Role of Media in Disability

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**Introduction**

**STATUS**

Around 15% of the world's population, i.e. one billion people, live with disabilities. Disabilities in India is estimated at 5% to 7% per cent of the population, i.e. 50 to 70 million people.

**PROBLEMS**

Long ignored

Persons with disabilities, "the world's largest minority", face barriers to participation in all aspects of society, which include those relating to the physical environment or to information and communications technology, or those resulting from legislation or policy, or from societal attitudes or discrimination.

**RESULT**

Persons with disabilities do not have equal access to society or services, including education, employment, health care, transportation, political participation or justice.
Attitudes, beliefs, and misconceptions of society constitute a major barrier for people with disabilities.

Attitude change can follow on heightened awareness, increased contact, and increased meaningful communication between disabled and non-disabled people.

Although personal interaction is the most effective medium for conveying the personal experience of disability, the mass media can be an effective vehicle for bringing about greater understanding, and a consequent gradual change in public perceptions, of people with disabilities.
Media is defined as "a means of carrying or communicating information."

**BUT**

*Is media’s influence over society been used to society's benefit?*

*Now think this particularly in relation to disability??*

*The answer is:*

*‘NO’*

*Is media continuing to add to the discrimination of disabled people?*
The media throughout history has depicted disability through the use of impairment.

The media has focused on portraying impairment through the influence of the medical model of disability.

Disabled people are under-represented both in terms of employment in the media & portrayal in the media.
Sociocultural values

- We live in a world that values and privileges the “able” body over the “disabled” body: set as opposites
- The disability is viewed as the problem, not the values of society
- As a result, we are given the message that one should fear having, or acquiring, a disability
International Day of People with Disability on December 3 each year is an international observance promoted by the United Nations since 1992.
Jenny Morris (1991) argues that cultural portrayals of disability are usually about the feelings of non-disabled people and their reactions to disability, rather than about disability itself. Disability thus becomes:

...a metaphor...for the message that the non-disabled writer wishes to get across, in the same way that ‘beauty’ is used. In doing this, the writer draws on the prejudice, ignorance and fear that generally exist towards disabled people, knowing that to portray a character with a humped back, with a missing leg, with facial scars, will evoke certain feelings in the reader or audience. The more disability is used as a metaphor for evil, or just to induce a sense of unease, the more the cultural stereotype is confirmed (Morris, 1991:93).

Many impairments are ‘hidden’ (dyslexia, visual impairments, deafness etc).
The following are some of the stereotypes that films have been perpetuating over the years:

**Disability as a comic interlude** – often you have characters in the film who are disabled just because the audience can enjoy at his or her expense. A classic example of this is the recent Bollywood release, "Mujhse Shaadi Karoge" in which Kader Khan appears with a new disability everyday and regales the audience. He even puts up a board outside his house saying he is blind today, he is deaf and so on.

**Disability as an object of pity** – There are innumerable films which reinforce the pity element. This is the most common emotion surrounding a disabled character in a film.

**Disability as requiring a patronizing attitude** – The hero patronizes the disabled character in the film. While it shows the disabled person in poor light, it enhances the former’s heroism.

**Disability as dramatic convenience** – Sometimes, disability is used to give a twist to the script and storyline as in the film "Koyla" where Shah Rukh Khan loses his speech only to regain his voice in the end when burning coal is thrust into his mouth and this introduces a twist in the film as he goes all out to avenge his enemies.

**Disability as heroism** – There are some films which project persons with disabilities as heroes and super-heroes. This too is an unrealistic portrayal.
**Disability as a liability** – use of the terms like "bechara", "andha", "langda" are found aplenty in films denigrating a person with disability as a liability and as an unproductive member of society.

**Disability as a burden** – This too reinforces the stereotype that they are unproductive members of society.

**Disability as a medical problem** – Many films reinforce this stereotype and hence even suggest miracle or quick fix solutions. This too is fraught with danger as disability is an irreversible condition and can be reversed only if there is early intervention.

**Disability as science fiction** – In "Koi Mil Gaya", Hrithik Roshan plays a mentally challenged character who is cured by an alien world. While this may be entertaining to the audience, it can send a wrong message to children.
The Language of Disability: Use of terms like ‘cripple’ and ‘spastic’ although have abusive connotations but are still prevalent in media.

Disability Media Training: To combat negative portrayals of disabled people, media personnel must be fully aware of the implications for society of their continued production.

Accessible Media Content: None of our media content currently is accompanied by sign language and subtitles for deaf people; print media content is not in Braille or taped for blind people.

Language and Terminology: Intelligent and sensitive reporting is necessary to bring out the true feelings and beliefs of disabled people and not describe the disabled in stereotypical and derogatory ways.
At the margins of public attention

Role of the media as a source of information

According to a 1999 Government of India report:
Only **two per cent** of the disabled are reached by the limited government services that do exist.

This leads to:

1. A majority of the minority community to not have access to available services;
2. Lack of information for prevention and early detection of problems such as blindness, deafness and neurological disabilities;
3. Lack of public awareness about disabilities;
4. Creation of myths and misconceptions leading to stigma, isolation, marginalisation and ostracism.
TALK OF RIGHTS & NOT TRAGEDIES

The media tend to focus on individuals who are physically or mentally challenged to portray them as either heroes or victims.

There is little attempt to present and analyse the situation of people with disabilities as citizens who together constitute an integral part of society, contribute to it and have a legitimate claim on its resources.
Community Radio
A case of IRRAD to reach out
Together, We Empower Rural India

Rural voices of Mewat
For every 100000 people in India, there were 1755 who were either mentally or physically disabled.

Among the rural residents, the prevalence of disability was 1.85 per cent and that among the urban, it was 1.50 per cent.
What is Community Radio

Community radio is part of a broader struggle for grassroots access to communication media, a struggle not only for freedom of communications but for freedom to communicate

(Berrigan 1977; Barbrook 1987)

- Community Radio refers to community-led radio broadcasting with the objective of serving the cause of the community

- “To the people, by the people and for the people” approach

- Operates in a 10-15 km radius
The Community: Meo-Muslims of Mewat

- Mewat is one of the most backward districts in the country
- Agrarian community
- Water scarce region
- Poor health and education infrastructure
- Fading local culture
### Disable Population by District : 2001

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<th>In speech</th>
<th>In Hearing</th>
<th>In Movement</th>
<th>Mental</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>201,358</strong></td>
<td><strong>24,920</strong></td>
<td><strong>27,682</strong></td>
<td><strong>151,485</strong></td>
<td><strong>49,595</strong></td>
<td><strong>455,040</strong></td>
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</table>

Source : Director of Census Operations, Haryana.
Investigation of the disability data suggests that around 1.5% of the total population in IRRAD villages has a disability. Locomotive disability is found to be the highest among the types of disabilities occurring in the region. Intellectual handicap, visual and auditory disability and poliomyelitis are other kinds of disabilities occurring in the region (sample study by IRRAD in 14 villages)
Why Community Radio

• Easily accessible
• Cost effective medium
• Accessible to women
• Effective in communities with low literacy level
• Use of local dialect
• Gives voice to the marginalized sections of society
• Government support
Results from a survey conducted in 51 villages; 34 in the reach and 17 not covered by radio

Television: 19%
Radio: 16.7%
Newspapers: 7.3%
Magazines: 0.5%

Win-Win situation for a radio which gives voice to the community

Cheapest way to reach out to the hard-to-reach communities on a range of subjects

Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD)
The story of Alfaz-e-Mewat

**Location**

The station located at the foothills of Aravallis in Haryana is housed in a community center, which holds village level trainings and field demonstrations.

**Reach**

The station covers villages in 15 kms radius, reaching to more than 180 villages, many of which have never had access to mainstream media.
Challenges...

• Strong ethnic barriers

• Women participation

• Sustainability of Volunteerism phenomenon

• Lack of skill set and know how

• Lack of infrastructure: Dependence on external resource persons
Getting the community together

• Baseline Survey

• Community meetings

• Community members’ training on technical and programming aspects of radio

• Representation of women, disable, children, youth, farmers and PRI members from society in program and content design.
On Air Experiences

- Community voices captured
- Community talent identified
- and recorded at the studio
- Community people profiled for their good work
- Bringing the differently able to the forefront
Reena: Saluting the Undaunted Spirit

Reena, a poor, physically challenged girl from village Karheda, found new meaning in her life when she joined the Tara Akshar literacy program by IRRAD in partnership with Development Alternatives.

Story published in the “Small interventions big impact case study compendium”
Building strength to strength

In Jyotisar (Kurukshetra) IRRAD implemented UNDP’s Endogenous Tourism project in 2005, an SHG of PWD was formed to provide income generation avenues to them. One poorest of poor couple, a differently-abled couple was provided a mobile popcorn vending machine. They now sell popcorons to the tourists coming to Jyotisar.
Parmal is a skilled entrepreneur and earns her own living today after learning machine embroidery through IRRAD’s Livelihoods Initiative in 2005.

Since then her mother, a single parent to her two children and field labourer with no regular source of income now assists her daughter in work and is liberated from the drudgery of agricultural labor.
Nahar, a 10 year old child who lost both his hands in an accident was interviewed by Alfaz-e-Mewat, IRRAD’s community radio station in partnership with Min. of Agriculture, got lot of encouraging response from the listeners. The listeners called in to say that the medium is really doing justice by sharing their story and giving them a chance to join the mainstream.

Nahar’s interview inspired many people and also increased his confidence.
Music brings light for Shiv

Shiv Charan
village Hasanpur, Mewat.
Disability-Blind

Through community Radio his talent received recognition. He has been recorded for a 30 hour program.
Sustainability & Linkages

S. M. Sehgal Foundation

Department of Agriculture & Cooperation

Galli Galli Sim Sim.

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Looking at the brighter side

• In terms of communication channels, radio is considered as the second best mode of communication followed by TV

• 65% of the respondents feel that radio can be a good source of information

• 67% of the respondents want to be part of community radio

• 49% population engaged in Agriculture
Alfaz-e-Mewat at present

• Broadcasting for 9.5 hours

• Received Directorate and Visual Publicity empanelment: Carried out ‘Bharat Nirman’ and ‘Jago Grahak Jago’ campaigns

• Successful partnership with the government and corporate sector

• A visit center for interns from Commonwealth Education Center for Media in Asia (CEMCA) and Community Radio Forum
The intermingling of communication and culture, for the preservation of values and participation by all in society is a way forward to inclusive development ........
Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD)

www.irrad.org
The Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) has been set up under Section 57 of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995 and mandated to take steps to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities.

Each State in India has its own State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.
Disabled people are under-represented both in terms of employment in the media and portrayal in the media.

Change from charity and human story to a development and rights issue.

Attitudes are the Real Disability

Casting a disabled anchor, looking out for a disabled “expert” or panellist or consciously widening the composition of a studio audience?

Will disability fit onto the front page??

Is media oblivious of the issues of the disabled, they do something only around World Disability Day.
Recommendations

• To conduct periodical training programmes / workshops either independently or in collaboration with established institutions to sensitize new and upcoming film makers, Non-Governmental Organizations and funding agencies to take up the subject connected with disability issues in their future production programmes.

• To have monitoring boards such that distorted depictions are avoided.

• To provide adequate expertise on disability issues to institutions and individuals interested in making films/documentaries/audio-visual programmes on the subject.

• To encourage persons with disability to get involved in the making of films, TV and audio-visual programmes and in print and social media.

• To persuade both public and private TV channels to allow time slots in their day-to-day programmes on disability issues.

• To document content data in a scientific manner, for possible use by researchers, communicators, media personnel and others interested in the use of the material in their respective fields and to have distribution networks to access these documents.
Stephen William Hawking is a British theoretical physicist, whose world-renowned scientific career spans over 40 years.

Disability: Motor Neuron disease or a variant of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis)
Helen Adams Keller was an American author, political activist and lecturer. She was the first deaf blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Campaigned for women’s suffrage, workers’ rights, and socialism and many other progressive causes.

Disability: Blind and Deaf
Thomas Edison, the great inventor turned the attention of the world after inventing Phonograph. Other popular inventions Electric Bulb; the telegraph system.

Disability: Learning disability and Deaf
Sudha Chandran amputated her right leg after an accident.

She was given an artificial leg and despite this terrible disability, she became one of the most accomplished and acclaimed dancers of the Indian Subcontinent.

Disability: Amputee
Able but unwilling…

The possibilities are endless. The question is whether or not the media are able and willing?
Disability is located Everywhere:

We all have so many stories to bear
Cry, laugh, sing, and despair;
how will our children learn and compare
if we’re too timid to dare
to raise the flare
share that we care.

From, Steven E. Brown,

“Tell Your Story”
THANK YOU!

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