

[Shri Bhadreswar Buragohani]

understand the enormity of the present situation and arrange a formal negotiation with the extremists in order to pave the way for a lasting peace in the State.

Problems of Mentally Retarded Persons

SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRA-KANT BHANDARE (Maharashtra): I rise to invite the attention of the Government as well as of the people at large to the very serious and urgent problems of the mentally retarded. The problems of the disabled, whether physically handicapped or mentally retarded, are serious and they call for urgent attention and remedial measures. I had occasion to repeatedly discuss this issue, but I thank you for giving me this opportunity to focus and highlight the problems of the mentally retarded. The basic philosophy of our Constitution and of humanity is that all human beings have equal value. All people who are mentally handicapped, no matter how severe the handicap is and regardless of whether they have other handicaps, have equal legal and human rights. The overall goal for people with a mental handicap is to be accepted by the society that they belong to a family group, to a circle of school-mates/workmates, friends and part of the neighbourhood and community. Unfortunately they are subjected to constant ridicule and neglect. If a man suffers from a heart disease, people go and console him with flowers. But if a man is slow in his mental faculties, he is subjected to indignity.

I must emphasise that the mentally retarded are normal people who are slightly slow in their intellectual functioning. The main task before us is to create an infrastructure of special services for them and it is here that the Central Government comes in. According to me, the special services are: Enable children to grow up in their homes through supporting

parents, carers and a provision for education enable adults to have a home of their own; to provide educational and other opportunities that equip people to live fulfilling lives in local communities, to provide opportunity for employment; to provide support to people in developing and maintaining relationships within their own communities, to enable people and to make positive use of leisure time and to support neighbourhoods and communities in their efforts to become more inclusive.

The first task is to shape proper attitudes towards people with handicaps. A change of attitude will come only when there is a correct knowledge of what a mental handicap is and how people with such handicaps can be helped. The parents and their associates have to take the initiative and become pressure groups to develop healthy attitudes towards the mentally retarded. Today the attitudes result in a hostile climate in schools and elsewhere against the mentally retarded, sexual abuse against the mentally retarded particularly when they are confined to institutions, no job opportunities, no normal rights of a citizen and the last but not the least, the problem of the parents, "what happens to our mentally retarded child are not there". I am sure this House will have an opportunity for an indepth study and discussion on the problems of the mentally retarded.

There has been a long standing commitment by the successive Governments to frame adequate legislation for the disabled. Repeated assurances have been given to both the Houses in this behalf. The three Bills which require to be immediately passed and enacted are: (1) The Rehabilitation Council of India Bill, 1990 (Bill No. 155 of 1990), (2) The Board for Welfare and Protection of Rights of Handicapped Bill, 1991 (Bill No. 1 of 1991) and (3) The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Mental

Retardation and Cerebral Palsy Bill, 1991 (Bill No. 11/91). I have sent many reminders in this behalf.

Similarly, the Mental Health Act, 1987—Madam, just listen to this—has been passed by both the Houses. It has received the assent of the President but has not yet been brought into operation only because it has not been gazetted. It is unfortunate that no steps have been taken in this regard.

The Members of Parliament have now formed a Parliamentarians Forum for the rights of the disabled cutting across all party lines and many of my friends Hari Prasadji, Satchidanandaji and Sanadji are all very active members of this forum. Parliamentarians must also act as a pressure group for the protection of the basic human rights of the disabled including mentally retarded who are the most deprived and discriminated among the vulnerable sections of the society.

There is also an immediate need of reservation of jobs for these mentally retarded and bringing them on the roster of the Employment Exchange. Madam, mind this that today no Employment Exchange registers the name of a single mentally retarded person, citizen. Mentally retarded persons also like others, need to be rehabilitated and employed on jobs for which they are capable.

In DTC there is a scheme for granting free passes for physically handicapped but nothing for the mentally retarded. This should be looked into. There is much to be done for the educational facilities of mentally retarded. There are no schools or specialised wings in schools to look after them. The Government should give its urgent attention to this problem. Now, see the anomaly. The Government of India has framed rules to regulate

the Government of India's scholarship scheme for disabled persons. Under these rules, a disabled candidate will be eligible for the award of scholarship for study from 9th standard onwards. This norm results in deprivation of scholarship to the mentally retarded child who ordinarily does not reach the 9th standard. These rules need to be amended to provide such scholarships to the mentally retarded child without reference to any class and irrespective of age and educational level.

Then, there is an immediate need for implementing, without delay, the proposal of setting up of special schools or special wings in schools for mentally retarded children. There is vast difference between the pay-scales and other conditions of the teachers imparting education to the mentally retarded and those of other teachers.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI-MATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): Please conclude. You have already taken six minutes.

SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRA-KANT BHADARE: It is best that the education of the mentally retarded is brought under the Ministry of Human Resources, Department of Education, instead of being under the Ministry of Social Welfare as it is now.

Madam, I am thankful to you for your patience. But the patience needed by the mentally retarded is much more than this. I know you have rung the bell four time. But I seek your indulgence.

Let me end by expressing my hope on behalf of the entire House that it will not be long before the rights of the mentally retarded are secured and their problems solved through adequate and expeditious steps by all concerned. Thank you.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY (Andhra Pradesh): Madam, I rise to associate ... (Interruptions).

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN): One by one, please.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: Please permit me because this is a very sensitive subject. The definition of 'the retarded' should change. This is the last year of the Decade of the Disabled. And these people are also disabled. In special schools, we do not know whether they have the right to vote. The very definition of 'retardation' is different. The abuse against them has to become extremely punishable. Severe punishment has to be meted out to the guilty. Every day, we read in newspapers that in Government institutions, where these handicapped and retarded people are kept, they are abused by allegedly normal people, not only physically but sexually too. I associate myself with Mr. Bhandare on this mention and I hope that the Government will pay attention. Otherwise, it will cast aspersions on their sanity levels. Thank you.

SHRI B. K. HARIPRASAD (Karnataka): Madam, as far as the mentally retarded children are concerned, in the international arena, now they have completely changed the word "retarded". They are now using the words "mentally disabled". I think, in our country, about three per cent of the population is mentally retarded. As the hon. senior Member, Chandrakant Bhandareji, has said, there are a lot of violations of human rights as far as the treatment of the mentally retarded ones is concerned. With these words, I associate myself with Bhandareji.

PROF. I. G. SANADI (Karnataka): Madam, I also associate myself with him.

SHRI MOHAMMED AFZAL alias MEEM AFZAL (Uttar Pradesh): Madam, I also associate myself with him.

Need for a new approach on Bofors issue

SHRI RAJ MOHAN GANDHI (Uttar Pradesh): Madam Vice-Chairman, the special mention that the Chairman has permitted me to make today bears the title "Need for a new approach on Bofors issue". The nation ... (Interruptions).

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY (Pondicherry): Every half an hour, the ghost of Bofors is hunting them.

SHRI RAJ MOHAN GANDHI: After you hear this, you will want to associate with me.

Madam, the nation receives a daily and escalating dose of violence and corruption. But the culprits remain unidentified or unpunished. The resulting climate of resentment and despair will alter, if some big-time offenders are punished; it will alter even more if some big-time offenders are fully honest about their wrong doings. The ears of the people of India are ready to listen to any voice of courageous honesty coming from our hon. colleague, Shri Madhavsingh Solanki. Already before this august House, he has admitted that he delivered to the Foreign Minister of Switzerland a note that he should not have carried or delivered. It is entirely up to him to stop there and to seal his lips hereafter. But it is also up to him to go beyond that and climb a difficult mountain. If he can admit all he knows, he will crack open the wall of cynicism that today separates the people of India from rulers and politicians of all parties.

I appeal to his conscience, I appeal to it not on behalf of my party or of any party, but on behalf of the long suffering, often cheated, but amazingly patient citizens of India. I