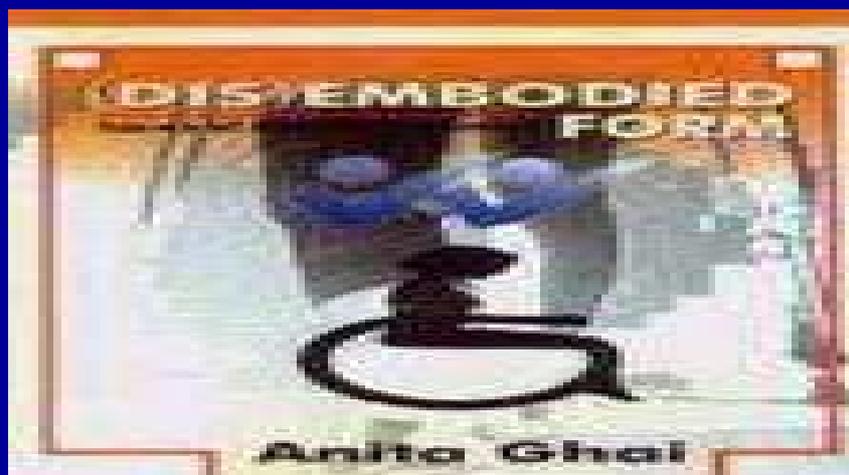


To Be Human Is to be sexual

Anita Ghai
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- sexuality was defined within the parameters of marriage. Most of the disabled women found themselves without words to express their sexuality. In a culture where any deviation from a norm is seen as a marked deviation, the impaired body becomes a symbol of imperfection. The myth of the beautiful body defines the impaired female body as unfeminine and unacceptable.

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Friendship/ intimacy



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Chit chat



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Advocates



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We can Show it



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Gender, disability & sexuality

- Norms of femininity - purity, beauty, bodily perfection/ symmetry, obedience, skill
- Disabled woman - failure in one norm = all feminine gender norms called into question, challenged
- Marriage prospects - gendered – for girl →
 - i) desexualised – absorbed w/in natal group rather than being married out
 - ii) Or marriage to elderly/disabled/widowed – renegotiation of disability – stigma contained w/in wider kinship group
- '*Rolelessness*' faced by disabled woman re marriage & childbirth –
- Violence and abuse experienced by DP, esp women



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A disabled woman in her late 50's described for me the arduous process of learning to be feminine after she began residing outside of institutions in her mid-twenties. She claimed that she had minimal opportunity to form a gendered sense of herself (normative or not) within her institutional childhood and young adulthood. Indeed, there has been minimal scholarly work or research that examines how disabled individuals form their gender and sexual identities

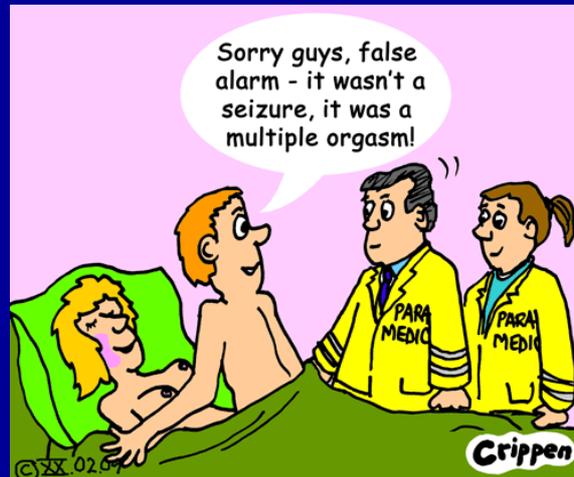
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Disability & Sexuality: Case Studies

- How much detail must I tell her? Won't she just get confused?
- Is it really necessary to broach the subject of intercourse since Puneet is simply not capable of a close relationship, let alone a sexual encounter. Besides, he'll be accompanied all his life by a close family member, so what chance is there that he will have sex?
- Lakshi is non verbal—how can I possibly teach her information related to relationships, and what is the chance that she would even understand it?
- Rashi has a severe developmental disability and will be child-like for the rest of his life. He won't need that type of information.
- Arjun is still young, there is lots of time to think about teaching him this type of information in five years or even later. What has "sex" or "sexuality" got to do with him now?

For WOMEN : MORAL PANIC

- How many loving families who have disabled daughters actually encourage sexuality?
- Issues of Access
- Where do meet peers?
- Tied to institution marriage
- Issues of motherhood



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Caregiving and sexuality

- Mothers extra work
- So should we give it up ?

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- Issues of sexuality have to be contextualized in a culture which privileges marriage as an institution.
- Silence of mothers on issues of sexualities was not surprising.
- In the interviews with the mothers, there was only one mother who voiced concern about giving the idea of sexual touch to her disabled daughter who has spinal injuries.
- *The mother says, "I know that she is bedridden, yet sometimes I find myself consciously telling my daughter that she will be touched have a lover, be a mother, and raise a family. I tell her this not because I believe that these are her only options. But I tell her this because I know that nearly all of the rest of the world doesn't believe that she can do it."*

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Mothers of developmentally disabled daughters were worried about sexuality issues *Shyama says, "She is governed by the Bollywood images. She wants a boyfriend, for sure, but there's no way that I can allow such interactions"* Radha's response to interview questions about reproduction focused on a view of innocence in relation to her daughter's visual impairment. This view of innocence about sexuality had discord with concern raised by her daughter's recent conversation *.I've thought about it, but I haven't taken any steps...It's kind of like, how can she have such dreams when I have taught her only of academics and nothing else. I take her to Gurudwara every day, so how can she think of sexual things"* Thus deep worries around her daughter's sexual vulnerability are clear.

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She recalled her own class 6th, where there was a girl who was ‘retarded’ in her school. “And when I had my daughter, my fears got doubled. So, you know, it’s been years, but that memory was right there— it always is—to know that there are people that will do that, so my worry gave me sleeplessness nights

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What is really poignant is that many of the daughters voiced out the barriers in attaining motherhood as daughters with disabilities face stigmatizing public perceptions of them as inadequate or inappropriate in the role of mothering.

For example, helping professionals and family members often discourage women with disabilities from becoming pregnant, expressing concerns that they will not be competent mothers and reflecting eugenic concerns that their disabilities will be passed on to their children. One hearing impaired woman had a baby. However the myth presumes that disabled mothers not only fall short of ideal mothering, but that they depend on their children for care and services, exploiting these ‘young care giver’ and robbing them of their childhoods. Kanchan says, “***I think the most invasive stereotype is a denial of my sexuality. Even my mother would never attend to the idea that because I am disabled, I should not express my sexuality. I also know that I cannot get married***

Shoma was yelled at by her mother when she shared the news report of a mentally challenged girl being given the permission to have a child. It is true that the news was of a rape in Chandigarh, but the daughter was excited more to know that having a child is a possibility. *“At least she could have a child”*

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Karuna who is visually impaired shares this with me, *“ I like this man who is married. However if I tell my parents, they would kill me. I live with them and I do require assistance. Also I am very confused whether I should be immoral as my mother says that virginity is very important. Also even though I stay in a city like Delhi, we have no idea as to where would be accessible spaces in which we can be safe and not get identified. I do want my needs to be fulfilled. However, every time we finally take a decision we cannot find the accessible place”*

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Rashmi shared this, "you know I am scared to say this as you might not like what I am going to say. My mother would hate it You know it has been rare in my life that I have dreaded men getting sexual with me, because most men don't see me as a sex object in the same way as they see most women for that. I am profoundly grateful! ... But if only more men had made me feel attractive and I could enjoy the touch".

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- **Disability** is so closely connected with **dependence** and **social isolation** that it is difficult for people to imagine a disabled person as a **sexual person**. These "exclusions" are unconscious as society communicates to disabled people that their presence is not expected in the domain of intimacy, motherhood, and pregnancy. Usually when disabled parents are researched, the general understanding is that parents are thought of as people who have disabled children. Issues of sexuality and disability need to be articulated and shared with the community, and policy makers. The daughters therefore need to have a voice

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- *polymorphous* sexuality eg people w SCI experience pleasure not focused on sexual organs
- So we need to broaden our understanding of sexuality
- I often teach parents about masturbation and privacy for their disable children

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INTERSECTIONS

- FEMINISM AS A CASE

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Is it easy?



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I CAN

