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Disability and Popular Common Sense in India: Noun versus Adjective

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Reflecting through the Indian experiences, a brief attempt is made to explore how disability as a noun takes shape in popular common sense "call names" (adjectives) and how does the popular common sense legitimise and normalise the oppressive language and the oppressed reality of the persons with disabilities? In the Indian context, the contempt for persons with disabilities is writ large in the language used to address them. However, to be conscious of this contempt, one needs to be conscious of the hegemonic nature of the popular common sense which normalises an oppressive reality as a natural social reality. The discussion on disability and popular common sense in India through the framework of "noun vs. adjective" might be helpful in gauging the challenges to the disability rights movement and the socio-cultural specificities to be reckon with for any meaningful intervention in the field of disability.

Keywords: common sense; disability; India; language; noun; oppression; persons with disabilities

There is widespread myth about *physical perfection*,
which is actually attained by no one but desired by all (Anonymous).

Introduction

Most discussions of disability begin with a laundry list of disabling conditions but while such a list is necessary for an understanding of disability, limiting ourselves to thinking in medical or quasi-medical terms limits our understanding: for disability is largely a social construct (Finger, 1983). In the mid-seventies, a new way of thinking about disability emerged from the disabled people's civil rights movement called the social model of disability (Oliver, 1986). The social model redefined disability as pertaining to the disabling effect of society, rather than the functioning of people's minds, bodies and senses (Barnes, 1991). It does not deny the problem of disability but locates it squarely within society (Oliver, 1996). Coles (2001) suggests an understanding of the social model in that it does not label unlike the individual and medical model wherein descriptions tend to emphasise deficits, incompetencies and the things which people cannot do (p. 506). To these scholars, disability is seen as inherently social phenomena, and in this "social constructionist" view, disability is the oppressive socialisation of given form of physiological difference (impairment) (Gleeson, 1996; Oliver, 1990).

Shapiro, Margolis, and Anderson (1990) questioned that in recent years much has been written about the educational implications of identifying and eliminating sexist

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