

(Special Education)
Exploration of Strategies to Meet the Needs of the Disabled in India

A Project Report By Professor P.R. Ramanujam
Staff Training & Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE) Indira Gandhi National
Open University
New Delhi, India, 1997

This report was produced on commission from The Commonwealth of Learning.

Contents

Preface
Acknowledgements
Chapter 1
Introduction
Chapter 2
Status of Welfare Services for the Disabled in India
Chapter 3
Methodology
Chapter 4
Some Typical Responses
Chapter 5
Analysis of Data, Findings & Recommendations
Appendix I The Disability Act 1995
Appendix II UN Standard Rules in India on Disability Index
Appendix III News Paper Reports
Appendix IV Questionnaires

Preface

Polio Vaccination was invented in 1954, When I was just 15 months old I had a severe attack of Polio resulting in my locomotor disability. My parents had no idea about Polio or the vaccination. None in the village knew about it. From then and now when I am working as a Professor of Distance Education at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, my life has been a series of challenges and struggles. My experiences as a physically disabled person prompted me to think of disability issues not as an observer but as a participant in facing all odds and challenges posed by disability. The journey from a remote village in Tamil Nadu, Southern India to Delhi, and the Capital of India has been a long one, literally and metaphorically.

As a distance educator, I realized quite early that open distance learning system, if creatively used, can contribute in many ways in the education and rehabilitation of the disabled in India. with this conviction, I planned a course on Special Education as a part of the M.A in Distance Education under the direction of my Teacher and Colleague Prof. B.N. Koul, the former Pro-Vice-chancellor, STRIDE-IGNOU who continues to inspire me in all my professional activities, though he is physically far away now in Mauritius. Somehow, the intended course on Special Education is yet to take of and become a part of the M.A. Programme.

While still thinking about the above course, came the help from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada, asking me to go ahead with my proposal to work on a project titled "Special Education :Exploration of Strategies to meet the Needs of the Disabled in India". COL's funding enabled me to give practical shape to my thinking about the needs of the

disabled in India. Needs of the disabled in India, for that matter anywhere, are multifaceted: medical, educational, vocational and social. Of these, social needs seem to be the least attended in India and other developing countries. In meeting the other needs too, the developing world has made very little progress because of weak or absence of political will and paucity of resources, physical and human. Unless the needs are met with a comprehensive plan, holistic approach and locally relevant strategies, the problems of the disabled in the developing world will continue to increase, notwithstanding the optimistic statements made by the governments on their achievements in the disability sector.

I have tried through the present study to focus on the broader issues affecting the lives of the four major categories of disabled people in India: the Locomotor or Orthopaedically Disabled., Visually Handicapped, Hearing-Impaired and Deaf and Dumb, and the Mentally Disabled. The issues such as prevention of disabilities, provision for medical treatment, educational facilities, employment opportunities, social integration etc. are basically rooted in the social, economic and political reality of India. While addressing the immediate needs of the disabled of any category, one is persuaded to think about the long term solutions to the social, economic and political problems of the country. Exploration of solutions to the problems of the disabled has to be at both the levels simultaneously. That is what I have tried to do in this study.

Going through the literature on the disability issues in India and the responses from the disabled persons, their parents, teachers and others and thinking about the formidable challenges in meeting the needs of the disabled have been as much revealing as educative to me personally. The odds faced by the disabled in many unique ways have tempered my will to explore further, and the experiences of the various agencies (government and voluntary) convince me that it is not money but the absence of will, the right attitude, the conviction, the necessary social awareness and consciousness that is really handicapping the disabled in India and hampering the work that could have been done long ago but which is yet to be completed. The issues discussed, the problems identified and the strategies suggested, I hope, will be of some use not only for the Special Educators but also others such as the Policy makers, rehabilitation workers and others engaged in the implementation of welfare schemes for the disabled. Even if some of the strategies to meet the educational and the rehabilitational needs of the disabled are considered, the present study would have served its purpose. The Open Learning system in India, on its part can certainly play its role in the area of education of the disabled, without waiting for other agencies to do their part of the job.

It is hoped that the present study in any case would generate some fresh thinking in Special Educators and Distance Educators trying to come to grips with the gap that exists between the provision and the need of education, employment and social integration of the disabled in India.