

Disabled Welfare in India

Mritunjay Kumar Dubey (M.A -UGC NET)

Abstract: Disability welfare encompasses policies, programs, and services aimed at ensuring the social, economic, and political inclusion of persons with disabilities. It seeks to address barriers related to health care, education, employment, accessibility, and social participation, thereby promoting equality and human dignity. This abstract examines the evolution of disability welfare from a charity-based approach to a rights-based framework grounded in social justice and inclusion. It highlights the role of governments, non-governmental organizations, and international conventions in safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities. Despite significant progress, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, social stigma, limited awareness, and gaps in policy implementation persist. Strengthening disability welfare requires inclusive policy design, community participation, and effective monitoring mechanisms. Ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities is essential not only for individual empowerment but also for sustainable and inclusive societal development.

Keywords: Inclusive growth, disability welfare, empowerment

1. Introduction

India, with over 2% of its population identified as persons with disabilities (PwDs), faces the pressing need to shift from a charity-based to a rights-based and empowerment-centric approach to disability welfare. Historically marginalized, PwDs continue to face significant challenges in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and public services. Inclusive governance and social integration are thus critical for ensuring equality and dignity.

Key Aspects:

- 1) **Classification of Disabilities-** As per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, disability includes 21 conditions such as locomotor, visual, hearing, speech, mental illness, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities. It adopts a rights-based, evolving, and inclusive understanding of disability.
- 2) **Prevalence and Socio-Economic Status of PwDs-** According to the 2011 Census, over 2.68 crore people in India live with some form of disability. Many PwDs face poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and social stigma, making them one of the most disadvantaged sections.
- 3) **Need for Empowerment, Not Charity-** Welfare approaches must emphasize capacity-building, dignity, and independence rather than pity. This includes skill development, equal opportunity, and enabling infrastructure.
- 4) **Role of Disability-Inclusive Governance-** Mainstreaming disability in policies, schemes, and institutional frameworks is essential. This includes reservation in education and jobs, accessible infrastructure, and inclusion in digital services and electoral processes.

Legal and Constitutional Provisions

India has developed a strong legal and constitutional framework to safeguard the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities (PwDs). These provisions aim to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and ensure inclusive development.

- 1) **Article 14 & 15-** Ensure equality before law and prohibit discrimination on grounds including disability, thereby providing a constitutional foundation for equal treatment.

- 2) **Article 21-** Guarantees the right to life with dignity, interpreted to include accessibility, health care, and inclusion of PwDs in all spheres of life.
- 3) **Article 41-** Directs the state to make effective provisions for securing the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of disability.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016- Replaces the 1995 Act, expanding recognized disabilities to 21 categories. It ensures 4% reservation in government jobs, 5% in higher education, rights to equality, accessibility, and protection from abuse, along with the establishment of Special Courts and District-level Committees.

- 1) **National Trust Act, 1999-** Provides for legal guardianship and welfare measures for persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and multiple disabilities.
- 2) **Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992** – Regulates and standardizes the training of professionals in rehabilitation and ensures quality care for PwDs.
- 3) **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** – Ratified by India in 2007, it reinforces international commitments towards protecting rights and promoting dignity, autonomy, and inclusion of PwDs.

These legal and constitutional safeguards collectively affirm the shift towards rights-based, inclusive development for persons with disabilities in India.

2. Institutional Framework

A robust institutional framework is essential for implementing disability-related policies, ensuring coordination, and monitoring welfare initiatives. India has developed several dedicated bodies and structures to support persons with disabilities (PwDs) at the central and state levels.

- **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD)-** A nodal department under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, responsible for policy formulation, implementation of schemes, and coordination among ministries and states on disability matters.
- **Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)-** Established under the RPwD Act, 2016, the

CCPD ensures the enforcement of disability rights, redresses grievances, monitors compliance with laws, and advises the government on policy matters.

- **State Commissioners for PwDs**- Function at the state level to ensure localized implementation of disability laws, protect the rights of PwDs, and monitor state-level schemes and accessibility initiatives.
- **National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities**- Provides legal guardianship, promotes independent living, and funds NGOs and local level committees for community-based rehabilitation.
- **Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI)**- Regulates training and certification of rehabilitation professionals, ensuring qualified support for PwDs in therapy, education, and vocational rehabilitation.
- **District Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRCs)**- Provide decentralized, accessible rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy, counseling, assistive devices, and awareness at the grassroots level.
- **National Institutes and Composite Regional Centres (CRCs)**- Specialized institutions focusing on education, training, research, and rehabilitation services for specific disabilities (e.g., blindness, deafness, mental retardation), playing a key role in capacity building.

These institutions form the backbone of India's disability governance system, promoting a coordinated, rights-based, and inclusive approach across levels.

Government Schemes and Programmes

The Government of India has launched various schemes aimed at empowering persons with disabilities (PwDs) through education, employment, financial assistance, and rehabilitation. These schemes focus on inclusive growth and bridging structural gaps.

- **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)**- A national flagship program launched in 2015 to make public infrastructure, transport systems, and digital services accessible for PwDs across urban
- **Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)**- Provides financial support to NGOs for delivering services such as special education, vocational training, early intervention, and rehabilitation for PwDs.
- **Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP)**- Offers free or subsidized assistive devices like hearing aids, wheelchairs, and prosthetics to economically weaker PwDs, improving their mobility and independence.
- **National Fellowship for PwDs**- Grants scholarships to students with disabilities for pursuing MPhil/PhD courses, encouraging higher education and academic participation.
- **Scholarship Schemes (Pre-matric & Post-matric)** – Aims to reduce dropout rates among disabled students by providing financial assistance during school and college education.
- **Skill Development Programs**- Launched under the National Action Plan for Skill Training of PwDs to improve employability through industry-oriented training and certification.
- **Unique Disability ID (UDID) Project**- A centralized initiative to issue a digital ID and disability certificate,

simplifying access to benefits and enabling better data-driven policy planning.

- **Viklang Pension Yojana (State Schemes)**- Many states offer monthly pension schemes for PwDs as a measure of social security and financial assistance.

These schemes reflect the government's commitment to building an inclusive, equitable society by addressing the diverse needs of PwDs through targeted interventions.

3. Challenges

Despite legal protections and welfare schemes, persons with disabilities (PwDs) in India continue to face numerous challenges that hinder their full participation in society. These challenges are multidimensional:

- **Social Stigma and Discrimination**- Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and lack of awareness lead to exclusion of PwDs from social, educational, and employment opportunities. and rural areas.
- **Inadequate Accessibility**- Many public buildings, transport systems, and digital platforms remain physically and digitally inaccessible, violating basic rights and limiting mobility.
- **Educational Barriers**- Lack of inclusive schools, trained special educators, and appropriate learning material results in low enrolment and high dropout rates among children with disabilities.
- **Limited Employment Opportunities**- Despite reservations in jobs, PwDs often face workplace discrimination, lack of skill training, and inaccessibility to workspaces, leading to high unemployment.
- **Weak Implementation of Laws**- Although the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is progressive, gaps in enforcement, monitoring, and lack of political will hinder its impact.
- **Inadequate Healthcare and Rehabilitation Services**- Poor access to affordable healthcare, therapy, mental health services, and assistive devices affects the quality of life of PwDs, especially in rural areas.
- **Fragmented Data and Identification**- Inconsistent data across ministries and delays in disability certification hamper effective policy planning and timely delivery of benefits.

These challenges highlight the need for a more inclusive, rights-based, and participatory approach in governance to ensure true empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Role of Civil Society and Private Sector

Civil society organizations and the private sector play a vital complementary role in promoting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities (PwDs), often filling gaps left by government efforts.

- **Advocacy and Awareness**- NGOs and disability rights groups conduct campaigns to reduce stigma, increase public sensitivity, and lobby for policy reforms related to accessibility and inclusion.
- **Service Delivery**- Civil society provides essential services like special education, vocational training, physiotherapy, legal aid, and assistive technologies, especially in remote and underserved areas.

- **Legal and Rights-Based Support-** Organizations help PwDs access justice through legal counselling, awareness of rights under the RPwD Act, 2016, and strategic litigation.
- **Private Sector Employment Initiatives-** Several companies are adopting inclusive hiring policies, workplace accommodations, and diversity training to ensure better employment for PwDs.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)-** Under CSR obligations, many corporates fund disability-related projects, such as setting up accessible infrastructure, digital literacy programs, or skilling centres.
- **Technology and Innovation-** Startups and tech companies are developing inclusive apps, assistive devices, and AI-based tools to enhance communication, mobility, and daily life for PwDs.

Together, civil society and the private sector foster a rights-based, participatory, and inclusive environment that supports the dignity, autonomy, and economic independence of persons with disabilities.

Global Best Practices

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), USA-** Enacted in 1990, the ADA is a comprehensive civil rights law that **prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities** in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and access to public and private places. It sets standards for accessibility and mandates reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunities.
- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Australia-** Launched in 2013, the NDIS provides individualized support packages to persons with significant and permanent disabilities. It adopts a life-cycle approach, **empowering PwDs with choice and control** over services, promoting community inclusion, and enhancing their quality of life through personalized planning and funding.

These global models emphasize a rights-based, inclusive, and participatory approach, offering valuable lessons for strengthening disability governance in India.



Way Forward

- **Mainstreaming disability in all policies and programs-** Disability concerns must be integrated into all developmental sectors- health, education, employment, and urban planning- to ensure holistic inclusion and prevent marginalization.
- **Rights-based and empowerment-focused approach-** Shift from a welfare-centric model to one that upholds dignity, autonomy, and full participation of persons with disabilities, in line with the RPwD Act, 2016 and UNCRPD.
- **Universal design and barrier-free infrastructure –** Promote inclusive architecture and transport systems by enforcing accessibility norms in both public and private spaces to enable independent living for PwDs.
- **Capacity building, data systems, and monitoring mechanisms –** Strengthen training for service providers, maintain disaggregated data on disabilities, and develop robust evaluation frameworks to ensure policy accountability and evidence-based planning.

A forward-looking, inclusive, and rights-affirming policy landscape will ensure that persons with disabilities become equal participants in India's development journey.

4. Conclusion

Ensuring the **dignity, inclusion, and well-being of the elderly and persons with disabilities** is a moral imperative and a constitutional commitment for any welfare state. As India witnesses demographic shifts and strives toward inclusive growth, **focused interventions** are needed to address their unique challenges—ranging from accessibility and neglect to social security and empowerment.

An **integrated approach** that combines strong legal frameworks, inclusive policy design, empowered institutions, and active civil society participation can create a just and equitable society where no one is left behind.



References

- [1] **Economic Gradient of Onset of Disability in India-** BMC Public Health (2021): A peer-reviewed study using National Sample Survey data to analyse rates and age of onset for different types of disability across socioeconomic groups in India.
- [2] **Socioeconomic and Geographic Variations of Disabilities in India-** *International Journal of Health Geographics*: Explores how disability prevalence

varies across social and geographic groups in India based on NFHS (2019–21) data and discusses policy implications.

- [3] **Employing Persons with Disabilities in India: Policy and Practice-** International Education and Research Journal (IERJ): Focuses on the gap between legal frameworks and actual employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.
- [4] **National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (NIEPMD):** Provides statistics on disability in India, including Census 2011 data (2.68 crore persons with disabilities representing 2.21% of the population) and info on rehabilitation services.
- [5] **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)-** Wikipedia overview: Describes India's national accessibility initiative and policy context including Persons with Disabilities Act evolution and targets for making public infrastructure accessible.

