

Case Study

Interview unique number: 03
Interview date: 22/11/2019
District: Ganjam
State: Odisha

Name: **Dhanjai Pradhan**
Age: **23**
Gender: **Female**
Education: **Graduated**
Marital Status: **Single**
Highest education: **Graduated and PGDCA (Computer)**
Current self-employment/ employment status: **Tutor**
Type of impairment: **Cerebral Palsy**
Any other members with disabilities in family: **No**

Dhanjai is a young, 23 year old woman with disability. She has gone through inferiority complex and still happens to feel that way whenever she attends social gatherings and/or community functions. She got cerebral palsy when she was three years old. Due to severe fever she took medicine from the village health practitioner (quack-who is not a licenced doctor) due to which she was unconscious for seven days. Afterwards she was admitted at Berhampur city hospital. However, after the treatment she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

Dhanjai stated, "I had fever and was unconscious for seven days and when I got out of trauma, I was declared with cerebral palsy."

Dhanjai expresses that,

"I got more support from my father in getting me admitted to a mainstream school. After 4th class, I stayed in a private hostel. My father and brother were daily waged labourers still they decided to pay 500 rupees per month for my hostel. My father wanted me to be graduated and hence, they shelled out this huge amount for two years. I could attend school only 30% because I had walking problems and was taunted by community on my gait."

Dhanjai also experienced certain level of ignorance and discrimination from few teachers and students in her school. She narrates one school incidence as,

"When I was in 8th standard, I was seated on the last bench during examinations. Some girls were playing and they pushed each other and we all fell from the bench. I was injured and was crying but they all left me alone. A school clerk who was passing by saw me and dropped me home. My uncle who was teacher in the school scolded and beaten the class mates. After that they did not speak to me ever. Even after apologising to them, they chose not to speak to me"

Dhanjai states, "Few teachers used to ignore and discriminate in the class. I never participated in any event or picnics of school as I was not 'included', hence, I did not had courage to reach out. Till 9th class I had friends, however, after that I had no friends. While we were kids 'acceptance' was easy. I feel that while growing up all got conscious about my appearance, gait and my speech deformity, I found my disability visible and led to my seclusion."

Dhanjai feels neglected in her family also. She was respected and valued till the time her brother was not married. Her borther trusted her more than his wife. She states that, "I get equal importance in my family until my brother's wife intervened."

She is not much aware of sexual abuse and violence that women undergo. However, she knows a bit about physical, mental and emotional violence as seen on TV. She shared an incident of abuse on the bus during her graduation days.

"During my college days in a bus, a conductor used to touch my back, I had a creepy feeling. It continued for many days. Suddenly, one day I shouted that I will stop going to college in this bus. After that he stopped and stayed away from me."

Dhanjai feels uncomfortable in front of her relatives and other known people whenever she attends a family function as she is excluded and not invited to participate. This 'exclusion' is experienced since she had grown up both inside family and in educational institutions. Many a times, boys have taunted her on her gait and she had faced several eve teasing instances because of her disability.

Dhanjai states, "I personally do not participate in family functions or festivals/gathering as community keeps taunting me. This usually happens in absence of my family members as y father has always been overprotective."

'My neighbours daughters and children who are non disabled and belong to same caste as mine have never faced greater risk of abuse, neglect, abandonment, exploitation, health problems and family separation as I have experienced till now. Ironically, it is disability that is the unifying minority across minorities. It does not discriminate on the basis of religion, caste, colour, social status or gender'.

Dhanjai has seen years of poverty during her childhood and how her family suffered due to lack of resources. Having graduated, she wants to get economically sound so that she can grow up leading a quality life.

I might not earn much in the DPO, however, I will continue working for upholding rights of others like me. Also, I have decided to be a member of a local self help group and earn a decent living for myself and save for my family. It will help me to stand up with economic empowerment.

She shares the following recommendations:

- Public awareness and self-awareness about disability. We all get disabled with age; this needs to be understood by one and all.
- Social security system with 100% guaranteed protection and safeguard early intervention and quality life of the WwDs in life cycle.
- Awareness about rights of Women with disabilities in school and university curriculum including understanding on 'disability is not a curse' and is not outcome of past life. This will go a long way in breaking attitudinal barriers.
- Women with disabilities are not invisible minority and are equally included in all social, political, cultural and economical facets of life.

Dhanjai's Moment of Honour

The day I completed graduation and got a degree, I saw both love and happiness in eyes of my brother and father. They gave up their moments of luxury so that I could be educated. My desire for quality education and my aspiration to 'go on' was supported by my family and no one else.

I am excited to meet Anjlee Ma'am from Samarthyam during interviews for gender assessment of my DPO. In an emotional moment I broke down; she took my hand and told me 'do not feel low, I will be your best friend.' I am so happy and feel proud that she is my friend!! My thinking is changing and so do my time!!

My dreams have wings now. When I was nominated group leader of parents and DPO group and undertake rating for the SDG Disability Inclusive Score Card recently in Behrampur, I found 'myself'. This was my first community exposure and I have now learnt how to lead active advocacy and stand up for rights of girls and women with disabilities. For me, 'now there is no looking back'. It's one of the things I've never wanted to give up, no matter what people said to me.

Today, I stand up with my chin high and confidence in my heart, 'yes, I can'. I am currently volunteering as an active DPO member. My learning on gender equality and SDG has boosted my confidence self-confidence multifold. I want to get exposure on national and international disability rights frameworks and if given a chance, I want to be part of wider women rights network.