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THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS IN NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN SRI LANKA

Abstract. Due to highly limited opportunities for higher education, gaining access to universities becomes paramount in the identity construction of students with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Opportunities for involving in artistic events are seen by them as occasions that bring them to limelight. Based on interview and case study data, the article demonstrates how body politics surrounding an aesthetic event contributes to fluid identities among these students. It concludes that while such an event could be a temporary catharsis for them, it also caters to justify their disability status, hampering the positive impact aesthetics could have on their self-identity formation.

Keywords: higher education, equal opportunities, identity, disability, aesthetics, taste, catharsis

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Introduction

Disability enters into sociological discourse first as a social problem which goes beyond 'normalcy' with an emphasis on 'treatment' and then as a 'difference', viewing disability as a social construction. The shift from the medical model to the social model of understanding disability is viewed as being influenced by the theoretical shifts in the field of sociology along with a number of significant conceptualizations, from Parsonian structural-functionalist perspective to interactionist, phenomenological and post-structuralist perspectives, and later by the strong influences made by the disability movement itself. The concept of body as an embodied reflexive self (Giddens, 1991) or as a socially and politically regulated, governed or disciplined entity (Foucault, 1981) has become a central theme in the current discourse on disability (Zola, 1982; White, 1995).

The present study was undertaken with the broader objective of understanding the process of embodiment of disability during the socialization and of how the embodied experience would impact the self-identity and

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self-actualization among the young people with disabilities. The locus of research was the higher education sector in Sri Lanka where young students with disabilities seem to be gaining new opportunities for higher education. The study endeavoured to identify (1) whether the enhanced social and physical space has effectively contributed to improve their social inclusion and create a space free of stigmatization and seclusion, supporting them to overcome the social restraints produced by perceived inability and otherness; (2) whether the new space has enlightened the students with disabilities, empowering them to explore their own lived experiences of the process of embodiment of disability and identity formation. The paper focuses on one aspect of the broader study: the politics of inclusion and identity negotiation in the process of aesthetic involvement of non-aesthetic university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

Higher education and identity formation

Gaining entry into higher education is viewed as a major factor which shifts the social space of individuals facilitating upward social mobility irrespective of having or not having a disability. The process the students with disabilities pass through to enter the university, including home, school, and other diverse physical environmental localities however, would be a 'reflexive process' [as used by Giddens (1991: 75)] which constructs varying identities for them from acceptance to rejection, inclusion to exclusion and care to negligence, creating shifting contexts of socially constructed selfhoods (Ewing, 1997). The university therefore, can be seen as a specific physical, social and cultural 'locality' in which the students with disabilities would be distinctly situated together with a multitude of aspirations they build at the time they enter the university. Thus the university would have an inimitable effect on the subjectivities and identities of disability and on the transformation of those subjectivities by enhancing and appreciating the capabilities (as used by Sen, 2000) based on its locality specific contingencies. In a non-aesthetic university, apart from establishing high academic competencies, demonstration of leadership, political activism, sportsmanship and artistic talents are added measures in the effort to "appear in public without shame" (Smith, 2008). Opportunities for participation in rare occasions available for artistic performances become precious moments for them that would thrust them to the level of recognition and appreciation, adding to their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, the subjectivities of experience they receive in these events within the context of 'otherness' (as used by Said, 1994) would produce 'shifting identities of self", moving them between locatability and non-locatability (Bataglia, 1999), contributing to an identity of individual and collective disability, compelling them to identify

themselves by their individual disabilities, simultaneously, assuming membership in a 'we' group in which disability becomes the prime source of their collectivity.

In the trajectory of life, each locality often provides students with disabilities with contradictory cues, ranging from almost "infantilizing" care (Scheidegger et al., 2010: 292) to debilitating negligence, to situations that totally deny their ability to become political subjects, constantly compelling them to negotiate their self-identity between these moments and locations reflexively. Getting admission to a university, overcoming physical, social and psychological barriers and many contradictions and paradoxes resulting from their disability is a reality beyond conception for many, which produces mixed feelings of joy and fear in them. Such feelings of uncertainty, Giddens (1991: 75) says, would lead individuals to become reflexive upon the experiences they receive at the new locality which would be part of the trajectory of development of self, making them what they are (Giddens, 1991: 75-76). The students are perpetually dealing with their status of 'liminality' (Reid-Cunningham, 2009) that accompany the shifting localities of disabled bodies, the image of 'inability' constructed on the basis of 'bio-power' (Foucault, 1981), and with the consequences of subjugation of 'disabled bodies' by the "architectural apartheid" (Friedner & Osborne, 2013) physical environment. Students with disabilities get removed from the mainstream identity marked by capabilities to a realm of inability, creating "shifting and multiple identities" (Ewing, 2005) among them, leading to an embodiment of disability. They become "outsiders" [according to Becker's definition of the term (Becker, 1983)] within the university community who exhibit an 'undesired differentness' from social expectations, becoming stigmatized (Goffman, 1963).

Methodology

It is in the above context that the paper focuses on how an annual concert organized exclusively for the students with disabilities in a faculty of one of the universities in Sri Lanka is seen by them and shared with the rest of the university community, and on whether it contributes to reach the goals envisaged by this involvement. The main research question which this paper attempts to address is whether the involvement of students with disabilities in aesthetic activities within the university supports the process of self-actualization, and changes their identity from one of segregation to one of inclusion. It further explores whether this involvement provides them with a feeling of accomplishment and an opportunity to gain an aesthetic experience of 'high taste' as anticipated at the university level, as a subjective or a shared experience.

This particular locality was selected for the study due to the significant presence of the students with disabilities in the locality and the on-going discourse prevailed there regarding the disability issue. The study was being carried out for three years between January 2011 and January 2014. The annual intake of students with disabilities of the faculty ranged from 9 to 15. After obtaining the basic admission data for 2011–12, 5 students with diverse disabilities were purposively selected with their consent for interviews. Since some students did not agree with the idea of being formally interviewed, data were gathered during informal personal meetings. The task was repeated in the following 2 years, producing 13 interview reports and 5 case studies. During the 3 years many discussions on the theme were held with students without disabilities who consented to being interviewed. The data were thematically organized and analysed.

The main problem encountered during the study was the view held by the students that their disabilities have been ‘used’ in research without causing any positive impact on their lives. They also feared that the information provided would cause them more disadvantages. To a certain extent both problems were resolved through the rapport built between the interlocutors during the study. The author wishes to maintain complete anonymity of the study locality and the participants in order to prevent any impact of the views expressed in the paper on the participants.

Universities as a locality producing aesthetic experience

Cultural revival which was an essential part of the independence movement in Sri Lanka led to the emergence of rhetoric of ‘high taste’, emphasizing the need for recuperating aesthetic taste which has been contaminated by the foreign influences, a process in which the then University of Ceylon played an important role. The productions based on the Sanskrit notions of taste incorporated into local traditions were capable of deriving a delicate synthesis between “academic capital” and the knowledge and practices which Bourdieu (1984: 18) classifies as “remote from academic education”, making a significant influence on the concept of taste which legitimized the aesthetic judgment of traditional arts as a component of “high-art aesthetic” [in Bourdieu’s (1984: 41) terms]. The ‘educated class’ which comprised of both rural and urban upper, middle and lower class individuals was at the time obviously not a passive adherent of upper class standards led by the desire to be accepted to the status group but was actively taking part in the project of making, feeling and appreciating “high-art aesthetic”. Neither did they “ignore the high-art aesthetic” as an art form “which denounces their own aesthetic” (Bourdieu, 1984: 41) because it did not denounce but supported and embraced their own aesthetic. Similarly, acceptance of ‘high art

aesthetics' produced within the intellectual circles by the educated masses did not result in abandoning those aesthetic trends by the upper classes as in the case of 'fashion' in the West as deliberated by Simmel (1957). Although the trend faded away in less than a couple of decades, a particular 'idealism' of 'high taste' continue to linger in the universities replacing the subjective experience with a taste based on "conscience collective".

As mentioned earlier, opportunities available for the students with disabilities to participate in any activity outside regular courses is extremely rare despite the numerous skills and talents they possess and exhibit when opportunity is given. University's architectural environment created for the 'normative bodies' combined with the non-receptive attitudes of the university community has a serious impact on their mobility and social, cultural and political involvement. These limited opportunities were appreciated by students on the view that it is better than not having any opportunity. Involving in the annual musical event had provided them with some level of confidence which they could not receive from regular studies. Once a year they had an opportunity to come to limelight while voicing themselves in an unconventional manner. Such unconventionality however, was not disruptive to the university community, but was accepted, admired and embraced. Batt-Rawden & DeNora (2005: 291) writes,

Music may also 'get into' the body, serving as a prosthetic device that modifies and extends body capacity – /for example, it may make us stronger, give us more endurance, enhance our coordination skills. So, aligned with and entrained by the physical patterns of music profiles, bodies not only feel empowered, they may be empowered in the sense of gaining a capacity.

Such empowerment via music was understood and anticipated by the students with disabilities, although with a concern of the problematic surrounding the event. 'Musicking' was not considered by them as a panacea for all their problems they faced during their studies at the university, neither did it provide, at least for some of them, a utopian facade that shrouded their difficulties, but oriented them towards "constructive, expressive, transformative, social ends" (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005: 291), providing them with new meanings in their daily lives.

Musicking and meaning making

The event was organized and taken part by students with disabilities together with the non-disabled students and was led by the student union. Compering and dance performances are usually shared by both groups and

singing is entirely done by students with disabilities. Outside help is often received for music and choreography.

The selection of music and dance items for the concert was fashioned by several factors which consciously or unconsciously influenced them. The expectation of the university community of “quality and good taste” had a significant effect on the decision. Neela stated, “My friends told me that I should select a ‘good’ song, which I can sing well. As this is a university event I cannot sing any cheap song”. The university community’s wish to continue the intellectual rhetoric of taste emerged in the country decades earlier echoed in such views. Despite the fact that no university in the recent decades has made any substantial contribution to performing arts, or “creation of taste”, these views could be seen as an effort to preserve the image of the institution in the face of country’s lament on disappearing ‘aesthetic quality’ as validated by the following quote.

With the extraordinary and haphazard expansion of the media since mid nineties, standards have reached rock bottom and music (the song) has fragmented both in style and quality to “pathetic” levels. The media (and commercial CDs) is replete with melody-less mediocre substandard songs sung by amateur, untrained, unknown “artists” with highly questionable musical credentials. (Anandappa, 2006)

In this context, the students with disabilities by the power of their aesthetic ability engage in an attempt to contribute to uphold the university’s image in the aesthetic scene both by will and by demand, in an event which brings them to the forefront representing the image of the institution. The ‘otherness’ seems to disappear when the ‘other’ becomes central to the community identity.

Memories, aspirations and negations also played an important reflexive role in the choice of items for the event. Neela further added, “For the concert I sang a song which my mother liked very much. It is because of her I am here today”. They did not want the songs to have anything to do with the blindness. Their grievances were ‘translated’ as Struhkamp (2005) writes, into music, not as an expression of pain or passive embodiment of disability but on the opposite, as an effort to assert their capabilities. The choice of music for them was a “reorientation of consciousness” (Denora, 2003: 63), a representation of their aspirations, an expression of the “human sentiments” they possess despite their disability and their wish to negate those negative experiences caused due to the bio-social constructions of disability. Music represented a denunciation of the social construction of disability and was an expression of the part of their identity devoid of the social construction; how they see who they are and whom they want the society to see in them. DeNora (2003: 132) writes,

Often, we find ourselves falling into emotional and embodied modes that 'fit' with settings and without any conscious effort. One might be tempted to posit a human capacity for co-operation – co-operation not only with other humans but also with the action implications of ambience... The propensity for co-operation is part of our social skill, part of what enables us to collaborate and act in concert so as to achieve collective endeavours.

The event provided them with the space to reflexively utilize this human capacity for co-operation to realize the unspoken need for inclusion, in an attempt to modify their capacity within the distinct space constructed by this particular cultural material which was music.

The goals of participation in the event at different levels, in organization or performance, and the experiences received provided diverse meanings for the students with disabilities. Both goals and experiences had aesthetic and non-aesthetic meanings for them. Pleasure, enjoyment, taste, recognition, appreciation, inclusion, improved capabilities, and also enrichment of the résumé were mentioned. Non-disabled students who joined in presenting the event and in dance performances were often those students known among the university community for those particular skills. Regardless of their active engagement in activities or passive participation merely as the audience, the reasons given by the non-disabled students for their participation were to help the students with disabilities while enjoying the taste (rasa vindana). Occasionally, students mentioned their willingness to provide “the little support they need to stand on their feet”, to “empower them” etc. Many considered the occasion as a ‘quality’ event and praised the opportunity to enjoy some “good taste”.

De (Re)constructing ability/disability dualism

The whole discourse on students with disabilities, whether sympathy or empathy, prevailed upon an “us vs them divide” based on the “ability and disability”. Following are some remarks by the she could dance so well without being able to see where she even is”; “They are very good, but what a sin without being able to see”; “They were very well dressed and looked happy, very different from normal days”; “Good that they have this day. Otherwise we wouldn’t even know that they have got so many talents”; “All the songs they had selected are good songs”. The ideas reflected a simultaneous attempt to separate and amalgamate ability and disability, a wish and a reluctance to deviate from the normative standards set for disability. Only one student expressed her displeasure on this separate event stating, “I can understand if it is a sports event where physical abilities matter. I don’t

know why we don't organize common events for all". The intellectualities of the university seemingly had not been adequately catering to change the conservative conceptions of disability and bridge the gap between the 'binary oppositions' (as used by Durkhiem, 2008) constructed by the society to demarcate boundaries for the purpose of identifying the 'other'. As Bauman (1991) posits, dichotomies seem necessary to separate the abnormalities (disabilities in this case) from the norm (normative body) in order to maintain the social order, which is accomplished by 'stigmatizing' the 'outsider' (Goffman, 1963). The individual (with disabilities) is detached from his/her aesthetic abilities, ability is admired while the disability is ignored, sympathized with or condemned; only the 'taste' remains connected and disconnected to its author while becoming a shared property. The event organized with the objective of opening up a space for the students with disabilities while promoting their talents, becomes a ground for intensifying the 'difference' by better knowing the 'other', identifying 'their' talents and supporting 'them' to appear in public and entertain public commendation.

Towards disembodiment of disability

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The views of the students with disabilities indicated their desire to see the event as an opportunity for participation, organization and joint decision making, as opening space for capability development, shifting their reflexive self-identity from disability towards ability. Such recognition, although marginal, mattered in improving their self-confidence and "channelling their emotions" (DeNora, 2003: 93). Weighing admiration against rejection, satisfaction against frustration, and pleasure against despair, identities could be negotiated towards a feeling of self-actualization, shifting those identities from one moment of the locality to another. As Neela stated, "It was the first time at the university that I felt some contentment since I left home. The university always reminded me of my disability. The event made me regain my confidence and I can leave the bad memories behind". The event was a 'gratification' for them in Kantian terms (Bourdieu, 1984: 41) and a distinct catharsis for many of the participants, making them feel 'better' at least for the time being. It was a social opportunity that turned out to be a "cultural good" (Slater, 2008: 153) which is a symbol of 'normality' or the 'class of the able bodied' and privileged, as opposed to the 'class of the disabled bodied' and underprivileged. As soon as the disability crosses the boundaries of 'restricted consumption', it reaches a domain possessed by the privileged social classes, the ability to enjoy leisure and social opportunities.

Appearing in front of an audience, applauses, cheers, positive comments and admiration, all lead to a high exhilaration overcoming the negative emotions of segregation, exclusion, and the self-identity of disability, creating

a sense “of ‘belonging’ via music” (DeNora, 2003: 80). From the point of view of the students with disabilities, this collective consciousness reached through sharing of music is a symbol of acceptance within the group identity where “music is used to ‘set the mood’” (DeNora, 2003: 80). The impact of the event as Kokotsaki & Hallam (2011: 154–157) illustrates was social, musical as well as personal, ranging from the ‘fun of it’ and meeting and making music with like-minded people, to find an outlet for relaxation and escape from diverse difficulties they encounter in university life. Apart from the fun, the event served an important practical purpose, at least for some, and for the time being; the catharsis, or outlet of pains and difficulties of the everyday university life. In the vocabulary of social praxis however, it was merely a pleasure producing event. It basically was a ‘talent show’ which provided ‘space’ for students with disabilities to showcase their talents. Neither the students with disabilities nor the university community comprehended the event on the basis of its potentials. Hoekheimer & Adorno (2002: 25) posit, “As long as art does not insist on being treated as knowledge, and thus excludes itself from praxis, it is tolerated by social praxis in the same way as pleasure”. Such a circumstance precludes the prospects of critically evaluating the outcomes, bringing in required changes to maximize the benefits of the event for the betterment of the students with disabilities.

‘Support’ given by non-disabled students was highly appreciated and was viewed as a ‘binding’ experience. The same ‘bond’ however, was not expressed by the non-disabled students for whom it was a duty, a responsibility, a ‘meritorious deed’ or a pleasurable activity while the audience saw it as a work of, ‘extraordinary’ (Strauss, 2011), ‘outsiders’ (Goffman, 1963), “them” who is the ‘other of us’ (Bauman, 1991); a delighting experience which stays outside the ‘collective’. Bauman (1991: 14) writes,

Dichotomy is an exercise of power and at the same time its disguise. Though no dichotomy would hold without the power to set apart and cast aside, it creates an illusion of symmetry. The sham symmetry of results conceals the asymmetry of power that is its cause. Dichotomy represents its members as equal and interchangeable. Yet its very existence testifies to the essence of differentiating power. It is the power-assisted differentiation that makes the difference. It is said that only the difference between units of the opposition, not the units themselves, is meaningful. Thus meaningfulness, it seems, is gestated in the practices of power capable of making difference – of separating and keeping apart.

Politics of negotiation of self-Identity

The effects of the event on self-identity varied mainly on two interdependent factors; the repeated experiences and the social class. Sisira who was an experienced participant articulated, "It gives us an opportunity we never get and it is a quality event. But every one talks to you for some time, admires you and then we fall back to the same position of 'disabled students'. He also expressed the fear that not having this event could mean having no opportunity for many of them who were coming from a lower social class background. Thushari said, "After my performance last year I felt my life changed. When I heard the song on the radio again, I kind of got into a soothing tranquillity. In a couple of months however, no one knew me anymore. Now I don't even like to hear that song as I feel sad". DeNora (2003: 62) says that music could be deployed "to direct consciousness back to past times and experiences", the song (or music) becoming a "workspace" for meaning making, or a "production of knowledge - about self and other" (DeNora, 2003: 63). For Thushari, meaning making takes an entirely negative form, developing resentment towards a particular piece of music. The placebo effect it produces in the first experience, encounter the truth of unchanged dichotomies prevailing in the locality leaving a bitter memory of the whole aesthetic experience.

Social opportunities become 'cultural goods' consumed by higher status groups. When applied to the ability/disability hierarchy, they become symbols of 'normality' enjoyed by the class of ability, or privileged as opposed to the class of disability or underprivileged. When an individual with disability is capable of surmounting the boundaries of 'restricted consumption' (Slater, 2008: 153; Veblen, 1994), s/he becomes exposed to diverse locales which give him/her the 'ability' to enjoy leisure and social opportunities. The event was a temporary opening of this social cultural space for the students with disabilities. Aziz was coming from an upper social class that had given him many social opportunities which many of his friends with disabilities (except for a few in similar social class situations) could not obtain. Although he supported the event as it was the only such opportunity they receive within the university due to financial restrictions the faculty faces, he saw the maintenance of ability/disability dualism in the activities as a relegation of students with disabilities into a 'class marked by disability'. The answers he saw in a locality where the 'disabled class' based on the 'normative body ideal' disappears and abilities become equally accepted and included in faculty activities, further helping to resolve financial issues that limit such activities.

The event organizers had a secondary motive behind the event which was to collect funds for some charity work. The need to be accepted in equal

terms in the university, freeing themselves from the feeling of dependency, to be helpful to some 'needy' groups thus transferring the perceived 'helplessness' to another and feel 'normal,' all could be seen as parts of the process of identity negotiation. The event becomes a tool of 'status competition' which is emulated (Slater, 2008: 156), {'aping' in Veblen's terms (Veblen, 1994)} by those students with disabilities who are not socially and economically privileged in order to be included and accepted within the boundaries of 'normalcy'.

This subconscious need to become a part of the 'we' group within the university, simultaneously having a separate identity, is a moment in 'shifting identities' which is a "part of the trajectory of development of self" (Giddens, 1991) moving between binary oppositions of ability and disability. Exploiting aesthetic abilities to achieve this rather emotional and functional need to be included and separated, shifting from 'receiving end' to 'giving end' create a new context within the same locality where these students become detached from their artistic talents. The objective of music making turns into one of money making at least among the leading activists; 'rasa' or taste become side-lined together with the rest of 'them' in sync with their talents. The 'other' becomes further divided in view of the new provisional power, which possibly would be limited to the duration of the agenda. The event shifts from its aesthetic and political goals to those shaped by notions of entertainment and economic interests. Thushari was rather critical on the commodification of abilities as it could compromise quality. She claimed that she decided to join the event at the last minute without proper practice, merely because a friend persuaded her to support the fund raise. Such "disenchantment" or "alienation" from a work of art would run the risk of distorting both the intended and unintended outcomes of the event by denigrating the embodied aesthetic experience to the level of mere 'amusement'. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 116) write, "Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its roots is powerlessness. It is indeed an escape, but not as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality." Students with disabilities get located in a new space in which they can call out loud and express themselves. If that expression would be an embodied artistic representation, or liberation from the sheer feeling of negation remains a matter of individual perception. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002: 116) posit, "Amusement, free of all restraint, would be not only the opposite of art but its complementary extreme". Under such circumstances, the event could lose its lofty goals in its entirety by shifting the "rationality" of music making (Weber, 1958); the students with disabilities could be relegated together with their artistic abilities to become mere entertainers or amusers, not being able to produce an embodied and shared

aesthetic experience with a lasting impact facing further disempowerment distancing them from reality rather than resisting it.

The impact of the event in the reflexive identity negotiation of the students with disabilities could be seen along two positions which are intertwined within the same locality. It is an opening of space for many depending on their social class. Once a year, the event provides an opportunity for them to come to prominence within the university community, exhibit their talents, achieve both subjective and shared aesthetic experience, all of which revert back in a matter of weeks relocating the students with disabilities in “their” place within the dichotomy. As Dumont (1980) suggests, ritualistic practices become instrumental in maintaining the hierarchical social order in highly unequal and hierarchical societies. Those who are in the lower rungs of the hierarchy are brought to attention during these rituals, masking their derogatory experiences, creating a new encounter which they could reminisce till the next ritualistic event (Dumont, 1980). Such ritualistic practices often lead to contentment and subsequent de-politicization of the ‘oppressed’.

The creation of ‘symbols’, Durkheim (2008) says is the basis of forming the collective. The significance of symbols for Durkheim does not lie in its appearance but in its representation which attests that they belong to the same group identity. Language, religion, architecture, food, dress and art forms including music and dance become strong symbols of identity for any group of people. For Durkheim, the functional necessity for the creation of religion, or more particularly ‘Totemism’ is to create symbols of identity for ‘them’ while demarcating the boundaries from the ‘other’. The purpose of a symbol is “not to evoke a particular object, but to bear witness that a certain number of individuals share the same moral life” (Durkheim, 2008: 177). In Sri Lanka, ‘traditional forms of art’ continue to be one significant symbol of maintaining identity, where these cultural forms of expression are shared by people irrespective of their ability or disability, not only by performing, but also by participating as spectators. The distinction would exist between the talented performers who are responsible of producing ‘taste’ and the masses which lack such talents, who still would be vital in many other aspects of shared aesthetic life of the community. In such a context, ability and disability do not become distinct in the cultural realm, but in the economic or the social realm where production and survival matter. In the universities where individual student is, at least ideologically, valued on the basis of intellectual ability, physical disabilities matter less; new symbolic representations are created in distinguishing students with disabilities from their able bodied counterparts, thus perpetuating the binary oppositions despite universities’ claim to be centres of knowledge production.

Conclusion

Entering a higher educational institution is a highly challenging experience for the students with disabilities due to numerous social, spatial and cultural impediments they encounter during their trajectory of life. The aspirations they build prior to entering the university are highly challenged by the diverse social and spatial circumstances prevailing in universities. The above discussion was focused on one particular musical event in the university, endeavouring to see if the highly commended performance by the students with disabilities in this event brought about the anticipated goals of negotiating and altering the embodied identity of disability while producing a feeling of accomplishment.

The identification of the 'disabled body' as the 'other' which causes stigma, segregation and devaluation during their exhaustive path to the higher education continues to haunt in different forms regardless of it being benevolence, approbation or assistance; never reaching total inclusion in the fullest sense of the term. The university becomes an ambiguous and contingent locality within which the students with disabilities negotiate their self-identity between numerous paradoxes it creates; ability/ inability, admiration/ denigration, acceptance/ non-acceptance. Organizing and taking part in an aesthetic event in this context is envisaged by them as a gateway to reach some specific objectives, to become passive recipients to active participants by way of employing their diverse artistic abilities in making of 'taste' as per the expectations of the university community and the society as a whole.

However, the decision of organizing an exclusive aesthetic event for the students with disabilities is one that reinforces the already prevailing paradox of inclusion/exclusion within the university. The sharing of the whole aesthetic experience with the non-disabled students becomes a catharsis that relieves their tensions they are hoarding over time providing them with a sense of belongingness only until they gain the realization of the cessation of the placebo effect of the event and 'falling back' to the same old dichotomous social relations based on their disabled body and the negating space. In this context, the aesthetic experience complements the already existing multiple paradoxes compelling them to negotiate their self-identity between these paradoxical ends constructing shifting and ambiguous identities within a contingent locality. The 'otherness' they attempt to overcome within themselves and in the community by organizing and participating in an aesthetic event, reaching the high standards drawn by the societal and community expectations gets reinforced through their own 'rational' measures and by the inability of the university community to convert a shared aesthetic experience to a shared social experience.

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