CHAPTER - 7

Conclusions
A study on the historical origin of response of the state and civil society to the problems of the handicapped indicates that the state in the ancient and medieval period was not friendly to the handicapped. They were made to feel disabled by focusing the attention more on their disabilities rather than their abilities. In the prehistoric days, the elimination of the handicapped was achieved by nature herself through the operation of the law of survival of the fittest. Most of the primitive tribes would discard their disabled fellow beings on the grounds of physical unfitness to fight foes and the wild animals. During the 18th century, with the spread of liberal ideas, this phase saw attempts to go for "training and education" for the physically handicapped. A number of institutions for the blind, crippled and mentally disabled came up. Medical sciences made strides in explaining the causes for of the handicap and also provide medical relief taking advantage of the scientific break-throughs. The modern period saw a further shift in the attitudes of the civil society and state towards the handicapped.

It has been a part of India's cultural heritage and legacy to help the poor and the needy. In keeping with this tradition, the question of protection of the physically handicapped was debated in the society. Manu's approach in degree and magnitude is more severe, harsh and solely anti handicapped. Kautilya's Artha Shashthra required the state and its citizens to care for the handicapped. Ashoka's welfare
administration through Dhamma attempted to reach the needy. These traditions had had their own influence in shaping the aspirations during the freedom movement and independent Indian state made attempts to reach the people in the fringes of the society through public policy measures. The elements of Manu-Kautilya combination are noticed in the nature of the state - a blend of indifferences and involved approaches to the vulnerable.

Independent India witnessed freedom and progress at one level and abject poverty, misery and suffering at another level. The state promised amelioration of the neglected and the deprived. The Indian government declared itself a welfare state. Our constitution enjoined upon the government to secure a socio-economic order based on the values of freedom and democracy in which the state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and promoting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life. The image of India as a welfare state emerged more fully from Article 41 of the constitution, which provides that the state shall direct its policy towards securing the right to work, to education, to public assistance in case of employment, old age, sickness and physical disability. The states are also directed to formulate social legislations as and when needed to meet the special needs of the individuals and groups, who, because of social and economic physical and mental handicaps, are unable to make use of services in the community or have traditionally been denied the use of these services.
In a welfare state, the state is called upon to play an interventionist role in providing services for the people. The governing bodies of central government each in its own sphere, have to ensure that they have at least the minimum administrative machinery for dealing with social welfare programmes. These programmes include social legislation, welfare of women and children, family welfare, youth welfare, physical and mental fitness, crime and correctional administration and welfare of the physically and mentally handicapped. This held considerable promise for the vulnerable in general and the physically handicapped in particular.

An analysis of the government organizations and programmes presents the institutional arrangements for understanding the welfare programme for the handicapped. The Department of Social Welfare was taking care of the physically handicapped till 1980s. The main task of the department was to look after the homes for the aged and disabled, hostel for the handicapped students, sanctioning scholarships to the handicapped so on. As a result of the declaration of 1981 the Internation Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP), most of the countries began to expand their services. The Government of India also instructed its welfare agencies to offer more services to the handicapped.

In 1981, the Government of Andhra Pradesh established a corporation and created a Directorate for the Welfare of Handicapped in the year 1983 for the overall
development of the handicapped persons. The task of directorate is to look after homes and hostels and issues of scholarships to the handicapped students. There are D.W.Hs as district officers in all the districts with an assistant director as the head of each district office charged with the responsibility to look after welfare of the handicapped. The DWH implements schemes such as supply of nationalized textbooks to pre-metric students, supply of notebooks to the hostel inmates, staffing the homes and hostels. It is, however, sad that the Department of Handicapped is not with the Ministry of Welfare in Andhra Pradesh, but with Women and Child Welfare Department. Does the welfare of handicapped have anything to do with women and child welfare? This sort of organizational arrangements suggests serious gaps in the institutional framework itself. In addition to this, the budget allocation of the Government of India and more specifically the state of Andhra Pradesh is grossly inadequate. The Directorate for the Handicapped in the State hardly had provided a budget that is barely sufficient to maintain its institutions. The Andhra Pradesh Handicapped Financial Corporation does not have sufficient finances to advance loans to the technically qualified people to stand on their own feet.

The organization has not been receptive to the needs and demands of the handicapped people. This study, therefore, reveals the need for a separate ministry for the physically handicapped as their problems starting from education, health down to assimilation in jobs are unique and need special attention. The policy framework of the state is much more problematic. State by choice has not made any
serious attempts or devise novel approach in rehabilitating the handicapped except a few token concessions.

A survey of perceptions of visually handicapped staying in homes and hostels suggest that a majority of the respondents are blind by birth and are very young. Most of them are poor and belong to the income group of below Rs.9000/- indicating the dire need for homes and hostels.

The presence of more than one blind in the family indicates malnutrition and improper health care. They are largely due to poverty. Added to this are the ignorance and illiteracy among others. The support and encouragement from the family shows that the family network continues to be one of the important support structures. A large number of them, it is seen, have come to the homes and hostels for education.

In rural areas the cause for blindness due to the impact of smallpox and genetical problem is high. This is attributed to doctor's negligence and parental ignorance. This happens to be more in rural than urban areas. Since villagers believe in witchcraft they consider blindness as a curse on the family. This shows that blindness to certain extent can be prevented once the rural parents get educated and better medical facilities are provided. It is the absence of medical facilities that makes them rely on superstition and all such unscientific beliefs.
All of them suggested the need to improve the living conditions of the homes and hostels, increase in provision for cosmetic, mess, cloth allowances and reader charges. Unlike the needs of the hearing impaired and orthopedically handicapped, the requirements of the visually handicapped are slightly different. As far as employment opportunities are concerned the visually handicapped are not provided with reasonable opportunities. Though one percent reservation exists for them in teaching and non-teaching sectors, they are not fully implemented. Notwithstanding the handicaps the respondents aspire to become engineers, doctors, teachers and join IAS, to realize their potential. The government should come forward with a fair package corresponding to their levels of disability and aspirations. The efforts of the state are far from satisfactory.

The whole discussion indicates as to how the visually handicapped feel deprived of the minimum facilities. There is a strong feeling that the system is insensitive to their requirements. This feeling and non-responsive attitude of the governmental agencies together lead to tensions in the maintenance of homes and hostels.

As far as the perception of the hearing handicapped the study reveals that a majority of the hearing handicapped get their deafness by birth. It is noted that absence of proper and immediate medical attention, use of over dosages of drugs during the pregnancy and marriage among the blood relationship contribute to
hearing disability. A large number of respondents have parents who are illiterate and come from landless agricultural labourer category. Despite these handicaps the study indicates that there are certain domains like carpentry, handicrafts, tailoring and machine repairs, where this category of handicapped can perform better as their concentration is not diverted by sounds.

It is rather dismal to note that there are no government institutions of higher learning for the hearing impaired after matriculation. It is desirable that government should come out with subsidies in providing latest technologies within their reach, such as the electronic hearing aid. It is also necessary that application of advanced technologies both in the field of medicine and education is encouraged. The government should open up more avenues looking more at their 'abilities rather than the disabilities' as there are lots of expectations. The inmates opined that a lot more has to be done to improve the homes and hostels, in respect of mess and cosmetic charges. They have to be raised periodically in tune with the living standards of the day.

The study suggests the need for involving the government and voluntary agencies to spread facilities for health and education which should form a part of literacy campaign, particularly to young girls who are ignorant of the basic care during motherhood. Along with it there is a need for a policy package which can be a correctional measure and see that this category does not feel neglected. Given their
levels of aspiration policy makers should see to it that the disabled realise their full potential.

The data on the Orthopedically handicapped male and female indicates that a number of male respondents became disabled due to accidents and female due to fever and lack of medical facilities. Poverty is yet another major reason as some of them could not consult the doctors at their curable stage. The medical expenses due to pharmaceutical prices add to the gravity of the problem in the absence of adequate medical aid. It is seen that most of these respondants have no option except to come to homes and hostels. The information about homes and hostels is not properly and adequately reaching the needy persons. It is noticed that in large number of cases the channel of communication to these respondents was friends and neighbours. This shows inadequacy of publicity agencies of the government.

The infrastructure facility is so appalling that people are huddled in the rooms. Understaffing, lack of furniture, absence of supply of basic necessities such as blankets, clutches, reading materials picturise the quality of homes and hostels. The clutches that were provided were either to big or too small making them more handicapped. As regards to the existing facilities, it was reported that the allowances - mess and cosmetic were not corresponding to the purchasing power of money. As far as education and employment is concerned the educational status of the respondents is quite impressive. A large number of them were college going students and some of them even reached the university level. The aspiration level is fairly
high and they aspire to become teachers, engineers and doctors. Given their handicap and levels of aspiration, they need sustained policy support.

The redressal machinery has on many occasions failed to address their ever increasing grievances. The study on the whole reveals that large number of respondents prefer 'strike' as a method to activate authorities, and ventilate their grievances. When the policies of the government are inadequate they are frustrated and resort to strikes which did take place many a times. In all the cases the causes were common. This includes: one, improving the living conditions of the members of the homes and hostels including increase in various allowances; two, to fill the 1% reservation in teaching and non-teaching positions.

An analysis of the strikes and agitations of the physically handicapped and more so the visually handicapped indicates that this is a tool for generating public consciousness and pressing a democratic method into action to remind the government of its obligations. The strikes of 1978, 1992, 1995 and 1998 were mainly for improving the living conditions of the homes and hostels of the physically handicapped and the implementation of the 1% reservation for the posts that were meant for the visually handicapped in teaching and non-teaching and also in group C and group D led to the agitations.

The analysis further reveals that in the state of Andhra Pradesh the physically handicapped resorted to agitations only when the pleas and petitions got exhausted.
After repeated appeals to look into the matter to begin with, they went on relay hunger strikes, hunger strikes and ended with fast unto death. These protests were met not through imaginative policy but police brutality. The only force that the authorities had was the 'police' which plunged into action even before they were called for.

It was only after the intervention of various pressure groups and democratic organizations that negotiations became possible and some policy package was announced. However this pressure for alternative policies were initially met with repressive measures. Arresting of the blind students without warrant, demolishing the tent where the students were agitating, beating up the students on hunger strike are some of the instances indicating the changing nature of the state. Notwithstanding these hardships the positive outcome of these agitations was sensitization of the public at large.

This study reveals the nature of the state and its attitude towards the disabled people. This is guided by two streams of thought. One, the diminishing Welfarism of the modern state and two the increased dependence on privatism. In other words the state is abdicating its role to protect the vulnerable from the onslaught of the powerful, privileged and organized interests. It is in the wake of such unfortunate drift, the strikes and agitations were able to partly contain the drift and check the system.
This is the overall tendency of the state attitude in the 20th century throughout the world, calling our attention once again to the question of basic issues of modern state. It should also be recognized that the bargaining power of the marginal sections in the society has considerably weakened. The lack of bargaining power or what in normal political parlance described the inability of vulnerable sections to pressurize, does shape the nature of the state. It also brings home the point that marginal groups, bereft of the capacity to directly or indirectly influence the state are left with no options except resort to strikes and movements. These methods, at this historical juncture, seem to be the only means to counter balance the anti-poor and anti-vulnerable interests that have come to shape the nature and content of public policies.