



## Divinity Vs. Dignity: What is Required for People with Disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

We need an honest view on this; does nomenclature has no effect at all on practices? Many times it is considered to be a first step in changing practice. There are arguments, both for and against it. The ones espousing the change cite this as an opportunity to create an environment of dignity and respect for the ones with disabilities. On the other hand, it would be patronizing and would be equivalent to accepting that people with disabilities are 'ill-prepared by God' and such a change would hardly have any effect on the level of discrimination and stigma faced by them.

*Keywords: Divyang, disability, India*

Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi on December 3, 2015, suggested that the term 'divyang' (divine body) instead of 'viklang' to be used for persons with disability (Salekar, 2018). It came close on the heels of the launch of the Accessible India Campaign (Suganya Bharat Abhiyan) (Wikipedia, 2018) in part fulfilment of India's commitments under the Incheon Strategy (UN), in line with the Article 9 of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to which India is a signatory from 2007 (UNCRPD). It also comes under the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 under section 44, 45, 46 for equal opportunities and protection of rights (MSJ&E). Again during his radio address "Mann Ki Baat" on December 27, 2015 he said that disabled people have a "divine ability" and the term 'divyang' should be used in place of 'viklang' for them (Venugopal, 2015). It was not just a speech of a political leader too but a preplanned and thoughtful act since the Department of Disability Affairs has already had two meetings on this with experts since the Prime Minister spoke about it. This proposed change in nomenclature is being worked out at the ministry of social justice which handles disability affairs. There are more reasons to believe that it was a preplanned thoughtful decision, one is after six months the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities is renamed 'Divyangjan' Sashaktikaran

Vibhag in Hindi, dropping the word 'viklangjan' from its previous nomenclature. The Centre had proposed the change in name of the department by amending the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961. Now, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities ('Viklangjan' Sashaktikaran Vibhag) is renamed Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities ('Divyangjan' Sashaktikaran Vibhag), according to an order issued by Cabinet Secretariat (Dnaindia.com, 2016).

The Government decision to use term 'divyang' (divine body) instead of 'viklang' for persons with disability was criticised largely by people with disability and disability rights activists both saying, "Disability is not a divine gift - this assertion is a grave misreading of the place of rights in realising human dignity, and the role of the state in ensuring protection against discrimination". They argued that it would be patronising and would be equivalent to accepting that people with disabilities are 'ill-prepared by God' and such a change would hardly have any effect on the level of discrimination and stigma faced by people with disabilities (Kannabiran, 2016).

We need an honest view on this, does nomenclature has no effect at all on practices? Many times it is considered to be a first step in changing practice. This is not the first time, in Hindi 'surdas' is being used for persons with visual impairment or blind in India like mahila (women) is 'Devi' and Dalit (people of backward caste) is 'Harijan'. In its English counterparts 'disabled' or 'persons with disability' vs. 'different-abled or challenged' and we are aware of the debate across the globe.

"There are arguments, both for and against it. 'Viklang' was derogatory and insulting, isn't the new term 'Divyang' both misleading and patronising? The ones espousing the change cite this as an opportunity to create an environment of dignity and respect for the ones with disabilities. They ostensibly believe

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that a mere change in name would undo the hardships and social ridicule that such people face on a daily basis" (Kannabiran, 2016). There are some actions by the government which can be viewed as next step towards the change like the government changed the name of National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped (NIMH) and it's three regional centers located at New Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai to National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014 was introduced into the Parliament on February 7, 2014 and passed by the Lok Sabha on 14 December 2016. The Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 16 February 2016 and received the President's assent on 28 December 2016 (PRS, 2018). The Act becomes operational on 19 April 2017. The Central Government rules 2017 have been notified under Section 100 of the Act and have come into force with effect from the 15 June 2017 (Live Law2, 017). In the Act's principle reflects a paradigm shift in thinking about disability from a social welfare concern to a human rights issue (Narayan, 2017). Last by not the least, initial achievements of Accessible India Campaign claimed in terms of universal accessibility for persons with Disabilities in Built Environment, Transport systems, and Information & Communication Technology ecosystem (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment).

Disadvantage, exclusion, and stigmatisation suffered by persons with disabilities are a result of discrimination against them and are attributable to social-cultural, socio-economic and physical barriers that hinder their effective participation in social and political life. It is quite sure that, it is not possible to change the situation just by changing nomenclature but it can be defiantly considered a step towards a positive change. For the desired change we all (not only the government) we need a constant, combined and coordinated effort. "Let us continue our ongoing efforts with renewed vigour and create a nation where both accessibility and equality prevail" (Bachchan, 2016).

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