

Disability and Devaluation: The Need for (SRV) Social Role Valorization in India

This paper examines the theory of Social Role Valorization (SRV) developed by Wolf Wolfensberger and its engagement with the process of normalization, particularly in relation to the lived realities of persons with disabilities. SRV emerges from the recognition that people with disabilities are frequently devalued within society and consequently denied access to the “good things of life,” including respect, meaningful relationships, economic opportunities, and social participation. Wolfensberger articulated the principles of SRV in the 1970s in the United States as a response to systemic marginalization and institutionalization of disabled individuals. The theory posits that social devaluation is not merely an outcome of impairment but is deeply embedded in cultural perceptions, social structures, and role expectations. Afflictions, impairments, disfigurements, and deformities are often socially constructed as markers of inferiority, leading to exclusion, segregation, and isolation. As a result, devalued individuals are accorded the lowest status in society and are frequently subjected to what Wolfensberger termed “wounding,” encompassing both subtle and overt forms of discrimination, neglect, and abuse. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are particularly vulnerable, often positioned at the lowest end of the social hierarchy, where negative stereotypes and reduced expectations further reinforce cycles of dependency and invisibility. The paper further emphasizes the urgent need to translate SRV from theory into practice, especially within the Indian context, where cultural attitudes, structural inequalities, and limited access to inclusive services continue to exacerbate the devaluation of persons with intellectual disabilities. By examining key issues associated with social devaluation—such as stigma, institutionalization, lack of inclusive education and employment, and restricted community participation—the paper underscores the importance of enhancing valued social roles for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in India. SRV advocates for deliberate strategies that promote socially valued roles through culturally normative means, including access to education, employment, family life, and community engagement. Implementing SRV in India requires not only policy-level commitment but also a shift in societal attitudes toward recognizing disability as a dimension of human diversity rather than a deficit. By foregrounding role enhancement, social inclusion, and dignity, the paper argues that SRV offers a powerful framework for countering devaluation and fostering a more equitable and humane society for persons with disabilities.