CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study entitled, 'An Anthropological Study of the Disabled in Guwahati', concentrates on the population disabled by mental, physical and visual impairments in Guwahati city. The study population under consideration are disabled people who are directly or indirectly concerned with various city based schools and institutions, exclusively directed towards the rehabilitation of this section of the society. This endeavour revolves around the problems and prospects of the disabled population of Assam in general and Guwahati in particular. It also tries to understand the views and opinions of the society regarding people with disability. Equal importance has also been given as to the attitude of the disabled people towards others, and in general towards life. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and attempts to draw conclusions on the social cultural and economic scenario concerning the disabled population in Guwahati.
The problem of the present study has been introduced in chapter I where emphasis has been laid on the relevance of the study. Besides reviewing the relevant literature, this chapter also throws light on the objectives of the present study, and the methodology employed for conducting this study. Chapter II provides a general idea on the subject of disability. It touches upon some important aspects integral to the phenomenon of disability in India. Attempt has been made in chapter III to highlight the ethnographic scenario of Assam in general and Guwahati in particular. The chapter focuses on the importance of Guwahati throughout times and how it has been able to maintain its unique place in the social, political, and economic arena of the entire Northeast region. Since Guwahati is the biggest and strategically most important city of the region, it has its own sets of problems. The situation here is typical of any growing metropolis in India with an ever swelling population. The highly heterogeneous population of Guwahati which has a sizeable disabled section requires serious attention from the policy makers and a lot of awareness on the part of the non-disabled people regarding the issues of their disabled counterparts. It is pertinent to mention that inspite of having a number of institutions in Guwahati for the rehabilitation of people with various disabilities; their numbers are still inadequate as the actual requirement is far greater. Insufficient numbers of inclusive schools in the
city is a major factor making a serious impact on the educational scenario of the disabled.

The study tries to address some of the vital issues, innately connected to the welfare of the disabled population. Among these issues, attitude of the society towards disability is a crucial factor in the way of achieving an all-round inclusion of variously disabled people in to the mainstream. In this endeavour it has been found that the society’s attitude at one end is characterized by pity and on the other is extreme neglect. At the same time it has also been observed that the usual ill treatment which the disabled people are usually subjected to on quite a regular basis seems to be conspicuously non-evident in Guwahati. People here seem to have some concern for the welfare of the disabled and they strongly advocate charity for this section of the society. Unfortunately enough the level of awareness among the people regarding the abilities of the disabled is very much wanting. They are hardly convinced that the disabled people are as capable as anyone else and therefore do not consider them as equals. Finkelstein (1980; 1981: 58-63) maintains three phases of societal attitude towards disability. According to him, during the first phase, disability was intertwined with low social status and in which blame for misfortune was attributed either to the disabled individual or to the indifferent attitude of the society. In other words, the disabled were segregated at the bottom of the economic pile in the company of poorly paid workers, the unemployed
and the mentally ill. Efforts were also made to differentiate the poverty of unfortunate ‘cripples’ from poverty of sturdy beggars, but disability was normally seen as a consequence of sin or wanton behaviour which required no special social provision. The second phase was crystallized along with the industrial growth. This phase was characterized by the development of segregated institutions for the disabled. During this phase, considerable development took place in the field of skilled professional help. That is why, the disabled started questioning the power relativities between them and helping professions. The third phase is accentuated by the innovation of new tools and techniques, which have offered a greater degree of personal independence to the disabled. The most remarkable thing of the third phase is the shift of social perception from oppression and dominance to the nature of society which largely ‘disables’ the impaired people. On the other hand Bhatt (1963: 84) regards mainly four stages of social attitude towards disability. These stages are, exposure and elimination, care and patronage, education and vocational training and social assimilation.

Chapter IV deals with the blinds in Guwahati city. It reveals various issues concerning the blind students, particularly of the Guwahati Blind High School, Basistha. The children studying in this school hail from various places of Assam, and a good number of them are from economically weaker families. It was pleasantly surprising to see that the children inspite of being away from their families were quite happy with
their lives in this school. The obvious lack of facilities in a government run special school has not been able to dampen the spirit of these special children. It may be due to the fact that the environment which prevails in the school is conducive enough for them to live a life which can be referred to as very normal. Here, they interact with the fellow students and hostel mates; and probably as they all are blind make it easier for them to identify themselves with one another, and perhaps understand each other’s problem far better than what they would have experienced with their family members at home. The love and affection on the part of the teachers have encouraged the students of this school to try and reach for new goals in academic as well as in personal life. Inspite of these positive aspects, there are number of problems faced by the Guwahati Blind High School, Basistha, which directly or indirectly make an impact on the lives of its blind students. Inadequacy of funds, inadequate number of trained teachers, inadequacy of teaching equipments, traditional character of the existing services, lack of recreational activities, non-assessment of visual acuity and gross lack of relaxation exercises are some of the perennial problems which this institution has been facing for many years without any respite. The most disturbing fact about the whole scenario is the lack of sincerity on the part of the government to take up measures which would solve the problems once and for all. The apathy of the government towards the education of the Blind students is quite evident from the fact that inspite of
having a Braille press in Guwahati, the long cherished dream of the blind students of Assam of having Braille books in Assamese is not yet been materialized. The situation in Assam is not at all unique when compared to what is happening in rest of the country. The news item that appeared in *Asian Age* in 2006 from New Delhi stated that, ‘The Delhi Government has turned its back to the education needs of the blind. Forget about the talking books reading machines and computers with speech software as proposed by the Human Resource Development Minister, Mr. Arjun Singh in March 2005. The students are yet to get Braille looks after the curriculum was changed from NCERT to SCERT for class I to VIII by the Delhi Government. Over 2500 blind students studying in special schools for blind and normal schools in the capital are devoid of books and are somehow managing on their own. The text books in Braille are not available in any of the Northeast state and many other states of the country. Kerala which boasts of the best literacy rate in the country also has not thought about their blind students’.

Again, in the matter of employment, the Assam Government has not done enough to provide jobs for the blind. Therefore, in response to that, the All Assam Blind Student Union (AABSU) took out a protest rally in 2008, in Guwahati, demanding the government to clear up the backlog jobs allotted to them under special quotas. Similar demonstration was staged in 2006, in New Delhi by the activists of the National Federation of Blind to
highlight their problems and also to seek reservation of job in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). They demanded a special recruitment drive to clear the backlog of vacancies reserved for the visually impaired and also protection of service benefits for employees working in the private sector, provision for double retirement benefit for those opting for Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) and promotion for those working in Public Sector units, so that they could live a normal, independent life. They also threatened to intensify their movement if the government failed to fulfill its promises made in the past (National Herald, 6th January, 2006).

The chapter also reveals the attitude of the people towards the blind. Though, there is some amount of negative attitude in the society regarding the visually disabled members, but it is generally due to ignorance rather than anything else which has created a smoke screen between the sighted and the sightless members of the society. As far as the mentality of the parents of the blind children is concerned, they generally seem to realize with time the worthiness of their blind sons and daughters. It was also evident that some parents, specially those who are economically not well off, tend to send their visually disabled children away from home, generally to charitable or government residential schools for the disabled. This is done to redeem themselves from the economic liabilities that come with a child with special needs. In addition to this, keeping a blind child away saves the family from embarrassment of having a disabled child at home.
As for the visually disabled individuals are concerned, they are very conscious of their disability, and that very often makes a big dent on their confidence level. But it was seen that with proper education and training along with a stable source of income, they are able to take any hurdle that comes on their way.

Chapter V highlights some of the aspects of the deaf population residing in Guwahati. Here, the study concentrates on the deaf children of the Government B.D.S. Deaf and Dumb School, Kahilipara. It has been noticed that, inspite of being the only government run school for the deaf in the entire state of Assam, it lacks the basic infrastructure to provide education to the deaf children in a proper and affective way. The school lacks the facility to make assessment of the degree of hearing loss at the time of admission. In the matter of teacher student ratio, this school does not meet the norms for specialized education for the deaf. Apart from these, inadequacy of teaching equipments, lack of organized extra curricular activities, poor quality of pre-vocational training and absence of medical unit attached to the institution to make periodical assessment of improvement or deterioration of deafness among the students, are some of the things which need to be addressed sooner than later. As far as teaching method is concerned, the school follows the oral method to impart education to its deaf students. The sign language which is used all over the world by the deaf for communication has surprisingly not been able to find
a place in the regular curriculum of Government B.D.S. Deaf and Dumb School, Kahilipara. The finger spelling method which is a very essential medium of communication for the deaf is taught and used only in English language class and that too by only a couple of teachers. It is a matter of concern that till date nothing has been done to develop this method in Assamese. The medium of communication among the students of this school is through various gestures and postures, which they have developed on their own; and therefore its utility is very limited. Moreover, the sign language or quite precisely the gestures which are used by the deaf individuals to communicate in Guwahati or in the whole of Assam could not be understood by someone outside of the state. This is due to the absence of uniform system throughout the country, and for which the deaf individuals of the state face a lot of problems to communicate when they go out of Assam. The hearing devices provided by various organizations free of cost to the students of this school seem to have made no impact, as most of these students are least interested to wear any hearing aids, as they find it uncomfortable in many ways, and also makes them conspicuous when in public. Moreover, the deaf in general, and specially those who are born with this disability prefer other modes of communication rather than opting for a hearing device to interact with people.

Regarding the term 'deaf and dumb' it has been opposed all over the world, and keeping that in view, the authority of the Government B.D.S
Deaf and Dumb School, Kahilipara has urged the Assam Government to drop the terms ‘deaf’ and ‘dumb’ from the school’s name and replace these with something more acceptable. The deaf persons here do not approve the terms ‘deaf and dumb’ and ‘deaf and mute’ as these convey a negative attitude. These terms do not connote pride or wholeness, but instead conjures a pitiful, pathetic, dull-witted image, with a hint of subnormal intelligence. The term ‘deaf’ is also used in a metaphorical sense to refer to a recalcitrant individual or someone unwilling to listen, obey or acknowledge an authority or partner. The third line of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29 provides an example; ‘when in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes, I all alone be weep my outcast state, And tone deaf heaven with my bootless cries’. The phrase “tone deaf” refers to someone who lacks relative pitch, or the ability to distinguish between musical notes. The expression ‘deaf and mute’ also suggests that a deaf person is doomed to a life of silence, without speech, without hope. Therefore, the deaf vehemently disapprove the use of such terms as they find them annoying, inaccurate, and insulting.

The attitude of the society towards the deaf is guided by a number of misconceptions and these include the notion that deaf are low on intelligence. It is also very common to find people avoiding interactions with individuals who are deaf and have difficulty with speech. The deaf individuals too find it troublesome to interact with people with normal
hearing, as neither the normal hearing persons understand the sign language nor the deaf individuals in a number of situations can make their verbal communication comprehensible to the other persons. Such hindrances in the way of free interaction between the deaf and the normal hearing people further widen the already existing gap. It is quite apparent that deaf, like any other disabled people are considered to some extent as an object of ridicule, a burden on the family and the society, incapable of participating fully in community life, and above all they are considered as their own worst and only enemy. Even though there is a long way to go for the deaf individuals to gain the due recognition of their capabilities from the society; they at least want the society to start considering deafness to be a difference in human experience rather than a disability.

The issue of mental retardation has been specifically dealt with in chapter VI. Here, the mentally disabled children of two institutions, namely Ashadeep Day Care and Rehabilitation Centre for the Persons with Mental Disabilities and Sishu Sarothi have been studied to visualize the realities concerning the mentally retarded in Guwahati city. Like many other institution for the special children, these two rehabilitation centers also have to encounter numerous hurdles in their earnest attempt to provide services to some of the less fortunate members of the society. These institutions being run by non-governmental organizations, their basic issue is of finances, for which they rely solely on charity as well as on funding.
from government and non-government agencies. Lack of awareness about mental retardation among the people is also a worrying factor for these institutions as it directly or indirectly makes a retarding influence in the process of rehabilitation of the mentally retarded.

The chapter brings to notice the various rehabilitation programmes provided by the institutions like the two mentioned above, and the difficulties which come on the way in rendering their services. Parental attitude which plays an important role in the development of a mentally retarded child has also been discussed. It has been apparent in this study that even though the parents take a lot of trouble to make sure that their mentally retarded children get the best possible education and training, and desperately want them to improve overnight; but it is also true that only a handful of parents have accepted their children's mental disability in true sense of the term. Some parents are very particular to see that their children attend school on a regular basis, but it was surprising to find that a good number of these parents do so, more for their own convenience. It has also been noticed that in case of families where both the parents go out for the whole day to their respective jobs, prefer to leave their special children in rehabilitation centers, rather than keeping them at home on the mercy of servants, family members or relatives, who generally refuse to shoulder the burden of looking after a mentally retarded child. There have been instances where the parents have refused to let their mentally retarded
children meet the researcher on various pretext such as the child is not well, the child is very shy or by saying that the child gets disturbed on meeting anyone who is a stranger to him. Such an attitude on the part of the parents may be due to the reason that they feel embarrassed about the existence of a son or a daughter who is mentally retarded. Another reason for their refusal may be that they do not want to give people any opportunity to show pity either on them or on their disabled children. The attitude of the society towards the mentally retarded is not very positive either. Even today the issue of mental retardation is enveloped by superstitions, and along with that, there are very few people who do not equate it with mental illness. However, the situation here is improving and at least the parents of these children are becoming more aware of the different aspects of mental retardation. The consciousness regarding the importance of rehabilitation programmes and the limitations as well as the capabilities of the mentally retarded children have also increased manifold.

The mentally retarded children though look somewhat different from their appearance, but they have emotions like anyone else. At the same time it is a fact that they are different in many ways, as they are special, exceptional and they possess a world of their own. It was noticeable that they have their own definition of good and bad. Sometimes they denote a person as good, just because he or she looks good in their vision, and similarly find someone bad because they did not like certain behaviour of
the person concerned. In case of individuals with Down’s syndrome, the scenario is little bit different. As they are unable to speak in most of the time, it is difficult for them to express their feelings in words. In such cases it is natural for them to take help of auto stimulatory behaviour such as finger flicking, rocking and head swing to attract attention. The only way to understand them is to spend as much time as possible with them. As it has been mentioned that the mentally retarded live in their own world, it is actually very important for their subsistence as individuals. A mentally retarded child is always considered as a life long burden on a family and he or she is generally dealt with sympathy or negligence, and most of the time the family members are never ready to accept such individuals as eligible to the mainstream. Apart from these, most people treat the mentally retarded as weeds of the society and consider them as a product of curse on the parents.

It is evident from the preceding chapters that India has a large population of disabled people with blind accounting for almost half of the total disabled population in the country. Besides the blind there are various other categories of disabled persons, which include the deaf, the mentally retarded, the orthopaedically handicapped, the lepers, etc. To improve the condition of these disabled people both government and non-government organizations have introduced many policies in India. The main objectives of studying the disabled persons are to help them in their physical and
psychological adjustment to society, promoting all national and international efforts to provide disabled persons with proper assistance, training, care and guidance, educating and informing the public of the right of disabled persons to participate in and contribute to various aspects of economic, social and political life; and promoting effective measures to eliminate any discrimination or negative attitude towards the disabled people in the society. In India there is no reliable data relating to the disabled population. It was the National Arts and Handicapped Information Service which has made an attempt to show the diagnostic categories of the disabled persons in India. In Assam and in Guwahati too there is no reliable data regarding the disabled population. In dealing with disability, ascertaining the cause of the impairment is of utmost importance and the causes vary from one category to another. For example in case of mentally retardation the causes might be conditions occurring before birth, during birth and after birth. Again the causes of blindness in India are malnutrition, congenital abnormalities, injuries to eyes, hereditary diseases, small pox, cataract, venereal diseases, trachoma and associated conjunctivitis, consumption of spurious liquor, glaucoma and so on and so forth. There are certain preventive measures to overcome the occurrence of disability. In case of mental retardation, it can be prevented to a certain extent by promoting developmental measures in social and economic sectors and also through a comprehensive medical care programme. The
above factors are not only affective in reducing the phenomenon of mental retardation but also equally applicable in achieving retardation in the number of blind, deaf, and people with other disabilities.

Since the blind population in the country is quite considerable, there is a need to sort out strategies for a full integration of this section of the society and it can be achieved at various levels. The moment a child is born blind or become blind, the parents are shocked and stunned. At that time they never allow him to mix up with other children and become over protective. In order to make a blind child self dependent, the parents need to realize that he or she too can become a useful member of the family, and they must not regard him as a mere object of pity. Through education, a blind child can be quite capable of leading an independent life. The blind persons must be provided with training in such trades which would help them get absorbed in jobs which are suitable and at the same time well paid. Like any other person, a blind individual also needs interrelations with persons, specially the sighted. It is a matter of great concern that even if a blind person has achieved everything whether it is education or even a respectable job; he would still struggle to find his due share in the society.

As far as deafness is concerned, there is imperative need of a vast network of centers for early detection, diagnosis, and treatment. Parents need to play a greater role in early detection of deafness in the child. The deaf children can be integrated in society through education. They must
have the opportunity to have education along with vocational training, so that they are well equipped to engage themselves and compete as equals in the struggle of life. It is an undeniable fact that, these people are inferior to none, but still they need some support from the society and equally from the government to get them started in life. It is the sole responsibility of the government to make sure that the deaf, who are qualified for a particular job in government or in public or private sector, get absorbed without facing any discrimination on the basis of his or her hearing or speech impairment. In this regard, reservation of jobs for the persons with hearing disability would help a great deal to enhance their scope of employment. However, any welfare measures for this disadvantaged section would not show results without the support of the society. It is ultimately the society which has the means to ensure socio-economic rehabilitation of the deaf.

There is not one well-equipped clinic in India exclusively for the diagnosis and treatment of mentally retarded children. With timely detection, treatment, and vocational training, a large number of mentally retarded children can be retrieved from being hopelessly helpless to living a life of respect and responsibility. Early and affective interaction of a mentally disabled child with his or her parents is of utmost importance and has a great influence on the child’s later development. It is the duty of the mother to give plentiful mothering for the proper development of the child. Next to parents is the school. School through its various activities can help
prevent mental stress in these children and make them learn things with ease. A conducive environment at school would help the mentally disabled children explore the abilities in themselves, which can be instrumental in achieving a relatively self-sufficient life. It needs to be understood that in order to make a disabled child improve upon his abilities at least in carrying out simple tasks concerning with his or her personal care, the parents and the teachers have to have a lot of patience. They should help the child understand himself, meaning thereby that the child must know about his body and mind.

Though, there are a number of legislations concerning the disabled persons in India, what is most crucial is their proper implementation. As for the visually disabled people, the authorities responsible for enacting and implementing constitutional measures should give priority to two aspects, viz, the prevention of blindness and welfare of the blind. There should be some mechanism to make the district or the local authorities responsible for the education, training, and employment of the blind persons residing in their areas. The ultimate goal should be the fullest possible development of the capacities of blind persons in the society. Again, the problems of the deaf are not much different. In all countries of the world, there are national / state level voluntary societies, which are working for the welfare of the deaf. The respective government agencies are also taking necessary steps to look after the needs of the deaf people. Unlike the blind and the deaf, the
problems of the mentally retarded are somewhat different and therefore there is a need for a comprehensive legislation concerning all aspects of their life, like a proper definition, provision of medical care and treatment, special schools, inheritance, owning and management of property, promotion of mental health etc. The legislations should also provide for a national institute for research and training to undertake programmes for the benefit of the mentally retarded.