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Count me! I'm differently-abled

By Vishnudas Sheshrao

The United States of America has 16 per cent physically challenged people, Australia has 20 per cent and England had 18 per cent. On the other hand, India has merely 2.1 per cent who suffer from physical disability," laughs Suhas Karnik, Honorary Secretary of the National Association for Blind.

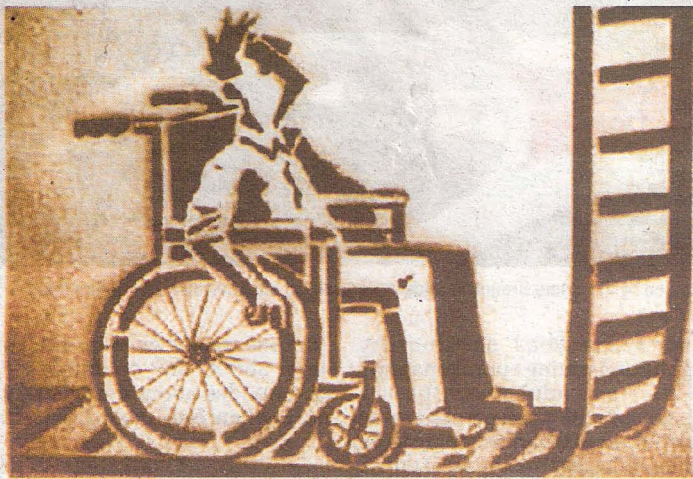
"In the same way, Sri Lanka's figure reads 6.5 per cent, China 7 per cent and Bangladesh 5 per cent. India's geographics and demographics are not different from China, Bangladesh and Lanka. Yet, our number is just 2 per cent," argues Karnik.

The fact is that the actual number of physically challenged people in our country is under recorded due to multiple rea-

sonally low due to multiple reasons – including vague questions in the census form and the fact that enumerators in a hurry to finish their target often overlook details. Consequently, it affects the overall number."

He further adds, "Sometimes family members consider physical handicap a stigma on their family and so try to hide it. Besides, due to the abnormality, their siblings face problems when they want to get married."

This year, taking cognisance of this point, the Union Government has placed the question on physically challenged on the first page, before the mother tongue question, which normally comes immediately after personal information. Besides, last year there were only five options regarding the nature of physical disabilities



sions, and that is way our records show such low numbers. After every ten years, the Central government carries out a national-wide head count. During the same exercise, the Census department calculates the number of physically challenged people and data is compiled at the state and national level. According to this number, the national budget is sanctioned. Probably, is it one of the reasons why so little is allocated for the differently-abled.

Comments Suhas Kale, Managing Director, Maharashtra State Handicap Finance Corporation, "The figures are unrealis-

– seeing, hearing, speaking, orthopaedic and mentally retarded. However, this time, three new options have been added – mentally ill, any other disability and multiple disabilities.

Karnik appealed to physically challenged people and their parents to make sure that their names are registered in the Census. Meanwhile, Additional Municipal Commissioner Manisha Mhaiskar explains, "We have given detailed training to all enumerators on how to deal with physically challenged people and their parents and even warned them about the secrecy of the data."