**A ‘Non-Productive’ Aspect of Disability: Marriage and Familial Life for Disabled Women in India**

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**Abstract**

Women within the minority group of disabled people are further marginalized due to their gender which is corroborated by their lower chances at education, employment and social relations. My thesis explores the attitudes of disabled women towards intimate relationships to understand the social lives of disabled women, with particular reference to their marital choices. In this context, I have tried to study their experiences within their families and outside their homes and attempted to comprehend how these experiences influence their marital choices. Using a constructive-interpretivistic approach the narratives of forty eight women from Odisha and West Bengal are recorded and studied. An inductive approach and grounded theory is employed to help themes and theories emerge from the narratives themselves.

Internalization of their undesirability and incapability to take on the caregiver role due to socialization within family and outside were two of the major reasons among a host of others which prevented these women from entering marital alliances. For many, the desire to marry was suppressed by the inability of the family to pay a higher dowry, reluctance of the family to economically provide for the woman during the marriage and fear of abuse from the prospective in-laws. However, for some of the women who were single, refraining from marriage provided them opportunities to explore and pursue their interests. Also, there were disabled women who married and boasted of familial support in taking care of their families and fostered a positive body image.

Co-dependence on family and community settings increases the chances of security and stability as well as social networks which are integral for the overall well-being of an individual. However, interpersonal relationships like friendship and marriage among others are often neglected aspects in the lives of disabled people. Disabled women are affected doubly because of their disability and gender and they have been long neglected by the disability and feminist movements. Legislative measures aimed at inclusion of disabled people have to be gender sensitive to reduce social exclusion including sensitization programmes to destigmatize disability, better accessibility and legal measures which will lead to better quality of life of disabled women. Thus, positive acceptance of disability rather than mere tolerance, along with support, will help in more inclusion and better growth.