

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO THE HANDICAPPED

Mr. K. V. Shetty

I am very grateful to God and it is my good fortune, that I being a leprosy handicapped I was given an opportunity to express my views for the 1981 International Year for the Disabled Persons. I am an optimist and my definition of optimism is one who is aware of all the difficulties, but yet is ever hopeful. I am one among the 4 crores disabled persons of India. I am more fortunate than many others and hence this contribution.

I do not believe in charity, pity, sympathy and humanity, I am having greater regard and respect for law and to our Constitution. I believe in implementing the policies firmly on legal and constitutional methods but not on humanitarian grounds.

According to me, article 41 and 47 of our Constitution devolve responsibility and duty on the state to extend adequate help to those suffering from disease and disabled and also call upon them to consider it as their duty to develop social health and equal opportunity should be given to every citizen.

I do not know with whom I can redress my grievances. The Minister for Health and Family Welfare is working for the health and medical education. The Minister for Social Welfare is working for the blind, deaf, orthopaedically handicapped, physically handicapped, then who will take care of me "The leprosy handicapped."

If you want to give a coat of paint to the high walls, you require a support to climb the high walls. Without a support, you will be handicapped. Similarly, if a handicapped is given a support with suitable placement, he can make the best use of his

talents. The handicapped knows his rights as a human being and is prepared to work and earn for a living if he is given a chance. His feelings are expressed by Tagore in a different context:

"Day after day this cry of desire
Moment after moment this
burden of shame
The prisoned bird is my heart,
that beats

its wings unto death
You call it a dream; a dream it is
That sets its sharp teeth deep
Into the fibers of my heart and
and will not loose its grip.

There are a number of trusts to create employment opportunities to the disabled. Few of the voluntary organisations are doing little work but in most cases, while the disabled approaches them, they are ill-treated and humiliated and in government the procedures are torturous and degrading.

Since so many years, in a town the Municipality was running Beggars Home, the food was regularly consumed in the home. The municipality was constrained to sanction additional amount of Rs. 5,000 towards food materials to the home. Once one of the Councillors insisted that they should see the working conditions of the "home". When they visited the "home" beggars were not there but the food was consumed systematically since so many years. While inquiring it revealed that beggars never stayed in the "home" but food was consumed in the name of beggars. Such is the state of affairs in majority of the government managed institutions.

I am disabled in many ways. I am disabled due to the aggression of the dreaded leprosy bacilli and it is my fault that I did not follow the disciplined medical advice. Again, I committed a big mistake that I could not

elect my representative who could implement my constitutional rights. India gained her Independence in the dead of the night and my elected representative also slept too long and did very little for me. My elected representative was also disabled for want of integrity, skill, will and determination to ride the bureaucrats horse. Hence the mismanaged economy and the badly managed country resulted in generating seven lakhs disabled beggars and equal number of able bodied beggars in the country. This is the result of depriving the constitutional rights of a section of the society.

Sometimes in November, 1947, in a leprosy worker conference "Gandhiji" said "the disease of the mind is more dangerous than the disease of the body and "stigma" is attached to unclean thoughts and bad morals but not the disabled.

I have to blame myself for everything and I could not find fault with others.

Let us hope for the best in the 1981 International Year of the disabled.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications for Scholarships are invited from Professional Nurses for higher studies in nursing in India for the academic year 1981 for Master of Nursing, Post Certificate, B. Sc. (Nursing), Post Certificate Diploma Courses and Operational Research in Nursing.

Details and application forms can be had from the Secretary-General, Indian Red Cross Society, New Delhi-110 001.

The last date for receipt of completed application is March 20, 1981.

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