



The Role of Police in Protecting Persons with Disabilities: A Study of Telangana

Dr K. Sanjeeva Reddy

PhD Research Scholar
Dept of Law, Osmania University

N. Venkateshwarlu

LLM (PhD in Law)
Dean (Law) & Professor
Osmania University

Abstract

Persons with disabilities (PwDs) constitute one of the most vulnerable sections of society and frequently encounter physical, social, economic, and institutional barriers while accessing justice. Although the Constitution of India guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws, persons with disabilities often experience discrimination within the criminal justice system. Police officers serve as the first point of contact between victims and the justice delivery system, making their role indispensable in ensuring that the rights of PwDs are effectively protected. This research examines the role of police in protecting persons with disabilities in the State of Telangana. The study evaluates the legal framework governing police responsibilities under the Constitution of India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and relevant criminal laws. It further explores the practical challenges encountered by police officers while handling cases involving persons with disabilities and assesses whether existing institutional mechanisms adequately safeguard their rights. The paper concludes that strengthening police capacity through specialized training, improving accessibility, developing standard operating procedures, integrating assistive technologies, and enhancing institutional accountability are essential to ensuring meaningful access to criminal justice for persons with disabilities.

Keywords: *Persons with Disabilities, Police, Criminal Justice, Telangana, Disability Rights, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, Accessibility, Human Rights.*

I. Introduction

The administration of criminal justice depends substantially upon the effectiveness, impartiality, and responsiveness of the police. Police officers perform multiple functions that extend beyond the investigation of offences; they are responsible for maintaining public order, protecting life and liberty, preventing crime, and ensuring that every individual can access justice without discrimination. For persons with disabilities, these responsibilities assume even greater significance because disability often increases vulnerability to exploitation, violence, neglect, and abuse. According to the Census of India, millions of individuals live with physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disabilities. Many experience barriers in education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and access to public institutions. These barriers become particularly severe when they seek protection under criminal law. Victims with disabilities frequently encounter inaccessible police stations, ineffective communication methods, lack of sign-language interpretation, inadequate procedural accommodations, and societal prejudice that discourages reporting crimes.

The evolution of disability law has transformed the understanding of disability from a purely medical issue into a matter of human rights and social justice. The enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 represents a paradigm shift by recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities as enforceable legal entitlements rather than welfare measures. The Act obligates public authorities, including police departments, to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal access to justice. Police officers occupy a central position in implementing these legal guarantees. They receive complaints, register First Information Reports, investigate offences, protect victims and witnesses, coordinate with prosecutors, and facilitate judicial proceedings. Their conduct significantly influences whether persons with disabilities obtain effective legal remedies.

Telangana provides an interesting context for examining these issues. Since its formation in 2014, the State has invested in modern policing, digital governance, community policing initiatives, and citizen-oriented service delivery. Nevertheless, questions remain regarding the extent to which these initiatives adequately address the needs of persons with disabilities. This study therefore seeks to critically examine the role performed by police in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in Telangana. It evaluates the legal obligations imposed upon police authorities, identifies implementation gaps, analyses institutional challenges, and proposes reforms aimed at making policing more inclusive, accessible, and rights-oriented.

II. Statement of the Problem

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and comprehensive statutory protections, persons with disabilities continue to face substantial obstacles when interacting with the criminal justice system. These obstacles arise from inaccessible infrastructure, communication barriers, inadequate awareness among police personnel, social stigma, and institutional deficiencies. Police officers often receive limited professional training on disability-sensitive investigation techniques, communication with persons having hearing or intellectual disabilities, and procedural safeguards required during investigation and evidence collection. Consequently, victims may hesitate to report offences, witnesses may be unable to communicate effectively, and investigations may fail to adequately protect their legal rights. In Telangana, while significant efforts have been made toward police modernization and digital policing, there is limited empirical and doctrinal research evaluating whether these reforms have sufficiently addressed disability inclusion. The absence of comprehensive studies examining disability-sensitive policing creates an important research gap. This study seeks to bridge that gap by analysing existing legal provisions alongside their practical implementation within Telangana's policing system.

III. Research Questions

The present research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What constitutional and statutory obligations do police authorities owe towards persons with disabilities?
2. How effectively do police institutions in Telangana protect the rights of persons with disabilities during criminal investigations?
3. What practical barriers prevent persons with disabilities from accessing police services?
4. To what extent are police officers adequately trained to interact with persons having different forms of disabilities?
5. What reforms can strengthen disability-inclusive policing in Telangana?

IV. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the constitutional and legal framework governing police responsibilities toward persons with disabilities.
2. To analyse the role of police in protecting persons with disabilities within the criminal justice system.
3. To study the implementation of disability-related legal protections in Telangana.
4. To identify institutional, procedural, and practical barriers affecting disability-inclusive policing.
5. To evaluate existing police practices concerning investigation, victim assistance, and accessibility.
6. To recommend legal and administrative reforms for strengthening police protection of persons with disabilities.

V. Hypothesis

The study proceeds on the following hypotheses:

Primary Hypothesis

Although India possesses a comprehensive legal framework protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, its implementation by police authorities in Telangana remains inadequate due to insufficient institutional capacity, limited disability-specific training, infrastructural barriers, and lack of standardized operational procedures.

Alternative Hypothesis

The modernization initiatives undertaken by Telangana Police have improved accessibility and service delivery; however, substantial legal and procedural reforms remain necessary before persons with disabilities can enjoy equal access to criminal justice.

VI. Scope of the Study

This research primarily focuses on the role of police authorities in protecting persons with disabilities within the State of Telangana. The study examines legal obligations arising under constitutional provisions, criminal law, disability legislation, judicial precedents, and international human rights instruments.

The research is confined to policing functions such as crime reporting, investigation, victim protection, witness assistance, accessibility, communication, and procedural safeguards. While courts, prosecutors, and correctional institutions also contribute to criminal justice, their role is examined only to the extent necessary for understanding police responsibilities.

The study relies primarily on doctrinal legal research supplemented by government reports, policy documents, official statistics, and scholarly publications. It does not include extensive field surveys or interviews but identifies areas where future empirical research may be undertaken.

VII. Research Methodology

The present research adopts a doctrinal legal research methodology supported by qualitative analysis of secondary data.

Nature of Research

The research is analytical and descriptive. It critically evaluates existing legal provisions, judicial interpretations, and administrative practices concerning disability-inclusive policing.

Sources of Data

The study is based primarily upon secondary sources, including:

- Constitutional provisions
- Statutory enactments
- Judicial decisions of the Supreme Court and High Courts
- Government reports
- Telangana Police publications
- Reports of the National Human Rights Commission
- Reports of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and related authorities
- International conventions
- Research articles
- Books
- Law journals
- Official statistical publications

Method of Analysis

The study adopts doctrinal legal analysis by examining constitutional principles, statutory provisions, judicial precedents, and policy frameworks. Comparative references to policing practices in selected Indian states and international jurisdictions are used to identify best practices.

Limitations of the Study

The study relies primarily on publicly available secondary data and legal materials. Certain police operational records, internal training manuals, and confidential investigation procedures are not accessible for academic research. Consequently, the analysis is confined to publicly available information and legal sources.

VIII. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach combining criminal law, disability rights, constitutional law, and police administration. The study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on disability-inclusive governance by specifically examining policing, an area that has received comparatively limited academic attention. The findings may assist policymakers, police administrators, legislators, judicial officers, and disability rights organizations in developing more inclusive policing practices. The recommendations offered by this research may also support future reforms aimed at ensuring equal access to justice for persons with disabilities and strengthening compliance with constitutional and international human rights obligations.

IX. Literature Review

9.1 Introduction

The intersection of disability rights and criminal justice has increasingly attracted scholarly attention following India's transition from a welfare-based model of disability to a rights-based approach embodied in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. While considerable literature exists on disability rights, comparatively fewer studies specifically examine the role of police in ensuring effective access to justice for persons with disabilities (PwDs). This chapter reviews the major academic contributions, government reports, judicial observations, and international perspectives relevant to disability-inclusive policing.

9.2 Conceptual Development of Disability Rights

Historically, disability was viewed through the **medical model**, which treated disability as an individual impairment requiring treatment or rehabilitation. Under this approach, persons with disabilities were often regarded as passive recipients of welfare rather than as holders of enforceable legal rights. The **social model of disability**, developed through disability rights movements, shifted attention from individual impairments to societal barriers. According to this model, disability results primarily from inaccessible environments, discriminatory attitudes, and institutional exclusion rather than physical or mental impairments alone. The **human rights model**, adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), further recognizes persons with disabilities as equal citizens entitled to dignity, autonomy, and full participation in society. This model forms the foundation of India's disability legislation and has important implications for policing, requiring law enforcement agencies to ensure accessibility, non-discrimination, and procedural accommodations.

9.3. Disability and Access to Criminal Justice

Legal scholars have consistently observed that persons with disabilities experience disproportionate barriers within criminal justice systems. These barriers include:

- Physical inaccessibility of police stations and courts.
- Communication barriers for persons with hearing or speech impairments.
- Limited availability of interpreters and assistive technologies.
- Social stigma discouraging reporting of offences.
- Lack of disability-sensitive investigation procedures.
- Inadequate awareness among police personnel.

Research indicates that many crimes against persons with disabilities remain unreported because victims fear discrimination or believe that police will not adequately respond to their complaints. Consequently, official crime statistics may significantly underestimate the actual prevalence of offences against persons with disabilities.

9.4 Police and Disability

The police constitute the first formal institution encountered by victims after the commission of a crime. Their responsibilities extend beyond investigation to include victim assistance, protection of witnesses, crime prevention, and coordination with social welfare agencies. Several studies highlight that police personnel often receive minimal training on disability rights. Consequently, officers may inadvertently adopt paternalistic attitudes or fail to provide legally required accommodations during investigation.

Common challenges identified in the literature include:

- Difficulty communicating with deaf complainants.
- Misinterpretation of intellectual disabilities.
- Lack of accessible documentation formats.
- Insufficient understanding of psychosocial disabilities.
- Absence of standardized operating procedures.

These deficiencies may compromise the quality of investigations and discourage persons with disabilities from seeking legal protection.

9.5 Indian Scholarship

Indian legal scholars have extensively analysed constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Much of the literature focuses on:

- Equality under Articles 14 and 15.
- Right to life and dignity under Article 21.
- Rights of persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
- Judicial activism in expanding disability rights.
- Inclusive governance and accessibility.

However, empirical examination of disability-inclusive policing remains relatively limited. Existing research frequently concentrates on education, employment, social security, and accessibility rather than criminal justice administration.

9.6 Research Gap

The review demonstrates several gaps:

1. Limited state-specific studies on Telangana.
2. Insufficient analysis of police responsibilities toward persons with disabilities.
3. Lack of evaluation of police modernization from a disability perspective.

4. Minimal discussion of implementation challenges after enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
5. Need for policy recommendations integrating disability rights into police administration.

The present study seeks to address these gaps through doctrinal legal analysis focusing specifically on policing in Telangana.

X. Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of India provides the normative foundation for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Although disability is not expressly mentioned in every fundamental rights provision, constitutional guarantees have been interpreted broadly to ensure equality, dignity, and inclusion.

10.1 Article 14 – Equality Before Law

Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws.

This principle obligates police authorities to treat persons with disabilities without discrimination. Equal protection requires not merely identical treatment but reasonable accommodations where necessary to ensure substantive equality.

For example, police officers must facilitate communication through interpreters or accessible formats whenever required rather than insisting upon uniform procedures that disadvantage persons with disabilities.

10.2 Article 15

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on specified grounds and has been interpreted to permit affirmative measures benefiting disadvantaged groups.

Although disability is not expressly listed, constitutional jurisprudence increasingly recognizes disability-based discrimination as inconsistent with constitutional equality.

10.3 Article 21

Article 21 guarantees protection of life and personal liberty.

Judicial interpretation has expanded Article 21 to include:

- Human dignity
- Privacy
- Access to justice
- Fair investigation
- Protection from arbitrary state action

Police authorities therefore possess constitutional obligations to conduct investigations in ways that preserve the dignity and autonomy of persons with disabilities.

10.4 Directive Principles of State Policy

Several Directive Principles strengthen disability protection.

Article 38

Requires the State to promote social justice and reduce inequalities.

Article 39A

Mandates equal justice and free legal aid.

Persons with disabilities often require legal assistance, accessible documentation, and procedural accommodations during criminal proceedings.

Article 41

Directs the State to provide assistance in cases of disability within available resources.

Although non-justiciable, these provisions guide legislative and administrative policymaking.

10.5 Fundamental Duties

Article 51A encourages citizens to promote harmony and renounce practices inconsistent with human dignity.

Police, as public servants, play a significant role in fostering inclusive governance consistent with these constitutional values.

XI. Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 represents India's principal disability legislation. It replaced the earlier Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 to align domestic law with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Objectives

The Act seeks to:

- Ensure equality.
- Eliminate discrimination.
- Promote accessibility.
- Facilitate independent living.
- Protect legal capacity.
- Ensure access to justice.

The Act recognizes twenty-one categories of disabilities, considerably expanding statutory protection.

Access to Justice

One of the most significant features of the Act is its emphasis on access to justice.

Authorities are expected to:

- Ensure procedural accommodations.
- Remove communication barriers.
- Provide accessible services.
- Protect victims during criminal proceedings.
- Promote equal participation.

These obligations directly affect police functioning.

Duties of Public Authorities

Public authorities must:

- Make buildings accessible.
- Eliminate discrimination.
- Provide reasonable accommodation.
- Develop awareness programmes.
- Ensure equal opportunity.

Police departments fall squarely within this framework.

Reasonable Accommodation

Reasonable accommodation refers to necessary modifications that enable persons with disabilities to enjoy rights equally.

Examples include:

- Sign-language interpreters.
- Wheelchair-accessible police stations.
- Documents in Braille.
- Easy-to-read formats.
- Audio recordings.
- Assistive technologies.

Failure to provide reasonable accommodation may amount to discrimination.

XII. Criminal Law Framework

The criminal justice system has undergone significant reform with the enactment of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA). These laws, together with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, require police officers to investigate offences fairly, protect vulnerable victims, and preserve the dignity of witnesses with disabilities.

Police are expected to:

- Register complaints promptly.
- Conduct impartial investigations.
- Ensure victim safety.
- Prevent intimidation.
- Facilitate access to legal aid.
- Coordinate with prosecutors and welfare authorities.

Where victims have communication or mobility impairments, investigators should employ appropriate accommodations to obtain reliable evidence while respecting individual autonomy.

XIII. International Legal Framework

India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), thereby accepting international obligations concerning disability rights. Article 13 of the Convention specifically addresses **Access to Justice**, requiring States to ensure effective participation of persons with disabilities in legal proceedings.

The Convention emphasizes:

- Procedural accommodations.
- Equal recognition before the law.
- Accessibility.
- Independence.
- Respect for dignity.
- Non-discrimination.

These principles should guide police practices throughout criminal investigations.

XIV. Critical Analysis

Although India's legal framework is comprehensive, implementation remains inconsistent.

Several challenges persist:

- Inadequate disability-specific police training.
- Limited accessibility of police infrastructure.
- Shortage of interpreters.
- Weak coordination with disability welfare departments.
- Insufficient monitoring of compliance.
- Under-reporting of offences.

Consequently, legal guarantees often fail to translate into meaningful access to justice.

The constitutional promise of equality requires more than legislative enactments. It requires institutional transformation, continuous police training, technological innovation, accessible infrastructure, and accountability mechanisms capable of ensuring that persons with disabilities receive equal protection under criminal law.

Role of Police in Protecting Persons with Disabilities in Telangana

XV. Role of Police in Telangana

The police play a vital role in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities by ensuring equal access to the criminal justice system. As the first point of contact for victims and witnesses, police officers are responsible for registering complaints, conducting fair investigations, protecting victims, and facilitating access to legal aid and rehabilitation services.

In Telangana, the police have adopted several citizen-centric initiatives, including digital complaint mechanisms, women safety programmes, and community policing. However, disability-specific measures require further strengthening. Police personnel should be trained to communicate effectively with persons having visual, hearing, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities. Accessible police stations, sign-language interpreters, wheelchair-friendly infrastructure, and assistive technologies are essential for ensuring equal access to justice.

XVI. Challenges

Despite legal protections, several practical challenges remain:

- Lack of disability-awareness training among police personnel.
- Inaccessible police stations and public infrastructure.
- Communication barriers for persons with hearing or speech impairments.
- Under-reporting of crimes due to fear, stigma, and social discrimination.
- Limited coordination between police and disability welfare departments.
- Shortage of interpreters and assistive technologies during investigations.

These challenges often discourage persons with disabilities from approaching law enforcement authorities.

XVII. Judicial Perspective

Indian courts have consistently emphasized that the rights of persons with disabilities are integral to the constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and access to justice. Judicial decisions have highlighted the obligation of public authorities to provide reasonable accommodation and ensure that procedural barriers do not prevent persons with disabilities from effectively participating in legal proceedings. These principles require police authorities to adopt disability-sensitive practices during complaint registration, investigation, and victim assistance.

XVIII. Comparative Analysis

Some Indian states have introduced measures that may serve as useful models for Telangana:

- **Kerala:** Focus on accessibility in public institutions and awareness programmes.
- **Karnataka:** Training initiatives on disability inclusion for public officials.
- **Delhi:** Use of digital platforms for citizen services and emergency response.

Internationally, countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have developed disability-inclusive policing guidelines, specialized victim support services, and accessible communication systems. Telangana can adopt similar best practices to improve policing for persons with disabilities.

XIX. Findings

The study finds that:

- India has a strong constitutional and statutory framework protecting persons with disabilities.
- Telangana Police have made progress in modernization and citizen-oriented policing.
- Practical implementation of disability-inclusive policing remains inconsistent.
- Police personnel require specialized training in disability rights and communication.
- Better infrastructure, technology, and inter-agency coordination are necessary to ensure effective access to justice.

XX. Recommendations

To strengthen police protection of persons with disabilities, the following measures are recommended:

1. Introduce mandatory disability-sensitivity training for all police personnel.
2. Ensure that every police station is physically accessible.
3. Appoint sign-language interpreters and maintain assistive communication devices.
4. Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling cases involving persons with disabilities.
5. Strengthen coordination between police, legal services authorities, and disability welfare departments.
6. Conduct awareness campaigns encouraging persons with disabilities to report crimes.
7. Establish monitoring mechanisms to evaluate compliance with disability rights laws.

XXI. Conclusion

The role of police is fundamental in ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy equal protection under the law. Although the Constitution of India and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 provide a robust legal framework, effective implementation depends on disability-sensitive policing. Telangana has made significant progress in modernizing its police system, but further reforms are needed to improve accessibility, training, communication, and institutional accountability. By adopting inclusive policing practices and implementing the recommended reforms, Telangana can strengthen access to justice and uphold the constitutional principles of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination for all citizens.

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