

**In Memoriam**

**Prof. Anita Ghai**

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**By**

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Around two decades back I had met Anita in a workshop and interacted with her on issues related to disability. She was an amazing person, very strong yet vulnerable. We were good friends and colleagues, contributing to building of Disability Studies scholarship in India. With the loss of Anita Ghai, Disability Studies in India has become impoverished in multiple ways. When I started working on Disability issues in the early 2000s, except for a very few articles and books by Indian academics, I could not find much. Anita was one such scholar who was present through the force of her pen and the might of her soul. She impressed me in so many different ways. Her passion for Disability Studies was unparalleled, especially in times when, in Indian academia, there were so few scholars pointing out the neglect and absence of Disability perspectives in the curriculum of higher education. Over time, I had several interactions with her at conferences, workshops, and such, and she always came up with novel ways of linking theory with her embodied experience. Her struggle to institutionalize disability studies as a discipline spanned over three or four decades, and she called out her parent discipline, psychology, but also Women's Studies for ignoring the concerns of women with disabilities. Her lived experience manifested through her work on embodiment, gender and disability interface, and care work. As a person who had survived serious health conditions like polio, heart issues, and cancer, which were disabling to her body but could not defeat her mind. Though a great proponent of the social model of disability, she was acutely aware of the binary of social and medical models in the Indian context, given her own struggles with serious medical conditions and access to biomedical care regimes.

Her openness to interdisciplinary perspectives, especially her alertness to Western disability theories, insights from Anthropology, English literature, Media Studies, and History enriched

her articulation of disability in the postcolonial context. Much before the emergence of disability scholarship in India, she was known in the international disability circles, something I realized when I spent considerable time with American disability scholars a decade ago. Her collaborations with British scholars like Tom Shakespeare and Dan Goodley are noteworthy. Her books and articles clearly demonstrate that she went far beyond the disciplinary boundaries of her parent discipline and engaged with theoretical questions that were critical in reframing disability in the South Asian context.

In her major work, *Rethinking Disability*, she thoroughly engaged with theoretical orientations from the Global North, identified the issues ailing Indian academia, and explored cultural and intersectional aspects of gender and disability. Her writing was partly theoretical and also auto-ethnographic in nature. Her narratives were powerful in positing the class, gender, and disability interface. She clearly recognized the importance of teamwork in building Disability Studies in the Indian context. She was cordial and supportive of younger scholars working on disability issues, and she collaborated with many senior and young disability scholars in editing a volume on *Disability in South Asia*, which brought forth voices from this part of the globe very clearly. In the last few years, she and Tanmoy Bhattacharya had also started a journal called the *Indian Journal of Critical Disability Studies*.

She was a lovely, jovial and optimistic person. I worked with her on several committees at Ambedkar University when she was the Dean, and I always found her fair and honest in her dealings. Though I was not much exposed to her activist self, I often heard of her participation in feminist and disability activism. In her untimely demise, we have lost the most shining star of Disability Studies in India, whose replacement will be next to impossible.