

Assistive Technology Research and Critical Disability Studies in the Global South

THE NEED FOR SYNERGY

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Extended Abstract

A detailed search of the past three years of CHI papers revealed that out of the more than 2000 papers, the number of papers that intersect with Critical Disability Studies is Zero. Further none of the authors of the paper have reported work that intersects with disability study scholarship in the ten years since. Alarming as this number is, it is even more concerting to note that, no mention is made of the emerging field of Disability Studies in the Global South. On the other hand, scholars of disability studies in the global south, to our knowledge, have not been part of any major discourse on assistive technology with a few emerging exceptions. For instance, a recent national conference on assistive technology had a session on the technology solutions for people with disabilities in the global south.

In this paper we would like to highlight the critical need to include voices from disability studies in the Global south in any discourse on Assistive technology design and development. We present the following reasons for this importance:

- 1) The majority of the global population of people with disabilities live in the global south. And it is well established that people with disabilities around the world are among the most marginalized populations, and especially in the global south.
- 2) The lived realities of people with disabilities in the global south are very different from those of the people with disabilities in the global north where the statutory, legal, financial, and infrastructure capacities are well developed and hence the quality of life of PwDs is at a minimum on an upward trajectory. In the global south, by definition, there is serious deficit in these capacities, including the capacity of the PwDs to absorb any available benefits.
- 3) Assistive technology work in the global north works on the premise that independence and access that is equal to the mainstream population is the desired end goal of the people with disabilities. However, this premise is being questioned by scholars in the global south; in the foreseeable future, PwDs primarily depend on their immediate family, and proximal social groupings for their everyday lives and not on government programs or public resources, even if legally mandated. Thus, the design of assistive technology solutions for these populations have to be rethought from the bottom up, taking the social context and the existing networks of support around PwDs.

We provide three streams of thought to seed further conversations on this intersection.

- 1) An overview of literature of the disability studies in the global south, especially those with any intersections on technology
- 2) A personal narrative of two of the authors of their experience of being women and disabled and growing up in two diverse regions of India, one from Delhi, the capital city and the other from a rural neighborhood of Bangalore. and lastly,
- 3) An introduction to a new methodology that we call Ludic Design for Accessibility which has been informed and influenced by the above.