



Cover Page



TRACING ENUMERATION OF DISABLED IN TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Yogesh Kumar Yadav

CAS, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, U.P.

Abstract

Disabled people have been a part of society from the beginning of human civilization. However, their existence has been forgotten and social inclusion has been denied due to societal biases against them. Thus, the theme of disability is hardly talked about in public and academic circles. However, with the emergence of many civil rights movements in different parts of the world, disability study also took off in 1980s and now is gaining currency in the western scholarship. But, it is still in infancy in India. Due to the dearth of research and awareness about disability, there is immense scope in this field. Thus, while considering the theme extremely important, enumeration of disabled particularly in the twentieth century India becomes the subject of investigation in this paper.

Census reports are crucial archival record to study a particular community in the modern era. This paper studies the census reports of colonial and postcolonial India in connection with people with disabilities. This article attempts to enquire why people with disabilities were included in the colonial census, what the British understanding of disability was and how they were constituting a category of disability. Article would delve into the irregularities and inconsistency in regard to including and excluding them from the census operations not only in colonial India but also in independent India. It would also highlight the role of Indian NGOs and international agencies for pressing the issue of enumeration of disabled in different countries.

Key Words: Civil rights movements, Disabled, Disability study, Enumeration, Infermities, NGOs,

Introduction

The ideas such as normalcy, perfect body and standard are celebrated and the ideas like difference, deviation, abnormality are looked down upon which become the basis for othering individuals and communities. Marginalized communities such as transgender, gay and lesbians are generally hated and socially excluded for not conforming the standard of sexual orientation set up by the society at large. Blacks have been discriminated over the centuries by the Whites due to white racist superiority complex. Women in General have been suppressed through various means owing to male chauvinism and patriarchy. The lower castes in India have been exploited through the concept of Brahmanism. People of north-east India are denigrated due to their different physical appearance than of the people of north and south India. History has witnessed many waves of communalism due to the belief of one's religious superiority over other. Unfortunately, people cherish the idea of commonality; whether it be commonality of race, religion, caste, sexual orientation, and region and so on.

Similarly, people with disabilities have been discriminated and socially ostracized due to preponderance of the idea of ableism. Nevertheless, they were counted in the colonial census. Therefore it is an earnest attempt to explore socio-cultural and political attitudes of society and the government towards persons with disabilities in twentieth century India through census operations. There may be multiple ways to deal with it. However, the politics of enumeration and the societal perceptions of disability will be mainly taken up to understand the discrimination against disability in society. Conducting surveys and census to ascertain the prevalence of a particular section of society is a prerequisite to conceive policies and programmes for them. But the way they have been defined and portrayed in these surveys and census, also reflects various preconceived notions of society about them. Throughout the twentieth century, a reluctance and apathy could be seen at the level of administration in regard to question of census of persons with disabilities. Hence, the issue of census or enumeration of persons with disabilities will be one of the core concerns of enquiry in order to comprehend this apathy and their negative



Cover Page



description in the census. Dealing with the history of Census will also help to discern the prevalent rate of disability or the magnitude of issue.

Colonial Census and Disabled

Census reports are an important archival source of history to study and understand the particular community of society. First census of all India character was held in 1872 and regular decennial census of all India nature commenced from the year 1881. Persons with disabilities also found their place in colonial Census and that too with the inception of modern but colonial enumerations. Notwithstanding, due to the dearth of disability research and disability awareness, many disabled including disability activists regard 2001 census to be the first census where people with disabilities were counted. For example, disability activists like Javed Abidi, former Director of National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) that persons with disabilities have been enumerated first time in the history of Census in 2001.¹ However, they have been counted since the inception of census in India in 1872 but with some irregularities or inconsistencies. Many aspects of their lives were not taken into account in these colonial Census reports; therefore, it is really difficult to read between the lines or to fill up the gap with other valuable information of their lives. Similarly, Nidhi Singal in one of her articles refers to the 1931 Census on disability but she never attempts to transcend beyond the line of 1931.²

Since this realm of disability in history has been an ignorant one and untouched aspect of research so far. Hence, people who are working for the welfare and the rights of persons with disabilities and leading the massive NGOs like Abidi, commit mistakes by giving less dependable arguments about census and disability in the absence of appropriate research and awareness. Government of independent India also did not take up the issue of enumeration of persons with disabilities seriously and completely ignored it for a longer period of time. They were enumerated first time in the Census of a sovereign union of India in 1981, half a century later as they were lastly recorded in the 1931 census. They were again dropped from the 1991 Census. But under the pressure of different NGOS and institutions, working for the rights and the well-being of persons with disabilities, government of India resumed the practice of their enumeration in the Census of 2001 at the eleventh hour.

Understanding of disability has been broadened over a period of time. But British had very narrow understanding of disability during colonial India as reflected in their colonial Census. Only four categories of disabilities were enumerated and recorded in the colonial Census E.G. 'insane', 'deaf-mutes', 'Blind' and 'lepers. These all categories of disabilities were referred to as 'infirmities and people inflicted with disabilities as 'infirm'.³ All categories of disabilities have their own specific functional and sensual limitations, thus, impact their lives in different degrees. However, British brought different disabilities within the ambit of single category and labeled them as 'infirmities'. Though, the notion of infirmity cannot be applied on any of the person with disability, suggests social model of disability. On the contrary, infirmity denotes to a weak, inactive and diseased body and mind. It is a pathological understanding of disability, exclusively existed in the first half of the twentieth century. In a way, British were constructing a more rigid form of disability through the Census because they were depicting persons with disabilities as incapacitated and worthless bodies.

The above description of disability as infirmity has been challenged by a very popular Hindi tropical expression, "*Saanp ki jakad aur andhe ki pakad se koi nahin bach sakta*" (No one can escape from the grip of snakes and that of a blind). This proverb has been derived from *Mahabharata* in which blind ruler Dhritrashtra is depicted physically so strong that he breaks iron replica of Pandu's second and the most healthy and powerful son Bhim. In this proverb persons with blindness are

¹ Satyamev Jayate- Persons with Disabilities- We Can Fly, *Star Plus*, 2012, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXbA5GIKWF8> (Accessed on August 6, 2024).

² Nidhi Singal, 'Forgotten Youth: Disability and Development in India', *Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty*, Cambridge University, Working Paper 14, p. 5.

³ *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. 1, India, Calcutta, Published by Superintendent of Government of India, p. 131, Central Secretariat Library.



Cover Page



depicted extremely powerful. Though, this depiction is also a construction of a stereotypical image of persons with blindness but it is entirely opposite to the notion of infirmity.

Moreover, there were numbers of loopholes in the method and technique of the colonial Census while collecting data of disabilities. First of all, colonizers had included only the four categories of disabilities mentioned above in their Census operations and left the other several disabilities out of Census such as persons with locomotor disability, persons with cerebral palsy, people with autism, and people with multiple disabilities etc. Even in the most of the Census of colonial India, Only totally blind, deaf-mutes both by birth, persons inflicted with corrosive leprosy were only counted. So, in this way, partially blind [who could see by one eye], only hearing impaired or only speech impaired were omitted out of Census generally. It was necessary for a blind to be blind by birth to be included in the colonial Census. Similarly, it was compulsory for the speech impaired to be hearing impaired at the same time and that too by birth to be the part of census. Consequently, a large chunk of disabled population was ignored and excluded from the census by the British administrators, particularly those who acquired disability later in their life, either in childhood or adulthood. Besides, clear-cut definitions of counted 'infirmities' were not formulated. Census commissioners kept changing definitions of disabilities over time. Hence, outcomes of Census after every ten years were to be drastically dramatic.

There was also a very negative attitude prevalent in society towards persons with disabilities. A stigma was attached to them. Having a child with disability in a family was considered a dishonor for the family and this attitude is prevalent even today. This was also one of the reasons because of which British faced difficulties in collecting statistics of persons with disabilities because families generally did not want to reveal the disabled identity of a person and sometimes person himself or herself did not want. There was a willful concealment of disabilities in general and women's disabilities in particular. Women of the family are considered as honor of the family. On the other hand, disability is seen as dishonor and shame even today. Therefore, it was the natural tendency of the family or society to conceal disability of a woman in public. Women's marriage prospects might be on stake by revealing their disabilities. Therefore, the number of females returned as lepers was 40,019 against 107,892 males in 1931 Census. It was also a belief that leprosy attacked a greater proportion of males than of females. Hence, it is really difficult to measure the natural incidents of leprosy and the problems of concealment and enumeration.

The Census commissioner of 1931, J. H. Hutton raised a point in regard to collecting appropriate data of disabilities. He said, "while the first three mentioned are defects which may be observe by enumerators but the fourth is the disease which can only be detected by expert eyes and should not be made the subject of a purely lay return."⁴ He further says, "Enumerators cannot be expected to add medical diagnosis to their limited ability to record fact."⁵ There are two important elements of his statement. First, he talks about the blindness, deaf-muteness and the leprosy as identifiable defects which could be observed by the census enumerators and persons with these disabilities could be counted easily. Though, this understanding of Hutton was very partially correct because first, enumerators are not expected to meet each and every person of the family. Only heads of the families are contacted. Second, many a times, the condition blindness and deaf-muteness may also confuse the enumerators. He rightly points out that mental retardation or mental illness 'insanity' is a complex condition of a person which could not be judged by a layman and that is enumerator. Every individual has his or her own different behavioral pattern which could be sometimes opposite and repugnant to one another. For instance, men who drink and beat their wives may be mentally retarded or 'dotards' for their wives. So was the case of a woman, mentioned by Hutton, who in Lucknow cantonment was filling in the schedule for her husband who was out at his work, describing him as insane, deaf-dumb, blind etc. because he generally used to offend her.

Therefore, total population of 'infirm' in 1901 was 670,817 that was less than 0.5 percent of the total population of India.⁶ This figure is really unbelievable because India was encountering extreme poverty, lots of famines, disastrous wars and battles, massacres etc. Good quality medical facilities were also not available. The discipline of modern medical science

⁴ *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. 1, India, Calcutta, Suprintendent of Government of India, p. 253.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁶ *Census of India, 1901*, Vol. 1, India, Calcutta, Government of India, p. 132, Central Secretariat Library.



Cover Page



was in its infancy. It must be remembered that there is direct relationship between disability and poverty as A. K. Dalal shows in one of his articles. International aid agencies and scholars agree that poverty and disability are causally intertwined.⁷ Impairment results in the absence of proper food, nutrition, sanitation facilities, and qualified doctors etc. Disability in many people was the byproduct of various battles and attacks during the colonial era. Consequently, it can easily be assumed that percentage of population with disabilities would be quite higher than presented by colonial records. Data is being given in following table on the next page on ‘infirmities’.

Table No. 1.1: Prevalence of Disabilities during 1881-1931

Census Year	Total Population	Total Infirm Population	Infirmity Rate (per 100,000 population)	Infirmity – type			
				Insanity	Deaf-muteness	Blindness	Leprosy
1881	253,896,330	937,063	369	81,132	197,215	526,748	131,968
1891	287,314,671	856,252	298	74,279	196,861	458,868	126,244
1901	294,361,056	670,817	228	66,205	153,168	354,104	97,340
1911	315,156,396	833,644	265	81,006	199,891	443,653	109,094
1921	318,942,480	860,099	270	88,305	189,644	479,637	102,513
1931	352,837,778	1,095,678	311	120,304	230,895	601,370	147,911

Source: Census of India, 1881-1931.

It would also be interesting for a historian to investigate the question of discontinuation of recording data pertaining to disability. Census commissioner of 1941 W. W. M. Yeats made the following observation in 1941 Census Administration Report regarding the discontinuation of enumeration of ‘infirm’:

“Infirmities are dropped at this Census, I decline to have anything to do with a record which admittedly could not get anywhere near the facts and which have been glaringly shown up in regard to leprosy in 1931, it is time the provincial governments, who are in charge of such matters, get down to their real task and the continuance of the Census question merely provided them with an excuse for neglecting It. How, therefore, anyone can say that the Census figures no matter how inaccurate are valuable is beyond comprehension.”⁸

Census commissioners found data pertaining to ‘infirmities’ problematic, dissatisfactory and almost impossible to get real statistics of disabilities. On these lines, notwithstanding the finding other alternatives for acquiring data of disability which would have been closer to actual data of disability, they stopped to record their statistics in 1941.

⁷ A. K. Dalal, ‘Disability-Poverty Nexus: Psycho-Social Impediments to Participatory Development’, *Psychology and Developing Societies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2010, p. 410.

⁸ Census of India, 1941, Vol. 1, India, Part 2, administration, Government of India, p. 21.



Cover Page



Subsequently, persons with disabilities remained out of the Indian Census almost for half a century. It is also difficult to find an answer that why persons with disabilities were made a subject of inquiry in British Census operations. British never utilized existing statistics of disabilities in formulating policies and programs for their welfare. Colonial Indian Census revealed the distribution of 'infirm' across the country, indicating their age-brackets and classified them on the basis of their sexes and religions. Children with 'infirmities' were also identified and mentioned in these Censuses. But miserably, educational and economic status of people with 'Infirmities' is not mentioned at all. Census organizers and enumerators did not even realize the need of it. Thus, colonial Census reports do not help us at all to discern the socio-economic and educational condition of disabled.

Disabled and Postcolonial Epistemology

In post-independence India, nothing changed in terms of their enumeration. Government did not pay any attention in this connection at all. During the 1951 Census, there was no powerful NGO or body which was working for the welfare of disabled at national level. Hence, no request and clamor reached into the ears of government of India for asking persons with disabilities being included in the Census. But in the year of 1952, an NGO called National Association for the Blind [NAB] was instituted in Bombay on the similar lines of National Institute for the Blind, London. When the preparations of 1961 Census commenced, the president of NAB, R. M. Alpaiwala tried to pursue the government to record 'handicapped' in general and blind in particular in the forthcoming Census. Moreover, The Association for The Prevention of Blindness for Bengal, National Union of Child-Welfare, and Blind Relief Association of Bombay etc. also made their requests to government to include disability as a category of enumeration and specially blindness in 1961 Census.

R. M. Alpaiwala on behalf of NAB, wrote a letter to Govind Vallabh Pant, (Union Minister of Home Affairs, Government of India) on first October 1959 that attempt had to be made for an enumeration of blind persons in India in 1961 Census because they were earlier enumerated in 1931 Census and since then, circumstances of the country had been extremely changed. He argued that not only all the age-groups of the blind had been radically changed since the Census of 1931 but the territorial changes had taken place on account of partition of Indian subcontinent. Therefore, he emphasized for a fresh Census of blindness in 1961 Census for the framing policies and programs for the welfare of blind.⁹

But the government declined his proposal while emphasizing the same arguments of the colonial administrators during the 1941 census. Home minister of the time Mr. G. V. Pant replied to Mr. Alpaiwala on 26 October 1959. He wrote: "I am afraid that it does not appear technically feasible for an enumeration to be made along with the Census. As you may know that the Indian Census up to 1931 attempted a Census of infirmities. But the results of each such Census were considered highly unsatisfactory because of the large margin of error. The data were neither reliable nor useful. The attempt to record the physical disabilities through the medium of Censuses has been abandoned even in other countries."¹⁰ He further argues that this act of enumeration of blind and other disabled should be performed by different NGOs, working for the welfare of disabled by applying sampling method of research.

Registrar general of India who was the in charge of Census operation of 1961 Mr. A. Mitra also refused to include blind population of India in this Census operation. He stated that some time or the other, an attempt would be made to conduct a sample survey of the blind; there was however, no immediate hurry for this survey.¹¹ Registrar General A. Mitra again wrote to private secretary of Prime Minister Mr. K. Ram on 16th October 1959: "The best medium of this inquiry of disabled would be the rural health centers, now established throughout the country and the WHO units, wherever they are working. Any investigation of infirmaries requires a minimum of clinical knowledge which our enumerators like a Patwari or a primary school teacher does not possess."¹² He further argues that information is to be provided about the family-members

⁹ File No. 2/83/59-Pub.I. *Census of Blind in India, Reference from the National Association for the Blind, Bombay and Reference from Government of India*, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1959, National Archive of India.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.



Cover Page



by the owner of the house, therefore, probability of concealing of disability is rather higher. But according to him, in hope of the medical treatment, owner of the house can reveal the fact of disability in his household. Ultimately, persons with disabilities were omitted out of 1961 Census deliberately.

It was true that there were many complexities and challenges to get the accurate data of disability at a single stroke. At least, efforts must be initiated to get the rough statistics of disabled through the Census operations because a large chunk of Indian disabled citizens could not be left out from the any national policy or program. Unfortunately, they were excluded. It must be remembered that to obtain an accurate data of any kind in such a large scale is almost impossible. For instance, elderly member or head of the family likely to misinform the enumerators about the educational status of his family to show his family highly educated. Besides, parents themselves did not aware about the exact date of birth of their children in the previous century generally in rural areas. Hence, age-wise calculation might also be fallacious and misleading. But still, age-wise data was collected. If the birth-rate or the mortality-rate could be added in Census operations, why was disability left out? Even National Crime Record Bureau also releases its annual data of crime-rate of different regions and the country. Many kinds of crimes especially from the rural areas and crime against women generally were not reported to concerned authorities as Indian society is still living in the tradition of cultural silence where little scope has been left for women to raise their voice and lodge the complaints against their oppression in this highly patriarchal society. In this backdrop, accuracy of this data of crime can be easily challenged. Nevertheless, data of crime is recorded. The aim is to record maximum possible data but not to reach at absolute number as absolute truth does not exist.

There might be couple of reasons for omitting the persons with disabilities from the Census of 1961 and 1971. First of all, the existing NGOs of the time working for persons with disabilities did not have the consciousness for the right of disabled. They were mainly operating within the idea of welfarism. They were sympathetic towards their problems and challenges. They were willing to seek the government's attention towards this section of the society. However, they could only request the government for some action to be taken but they could not force them because as needed consistent support of government and the society in fulfilling their financial needs. The concept of rights for persons with disabilities did not exist in India at that point of time. Hence, they were not in a position to pressurize the government for the affirmative action for them. Secondly, the abovementioned quotes of Govind Vallabh Pant and A. Mitra also provide the glimpses of colonial mind-set of the government officers of independent India. They were just following the colonial mindset in this regard.

Nevertheless, few attempts were commenced by few states and the organizations to enumerate the persons with disabilities in the form of small surveys on the pilot bases. For instance, a survey on the 'handicapped' was conducted in Bombay in 1957 by the All India Occupational Therapists Association on behalf of the Central Advisory Council for the Education of the Handicapped. Surveys of the disabled were also conducted by the Kerala and the Uttar Pradesh governments during the year of 1960-61.¹³ Under the auspices of the Census organization, a survey was carried out in Madras and Chinglingput, districts of Tamil Nadu, as part of a special study of 1961 Census and a specific survey was conducted on the blindness by the Indian Council of Medical Research in different centers during 1971-73.¹⁴

National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) which was established in 1950 also undertook this responsibility to conduct the surveys for obtaining approximate estimates of persons with disabilities in the country. Its first endeavor for counting the persons with disabilities was documented in the 15th round during July 1959 to June 1960. Limitation of this survey was that it was conducted only in rural areas. But the very next year, during July 1960 to June 1961, in its 16th round, its survey on the numbers of disabled was extended in urban centers as well. Likewise, inconsistent enumerations of disabled were continued on the different occasions in the NSSO's surveys. For instance, 24th round during July 1969 to June 1970 and the 28th round during October 1973 to June 1974 were conducted to get the numbers of disabled.¹⁵ The objective of these

¹³ Physically Handicapped Population in India, 1981, p. 6, Central Library of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁵ Report No. 485 (58/26/1), Disabled Persons in India, NSSO 58th Round, (July-December 2002), Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, 2003, p. 1.



Cover Page



surveys was just to find out the statistics of disabled in their respective localities. Other aspects of their lives such as the status of education and employment were not touched upon.

A major world-wide development in the field of disability was witnessed when General Assembly of United Nations in 1976 proclaimed the year 1981 to be solemnized as International Year for Disabled People (IYDP).¹⁶ It invited representatives of all countries in the Assembly to prepare a Plan of Action at the regional, national and international level. As a result, two major changes were also observed in India as far as the enumeration of disabled was concern. Whereas, National Sample Survey Organization conducted its surveys earlier in certain selected areas. Since 1981, nation-wide investigation of disabled was begun. NSSO therefore, conducted a comprehensive survey in its 36th round in 1981. Later on, its surveys on disabled were carried on in the 47th round in 1991 and the 58th round 2002 which will be referred later on.

Moreover, the preparation for the 1981 Census commenced in late 1977 and at the time when the draft questionnaires were being prepared for the presentation at the first data-users conference in early 1978. As mentioned above that the year of 1981 had been declared as International Year of Disabled Persons by United Nations and this declaration made excited and energized many Non-Governmental Organizations working in the field of disability in India. As a result, several associations and federations of the blind, the deaf and others along with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Welfare, government of India made a strong request to the Registrar General of India and the Census Commissioner of India for collecting data of persons with disabilities in the coming Census.¹⁷

Though, it was the first time in independent India when data on disability was gathered in the massive and official Census operation. It can still be argued that government did not take up this issue of disabled seriously. In this Census, narrow definition of disability was adopted. Ministry of Education and Social Welfare provided definitions of blindness, deafness and orthopedic disabilities which were sought by Census officials. According to these definitions, the blind are those who suffer from either of the following conditions: A. Total absence of sight. B. Visual acuity not exceeding 6/60 or 20/200 (Snellen) in the better in correcting lenses. C. Limitation of the field of vision sub standing an angle of 20 degree or worse. The deaf are those in whom the sense of hearing is non-functional for ordinary purposes of life. Generally, a loss of hearing at 70 decibels or above at 500, 1,000 or 2,000 frequencies will make residual hearing non-functional. The orthopedically handicapped are those who have the physical defect or deformity which causes an undue interference with the normal functioning of the bones, muscles and joints.¹⁸

Nevertheless, these definitions suggested by Ministry of Education and Social Welfare were completely overlooked. P. Padmanabha, the Census Commissioner, 1981, himself writes that these definitions are too complex to be understood by Census enumerators due to lack of training and insufficient time and it would not be possible for them to complete their duties within stipulated time.¹⁹ Hence simple and straightforward questions linked with disabilities were put up before people. Consequently, totally blind, totally deaf and totally orthopedically disabled population was counted. Partially disabled of these three categories were omitted. Other disabled other than these three categories such as speech impaired, lepers, intellectually disabled and other people with developmental disabilities were excluded. When issues of age and sex of disabled were ignored, how questions of their socio-economic and educational status could be thought of. Its seriousness may be understood with the fact that again in 1991 Census, persons with disabilities were entirely ignored. The table is given below to illustrate the prevalence of disability in 1981.

¹⁶ Resolution 31/123, International Year for Disabled Persons, 1981, United Nations General Assembly, 1976, p. 104. Retrieved from <https://uvalsc.s3.amazonaws.com/travaux/s3fs-public/A-RES-31-123.pdf?null> (Accessed on January 25, 2025)

¹⁷ P. Padmanabha, Physically Handicapped Population of India, Census of India, 1981, New Delhi, Controller of Publication, 1983, p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 8-9.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 9.



Table No. 1.2: Category Wise Disabled Population in India as Per 1981 Census

Disability Type	Rural	Urban	Total
Totally Blind	424,307	54,350	478,657
Totally Crippled	304,640	58,960	363,600
Totally Dumb	240,454	36,237	276,691
Total Disabled	969,401	149,447	1,118,948

Source: *Physically Handicapped Population of India, Census of India, 1981, p. 11.*

The table indicates that India registered a Total number of disabled 11, 18,948 out of which 9, 69,401 almost 86.63 per cent persons were living in rural areas and 1, 49,447 almost 13.35 persons were living in urban areas. Among the disabled, the largest number was accounted for the totally blind 4, 78,657 persons almost 42.77 per cent) followed by the totally crippled (3, 63,600 persons almost 32.49 per cent) and the totally dumb (2, 76,691 persons almost 24.72 per cent). The rural areas have returned the largest share of disabled persons in each category. While 4, 24,307 totally blind persons 88.64 per cent were recorded in rural areas and only 54,350 almost 11.35 per cent in urban areas. Among the totally crippled, while 3, 04,640 almost 83.78 per cent and only 58,960 nearly 16.21 per cent in urban areas. Among the totally dumb, 2, 40,454 persons nearly 86.90 per cent were recorded in rural areas and 36,237 nearly 13.09 per cent in urban areas. However, it is crucial to go through the data of disability in the state of Uttar Pradesh for which another table is designed below.

Though, people with disabilities were omitted from the 1991 census operation, however, with the enactment of Persons with Disabilities 'Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation' Act in 1995 (PWD Act), it became arduous for the Indian state to neglect them further at least from the Census operations. PWD Act imposed obligation on Indian state not to discriminate or exclude people on the ground of disabilities from any governmental policies and programs. For instance, Section 25 (A.) of the PWD Act says, "Appropriate governments and local authorities with a view to preventing the occurrence of disabilities shall undertake surveys, investigations and research." However, reluctant attitude of the government continued till January, 2000 as no earnest endeavors were made by the government on the question of enumeration of people with disabilities. The same colonial pretexts were again put forward. The Technical Advisory Committee which was constituted for finalizing questioners of Census 2001 opined not to include disability as a category in 2001 Census operation due to its complex nature of definitions given in PWD Act and the sensitivity attached it in society.²⁰

Nevertheless, in January 2001, various stakeholders working in the field of disability took up the issue with the government. It was really delayed on the part of disability activists as all preparations like questionnaire, training instructions and other were already commenced. ultimately, with the persistent efforts of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment [MSJE], Ministry of Planning and Program Implementation [MPPI] and various NGOs working in the field of disability, category of disability was included in this forthcoming Census operation on 10th June, 2000, in a meeting convened by Home Ministry.²¹ Where Census organizers was then involved in preparing questioners and training of enumerators, MSJE undertook the responsibility to launch an awareness program across the country and urged people to reveal their disabilities if any. Few international agencies and Indian NGOs also assisted MSJE and Census organizers to launch the awareness programs in their respective regions. For Instance, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) organized the regional awareness workshops in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai almost three months

²⁰ Census of India 2001, the First Report on Disability in India, Delhi, the Controller of Publications, Government of India, pp. XII-XIII.

²¹ Ibid. p. 13.



Cover Page



before to the commencement of fielded-work.²² Consequently, data of disabilities was collected in the Census of 2001. History and data of 2001 Census would not be detailed as the time constrain of this study.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the official census operations of the twentieth century in connection with people with disabilities, it can be inferred that little change could be witnessed in the understanding of disability. In fact, in the 'progressive' twentieth century, regressive tendencies developed against disabled population. For instance, where four types of disabilities including lepers were included in the colonial census operations, on the other hand, only three types of disabilities excluding lepers were recorded in 1981. Besides, enumeration of disabled was totally dropped by the independent Indian state except for 1981. Though, British included them in their census, however, they did not use this data for the welfare. On the contrary, they constituted a rigid and stigmatized definition of disability which portrayed it as a diseased body.

International developments like United Nations Development Programme for disabled, International Year for Disabled People and some local efforts of disability NGOS and PWD Act have been instrumental to bring some positive shifts for the inclusion of disabled in census operation in the beginning of the twenty-first century. For instance, where in 1981 Census, only three types of disabilities were surveyed, but in 2001 Census, five types of disabilities were surveyed in which seeing, speech; hearing, movement and the mental disabilities were included. But in 2001, lepers were omitted. The significant fact is that partially disabled such as people with blurred vision, people with hard of hearing and others were counted in 2001 Census which had never been occurred in the past. People with speech impairment were also recorded first time in 2001 Census. It was reflected earlier in the colonial Censuses that persons with speech impairment would automatically be hearing impaired. They were therefore, counted in the single category of deaf and dumb. However, 2001 Census also fails on multiple grounds. Whereas PWD Act mentions seven categories of disabilities as blindness, low-vision, hearing impaired, loco motor disability, leprosy-cured, Mental retardation and mental illness, on the other hand, it had included only five out of seven. Though, blindness and low-vision and the mental retardation and mental illness were being clubbed together in the category of seeing and mental disability respectively. Still, leprosy-cured were not counted. Even data of persons with cerebral palsy, autism and multiple disabilities was not collected. It also does not provide the age-wise data of disability which was recorded in colonial Census. Therefore, it would be difficult to ascertain the total number of children and adults. It does not describe religious affiliations of persons with disabilities which were also revealed by colonial Census organizers. But the most crucial information about persons with disabilities as their educational and economic status was gathered in 2001 Census which had never been explored earlier.

References

1. *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. 1, India, Calcutta, Published by Superintendent of Government of India, 1903.
2. *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. 1, India, Calcutta, Superintendent of Government of India, 1931.
3. *Census of India*, 1941, Vol. 1, India, Part 2, administration, Government of India, 1941.
4. File No. 2/83/59-Pub.I. *Census of Blind in India, Reference from the National Association for the Blind, Bombay and Reference from Government of India*, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1959, National Archive of India.
5. *Census of India 2001, The First Report on Disability in India*, Delhi, The Controller of Publications, Government of India, pp. XII-XIII.
6. Dalal, A. K. 'Disability-Poverty Nexus: Psycho-Social Impediments to Participatory Development', *Psychology and Developing Societies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2010.
7. Padmanabha, P. *Physically Handicapped Population of India*, Census of India, 1981, New Delhi, Controller of Publication, 1983.
8. *People with Disabilities in India: From Commitment to Outcome*, World Bank Report, 2007.

²² Ibid. p. XIX.



Cover Page



9. Reddy, C. Raghava and K. Pavani Sree. 'Situating Census Data in Disability Discourse: An Analysis of Census 2011 and 2001', *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol. 42, No. 2., 2015.
10. Report No. 485 (58/26/1), Disabled Persons in India, NSSO 58th Round, (July-December 2002), Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India, 2003.
11. Resolution 31/123, International Year for Disabled Persons, 1981, United Nations General Assembly, 1976,. Retrieved from <https://uvalsc.s3.amazonaws.com/travaux/s3fs-public/A-RES-31-123.pdf?null> (Accessed on December 25, 2024)
12. Satyamev Jayate- Persons with Disabilities- We Can Fly, *Star Plus*, 2012, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXbA5GIKWF8> (Accessed on August 6, 2024).
13. Singal, Nidhi. 'Forgotten Youth: Disability and Development in India', *Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty*, Cambridge University, Working Paper 14.
14. *The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*, Extraordinary Gazette of India, Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, Government of India, 1996.
15. Yadav, Yogesh Kumar. (2016). Educating the 'Disabled' in the Twentieth Century India: Some Historical and Contemporary Issues. Unpublished M.Phil thesis, CHS, JNU.