Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyze the challenges encountered by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India. Suggest effective measures to empower them for full societal participation. (250 words)

16 Jul, 2024   GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Give a brief introduction to the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India.
- Highlight the challenges encountered by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India.
- Suggest effective measures to empower them for full societal participation
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

As per Census 2011, the number of Persons with Disabilities in the country is 2.68 crore , which is 2.21% of the total population of the country. As per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, there are 21 types of Disabilities which includes Locomotor Disability, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Speech & Language Disability, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Cerebral Palsy, Dwarfism etc.

Body

The Major Challenges faced by PwDs in India :

- **Inaccessible Infrastructure:** Infrastructure remains largely inaccessible to PwDs. Public spaces, transportation, and even many private buildings lack proper ramps, elevators, or tactile paving.
    - According to a 2018 report by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, only 3% of buildings in India were found to be fully accessible.
- **Educational Exclusion**: Despite the Right to Education Act, many PwDs face barriers in accessing quality education.
    - Approximately 45% of disabled people are illiterate, and only 62.9% of disabled people aged 3 to 35 have ever attended regular schools
- **The Glass Ceiling of Prejudice**: PwDs face significant challenges in securing meaningful employment.
    - India has almost 3 crore people with disability (PwD) of which around 1.3 crore is employable but only 34 lakh of them have been employed.
- **Healthcare Hurdles**: Accessing appropriate healthcare remains a significant challenge for PwDs.
    - Many healthcare facilities lack disability-friendly equipment or trained staff to handle specific needs.
- **The Invisible Chains of Social Stigma:** Deep-rooted social stigma and misconceptions about disabilities continue to marginalize PwDs.
    - They often face discrimination, exclusion from social activities, and even violence.
    - This social ostracism impacts mental health and overall quality of life.

- **Digital Divide**: As India rapidly digitalizes, many PwDs are being left behind due to inaccessible digital platforms and technologies.
  - A 2020 report by the 2020 Web Accessibility Annual Report found that 98% of websites fail to comply with accessibility requirements for People With Disability
- **Legal and Policy Implementation Gap**: While India has progressive laws like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, implementation remains a major challenge.
  - For instance, a 2019 report by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities revealed that only 23 out of 35 states/UTs had constituted State Advisory Boards on disability, as mandated by the Act.

Measures to Empower Persons with Disabilities in India :

- **Disabled-Friendly Infrastructure**: Upgrade public infrastructure to be disability-friendly, including clearly demarcated ramps, tactile paths, accessible public transportation, and adaptive technology in workplaces.
  - Implement strict guidelines to make school, hospitals, and digital services easily accessible to all.
- **Increased Research and Development in Artificial Limbs**: To enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities in India, increasing research and development (R&D) in prosthetics is crucial.
  - This can be achieved by boosting funding from both government and private sectors dedicated to innovation in prosthetics.
  - Establishing specialized national and regional prosthetic research centers will provide a focused environment for cutting-edge developments.
- **Clear Identification of PwDs**: A crucial step forward in ensuring that only genuine persons with disabilities (PwDs) receive benefits is the implementation of a stringent identification and verification system.
  - This can be achieved by creating a centralized digital database that records and verifies disability certifications through biometric authentication and regular audits.
  - Regularly updating and cross-checking this database with other government records will help identify and eliminate cases of false claims.
- **Changing Perceptions about PwDs:** Shift societal attitudes by promoting the use of empowering terms such as "Divyang" instead of "Viklang" (disabled).
  - Highlight the abilities and achievements of PwDs through media, arts, and public platforms to foster a more inclusive and respectful society.
  - Badhte Kadam initiative is a significant step in this direction.
- **AI-Powered Accessibility Audits**: Implement AI-driven accessibility audits in urban planning.
  - Use machine learning algorithms to analyze city infrastructure, identifying accessibility gaps in real-time.
  - This could involve deploying sensor networks and computer vision systems to map out accessible routes, detect obstacles, and suggest improvements.
    - Such a system could continuously update, providing dynamic accessibility information to both city planners and PwDs.
- **Universal Design Innovation Hub**: Establish a national Universal Design Innovation Hub, bringing together designers, engineers, PwDs, and policymakers.
  - This hub could focus on developing and scaling up innovative, cost-effective universal design solutions for products, services, and infrastructure.
  - It could also serve as a testing ground for new accessibility technologies before wider implementation.
- **Neuro-Adaptive Learning Platforms**: Invest in developing neuro-adaptive learning platforms that use electroencephalogram (EEG) to personalize educational content for students with different learning disabilities.
  - These platforms could adjust in real-time to a student's cognitive load, attention levels, and learning style, making education more accessible and effective for PwDs.

Conclusion

By adopting these comprehensive measures, India can foster an environment where PwDs are not only integrated into society but also thrive as equal and active participants. This empowerment is not just a

matter of social justice but also a critical step towards a more inclusive and equitable society for all.