
Book Review

India: Social Development Report 2016 Disability Rights Perspectives

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The Social Development Report 2016 provides a comprehensive interpretation of disability and is indeed a fresh approach, quite different from the usual works concerning persons with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in specific. It skillfully intersects various concepts—disability, discrimination and development, and highlights how each of these different concepts can traverse across and cast an irrefutable impact on each other. The layout of the Report is clear and concrete. It showcases a vivid collection of papers by proficient writers. It certainly addresses a wide array of issues concerning persons with

disabilities, ranging from critically reviewing disability in relation to gender employment, education and access to economic rights. It must be stated that the work does stand out exceptionally well because while addressing various issues in detail and based on the empirical evidences, it also focuses on the achievements of persons/women with disabilities.

The expertise of the Report finds reflection through its ability in highlighting the problems or plights of persons with disabilities and thereby reveals a committed initiative to create awareness concerning them. Its dexterity in emphasising the achievements of

women with disabilities does play a central role in clearly communicating the message across, that the real essence of disability lies not in being treated based on charity or the medical model, but rather strongly advocates the inclusion of persons with disabilities and other social groups into the mainstream society. I believe that this can create concrete awareness not only among the general masses but also among persons with disabilities themselves by making them conscious of their own rights.

The Report, while presenting a commendable spectrum of papers highlighting neglect and abuse based on narratives of women with disabilities, displays not only academic excellence but also a whirlpool of humane emotions. The authors have effectively communicated numerous socially relevant messages through their well-researched papers based on empirical evidences.

The Report provides a fresh set of information, much in deviation from the usual quantitative and qualitative data available from other sources. It provides tangible quantitative and qualitative data based on the diverse demographic locations and boundaries. This variability of data is commendable as it not only facilitates in-depth understanding of the issue of disability among the readers, but at the same time glaringly points out how issues concerning persons or women with disabilities in spite of commonness vary in nature and intensity across geographical

boundaries. The proficiency of the Report is also revealed through the presentation of quantitative data, wherein the tables provided are comprehensive, well explained and clearly communicate the intended purpose through the data presented.

I strongly feel that besides addressing singular issues, the report also reflects a strong relationship between the civil, political, economic and social rights of people across various social groups. The vivacity of the writers in addressing various issues finds expression in the nature of their papers. Besides urging the imperative need to undertake concrete educational, social and civic initiatives as a means to implement inclusion and use it as a revolutionary measure to ascertain essential respect for women with disabilities, it also challenges the concept of ability in conceptualising labour. This is well reflected in papers exploring the perceived relation between disability and labour space, thus highlighting the innumerable issues and factors that mediate as persons or women with disabilities negotiate a space in, and recognition for themselves in the labour space.

The social development of any country is affected by a multiplicity of factors, among which the progress of women, persons with disabilities, other marginalised communities and the aged or elderly constitute a significant role. This finds good representation in this report. It is true that some of the topics do not

address the issue of disability as a theme, but they do certainly address numerous challenges that people from other marginalised social groups experience. Through its attempt in addressing various issues concerning numerous other social groups, the Report adequately highlights the innumerable challenges experienced by the elderly, and advocates the necessity for a strong social security system to resolve their varied issues. The report justly explores how vulnerability of the old age makes them susceptible to disease, dependency, being considered a burden, and there hence, lies the element of disability.

Elaborating on numerous degenerations that the marginalised sections of society experience, the Report traces the essential and acute problem of accessibility to housing in urban India. It exposes the status and character of unmet demand for housing in the light of present policy frameworks. Addressing the needs of diverse communities, the Report also presents a critical analysis of the gravity or volume of development of the mining community.

In a period when continual emphasis is being laid on laying the strong foundation of '*Swachh Bharat*', the Report attempts to provide a concrete picture revealing the multiple layers of shame and oppression imposed by caste, patriarchy and untouchability as professed by the livelihood of manual scavenging. It contests the workability of the current sanitation programmes

in the realm of missing of toilets, neglect of waste management, etc.

Section Three of the Report, which includes composite social development indices based on a wide range of indicators, provides comprehensive, valid and comparable statistics traversing across states, social groups as well as urban-rural divide. This can facilitate greater understanding of the numerous issues concerning persons or women with disabilities and other social groups. This can be particularly resourceful for researchers, people from diverse professions, governments, the civil society and organisations of persons with disabilities, to focus on various issues related to the inclusion and development of people with disabilities both as beneficiaries and agents.

Based on an overall analysis, I find that the report fervently urges the necessity to review the concept of inclusion. It argues for the need to go beyond the prerequisite norm of mere adaptation, as argued by the concept of integration towards transforming the system itself, which would instead acknowledge and accept diversity. Most of the papers throughout the report raise strong deliberations on the need to establish a link between the varied needs of the diverse sections of society and address the basic structures of inequity in the society. The Report provides critical insight into several Indian policies and makes a judicious attempt not only to highlight their chief assurances,

but rather traverses ahead to judge and challenge some of their failures in terms of addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, women with disabilities, migrants, status of financial services, etc. It critically questions the feasibility of some of the policies and glaringly points out to the innumerable shortcomings, ranging from regulatory failure to institutional neglect.

I am sure that the Report will be widely referred to by people from diverse professions concerned with issues focussing on disability. The work does not need very many revisions, except a few typological errors and a few suggestions which I think can be incorporated into the Report. I think that the introduction to the Report can be made more compact. The issue of disability can be introduced in a more evaluative manner thus, rationalising the necessity and urgency for the Social Development Report to incorporate it as a subject to be addressed in one of its issues. Moreover, I also believe that although the Report has dealt with the concept of disability across various social groups, yet it is also advisable, if besides the various groups emphasised on it could also address challenges confronting persons experiencing visual impairment, dyslexia, autism and psychiatric problems. It could include research papers or thematic papers concerning specific forms of disabilities since each of its kind has its own sets of achievements and

confrontations. On certain occasions, these can vary across territorial boundaries which can be highlighted. It could also focus on providing some pertinent information concerning legal rights and accessibility issues (transportation, sanitation, etc.) of persons or women with disabilities.

It is also a suggestion that the Report could deal with disability as a singular issue in one of its publication, since there are still several issues that can be incorporated in its deliberations. Although Section Two of the Report explores some essays on financial inclusion, housing and Clean India campaign, and there is no denial of the fact that they too portray significant issues that need to be addressed, but it would be good if they can be dealt with in a separate publication issue rather than attempting to incorporate it with the disability studies.

There are a few single authored and edited books available in the market that deal with the subject of disability at large. They focus on the diverse challenges experienced by persons or women with disabilities. However, this Report does comprehensively deal with some of these issues.

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