

# Book Review

## STATUS OF DISABILITY IN INDIA - 2007

### Vol. I - Hearing Impairment & Deaf Blindness

Chief Editor: Dr. Shailaja Nikam\*

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The Rehabilitation Council of India which was established in May 1986 will soon celebrate its Silver Jubilee. Twenty five years is a short time in the life of an institution. In this short period the RCI, as it is affectionately called by all rehabilitators has done tremendous work and now as a Statutory Body is guiding, monitoring and encouraging a variety of rehabilitative endeavours. It has stimulated the establishment of new programmes, new institutions and very importantly encouraged appropriate meaningful legislation.

Among the many good things it has achieved is the publication of three books, 'Status of Disability in India – 2000, 2003 and 2007'. The latest book 'STATUS OF DISABILITY IN INDIA – 2007' was published in the year 2008. The earlier books were published as single books covering all the disabilities and they were called as 'Mahapuranas' by Mr. A.K.Sinha who was for sometime the Member Secretary of RCI. The present book is published in separate volumes, each dedicated to one or a set of related disabilities. Each volume is now handier; but it is also a 'Purana' considering its value to the readers.

The Chief Editor of the present book Dr. S Nikam has had her hands full and she has risen to the challenge admirably, if I can go by the volume on Hearing Impairment and Deaf blindness. All kudos to her!

She has had the help of sets of eminent teachers and rehabilitators to the two sections.

Their contributions are very impressive. There is no indication in the book whether the different chapters were written by different individuals or the whole contributions are a result of team work and group discussions. It would have been useful if one knew who contributed what so that one could seek more information if necessary from individual contributors.

The goal of these Status Reports seems to have slowly shifted though the original intentions have not been lost sight of. The first book was originally conceived to be a primary reference for professional people to fulfill a felt need for an 'in depth reference point.' Dr. J.P.Singh, Member Secretary desired the second book 'to take stock, change to introspect or otherwise the future as want cannot be ours'. The present book, 'Status of Disability in India – 2007' also intends to take 'stock of the present status and chart new directions'. Dr. Nikam, the Chief Editor emphasizes introspecting, questioning and modifying our efforts and she hopes that the imbalances and obvious unevenness in the welfare measures are looked into and that this would lead to greater effort to keep up with each other!

The chapters in the volume are well planned and cover valid questions. This volume when read along with the previous volumes provides a clear picture of the status of disability in India, thus amply fulfilling the purpose of the efforts of the contributors. The chapters are very well written and the contributors must be complimented on the

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clarity and validity of their information.

The present volume has consciously tried to continue where the older books ended and thus in general has avoided duplication. This is a good plan. The chapter on historical perspectives in Hearing Impairment has rightly included only the newer innovations such as the early intervention centers and the disability-help-line. It would have been good if all the writers had done similarly.

In general, the chapters are clear and concise and do give a fair picture of the current status. However, it is an onerous task to be concise and comprehensive at the same time. Several errors of omission and commission are bound to occur. The contributors of the present volume have not been able to escape these pitfalls.

Some information of common knowledge such as the ear and its work, the impact of hearing impairment are totally out of place here. Similarly history of rehabilitation around the world or discussion of definitions and of issues in rehabilitation could have been avoided except when they affect current status in India. Careful editing could have made even an excellently written chapter on deaf blindness shorter. As it is the section on Deaf blindness reads like an extremely well written brochure on Deaf blindness. However, much of the section is superfluous and takes attention away from the excellent analysis of the current status! (Incidentally, the Deaf blind Fredrick, the young man from Trichy who passed the preliminaries of the Indian Administrative Service should have found a place among the

Indian achievers instead of being banished to a note in a running paragraph!)

Some glaring omissions that need mention are sign language and the efforts to promote it, the phenomenal increase and success in preschools, the great push to inclusive education, the increase in access to education through reservations in colleges and technical institutions, Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan and such efforts of expanded education facilities. The research referred to seem limited to that done in NIHH and all the wonderful work being done in AIISH and other centers seems to have been overlooked. Strangely the professional journals being published in the field find no mention. Stranger still the professional associations N.C.E.D and ISHA and many Associations of parents of the hearing impaired seem to be ignored.

The chapter on educational services for the hearing impaired does an excellent, though incomplete, qualitative assessment of education. Other chapters do make passing references evaluating the present status. However, status reports should make honest performance audits as a part of the introspection everyone emphasizes.

However, in *total*, all the contributors deserve our applause for the sincerity with which they have approached their task. One can only have great regard and appreciation of their wonderful achievement.

We thank the RCI, the contributors and the Chief Editor for this book of value.

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