services such as job analysis, inclusion services, workplace accommodations, leadership development, and increasing awareness and sensitivity.

Technology-based platforms such as Namma Vaani, an interactive voice response system which is available via a missed call, provide virtual networking for many disabled people across rural Karnataka. PwD share their stories, issues and solve each other's problems to gain awareness, hope, face their daily challenges and become economically independent. These technology-based platforms will be the game changers and will ensure a bright future for the skilling of persons with disability.

PwD working successfully are harbingers of this change. It is important to capitalize on the successful models for PwD with a special focus on severe physical and mental disabilities and by giving equal importance to all forms of employment across geographies.

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