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The Disability Movement: Raising awareness and making the voices heard

The situation of disabled people provides a microcosm of the whole development debate and the process. Disabled people are oppressed and marginalised in every country. Their lives are constrained by social attitudes which stem from fear and prejudice. By probing these prejudices and studying cases where they have been overcome, we gain an insight into the processes of liberation and empowerment that lie at the heart of any development effort.

However, a question arises over the logic of forming a separate group called '*disabled people*'. If integration is the final aim, so that disabled people are regarded as normal as others and are accommodated into the affairs of everyday life, then surely forming a separate group runs counter to that aim. The crucial issue for disabled people is whether they have the choice to form their own groups. Being in the same boat, sharing experiences and helping oneself by helping others is the key feature of self-help groups. It is the choice, that possibility of forming common-problem groups that marks the beginning of empowerment for disabled people. But there is a need to go beyond this and take on the question of advocacy to create a movement. An ideal world would regard disabled people as nothing out of the ordinary and there would be no need for a separate movement. But in this very unbalanced world, in which we live, run by the power-thirst as well as by self-meaning administrators, there has to be a kind of advocacy, a movement to make its voice heard. Disabled people want to be treated as normal citizens, with rights. They want to be treated equally and participate as equal citizens in their own communities. To achieve this, you need political and social action to change society and this is where the disability movement comes into the scene.

Disabled people need to see themselves and their roles positively and they can be given the powers to achieve this provided the *other* people relate to them positively. Once such an understanding has been reached, they can begin to do something about it. Other citizens too can act as catalysts in this process where the right environment for a change in consciousness is created. The effect is not just in terms of the change in the consciousness, but in showing a far more effective way of dealing with the practical problems of disabled people. This is where the social and political action comes to the rescue and that is why - the Disability Movement.

The rights of people with disabilities are best promoted by people with disabilities themselves. The growth of a democratic disability movement is one way to help ensure that government provision is appropriate to the needs and rights of people with disabilities. It can also help ensure that target groups are involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all disability and development work.

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The First Visually Impaired Qualified Classical Dance Teacher in India

- Sri Ramana Maharshi academy for the blind (SRMAB), Malavalli Project



Manjappa, a visually impaired person from birth hails from a Village in Bangalore District. He had completed his 5th standard (5 years of schooling), when a student of SRMAB informed his parents about the facilities in SRMAB for the visually impaired persons. The dance teachers at SRMAB saw his penchant in music and dance and encouraged him to take up classical dancing. He started training under them along with other students through touch and feel method. Hours of discussions / constant touch with his teachers and long duration of dance practice each day saw him blossom as one of the best in his class. Now he has mastered the technique of balancing the pot on his head while keeping his foot on a plate (Kuchipudi, a kind of classical dance). By

constant practice, guidance and blessings of his teachers, he is confident enough to give three hours non stop performance at ease.

Mr. Manjappa has given stage performances both in India and abroad. Apart from sparing time for dance practice in his daily schedule, he has successfully completed his academic education till 10th standard in first class. In the dance he has successfully completed his Junior Grade Examination in First Class.

Mr. Manjappa has led the dance troupe to many places in India and abroad. The dance troupe has performed in Australia (1999), Italy (2003 and 2004) and in USA (2003). He has received many awards like, Prathibha Puraskar, Aralu Mallige Puraskar and Angavikalara Kalyana Award from the Government of Kamataka. His name has also entered *Limca Book of World Records-2004*.

Mr. Manjappa is now teaching dance at SRMAB and is the first qualified classical dance teacher among the visually impaired. He says he is ever grateful to Sri T.V. Srinivasan, Founder President of the academy for providing all supports in his academic and dance career. He has also appeared for the Senior Grade Examination conducted by Govt. of Karnataka, India in May, 2005

AIFO wishes Mr. Manjappa the best in his dancing career and also in his future endeavours.

“Recreation is not just a play. It is a re-creation of our innate abilities ”

WE CARE's strategy to promote Inclusive education

We Care (CBR & Bangalore Adoption) initiated the **Inclusive Education programme** since 2004 in the target area of 9 slums in Bangalore supported by AIFO. The primary aim was to explore and develop an understanding of the process involved in integrating the disabled students with abled students in local regular primary schools. To promote this WE CARE has adopted a unique 4-stage process.

Initial/First Stage – A non-formal education programme for the period of seven months will be conducted for the children with disabilities from the target area for the before the school academic year. During this period, the children will be provided with medical care and also make them to learn to support themselves in their daily activities. Suitable aids and appliances will be distributed for those in need with economic intervention for the deserved. With this kind of medical, social and economic intervention, these children will be fit to get initiated into the local schools



Second Stage – A workshop on inclusive education will be conducted for all the teachers of the target area with help of the local Board of Education Officer. This creates awareness among the teachers and is helpful to admit children with disabilities in the local schools.

Third Stage - the family members of the children with disability were also given encouragement through counselling and frequent family visits by the area CBR worker. They were also given awareness on the rights of the disabled persons.

Fourth Stage – integrated camps are being conducted in view of promoting inclusive education. The camp helps both disabled and abled children to participate in the programme with enthusiasm and gives them an opportunity to explore and experiment their talents through various activities. The camp also enables the project staff to understand certain difficulties experienced by the disabled children.



By this time these children would have learnt to read and write. With the regular follow up of the CBR workers and with sufficient counselling, the parents also come forward to admit their children in the schools. The school authorities do not object in admitting the children with disabilities, thanks to the awareness camp

"If you deny disabled people education opportunities, then it is the lack of education and not their disabilities that limit their opportunities" Judy Heumann, World Bank's Advisor on Disability and Development

Award for Sr. Mary Mascarenhas of Sumanahalli Project



Sr. Mary Mascarenhas has been awarded the Ugadi Puraskar award for her contribution to social causes specially leprosy by the Karnatakandra Lalitha Kala Academy. The award was presented by noted filmstar Chiranjeevi in a programme on 11th of April, in the presence of former Governor of Karnataka.

Sr. Mary has been working as the placement officer of Sumanahalli Society since the inception of the project in 1978. She has spearheaded the rehabilitation programme of Sumanahalli. Housing project with the government, reservation for the leprosy cured in government job, placement of numerous people for work in private companies are some of the major achievements of her career.

Sr. Mary had also been a recipient of a national award for the Best Placement Officer and five state awards for her involvement with the leprosy affected people. AIFO takes this opportunity to congratulate her on her achievement.

3% reservation in IAS jobs for disabled persons

In a move that will benefit disabled persons qualifying the Civil Services Examination, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has issued orders to reserve 3% of the IAS jobs in the 2005-06 exams for persons with disability.

The orders came after Singh approved the appointment of Mr. Satish, a disabled candidate who qualified the examination in 2002, to the Indian Revenue Service (I.R.S.). Mr. Satish, who secured 249th rank in the examination, had written to Singh after he was denied the I.R.S. because of his being disabled (right hand polio).

After an inquiry, his name was cleared for allocation to the I.R.S and Mr. Satish has been told to join the training course. With this decision of the government, the higher Civil Services, non-technical Group A and Group B services have now been opened up for the first time to disabled persons.

First International Symposium on Ocular Leprosy will be held in Kolkata, India on 1st and 2nd October 2005. This will be First Ever International Event of Ophthalmology in Eastern India. For further details, kindly contact Dr. Swapan K. Samant: swapan_samanta@hotmail.com, swapan_samanta1@rediffmail.com

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