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SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN RURAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF NORTH DINAJPUR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Persons with disabilities are integral part of any society and it can't develop without full participation of every section of the society including PWD. But most of the time, society happens to be unjust with them in general and girls with disabilities in particular. Girls with disabilities face hardship, various challenges throughout their life and they are unable to sustain in the society. They have been victim of abuse, violence, harassment etc. A number of Acts, various social security schemes and programs came into existence to ensure their protection, let them get their due to make themselves self-dependant. Are these Acts and social security programs enough to protect all of them? So this paper examines that how the girls got benefited from various govt social security programs, equal opportunities enshrined in numerous Acts and where they find themselves in the society of rural India. North Dinajpur district of West Bengal has been taken as a case study.

Major findings state that girls with disabilities are not socially protected. Social security schemes accessible to them in rural areas are very few and they don't get benefited from these schemes due to its less coverage capacity, inadequate funds, and discriminatory distribution system adopted by local authorities for their own political and social endeavour. The existing situation makes them entirely dependent on their family, burden for the society, victim of abuse and most of them are forced to spend their lives on charity and beggary.

Objective: *To assess and review the existing social security schemes for girls with disabilities in rural areas and provide suggestions for their betterment.*

Methods: *Both types of data- primary and secondary have been utilized to reach a conclusion; questionnaire, surveys and case study of primary and available literature of secondary data adopted for this research.*

KEYWORDS: *Girls with disabilities, social protection, rural area, victim of abuse.*

INTRODUCTION

Any state in the world-consists of weak & strong individuals. It can only develop if it adopts inclusive policy. Without full participation of very section of the society, no nation can be termed “developed”. Persons with disabilities are considered weakest section of the community. India –know for adopting inclusive policies- since beginning gave them equal status, opportunities, social protection, easing education, providing employment and education reservation through various constitutional Acts and schemes to abolish domestic violence, abuse, hardship that PWD in common and girls with disabilities in particular face in their daily life. They will be equally treated and accepted by the society without any reservation.

POPULATION OF DISABLED WOMEN

North Dinajpur is of 20 districts in West Bengal which came into existence in 1992 after bifurcation of West Dinajpur district into North and South Dinajpur. The district occupies an area of 3142 sq. km bordering with Bangladesh on the east, Bihar on the west, Darjeeling & Jalpaiguri districts on the north and Malda & South Dinajpur districts on the south. According to census 2011, total population of the district is 3,007,134 with 1,551,066 male and 1,456,068. The district economically backward and largely depends on agriculture and daily labour. Population of disabled persons in India and the district with special reference to disabled women given below.

Table-1: Population of Disabled persons in India and North Dinajpur

Total Population of PWD in India/% to total population	Female/% to total population	Rural/% to total population	Urban/% to total population	Total population of PWD in North Dinajpur/% to total population	Female/% to total population	Rural/% to total population	Urban/% to total population
26,810,557/ 2.21%	11,824,355/ 2.01%	8,223,753/ 2.03%	3,600,602/ 1.98%	51,237/ 1.7%	22,179/1.52%	19,783/1.54%	2,396/1.38%

Table-2: Disabled persons by types of disability and by sex in North Dinajpur

Disability	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
In Seeing	5045	4306	9351	740	654	1394	5785	4960	10745
In Speech	1970	1475	3445	249	183	432	2219	1658	3877
In Hearing	3445	2932	6377	436	334	770	3881	3266	7147
In Movement	4674	2712	7386	525	320	845	5199	3032	8231
Mental Illness	854	651	1505	157	97	254	1011	748	1759
Mental Retardation	1709	1371	3080	220	157	377	1929	1528	3457
Other Disability	5555	4294	9849	523	408	931	6078	4702	10780
Multiple Disability	2657	2042	4699	299	243	542	2956	2285	5241
Total	25909	19783	45692	3149	2396	5545	29058	22179	51237

Total population of disabled persons in India is 26,810,557 which constitutes 2.21% of total population, disabled women’s population is 1,824,355, 2.01% of females’ population with rural disabled women’s population of 8,223,753, which is 2.03% of total population. North Dinajpur District of West Bengal has a population of 51,237 disabled persons, 1.7% of district’s total population with females’ population 22,179, 1.52% of total female population, out of which 19,783 disabled females live in rural area which constitutes 1.54% of their population.

Population of disabled women in rural area of the district given in the table 2 states that category “Other Disability” ranks first with 21.94% of total disabled females followed by type “in seeing” with 21.77% of them. Lowest one is mental illness with 3.29% of them followed by mental retardation with 6.90%.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO PWD

The Constitution of India provides six fundamental rights to all Indian citizens, so all these rights are also available to persons with

disabilities. The special direction given to the state in Direct Principles in Article 41 as: Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases, provides: "The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and *disablement* and in other cases of undeserved want."

Eleventh Schedule to Article 243-G: says "*Social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded.*"

Twelfth Schedule to Article 243-W: says "*Safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society, including the handicapped and mentally retarded.*"

Following Constitutional directions, below Acts passed by the legislature to safeguard PWD's interests.

1. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992, The Rehabilitation Council of India was set up under the Act. The Council regulates and monitors the training of rehabilitation professional and personnel and promotes research in rehabilitation and special education.

2. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995; The Act providing for education, rehabilitation, employment, non-discrimination and social security to persons with disabilities

3. The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 is a welfare legislation which deals with the care and protection of four specific categories of Persons with Disabilities stated in the Act.

The Mental Health Act, 1987

Mental illness has been recognized as one of the disabilities under The Persons with

Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The treatment and care of the mentally ill persons are governed by The Mental Health Act, 1987.

4. National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2006)

With a view to create an environment that provides such persons equal opportunities for protection of their rights and full participation in society, formulated and brought out the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities. With the focus on Prevention of Disabilities and Rehabilitation Measures,

SCHEMES & PROGRAMS FOR PWD

Schemes and programs may be categorised into two national schemes & state schemes.

National Schemes:

A number of schemes run by central government, few mentioned below:

- Assistance to disabled persons for purchase/fitting of aids and appliances (ADIP scheme)

- Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme to promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disability (Revised DDRS scheme) to facilitate delivery of various services to persons with disabilities by voluntary organizations.

- Scheme of National Scholarships for Persons with Disabilities: Every year 500 new scholarships are awarded for pursuing post matric professional and technical courses of duration more than one year.

- The National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation provides loans to PWD for self-employment.

- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas reserved 7.5% of dealership to PWD.

- 3% of seats reserved for PWD in all central government jobs.

- Rajiv Gandhi fellowship scheme- the scheme provides scholarship to PWD for higher education as M Phil/PhD.

State Schemes

Many schemes & programs executed by the government of West Bengal; few important mentioned below:

- Free education is provided to children with Special Needs

- 3% seats are reserved in all educational Institutions for persons with disabilities.

- Physically Challenged persons are provided with a relaxation of 5% marks for admission and/or selection in employment.

- Scheme of scholarship for Students with Disabilities Studying below class ix, 2010

- Department of Mass Education Extension provides Scholarship to 2500 students with disabilities from class IX onwards

- Persons with Disabilities are provided with Aids and appliances free of cost

- 3% seats are reserved for Persons with Disabilities in all govt jobs

- Economic Assistance up to Rs. 10000/- to adult with disability belonging to families in low income bracket for pursuing self-employment.

Disability Pension by Department of Women Development & Social Welfare to persons who are unable to earn livelihood and below poverty line @ Rs. 750/- pm.

- National Indira Gandhi Disability Pension Scheme @ Rs. 400/- pm (Rs. 200/- Central share and Rs. 200/- State share).

- Govt. of West Bengal provide 3% reservation in all Poverty Alleviation Schemes for the benefit of Persons with Disabilities.

- Persons with Disabilities are allotted houses under Indira Awaas Yojana

- Persons with Disabilities are provided employment under MNREGA

- Persons with Disabilities are allowed free travel facilities in Buses run by State Transport

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE FAMILIES

Before detailed discussion about disabled girls starts, it is advisable for better understanding

to briefly analyse the economic conditions of their families. The researcher found the fact through questionnaire as mentioned in below table:

Table-3: Economic Status of their families

Beggars	15%
Labour	45%
Semi-labour	20%
Agriculture	10%
Business	03.5%
Govt job	03.5%
Orphans	03%

Above table clearly says that about 90% of their families are poor. 15% of total families are daily beggars, 45% are labour, 20% semi labour and 10% families are agriculturists. 3% of them have lost parents or one of them, they are brought up by relatives or they have no option other than beggary. Only 7% of them belong to well settled families as 3.5% from small business families while other 3.5% from govt job holder families. Since the disabled girls-being weakest themselves-belong to weakest families of the society, their welfare, development and social protection can't be left out to their families. Government authorities and civil society should take initiatives to provide them what they need for their survival.

HEALTH CARE FACILITIES & THEIR STATUS IN THE FAMILY

As most of disabled girls belong to poor families, they rarely get proper medication. The govt hospitals don't show generosity to disabled girls due to insufficient health facilities, lack of disabled special departments and disabled girls have difficulties to approach the hospitals because of being far away. Obstacle of transport stops them and their families to think about district hospitals. Nearby small govt hospitals don't have such facilities. By birth disabled girls are treated by their parents at initial stages, once they confirmed that the disability is permanent and no hope for recovery, 90% parents stop approaching doctors at the age of 4-5 years. Only 10% parents never lose hope of recovery and continue to make appointments with doctors for their disabled kids' treatment. They try to give some relief to disabled and make some options for their betterment.

If a disabled girl suffers from general illness other than disabilities as fever, cold, cough etc. 30% of them get immediate treatment, 20% of them get after 1-2 days, 25% are taken for treatment once illness becomes saviour while 25% of them never receive any such kind of treatment for general illness.

Rehabilitation centres must be set up in the district for proper treatment of disabled girls.

Their status in the family is concerned, always they come lowest in the society in 80% families and only 20% have no such categorization. 20-30% disabled girls do have freedom in their decisions, what they wish to eat & wear, their wishes are fulfilled by their families. Sayings/demands of 20% of disabled girls sometime fulfilled while remaining 50% of them face heat of the family, their wishes not fulfilled and they have no options other than to keep quiet and take what offered.

EDUCATION

Off course education is one of the best gifts on the earth which enables human beings to differentiate between right and wrong. It is obligatory for everyone to sustain in the society. Without education life becomes miserable and difficult to succeed in life. As per our Constitutional provisions, education is a fundamental right for every citizen of the country and fundamental duty of parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education for his child. When disabled people in common and disabled girls in particular are concerned, are they able to get education without any obstacle or not? The issue has been discussed below:

Table-4: Number of school going disabled girls

Age group	Number of girls surveyed	Going to school	Percentage
5-9	100	25	25%
10-15	50	10	20%
16-20	50	5	10%
Total	200	40	20%

Only 25% disabled girls aged 5-9 go to school and 20% of age group 10-15 and just 10 of 16-20 age groups girls go to school. Overall 20% of disabled

girls go to school which indicates towards worst educational environment in the district when disabled girls' education is concerned.

Table-5: Disabled girls got educational certificates

10 th	08/04%
12 th	03/1.50%
Graduation and above	01/0.5%
Professional courses	00/00%
Vocational training	01/0.5%

As per above table, 8 out of 200 girls successfully passed matriculation exam and 3 passed higher secondary exams while only one girl completed

graduation. Professional course by none of them but one disabled girl got one vocational training.

Table-6: Reasons for less enrolment by disabled girls in schools

Lack of special schools	40%
Lack of awareness	20%
Lack of encouragement	18%
Insufficient assistance by govt & civil society	15%
No educational environment for girls	07%

Non-existence of special schools for disabled girls causes less enrolment in general schools as per 40% of respondents. Families are unaware of importance, necessity of education for disabled girls as 20% respondents say. 15% respondents say that disabled girls are not encouraged to study, common perception of the society about them is that what they will do with study. They are unable to pursue their study due to insufficient assistance by the govt and there an

education friendly environment is missing as per 15% & 7% respondents respectively.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME RESOURCES

Employment opportunities and income resources are main concerns for disabled girls. As discussed earlier, many schemes/programs launched by the govt and reservation of 3% in all govt jobs provided to them. But all these initiatives proved insufficient to provide them an employment and social protection.

Table-7: Public and private employment

Govt teaching jobs	01	0.5%
Govt non-teaching jobs	00	00
Private teaching jobs	01	0.5%
Private non-teaching jobs	00	00

Even though 3% reservation in state and central govt jobs given to disabled persons, but the reservation provision did not benefit disabled females of North Dinajpur. As per survey, only one

female got a govt job in anganwadi which constitute 0.5% of all disabled women surveyed and another female got one non-govt job (0.5%).

Table-8: Reasons for unemployment

Lack of education	40%
Lack of willingness by officials	10%
Lack of awareness	10%
Non-existence of reservation implementation	10%
Unavailability of employment opportunities	30%

Above table says that disabled women are lagging behind in employment mainly because of lack of education as per 40% of total respondents. Lack of employment opportunities is also a big factor, since opportunities are not created for them, how they get employed. Jobs filled up by local authorities, they entirely ignore disabled people for jobs as 10% of

respondents indicated. Educated disabled girls are not fully aware of reservation and other benefits provided to them, so they could not demand for it as 10% respondents say and reservation not properly implemented in the district as per 10% of respondents informed.

Table-9: Beneficiaries of various schemes

National Indira Gandhi Disability Pension Scheme	03%
Indira Awaas Yojana	10%
Employment under MGNREGA	01%
Govt jobs under reservation	01%
NHFDC loans	00%
Financial assistance for self-dependence	03%

As a long list of schemes of central and state governments mentioned earlier, are really disabled girls benefited from these schemes? Only leading six schemes related to their social protection and employment have been analysed as mentioned in above table. So most discussed schemes pension and Awaas Yojana benefited only 3% & 10% of total disabled females. MGNREGA- having a provision for disabled persons- succeeded to provide an employment of merely 1%. All these three programs completely handled by Panchayat Raj Institutions where elected members do bargaining with these schemes. They prefer to

recommend those names who are blind supporters of them. Somehow they use these schemes for political gain. Once a disabled person gets such assistance, he/she is supposed to be life time supporter of that politician. This type of dirty politics often deprives the neediest person of the society. Less than 1% disabled got govt jobs through reservation. No disabled female of the district got a loan from NHFDC but 3% of them got financial assistance for self-dependence. So all these above factors forced them to live in a dark world and what they do for their livelihood (do waqt ki roti) as mentioned below:

Table-10: Current income resources of disabled women

Full time beggar	30%
Part time beggar	20%
Charity of relatives/villagers	10%
Dependent on NGO/Govt assistance	10%
Self-dependent	05%
Dependent on family	15%

Above table states that 30% of them are full time beggar, 20% of them are part time beggars as they do this profession during a particular period as crops & festival season when they can easily get a good amount of donation sufficient for remaining period. Other half of disabled females don't do beggary. 20% & 10% of them satisfied with charity of relatives, villagers and 10% with NGOs' & govt assistance. Only 5% of them are self-dependent, do some work as bidi worker and ear their livelihood while 15% of them are totally dependent on their families.

MARRIAGE

The marriage is most important part of a person's life. The institution of marriage provides both of male and female happiness, affection, oneness and most importantly taking care of each other till the end of their life. This is the necessity for both of them. PWD should not be excluded from this precious gift when they are needier than others and undoubtedly they require assistance of others for their survival. But the ground reality is entirely different from what expected. PWD in common and disabled girls in particular are deprived from marriage as a survey concludes below:

Table-11: Status of marriage of disabled girls

Number of disabled girls surveyed	100
Married	15
Divorced	3
Not married	85

So just 15% of disabled girls got married, 20% of married were divorced. Remaining 80% of married women enjoy their happy married life but 85% of total disabled women remain unmarried in their whole life. While growing old, they are unable to sustain their life. Parents died, siblings not bothered

about them as they are busy with their own families, disabled women left alone. No one is there to assist them for basic needs, their situation worsens. Slowly they become completely dependent on charity and beggary.

Table-12: Reasons for less marriage

Disability	60%
Illiteracy	8%
No income resource	10%
Less sympathy	10%
Discouragement	12%

As per 60% of total respondents, disability is the main reason for not getting married, 8% respondents indicated towards lack of education, 10% stated no income resource deprive them from marriage while 10% & 12% of them mentioned respectively that people are less sympathiser with disabled girls and discouraged to get married with them. The society is still not ready to accept them as their integral part.

ROLE OF NGOS

Off course Non-govt organisations play a pivotal role in destroying evils from the society and uplifting underprivileged people, facilitate them to sustain in the society. But the said district neglected by NGOs as well, it never been a centre of attention for them.

Number of NGOs working for PWD in the district of North Dinajpur is 16 out of 602 in whole state as per latest update on the website of Commissioner of PWD, Govt of West Bengal., once tried to contact them, most of them were unreachable. Only few responded and gave fruitful information about their activities in the district.

Few are still functioning in different parts of the district by providing different types of assistance as scholarship, clothes, aids and appliances. Their concentration is very limited and

number of beneficiaries are few and even some NGO is working only for disabled boys, disabled girls are not their target at all. But others were forced to shut their activities down due to lack of cooperation from local & state authorities and inadequate funds to continue their activities. The govt authorities must be flexible and cooperative with NGOs without considering their political mileage, while analysing the role of NGOs in the district, one interesting fact came into picture that few NGOs centred on self-interest, not ready to compromise with any activity which may go against their self-interest. They somehow aim at political gain for future perspective, their association with a particular political party also ruins the image of social service and common people are not attracted for donation & support. Social service must be primary & other things come secondary.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Disabled girls are the weakest section of the society. So they have been easily victim of domestic violence and abuse. Almost all of them have been subject to domestic violence in their life as mentioned below:

Table-13: Domestic violence against disabled girls

Everyday	10%
Every second day	18%
Once in a week	18%
Once in a month	20%
Once in a year	10%
Once in a life	11%
Never	03%

As per above table, 10% disabled girls face domestic violence every day, 18% of them have been victimised every second day, 18% of them face it once in a week, 20% once in a month while

10% & 11% of them are targeted with violence once in a year and life respectively. Only 03% of total surveyed girls never had been subject to this condemnable act.

Table-14: Violence by whom

Parents	20%
Siblings	30%
Relatives	10%
Husband	15%
Society	25%

Above table says that 20% of domestic violence committed by parents, 30% by their siblings means half of domestic violence and abuse comes from own home only because they start considering them burden and their frustration

results in domestic violence and abuse. Relatives and society share 10% & 25% of total violence respectively. They use abusive words and pass sarcastic comments against them which really hurt

a lot while 15% of violence committed by husbands of married disabled females.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY AND ITS ATTITUDE

A society-consists of all individuals live in-plays an important role in civilising them. The

society does have a mixed population of strong & weak people. How are disabled persons-being a weaker party of the society-treated? Do they comparatively respected or subjected to ignorance in common needs? These issues have been highlighted in below tables.

Table-15: Perception of society about PWD

	Yes	No
PWD are integral part of society	85%	15%
PWD to be respected	80%	20%
PWD need assistance	85%	15%
PWD to be self-dependent	80%	20%

Above table shows the perception of society about PWD that 85% of individuals in the society consider them an integral part of it and they need our assistance for their survival. They are to be respected and made self-dependent, so they would not be target of any atrocity as per 80% of

total respondents, while only 15% respondents are not ready to recognise them as part of the society and decline any assistance to them. 20% respondents are unwilling to respect them and hesitate to make them self-dependent.

Table-16: From Perception to Action

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Visit PWD	4%	10%	86%
Query about their condition	8%	22%	70%
Offer donation/charity without being asked	5%	10%	85%
Offer donation/charity after being asked	25%	35%	40%
Offer seats while travelling	10%	20%	70%
Assist them to cross the road	20%	30%	50%
Drop them @their home if needed	5%	10%	85%
Encourage/appreciate others for assistance	25%	35%	40%

Actions of a person show what he/she really thinks. People’s actions are totally different from their perception. When they were questioned about their action regarding PWD, researcher found that only 4% people always & 10% sometimes visit PWD to know their condition while 86% people never visit them. While meeting them, 8% people always ask them about their problems, 22% people sometimes want to know and 70% people are never bothered about knowing their conditions. 5% individuals always & 10% sometime help them without being asked for through donations and charity but 85% people never help them without being asked for. When people are asked to help PWD, 25% of them always and 35% sometime assist them while 40% of them never offer a penne as an assistance after being approached to do so.

While travelling in buses and trains, all of us interact with PWD, do people assist them by offering their seats? Only 10% of travellers always & 20% sometime offer them seats but 70% of them never express their willingness for an assistance. While looking at a disabled person needs someone’s assistance to cross the road, only 20% people always & 30% sometime help him to cross the road but 50% of them don’t come forward to help him. If a disabled person needs to be dropped at particular destination, only 5% people always & 10% sometime make him reach the destination but 85% people don’t care about it. 25% people always & 35% sometime encourage others to do and appreciate if a person does but 40% are even not bother to encourage or appreciate others for noble deeds.

Table-17: Reasons for Negative Attitude

Lack of sympathy	45%
Lack of awareness	35%
Arrogance	16%
Hatred	14%

Above table states that 45% & 35% of people in the society have negative attitude towards PWD because of being less sympathiser with them and not aware of importance/necessity of assisting them respectively. 16% of them happen to be arrogant about what they have and disabled people don't while 14% of them hate PWD.

SUGGESTIONS

- 1) Girls with disabilities must be considered equal and integral part of the society.
- 2) Free health care facilities to be provided to them.
- 3) Free education with adequate financial assistance to be ensured. 100% literacy rate to be secured.
- 4) Special educational institutions to be opened to cover all of them by the state & central governments with NGO's cooperation.
- 5) NGOs should give special attention to the welfare of girls with disabilities.
- 6) Number of beneficiaries of national & state scholarships to be maximised, so all disabled girls can benefit from these funds.
- 7) Number of beneficiaries of national security schemes to be increased.
- 8) Domestic violence and abuse against disabled girls to be abolished, govt authorities and civil society must come forward for ending this evil.
- 9) Girls with disabilities must be accepted for marriage.
- 10) Girls with disabilities must be made self-dependent. Employment opportunities to be created, reservation must be implemented. Professional trainings to be provided, so can earn money for their livelihood. The state and civil society must play a leading role.
- 11) Rights, schemes mentioned on the paper must be fully implemented.

CONCLUSION

Girls with disabilities are considered burden on the family and society. They are denied to get basic needs of health care, proper livelihood and education. They are not encouraged for study and adequate facilities are not provided for the same. Professional trainings not facilitated to make them self-dependent. Most of them are forced to live in worst condition.

If governmental authorities and civil society sincerely work for their welfare, their skills will be polished and they can be easily self-

dependent and spend a prosperous life ahead as others do. We must give them a space to prosper, create long lasting opportunities for their livelihood and they must be socially protected.

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