

**ARTICLE**

## **Perspectives on Addressing Educational Hurdles Faced by Person with Disabilities in India: Insights from Analysis of the 76th NSS Dataset**

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The Constitution of India guarantees Indian citizens the right to education (Article 21A), the right to free and compulsory education (Article 45), promotion of education, and economic interests of ST, SC, and weaker sections (Article 46) through other provisions and enactments. Even after various constitutional rights were enshrined and laws enacted, the persons with disabilities (PwDs) in the disadvantaged groups face social discrimination and exclusion from getting equal opportunities in different social and economic avenues education being among them all. Various Census Reports and different Rounds of National Sample Survey (NSS) reports show that persons with disabilities are less educated, least employed, and have low living standards in society.

It is widely acknowledged that promoting education can uplift living standards (Sen Amartya and Jean Dreze, 2002). However, the absence of education among individuals with disabilities poses a significant barrier to improving their quality of life. This paper aims to provide an examination of the educational status of persons with disabilities. The study draws from data collected during the 76th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) on the 'Survey of Persons with Disabilities conducted from July 2018 to December 2018 and considers the provisions outlined in the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP) aimed at fostering education among persons with disabilities.

### **Exploring Policy Evolution: Changing Landscape for Persons with Disabilities in India**

Promoting Inclusive Development entails prioritizing attention and opportunities for marginalized segments of society. Despite affirmative actions over the past few decades, including efforts targeting Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, minorities, and persons with disabilities (PwDs), their conditions have seen limited improvement. Additionally, it's widely recognized that persons with disabilities face a dual burden of discrimination: statistical

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discrimination due to their lower numbers and discrimination by taste based on physical capacity, as conceptualized by Becker (1957). This underscores the need for a heightened focus on addressing these challenges.

To combat exclusion and discrimination, raise awareness about disability rights, and improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities, a disability movement was initiated in India (NHRC, 2005). However, existing policy barriers hindered disabled individuals from accessing equal opportunities, fair treatment, and democratic practices essential for living with dignity. Throughout, the five-year plans, the government implemented numerous measures to bolster the disability movement. The introduction of disability laws in 1995, aligning with 'The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunity for People with Disabilities (1993),' was a significant milestone in the social sector, facilitating increased participation of disabled persons across various domains. Moreover, the establishment of disability-specific institutions aimed to promote and safeguard the rights of disabled individuals. While these advancements represented crucial landmarks in the disability rights movement and fostered greater awareness among persons with disabilities, they fell short of fully realizing their growth and potential.

In 2016, the government introduced the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to enhance accessibility, employment opportunities, education, and access to justice for individuals with disabilities. This legislation marked a significant advancement following a substantial gap since the enactment of the Equal Opportunities and Participation Act of Disabled Persons in 1995. According to the 2011 Census, the disabled population comprised approximately 2.91 percent of India's total population. However, there are ongoing debates regarding the accurate count of disabled individuals in India, primarily stemming from definitional discrepancies. It is believed that with a more comprehensive and inclusive definition of disability, the actual population count would exceed the figures reported in the Census.

In both India and globally, disability historically received minimal attention. In India, the Census provided some data on disabled persons up until 1931. However, after 1931, the Census ceased to separately count disabled persons, despite a notable increase in their numbers with each passing year.

In the aftermath of the 1970s, persons with disabilities and advocacy organizations began mobilizing to safeguard the rights of disabled individuals, striving to enhance their quality of life. These rights-focused movements for persons with disabilities gained traction globally, prompting the United Nations (UN) to launch numerous awareness campaigns for disabled individuals. The UN designated 1981 as the 'International Year of Disabled Persons' and subsequently declared 1981-1991 as the 'Decade of Disabled Persons'.

Following independence, surveys on disabled persons in India were intermittently conducted by the National Sample Survey (NSS). The persistent advocacy efforts aimed at advancing the rights and living standards of disabled persons exerted pressure on the Government of India (GoI) to include disability-related questions in the 1981 Census.

### **Education Status of Persons with Disabilities**

Imparting education plays a pivotal role in fostering significant societal transformation. Education catalyzes social change and acts as a transformative force, shaping values and enhancing overall quality of life. A steadfast commitment to promoting basic education is imperative due to its strategic significance in uplifting marginalized sections of society (NCERT, 2014). This strategic importance can be understood through five key dimensions: (i) Intrinsic importance, (ii) instrumental personal roles, (iii) instrumental social roles, (iv) process roles, and (v) empowerment roles (Sen and Dreze, 1998). Each of these dimensions reinforces the value of education in enabling individuals to improve their living conditions, including persons with disabilities.

In India, three key policies have been implemented to ensure inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Firstly, the integration of disabled students into mainstream schools has been embraced, with a focus on providing necessary accommodations within regular school settings. Secondly, there is recognition for the establishment of a dedicated special school system catering to students with various disabilities (Disability Manual, 2005). Thirdly, there is a call for the development and delivery of vocational courses tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities. Despite these efforts, data from various rounds of the National Sample Survey (NSS) indicates inadequate educational attainment among persons with disabilities. Similarly, rehabilitation programs aimed at enhancing self-reliance and employment opportunities for disabled persons have also shown shortcomings. According to data from the 58th Round of Disabled Persons Survey, only 20% of rural and 25% of urban disabled individuals were engaged in technological courses, reflecting a decline compared to previous surveys such as the 47th Round in 1991.

The declining trend in educational attainment among persons with disabilities can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate institutional coordination, subpar expenditure performance, and various challenges in delivering education effectively (Soni, 2020). The inclusion of disabled children is hindered by deficiencies in identifying disabilities, as well as barriers to accessing the education system. Even when identified, their integration into the schooling system depends on factors such as the quality of available education, ease of inclusion within schools, and the effectiveness of government-led support systems. Additionally, factors such as family and peer support,

social stigma, and physical and infrastructural barriers play crucial roles in determining whether a disabled student can successfully integrate into the educational system.

## Educational Mapping for the Disabled Persons from the Latest Data Source

As previously mentioned, three key policy approaches were implemented to facilitate education among Persons with Disabilities (PwDs): Firstly, integrating disabled individuals into mainstream education alongside their non-disabled peers. Secondly, offering specialized education tailored to the needs of specific types of disabilities. And thirdly, prioritizing educational opportunities for disabled students who face challenges in leaving their homes.

The latest National Sample Survey (NSS) data collection offers a detailed insight into the educational landscape for persons with disabilities.

	Attending Educational Institution			Attended Educational Institution earlier			Never Attended Educational Institution		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Total	61.17	61.74	60.45	60.45	12.33	11.88	26.68	41.97	19.81
Rural	59.77	60.64	58.64	58.64	12.65	12.07	27.82	44.01	21.37
Urban	64.66	64.5	64.86	64.86	11.52	11.42	23.85	37.16	16.21

Source: Calculated by Author from Census, 2011, Data Figures Round to be 100%

Table 1 provides insights into the educational attainment of persons with disabilities. It illustrates the level of participation of disabled persons in educational institutions. The data indicates that 26.68% of disabled persons have never received education from any educational institution, while 61.17% have enrolled in educational institutions. However, this data also sheds light on the prevalence of dropout rates among disabled persons.

	Disabled	Non-Disabled	Gap
Not Literate	48.96	26.22	22.74
Literate without any Schooling	0.53	0.34	0.19
Literate without formal Schooling through NFEC	0.02	0.03	-0.01
Through TLC/AEC	0.02	0.01	0.01
Others	0.2	0.23	-0.03
Literate with formal Schooling below Primary	11.58	15.63	-4.05
Primary	10.98	13.27	-2.29
Upper/Middle	10.67	13.66	-2.99
Secondary	7.8	12.33	-4.53
Higher Secondary	4.64	9.07	-4.43
Diploma/Certificate Course (upto Secondary)	0.22	0.41	-0.19
Diploma/Certificate Course (Higher Secondary)	0.22	0.31	-0.09
Diploma/Certificate Course (Graduation & Above)	0.1	0.16	-0.06
Graduate	3.14	6.79	-3.65
Post Graduate and above	0.92	1.53	-0.61

Source: Self-Calculation by Author from NSS 76th Round Unit Level Data

Several factors contribute to the dropout phenomenon, including the lack of compatibility between educational institutions and disabilities. Additionally,

the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at creating an inclusive educational environment for disabled persons within the current education system is questionable. These challenges are often exacerbated by social stigma, which further hinders the educational progress of disabled persons.

Table 2 aims to examine the disparity in educational attainment between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities. The data reveals that disabled individuals have a 22.74% higher rate of illiteracy compared to non-disabled persons. Across all levels of education, including primary, middle school, high school, graduation, and post-graduation, there exists a negative gap between disabled and non-disabled persons, highlighting the unequal access to education for disabled persons. This discrepancy underscores the inadequacies in providing proper support and advocacy for disabled persons, resulting in ineffective implementation of measures aimed at promoting their education.

In addition to providing education for disabled persons, various other provisions have been implemented, with a primary focus on technical education. The objective of technical education is to equip disabled individuals with vocational skills that enhance their employability and foster self-sufficiency. Technical education encompasses certificate courses, diploma programs, and degree courses. However, the progress of technical education in India has been sluggish, with a notable disparity between disabled and non-disabled individuals. According to the 76th Round of NSS Data, nearly 99% of disabled persons lack access to any form of technical education. Participation of disabled individuals in degree programs remains minimal, despite reservations established for them in various education sectors. Although reservations for disabled persons have increased from 3% to 5%, their participation rate remains below 1%, indicating that the standards of reservation are not being met.

The participation of disabled persons in education and technical education remains significantly low, influenced by various underlying factors detailed in Table 3. Disabled persons often require pre-intervention programs before school admission to facilitate their integration with non-disabled peers in reading and writing. However, only 10.11% of children have access to such programs. Furthermore, a mere 62.91% of disabled children are admitted to any type of mainstream school, with only 36.65% able to sustain their schooling. Conversely, 63.35% of disabled children are unable to attend any school due to their disabilities. Enrollment rates in special schools designated for disabled children stand at a mere 5.34%, with 11.89% in urban areas and only 3.15% in rural areas (Reddy & Sarap, 2017). However, the observed enrollment rate in special schools falls far short of the expected 48.65%. This indicates inadequacies in both mainstream and special education systems for disabled

children (Asher & Others, 2015). Difficulty in enrolling and accessing educational institutions poses a significant barrier, particularly in rural areas, necessitating special attention for disabled children in these regions.

Table 4 illustrates the current presence of disabled persons in the education sector. The highest participation of disabled persons is observed in primary education, with an enrollment rate of 35.3%. This is followed by participation in middle and secondary classes, with rates of 19.45% and 12.9% respectively. The enrollment rate slightly increases to 6.54% in undergraduate classes, while only 1.2% of disabled persons are enrolled in postgraduate programs or higher education. It is evident that participation of disabled persons in the education sector gradually increases from primary to postgraduate education, although it remains low in technical education programs such as diploma or certificate courses (UN, 2017). There is a pressing need for specialized programs aimed at increasing the enrollment of disabled persons in technical education.

<b>Table 3: Some Basic Facts Regarding Education Status of the Disabled Person (%)</b>			
<b>Part A: Whether the Disabled Person Attended Pre- School Intervention Programme</b>			
	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Yes</b>	9.13	13.06	10.11
<b>No</b>	90.87	86.94	89.89
<b>Part B: Whether Ever Enrolled in Ordinary School (i.e., other than Special School)</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	62.48	64.21	62.91
<b>No</b>	37.52	35.79	37.09
<b>Part C: Whether Currently Attending in Ordinary School</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	37.2	35.05	36.65
<b>No</b>	62.8	64.95	63.35
<b>Part D: Whether Currently not Attending in Ordinary School due to onset of Disability</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	23.89	24.9	24.15
<b>No</b>	76.11	75.1	75.85
<b>Part E: Whether Disabled Person Enrolled in Special School</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	3.15	11.89	5.34
<b>No</b>	96.85	88.11	94.66
<b>Part F: Whether Disabled Person Currently Attending in Special School</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	35.23	59.29	48.65
<b>No</b>	64.77	40.71	51.35
<b>Source: Self-Calculation by Author from NSS 76th Round Unit Level Data</b>			

**Table 4: Level of Current Attendance of the Disabled Person (%)**

	Rural	Urban	Total
Currently Attending in:			
NFEC	0.33	0.07	0.25
TLC/AEC	0.03	0	0.02
Other Non-formal	0.54	1.92	0.93
Pre-Primary (Nursery/ Kindergarten, etc.)	10.99	10.66	10.9
Primary (Class I to V)	37.2	30.57	35.36
Upper Primary/Middle	20.05	17.89	19.45
Secondary	13.6	11.42	12.99
Higher Secondary	9.05	9.62	9.21
Diploma /Certificate Course (upto Secondary)	0.43	0.7	0.5
Diploma/Certificate (Higher Secondary)	0.65	0.6	0.64
Diploma/ Certificate (Graduation and Above)	0.26	1.01	0.47
Graduate	5.73	8.66	6.54
Postgraduate and Above	0.9	1.96	1.2

Source: Self-Calculation by Author from NSS 76th Round Unit Level Data

**Table 5: Reason for Non- Enrolment of the Disabled Person in Special School (%)**

	Rural	Urban	Total
Due to Disability	27.48	27.12	27.4
School not Known	22.7	19.25	21.89
Difficulty in Getting Admission	0.35	0.83	0.46
School far Away	10.27	6.55	9.4
Expensive	1.53	1.53	1.53
Not Interested in Education	8.72	8.98	8.78
For Participation in Household Economic Activity	1.91	2.34	2.01
For Other Economic Reasons	4.77	5.92	5.04
For Attending Domestic Chores	1.84	1.61	1.79
Completed Desired Level/ Class	6.33	9.05	6.96
Other Reasons	14.1	16.81	14.73

Source: Self-Calculation from by Author NSS 76th Round Unit Level Data

Upon examination of the preceding data, it becomes evident that educational attainment among disabled persons remains significantly low. Advocates have called for the implementation of an integrated and equitable education system for disabled persons. However, the participation of disabled persons within the general education system has not met expectations.

There is a pressing need for a specialized school system catering to the diverse needs of disabled persons. Such a system would address the unique educational requirements of disabled persons effectively. Unfortunately, the establishment of specialized schools for disabled persons in the country is quite rare. Table 5 presents data highlighting the low enrollment of disabled persons in various special schools and the reasons behind it. Approximately 27.4% of disabled persons are unable to enroll in these schools due to their

disabilities, while 21.89% are hindered by a lack of awareness about the schools. Additionally, 9.4% face challenges related to distance from the school. Consequently, approximately 55% of disabled persons face obstacles preventing their enrollment in special schools. Establishing effective publicity campaigns about special schools targeted at both the disabled population and the general public is crucial to increasing the enrollment of disabled persons in these institutions.

### **The Way Forward**

In the Indian context, there exists an opportunity to review and enhance policies while bolstering the capacity of institutions dedicated to addressing disability issues. Affirmative action has been instrumental in sparking interest in developing inclusive strategies for persons with disabilities, recognized as crucial interventions to combat discrimination and inequality. Legislative provisions and increasing state commitment have contributed to noticeable shifts in public attitudes towards disability. However, the extent of this change hinges on a conscious understanding of disability, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue with justice.

This study advocates for both equal and differential treatment for persons with disabilities, reflecting the demands of the disability rights movement. Crafting policies that effectively address disability-based discrimination is essential. Success in this endeavour relies on fostering a sense of dignity and confidence among disabled individuals. Moreover, alongside raising awareness, dedicating additional resources and research towards disability-related initiatives will further amplify their transformative impact.

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