RENISON ONLINE INITIATIVE

TITLE: "PARKS FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED"

Parks are the biggest source of recreation for kids, but this has not been true for differently abled children in India. Children with different disabilities were not taken into account until the 1971 census. Eight types of disabilities were later included in the 2011 census (2.04 million people on total). In earlier days, these children were denied of opportunities pertaining to health, education, etc. But today, due to advancements in technology and development of the nation, such kids are given special education. Few notable special schools in Madurai are

a. Anbagam Special School (Since 1970)
b. Bethshan Special School (Since 1996)
c. Shine Special School (Since 2003)
d. Neyam Special School (Since 2009)

Usually, play is an important component of socialization for all kids, and for children with disabilities, play and other physical activity has always been an unfulfilled dream. To fulfil this dream, parents of these kids have gathered into an organization called MADURAI GROUP OF LIVING FOUNDATION (MGLF) and proposed an idea of setting up special parks for these children.

The then-commissioner supported this idea and sanctioned 50% of the funds, and for the remaining, the MGLF had taken loans. The main objective of this park is to provide a different environment for children with special needs and to initiate interaction between normal kids and special children. Usually children with special needs are sent to special schools where they remain restricted in small rooms. Thus, to help them to play freely in an open environment, these parks are set up.

To eliminate discrimination, events are organized every month in which normal children are allowed to interact and play with these children, so that any form of segregation can be avoided. Thus, these parks also stand up as platforms for the parents of those children to interact and to gain a sense of hope and help (in the form of support groups).

The play equipments are also designed in such a way that the children feel safe and comfortable. For instance, the swing and the merry-go-round has wider seats for protection and the stairs are wider and broader, for the children to climb up at their own pace. Apart from the space for play, the other major concern is the lack of caretakers for these children. This may be due to low pay being given to caretakers. So, the MGLF is also planning to propose an idea of increment in the salary of the caretakers to the Madurai Corporation.

On the whole, there are seven other special parks in India. For instance, Bangalore has three such parks, followed by Nagpur, Mangalore and Mumbai having one park each. This is a much needed development in India. Thus, it should not only be the concern of the parents or teachers of these kids, but every individual should contribute as much as possible for the development and well-being of the nation in this aspect.

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