

Intersectional Approaches in Indian Disabled Woman Life Narrative

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How to cite this article: M. Nagarajan, U. Thanesh (2024) Intersectional Approaches in Indian Disabled Woman Life Narrative. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 22209-22213.

ABSTRACT

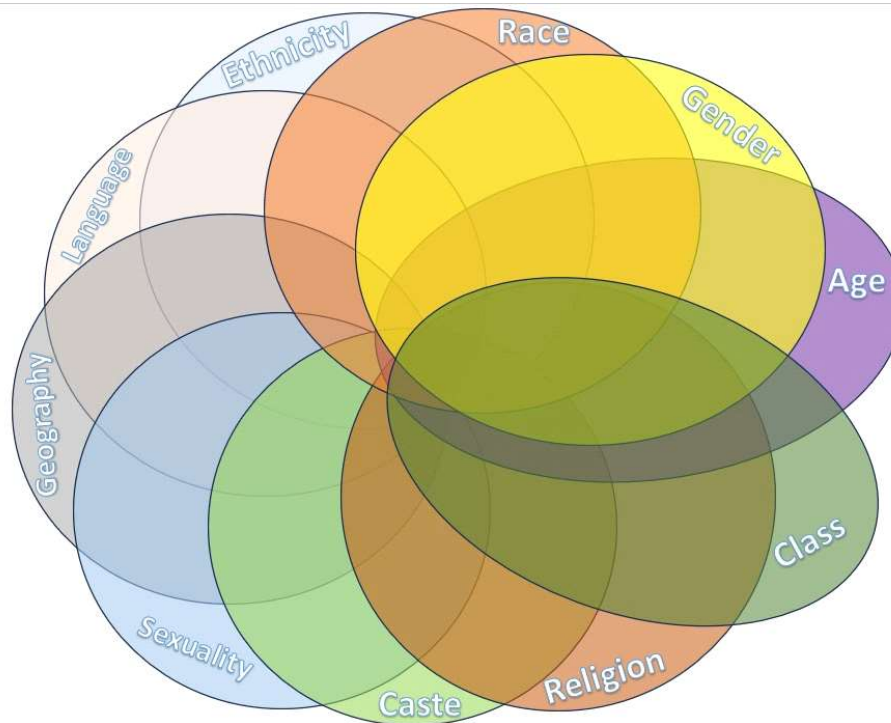
The disability is a social condition in the human existence but how, this possession intersectional through the identities in Indian disabled women? That is what this research article is trying to analyze through the auto biography of Naseema Hurzuk. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that examines how different forms of discrimination, oppression, and privilege intersect and interact with each other. It considers how various social identities (such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and more) intersect and compound, leading to unique experiences of discrimination and marginalization. This woman, among many others, have shared their experiences and highlighted the need for an intersectional approach to address the unique challenges faced by disabled women in India.

Key words: disability intersectionality marginality gender

Today the subject disability studies has become an image of interdisciplinary field of enquiry more in keeping with the socio-political position associated with the social model of disability. In fact it brings the value to the disability society and it is an upcoming research field of academia. More over the study of disability crosses academic boundaries and draws on a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, psychology and history in order to analyse issues concerning the relationship between disability, social justice and political understanding. Indian women with disability is all so generating wide awareness among the disability community through their auto biographies. In the last two decades there are number of women with disabilities questioned the social stigma and discriminating able society with the power of their words. "the incredible story" by Naseema Hurzuk is a finest text for the example of the auto biography of disability studies. This research article deals with issues of intersectionality of a disabled woman in India.

Intersectionality in disability refers to the recognition that people with disabilities have multiple identities and experiences that intersect and interact with their disability. These intersections can include Race: People of color with disabilities face unique challenges, such as inadequate access to healthcare and higher rates of incarceration., Gender: Women with disabilities may experience gender-based violence, reproductive health disparities, and caregiving burdens., Sexuality: LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities may encounter discrimination, lack of representation, and inadequate healthcare., Class: People with disabilities from low socioeconomic backgrounds may face barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment., Age: Older adults with disabilities may experience ageism, social isolation, and inadequate support services., Ethnicity: Individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds with disabilities may encounter cultural and linguistic barriers in accessing services., Religion: People with disabilities from religious minorities may face stigma, exclusion, and inadequate support., Geography: People with disabilities living in rural or remote areas may face limited access to services, transportation, and healthcare., Language: Individuals with disabilities who are non-native language speakers may encounter communication barriers and inadequate support., Intersectional identities: People with disabilities may identify with multiple marginalized groups, experiencing compounded discrimination and exclusion.

The following diagram explicitly says the idea of intersectionality in disability



Intersectionality in disability highlights the need for Inclusive language and representation, Accessible and culturally sensitive services, Intersectional analysis in research and policy-making, Empowerment and leadership opportunities for marginalized groups, Addressing systemic barriers and discrimination and Fostering alliances and solidarity across social justice movements

By acknowledging and addressing intersectionality in disability, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society that values diversity and promotes full participation for all individuals.

Intersectionality in Indian women with disabilities is a critical framework for understanding the multiple layers of discrimination and marginalization they face. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, refers to the intersecting social identities that create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

Indian women with disabilities face Gender-based discrimination: Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, Disability-based discrimination: Inaccessibility, stigma, and marginalization, Caste-based discrimination: Intersections with casteism, a system of social stratification, Class-based discrimination: Economic disparities and limited access to resources

Social and cultural discrimination: Stigma, exclusion, and marginalization

These intersections lead to unique experiences of:

Double marginalization: Exclusion from both disability and gender rights discussions

Triple oppression: Facing discrimination based on gender, disability, and caste

Lack of representation: Underrepresentation in decision-making processes and media

Limited access: Inaccessible environments, healthcare, education, and employment

Violence and abuse: Increased risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation

These challenges can be addressed through it's essential to Use an intersectional lens in policy-making and advocacy

Create accessible and inclusive spaces for Indian women with disabilities

Amplify their voices and stories

Address the intersectional stigma and discrimination they face

Ensure equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and social services

It acknowledges and addresses these intersections just by working towards a more inclusive and equitable society for Indian women with disabilities.

Born in a middle-class Muslim family in the state of Maharashtra, Naseema Hurzuk, the disability activist and founder of the renowned organization Helpers of the Handicapped, acquired paraplegia when she was in college. Similar to Subra-man and Monga, she faced numerous struggles and distress related to unexpected disability and lack of awareness in both her family and in society about accommodating her impairment. Like the majority of the disabled in India, Hurzuk encountered many obstacles to continuing her education, as she needed to be taken to the doctor frequently because of her progressive impairment. It affected her family's economic condition, causing distress among her parents and leaving them in poverty. The untimely death of her father especially left her family in a miserable state, compelling Hurzuk and her brother to support the family financially. The harsh reality is that the majority of disabled people in India live in acute poverty and in rural areas, like Hurzuk. Additionally, because of their families' economic backgrounds, some disabled people who have managed to secure employment end up supporting their families, and are unable to start families of their own. This reality, however, motivated Hurzuk to help empower such disabled people to live on their own and to support their families: she started an organization to serve the disabled after struggling in her own district, Kolhapur, at a time when the government did not think of providing welfare services to the disabled. Through her organization, Helpers of the Handicapped, she has empowered hundreds of poor disabled individuals from rural Maharashtra to get education and to seek out healthcare, employment, and participation in disabled sports.

Hurzuk's life narrative, unlike the other two texts, dwells more on the intersectionality of poverty and disability, a largely untouched terrain for disability studies in the Indian context, despite the fact that the majority of the disabled belong to lower economic backgrounds (Ghai, *Rethinking Disability* 105-07). Although she comes from a lower economic background and faced numerous difficulties in her personal and public life, Hurzuk decided to fight for disabled people who lack economic means at a time when disability was not even a consideration of important national organizations such as the Planning Commission, Census Commission, and Human Rights Commission (iii). As Javed Abidi, the founder of the cross-disability movement in India,¹ rightly says in his foreword to Naseema:

The story of Naseema Hurzuk is not that of her alone. It is reflective, in more ways than one, of the trials and tribulations of millions of Indian disabled people—to become disabled, to encounter suicidal depression, but then to conquer it and to move on in life. Naseema, of course, is an exceptional individual. She has not merely lived. She has reached out, influenced other disabled people and has in turn, taught them how to live a productive life, (iv)

The fact that poverty and disability are intertwined in India was rightly understood and addressed by Hurzuks organization in the 1980s when there was a lack of legislative action for disabled people. As Abidi mentions in his foreword, disability did not appear on the agenda of the National Human Rights Commission until 1998. Further, as a glance at the census data collected from the colonial period onwards shows, disability was not included in census questions until 2001. The proper counting of the disabled population in India, as many disability activists argue, began in the 2011 census, centering on disability demography, in terms of gender, place, age, and identity (Anicca). While disability organizations advocating for blind people were focused on fighting for reservations in education and employment in the 1980s and 1990s, Hurzuks organization single-handedly worked to empower hundreds of disabled people in the state of Maharashtra, realizing the dire need to address the intersectionality of disability and poverty.

In addition to shining a light on issues pertaining to disability and poverty, Hurzuks book foregrounds the varied subject positions of disabled women in India. Unlike other disabled life narratives, Hurzuks considers the tripartite identities of disabled women, as Rukmini Sekhar outlines in her editor's note: "To be disabled in India is bad enough, but to be poor and disabled (and a woman) is pure hell. So that is where Naseema turns her gaze" (xi). After Hurzuk became hopeless about her future prospects after becoming paraplegic at a young age and after the sudden death of her father, she connected with the veteran disability activist Babu Kaka and sought out his advice for continuing her education and coping with the progressive disability of paraplegia. As Hurzuk writes, her meeting with Babu Kaka helped her overcome an inferiority complex and her sense that she needed to live entirely independently:

I don't remember exactly what he said, but I do remember being overwhelmed at seeing a man on a wheelchair smile so happily and talk about things like big industry and air travel. I had a strange feeling that I had indeed found my buland man in Baba s khudi ko kar buland poem [determined person who appears in the poem "Making oneself strong and determined"]! He told me how I should complete my education and participate in sports

competitions for the disabled. He also told me that I should not only get self-reliant but help other disabled people in Kolhapur. It was a day I could never forget because for the first time I felt I had control over my own disability. (20) Moreover, Hurzuks association with Babu Kaka and his constant guidance in empowering disabled people motivated her to start a welfare institution for the disabled people in the district of Kolhapur in the 1970s. By further connecting with disability activists and social workers in and out of Maharashtra, Hurzuk could better understand the ability of disabled people to run organizations and businesses, and manage their lives independently with assistive aids. The extensive network of the disabled community and exposure to self-reliant disabled women in Babu Kaka's organization for the disabled in Bangalore made her realize that lack of training and social stigma confined disabled women to their houses. So, she concluded that carrying out rehabilitation either through doctors or through her organization would be a possible solution. Hurzuks book also hints at the priorities being given to upper-caste people (Brahmin) in the committee for the establishment of a training center for the disabled by the government:

Babu Kaka wanted me to call him as soon as I received his letter which I did from the nearby Woodland Hotel. Just hearing his voice was enough to make me happy.

He asked without much preamble, "Naseem, why isn't your name included in the Committee? Is it a mistake?"

I told him, "It doesn't matter if my name's not in it. What matters is that I'm going to run the training centre. In fact, Rajani was very keen that they take me instead of her. She told them that she wouldn't be able to work as hard as me and that all this has come about because of me. But the decision was unanimous that I was too young and inexperienced. But, Babu Kaka, how does it matter whether I am in the Committee or not? You wait and see, the next time you come to Kolhapur, you will be visiting a fully functioning vocational rehabilitation centre!"

He said not letting go, "Is it because you are not a Brahmin?"

I was shocked, "No, no! If that was so, why would they give me the responsibility of the training centre?"

"Well Naseem, you know best." (65-66)

Besides starting up a training center for rehabilitation works and organizing sports for the disabled, Hurzuk also endeavored to ensure accessibility in public places and entertainment halls such as theaters when the idea of an accessible environment for the disabled was not even conceived by state and central governments. By proposing inclusive education for the disabled, she staunchly opposed the institutionalized separate school system put forward by the authorities and renowned educationalists: "All 'normal' schools should have a policy of including disabled students. Stop looking at our bodies. Give us normal education" (131). The constant struggles she encountered in building an organization for the disabled and in her personal life as a disabled woman hailing from a lower-economic Muslim family testify to her resilience and relentlessness. Her struggle during the pre-legislation period for the disabled transgressed regional limitations to reach the majority of the disabled in the state of Maharashtra. In her personal life as well she overcame religious, gender, and disability exclusions to emerge as a popular disability activist who focused on empowering socially and economically challenged disabled people. This intervention clearly established the idea that a disabled person could also uplift fellow disabled people through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The approach of complete self-reliance that Naseema sought to uphold for the development of the disabled, however, did not prove to be very useful, because it was restricted only to a rehabilitation model. Instead, her activism might have moved toward creating more sustainable employment and education opportunities through legal intervention, as achieved by the movement of the organized blind and cross-disability movement, which emphasized a rights-based model (Chander 178-79).

Seen as deviance, disabled women are doubly marginalized—and in some cases they are triply oppressed as disabled women of lower-economic or lower-caste status. Despite having supportive parents and friends, Hurzuk felt that after becoming paraplegic she could not become a mother or a wife because of her disability. This feeling continuously nagged at her and made her feel alone in life:

No one told me but by now I knew that I had become a paraplegic. Do you know what it feels like to be a paraplegic? As a small girl, I had read a story about a king who had been cursed by someone. Half his body turned to stone, rendering him immobile, pinning him down in a particular place for years. Then someone came and removed the curse and he became a whole man again. Half my body, from the waist to the tips of my toes had turned to stone. The only difference was that the king in the story was standing whereas I had to lie down all the while. Half my body was going to be listless for the rest of my life. I had no control over my urine or bowels, neither was I aware of when I passed them. When there was an odour I was turned on my side and the sheets would be changed. It required four people to do this. Powder, perfume and even incense sticks were used to keep the odour at bay. The radio was switched on to cheer me up and a storybook kept next to me.

But the tears flowed and kept wetting my pillow. Only a sleeping pill would finally put an end to my tears. (25)

In developing countries such as India, disabled women, particularly those who are mobility impaired with paraplegic conditions, seemed destined to embrace loneliness. Hurzuk describes how she endured loneliness because of her bodily condition in the early part of her life. However, in a later period, Hurzuk set up a welfare organization for people with different types of disabilities to create empowerment and to envision a better future for the disabled in the state of Maharashtra.

As Pramod K. Nayar argues, “Naseema’s text . . . uses disability discourse to articulate general desires for a better society. A taxonomy of such general desires starts off with disability, but they function as metonyms for a larger social condition” (139).

Conclusion:

In this article one can embrace intersectionality by working towards a more inclusive and equitable society that addresses the complexities of social identity and inequality.

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