



## Role of Media for the Socialization of the Disabled Persons

<sup>\*1</sup>Dr. Goutam Majee

<sup>\*1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of History, Banwarilal Bhalotia College, Asansol, Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal, India.

### Abstract

Today media is not confined to the Radio, Television and Newspaper. After the invention of Internet and World Wide Web (www) revolutionize the media world in the late 1990s. Now we live in the era of Information and Technology. The Digital media and new media be in command of our society and culture. Most of the people are attached with the Social media. So social acceptance of media is no doubt very influential. On the other hand Disabled people are the most neglected in our society. They are burden for our society from the time immemorial. But the development of Internet, IT and Social media somehow change the shrewd idea of the social exclusion of disabled people. Disabled people can be categorized in to social, medical and religious term. They are commonly either hero, or villain, or victims to our society. The common people do not feel them as equal as another. The United Nations took great initiatives through UNISEF, WHO, UNESCO, WB like 'MDG' for the inclusion of disabled people all over the world. There are many rules and regulations like, PWD-1995 and RPWD Act 2016 enacted by the Indian Government for the inclusion of those disabled people in the mainstream society. There are a lot of guidelines in the National Education Policy, 2020 for widening the elementary, secondary and higher education among the disabled persons. But there are no remarkable changes in the social attitude towards them. Only media can alter these social taboos more effectively. The common people will not stigmatize and stereotype if the mass media takes initiative more actively. In this article, I will try to explore the role of media in response to the socialization of the disabled persons.

**Keywords:** Media, Disability, Advertisement, Print media, new media, Social media, UNO conventions, disability laws.

### Introduction

Media is the fourth pillar of Indian democracy. How this fourth pillar can influence our psyche in respect of socialization and inclusion of the disabled persons. Media has changed drastically in its form from the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. India is still a developing country. Our country may have food, shelter, education, health, unemployment related problems. But we cannot think without Social Media Network (SMN) and Internet. The New Media swallows our psyche and culture rapidly. Media can alter our mind so effectively. There are so many barriers for a disabled person to roam around the world. He/she cannot move easily every time having physical disabilities. Assistive technologies somehow help those disabled people to some extent. But one can easily communicate with the entire world through Internet and social media without facing any difficulties. Hearing impaired, visually impaired, orthopedically handicapped, cerebral palsy and other disabled persons can use Facebook, twitter, Skype, Instagram and so on for communicating with others. Even a visually impaired person can use these New Media with the help of the screen reader and talkback. According to the census of India, 2011, 2.21% people of the total population are disabled persons, which is almost two crore and sixty eight lakh people. This figure must be increased in respect of population growth. Besides that, 21 types of disabilities have

been categorized in the new RPWD Act, 2016. But, there should not have any doubt about the erroneous mind set up of the common people towards disabled persons can be altered through the help of this New Media, electronic media and print media.

### Disability Meaning

First of all, we should know, who are considered as the disabled persons in India. "Before the enactment of the PWD act in 1995, there were some ambiguities about the term, disability. Disability can be referred to as religious, medical and social terminology. Disabled, differently abled, physically challenged and especially 'Dibyang' are sometimes talked about. All these words actually bear the same meaning. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995" says; "Person with disability" means a person suffering from not less than forty percent of any disability as certified by a pertinent medical authority. A person having permanent or long-term physical or mental disability can be considered as disabled person. There were mainly 7 types of disabilities mentioned in PWD Act; blindness (totally absence of sight), low vision, hearing impairment, loco motor disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness respectively <sup>[1]</sup>.

The RPWD (Rights of Persons with Disabilities) Act has been

replaced the existing PWD Act, 1995. The types of disabilities have been increased in this new disability law from existing 7 to 21. Those 7 types of disabilities, mentioned in the PWD Act, 1995, are considered as 'Benchmark disabilities'. Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education. However, the central government has the power to add more type of disabilities <sup>[2]</sup>. The new 21 types of disabilities are as follows:

1. Blindness
2. Low-vision
3. Leprosy Cured persons
4. Hearing Impairment (deaf and hard of hearing)
5. Locomotor Disability
6. Dwarfism
7. Intellectual Disability
8. Mental Illness
9. Autism Spectrum Disorder
10. Cerebral Palsy
11. Muscular Dystrophy
12. Chronic Neurological conditions
13. Specific Learning Disabilities
14. Multiple Sclerosis
15. Speech and Language disability
16. Thalassemia
17. Hemophilia
18. Sickle Cell disease
19. Multiple Disabilities including deafblindness
20. Acid Attack victim
21. Parkinson's disease

Special Report, (2016 16<sup>th</sup> December) Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Retrieved from, <https://pib.gov.in>

So, this act was modified and rectified by the Indian Government in 2016. Including cerebral-palsy, acid victims and other 21 types of disabilities had been mentioned in the 'RPD Act' 2016 <sup>[2]</sup>. So first of all, we have to understand how those disabled persons can be defined. There are three models of disability which are; social model, medical model and religious model. The social model always tries to highlight about the socialization of disabled persons through some assistive technologies, barrier free environment, tactile path etc. in our society. Over all, this model talks about some administrative, legal and technological improvements for the inclusion of those disabled persons. The medical model talks about the physical disabilities in their medical term. It mentions about the physical obstacle of the disabled persons. This model always champions the proper treatment for eradicating the disability. Whether the religious model try to project those disabled persons as a past lives' deeds. Which mean, disability happens due to human's sin <sup>[3]</sup>. In the epic 'Mahavarata', Dhritarashtra who is a blind monarch has been blamed for the battle of 'Kurukshetra'. His position has been denied because of his blindness. On the other hand Sakuni who has a limping leg, characterized as a cruel and vindictive character. Most of the common people in India are guided by those beliefs, myths and superstition <sup>[4]</sup>. To overcome these challenges, the media can play a major role in portraying the actual scenario. The literacy rate among the common people as well as the disabled persons increased after independence to large extent. But, the traditional idea about the disability did not change fundamentally in our day to day life. In this aspect, media can play a major role in the long run.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (1945), a huge number of disabled

people emerged due to war casualty, essentially among the soldiers. The statesmen of different war effected countries, started thinking, how such a huge number of disabled people can be used as human resources. Disability problems emerged as an important issue in most of the countries. In spite of that, there was no proper projection of those war effected disabled soldiers in different countries. From 1941 to 1971, 3 different Indian census, there was no statement about how many disabled persons existed in India. In 1981 census, only 3 types of disability had been mentioned, which had been totally disappeared in 1991 census. No print media covered that incident any way. After a prolonged discussion and debate among different nation-states, in the end, the United Nations especially declared 'A Decade for the Disabled Persons' from 1983 to 1992. This was a remarkable resolution taken by the UNO for the disability movements. After that declaration, disabled rights' movement got momentum and spread all over the world. There were many strikes, gheraos, road-blockades, peaceful resistance, and petition against the government, primarily guided by the disabled persons for their actual rights and dignity in different parts of India. The print media highlighted such disability rights' movement. Print media was very much influential in the beginning of 1990s. Thus, the conventional idea of the common people altered to some extent. Finally, the 'Persons with Disabilities Act' (PWD) was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1995. This was the first disability law passed by the Indian parliament almost after four decades of independence. This act declared for the full participation and equal opportunities of the disabled persons. 3 per cent seats reserved for those disabled persons in getting education and employment in the governmental sector. In 2001 census, it had been revealed that, 2.1 per cent of the total Indian population is disabled persons. Though this had been rectified in 2011 census and stated that 2.21 per cent of total Indian population are disabled persons <sup>[5]</sup>. So the Indian Government realized that the increasing number of disability cannot be neglected any more.

On the other hand, in 2000, The United Nations adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In this declarations, the head of the states around the globe formulated Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They are to be achieved within 2015 <sup>[6]</sup>. So disability matter became an international issue. The member-states of United Nations try to eradicate the disability from this world through mass campaign, awareness camp for growing literacy rate, malnutrition, polio vaccination and so on. On the other hand they try to socialize those disabled persons through some inclusive measures. Besides that, Government of India signed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. 'No one leave behind' is the main motto of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Holistic development approach has been clearly stated in the SDGs within the target year of 2030. So, naturally the disability issues come in to the forefront, which have been popularize by the print-media, electronic-media as well as social media very effectively.

Generally it is seen the disabled persons are quite often suffer from discrimination and social exclusion. Articles 8, 9 and 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the People with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006), guidelines deal with awareness, accessibility and access to information <sup>[7]</sup>. The state should facilitate access to new information and communication technologies especially the Internet for PWDs. In fact mobile phone and services should be accessible for the PWDs published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in cooperation with the

Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ICT). The convention also calls for the states to ensure that the all educational, cultural and recreational and official materials are available to PWDs in accessible format <sup>[8]</sup>. The Information and Technology Act of 2000 in India was totally silent about the web accessibility. The United Nations General Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on his message on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2014 urged the international community to harness the power of technology for development of all. He opined that through adaptive, assistive and inclusive technology the persons with disabilities can make the most of their potential in their community and in their workplace <sup>[9]</sup>. But, still today, there are a lot of governmental websites, which are not properly accessible for the visually impaired persons. Such persons cannot access those websites with the help of the screen readers or talk-backs. The sign language is not seen in most of the cases. Even, we do not have the constitution of India in Braille or Indian Sign Language (ISL), which are accessible for the visually impaired and hearing impaired including deaf and dumb persons respectively.

Today, 10 per cent of the world population is disabled people. Which means approximately 650 million people currently live with permanent physical or mental disability all over the world. According to the United Nations report, 80 per cent among those disabled persons live in the developing countries. India is also a developing country. The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the poor people in the world are disabled persons. According to the UNICEF, more than 90 per cent of children with disability in developing countries do not attend schools. Although, Right to Education of 2009, talked about the compulsory elementary free education for every child. This law has been amended in 2012, where the disabled children between the ages of 6 to 18 have the right to get the free elementary education. In spite of all these, the ratio of school education among the disabled children did not increase so far. Recently, the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, also provides some definite guidelines for spreading elementary, secondary and higher education among the children with special needs. Media can play an active role for growing awareness about the necessity of spreading education among the all spectrum of our society. We should not forget that, poverty and disability are interlinked because of the conditions in which they live in <sup>[10]</sup>.

The World Disability Report (2011) published by the World Health Organization (WHO) a World Bank (WB) states that 15 percent of the world population has some form of disability. Over 80 percent of those disabled persons live in the rural area of the developing countries. 186 million children with disability cannot complete their primary education. According to the Indian census of 2011, there were 26,810,557 persons with disability live in India. Which comprise 2.21 percent of the whole population of India.<sup>11</sup> This kind of statistics clearly reveal that the UN Councils and Indian Government, both are very concerned about the disability crisis. They are taking so many effective measures from their part for the inclusion of those disabled people in to the mainstream of our society. But the mass media cannot remain totally silent about this matter. This media can take an important part in socializing those disabled people. The ignorant, illiterate, unconsciousness Indian common people will be more responsive, if different forms of media can take great initiative portraying of how many disabled students are appearing in WBBSE or WBCSE or ICSE in this year, can be

a good approach to the news media. When some disabled students secure good marks in secondary and higher secondary level examination, published in the daily newspaper, which can be more effective to our society. This kind of information may change the mind set up of the ignorant common people who little know about those disabled persons <sup>[12]</sup>. Till today, many people think that the disabled persons are the burden for the family and society as well. They have nothing to do in their lives except begging. If media projects how many disabled persons secure government jobs in state or national level selection test, that depict a good effect on common people. Many Indian daily newspapers portrayed that Ajit Kumar, in spite of having visual impairment, cracked in the IAS exam successfully. The Hindustan Times daily newspaper brings out that 'India's first visually challenged woman IAS officer becomes Sub-Collector'. The visually impaired IAS, Pranjal Patil's <sup>[13]</sup> name obviously change the traditional mind setup of the ignorant people. The projection of this kind of success stories of some disabled persons in different newspapers and television channels have a great impact in our common psyche.

Every year, 3<sup>rd</sup> December day has been celebrated as world disabled day. But the main focus of this day is to highlight the violence of the acts which has been implemented for the benefit of the disabled persons. No media or governmental or nongovernmental organization talk about the actual rights for the persons for the special need. Here it can be mentioned about a particular news, published in a daily newspaper which stated that Chhattisgarh is the first the state where 'Sugam Election Accessibility Observers' had been formed for the disabled persons in the state election in 2019. In the same year, there are so many polling booths which were not disabled friendly in Telangana state. The number of EVMs with Braille were insufficient, as were wheelchair and other basic amenities in Karnataka state election <sup>[14]</sup>. Election is very significant for such a big democratic country. If media and newspaper depict how many measures taken by the Indian Election Commission for the disabled voters that may be a good indication for the inclusion of those disabled persons. We all know, general election is regarded as a great festival in our country. Different reports about the special initiatives for the above 85 year aged people and disabled persons for ballot voting from their home is another issue in the mass media in the 2024 general Lok Sabha Election. This kind of news reports actually help for the socialization of the disabled persons.

Radio is also a good medium for nurturing disabled consciousness among the common people. Because, India is a developing country and its literacy rate is not up to the mark till today. Besides that, almost 30 per cent of the Indian population live in below poverty line. So to endorse those disabled persons more inclusively, Radio can be excellent medium for those ignorant people. Radio is a good companion for a visual impaired person in getting information's and entertainment. Here I can mention one programme named 'Uttoron' regularly broadcasted in 'Gitanjali' channel at 8:15 in the morning <sup>[15]</sup>. In this programme, how a disabled person achieves his/her goal in spite of having disability, represented in actual fact. Common people can get motivation from that kind of programme. On the other hand, they can know about their struggle also. There are so many FM channels broadcasted in different Indian metropolitan cities and small towns in different regional languages. If those Fm channels and Radio broadcasting authorities sermonize inclusive



messages, then disabled friendly society can be created more efficiently. The concept of community radio may be another good tool to aware the common people concerning the disabled persons and their acceptability in the mainstream society.

Cinema is another medium to convey influential messages for the common people. But sorry to say, in the decade of 1960s and 1970s Indian Baliwood Hindi cinema always depicted a pitiable and pathetic picture about those disabled persons. They were regarded as downtrodden and poverty-stricken people<sup>[16]</sup>. Disability may happen due to poverty, illiteracy, unconsciousness, malnutrition and so on in most of the cases such a developing countries. But Media should not generalize those things appropriate to all. Cinema should have constructive attitude and should be inclusive for those disabled persons. This can be seen especially from the middle of the 1990s. I can mention about 'Koyee Mil Gaya', 'Tare Zamin Par', 'Iqbal', 'Black' etc. Baliwood films where disabled welcoming and sociable message had been depicted much accurately. A Bengali Taliwood film named 'Care of Sir' also conveyed inclusive picture for those disabled persons.

Television programmes can take a major role in making social opinion and eradicating social discrimination. The television has the potential to play an important role in constructing the actual concept of disabled persons in Indian society. Television news channels should present some disabled persons' oriented programmes. TV serials in different regional languages are very popular to our household society. Here I can mention about a serial named 'Sanjer Bati' broadcasted at 6:00 PM every day in 'Star Jalsa' channel where demonstrates a visually impaired person who is successfully facing his family related problems in spite of having physical disability. Thus Media should popularize the true representation for the social awareness towards the differently abled persons<sup>[17]</sup>. In recent times, the 'One plus One' Cultural Exchange Centre is a media operation which run entirely by the disabled journalists in China. This kind of instances are totally absent in our country. We have to realize that, people with disability are in the every community and they have the same range of emotions, interests, talents and skills<sup>[18]</sup>.

Our society always stereotype the disabled persons. Actually the common people's feelings are generally guided by some superstitions, myths and beliefs regarding those disabled people. We can easily observe that, the Television, Radio, Newspapers etc try to champion about the medical treatment and personal achievement. Images of the disabled people are pitiable and pathetic to our society. So advertising agencies always exclude those people from any kind of advertisement<sup>[19]</sup>. We hardly notice an advertisement where assistive technologies especially made for the disabled persons, shown in the television or newspaper.

Besides that, we can hardly notice an advertisement where a disabled person acts in a leading role. The advertising agencies constantly pay no attention to those disabled persons as they are taken as pitiable and pathetic objects. Inclusiveness of those disabled persons can be motivated through the effectual advertisements. Recently, picture of disabled persons are portrayed in the commercial 'NESS Coffee' and 'KFC' advertisements which would be regarded as a good sign<sup>[20]</sup>.

There are many forms for getting information nowadays. Besides Television, Radio, Newspaper, Internet and social media are most popular form of media. The mass media has

great impact in influencing the society. But how media projects the disabled people? Is a matter of great debate. Sometime we can see a few disability specific programme such as YouTube documentary. But disabled people are hardly ever thought to the mainstream society. They are either stigmatize or stereotyped. They are objects of super hero or pity. Media can provide balanced and fair representation of those disabled people. Media can wipe out the negative perception in the society. Portraying people with disabilities with dignity and respect in the media can help promote more inclusive and tolerant society. Media should promote positive and inclusive images of men and women with physical disabilities<sup>[21]</sup>.

According to the inventor of World Wide Web (www), T. Berners-lee, there is no difference in between capability and disability while using the web. The W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) is committed to removing accessibility barriers for all people with disabilities including hearing, physical, cognitive and visual impaired persons<sup>[22]</sup>. 'Digital India' is nowadays governmental motto. So accessibility of Internet through computer or smart-phone is a normal phenomenon. The world is becoming smaller and smaller in the age of 'Global Village'. Even a visually impaired person can easily utilize the computer and smart-phone with the help of 'Jaws', 'NVDA', and 'Talk-back' respectively.

The Internet and the World Wide Web today revolutionize the global communication system. The information revolution really take us to the McLuhan's notion of a 'Global Village'. We have already noticed the Internet revolution and IT revolution. Now we are in the age of social media revolution. The 'new media', 'social networking' and 'socializing' have also changed drastically in the last few years even among the PWDs<sup>[23]</sup>. Disabled persons can easily express their happiness, sorrow, affectionate and bitterness through 'Skype', 'twitter', 'Facebook' and other social media networking site. The digital based new media is accessible for all today. As a mass communication tool, the new media plays an important role to congregate information's, entertainment and education for all.

The Copyright Bill was passed by the both houses of Indian parliament where it had been stated that, the websites should be accessible for the benefit for the persons with disabilities. The Honorable President of India signed that bill in June 2012. This Copyright Act was published in the Gazette notification. Accessible websites have great significance in disseminating education and information<sup>[24]</sup>. The media representation of inclusive education can be strong tool for the social response. In 2015, the International Labour Organization argues that portraying PWD with dignity and respect in the media can help promote more inclusive and tolerant societies<sup>[25]</sup>.

## Conclusion

Now we live in the era of Information and Technology. The Digital media and new media be in command of our society and culture. Most of the people are attached with the Social media. So social acceptance of media is no doubt very influential. The United Nations and the international agencies like World Bank, IMF, UNICEF, UNESCO, etc. take great initiative for the inclusion of those disabled persons in to the mainstream of our society. There are many rules and regulations enacted by the Indian Government for the inclusion of those disabled people in our society. But there are no remarkable changes in the social attitude towards them. Only media can alter these social taboos more effectively. The

common people will not stigmatize and stereotype if the mass media takes initiative more actively. According to the disabled activist Paul Hunt; 'we are tired of being statistics'. There is not a single newspaper or magazine published in Braille for the visually impaired persons. No sign languages have been used in news channels. Digital media should be audio-visual for the sake of disabled persons. There are so many disabled academicians and administrators in our country. But generally those intellectuals are not invited during discussions and debates in the TV shows. The advertising agencies should motivate such advertisement which can socialize those disabled persons. Disabled friendly motivational news should be broadcasted in the prime time. Our society has to realize that, the disabled persons are the important part of ourselves. They should not be overlooked. 2.21 per cent of the whole population is not a small one. There is no doubt, the mass-media can take an important part to promote those disabled persons for their social inclusion.

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