**Spivak and Rethinking Agency of Disabled Children**

**| (c) Prayathna Kowitz, Independent Researcher**

**Plain English Summary**

**Source:**

**1. Introduction**

The paper ‘Spivak and Rethinking the Agency of Disabled Children’ attempts to fill a knowledge gap. The gap is about the rights of disabled children in the so-called developing world with regards to their right to express their opinion. The gap exists, because people do not look at disability in Postcolonial studies. Human rights treaties pay a lot of attention the right for children to hear their opinion. But nobody looks at the fact that not all childhoods are created equal. Article 12 of the U. N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (‘UNCRC’) says that all children can express their opinion. This paper shows that the experience of disability and the right to express the opinions depends on the place where you live. But the UNCRC only pays attention to a particular type of childhood*.* It does not pay attention to the influence of race, disability, the construction of disability, and social justice, on disabled children in poorer countries.

**2. Summary of the research approach**

This paper uses a non-empirical approach, meaning that reflection and personal observation were used to acquire knowledge. I have studied the text 'Can the Subaltern Speak?’ written by Prof. Gayatri C. Spivak. Then I tried to find out whether the U. N. Convention of the Rights of the Child is suitable for all disabled children across the world. Prof. Spivak is well known as a post-colonial author. She explains the impact of human control on people in the so-called developing world and the former colonies, for example in countries like India. This paper relies heavily on Prof. Spivak’s theory. I also happen to be a disabled woman from India. So this work is heavily influenced also by personal experience and reflection about what it was like to live as a disabled child in India. My readings and writings are influenced by these experiences.

**3. Summary of the main points in the paper**

In the Global South (mostly countries outside Europe and America), disabled children do not experience disability in the same way as children in ‘rich countries’ (Global North). They experience discrimination and oppression due to various reasons. This can be due to their gender, caste, and their perceived position in society, as well as disability. How disabled people are treated varies across the world, and it depends on many factors such as the culture of the country, the religion and the way the country cares for and treats disabled persons. The main point of this paper is that disabled children in countries of the Global South cannot express their opinion like children in richer countries. Because children experience many ways of discrimination and oppression, they are not able to exercise their right to expressing their opinion. The paper says that disabled childhoods in the Global South need to be understood better. This is one limitation of Article 12 of the UNCRC. One must pay attention to this when discussing human rights of disabled children.

**4. Summary of the main implications**

People fail to consider the cultural and social realities of disabled children in the Global South. This makes the children vulnerable to many different types of oppression and discrimination. The children cannot get access to their human rights. This paper pays attention to this. It argues that Disability studies is ‘Eurocentric’, which means it focuses heavily on the view of Europeans and people from rich Western countries. Prof. Spivak talks about the subaltern. By studying scholars such a Prof. Spivak, who write about the concept of the subaltern (any group that has been constantly oppressed in history), we can understand the different ways in which oppression and discrimination affects disabled children in the Global South.

This can affect their access to *all* their rights, including the right to express their opinion. Gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, caste, disability cannot be excluded from human rights talk and treaties. So we must ask ourselves, in the context of the framing and implementation of agency, in the UNCRC: whose agency does it represent? For disabled children in the Global South, this means that agency is not a blanket, equal right all have access to.

**5. More information**

This paper shows that the field disability studies needs to also consider the voices, narratives, and realities of disabled people from the so-called developing world so that ‘more information’ can actually emerge. This is a challenge that Spivak steers us towards, to support and engage with the ‘subaltern’ for agency to emerge. This paper was written as a semester paper (M. A. Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights) at the University of Applied Sciences, Potsdam, Germany.

Contact: [prayathna@gmail.com](mailto:prayathna@gmail.com)