



Condemning Disability of a Rural Women in *Gulki Bannoby* Dharamveer Bharti

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Abstract:

Disability is an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations and participating restrictions. This limited access to world leads to various psychological, social and economic problems along with anxiety issues in individuals with disabilities. As said by Mahatma Gandhi, "India is a country of villages," (Gandhi, 21) as more than 60% of the total population of the country resides in villages. According to Village Square an online journal writing about Real picture of Rural India, it is revealed that there are about 27 million people in India with disabilities, of which more than 70% of disabled population of India lives in villages. They are a neglected and marginalised section of the society. Disability is a physical, mental, and intellectual condition that may be inherited or acquired by the individual. There have been many cases where individuals were born without any disability but due to some illness or accident, they acquired one or the other form of disability, landing in the excluded section of the society. This condition can occur to anyone; hence it becomes very important that people should be sensitive when dealing with differently abled people. It is an unsaid fact that lives of people with disability is full of challenges, and in rural background lack of education, prejudices, biased social and religious beliefs, stereotypes, poverty, poor hygienic conditions add to the misery.

Keywords: Disability, Impairments, Rural, Women, Challenges

Introduction

Based on the 2011 Census, a recent statistical profile of the PwD done by GOI puts 27 million as a round figure of PwD. This figure includes diverse forms of disabilities as defined by the Census Commissioner and includes blindness, deafness, neuro – motor disabilities, mental disorders, leprosy induced disabilities, etc. This census also says that about 71% of PwD lives in rural areas (Consensus 2011). People with disabilities face many difficulties in society, they are met with unexpected challenges and problems. Their fight for inclusion in main stream society is laden with uncounted difficulties. Men and women both suffer the sting of being disabled, but the later suffers a lot when compared. In Consensus of 2011 is also found that the sex ratio among the PwD is 787. This figure shows that the disabled girl child has much poorer chance of survival in this country than his disabled brother. The neglect of women with disability is also reflected in the poor literacy ratio among them. Women and girls with disabilities are doubly oppressed, as firstly they are physically or mentally unsound and secondly, they belong to the “weaker sex.” In modern society everything that confirms to the set norms is termed as able or normal, women have always been described as lacking something, they possess a deformed state of mind, they lack Penis which makes them abnormal or incomplete and disabled, because the normal version of human being is a ‘man’. The diverse fabric of Indian society reflects its rich past, inhabited by Dravidians, Aryans, Mughals, colonised by the Britishers for a significant period, and then divided into two as it became independent in 1947, the complexity of India’s diversity defies a simple explanation to the topic that how people with special needs are treated in this society. With twenty- two official languages and numerous other languages and dialects, the birthplace of three religions and home to many others each of them carries a discourse of their own for addressing the issues of disability. History, region and religion all contribute to shape social perceptions on disability. The cultural baggage of Indian society forms different types of treatment offered to people with special needs. (Mahanta, 44) There is a sense of stigma attached, when addressing PwD, it is seen that if one among the many siblings is differently abled, then it hampers the prospectus of other ‘normal’ siblings as it becomes very difficult to find suitable match for them. The burden of this stigma and insensitivity lies particularly heavy on PwD in rural areas. They receive very little support from people and no support from schools and public institutions. It is seen that in rural background PwD are given various nametags, such as “*langda, lula, kaana, bahira, Andha, pagal, ullu, bewakoof, kambuddhi, adhibuddhi*” (Village culture), which is very demeaning. These titles fill up the individuals with a sense of alienation and distances them from the mainstream society. These disability terms used in the society show regressive thinking towards PwDs. This form of addressal hinders their social engagement and psychological wellbeing, which adds to the challenges they are already facing. It automatically implies pessimism that PwDs are not of any worth (Nagarajan 67).

Disability of a Rural Woman

Disability cannot be read in isolation, it is interlinked with religion, caste, class, gender, and sexuality. People with disabilities have been treated differently from time to time (Mahanta 56). In this paper I am going to discuss about Gulki Banno, the titular character of the short story Gulki

Banno by Dharam Veer Bharti, she is a victim of domestic violence, which resulted in her lifelong spinal injury and placed her in the category of Women with Disability. The story 'Gulki Banno' is written by eminent Hindi writer DharamveerBharati (25 December 1926 – 4 September 1997) he was a renowned Hindi poet, author, playwright and a social thinker of India. He was the chief editor of the popular Hindi weekly magazine *Dharmayug*, from 1960 till 1987. Bharati was awarded the Padma Shree for literature in 1972 by the Government of India. His novel '*GunahoKaDevta*' became a classic. Bharati's '*SurajkaSatwanGhoda*' is considered a unique experiment in story-telling and was made into a NationalAward-winning movie by the same name in 1992 by ShyamBenegal. *AndhaYug*, a play set immediately after the Mahabharata war, is a classic that is frequently performed in public by drama groups. Dharamveer Bharti was awarded the SangeetNatakAkademi Award in Playwriting (Hindi) in 1988.

In his story Gulki Banno, Dharamveer Bharti has presented the life of a physically challenged woman named Gulki, who suffers a hump at her back due to the harsh beatings she got from her husband because of her only fault that, she gave birth to a 'stillborn'. We come to know through the dialogues of Driver Sahab that, "After five years a child was born. If the child was born dead, what was her fault? She was battered and pushed over the stairs that greviously injured her back for life" (Bharti 29) This is a story about a woman who is now an orphan and also bereaved by her husband Mansedhu, she gave birth to a still born and that too after five long years of her marriage, and hence she was thrown away from the stairs by his abusive husband which resulted in a severe spinal injury and her back turned to hump which gave her immense pain in every winter. After this severe beating and spinal injury, she was left by her husband, so she came back to her paternal village, where her neighbours have usurped her father's house, but as she was a disabled woman, the villagers took pity on her and Ghengha Bua an elderly lady gave her chabootra (raised platform at one's entrance) to sell vegetables and make her living as we see, "Gulki would carry a large sack of vegetables from the wholesale market on her humpback"(Bharti 29) and fill her belly with this hard work. The story very subtly talks about the treatment given to a woman who is disabled by the people in the society. Gulki is made to suffer a lot; she is feared and rejected by the society. On the chabootra on which Gulki started selling vegetables was earlier used by the children of the village as their suitable playground, as it had nice pillars and was covered with a temporary roof, but when Gulki started her shop over there, these children despised her, in this story Bharti has tried to show that even these innocent looking children become a threat for a woman who is already suppressed by the society, as one of the child character Mewa says, "humpback let us see yourhump, and threw a handful of dust on her"(Bharti 25). It throws light on the aspect that entire society stands against a woman with disability. The children present in the story Nirmal, Munna, Matki and Mihirwa make fun of Gulki and even beat her, Bharti has describedpitiabile condition of Gulki, after beating her, "children cried joyously, 'killed humpback, killed humpback'" (Bharti 30).Through the portrait of Gulki, we see the miserable condition of a woman with disability, she is the icon of women with disability in rural India, with no assistance from private as well as public sector. Gulki is presented as a 'doubly marginalized' character , firstly she is a woman and secondly a woman with disability, both these attributes make her condition worse in the society, she is unable to voice her demands and seek her just place in the society, she suffers the atrocities of her husband,

pain of a stillborn child, she is harshly beaten and bereaved by her husband, she becomes the receiver of the hatred of her neighbours, she faces the anger, disrespect and harassment by group of children, they abuse and beat her. Above all she suffers a physical disability in form of spinal injury which becomes her lifelong pain. She is described as “ Gulki was not much old, at most twenty five or twenty six. But wrinkles appearing on her childlike face made her look much older. At her waist she was all bent doubled up like an eighty year old women” (Bharti 26). In this story we find that even the innocent looking children, who are receiving good education from primary school of their village also become a medium of pain inflicted upon a woman who is already suffering a lot. It shows that as a society we lack the sensitivity and sensibility to treat PwD. One of the child character voices that, “ Mewa said , are it’s not the humpback! The puffy back is packed with the rupee of her husband” (Bharti 29). They try to implement that the hump on the back of Gulki is the money that she has stolen from her husband’s house, and that is why he has left her here all alone. Nirmal says, “ she must have stolen money from her husband’s house too” (Bharti 29). We also see that after throwing Gulki out of the house, her husband Mansedhu remarries and his new wife gives birth to a baby boy and then he returns to fetch Gulki back, so that she can perform the house chores and look after the kid, she is not accepted as a wife but only as a house help to his new wife and child. This is a real picture of the society, who perceives PwD either as a burden or unpaid, undemanding, free of cost house help. According to the reports, in a study made about the pattern of marriage, it is observed that, disabled women are divorced by their husbands more than the men with disability, and if any disability occurs after marriage, then also men divorce their wives, as it happened with Gulki that when she got a hump at her back, her husband threw her out of his house. It adds to the reader’s dismay that despite all the hardships that Gulki suffered because of the spinal injury caused by the thrashing of her husband, she decides to go back with him and look after his new wife and son. “ Gulki, the bride is leaving for her husband’s home” (Bharti 41) this represents the harsh reality of lives of women with disability, they are made to choose the same path as they are left with no other choices and support.

Women with disabilities are economically dependent on others and this makes them bear all the torments inflicted on them silently, Gulki Banno tries to meet her expenses through a minimal income she makes by selling vegetables on the raised platform provided by Ghengha Bua, but after a certain period Ghengha Bua uproots Gulki’s shop and throws her out from her chabootra. In this way women are reduced to the lowest levels and they become victims of many crimes inflicted on them by the powerful male as well as female members of the society, for example Ghengha Bua and Mother of Nirmal emerge as oppressors of Gulki as they both stand against Gulki, they torture her with their crooked comments on her, Ghengha Bua abuses Gulki and destroys her vegetable shop in her rage and fury, Mother of Nirmal forbade her husband to help Gulki, through this story Bharti ji has tried to show that not only males and females but also the children of the society become a cause of pain for people with disabilities, as it was also shown in *Tara*, a well celebrated play by Mahesh Dattani, where a young girl of the same age of Tara and Chandan makes fun of their disability, which hurts both of them. There have been numerous narratives where people with disabilities are mocked and ridiculed by all the sections of the society. Hence, we can say that in *Gulki Banno Dharamveer Bharti* portrays the miserable life of Gulki who is a humpback, set in a rural area of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh of 1970’s , times when women had very few rights in their support, it was the time

when women were closed in the four walled rooms, it shows Gulki's struggle for survival and lays bare the treatment our society gives to the disabled or deformed, the society to which Gulki belongs becomes the microcosm of the macrocosm, my paper shows how her deformed body is viewed as evil and deviant, how it becomes the object of children's pranks and mockery and adult's criticism. It presents issues of Spousal abuse, juvenile delinquency, a disabled's search for belongingness and the selfish objectives of other people, who under the garb of philanthropy abuse her for their own vested interests.

Conclusion

The recent changes that have been introduced by Government of India have led to the empowerment of a growing population of disabled people which is now educated, professionally successful and is placed on eminent positions. The number might not be a significant one, but the qualitative changes in their lives are evident but we should keep in mind that these are people who mostly belong to the upper middle - classes of society. There has also been an increase, in recent times, in academic interventions in the field of disability studies. Academics and policy planners have initiated discussions on the issue in various bodies and forums, and this has led to disability being more discussed and researched on than it was earlier. It has sensitized people to recent developments in the field. By and large though, general and policy level consciousness about people with disabilities is a fairly recent and limited phenomenon. However, the majority of the population of people with disabilities lives in rural areas, is not mobile, and is left out in terms of the urban thrust of disability policies like job reservations, travel concessions, special parking facilities, educational facilities and ease of access to institutions, which are utilized by only a miniscule section of the population. NGOs have taken up the issues of disabled people in rural and community settings. The situation today continues to be a curious coexistence of traditional perceptions and modern attitudes, of conventional thought and radical views, of the indigenous and the western an uneasy juxtaposition of the charity and medical models on the one hand and the social model on the other. Disability studies as an academic area of inquiry is in a relatively nascent state in recent times, but in which a lot more ground still needs to be covered. One should always remember that, "There is a plan and a purpose, a value to every life, no matter what its location, age, gender or disability."

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