

PORTRAIT OF THE SOCIETY

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Portrait of the Society

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The Social Model of Disability: Inclusivity in Mouth and Exclusivity at Heart both in Literature and Society

Prasanta Rakshit

Abstract

Disability studies are perhaps the most complex and problematic field of research currently in vogue. Whereas the "medical model" of disability views disability in terms of individual impairments to be cured, the "social model" talks about the societal barriers operating within a society because of the differences in body structure. The word disability is associated with 'pathos', 'pain', 'suffering', 'sympathy' etc. But the society is apathetic and full of hatred towards people with disabilities. People with impairments are facing regular challenges in their day to day activities and these challenges are aggravated by society. Educational institutions talk about inclusivity regarding people with 'impairments' in the mainstream educational system, but in reality educational institutions are unable to accommodate these people and give them equal opportunity in reading, writing, and speaking to that of other students. Literature is a reflection of the society and in literature differently abled people are marginalized and are represented with a lot of negative stereotypes. Literature portrays differently abled people as helpless, pitiful, laughable, evil etc. Society reinforces the 'norm' and anything deviating the 'norm' is stereotyped and stigmatized. Social institutions like marriage, various ceremonies are not meant for differently abled people and sometimes, they are considered as less than human. This chapter will discuss the hypocrisy of the society in dealing with differently abled persons (from the author's first hand

knowledge of disability) – boasting about equality, equal status and equal opportunity, but in reality cherishing a deep rooted hatred, bifurcation and denigration towards these people. In short, differently abled people are actually people with different set of abilities, but society made them disabled through its representations, and thereby marginalizing them from the mainstream society.

Keywords : Disability, Society, Education, Literature, Stereotypes.

The word 'Disability' hints at something missing either physically, mentally or legally. According to World Health Organization (W.H.O.), about 15% of the world's population – one in seven – lives with some form of disability. Disability is perhaps the most interesting and complex issue at present. Any person can become disabled at any point of time. A person may not be born with impairment but he might be attacked with a disease or have an accident. Similarly, aged people who face difficulties in performing their day to day activities are also disabled. So each and every person has to face disability at some point of time. It is true that most impairment is acquired rather than being born with. I am writing this chapter from my firsthand experience of disability and I am very much aware how societal responses to disability have affected my life and the life of other disabled people. One integral part of our society is the concept of normality and our society does not want to accept anything that is out of the 'norm'. Though our society talks a lot about equity, equality and all these things, in reality societal approaches to disability is different.

Disability studies have always been a neglected category in social science researches where class, race, gender etc. were discussed a lot. Lately, few researchers are doing their researches on this field, but very few among them are themselves disabled or do have the experience of disability. Without experiencing disability, it is very difficult to understand the pains and agonies of disabled people