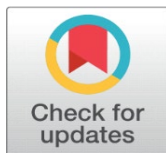
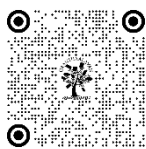


GENDER AND DISABILITY: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Gender and disability are both societal constructs. Both ideas entail various preconceptions that establish expectations and limitations regarding them. These expectations and restrictions can generate issues about identity development among those with disabilities. This research seeks to elucidate various social expectations and restrictions while providing a concise explanation of the ideas of gender and disability. This research seeks to examine the correlation between gender and disability, as well as to identify the factors that influence these correlations. This paper examines the societal issues associated with disability notably concerning women and proposes potential solutions. This paper analyses in-depth interviews conducted with women from three distinct age groups, framed around research questions derived from a review of numerous studies concerning gender, disability, and the intersection of women and disability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our civilization is so interconnected that nearly every topic within its scope is related to others at some juncture. The link between subjects may stem from longstanding societal customs and regulations that have evolved over time. Every culture perceives, comprehends, and interprets any subject or issue within the framework of its traditions and regulations. Consequently, when analogous rules and traditions underpin any social subject, it is expected that they will be interconnected. Disability and gender are social constructs that have been defined by society. Consequently, comprehending them necessitates an understanding of the link between the two. Disability influences gender in numerous ways, and conversely, it shapes the understanding of gender. To comprehend these concerns thoroughly, it is essential to first delineate them and subsequently analyze them within the framework of their interrelations.

GENDER

This idea is now universally acknowledged: gender is entirely a social construct. This notion has specific boundaries, roles, and expectations. Which are, in numerous respects, rather inflexible and intricate in their essence? This approach

initially assigns distinct qualities to men and women, subsequently imposing several restrictions based on those attributes. Ultimately, several expectations are imposed within the framework of these identities, bifurcating the entire world into two distinct social identities.

DISABILITY (SPECIAL ABILITY)

Disability can be comprehended in two dimensions: social and physical. Disability refers to a physical deficiency or incapacity to execute specific tasks. Conversely, when analyzed from a social perspective, it constitutes a form of direct or indirect collective exclusion resulting from the inability to conform to societal norms and standards. A thorough analysis of these two categories of disability leads to the conclusion that disability is predominantly a social construct rather than a physical one. This assertion is bolstered by a novel framework for defining impairment, known as the "social model of disability." The societal attitude towards a disabled individual exacerbates their incapacity and isolation more than the inherent condition itself. This paradigm prioritizes social inclusion.

DISABILITY AND GENDER

Despite disabled individuals being perceived as external to the notion of gender, the concept of gender remains significantly influential in the context of disability. While disability is a misfortune for all gender groups, social attitudes, expectations, and restrictions related to gender operate distinctly. Consequently, the experiences of disability among various gender groups are inherently divergent. The notion of disability is influenced by the prevailing societal norms on gender. This idea is rather lenient for men, whereas it is exceedingly rigid for women. Until recent years, women were excluded from the discourse on disability. The National Disability Policy in India was established in 2006, providing several rules regarding disability; nevertheless, it lacked specific provisions addressing the needs of impaired women. This paper elaborates on this context in further depth.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION PERTAINING TO THE STUDY

The researcher examines several papers and articles to establish a theoretical foundation for the issue discussed in the paper. This theoretical framework pertains to disability and the disabilities experienced by women. To comprehend disability, the researcher has utilized different scholarly resources, including the book "Understanding Disability" (2005) by Plouse T. In the first chapter of this book, Jaeger, Sinthia, and Bowman Endeavour to comprehend disability from a multidimensional perspective. The author posits that a physically impaired individual will feel empowered and competent in conducive settings, such as an accessible environment, whereas an unfavorable social structure can render even a physically able person disabled. The assumption is that impairment thrives in specific contextual situations. This book emphasizes the consideration of disability as a social construct. Renu Adhalkha's research on gender and disability presents significant insights to the readers. Renu Adhalkha (2007) asserts that an individual's inherent impairment or frailty, coupled with societal attitudes, renders that person incapacitated or unable of functioning to their full potential. Social prejudices, preconceived notions, and societal structures marginalize women, categorizing them as disabled; yet, if an individual is both disabled and female, she must confront her impairment and the challenges associated with being a woman independently. In this context, she must confront the compounded challenges of being a woman, being physically crippled, and the intersection of both identities. They encounter this dilemma in all facets of their lives, particularly in education. In India, the enrolment of girls in conventional schools is nearly insignificant. There exist specialized schools in this area that socially isolate girls on the pretext of security; nevertheless, there are no equivalent institutions for higher education. Under these circumstances, disabled girls must attend conventional institutions, where they may encounter numerous problems related to social and academic adjustment and inclusion. Researchers elucidate certain aspects of their research regarding dual prejudice faced by women with disabilities. Many researchers asserted that women with disabilities encounter dual prejudice in society: firstly, due to their disability, and secondly, due to their gender. Frequently, upon acquiring a disability, an individual's caste and religion are relegated to secondary importance by society. Their identity is shaped by the prevailing attitudes around disability and those with disabilities. She asserts that biological factors contributing to disability are less significant than social interactions, societal ideas, social structures, and the dynamics of kinship. All these factors exacerbate the character of an individual's handicap. Anita Ghai thoroughly examines the challenges associated with women's disabilities in one of her essays, presenting significant facts to the audience. Anita Ghai (2006) amplified the perspectives of women with disabilities by addressing their issues in India. She particularly focuses on the childhood experiences and challenges faced by girls with disabilities, the lack of access to traditional roles, and the absence of societal pressure to marry, which enables parental oppression. Under these situations, individuals either remain at home or are rendered free yet powerless in selecting their life mate, complicating their predicament significantly. She has also addressed gender issues, discussing social myths. The physique of a disabled

woman is deemed effeminate and therefore dismissed; she asserts that these misconceptions are rooted in Indian culture and old mythology. She elaborates on the impact of stigma associated with girls with disabilities on their moms, indicating that this unfavorable perception also adversely affects the mothers, leading to a future apprehension among girls with disabilities about bearing children with impairments. She further enquires whether such exclusion is permissible.

Minu Bhambani (2003) examined the social, cultural, and historical aspects that contribute to the invisibility, hesitation, and gradual neglect of women with disabilities. To substantiate this claim, she analyzed representations of women with disabilities in Bollywood films and examined societal responses to female impairment in contrast to male disability. Her research indicates that the capabilities of women with impairments are never or infrequently emphasized. In these films, those with disabilities are depicted as the most exploited and unattractive, rendering their integration into normal society unattainable. He articulates that Indian civilization and culture, in contrast to Western nations, fosters helplessness and dependency instead of independence and self-reliance. Nirab Raj Gupta (2013) examined the experiences of individuals with disabilities at two Indian universities. He conducted interviews, and analyzed the experiences of research participants. He contends that the Indian government has initiated the process of inclusion in higher education institutions; nevertheless, it is evident that this process has been confined to a select number of central universities. His research indicates that Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University receive greater funding than other government universities, however they fail to adequately help students with impairments. Despite their numerous efforts, these students have integrated into the academic mainstream; yet, the universities and the surrounding environment fail to offer adequate opportunities for their healthy social growth. This research indicates that students with disabilities are somewhat integrated into the higher education system, receiving some financial support based on academic performance; yet, there has been limited advancement in their social experiences. Upon examining the experiences of students with impairments, the researcher concludes that the majority of their exclusion stems from prevailing attitudes and prejudices within Indian society. Research indicates that even in institutions founded on democratic principles, such as universities, individuals with disabilities often experience significant exclusion from their classmates.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The study is entirely composed within the framework of qualitative research philosophy. The primary reason for this is that the research topic is located inside social situations. This research work used the case study method as its primary research approach, selecting five women from distinct age ranges as subjects. This selection is entirely founded on purposeful sampling. The unstructured interview method has been employed as the study technique. The identities of all five participants have been fully confidential during the analysis for their privacy and safety.

The research advances with several signification enquiries that are framed as research questions: -

- What is the significance of comprehending disability within the context of gender studies?
- What is the correlation between gender and disability?
- How do the experiences of disability differ or align between women and men?
- What factors contribute to the dual disadvantage of disability for women?

ANALYSIS

The researcher has endeavored to provide an analysis grounded in the investigation of several research materials pertinent to the topic and the data acquired from interviews.

THE CHALLENGE OF ACCESSING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS – Numerous studies indicate that disabled women face significant obstacles when attempting to enter major social institutions. Even after overcoming these challenges, they must continue to fight throughout their lives for dignity and self-respect. Marriage is a significant social institution. The institution of marriage has specific expectations for its members, requiring males to embody the full attributes of masculinity and women to embody the full attributes of femininity. This institution exhibits a degree of civility regarding the attributes of male perfection in other social structures, a phenomenon elucidated through the analysis of patriarchy; however, it demonstrates a certain severity concerning the characteristics associated with femininity. Participant's statements elucidate the status of a disabled woman within the institution of marriage. The status of a disabled woman is marginalized not only in marriage but also inside religious institutions.

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY - The World Bank Report (2009) asserts that education is crucial for individuals with disabilities, as it serves as the sole avenue for challenging societal perceptions and integrating into the community on equal footing with others. India is making substantial advancements in numerous sectors; yet, there has been a lack of major progress in the education of individuals with disabilities. The literacy rate among impaired children and teens is significantly lower than the overall literacy rate, and their school attendance is likewise markedly inferior to that of non-disabled individuals.

Opportunities for impaired women are far less than those for disabled males. Preconceived views regarding women's education exist in society, and the presence of disability exacerbates the situation. It is presumed within the family that she is now incapable of any action. The distance from home to the school exacerbates the challenges faced by disabled females. The educational opportunities for a disabled girl are hindered by logistical concerns such as transportation to and from school.

THE INTRICATE AND CHALLENGING NOTION OF A COMPLETE WOMAN has been shaped by society for an extensive period. This technique has undoubtedly evolved its approaches over time, although its evolution has consistently been positive. In shaping this picture, society frequently operates with such precision and correctness that it assumes a complicated and formidable form at the conceptual level. Society does not permit even a little transgression in this regard. Socialization serves as the primary instrument for this shaping and influencing. Contemporary literature, media, and cinema significantly contribute to this. The attributes of an ideal woman are heavily emphasized, and the Endeavour to shape each generation of females into this standard of perfection persists. It is remarkable that girls adopt this level of perfection with meticulous accuracy. In such a scenario, where does a girl position herself who does not conform to this standard of perfection? She experiences profound disappointment when seeking her identity in quotidian cinema, media, and literature. As the archetype of a complete woman solidifies, it becomes merciless towards those it deems unworthy.

SEXUAL INSECURITIES PERSIST, as the majority of sexual violence incidents is directed towards women, primarily because they have historically been regarded as objects of pleasure. The incidence of sexual abuse against disabled women is particularly alarming, largely due to their heightened reliance on others. Women with disabilities frequently encounter societal neglect, resulting in loneliness and isolation, rendering them vulnerable to deviant mindsets.

AN IDENTITY CRISIS PERTAINS TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY, which is associated with two fundamental enquiries. Firstly, what is his self-perception? What is the opinion of others towards him? Both enquiries ascertain the robustness and positivity of his identify. These enquiries are crucial concerning ladies with disabilities. What is the opinion of their significant others regarding them? The response to this inquiry significantly influences their self-perception. Prejudices concerning disability and gender significantly influence the societal roles of women with impairments. The existence of an identity that is largely external to the concept of gender, yet possesses elements of gender identity, engenders a form of identity crisis for women with disabilities. All societal identities are inherently incomplete. Society frequently perceives individuals with disabilities as perpetually need assistance; however, it is essential to recognize that regarding someone as worthy of aid differs significantly from viewing them as deserving of collaboration. The actions of individuals lacking comprehension of the distinction between these two concepts generate issues about the identification of women with impairments.

4. CONCLUSION

Regardless of the political, social, or empathetic language employed to characterize or enhance the concept of handicap, we cannot refute that it constitutes a physical and mental calamity for women, men, and those of third gender. This research focuses on disability as it pertains to women, indicating that for them, being impaired constitutes a dual disadvantage. One constraint arises from social expectations, laws, and traditions, while the second stems from boundaries imposed by societal standards and neglect associated with handicap. A historical review of our society reveals that the notion of a whole woman has evolved to become increasingly rigid. Society's construction of the ideal woman is so meticulously crafted that even the slightest deviation might obliterate the perception of her completeness. The complexities and inflexibility in defining women's identity and structure lead to numerous issues regarding women's

disabilities. Key issues include ineligibility for admittance into social institutions due to stringent norms of normalcy, lack of cooperation and acceptance from diverse groups, and the absence of prospects for gainful employment. These issues or limitations adversely affect the identity development of a disabled woman, often resulting in an identity crisis. In this context, integration into the mainstream remains an aspiration for these women. Disabled women have numerous accomplishments; today, we can find thousands of examples where these women have demonstrated through their diligence and persistent effort that they are equal to their peers. However, has society succeeded in integrating them into its mainstream even now? Has society succeeded in overcoming its biases concerning disability? Has society managed to introduce flexibility and adjustments in its notion of completeness? These are significant questions that require answers. It is essential to recognize that the rate of social development is inherently gradual; so, we must exercise patience and sustain our efforts for any transformation to occur. We must eliminate some assumptions at our level and cultivate more sensitivity towards these issues. We must broaden our definitions of "completeness" and "normality," which can only be achieved by integrating inclusiveness into our thoughts and daily practices. Today, millions of marginalized individuals aspire to attain a decent existence and societal acceptability. Those who have the opportunity are striving to integrate into the mainstream; nevertheless, for those unable to do so, we must serve as their beacon of hope. This is the fundamental characteristic of humanism and its adaptation within liberalism.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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