

'Feminists failed in responding to issues of disabled women'

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GUWAHATI, Jan 12 — "Though India has around 49 to 50 million disabled people, the country continues to rely on voluntary sector for the provision of basic services for them, although this sector, stretched beyond its resources is unable to serve even a minuscule proportion of those in need."

This was opined by Anita Ghai, social activist and senior reader at Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College, Delhi, at an interactive session on 'Gender and disability, Issues of Violence,' organized by the North East Network (NEN) recently.

As a guest speaker, Ghai addressed the issues related to disabled women vis-à-vis the feminist movement in India.

"It was a painful and disillusioning realization to recognize that disabled women occupy a multifarious and mar-

ginalized position in India based on their disability and also on socio-cultural identities that separate them into categories constructed according to properties like caste, class and status," she said.

Responding to the queries posed by the participants, she mentioned that the feminists engaged with issues of difference and resolve to transform social inequalities have not picked up on the issues concerning the disabled women. On the other hand, disability movement has also failed to address the issues related to disabled women, in particular.

"What is more troubling that Indian feminist thoughts fail to recognize that the problems of women issues apply equally to the disabled women. There are ample evidences that the disabled women are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse," she added.

However, when the nation-

al media gave widespread coverage to a story about a woman with cerebral palsy being abused by her father, women's group gave no more than perfunctory response.

Calling upon all the women's rights activists to do a mind mapping in order to address all the issues related to persons with disability in general and disabled women in particular she said that isolation of disabled women from the mainstream rendered a large part of their experiences, including the experiences of violence invisible.

Elaborating her points with several examples of violence against disabled women, she added, "My personal experience of the disability movement however, indicates to me that the gender based bias that women must contend with everyday in patriarchal society also permeates India's disability movement."