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In the 1980s and 1990s disabled scholars in the West began to develop a radical critique of biomedical conceptions of disability that focused exclusively on the individual body and its limitations. They also exposed the failure of the social sciences to critically address what this medical understanding of disability meant, and what it excluded from consideration. Out of their work emerged what is generally called the 'social model' of disability. Over the past twenty years this perspective has generated a substantial literature, much of it making use of the methods of qualitative social research. Narratives and life histories produced by disabled people themselves have a central place in the Disability Studies literature. This work has major implications for professionals in the rehabilitation field, for the social sciences, and the ultimate goal for the full integration of disabled people into society. However almost all of it focuses on the traditions, practices and dilemmas of northern countries.

In India, in Thailand, and in most of Asia, the field of disability continues to be dominated by the biomedical model. Thus, "disability" is understood as an incurable chronic illness and, increasingly, an object for medical diagnosis and investigation. Despite many positive developments, little convergence between disability politics and practice on the one hand, and sociology and anthropology on the other has taken place. Surveying the international literature on disability and rehabilitation, it becomes apparent that many studies carried out in Asian countries are designed to measure the extent of (unmet) need or the impact of services or attitudes to disabled people. Virtually no studies make use of the innovative, usually qualitative and often holistic approaches developed in Western countries over the past twenty years.

This book introduces readers in Asian countries to the recent disability literature of the West. The editors hope that it will inspire new thinking among social scientists, rehabilitation professionals and organisations of disabled people themselves that could further the empowerment of people with disabilities.



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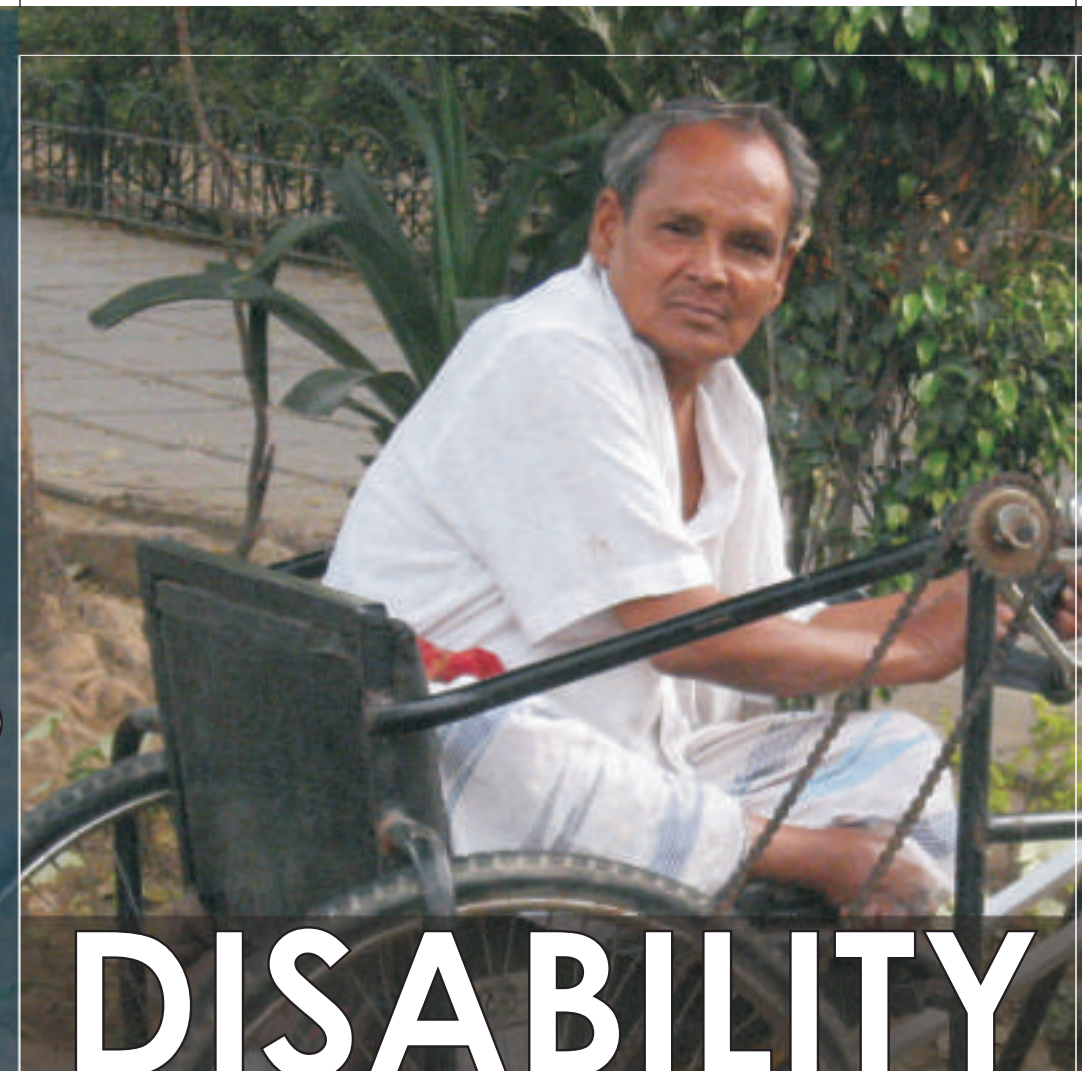


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AND
DISABILITY
AND
SOCIETY



Orient BlackSwan



DISABILITY AND SOCIETY

A READER

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Cover image: A person with Hausen's Disease on a hand-cranked tricycle