


Chapter 6

An Epiphany Into the COVID–19 Crisis– Induced Influence on the 'Otherly' Abled

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ABSTRACT

The nuanced structural invisibility in the social phenomenon is suggestive of it being inclined towards the normatively accepted standards of 'normality'. The failure to fit into the accepted standards and definition of normality often results in being 'othered'. Progressive legislation, policies, and guidelines have been enacted both pre-dated and during the Covid-19 pandemic only to delimitate categories between the 'abled' and the 'differently-abled'. Human behavior and inclusivity, a basic expectation from the social phenomenon, that is considered to be the mainstream idea behind such policies is still a dream far from reality. The academic gap between the normatively accepted definition of 'abled' and those being 'othered that is the differently-abled existed even prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, however, post-dated-pandemic-era the gap has only exacerbated. The article seeks to examine how the pandemic has induced exacerbation of 'othering'.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I find myself suddenly in the world and I recognize that I have one right alone: that of demanding human behavior from the other.”

- Frantz Fanon (1952)

India is home to 1.36 billion residents, and over 2.21% of the population endures some or other form of disability (Kanwal, 2022). Able and differently-abled are the two categories of individuals delimited by the existing enactments in the social phenomenon and witness different treatment in parallel simultaneously. For the purpose of this article, the authors use the term disability or differently-abled or specially-abled in the broadest sense possible to elaborate on ‘othering’ of these persons and how it results in non-coherence with sustainability and its principles. We are aware that the term disability has a set of diverse connotation hence, in this article we take the liberty to use the term to encompass them all who ‘differ’ from the accepted normal standards of the society and fall beyond the lens of the ‘normate’ grip.

The social structure exhibits a form of structural and infrastructural invisibility only forming visibility that is inclined towards certain categories of people who normatively fits into the hegemonic discourse of what is defined as ‘normality’. The ‘structural invisibility’ is about those categories of people who do not fall within the purview of the normative definition of ‘normality’. This socio-cultural apartheid prevalent in the society across the nation is sustained merely by the existence of an environment that lacks basic amenities for the differently-abled because it seems to cater to those who fall within the purview of ‘abled’ persons. Additionally, the existent enactments concerning the differently-abled and their rights explicitly mentioned rests on the idea that all human beings are equal and the goal of the majority of the enactments is to create a pedestal that enables the persons with disability to be able to live life like other members of the society. The legislation and the policies enacted for the differently-abled follow a medical approach rather than a social one thus accentuating the dichotomy of the abled and the differently-abled. Inclusivity and human behavior a basic expectation from the social phenomenon, which is considered apparently to be the mainstream idea behind the enactments is still a dream far from reality only to make it a utopian dream for the differently-abled. The conventional discourse prevalent in the nation makes it utopian for the differently-abled to be treated on an equitable pedestal when compared to their abled counterparts thus not aligning itself to the socio-economic sustainability. This equitability was further undermined and denied to the differently-abled during the Covid-19 pandemic period, thus exacerbating ‘othering’. ‘Othering’ and stigmatization either in normal times or in the influence of a pandemic against a certain

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