

# Poor People with Disability: Breaking the Vicious Circle of Poverty and Disability in India

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**Abstract:** Disability and poverty both are social phenomenon. Social exclusion and isolation are common experience of the persons belonging to these groups. Disability leads to many types of deprivation due to social inaction which ultimately intervenes with the opportunity to participate in productive work. Gainful employment becomes difficult for physically challenged persons. They are frequently marginalized and consequently become an immediate liability to the family they belong. Disability is a development issue. The nexus between poverty and disability is casually intertwined. A high correlation between disability and poverty in India cannot be ruled out. Investigating the interconnection between poverty and disability has not been properly investigated. However, Indian polity has shown greater concern for breaking the vicious circle of poverty and disability. Government of India has taken a range of poverty alleviation schemes for Poor People with Disability (PPWD). But PPWDs are not integrated - below beneficiaries in all policies and schemes. The public implementations are far below expectations but Non Govt. Organizations (NGO) is showing some promising approaches.

**Index Terms:** Social Exclusion; Poverty; Disability; Poor People with Disability; Vicious Circle of Poverty and Disability

## INTRODUCTION

Concerned for Poor People with Disabilities (PPWDs) from few decades the international disability movement has been saying that disability is a cause of poverty, that poverty often leads to disability and that disabled people are among the poorest of the poor in any country. However, it has recently come about through the promotion of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDGs have prioritized poverty reduction in developing countries, and the establishment by the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) of various new aid instruments and producers, also build ostensibly around reducing poverty. Poor People with Disabilities (PPWDs) tend to be among the most socially, economically marginalized populations wherever they exist. Disability and poverty tend to go hand in hand, forming a cycle of cumulative causation (Action 1983, 79). Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are generally more poor than non disabled persons and people living in poverty are become more disabled than who are not. In adequate economic and social policies have contributed to large numbers of people living in extreme poverty. Poor families often do not have sufficient income to meet their basic needs. In adequate shelter, unhygienic living conditions, lack of sanitation and clean drinking water combined with poor access to health facilities led to disability.

According to the United Nations, 1 person in 20 has a disability and more than 75 person of this live in developing countries. More often than not, they are among the poorest of the poor. In 1992, UN/WHO studies estimated that 4% for developing countries and 7% for industrialist countries are disabled respectively (Metts, 2000). The UNDP estimates a global proportion of disabled people of 5% (Coleridge, 1993). Recent World Bank studies contend that "Half a billion disabled people are undisputedly amongst the poorest of the poor" (Metts, 2000). And are estimated to comprise "15 to 20% of the poorest in developing countries" (Elwan, 1999).

India is a developing country with the second largest population in the world. In India, almost 35% of the population lives below the poverty line. According to the census, 2011, there are 2.16 million PWDs in India which constitute 2.21% of total population. This includes persons with visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities. The proportion of PWDs in India keeps increasing due to the large incidence of poverty, lack of occupational traffic management, civil conflicts, and land mines. Further, poverty keeps increasing among PWDs. PWDs in India are poor because they are denied the access and opportunities most basic to human development education, income, and self – esteem.

In comparison to many third world countries Indian polity has shown greater concern for PPWDs. Government of India has taken a range of poverty alleviation schemes. But PPWDs are not integrated - below beneficiaries in all policies and schemes. The public implementations are far below expectations but Non Govt. Organizations (NGO) is showing some promising approaches.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present paper is to breaking the vicious circle of poverty and disability by inclusion them into mainstream society.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The study will be undertaken with the help of published Government and private information. Publications and reports of UNO, WHO and other international bodies will be also utilized. Secondary published and unpublished sources will be the main source of information. Census and NSSO are two important sources of quantitative sources of disability in India.

## DISABILITY - A SOCIAL STIGMA

Disability is related with human condition. Disabled people exist in every community of the world. Disability is a dynamic phenomenon - modified by changes in environment (Jahiel, 2007) and academic understanding. Concept and understanding of human disability are observed to be undergoing continuous modification and consequently administrative attention across the world. The central concerned in modern debates appears to be 'how one should view the presence of a disability' (Barnes, 2009).

Convergence in conceptualization is desirable, unfortunately universally accepted definition of disability is yet to emerge and according to some researchers probably impossible to achieve. Different international organizations discussed the concept of disability in diverse ways. Some of them highlighted here -

World Health Organization has addressed the disability issue and provides a conceptual framework for disability with three significant aspects or issues; they are interrelated and overlapping in some sense:

- a. Impairment
- b. Disability
- c. Handicap

We may observe some hierarchical order in conceptualization.

Impairment is "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function".

Disability is a "restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being".

Handicap is a "disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual".

In 2001, the "International Classification of Functioning and Disability" (ICF) explains the concept of "disability," or "functional" abilities or inabilities as an umbrella concept applicable both for the body perspective, and to the individual and society perspective.

In India, disability condition has been introduced essentially following the medical model and, as such, they have been based on various criteria of ascertaining abnormality or pathologic conditions of persons. In 1995, The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD-Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) is defined disability as - a person suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority. The disabilities identified are; blindness, low vision, cerebral palsy, leprosy, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotors disability, mental illness and mental retardation. Census and NSSO are two important sources for quantitative information on disability. NSSO considered disability as "Any restriction or lack of abilities to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being".

Disability is basically a socially – created phenomenon. Defining disability is complex and controversial. The person with disabilities (PWDs) faces dual challenge of marginalization on account of normal socio-economic changes as well as on account of their physical and mental condition. They often start life with little access to opportunities and continue in the same state throughout their life. Disability does not just affect the individual, but impact on the whole community. The cost of excluding PWDs from taking an active part in community life is high and has to be bond by society. This exclusion often leads to losses in productivity and human potential. PWDs face numerous barriers in realizing equal opportunities, environmental and access barriers, legal and institutional barriers and attitudinal barriers which cause social exclusion. Social exclusion is often the hardest barrier to overcome and is usually associated with feelings of shame, fear and rejection. Negative stereotypes are commonly attached to disability. PWDs are often assigned a low social status and in some cases are considered worthless. Disability limits access to education and employment and leads to economic and social exclusion.

In India, disability is very much a growing problem. It has consistently found substantial social marginalization of PWDs. Attitudes of society; families and PWDs themselves contribute to converting impairments into disabilities. An interesting perspective on Indian attitude to disability is two forms of mythology: the traditional Hindu myths which still play an important role in shaping social norms and values, and the "modern myth machine" of Bollywood, which has impact on popular culture and society.

There are 93.01 lakh women with disabilities in India which constitute 42.46% (2001 census). Women with disabilities are doubly stigmatized. Women from minority ethnic and racial groups are marginalized even further. Women with disabilities are excluded from all important areas of life: social interactions, development activities in education and training and economic opportunities in the areas of employment, earning money and maintaining control in their lives. According to the NSO, 2002 report on "Disabled persons in India", 55% persons with disabilities are illiterate. This is very large and

unacceptable percentage. Educational outcomes for children and adults with disabilities remain very poor. Illiteracy rates for school -age disabled children remain much higher than the general population and school attendance among school- aged children with disabilities massively lacks that of non disabled children. Employment is a critical element of independent living, and it is a primary aspiration of PWDs in India. PWDs have lower employment rates than the general population across all India locational and gender cuts. The PWD employment rate actually fell from 42.7% in 1991 down to 37.6% in 2002. However, employment rates vary sharply by type of disability. PWDs appear to face different obstacles to employment according to their gender and to whether they live in rural and urban areas.

As country develop and modernize, changes occur in the disability profile. With the rise in smoking habits and environmental pollution, disabilities associated with chronic non specific lung diseases are expected to increase significantly. Mental disabilities such as depression and alcohol abuse are also becoming more prominent. Furthermore, with populations aging, disabilities associated with increasing longevity, such as muscular diseases, will also increase. In addition, road traffic accidents in India have received relatively little attention from public health experts.

### **POVERTY - A SOCIAL CURSE**

Poverty is the issue that is hard to define. However, in order to define poverty it is important to realize that poverty has a multidimensional nature. The United Nations describes poverty as: 'the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development - to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others'. The World Bank created a more "practical", but simplified monetary indicator to identify poverty using a 'poverty line' of income of less than US\$1 a day.

Poverty is a social phenomenon in which a section of society is unable to fulfill even its basic necessities of life. Poverty has been described as a situation of "pronounced deprivation in well being" and being poor as "to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled... poor people are particularly vulnerable to adverse events outside their control. They are often treated badly by institutions of the state and society and excluded from voice and power in those institutions" (IBRD, 2000- 2001:15). The basic cause of poverty is exclusion: exclusion from social, economic and political life. The industrialized North is not exempt from this exclusion.

Simon Max well (1998) writes that people become poor because they are excluded from social institutions where access is based on status, privilege, race and gender. Exclusion leads to lack of resources, lower expectations, poor health and poor education. The countries of the third world exhibit invariably the existence of mass poverty, although poverty also exists even in the developed countries of Europe and America. Poverty may be defined in different societies in a different way but all of them are conditioned by the version of minimum or good life to be obtained in society. Most of the economists and organizations estimated the poverty with the help of poverty line. According to report of " Task Force on Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand"- and expert group of planning commission, defined poverty line on a nutritional norm of per capita daily intake of 2400 calories in rural areas and 2100 calories for urban areas. A person who fails to obtain this minimum level of calories is treated as being below the poverty line. Those who are severely below the poverty line are largely involved in subsistence type activities for which they get exploitatively poor returns despite suffering extreme physical hardship and undertaking grave risks so as to earn a meager income.

The poverty in India is a problem with some grave dimensions. It is, on the one hand, quantitatively a very big problem as the number of the poor is indeed a massive one. Another aspect is that it is a problem of low productivity of the poor. This people are resource- poor in terms of assets, skills, credit availability etc. This makes their earnings to be dismally small. Equally serious is the fact that the poor, belonging as they do mostly to society deprived or weaker sections of the society, have no means, political or social, to uplift themselves on their own. As per the estimates of 1999 -2000, in India the poor in the rural areas and urban areas are 27.1% and 23.6% of rural and urban population respectively. The rural poverty continuously increasing due to rapid population growth, lack of capital, lack of alternative employment opportunities other than agriculture, illiteracy, lack of proper implementation of public distribution system. Side by side the urban poverty also increasing especially for migration of rural youth towards cities, lack of vocational education training, limited job opportunities of employment, rapid increase in population. In rural areas the poor people are the landless labourers, small and marginal farmers, rural artisans including fisherman, and backward classes and backward tribes. The urban poor, quite many of them immigrants from villages like in slums and on pavements. Most of them are in the unorganized sector, doing petty jobs. Unfortunately these people are put at a low status in the India's social system. And they have been so placed since long in the past. There are the pupils who have never wielded political power. These economically poor people are weak socially and politically.

### **POVERTY AND DISABILITY - A VICIOUS CYCLE**

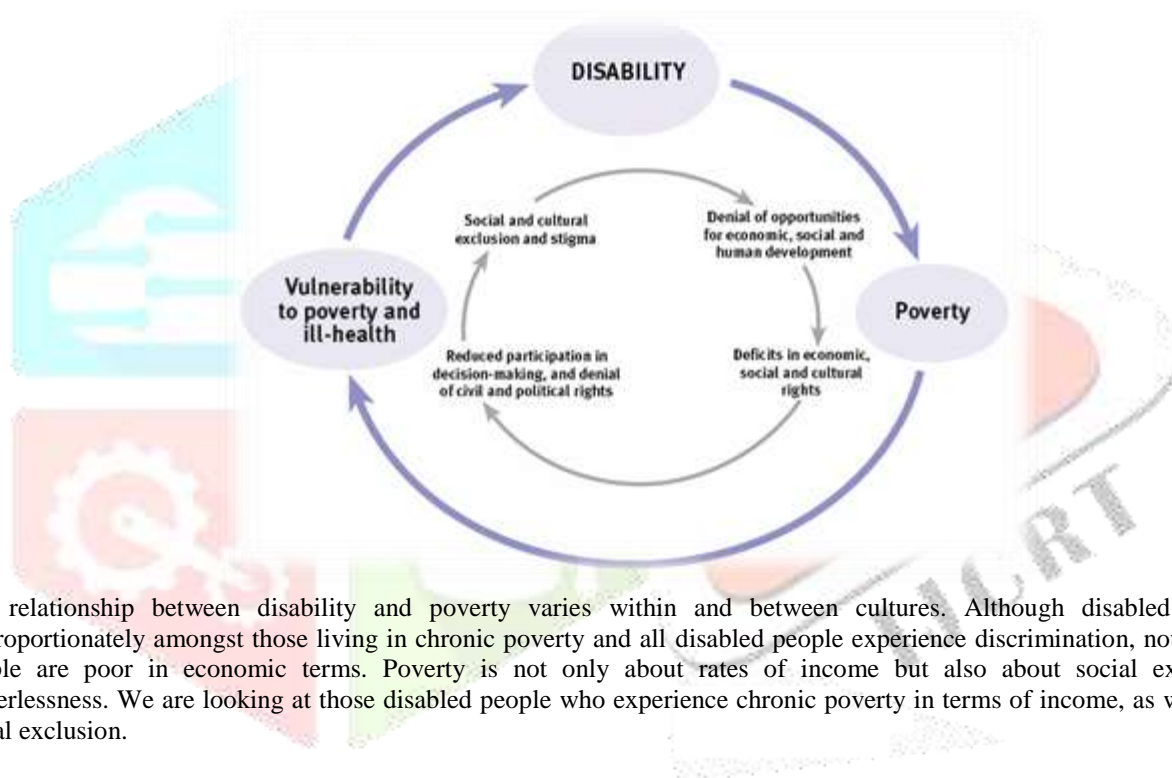
Disability and poverty are intricately interlinked. Poverty can cause disability with its associated malnutrition, poor health services and sanitation, and unsafe living and working conditions. Conversely, the presence of a disability can trap people in a life of poverty because of the barriers disabled people face to taking part in education, employment, social activities and indeed all aspects of life.

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of disability. Poverty and disability reinforce each other, contributing to increased vulnerability and exclusion. The majority of PWDs find their situation affects their chances of going to school, working for living, enjoying family life, and participating as equals in social life. It is estimated that only 2% of PWDs in developing countries have access to rehabilitation and appropriate basic services. Poor nutrition, dangerous working and living conditions, limited access to vaccination programs, and to health and maternity care, poor hygiene, bad sanitations, war and conflict, and natural disasters all cause disability.

In turn, disability exacerbates poverty, by increasing isolation and economic strain, not just for the individual but often for the affected family as well. PWDs who are denied education are then unable to find employment, driving them more deeply into poverty.

In this way the poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability. Breaking out the vicious cycle of poverty and disability becomes more and more difficult. The result of the cycle of poverty and disability is that PEDs are usually amongst the poorest of the poor and their literacy rates are considerably lower than the rest of the population. Women with disabilities suffer a double discrimination, both on the grounds of gender and of impairment. Their literacy rates are lower than their male counterparts. Recent UNESCO studies have suggested that only ½% of children with disabilities in developing countries receive an education.

The vicious cycle of poverty and disability can be shown with the following figure –



The relationship between disability and poverty varies within and between cultures. Although disabled people are disproportionately amongst those living in chronic poverty and all disabled people experience discrimination, not all disabled people are poor in economic terms. Poverty is not only about rates of income but also about social exclusion and powerlessness. We are looking at those disabled people who experience chronic poverty in terms of income, as well as wider social exclusion.

### PPWD - POLICIES IN INDIA

Positive changes in the situation of PPWDs are dependent on the action of governments, and the empowerment of PPWDs themselves. A strong international commitment to uphold the rights of PPWDs is also an important element. There are many opportunities for action by governments and the international community in support of PPWDs. Benefits are likely to be greater when services for PPWDs are provided within existing social, educational, health and labour structures in society, and where producers are established to permit effective participation of PPWDs in decision making process. Inclusion Education is an example of an inclusive approach to development. The educational and developmental needs of children with disabilities are more likely to be fulfilled by their inclusion into mainstream schooling systems.

But governments, development agencies and service providers have frequently, either ignored PPWDs or, Created 'special' expensive programmes that exclude PPWDs from mainstream society.

India has one of the more developed disability policy frame works of developing countries, but there remain a number of policy short coming in the PWD Act's design; The public implementation institution are relatively weak and under –resourced, but NGOS have developed some promising approaches. In India, the social protection system for PWD consists of social safety net and social insurance interventions, But these have had small impacts on welfare levels of the disabled poor. Safety nets for PWD offer low coverage and limited financial protection. The PWD Act commits to reservations for PWD of not less than 3% in all poverty alleviation schemes, but it appears that PWD are well below 3% of beneficiaries in all schemes. India also has social assistance case payments for destitute elderly, Widows and PWD. All states/UTS have disability social pension

schemes. Though coverage in different states exhibits wide variations. While the unemployment allowances for PWD are anticipated in the PWD Act, few states have such schemes. There are a range of poverty alleviation schemes, e.g. Integrated Rural Development Programme [IRDP]; National Rural Employment Programme [NREP], Minimum Needs Programme [MNP], but these have not yet benefitted all those who are to be benefitted. In India, the disability NGO movement has contributed greatly to promoting the interests of PPWD and awareness of their situation. However, it remains in many ways an underexploited resource in terms of fully mature partnerships between the public and NGO sectors.

### CONCLUSIONS

Poor people with disabilities are socially deprived and marginalized segment of the society. They are always excluded from productive activity and political power of any economy. Most of the countries still not recognized that poor people are disabled from participating by others' attitudes and social barriers. Most people still believe that disabled people are not able to participate. Proper actions from public sector, NGO sector are required for PPWDs to participate into the productive activity in any economy. The author's hard work will be fruitful when the PPWDs are participating into the productive activities in the economy and the society includes them into the main stream of the society.

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