

Disability, gender and the trajectories of power

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Disability, gender, and the trajectories of power,

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Disabled women (for example, Morris 1991, 1996; Sheldon 2004; Vernon 1997, 1999) have for a long time been arguing that, since its inception, the disabled people's movement has overlooked the particular experiences of disabled women. In addition, disabled women have also expressed general dissatisfaction towards the feminist movement (for example, Begum 1992; Morris 1996), resulting in disabled women feeling marginalised from both movements. Morris (1993, 1998) argues that the issues which are of particular relevance to disabled women have often been excluded to the extent that women seem invisible within the disability movement. Similarly, Vernon (1997, 1999) writes that the disabled people's movement often ignores certain challenges met by disabled women in particular, such as the fact that disabled women are subject to patriarchal oppression and that they are very often targets of sexual discrimination. Morris (1996) further writes that if disabled women's issues are given any attention at all, they are only tagged as a special interest or an optional extra with the result that even today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, there are still very few separate books and articles that solely focus on the issues of disability and womanhood.

The editor of *Disability, Gender, and the Trajectories of Power* tends to agree with the aforementioned arguments, and hence aims to shed light on and bring forward the issues of gender and disability as lived and encountered by disabled women in India. In particular, this book aims to put forward the message that the lives of disabled women matter and that the obstacles and challenges they encounter should not be side-lined but should be given the prominence they deserve. Contributors to this book are both male and female, both disabled

as well as non-disabled, thus also putting forward the message that the issues of gender and disability are not solely the issues of disabled women but the issues of all sectors of society.

The book is well organised and consists of an introduction, 11 chapters, and an epilogue. The 11 chapters are grouped into three sections, namely: Section One titled 'Disability: A Gendered Problematic and Conceptualization' which consists of three chapters; Section Two titled 'Human Experiences and Agency' which consists of five chapters; and Section Three titled 'Toward Nondiscriminatory Gendered Strategies' which consists of the remaining three chapters. Since most of the authors refer to a number of conventions and declarations throughout the whole book, it would be easier to follow the authors' train of thought if one is familiar with the mentioned conventions.

The introduction aims to set the background for the rest of the book by giving an overview of the general and contemporary obstacles met in the field of gender and disability, including: the overall need for the emergence of feminist disability studies research and how the lack of gender-disaggregated data continues to perpetuate the exclusion of disabled women; how the invisibility of disabled women is taken both as a source of injustice but also as an effect of the injustice and inequality experienced by women; how violence and torture experienced by disabled women are usually due to patriarchal control; and how disabled women have often been placed on the periphery of or outside the discourse altogether about the issue of motherhood and the right to be born.

The scope of the first three chapters of the book is to highlight some of the problems encountered within the gender and disability sector. The author of the first chapter observes that, unlike western countries, academic discussions about disability in India have only just begun and thus the experiences of disabled women have received little or no consideration in the academic arena. Furthermore, the author stresses the need to explore the gender dimensions of disability which, according to the author, are still far from being met. The author of the second chapter focuses his work on disabled women in four particular states of India and aims to bring together and compare data from different sources about the status of disabled women in these four states. He discusses these data and its implications within the

context of a number of issues, including literacy, marital status and family support, and workforce participation. The third chapter gives a very detailed overview of how the psychosocial distress as experienced by women has been understood and addressed and how the leap from medical to the social approach has been crucial in this aspect.

The scope of the second section of the book is to highlight some of the lived experiences of disabled women at different stages in their lives. It elaborates on the particular experiences as lived by disabled women in India, including the experiences of marriage, motherhood, and family life. I found the second section of the book to be particularly interesting since it takes a more narrative approach as well as giving a direct voice to disabled women. Chapter 6 presents a very detailed account based on the author's research about the complexity of the marital situations of disabled women in India. Chapter 7 then gives a detailed account of the journey that a disabled mother undergoes in raising her child. In this chapter the author sheds light on the contrasting experiences of non-disabled mothers and disabled mothers as well as the high level of widespread prejudice encountered by disabled mothers.

Section three of the book takes on a more legal perspective by focusing on the right to education, employment, and the legal capacity as well political rights for disabled women and girls. The author of Chapter 9 maintains that disabled girls and women in India have the lowest participation rates in education, thus resulting in equally low employment rates. In addition, the author argues for the urgent need to include disabled women and girls in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields. Chapter 10 of the book investigates the intersections between work, disability, and gender in a contemporary Indian context. The author, with previous training in anthropology, goes into great detail about the work and career aspirations of young disabled women in Delhi. Chapter 11, whose author was an active participant in the Indian legal reform process, makes strong references to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), particularly to the right to legal capacity and voting as enshrined in the same Convention. The chapter also includes some case law illustrations in the post-UNCPRD period in relation to women with psychosocial disabilities.

Although *Disability, Gender, and the Trajectories of Power* focuses solely on the issues of disabled women in India, it is a much-needed resource for students and researchers in both Disability Studies as well as Gender Studies. The book can function both as a teaching text as well as a research-based book which offers an important insight into the subject matter. I am sure that it will be the source of much generated discussion on the particular issues met by disabled women which are often sidelined by both the disabled people's movement and the women's movement.

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