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URBAN MARKETS AND DISABILITY ACCESS: A CASE STUDY OF KOLKATA

Abstract

The city is a collective space that promises to provide equal opportunities to all to enjoy its resources, goods, services, etc. Cities are inscribed with the values of an 'able-bodied' society, which legitimize oppressive and discriminatory practices against disabled people purely on the basis that they have physical and/or mental impairments. This paper elaborates the different ways in which contemporary urban market spaces in Kolkata metropolis are rendered exclusionary for persons with different disabilities, despite state policies on inclusive design. The paper uses two marketplaces as examples of the ableist structuring of space and highlighted the experiences of disabled people in their use of these markets, which tend to push people with different impairments to the periphery of such spaces. The experiences of disabled people in marketplaces thus are positioned within a matrix of ideological premises and structured practices that impair their access, limit their participation and build and promote a comprehensive system of exclusion and marginalisation. The processes of development theoretically promote universal design and accessible, safe and inclusive spaces, but largely end up promoting a normalising culture. Marketplaces are increasingly becoming abilist, privileging normality over difference, legitimizing practices that discriminate and feeding into the ideological framework that deems disabled people as defective consumers.

Keywords: *disability, city, markets, inclusive spaces, citizenship*

Introduction

The city is a collective space characterized by cultural diversity imbued with the promise to provide everyone with equal opportunities to enjoy its resources, including goods and services (Rattray 2013). According to Lefebvre (1996 (1968)), the urban city can be understood in terms of social relations that are embedded within the political economy – it includes the lives we are able to live, the choices we make, our cultural expressions, all of which together work as symbols of collective well-being and sites of public encounter. By

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emphasizing citizens' needs, he argued for the removal of discriminatory and segregative organization and promotion of public spaces like streets, parks, squares, etc, within the socially produced urban spaces. Thus accessibility as a social right to the collective public resources of the city is embedded in the ideas of equity, inclusion and social progress premised by urban public spaces. Yet Sassen et. al. (2018) have elaborated the ways in which segregated, exclusionary cities infringe upon the rights of citizens - not all citizens are equal, have the same opportunities, or experience the city in the same way. Often cities are organized on the basis of segregation (Maffini and Maraschin 2018) with urban spaces being constrained and controlled by people and groups with differential access to resources. Thus accessibility to public spaces is inscribed by norms, representations, and symbolic images linked to different functions and identities, and thus access to the material and/ or symbolic resources of the city varies along different identity markers.

Grosz (1999) posited that the built environment of the city influenced the social production of corporeality as it provided the context and coordinates for most forms of the body. The relations between disabled bodies and city are complex, as disabled people, in their everyday lives, confront hostile built environments, which were never designed to cater for a range of bodily differences. This paper highlights the exclusions that define everyday life for persons with disabilities in cities, using access to markets as an illustrative example. This paper explores disabled people's experiences of urban market spaces in Kolkata that reflect social attitudes towards non-normate bodies. While laws and policies press for changes in physical infrastructure to make spaces more accessible and inclusive, the paper aims to explore how disabling market spaces in the city are developed and perpetuated, to cater to ableist ideologies of the fit and young user/consumer, thus denying access to disabled people. The paper uses two marketplaces in Kolkata as cases to illustrate both the ableist structuring of space as well as the discriminatory attitudes of people occupying these spaces that tend to push people with different impairments to the periphery of such spaces.

Disabled People and Access to Market spaces

The UNCRPD stresses elimination of social exclusion (Ferri 2010) and promotion of personal autonomy (Mégret 2008), by intertwining equality with social participation, and directs states to ensure facilities and services open or provided for the public to be fully accessible for persons with disabilities. Critical Disability Studies (CDS) has highlighted the social, cultural, historical, and capitalist market structures that stigmatise bodily impairments and exclude people with impairments from larger social processes (Barnes and Mercer 2003, 2005; Imrie 2013; Priestley et al. 2007; Oliver 2009). Gleeson (2009) posited that various features of contemporary cities—including physical design, institutional policies and mobility systems— have prevented disabled

people from participating in the mainstream of urban social life. The poor social status of disabled people, their invisibility due to lack of participation in social processes inscribed by socio-cultural ideologies and social structures that keep them out, consign them to outsider positions within the urban spaces.

Imrie (1999) highlighted built environments as contexts for creating, maintaining and extending social inequities for disabled persons through discriminatory architectural design. Both spatialisation and ableism influence physical design and mass transport systems effectively preventing disabled people from full participation in the activities of mainstream society (Gleeson 1999). Spatialisation is the process of locating disabled people in segregated spaces away from the non disabled people (Imrie 1996). Ableism is defined as the ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume ablebodiedness and by doing so construct disabled people as oppressed, marginalized and largely invisible to others (Chouinard 1999, p 380). Accessibility allows us to qualify the extent to which a space is public, not only in terms of the possibilities of the relationships between spaces (between physical and geometric accessibility, linked to the means of transport and to how to get around in the city), but also in terms of how open and hospitable a place is in terms of accepting various uses and publics (Ratray 2013). Accessibility is above all a social right to access the resources of the city, and its restriction is always aimed at a mainly socio-economic homogenization.

Modern cities reinforce the social, economic and cultural exclusion of disabled people through values and ideologies embedded within the wider socio-political and structural processes that frame the production of space (Gleeson, 1999), along with the actions and practices of agents and institutions. Disabled people's experiences of urbanisation are not just related to the form of the physical environment but by what Ellin (1996) referred to as the city as a confluence of meanings rather than functions. Architectural problems of the built environment must be placed against dynamic social interactions that structure one's experience of the surroundings. Disabled people have to confront built environments which were never designed to cater for a range of bodily differences but rather encourage a retreat into private spaces. As disabled people are restricted to particular spaces within the city, their absence from socio-institutional power, results in structuring of spaces within ableist norms and interactive practices that underscores their transgressive entry into public spaces. Further, cultural ideas of dependency and disability relegate disabled people to peripheral spaces of welfare, and consign them to the realm of 'defective consumers,' with little or no income with which to exercise their 'citizenship' rights with (Imrie 1996). This affects the practices within market places that govern both usage and access to goods and services available. While the built environment is marked out by spatial signifiers or symbols of difference that serve potentially to separate disabled people from other people, the users of such public spaces also exclude non-normate bodies through ideologies that

deem disabled people as improbable consumers.

The introduction of the “average” and “vulnerable” consumer categories communicates to the public what is a “normal” and expected (Eskyte 2019). A few studies in the west have attempted to address disabled people’s experiences in the market, focusing primarily on persons with mobility and vision impairments and their interactions in retail premises (Advani et al. 2017; Kaufman-Scarborough 2001; Zientara et al. 2017). Such research has to take into account that bodies are constituted by the interactions between discourses, institutions, and corporeality (Frank 1991). These discourses also help to constitute bodies, and their experiences within particular institutions, and impaired bodies are viewed through the lens of ‘appropriate’ and ‘normal’ appearance and behaviour. Ableist discourses deem that public spaces must be inhabited by bodies that can conform to acceptable behavior and maintain a physical presence in public space without social challenge. Disabled people’s access to public spaces, especially market spaces, becomes inhibited by such ideologies that deny a consumption role – goods and services as well as leisure - to impaired bodies. Disabled people, with the aspersions of dependence and incapability, are not considered as viable consumers, both in terms of financial ability as well as in terms of physical capacity.

Ableist discourses lead to the fashioning of urban market places by institutions concerned with the design, construction and maintenance of the built environment. The physical layout and structuring of market spaces puts disabled people at risk of both personal injury and social exclusion by not accounting for their mobility requirements (Imrie, 1996). Disabled people expend much of their energies trying to gain right of passage; to cope with the negative attitudes, the poorly arranged surroundings, the constant fear of being ‘on approval’ in non-disabled space (Hansen and Philo, 2007). Marketplaces operate as social institutions that are constructed in culturally specific ways, controlled or organized by particular social groups or classes, yet dependent on governments, laws, and larger cultural understandings supporting market activity.

Locating the Sites: Relations of Exchange within Marketplaces in Kolkata

Historically, markets have been an important not just for business transactions, but also for social interactions among different groups of people. As Kolkata developed as a city, planned well-regulated markets were envisioned for multiple functions – removal of vendors from the streets for relocation in the new markets, clearing of roads and drains of the dirt from street bazaars and permanency of the structures as well as fixed revenues for the government (Sengupta 2015). The physical form of the bazaar was thus seen as important, as the space needed to be organized in an efficient manner. The two marketplaces used to elaborate the argument in this paper are New Market in

Central Kolkata and Gariahat Market in South Kolkata. Both sites have some common features – both markets were developed during the colonial period and are at present municipal markets, with properly constructed shops as well as large hawker presence. These markets are maintained by the state government vide the Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act of 1980, which states as it as an obligatory function and a statutory duty of the civic body.

New Market, situated in the heart of the city, refers to both the original enclosed markets as well as the surrounding areas where shops have developed over the years. The New Market was set up in 1874, to provide a market space that would be the preserve of Calcutta's British residents, rebuilt by Calcutta Corporation over Fenwick's Bazar, with a Victorian Gothic design, which was extended twice in 1909 and again in the 1930s. The extensive complex has a corner clock tower, ornamental facades, shuttered arched windows, sloping tiled roofs, pillared walkways, wide eaves supported on stepped brackets and tall spires surmounted by pointed finials and multi-pointed stars. Despite surviving two devastating fires in 1985 and 2011, New Market remains at the core of the shopping experience in the city, with over 2000 shops spread over sprawling maze-like interiors with over 2000 stalls, the market has outlets of big brands as well as small vendors and hawkers with makeshift shops. Gariahat market in South Kolkata started in 1939, originated in the colonial era, and was managed by the Calcutta Corporation. Gariahat Market, sprawling across two acres, is the longest standing unfinished market complex in the city, which was renovated in 1984, but still suffers from lack of maintenance. It is the second civic market in the city after New Market where everything under the sun from fish, vegetables to jewelry and garments are available under one roof. The colonial open market design is visible in the fish and vegetable sections while the newer building that was added in 1984 resembles the new Hogg Market that has been built adjacent to the New Market.

Both the marketplaces are similar in their broad layouts as the main market is a square structure, where the original ground floor building has been extended in the form of a few storied buildings just adjacent to the market. In both the marketplaces, the entry gates are wide and sloped, facilitating walking or wheeling into the market areas where vegetables, fruit and fish are sold. In New Market, there are many entrances to the original market area is accessible from two sides, with sloping entry ways and very low footpaths which used to allow for easy access to the market spaces, specially the fruit and vegetable sections. In Gariahat market too, the original market has multiple entrances from all sides except Gariahat road flank which used to have sidewalks slightly higher than the road. Both markets have witnessed processes of development, with the building of multistoried markets adjacent to them. The Hogg market built beside the old New Market is a three storied structure with a basement and two floors above the ground. In Gariahat market too, the four storied extension building constructed in 1982 has a lift, where many

important offices including that of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation is housed. Despite being constructed in the 1980s and 1990s, both these extensions are not very accessible, having no ramps and only steep flights of stairs without guard rails provided for entering these markets, the edges of which have broken due to poor maintenance. In the four storied Gariahat market, a lift has been installed but access to the lift is prevented by 2-3 steps that need to be negotiated to access it.

Picture 1: New Market (left); Gariahat Market (right)



Disabled People and Markets

Baker (2006) has stressed that consumers feel reassured by participating or being in the marketplace, demonstrating control or competence and in being perceived as an equal in the marketplace. Consumer vulnerability is a state of powerlessness that arises from imbalances in marketplace interactions (Baker, Gentry and Rittenburg 2005). Persons with disabilities often face such consumer vulnerability in India, with ideas of dependence and restricted buying power resulting in limited participation in the marketplaces, both due to access issues and invisibilisation as consumers. While the physical infrastructure is determined by historical and social contextual factors, the attitudinal aspect is evident both in the structuring of the infrastructure as well as in the social interactions between disabled consumers and the marketplaces.

Entering Marketplaces

Entry pathways into the marketplaces in the original colonial design were accessible for all, including persons with different kinds of impairments. In both New Market and Gariahat market, the areas where vegetables, fruits and fish are sold used to be and still are largely accessible. The entrances are wide with clear passage for trolleys of goods, and for range of people with impairments – wheelchair and tri-cycle users, those with mobility issues and the persons with blindness. Sumit, a blind person who goes to New Market pointed out, “it is relatively easy to walk in and out of New Market and most days I can manage alone.” A research participant Deep, a wheelchair user said, “I come shopping for vegetables and fish to Gariahat once a week. I need

to enter from the inner road where it is easy to manoeuvre the wheelchair. However the fish market is difficult to access as there are no side rails and the other side of the entry way has 3-4 steps leading inside.” In Gariahat Market, the entryway to the fish market is wet and slippery but has a slope almost ramp style not designed for disabled people but to wheel in trolleys of fish and ice but serves the needs of disabled people.

Picture 2: Original Entry Paths: New Market (left); Gariahat Market (right)



Disabled users at both marketplaces elaborate how the changes brought about in recent years in the physical infrastructure has actually made it more difficult for them to use them. Joy, a woman with cerebral palsy who frequents the Gariahat market felt that with development work, entry has become more difficult. “When I used to come to the market with my mother as a child, there was a gentle slope from the main road through a footpath, but now the footpaths have become higher, and the entrances have big concrete slabs, on which it is difficult for me to step on and off.” The sharp rise and fall at both ends of the high concrete slabs have led many disabled users to stumble and fall, as reported by some shops around the entrances. Most shop owners cannot recall how and when these changes were effected, and there is no one who can claim responsibility for putting in or removing these structures, that restrict access to many people. Deep, a wheelchair user, says while he could easily wheel into Gariahat market before now he has to scout for entryways into the larger market as slabs block the access onto the footpaths leading into the marketplace. “It is difficult to cross the slabs as one has to wheel oneself up a barrier and then manoeuvre with a bump onto the footpath. This requires physical strength and capacity to manipulate the wheelchair, and also take care not to fall out of the wheelchair user. I therefore go to the market very rarely nowadays.” Jaya pointed out, “In certain places, especially the entryway into the Gariahat market, the height of the footpath has been raised to it more ‘usable’ for the able-bodied people, by putting bricks and stone blocks. Because

I cannot see so well, I have fallen on these stone blocks and got hurt. Moreover, these change every few months and so I need to be careful all the time.”

Picture 3: Entry ways - New Market (left); Gariahat Market (right)



The entryways have become narrow as hawkers have set up their shops/wares on either side of the entrances in both markets. Often only a very narrow passage is left on the footpaths in between the rows of stalls on either side, where bags of goods or tables and stools taking up the rest of space means that any user of the footpaths has to carefully negotiate one’s way through these lanes. Jaya, a person with cerebral palsy narrated her experience of sliding in, while avoiding bumping into customers making sharp use of all sensory and other faculties. “The entryways are lined with sacks of stuff. The hawkers sit on stools beside their wares which means a very narrow passage is left to walk. My swinging gait brings censure from these people, as I weave from one side to another while walking. Often I have to hear comments like ‘what is she doing here?’” Interactions with the hawkers brought forth this response, “We cater to all people’s needs, general people’s needs. How can we accommodate special people? How do we know what they need? If we clear the footpaths and passages of our wares, how shall we survive?”

Inside the Market

Though getting into the market is itself affected by access concerns, negotiating spaces and attitudes inside the markets poses other challenges. In both markets, due to non-enforcement of rules regarding use of the market spaces and poor responsibility for its upkeep, passages become the store for goods on display. While infrastructural changes in the name of development have made the marketplaces less accessible, the regularly changing use of space within the markets makes it even more difficult for disabled people to negotiate. For people with visual impairment, learning and relearning the layout of the shops becomes imperative both for procuring stuff and for finding their way in between the stalls. As Sumit, who usually buys vegetables in New Market on his way home from work says, “I have to keep asking loudly whether

there are any vendors sitting along the lane along which I am walking. Often I cannot make out with my stick also as there are too many obstacles and people get angry when I get stuck with my stick.” Zeeshan, a visually impaired boy, who crosses New Market every day on his way to school, said, “Almost every step I take, I bang into something and get shouted at, if things fall. Just when I think I have learnt the layout of the hawkers’ stalls they change it around for some festival or other and I am lost again.”

Picture 4: Blocked Passageways: Gariahat Market



The broad passageways within New Market and Gariahat with its reasonably even flooring can facilitate ease of access for most categories of disabled users. But in both marketplaces, the wide corridors and pathways are blocked by sacks of produce or goods, mannequins and wares and cardboard boxes either spilling out of the shops or simply propped around. This affects the movement of many people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, unsteady gaits and wheelchairs. The shop owners argue that they save time and money by stocking their wares on the passageways. “I would have to hire larger storage spaces for these goods. When I close the shop, I put them inside and display them outside during the day. I usually pay a fee to ensure that I am not bothered about these things. How many disabled people come into the market? Very few and that too, not with major mobility problems.”

With modernization, both marketplaces have witnessed makeshift arrangements made to facilitate entry of wheeled carts, including wheelchairs. In New Market while the shops on the by-lanes have two or three steps from the main path, in some places half of the steps have been converted into slopes

to facilitate use by wheeled vehicles. Jaya, a woman with locomotor disability feels that these makeshift ramps are narrow and made cater to heavy trolleys of goods, without much thought given to the width, height and quality of the ramps. “Most of these ramps are of steep height, are narrow and have uneven and broken edges. When trolleys with heavy goods go over these, the edges break and become difficult to step on. There are no rails to hold onto, maybe there were not meant for disabled people. When I walk on these ramps, I am scared as my movements are not always controlled and I run the risk of falling off.” Zeeshan added, “Most of the disabled people who use the market are people with blindness and reduced mobility. But many non disabled people also use the ramps, as it is easier to walk straight over these ramps. There are no special measures like side edges to indicate end of road or visual signs indicating the location of shops for blind or deaf users. I have often stumbled on the rough edges of these makeshift ramps.” Seema, a young woman with low vision, also expressed, “I try to use the ramp as it is a smooth transition from the path at one level to another. But as I approach, I often hear trolleys being dragged on it and I have to wait. If I am waiting at the side, I am often shouted at by the potters to move out of the way and to use the steps on the side.”

Picture 5: Ramps and Access: New Market



The flooring of the marketplaces is equally important in facilitating access for disabled people. In both the markets, though there are traditional non slip floors, these are often broken in places and rough with shoddy repair work. “The loose tiles are a problem, only after you step on it, one understands its fragility. I have stumbled many times on those tiles,” says Jaya, a young woman with locomotor disability. Disabled users have also complained about

the poor maintenance of the market spaces, which means that litter from rotten vegetables and fruits to paper and plastic both discarded by the shop owners and shoppers is strewn on the passages and stairs. Ali, a person with locomotor disability, said “The steps of the Hogg Market are usually full of newspapers discarded from inside of the bags sold by the hawkers, along with plastic packets and food wrappers thrown by the shoppers. I have slipped and fallen many times on the steps where piles of paper hide the edges.” Jaya added, “In front of Gariahat market, there is water and packets thrown by the food and adjacent meat shops. This makes it slippery and I have stumbled here on my last visit.” Seema, a person with low vision narrated, “When I came out this way, my pants got wet as I did not see the puddles. Now I deliberately go out the other way, even if that means walking more.” Thus disabled people find it really difficult to use the physical market spaces, with inaccessible infrastructure and unhelpful layout practices. This is further exacerbated by their experience of being a user of the services provided in these market spaces.

While the physical infrastructure has grown increasingly inaccessible with the slow and steady progress of development, thereby reinforcing the ideology of discriminatory spaces and disabled nonusers, the markets have also become less sensitive to disabled users, as expressed by many of the research participants. Sumit pointed out, “many of the shops in New Market now have glass doors. In the name of development, they have ensured that people like me cannot enter these shops after maneuvering heavy glass doors.” Zeeshan added, “when there were no doors, one could ask from outside whether they had a certain thing or not. Now as the doors are closed, for blind people to interact with them is difficult. Moreover, for a new person in the market to figure out where the door is and which way it opens is an overwhelming task sometimes. Not all of us are moving around with escorts. So, we stay out.” The remodelling of the shops inside the market thus creates multiple levels of barriers, primarily through the ideological premise that disabled people have poor consumer value. Deba, a young man in a wheelchair never goes shopping in Gariahat even though he stays very close to this marketplace. He prefers going to New Market, which he feels is more accessible, at least parts of it. “In New Market, at least my wheelchair can go to some of the shops but in Gariahat, with so much traffic and completely inaccessible footpaths I cannot even think of going there.” The shop owners, however, cite the negligent presence of disabled people in the markets and use this reason to justify their taking up space along the footpath. One shop owner said, “For one disabled person who will come once in a month, we cannot change everything around. None of our other customers complain.”

Around the Markets

The spaces around the markets have become and function as extended

market areas, with hawkers and small stall owners co-existing alongside the big shops that exist in and around the markets. Many of these are located on the footpaths adjacent to the markets, where hawkers' stalls and small shop keepers on both sides, with their goods and customers that reduce the space for people to pass through. With the passage of time, these spaces have changed physically and in their social usage, with raising of the height of the footpaths, which used to be low and sloped onto the roads allowing for easy access by all people, including children, elderly people, pregnant women, disabled and ill people. At present, the surfaces of many of the footpaths are potholed and uneven with additional barriers for people to negotiate while stepping and off. At the Gariahat Market crossing, one of the footpaths has raised manhole covers, while on the other side, streetlights and pipes block access from the roads. Deba, a wheelchair user, finds it difficult to move around in these extended market areas. "Getting on and off the footpath is extremely difficult. The ends of the footpaths are blocked, if not by hawkers, by lamp posts and broken edges. So, I am forced to move along the road in my wheelchair. But I must have someone to assist me as the roads are very crowded most of the time. Even if I want to be independent in the city, its infrastructure and its people do not allow me to be so."

The encroachment of hawkers and their ware on the footpaths affect disabled users in other ways also. Jaya, with locomotor disability, pointed to one of the footpaths in New Market (picture given below), and said, "See the green coconuts on the edge of the footpath. The seller is sitting beside it and a rickshaw is parked just beyond. On the other side there is a small stall of fruits. How can I walk on the footpath, if I cannot get on to it?" Joy indicated the edge of the footpath and said, "With my unsteady gait, it is so difficult for me to step on and off such footpaths. In many places they are also so high that sometimes I need to ask other people to hold my hand to step on or off." A hawker, displaying and selling his wares on the footpath near New Market said, "What is the need of these people to come to the market if they cannot deal with the crowd here? They need more space, more time and often must be helped in different ways. In the morning when the crowd is thin it is fine, but it is better if they do not come in the evening. It spoils our trade."

Picture 6: Access to Footpaths: Gariahat (left); New Market (right)

Negotiating the footpaths with the hawkers, small stalls and big shops around Gariahat market makes it difficult for disabled users to attain the status of consumers. Outside Gariahat market, food and other stalls block the access to and from the footpath with large trunks of materials or barrels of water or dustbins.

Jaya, who shops at Gariahat market, says, “It is so difficult to get on or off the footpaths near the market. In some places there are potholes or broken tiles or protruding flagstones, in other places, lamp posts, steel railings and traffic dividers block the road. In other places, the footpath is blocked by bamboo structures of the stalls, and the tables used to display their wares. In the middle there is only a narrow passageway left for people to weave through. I find it particularly difficult as I swing while walking and often either my hands or feet get stuck in the wares laid out for display. Instead of being sorry, the stall owners shout at me, for being clumsy. The stalls also block the entry from the road to the footpath.” Sumit added, “I can never find the entry from the road to the footpath. I keep bumping into bamboos and plastic sheets – in some places there are narrow spaces to sidle in but as I cannot see, I have to walk on the traffic filled road. I am always afraid of being run over.

Picture 7: Access to Footpaths: Gariahat

Conclusion

Disabled people are relegated to marginal spaces within society and one of the primary spaces, as has been illustrated in this paper, are marketplaces. The paper has used two marketplaces as examples of the ableist structuring of space and highlighted the experiences of disabled people in their use of these markets, which tend to push people with different impairments to the periphery of such spaces. The social structural frames with their latent ideological premises that determine the consumer potential of different groups of people also propagate practices that contribute to their further exclusion and strengthen the ideologies. Disabled people are excluded from markets by discourses that negatively correlate the disabled body with physical, social and cultural capital, influenced by aesthetic criteria that dominate judgements about bodies in consumer culture (Hughes, 2000). In case of disabled people, the assumptions of incapacity linked with financial instability represent them as Bauman (1997) says flawed consumers. The experiences of disabled people in marketplaces thus are positioned within a matrix of ideological premises and structured practices that impair their access, limit their participation and build and promote a comprehensive system of exclusion and marginalisation. While the production of exclusionary space rests on the ways in which economically valorised bodies are valued (Harvey, 2000), ideas of 'normal' embodiment exude aversion and nervousness towards disabled people in non-disabled spaces (Chouinard 1999). Both appearance norms and ideas around how bodies should behave in public spaces, along with ideologies of capabilities and resultant purchasing power influence the interactions between disabled people and marketplaces.

Disabled users of marketplaces are faced with barriers at multiple intersecting levels – access to physical spaces and unhindered movement in and around the markets is affected by ideas that discount disabled people as paying consumers and represent them as dependents, which breed inaccessible market spaces and resultant marginalisation of users, leading to greater invisibility and further concretisation of ideas of flawed consumer ideologies. The fallout of such convergent practices is the edging out of disabled people from certain activities and functions within marketplaces, and the resultant absence of disabled people from such spaces is then used to justify the exclusionary practices. Access to market spaces for disabled people remains provisional, which they are allowed to inhabit, utilise and conduct themselves only if they can do so in the manner of a non-disabled person. They are indeed only there 'on approval', and many disabled people feel out of place, being left to explain or even to justify their presence under the most mundane of circumstances. Modernity and development have constricted disabled people's use of market spaces, with apathetic attitudes of the state parties neglecting access concerns, thereby creating barriers to disabled people's right to access to the market spaces and the city itself.

The processes of development theoretically promote universal design, with urban renewal focussing on accessible, safe and inclusive spaces, but largely end up promoting a normalising culture. Urban cities often segregate and marginalise groups with differential access to wealth and power, and sideline them in decision-making processes. Thus disabled people are never consulted when it comes to design of urban public spaces or practices that can include them. While access issues abound throughout the urban spaces, it becomes especially evident in essential services like marketplaces, from where disabled people are being slowly but surely pushed away. Marketplaces are increasingly becoming abilist, privileging normality over difference, legitimizing practices that discriminate and feeding into the ideological framework that deems disabled people as defective or poor consumers. This is, despite the fact that in the last two decades, laws have been brought in to advocate for developing of inclusive physical environments, to provide improved access to public spaces for disabled people. While the Indian state has put in place, planning and building regulations that aim to reduce inaccessible built environments, these regulations are often poorly enforced.

Access to markets is predominantly determined by the state's attitude towards markets and their development, which does not accommodate the disabled consumer within its framework. The non-disabled state authorities, who take decisions about marketplaces and access, remain oblivious to the concerns of disabled people and direct both structure and practice in ways that enhance segregation and exclusion. State mechanisms, markets and disabled people themselves have a concept of citizenship which, in accordance of their lowly and marginal status in the labour market, and a welfare system that provides minimal support, consigns them to the realm of defective consumers. The responsibility for inclusion therefore rests primarily on the idea of voluntarism – the disabled consumer deciding to use or not certain marketplaces, and the markets choosing to accommodate disabled people, but only on their own terms. Thus the urban city of Kolkata, instead of celebrating social heterogeneity, highlights the access, exclusion and segregation, in the comprehensive system of social oppression, through a wider framework of social structures, values and ideologies that seek to marginalize certain groups of people and particular categories of bodies.

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RECEIVED: 05TH JAN 2023

REVISED: 02ND JAN 2024

ACCEPTED: 18TH JAN 2024



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