



# **Deaf Culture, History, Identity and Sign Language**

**Paper Code: DISLI T2**

**Hours: 90**

**Marks: 50**

**Coordinated by Dr. Madan Vasishta**

**REHABILITATION COUNCIL OF INDIA**

(Statutory Body of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment)

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) Government of  
India

B-22, Qutab Institutional Area

New Delhi – 110 016

[www.rehabcouncil.nic.in](http://www.rehabcouncil.nic.in)

## **DEAF CULTURE, HISTORY, IDENTITY AND SIGN LANGUAGE**

**Paper Code: DISLI T2**

**Marks: 50**

**Total Hours: 90**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

**After undergoing this course, the learners will be able to:**

- Discuss deafness from a cultural perspective
- Describe historical developments with regard to deafness and D/deaf people
- Discuss identity related issues of D/deaf people
- Explain the components of sign language, significance and role in education
- Discuss legal issues related to deafness, language and culture

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# **UNIT 1**

## **HISTORY OF DEAFNESS**

**Total Hours: 14 hours**

### **Learning Outcomes**

**After completing this topic, the learners will be able to:**

- Explain treatment of deaf people before the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- List reasons for lack of education provided to deaf people
- Compare services provided to deaf people in various periods of pre-19<sup>th</sup> century India

#### **1.1 D/deaf people and education before the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

#### **1.2 Modern D/deaf history—19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century**

#### **1.3 Recent historic development in the deaf community**

#### **1.4 Historical comparison and perception of D/deaf communities– India and other countries**

### **1.1 Deaf people and education before the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

#### **Introduction**

This subunit covers the period pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Since education, in ancient India, was more of a privilege than a right, deaf people were subjected to discrimination and no educational opportunities were offered to them.

There is only one mention of deafness during the Vedic age. There is one reference in the *Rig Veda* (ca 1500 BC) about deafness and another in the *Atharva Veda*: Deafness was looked down as a sickness or something undesirable (Anon, Dissertation 2015). The idea of education or rehabilitation of disabled people with this kind of attitude is unthinkable.

Manu, the originator of the caste system, did not think that persons with disabilities had any rights, including education. The old Hindu belief that disabilities were the result of sins committed in the earlier incarnation resulted in their neglect. Manu did not consider deaf people to be any better than animals. Manu's Law dictated that the "eunuchs, blind or deaf, the insane, women and those deficient in any organ" receive no share in property (Dennis 2005).

Interestingly, deaf people were included in the upanayana (coming of age) ceremony. Special procedures were used. The deaf person remained silent while the priest recited the Vedic hymns (Miles 2000). However, no formal education was followed after the ceremony.

There is no mention of deafness in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. However, we know that Dhritrashtra was blind and was not allowed to inherit the kingdom despite being the elder of the two sons of the king Bharata (Dennis, 2005).

It is sad that India with its rich civilization and focus on education, science and other developments, has neglected educating its disabled children. The belief has been that disabled people should be given food and clothes and shelters or otherwise, just looked after. Education was the privilege of the elite. Manus had excluded even women, including the mothers, sisters or daughters of the scholars, from receiving any education. Disabled people, including the deaf, were way down the totem pole of the hierarchy of privileges (Miles 2000).

### **Gupta Period to Middle Ages**

Persons with disabilities, including the deaf did not fare any better during the Gupta period (320 AD to 550 AD) known as the Golden Age in Indian history. During their rule, education, literature, music and other arts thrived. The Gupta kings established several universities in Varanasi, Nasik and Kanchi. However, there is no mention about education of or support for disabled population. After the Guptas, the emphasis on education was reduced. The ongoing invasions from the north kept the people occupied.

The Mogul Emperor Akbar was very interested in education. Akbar's goal was to raise the intellectual levels of the citizens and also to bring Hindus and Muslims closer to each other by learning about both religions. There was no mention of education of disabled children. It is obvious; the earlier belief that disabled persons should be taken care of by their families prevailed.

On the whole, this apparent neglect of disabled children's education or training was evident throughout the history and until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. One might wonder how many talented disabled children, including deaf, never had an opportunity to rise in the society along with their "normal" peers.

### **Summary**

The attitude toward deaf people has been very negative in India due to the karmic belief that deafness is the result of sins committed in the past birth. Therefore, little or no efforts were made before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even during the Gupta period, the golden age in Indian history and during the Mogul period, no formal efforts were made to educate deaf people.

### **Suggested readings**

Included in Reference Section.

## References

- The Mahabharata, translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. Aswamedha Parva, section XXXVI. Accessed online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/mbh/mbhI4/mI4036.htm>
- Miles, M. (1998). Goitre, cretinism & iodine in South Asia: Historical perspectives on a continuing scourge. *Medical History* 42: 47-67.
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## 1.2 Modern D/deaf history—19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century

### Learning Outcomes

**After completing this topic, the learners will be able to:**

- Explain the developments in deaf education after 1885
- List reasons for the beginning of formal education in India
- Be able to list at least ten schools for the deaf in India starting between 1885 and 1947
- List of various laws and policies that helped spread deaf education
- Compare various educational systems provided to deaf children

### Modern deaf history—19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century

Christian missionaries from Europe had started work in India around the same time as Vasco De Gama's arrival on the Kerala coast (1498). Their main goal was spread of Christianity. However, they knew that the religion couldn't be taught without education. In the beginning, the missionaries had focused on education of the general public. They started to include minorities such as women and lower-caste Hindus. Services for disabled children, including the deaf, were also started gradually. Their schools, in addition to 3 R's education, also provided training for getting employment (Manokaran 2009).

The British colonial government did not get involved in education until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Indian Education Commission in 1882 published a report. The focus of this detailed report was education of general public. No mention of or interest was shown in education of disabled children.

It is possible that sporadic efforts were made by well-meaning people and parents of deaf children to educate them, but these efforts must have been minor and short-lived. These did not make any impact on education of deaf children, hence there is no mention of them in any documents related to education.

### **Beginning of Deaf Education in India**

The history of education of deaf children in the modern era has distinct four eras (Bose 1982). Her article was written in 1982 and the following division of history of deaf education will be more logical:

1. 1880-1900—Pioneering Period
2. 1901-1947—Growth and Development Period
3. 1947-1990—Post Independence Period
4. 1991-Present—Maturity Period

**1. The Pioneering Period (1880 to 1900)** - The genesis of deaf education in India began with the establishment of the first three schools for the deaf. The British government's Report of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 might have influenced the overall picture of education in India. The government did not actually start schools for the disabled, but it did provide support in the form of grants (Miles 2000).

The first school for deaf children – Bombay Institute for the Deaf Mutes (BIDM) – was established in 1882 by efforts led by Reverend Dr. Leo Meurin, Vicar Apostolic of Bombay.

The Calcutta School for the Deaf and Dumb (CSDD) was started by Mr. Girindra Nath Bhowse, father of four deaf children in 1893. He hired Mr. J. N. Banerji as a teacher. Mr. Banerji also started the first teacher training program in Asia. .

The third school was started in 1895 in Palayamkottai in Tamil Nadu by Miss Florence Swainson, a missionary with the Zanana Missionary Society of England.

**2. The Growth and Development Period—1900-1947**—After a lull of more than a dozen years, a number of schools opened in various parts of India. Some of these schools are listed in the table below.

<b><u>School</u></b>	<b><u>Establishment Year</u></b>	<b><u>Founder</u></b>
School for the Deaf Mutes, Ahmedabad	1908	P. L. Desai
MukVidyalya, Baroda	1909	Baroda State
Deaf and Dumb School Barisal, Bengal	1911	H. N. Mukherji
C.S.I School for the Deaf, Madras	1912	CSI
School for the Deaf and the Blind, Mehsana, Baroda	1913	Baroda State
The CEZ M. School for the Deaf and Dumb,	1913	Miss Swainson

Mylapore, Madras		
Bhonsla Deaf and Dumb School, Nagpur	1915	V.V. Gadge
Dacca Deaf and Dumb School, Dacca	1916	S.C. Ghosh
Sri Meenakshi Deaf and Dumb School, Madurai, Madras	1920	Mr and Mrs.SwaminathPillai
Municipal Deaf and Dumb School, Bangalore	1921	Municipality
Chittagong Deaf & Dumb School, Chittagong	1923	R. C. Hazari and BholanathGhattak
N. G. Gondhalekar's Deaf & Dumb School, Puna	1924	N. G. Gondhalekar
Deaf and Dumb School, Sholapur	1924	
Mymenshingh Deaf and Dumb School, Bengal	1925	H. N. Mukherji
Little Flower Convent School, Madras	1926	CSI
U.P. Deaf and Dumb School, Allahabad	1929	Sukhdeo Misra
The Deaf & Dumb school, Thambupuram, Madras Presidency	1930	Miss S. Gnanaratnammel
Deaf and Dumb School at Nanguneri, Tamil Nadu	1930	
Municipal Deaf and Dumb School, Coimbatore	1931	
Rajshahi Deaf and Dumb School, Rajshahi, Bengal	1931	B.C. Maitra and BhulanathGhatak
Lady Noyce Deaf and Dumb School, Delhi	1934	K. D. Bhattacharjee
Murshidabad Deaf and Dumb School, Berhampore, Bengal	1931	K. D. Bhattacharjee and Gopladas Neogi Chowdhury
Bombay Deaf and Dumb School, Kakadwadi		
The Central Institute for the Defectives, Mysore		Mysore State
Prof Date's school for the Deaf-Mutes, Bombay		Prof. Date



This period saw the opening of a large number of schools for the deaf. The Convention of Teachers of the Deaf was started in 1935 and a professional journal focusing on deaf education—the *Deaf in India* also began its publication around 1949. Many strong leaders in deaf education worked hard for improving quality of education by focusing on curriculum development and providing pre- and in-service training for teachers. The Convention during its third meeting also requested all state and municipal authorities to make education of deaf children between the ages of 6 and 16 compulsory.

According to the 1931 census, there were 230,895 deaf people in India (Bhattacharya 1939). At that time, there were about 25 schools serving only 882 children. Thus, less than 1.5% of school age children were in schools for the deaf.

The Word War II disrupted the whole country and schools for the deaf were also affected. Several schools were closed temporarily or moved to other cities as the government took their facilities for war-related activities.

**3.The Post-Independence Period (1948 to 1990)**—Education of deaf took deeper roots as the government of the newly-independent India began to show interest in education, including special education. There was also some uncertainty in formulating plans and implementing them. The war had stopped a lot of work in education and the new government formed after independence was evaluating everything, including education. This might have led to the uncertainty.

The population of India after independence was 350 million. Extrapolating the prevailing incidence of deafness, there would have been about 240,000 school age deaf children at that time. Of these only 1% were in schools for the deaf. The government had a huge task at hand.

In the All India Educational Conference held in 1950, there was a section to discuss education of children with disabilities. One of the many resolutions passed in the conference again asked the government to make the education of the deaf compulsory, free and provide medical services and hearing aids. This was a bold demand and still has not been fulfilled after 50 years despite various legislations and government initiatives.

The government established the National Advisory Council for the Education of the Handicapped (NACEOH) in 1955. Among the Council's major recommendation were the establishment of a model school, a technical training college, a comprehensive audiological centre and employment exchange for deaf people.

The Kothari Commission (1964--1966) played an important role in changing the attitude about educating the Disabled from "humanitarian to utilitarian."

The All India Institute of Speech and Hearing (AIISH) was established in 1965 in Mysore. It provided high quality clinical services and training in speech pathology,

audiology and special education. AIISH has been playing a major role in education since its establishment.

The Integrated Education of Disabled Children Scheme was started by the Ministry of Welfare in 1974 to integrate disabled children in regular classrooms by providing “financial support for books, school uniforms, transportation, special equipment and aids.”

Education of children who were deaf or hard of hearing in India took a major turn in 1981 when India participated in the International Year of the Disabled. Many new laws were introduced and new initiatives passed.

#### **4. Maturity Period (1991 to Present)**

The passage of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) in 1992 helped improve the quality and quantity of training of teachers and other professionals. The RCI established committees of experts in each disability area, including deafness, and had them “adapt all available curricula into one uniform master curriculum. Universities and colleges providing training programs adapted that curriculum to fit their own system (AsmitaHuddar, email message to Author, May 27, 2017).

The enactment of the Persons with Disability Act (PWD) in 1995 brought the education of disabled children to the forefront. However, according to a UNESCO report, about 5% of deaf children in India were in schools (Brill 1985).

The Persons with Disability Act of 1995 (PWD) is considered one of the most important pieces of legislation. It was based on the Americans with the Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The PWD emphasized the importance of “free and appropriate education” (FAPE) for students with disabilities.

The government pushed for compulsory education for all children and emphasized inclusive education for children with disabilities. It established the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) plan. The SSA’s goal was to provide quality education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 by 2010. This age was raised to 18 later. In 2010, the Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed. It also supported compulsory education for all children, including those with disabilities. Due to lack of appropriate training to general education teachers and support services for disabled children, these efforts were not very successful.

It is felt by professionals in the field that the SSA should have been started as a pilot project in a few districts and spread around the country after fixing various flaws. The main problem is that a resource person with training in only one disability is expected to provide support in all disabilities. The copious paperwork required for the services provided used up more time than was spent providing actual services (Saraswathi Narayanaswamy, Email message to the author, June 14, 2017).

The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) was established in 2011 at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to conduct research on ISL,

provide ISL classes for the public and professionals and train interpreters. However, it was closed after two years due to various implementation problems. It was reopened as an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) in New Delhi in 2015.

The RPWD act was passed in 2016. The Act removed most of the weaknesses in the 1995 PWD Act. This Act is much more comprehensive than the PWD of 1995. The number of disabilities covered increased from seven to twenty-one. It has included some debilitating diseases such as sickle cell anemia in the list of disabilities to be served. It has separated blindness and low-vision; however, it has put deaf and hard of hearing under one category—hearing impairment. A separate category for speech and language disability was also added. All in all, the RPWD has taken care of some of the strong criticisms levied at PWD Act 1995. The RPWD also allows use of sign language and interpreters in classrooms and other settings. This will impact education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

**Major Deaf Organizations**—History of deafness and deaf education cannot be completed without including information about organizations of deaf people. They play important role in social, political, educational and general lives of deaf people. A list of major organizations is given in Unit 5.

### **Summative Comments**

The education of children with hearing loss has come a long way since the first school for the deaf was established in 1885 in Mumbai. Two other schools were established within the next decade and formal education of children with deafness in India was on its way.

India currently has about 800 to 900 schools depending on the criteria. Some schools are too small or they go defunct after a few years. Government and private schools for hearing students also admit students with hearing loss. No exact count is available about them. We can assume that more deaf children than before are attending school.

Compared to western nations and even to some developing countries, India is significantly behind in providing education—qualitatively and quantitatively—to its young citizens with hearing loss. We cannot say with confidence that 10% of deaf children are in schools of any type. We cannot even say that 5% of deaf children get a high school education. The miniscule number of students with severe to profound deafness who go to college could be less than a quarter of one percent. It is difficult to talk about employment figures for deaf people, as employment depends on education and vocational training.

The government schools for the deaf have been neglected for the last 20 or more years. This is due to the emphasis on integrated education and later on full inclusion. The state governments that are responsible for these schools do not provide the necessary funding as their priority is meeting the mandates of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right

to Education mandates. Both of these do not support placement segregated school despite the fact that required support system for deaf children is not available in most of the schools where deaf children are placed.

### **Summary**

Formal education of deaf children in India started in 1885. At present there are about 800 schools. Most schools follow oral philosophy, but use sign language and gestures as well. Many new laws and policies were passed to spread deaf education and emphasize inclusion. Despite proliferation of schools, only 5% of deaf children do get some formal education.

### **References**

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*Note: Most of the historical information here is based on Madan Vasishta's book on history of deaf education to be published in 2019.*

## **1.3 Recent historic development in the D/deaf community**

### **Learning Outcomes**

**After completing this topic, the learners will be able to:**

- List at least five new developments in deaf education since 1947
- Explain how Indian Sign Language spread in schools

- Provide history of establishment of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre.
- List educational program options available for deaf children

## **Introduction**

A lot of new developments took place during the last part of 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chief among these are spread of Indian Sign Language, technology and new laws and policies

## **Indian Sign language**

Historically, the use of sign language in deaf education has been discouraged in India since the inception of formal education of DHH children. All teacher training programs focused on the oral method of education as most of the principals were trained in the training college in London and the Clarke School in the US, both strictly oral programs. Additionally, parental pressure also played an important role in keeping almost all the schools oral. J.N. Banerji and S. N. Banerji were trained in Gallaudet and mentioned about using “simultaneous method” that Gallaudet University supported. However, they did not use signs in their school. The actual existence of a sign language used by millions of deaf people was also denied. However, with few exceptions, children in all schools for the deaf have used and still do use sign language (Miles 2000).

In 1928, A. Banerji published an article comparing three sign languages used in West Bengal. This was the first time a research article on Indian signs was mentioned in a research format. No other formal research work on sign language in India was done until 1977 when MadanVasishta, Dr. James C. Woodward and Dr. Kirk Wilson from Gallaudet University in the United States started the initial research. They collected sign language data from four large cities. Their analysis showed that there was a common sign language with regional variations. They called it Indian Sign Language (ISL). The first dictionary of ISL was published in 1981 (Vasishta et al 1981). Limited editions of the three other dictionaries with focus on Kolkata, Mumbai and Bangalore varieties of ISL were published at Gallaudet and distributed to researchers and schools (Vasishta et al. 1987) in 1996.

Dr. Ulrike Zeshan, a German linguist, analysed the grammar of Indo-Pakistani Sign Language for her Master’s thesis. Later, in 2000, she analyzed Indian Sign Language for various grammatical components in her doctoral dissertation. This early research covered topics in phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse, and established ISL's level of linguistic complexity on a par with any other signed or spoken language.

In 2001, Miles compiled the details of historical development of sign languages and deaf education in South Asia region. His annotated bibliography has a lot of information about disabilities-related issues in South Asia.

Until 2001, no formal classes for teaching ISL were conducted in India. Dr.Nagaraja, then acting director of Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Hearing Handicapped (AYJNIHH), Mumbai, took the bold step of establishing ISL cell. It started a course – Diploma in Sign Language Interpreter Course. The curriculum designed for the course aims to develop professional communicative competence in Sign language and ability to interpret professionally. It also focused on the basic understanding of Deaf community and Deaf culture. Later, the course was offered in the regional centres in Hyderabad, Bhuvaneshwar, Kolkata and Delhi. Dr.Zeshan and Sibaji Panda developed the three-level Indian Sign Language course between 2001 and 2006. These have been in use for almost two decades.

The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in collaboration with Christian Blind Mission (CBM) International released the first Indian Sign Language dictionary in the year 2001. The dictionary documented over 2500 signs from 42 cities in 12 states all over India.

In 2009, IGNOU in collaboration with University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) started B.A. in Applied Sign Language Studies (BAASLS) for the Deaf students. The course was the first of its kind in India for Deaf students. For the first time, the Deaf students in India were able to access university education through the medium of sign language.

#### **Establishment of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC)**

The National Association of the Deaf under the leadership of Arun Rao, father of a deaf child, led a decade-long campaign requesting the government to establish a formal organization that supports research in ISL and provides interpreter training. These requests were initially denied as the powerful oral lobby had a strong influence. India's ratifying of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was of great help. The NAD leadership used this as a linchpin and intensified its demand. After several marches and demonstrations, the government finally relented and the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre was established in 2011 at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) under a Memo of Understanding. Due to a change in IGNOU's leadership, the MOU was not followed up and the government took ISLRTC back. It was established as an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2015.

The goals of ISLRTC are to develop resources and encourage research on ISL, develop bilingual education materials and methodologies, train interpreters and ISL teachers and be a clearinghouse for providing information on ISL to the general public and professionals. It published a 3000-word dictionary both on line and in print format in 2018. However, due to the lack of leadership, the ISLRTC has not yet met the expectations of the Deaf community. After three years of its establishment, it does not have a director. The officials in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment who have no background in ISL or deafness or linguistics are managing it. The position of the

director was advertised several times and some people were interviewed and rejected as unqualified.

### **Deaf culture**

India celebrates the International Week for the Deaf in September, and September 26 is recognized as the "Day of the Deaf" in India. India has several deaf organizations at the national, state, and regional levels. Deaf women in India have their own organizations. There is the Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women, and the Madras Foundation of Deaf Women.

### **Technology**

Since deaf people are visual learners, they miss out a lot of what is aired on the television and radio. The United States had passed several laws in 1980, 1990 and 2010 to make TV and general videos accessible to deaf people. These laws allow deaf people to benefit in the following ways:

**Captioning**— The captioning of commercial entertainment and educational films began in the United States during the late 1950's. Later, it spread to other countries. In 1973, a new technology called Closed Captioning (CC) was introduced. This made appearance of captions on the screen optional with the help of a caption decoding machine. In the United States, by law, all television news and entertainment programs are required to be closed-captioned. The RPWD mandates availability of captioning for DHH people and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been working on this since early 2017. Provision of either closed or open captioning is required by law in most countries. It is hoped that this mandate will be followed soon. Research studies show that closed-captioned TV programs have been used for teaching reading to D/HH children with positive results (Koskinen 1986).

**Remote video interpreting** is another option when no interpreter is available in the area. An interpreter in another city or even another country can be attached to the classroom via the Internet and students can see the interpreter on the TV screen and vice versa. The student can follow the teacher's lecture and can also ask questions and receive responses in real time.

**Interactive Whiteboards** such as Smart Board and Active Board can also be used for teaching. A standard white board is combined with a computer for interactive learning. These boards work with touch or stylus input. It is just like writing with a marker on a whiteboard.

**Tablet PCs**—Just like Whiteboards, Tablet PCs enhance student interaction with instructional material. These small tablets are very versatile due to their size and portability. They also receive input via touch and/or stylus. They are cheaper alternatives to laptops and get more powerful each year as new capabilities are added.

**Web-based Learning**—The World Wide Web (WWW) has revolutionized learning inside and outside of the classroom for all students, including D/HH students. Students

can access information needed for research papers, meaning of new words and concepts and access information for any subject area. Another benefit of www learning is improvement in vocabulary and reading skills of students.

### **Deaf Education**

#### **Inclusive education**

Inclusive education welcomes deaf students to attend neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes. In inclusive education, children are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusion has the benefits of including daily interaction with hearing students and the opportunity to live at home, but it also has drawbacks such as isolation and limited availability of support.

#### **Bilingual approach**

Bilingual approach to the education of deaf children uses both the sign language of the deaf community and the written/spoken language of the hearing community. The bilingual approach holds the belief that academic content should be fully accessible to all deaf students, so academic content is delivered in sign language and written /spoken language. Since it is not possible to simultaneously produce grammatically correct, fluent Sign Language and spoken language, only one language is used at a time. Because there is no risk in learning sign language, the bilingual approach mitigates the risk of language deprivation (a condition that arises when children have limited access to both spoken and sign language).

#### **Open Distance Education Model**

Distance education is gaining ground for imparting school education through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and State Open School (SOS) and higher education through Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU).

#### **Organization of Deaf Communities**

Deaf communities have been growing cohesively slowly across the world for several centuries and are now politically organized on all levels: local, national, and international. Deaf people have long participated in both their own cultural communities and in the larger cultural communities in which they live. In the 21st century, the increasingly widespread use of cochlear implants and auditory enhancement devices has brought about a resurgence of the oralist philosophy and the nexus of medical model and education. Research into the genetic causes of deafness presents deaf people with an existential dilemma, since potential treatments or even cures could emerge, potentially leading to a reduction in the size of deaf communities.

Deaf communities in India are not as organized as in other countries. There is not a single national organization that speaks for deaf people. Both the All India Federation of the Deaf and the National Association of the Deaf try to lead various national issues. Regional and state organizations emerge and wane depending on the leadership of that time.



## **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

India ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007. The CRPD also sets a framework for deaf people's rights filling an important gap in international human rights legislation. India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) passed in 2016 draws heavily on the CRPD. It helped bring access to sign language and participation in cultural life, etc. in deaf people's domain to rights.

### **Summary**

This period saw a lot of growth in use of ISL and infusion of technology in education. New laws and policies spearheaded by Indian's ratification of United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) helped deaf people get their right to appropriate education.

### **Suggested readings**

Already Included

## **1.4 Historical comparison and perception of Deaf communities – India and other countries**

**After undergoing this sub-unit, the learners will be able to:**

- Describe deaf communities in India and one Western country
- List developments occurred that in Western nations with reference to time
- List developments that occurred in India
- Rationalize why Indian lagged in various developments

### **Content**

India is 70% rural and there is limited mobility in urban areas, therefore, deaf communities in India did not emerge until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Schools for the deaf played an important role in forming Deaf communities in India. There were no schools until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and there was no formal deaf organization until 1935 when the West Bengal Deaf & Dumb Association was established in Kolkata. Local deaf clubs were opened in middle-sized and large cities. These clubs mainly focused on sports and celebrating major holidays with picnics and other get-togethers.

The Indian Deaf community became stronger with the establishment of the All India Federation of the Deaf in 1955 and the All India Sports Council of the Deaf in the late 1960's. Women also got together and established local deaf organizations following the example of Delhi Federation of Deaf Women in 1973. The National Association of the Deaf was established in 2003 and has played a major role in advocacy for deaf people. It also fought and helped pass various laws and in establishing the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. Due to lack of coordination among various national organizations, India still lacks a strong entity to represent deaf people.

The major differences between the deaf community in India and those in other countries are:

- **Proliferation of organizations**—In India, there are several organizations while other countries have a smaller number, but these organizations are stronger.
- **Separation by Gender**—India is perhaps the only country where deaf women have separate organizations. For example, in the United States, the National Association of the Deaf is the main national organization. Women play an equal and important role in it. In India, women felt that AIFD did not provide enough support for women's programmes and decided to start the Delhi Federation of Deaf Women. This resulted in formation of women's organizations all over India.
- **Lack of coordination among deaf organizations**—This is an on-going problem despite several efforts to unite different organizations.
- **Rural signs**—In other countries, there is one sign language, but in India, due to the fact that 70% of its population lives in villages, many sign languages thrive in villages. Deaf people living in small villages have limited or no contact with other deaf people. They do not have access to Indian Sign Language used in urban areas and develop their own sign language to communicate with each other. Jepson (1991) had proposed that the sign language used in rural areas is a separate language in itself. Deaf people in villages do use different signs, but each village might have its own version, as there is no contact among various villages. For example, deaf people in Tamil Nadu villages might be using a very different sign language than that of Deaf people in Punjab's villages.
- **Deaf-Deaf Marriage**—In other countries, most deaf people married other deaf people for more than a century. In India, due to its arranged marriage system, deaf people were married to hearing partners. However, this practice has changed thanks mostly to various Parnaya-Milan Sammelans (marriage conferences) arranged by DFDW and other organizations. More and more deaf people are choosing deaf marriage partners.

#### **Suggested readings**

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/language-in-society/article/urban-and-rural-sign-language-in-india/623BF9CF67F582F7979FC3925D39276F>

## **UNIT 2**

### **CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND THE DEAF COMMUNITIES**

**Total Hours: 14 hours**

#### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Understand and describe the concept of Deaf culture and deaf community
2. Describe culture in various contexts
3. Understand about deaf culture in India linking it with the global scene.
4. Narrate the relevant concepts like audism and intercultural sensitivity
5. Understand and apply the cultural aspects of deafness in working with deaf people and their language

#### **2.1 Definition of culture in various contexts**

#### **2.2 Similarities and Differences between Deaf culture and other cultures**

#### **2.3 Deaf culture in India and rest of the world: An Overview**

#### **2.4 Audism, Intercultural sensitivity and D/deaf communities**

#### **Introduction**

In human societies, accepted ways of behaving, relating, and sharing experiences are learned and transmitted down from older to younger generations. The transmission is not necessarily linear from top to bottom. Cultures are developed and shared by young people also. An important characteristic of culture other than sharing-learning is the integration into other forms of expression: dance, music, arts, ritual, religion and clothing. These forms of expressions as a part of culture are often easier for some people to understand than abstract aspects like values and beliefs that make up the culture of a given community

People feel united by their interests, values, identity, language, and geographical or virtual area. Members of a community have some common aims and intentions. It is human nature that when people share similar interests, they tend to converge and communicate and influence others for the satisfaction of their needs. Emotional and social connection is established among members of a particular community. For example, people practicing yoga or having interest in horse-riding can easily connect with the people sharing their passion for yoga and horse-riding. But a crowd of people waiting for the traffic signal to turn green cannot be called a community.

Similarly, experiences of those who are born deaf can be entirely different than those that are hearing.

Those born deaf have entirely different experience of being deaf, especially those born to deaf parents. Several studies (Charrow and Fletcher, 1981 cited in Huddar et al, 2016; Hovinga, 1989, Berke, 2012) have found that when the parents are deaf and they expose the deaf child to sign language as their first language (L1), then the deaf child too shows equal fluency and command over the language. With language comes cultural Deaf identity. Deaf people connect easily to culture via signed languages. Deaf culture is best explained as the ‘Deaf experience:’ it is the experience of existing with visual communication.

It is easy to define and describe cultures which have distinct religions, for example, rich Islamic cultures in India. Some cultures are specific to the region like Rajasthani culture having easily identifiable custom, clothing and food. People belonging to a particular geographical area having a common language like Sindhi may have their own culture. Culture is often easy to identify for people in these terms and therefore it is questioned that “How a group of people who did not have any distinctive religion, clothing, or diet—or even inhabit a particular geographical space they called their own—could be called ‘cultural?’ (Padden and Humphries 2005) discuss this in their landmark book ‘Inside Deaf Culture’. How the deaf people in United States have their own ways and views that has all the characteristics that can be called a culture.

There are many ways to be deaf. Monaghan et al (2003) have described the variations that exist within Deaf communities around the world. Even native deaf signers and deaf who have learned sign language later have differences in the ways they perceive the world but both share the feature of being more visually oriented, as compared to hearing people. Most of the native deaf rely on shared information and knowledge in Sign Language. We are going to discuss the dynamic and fascinating concept of ‘culture’ in the first sub-unit emphasizing on various contexts of defining it.

If there are various cultures co-existing simultaneously, it would be interesting to see how these are similar or different from each other. In fact, late deafened and other people who learn sign language later remain different from those who are born deaf. Even the hearing children of deaf parents never get into the zone which the core deaf people occupy because they can hear and develop different ways of understanding than native deaf. Subunit 2 would shed light on deaf culture and other cultures.

Obviously, as we take a look at these complex concepts, we need to keep Indian context in mind. Subunit 3 intends to help you link global realities with the ones in India. The trends and patterns about Deaf communities and Deaf culture described by Padden and Humphries and Monaghan et al. are also found in India. The Deaf community in India is one of the largest, if not the largest, communities of Deaf and hard of hearing people in the world. At present the situation in India is similar to that described by Padden and Humphries in that deaf people are in a kind of transitory phase. They are intensely debating whether there is Deaf Culture.

It is important to emphasize here that native deaf people often do not miss out on hearing. Any attempt by a hearing person to experience deafness by using earplugs or sound proof environment is completely artificial. We are going to look into ‘audism’ in the subunit 2.4 along with some discussion on intercultural sensitivity.

It is a known fact that language and culture are inseparably linked together. You, as ISL interpreter, are interested in the language but you cannot get adequate hang of it by bypassing the Deaf culture. This unit will provide you the opportunity to understand culture – which in turn would help you understand the language better.

## **2.1 Definition of Culture in Various Contexts**

### **2.1.1. Culture**

Culture is associated with various contexts like language, clothing, cuisines, religious beliefs, customs, traditions, performing and visual arts, etc. The Cambridge English dictionary defines culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.”

A culture is a way of life of a group of people; the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next generation (Hofstede, 1997). Members of a community assert their cultural identity and feel that successful cultural transmission among members is their moral responsibility. Culture is most commonly understood in terms of language, religious belief, performing arts, literary tradition, history and values. Beliefs and practices of people in any community are conveyed through language. Rules are made for a particular group of people by the people themselves over an extended period of time with the help of language spoken by the community; language also reflects and shapes reality. Various religions have their own beliefs that people follow and which give rise to cultures associated with the religions. Performing arts like dance, drama, theatre, music, etc. reflect the culture of the artists and of the times. The Indian literary tradition was passed down orally in verses to many generations before it was written and recorded on paper. Huge variety of literature has been produced in India’s many languages over time. All of these, language, arts, literature, etc. are both - a reflection of the culture and also act as means of perpetuating the culture.

#### **2.1.1.1 Types of culture:**

Famous sociologist Ogburn (1922) classifies cultures into two types:

##### **a) Material culture**

Material culture refers to things such as jewelry, art, clothing, hairstyles, buildings, etc. For example, traditional clothes vary across India depending on the culture. There is not much historical evidence of deaf material culture in India. However, the current records of developments in the Deaf community and expressions of Deaf culture in the form of

art works, technological items like DVDs, etc. by deaf people will serve as historical artefacts for future generations to come.

### **b) Nonmaterial culture**

Non-material culture consists of abstract things like the ways of thinking, beliefs, values, common patterns of behaviour, language and gestures, etc.. Cognitive as well as normative aspects of Indian deaf culture are getting accumulated and encouraged since the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. First dictionaries, first formal course materials, first formal record of lectures and talks by deaf dignitaries and the knowledge and pride in Deaf culture and Deaf identity have already started comprising the non-material cultural things of Indian deaf community.

## **2.1.2 Theories of Culture**

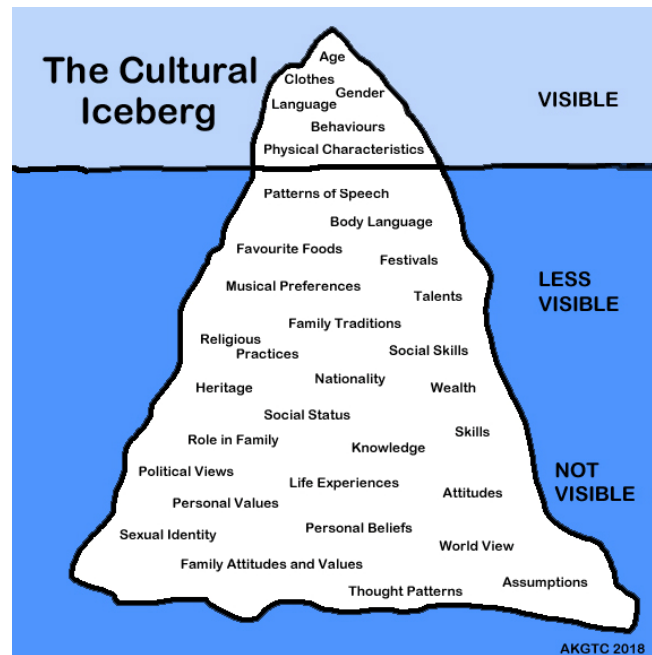
In this section, a few important theories of culture are described.

### **2.1.2.1 Low and High context cultures**

According to Hall(1989), in a low-context culture, the message will be interpreted through just the words (whether written or spoken) and their explicit meaning. High context cultures often stem from less direct verbal and nonverbal communication, utilizing small communication gestures and reading into these less direct messages with more meaning. In a high-context culture, messages are also interpreted using tone of voice, gesture, silence or implied meaning, as well as context or situation. There, the receiver is expected to use the situation, messages and cultural norms to understand the message. Low context cultures are the opposite; direct verbal communication is needed to properly understand a message being said and doing so relies heavily on explicit verbal skills.

### **2.1.2.2 Cultural Iceberg**

Terreni and McCallum(2003) coined the term ‘cultural iceberg’ to visualize the visible and invisible aspects of culture. The tip of the iceberg which is visible above the water level includes aspects that people are aware about, for example, dancing, games, and music. The part of the iceberg below the water level which is **invisible contains** cultural concepts that remain hidden, for example, beliefs, values, and feelings.



Source (<https://akgtcanada.com/if-i-really-knew-you/>)

### 2.1.2.3 Decision Making Cultures

Bryant (2018) discusses how cultures affect corporate decision making styles. In France or the Arab countries, decisions come from the top, while in countries with flatter management styles, like the Netherlands, Australia or Israel, consensus is important. In Sweden, decisions are made by consensus and as such, may take a long time. Once a decision is made, it won't change generally because so much discussion has gone into making it in the first place. Arab cultures are also, generally speaking, risk averse and hierarchical. Decisions are made from the top, often following discussion with other stakeholders of equal seniority. Once a decision is made, is it not questioned.

### 2.1.2.4. Culture - Power distance

Hofstede (1997) has stated that the power distance in various cultures has the strongest and a lasting influence on the society's main beliefs, values, etc. "The degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally". In very high power distance cultures, the lower level person will unfailingly defer to the higher level person, and feel relatively ok with that as it is the natural order. In **low power** distance cultures, everyone expects to be listened to regardless of rank position or their background. For example, in Malaysia and Singapore, junior people accept that power is shared unequally, and that they have low power and this is because of senior people's power (top-down leadership style). People in some Western countries like Norway and New Zealand, refuse to rely on authorities; they want power to be shared equally whereas in other countries, immigrants accept low power and adapt to the work in the society.

#### **2.1.2.5 Cultural Ethnocide**

“Ethnocide means that an ethnic group is denied the right to enjoy, develop and transmit its own culture and its own language, whether collectively or individually. This involves an extreme form of massive violation of human rights and, in particular, the right of ethnic groups to respect for their cultural identity” (Schabas, 2000).

For example, Persian culture was almost completely wiped out along with their religion Zoroastrianism. Only the Parsi people who fled from Persia to India have been able to keep this culture alive.

#### **2.1.3 The concept of Deaf culture and community**

The previous section discussed culture in general terms from the perspectives of language, religious beliefs, etc. and some theories of cultural models were explained. This section discusses the concept of deaf culture and community.

##### **2.1.3.1 Deaf Culture and Community**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ideas of ‘deaf culture’ and ‘deaf community’ started being used in research papers as scholars perceived that deaf people felt that their culture was distinct from the hearing world. The book ‘Inside deaf culture’ written by Padden and Humphries (2005) cites Adam Kuper’s (1999) statement that “culture” is “always defined in opposition to something else” (Padden and Humphries 2005: 3). However, Padden and Humphries (2005) say that “for us, the term culture allowed us to move away from what we and our colleagues believed was a debilitating description of deaf people as having specific behaviour or ideas about themselves or others that were the consequence of their not being able to hear”. The concept of culture allowed us to explore Deaf people’s long tradition of language and history as a way of understanding such as social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values and shared institutions of communities that are affected by deafness and which use sign languages.

Stokoe, Casterline and Croneberg (1965) were the first to use the term “Deaf Culture” in their American Sign Language Dictionary. Hantrais (1989) defines culture as the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. It is also reflected in para-language or non-verbal communication, such as gestures, pronunciation, voice dynamics, including intonation, rhythm, speed and continuity of speech.

Deaf Culture is defined by Ladd (2003) in his book ‘Understanding Deaf Culture,’ as - the belief that Deaf communities contained their own ways of life mediated through their sign languages. He further coined the term Deafhood to begin the process of defining the existential state of deaf ‘being-in-the-world’. Ladd tried to bring out the Deaf collective existence which is rendered invisible in the definition of deafness that is used to define



the experience of hearing-impaired. Deafhood is not seen as a finite state but as a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity.

Travato (2013) stated that every language and culture is transmitted from one generation to another generation. However, sign language and culture is not transmitted via hearing families (excluding deaf families). It is estimated that 95% deaf children are born to hearing parents (Hoffmister & Wilbur, 1980). So where will we find deaf culture? It exists in the deaf communities in the world. How does deafness, which has historically been labelled as a disability, become the basis for cultural identification?

Language and culture are inseparable (Polome et al, 1992). Travato (2013) pointed out that minority language groups live in a particular geographical area but deaf people generally do not live in a defined geographical area. The deaf community is formed by sharing common sign language, common values, belief, traditions, identity etc. And these beliefs and values arise at and are spread through deaf residential schools, deaf clubs and other social gatherings. There are several stories of deaf development around the world. Deaf people later in life get in touch with adults who use sign language and learn signed language from them. They identify themselves as deaf. They learn to **relate** with them. Research studies have found that members of the Deaf community view their deafness as a difference in human experience rather than a disability. Alexis and Stein (2011) stated that being involved in the Deaf community and culturally identifying as Deaf has been shown to significantly contribute to positive self-esteem in Deaf individuals.

Dirksen & Bauman (2008) demonstrated that deaf community is distinguished from deaf culture in that the deaf community may include persons who are not themselves deaf and those who actively support the goal of the community and work with deaf to achieve the goals but deaf culture is at the center of deaf individuals which becomes an important feature of the cultural discourse.

#### **2.1.3.2 Some Aspects of Material Deaf Culture**

In this section, Deaf culture including deaf art, poetry, theatres, history, etc. that is distinct from hearing culture will be described.

One good example of deaf artists and artistry are Deaf Paintings featuring creative and beautiful expressions and abstracts through sign language in National Institute for Speech and Hearing, Kerala.

There is also a rich tradition of storytelling and joking. A number of storytelling, entertainment, jokes etc. are often seen in the deaf residential schools in the country. A rich ISL culture of storytelling and jokes exists even though 'most deaf schools forbid the use of sign language in the classrooms' Randhawa (2005).

In Mumbai, a deaf group has gotten together to form Deaf Entertainment, giving strong inspirations to the deaf audiences and selling DVDs across the nation, thus playing a crucial role in the deaf communities. The Deaf Entertainment team not only makes films

but also performs dramas, awareness programs and poetry sessions. In Gujarat, Mook Badhir Mandal (MBM), Rajkot Deaf Association and other deaf associations in other states draw attention of the deaf communities by making a number of deaf films, awareness videos, etc. There are film festivals organized by deaf organizations to encourage the visual vernacular. Developments in the entertainment field in one state encourage deaf in other states also to promote and create deaf films. Randhawa (2014) has compiled a list of deaf films.

Since 2015, several news media for the deaf like Newz Hook, India Signing Hands (ISH) and MBM's news channel have come up which share news in ISL. These news outlets are a positive step forward for deaf communities since they enable deaf to access news and meet the deaf communities' needs. Two of the media teams, ISH and MBM, are completely owned and built by deaf teams. Social media and networking have enabled Indian deaf to be in touch with the Deaf in other parts of the world and share interests, experience and knowledge easily through videos and video chats. Cyberspace, in short, has revolutionised the Deaf life (Kulshreshtha 2014).

In 2018, the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Center (ISLRTC) conducted the First ISL Competition in which deaf school children submitted jokes, stories, mimes, etc in ISL. Earlier, the visual vernacular perished with the demise of skilled leaders who signed eloquently.

There are cultural organizations of the deaf in India. Many deaf people have performed and participated in International cultural exchange programs. Hajee (2014) has compiled a list of such organizations in India given below.

1. The All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD) 1955
2. Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women (DFDW) 1973 , now the All India Foundation of Deaf Women
3. Mook Badhir Mandal, Vadodara (MBM) 1972
4. Bombay Foundation of Deaf Women (BFDW)
5. National Association of the Deaf (NAD) 2005
6. Deaf Enabled Foundation (DEF)
7. Youth Association of Deaf - India (2016)
8. Deaf Way Hyderabad (1991)
9. Deaf Way New Delhi (2001) (now closed)
10. Indian Deaf Youth Forum (Delhi)
11. Yuva Association of Deaf, Mumbai
12. Leadership Education Empowerment of Deaf (LEED) Pune
13. All India Deaf Bank Employee Association (ADBEA)
14. All India Central Government Deaf Employees' Association
15. National Foundation of Deaf Women (NFDW)
16. All India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD)
17. All India Deaf Arts and Cultural Society

Deaf organizations are becoming stronger than before with a number of NGOs and Deaf organizations regularly organizing events like International Deaf Week and actively participating in disability events like the World Disability Day programs.

All India Deaf Arts and Cultural Society and All India Deaf Sport Council are two national level organizations that encourage different forms of arts, dance, drama, sports, etc. One of many dramas is mime that is mainly popular in the country. Most deaf participants find their life partners through local and national associations and clubs. Also, matrimonial events for the deaf are regularly organized by various organizations.

All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD), All India Foundation of Deaf Women (AIFDW) and National Association of the Deaf (NAD) serve the Indian deaf community by advocating for laws, accessibility, etc. to meet the needs of the deaf community. Deaf Youth associations have also been established to focus on issues faced by deaf youth.

Every year, on festivals, and international events like Women's Day and International Week of the Deaf, events and programs are organized by deaf associations to celebrate the occasions. The deaf associations and clubs aim to bring the deaf communities in the country closer for the purpose of awareness, sharing news, etc. Since 2010, strong lobbying for the Deaf Rights by deaf associations in Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and other states has been growing to meet the demands of deaf communities. These movements are taking place at the state level as well as nationally.

There are a number of religious deaf organizations in India operating to promote religious beliefs among D/deaf population. Deaf Christian missionaries, Deaf Jehovah witness groups, Hindu and Sanatana Dharma organizations, and Islamic group meetings are spread across India and they conduct activities to spread their religious beliefs as well as provide religious education in sign language. Sign language plays a crucial role in the activities of these religious organizations (Hajee, 2014).

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organization that acts as a peak body for national associations of Deaf people, with a focus on Deaf people who use sign language and their family and friends. WFD aims to promote the Human Rights of Deaf people worldwide, by working closely with the United Nations (with which it has consultative status) and various UN agencies such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). WFD is also a member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA). All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD) is affiliated with WFD and National Organisation of the Deaf (NAD) is associated with WFD. World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is also affiliated to UNESCO and UNICEF to spread awareness and campaign for deaf rights.

WFD members and WFD(YS) Youth Section members frequently visit India to encourage deaf awareness by giving presentations and conducting workshops in collaboration with various deaf, interpreting and disabled people's organizations.

Thus, we can say that the Deaf culture in India is getting more visible in various areas like performing arts, matrimony, religion, sports, advocacy etc. As the Deaf community

gets closer thanks to technology, the cultural ethos would further evolve. ISL will have a pivotal role to play in the process and so will the interpreters.

## **2.2 Similarities and Differences between Deaf Culture and Hearing Culture**

### **Introduction**

There are many similarities and differences between Deaf Cultures and Hearing Cultures. Story of Dr.MadanVasistha from his two memoirs, *Deaf in Delhi* (2006) and *Deaf in D.C* (2010) are reviewed below. Then the similarities and differences are compared in the table followed by a discussion on membership of a deaf community.

The conditions which Dr.Madan Vasishta faced as a Deaf person, as he describes his story about first moving to Delhi and then later to Washington D.C. in his memoirs is a deep insight into the life of deaf in India. His experience as a deaf person is a good example of what it is like being deaf in India. The first volume “Deaf in Delhi” shows what a deaf person has to go through. Family’s support of deaf child and at the same time society’s rejection of a deaf person, are two main parts of his life which are common to most deaf people in India. He learned sign language and his potential to be a good educator for deaf students was recognized by his teachers. He became a successful leader in deaf organisations in Delhi and India. Gradually he managed to achieve all his dreams with consistent hard work excelling in whatever he took up: farming, photography, teaching and administration. The 40 chapters of his memoir are detailed testimony to his ingenious ways of solving all the problems and getting the better of them as a deaf person. ‘Deaf in Delhi’ contains serious stories narrated with a humorous style that is well understood by a deaf person. Dr.Vasishta shows grit in facing the difficulties as a deaf person in his time when the conditions were more unfavourable than today. The first volume ends with his admission at Gallaudet University in USA. The second volume “Deaf in DC” begins with his arrival in Washington DC and the book is full of the cross-cultural encounters he experiences in the new place. From the very start he faced lots of challenges due to differences in culture here in India and there in United States as well as the cultural differences in the Deaf community of USA and India. Dr.Vasishta did not know the language used by deaf people of USA in Gallaudet University (which was Gallaudet College back in the 1960s). *Deaf in DC* nicely documents more than 5 decades of living in America. Dr.Vasishta became more resilient with time and circumstances. He learned to adapt quickly to his new environment. He acculturated himself in the new culture and language. Ways that worked in India did not work in the west. For example, when Dr.Vasishta arrived in USA in 1967, the first cultural clash he faced was while getting the attention of deaf students at Gallaudet. In his words, Gallaudet is the Mecca of the deaf world. In the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was already a flourishing deaf culture in spaces like Gallaudet. As Dr.Vasishta learned while getting attention of deaf students, they had very little or no patience for those who do not know signed languages.

This is very different from the situation in India. English also was not the same there. College life, sports, cultures and ways inside classrooms, teachers and students, all were different. Lots of learning happened for him outside the classroom. Dr.Vasishta has given an honest and wise description of all the events around him. Western environment was more fertile for a deaf culture with a civil rights movement originating in Gallaudet University over the appointment of a non-deaf president. India has seen deaf mass mobilization on 3<sup>rd</sup> December every year led by organizations of disabled people to claim their rights for a better future. Dr.Vasishta has written honestly about everything, from something as simple as a cigarette to something as complex as god.

His memoir shows that differences in cultures are everywhere – Deaf culture in India and Deaf culture in the US and hearing cultures in both countries as well. Deaf people anywhere do not accept a deaf person unless he/she signs their language. Deaf cultures in each country are superimposed on the larger society, but it is hard to tell which is more prominent – deaf culture or the hearing culture. Living in four different cultures helped him grow both as a person and a professional. Of course this can happen only if a person is open enough to absorb new cultures positively.

Dr.Vasishta himself is a living example and a treasure trove of deaf culture. The events he describes give an idea of the perception of deaf cultures in India and the West. His two memoirs painfully reveal the rejections he faced in his own country of birth despite having a Ph.D. However, now the public mindset is changing. Earlier it was strictly focused on the pathological perspective.

### **Similarities and Differences**

Deaf people in the community have developed their own cultures over the years but, Deaf people always adapt to the lives of majority cultures in the hearing world. Deaf people follow along with existing cultural norms. It is clear that they are part of majority cultures. But deaf people find it very difficult to understand some particular manners, values, etc. of other cultures due to communication barriers.

Difference in cultures between deaf and hearing world are given below with examples.

<b>Deaf culture</b>	<b>Hearing Culture</b>
Deaf people usually get attention by tapping the shoulder or waving at someone.	To get attention, hearing people usually speak the person's name.
In any communicative situations, for example, meetings, in classrooms, in restaurants, etc. the deaf participants ensure that there is a clear line of sight. If there are	In any communicative situations, it is not necessary to ensure a clear line of sight. Being able to see each other is not essential for communication. But hearing people

things that obstruct the line of sight and hinder communication, the furniture is rearranged or obstructions are removed so that all participants can see each other clearly.	rather ensure that there is a clear listening connect.
When meeting a new person for the first time, recognition and connections are usually established on the basis of a deaf identity first and foremost. Other aspects like place of birth, education, religion, etc. are either secondary or not considered at all.	When meeting new people for the first time, connection may be established on the basis of geographical background, language, religion, etc. Being hearing by itself is not considered a factor in establishing relations.
Eye contact is essential for communication. This is also one of the reasons for maintaining a clear line of sight. Eye contact is also considered important and respectful. If eye gaze is removed from the conversation partner abruptly, it is considered rude.	Eye contact is considered important in some cultures and contexts. But eye contact is not essential for communication. Hearing people can communicate without maintaining eye contact. Also, staring in the face is considered rude.
Standing up is not given much importance as indicator of respect.	Standing up is important to indicate respect towards seniors - for example in Indian hearing culture.
The making of noise in a place is not considered rude when Deaf people are around.	It is considered rude to make noise and disturb other hearing people.
Priority is given to use of sign language and there is a comfort level associated with it.	Priority is given to use of spoken language (e.g. Hindi, English, etc.) and there is a comfort level associated with spoken language.
Artistic expressions like drama, storytelling. Jokes, etc. are done in sign language either directly or through technology.	Drama, fun jokes, storytelling, etc. are done through spoken language or in written form.
Deaf people usually value information sharing and share personal information	Sharing of personal information varies in hearing cultures. In Indian culture,

openly. Asking personal questions is not considered rude. This is also results in them being very direct and making comments that might be considered rude in some hearing cultures.	information is shared and asking personal questions is not considered rude but some Western cultures have strong notions of privacy and questions about personal information are considered rude.
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(Note: The points above use the general terms ‘deaf culture’ and ‘hearing culture’. However, these are discussed in an Indian context. It is important to again emphasize here that cultures vary across the world. Even within deaf culture or within hearing culture, there are wide variations across communities. In India, there is less research on deaf culture, therefore the above points are based on research in western countries and on the authors’ own experiences.)

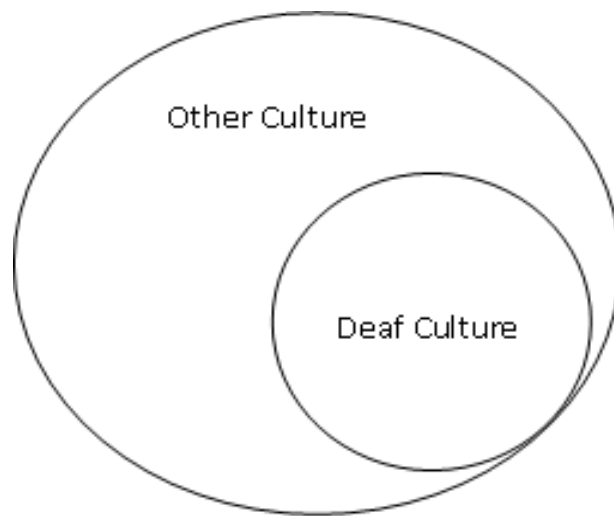
In the table above, for the deaf communities, they naturally adopt other cultures’ clothing, food, religion, arts, etc. since such culture is inherited through one generation to next generation. In short, deaf people are always part of dominant cultures.

### **Membership of deaf communities**



**Figure No. 2.1**

In figure 1, the Deaf culture circle includes hearing people such as CODAs (Child of Deaf Adults) and non-CODA who have acquired Deaf culture due to their experiences and their journey in the deaf community. However, the feeling of being a member of the Deaf community and being a part of Deaf culture cannot be measured. In fact, Padden and Humphries (2005) say that “the core of the deaf culture is the greatest value of all deaf individuals”.Dirksen and Bauman (2008) raised the question “Can a hearing person as CODA be more deaf than non signing deaf?” In other words, Deaf culture may be adopted by very few hearing people. For deaf people, they are always part of other cultures in the hearing world. But there are some properties of the hearing culture, especially those which involve spoken language, which are difficult for deaf people to adapt to.



**Figure no. 2**

There are many cultures present in the society. The circle in the figure given above represents the collective of cultures present in the society. Deaf culture is inside that circle. The figure no. 2 represents cohesiveness of the community. Other cultures highly influence deaf culture as it is a linguistic minority group. In fact, deaf people feel inferior and sometimes feel that they must accept and adapt to the other cultures in certain behaviors such as chewing food, walking, moving chairs (not making of noise), etc. In addition, they are naturally part of majority cultures with respect to clothing, religions, etc.

The question however is that what are the criteria for membership of deaf communities? Ladd (2003) and Padden & Humphries (2006) have discussed that those who accepted themselves as deaf with varying degree of hearing, the process of acceptance of deaf identity through journey of similar experience, sharing common goals, belief, pattern of behaviours, etc. are members of the Deaf community. Other than deaf people, others who contribute and actively support the deaf community may be included in the deaf community.

## **2.3 Deaf Culture in India and Rest of the World: An Overview**

### **Introduction**

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin” Murray (2007).

The quote above clearly explains about nature’s touch making whole species of people into one family. Deaf people around the world easily relate to each other more than hearing people in general. It is not possible to learn and catch up with other spoken languages like French and Spanish in a day or two. Signed languages of France and Spain are not related to Indian Sign Language but when the deaf people from France or Spain meet an Indian Deaf they do not face much difficulty in communication. This ease of cross cultural communication is not because all sign languages are iconic but, due to the knowledge of International signs. As of now there no research comparing International



Sign and Indian Sign language. Simple comparison of H3.Tv on internet that shows news in International Signs shows clear understanding of the international signs by those fluent in ISL. Some sign languages are totally incomprehensible to Deaf people in India. For example, Chinese Sign Language is totally different to be understood to continue basic communication. One interesting study by Zeshan and Panda (2015) on deaf bilinguals, fluent in ISL and Burundi Sign Language (BuSL) code-switching at lexical and discourse level shows that despite individual differences between signers, there are also striking commonalities. That is shared characteristics of the signers' bilingual outputs in the domains of negation, where signers prefer negators found in both SLs, and WH-questions, where signers choose BuSL for specific question words and ISL for general WH-questions.

However, the deaf culture in other countries is affected by surrounding local cultures and nationality to a great extent. It is possible for a deaf Indian to feel like a foreigner in India because of failure in successful transmission of cultures present around.

Experiences of deaf people in any country are shaped by the national education policies, inclusion in the society, and acceptance of their language and culture. Some countries like Uganda have given constitutional recognition to their signed language. Some countries are still recovering from the wrong education methods and a century long period of oppression and exploitation. Advocacy efforts at international levels have resulted in inclusion of the term deaf culture in conventions and treaties which is showing its effect on a large number of countries around the world.

Deaf culture is recognized under Article 30, Paragraph 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that "Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture." Rights of Persons With Disabilities Act(RPWD)was passed in 2016.It was indeed, a historic moment and a path breaking achievement largely fuelled by the efforts of deaf people working with other disabled people in India. Apart from covering 21 categories of disabilities from the previous 7 categories under 1995 Act (and four more categories under a separate act), this new Act lays complete emphasis on one's rights, especially the right to accessible information in Indian Sign Language.

### **2.3.2 Indian Sign Language and other sign languages**

Deaf culture in India existed long before sign language research started and long before the first ISL dictionary was published. The first dictionaries published in 1978 by Vasistha and colleagues named the sign language used by Indian Deaf people as Indian Sign Language. Sign languages in western countries make more use of written form of words as a source of new signs. In ISL, the influence of writing is limited as ISL has developed more autonomously from spoken languages than many other sign languages.

ISL and other minority sign languages in India are a genuine and legitimate part of the linguistic and cultural heritage of India (Zeshan, 2014).

There are various kinds of deaf people in India. Some are fluent in signed languages whereas some are completely oral. Many deaf people with usable hearing and good lip-reading skills depend on speech and speech reading when communicating with hearing people. Some oral deaf people also use ISL when communicating with deaf. Deaf people living in rural areas depend on gestures and home signs. Vasishta (2014) rejects the suggestion of Jepson (1991) that the sign language used in rural India be called Rural Indian Sign Language (RISL) because he stated that deaf in rural areas rarely meet each other, and thus, chances of developing a distinct variety of ISL, i.e., RISL are very low. Sign languages in the neighbouring countries of the west like Canada and United States have similarities in their sign languages. Likewise ISL, Pakistani Sign Language (PSL) and Nepali Sign Language (NSL) have also been found to have grammatical and some lexical similarities (Zeshan, 2000, Woodward, 1993).

All known village sign languages are endangered, usually because of pressure from larger urban sign languages. Ironically, it is often the success of the larger sign language communities in urban centres, their recognition and subsequent spread, which leads to the endangerment of village sign languages. A number of village sign languages are in immediate danger of becoming extinct without ever having been documented. Zeshan & Vos (2012) initiated The Village Sign project to describe village sign languages across the world, including Alipur Sign Language in India, Adamorobe Sign Language in Ghana, Algerian Jewish Sign Language in Israel, Ban Khor Sign Language in Thailand, Country Sign of Jamaica, Kata Kolok in Indonesia, etc. Alipur Sign Language is spoken in the town of Alipur, Karnataka, a Shia Muslim enclave with a high degree of congenital deafness. There are between 150 and 250 deaf people in Alipur, and there are approximately 10,000 hearing people speaking the language out of a total population of 26,000 (in 2015). The language has no official status and deaf children receive no formal education. This fact plus the increasing influence of Indian Sign Language threaten the survival of Alipur Sign Language. Sibaji Panda was the first person to officially document the language in 2012.

### **2.3.3 Deaf Communities in India and across the World**

In the West, lobbying for the Deaf Rights is highly prevalent to meet the deaf communities' needs. For instance, Jordan (2006) narrated the incidents that took place at Gallaudet University, USA, where deaf people protested against the university when a hearing president was appointed. The deaf students and the deaf community loudly proclaimed "Deaf President Now" (DPN) in the year 1988, even before the American Disability Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. The protests by the deaf student community led to the resignation of the hearing president and the appointment of a deaf president at Gallaudet University.

Deaf leaders in India learnt from the experiences of deaf in the West and started lobbying

for deaf education, driving license, and other essential needs. One of the most important demands from the deaf communities was the establishment of the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. There was a long struggle by the deaf community working with a group of hearing professionals from 2008 onwards and ISLRTC was finally approved and established as an autonomous institution by the Government of India in 2015. It is a new beginning for the deaf community. Deaf philosophy, deaf education, deaf counselling, etc. are more advanced in the developed countries than in India. This is due to lack of provision of proper education in the universities, schools and colleges in India. In fact, according to a WFD publication (2018), many deaf schools are closing down and it was found that in 68% of the countries surveyed, over 50% of deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils attend mainstream schools. Millions of deaf persons in India use ISL for communication but its official use in educational institutions is still in its early stages. As of 2018, less than 10 schools in India use ISL to teach. For example, Randhawa (2005) in her study of 20 deaf schools found that only one school used a bilingual communication policy.

Two of the very few schools that follow a bilingual model of education are Indore Deaf Bilingual Academy and Bajaj Institute of Learning in Dehradun. In USA, 54% of special schools are bilingual (Madan, 2014). In India, the teachers are not skilled in bilingual approaches of teaching deaf children (Randhawa, 2014).

In India, it has been observed that deaf workers often share training and job opportunities with other deaf people, like encouraging them to apply for VRCs (Vocational Rehabilitation Centre) run by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, ITI (Industrial Training Institute), available government institutes, for Multi Purpose Training Centre (MPTCD) in Delhi run by AIFD and other such institutes in other states which provide courses like photography, welding, stitching, etc. Deaf encourage other deaf to join these institutes even though they might not know each other well. This is an important aspect of deaf in India i.e. the values of sharing that creates community. The number of deaf local and national associations and clubs in India has been growing whereas in the West, Padden (2006) cited that deaf associations and clubs are declining due to advanced technological communication such as captioning on television, video relay service, etc. If there are many technological communications available in India like the West, deaf associations and clubs may decline in the future.

### **2.3.4 Deaf Culture in India and the World**

It is known that deaf people live in the dominant hearing cultures across the world, and the dominant cultures influence various aspects of deaf culture as well. Since deaf Indians' dominant cultures are different from the West, and Deaf people follow along with hearing cultural norms both in West as well as India, this also results in differences in deaf culture in India and other countries. Domination of one language-using community by another can come to result in a process closely resembling colonialism

(Ladd 2003). He described that cultures were not only directly affected by majority cultures, but that their own cultural patterns had become shaped by both acquiescence to and resistance against, that cultural domination.

Michele Friedner a social anthropologist has vividly described in her book 'Valuing Deaf Worlds in Urban India' the culture and lives of deaf Indians in urban settings. A short review of the five chapters full of facts on Deaf Indians is given below.

Valuing Deaf Worlds in Urban India is the first in-depth research focusing on deaf Indian in book form. Michele is deaf herself and knowing Indian Sign Language allowed her to easily enter the deaf worlds in India. Minor details of how the deaf people manage their time and space as disabled people in modern India begins with the first part of the book. Everyday lives of deaf people and how they experience life and make meaning and negotiate their existence in the larger hearing world is discussed in detail.

Friedner has creatively articulated the simple yet complex relationship between the deaf and development, and about how the deafness is seen as a good thing. Deaf people accept other people who are same as them. This feeling of sameness creates belonging for each other and creates deaf similitude and sociality.

Deaf in the hearing world find comfort and hope in the deaf world when even their families, who are hearing, do not accept their language to support the communication needs of deaf children. Deaf in India gain real friends in school instead of real education because the oral education methods are not appropriately matched with technology and expertise resulting in half-half learning and copying. Friedner further explains on deaf churches, where the deaf get to see fluent signing that caters to the emotional and communicative needs of deaf people. It also orients them to development of their unique identities.

Various training institutes in India employ deaf workers where they become a source of value. The stigma attached to deafness is ignored in favour of what deaf can do for the organization that employs them. Good employment opportunities and ideally, a job that would help other deafs develop is desired by most of the deaf people in urban India. Due to inequalities faced by deaf people in India, the deaf community had developed a concept of deaf development that not only means employment but also includes social, economic and morals aspects of development.

Some experiences of deaf Indians that describe the differences in Deaf culture in India and other developed countries are described below. These experiences were shared with the authors by various deaf people.

1. One deaf Indian went to participate in a short-term training program for deaf youth in Denmark. The Indian participant was not aware of the individualistic cultures and customs of other deaf people present around. The simple act of sitting on a chair without the permission of the person sitting there earlier was considered inappropriate. The Indian deaf learned this cultural difference and started appreciating the **relation based cultural** values of India more after that experience.

2. Another similar experience was shared by a deaf person who had a visitor from another western country. In India it is common for deaf people to peep at another person's laptop screen to see what the person is doing instead of interrupting. When the Indian deaf glanced at the laptop of the western deaf, he was infuriated and felt uncomfortable at this behaviour of his Indian colleague. Later on, they discussed this cultural aspect of respecting the privacy of individuals and that privacy cannot be taken for granted in western work environments.
3. Deaf Indians do not have access to many public services. However, they manage to overcome the communication barriers in case of emergencies with family and friends' support. Regarding access to medical services, the western deaf have provision for interpreters and other services. But this can cause more problems when the deaf persons are made to wait or denied the services when the interpreters are not available. Here in India, the experience of deaf westerners gave them a different cultural experience when their communication was facilitated by the interpreters free of cost and when they got lots of support from local deaf people. This indicates that the Deaf culture in India is in tune with the larger 'Indian' culture.
4. One cultural confrontation in communication happened when two Western deaf were travelling and sightseeing with Indian deaf. The confrontation happened because in India it is acceptable to politely interfere and offer help and suggestions without being asked, while the Western Deaf individuals felt that the Indian deaf crossed their personal boundaries when the Indian deaf tried to help them out in their communication with the local driver.
5. Indian Deaf people like most of the hearing people in India are flexible in timing and punctuality. Deaf Westerners have a strict sense of time as per the larger culture of their nations.
6. Spaces where deaf culture thrives are schools, colleges, clubs, spaces near tea-stalls, eating joints frequented by deaf from nearby areas, etc. Railway stations and train compartments in Mumbai also serve as important meeting points for creating deaf spaces that strengthen links in the community (Kusters, 2009).

### **2.3.5 Deaf Education and Deaf Culture: Historical Developments**

Deaf history can be traced back to 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain where a hearing monk taught deaf children. This is a very popular narrative amongst deaf community members and serves as a record of early deaf education and literacy, when methods to teach deaf people were made public. It is seen that the methods were varied and were deeply influenced by the regional politics and cultures. Signing was favoured by French and the Germans were more inclined towards medical model oriented speech training.

The Spanish monk's teaching methods shattered the beliefs that deaf are not educable. This is important in the history of deaf because historical records exist because of their written record. Before that there may be more histories but there is no written evidence. This has resulted in huge gaps in the history of the deaf communities.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, teaching was not done by monks only. There were private tutors for teaching deaf. In 1640s, finger spelling alphabets and techniques for teaching deaf students were intellectual topics in Britain. There is a history of evolution of teaching methods by private tutors from strictly oral to mixed manual methods.

The first person to teach a large number of deaf students was a French priest Abbe de El Epee. His acceptance of signing led to the manual method of education known as French method. The first deaf school was opened by him. Later he received royal sponsorship. But, he did not survive long as another private tutor, Samuel Heinicke, opened an oral school.

Deaf education spread from Europe to North America as well as Asia along with European influences. Many deaf schools were opened around the world based on Epee's methods. The Connecticut Asylum for the Education of Deaf and Dumb persons was started by Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc in 1817. Clerc trained a large number of deaf teachers and administrators throughout America.

The world population was not dense like that of today's. Most of the deaf institutions established early in 18<sup>th</sup> century were residential boarding schools. Children lived there together and developed strong bonds with each other. Some families had many generations of relationships with specific schools. These close ties of family and friends supplied the numbers to make robust adult deaf communities.

Since 1834, the Parisian Deaf community held banquets honouring Epee's birthday. Vienna was the centre of Austrian Deaf culture with 10 deaf clubs and an active café life. In 1854, alumni from the Connecticut Asylum, by this time known as the American School for the Deaf, officially started the first U.S Deaf club. Gallaudet College was founded in 1864.

All the large scale movements like civil rights movements have had good and bad effects on the lives of deaf people.

### **2.3.6 Genocide of Sign Language**

The United Nations International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E793, 1948) has five definitions of genocide. Three of them are about physical killing whereas two of them are not, and it is these two definitions that fit today's indigenous & minority education:

Article II(e): 'forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'; and

Article II(b): 'causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group';

Many researchers demonstrated that during Nazi period, disabled groups including deaf people were considered as not being human. In total, nearly 2,40,000 disabled and deaf

people were killed in gas chambers, later used in the massive killings of the Jews in Poland (Brueggemann, 2009). Padden (2006) noted that doctors and scientists are experimenting with approaches to correct genetic deafness to eradicate the deaf communities and sign languages. Scientific advancements may result in parents being able to remove deafness genetically. Dirksen and Bauman (2008) cited a researcher who predicted that eradication of Australian Sign Language (Auslan) might come within next few generations due to increasing cochlear implants, genetic testing, and mainstreaming.

In India, since the use of sign language has been discouraged and looked down upon, the effects reflected in Indian deaf education and rehabilitation policies. Deaf community in India was at the risk of getting totally wiped out, but sign language use persisted amongst deaf children at schools and at clubs due to failure of oral methods. However, the present situation of Indian Sign Language is improving along with support from the state. With advancements in medicine and genetic science, Indian deaf culture is again at risk as Gene Therapy may eradicate deafness and result in reduced number of deaf births. Varshney (2016) noted that the high burden of deafness globally and in India is largely preventable and avoidable. The **prevalence of deafness** in South-East Asia ranges from 4.6% to 8.8%.

### **2.3.7 Disability models and deafness**

The way of looking at disability is technically known as a model of disability. There are various models of disability described below. Srivastava (2019) writes in 'Inclusion and Children with Disabilities' that in earlier days disability was looked upon differently than now a days with advancement of science and technology and also with change in social mindset along with self-advocacy efforts of disabled population. World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) has released a position paper situating the deaf communities in both disability perspective as well as cultural linguistic minority constructs. According to WFD, Deaf people consider themselves as a linguistic and cultural group, with highly complex natural languages but the rights of deaf people are however assured through disability policy, legislation and instruments. Deaf identity is not a monolithic entity and a person can also have other identities relating to gender, race, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.

**Medical model:** This model of disability is also known as bio-centric model. According to this model, the fault lies in the body of a person which needs to be repaired. This model of disability appeared in the 19th century when medical science was making great progress. Role of doctors became more important than ever. Doctors found new ways to cure the diseased body. Any deviation in the body is required to be cured in this model. The medical model has therapeutic value. That is, it functions to alleviate the physical and mental conditions of persons with disabilities to a large extent. However, it also created lots of prejudices against disabled people. People began to discriminate against them.

**Social Model:** According to this model, it is the society and environment which disable us more than our impairment. This model appeared as an improvement on the medical model. It placed the origin of disability in the environment and society instead of in an individual. One drawback of this model is that it tends to ignore the problems of disabled people at individual levels.

How the deaf people in India come to accept their deafness is noted in a study conducted by Jill Jepson in 1987 in both rural and urban areas. The process of normalization follows a pattern that emerged from the narratives in the study. This pattern is similar to Benett's development model. In the beginning, all cures are sought and tried by deaf people and their family members. After the prolonged search for causes and cures, Deaf people and their families begin to realize that the deafness is not something that must be cured. The normalization process is described as 'natural' equal to the Hindi word 'Prakritik.' For Indians to accept deafness is not an easy or quick decision. Early response to deafness is extreme unhappiness followed by search for understanding and getting rid of this condition. Jepson interviewed many people to find that large number of Indian families have entirely different perception of deafness. After prolonged duration and attempts over the years, people experience a shift towards a different view of deafness. In this new view of deafness it is no longer seen as an abnormality that must be fixed or a tragedy that must be endured, but a simple fact of existence that could be dealt with in successful ways while living a relatively normal life. After running to doctors, priests and local faith-healers and a variety of consultants, Deaf people and family members adapt to their deafness. They start accepting that their deafness is the natural state of being in the world. It is not a disease, for which they must search for a solutions.

## **2. 4 Audism, Intercultural Sensitivity And Deaf Communities**

### **2.4.1 Audism**

The term Audism was coined by Tom Humphries 30 years ago. Tom further developed the idea of Audism in his Ph.D dissertation "Communicating across Cultures (Deaf/Hearing) and Language Learning." The term audism helps the deaf community to describe and define their experiences of being left out, being discriminated and all other negative encounters in the hearing world. Humphries defined audism as "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears" (1977:12). Audism is understood as "the bias and prejudice of hearing people against deaf people" (Humphries 1977:13).

Eckert and Rowley (2013) simplify the explanation of the term audism as assumptions and attitudes of supremacy based on hearing and speaking. Stories shared by Eckert and Rowley (2013) are similar to those experienced by deaf people in India while visiting shopping stores.

*A cashier at local grocery store starts to talk to a customer who is purchasing some food items. The customer is uncertain what the cashier is saying. The cashier ignores the*



*shopper and continues to talk. The Deaf shopper gets the cashier's attention by pointing to his or her ears and then shaking their head in a sideways motion, and the shopper forces the cashier to understand. The cashier realizes that the customer is deaf and stops talking. The shopper gestures as if writing on hand and tries to encourage the cashier to write what was just said. The cashier replies by shaking their head and hands, once again voicing, "No, no that's ok."* Eckert and Rowley (2013: 102)

Deaf authors (Eckert and Rowley 2013: 102) highlight and ask: "Who is that omission of information OK for? Why is it OK for the cashier to not have to communicate with the Deaf customer? What makes it OK for the Deaf shopper to not have the same information as other customers?"

The cashier in the story above is so busy in finishing his work that he simply does not want to entertain a different customer. It will not take much time and efforts but there is lack of awareness of deafness. This is one example of how deaf people are excluded from accessing information.

#### **2.4.2 Ethnocentrism and Forced Assimilation**

In certain situations, people adapt to new cultures or majority cultures while preserving and maintaining their own culture. However, sometimes, people can be forced to adapt and follow the rules of a particular culture. This is called forced assimilation. We live in a colorful world and, we look at everything in the world from own lenses first. The color of our world paints our lens in the same color. When we see other people and their actions we tend to see them first from our own color. The color of other person's world is not always the same. As a result of this difference we see other cultures as difficult to understand, even wrong and dangerous. This superior view of own culture is called cultural ethnocentrism. It is when the belief that gives pleasure and satisfaction in our culture becomes a kind of obsession and aggression that results in negative responses toward other cultures.

Ethnocentric people try to forcibly assimilate people into their culture which they consider superior.

For instance, many Deaf people follow hearing-created rules when among hearing people. For example, Deaf people chewing with open mouth is not considered to be rude in Deaf culture. When they are with hearing majority, deaf are expected to chew with mouth closed. Therefore, they are expected to learn certain manners and conform to hearing culture.

#### **2.4.3 Intercultural Sensitivity and Deaf Communities**

Developing intercultural sensitivity is becoming more and more important nowadays especially with those working with deaf people and in language learning-teaching. People naturally learn about the environment they are born in. Enculturation of people continues

during their entire lives. Cultures developed over a long period of time, over one generation or several centuries, give immense pride to the community of people for whom the culture is the core of their existence.

The communicative approach to language learning stresses the interrelatedness and interdependence of language and culture.

Humour is an important aspect of language and culture. Language learners also need to learn about the humour conventions of the target language community. For example, a common anecdote states that a spy in Germany who was recruited to supply information, learned German language very well but he was caught when he failed to laugh at a joke by native Germans. Sign names and jokes in Indian Sign Language carry a huge load of experiential and cultural information. Non natives miss out on the scene set-up or the punchline most of the time. Even CODAs and SODAs may not understand all the humour and dialects in Indian Sign Language. This is similar to the humour and language related variation that exists in spoken language communities as well. For example, what is funny for auto-drivers is not always funny for the academicians.

There are many jokes in Indian Sign Language depicting the conflicts in values, beliefs and attitudes of deaf and hearing people. Linguistic, cognitive, semantic and cultural content of humour in Indian Sign Language is comprehensible for those who have near native fluency in ISL. There are many talented young and old comedians popular in the Indian Deaf community.

Some deaf people stop signing in the presence of hearing people because they feel that hearing people might laugh at them which makes them feel inferior. Many deaf people might not accept being deaf due to various factors such as communication barriers, a sense of feeling inferior, etc.

In India, it is often seen that deaf persons give priority to deaf identity of deaf people rather than other aspects like religion, community, caste, etc. Their interactions are based on shared deafness. For example, a hearing mother of a deaf son shared her experience with the authors. She stated that she did not feel comfortable with people of lower castes and maintained distance when lower caste people came to her home as guests. However, her deaf son would happily meet and give handshakes and hug deaf people, even of lower caste, and conversed with them for hours. Therefore, the deaf son did not recognize the caste identity, rather giving emphasis to the deaf identity. This example is true for most deaf people in India.

There are lots of cultural similarities and differences among people and these differences influence learning, behaviour and values. How two groups with cultural differences relate to each other and their communicative ways are affected by their perception of cultures. Being culturally sensitive requires that we recognize and respect the differences and variations amongst cultures. It is wrong to presume that all cultures are same or all the customs and codes are same in all the different cultures. Intercultural sensitivity

represents both the ability of an individual to distinguish between the different behaviours, perceptions, and feelings of a culturally distinct person and the ability to appreciate and respect them as well.

### **Summary**

Deaf culture is defined in variety of contexts that is helpful in an understanding of what is culture. Major works done focusing on deaf culture and the existing literature on deaf people and sign language in India are reviewed and cited. Relationship of language and culture, types of culture and theories of culture are described before moving to the section on deaf culture and community.

Culture creates communities and culture is the complex pattern of interconnected system that develops in a given population independently. How the deaf people interact with people around and develop various coping mechanisms for survival and how they thrive is an important part of culture.

The powerful concept of Deafhood is introduced before describing the cultural organizations that are functional in India. Similarities and differences in deaf and hearing cultures are discussed along with membership of and other features of deaf community in India. A comparison of deaf culture in India and the west is done. In the last part intercultural sensitivity is discussed: What the hearing people must know about the deaf people and what the deaf people should be aware of about hearing people for good working relations. It is possible to sensitize and bridge the gap between hearing and deaf worlds with information about each other.

### **POINTS TO PONDER.....MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

1. In some countries, women are not allowed to drive or participate in sports activities. Can this be considered a cultural belief? If yes, how?
2. Is language created by culture or does culture create language? Explain.
3. Is it true that culture and technology influence each other? Explain the reasons.
4. Have you noticed any changes in culture in your society and your life? Explain.
5. What is the difference between hearing and deaf culture? Share your experiences.
6. Share your experiences with cross cultural differences.
7. Discuss your experience of identifying your deafness and responses of your family members.
8. How did neighbours and relatives react to your deafness?
9. What are the challenges faced by you outside home. Why?
10. What is the response when people discover that you are deaf? Discuss.

### **Activity: Deaf Culture Elephant Game**

The game has the following objectives:

- Increase attention span
- Promote body awareness and refine motor coordination

- Develop a keen sense of observation
- Provide cognitive/academic skills training
- Learn cooperation, positive interaction and adaptability
- Experience appropriate touch

To play the Elephant Game, players (often called elephants) are arranged into a circle and face inward towards the caller or pointer who stands in the middle. That person points to a player who must immediately form the elephant trunk by placing two S handshapes together in front of his or her nose. The two players on each side of the person forming the elephant trunk create that person's elephant ears using the B or Open B handshapes, completing the arrangement. If no errors are made, then the caller/pointer selects a new person to become the elephant and the game continues.

However, if a handshake or location error is made, then the player or players who made the error are eliminated. The game continues until only the caller/pointer and two players remain, leaving three final players who win the game. Advanced players of the game often continue the game beyond this point with these additional steps: The caller/pointer continues to point to one of the two players. The player pointed to forms the elephant trunk, while the second player must lean over and form both elephant ears on that person. The caller/pointer continues to select who becomes the elephant. When one of the last two players is eliminated, the caller/pointer steps in to continue the game. Without being called or pointed to, the two players alternate forming the elephant trunk and ears until an error is made. The last player remaining wins the game.

(Source: <https://www.playtherapygames.com/HTML/dgptelephant.html>)

### **Exercises**

#### **True or False**

1. Culture and Language are not interdependent.
2. Sign Languages are not preserved by advanced technologies.
3. Deaf culture in India and USA is the same.
4. Those deaf who do not use a sign language can be considered culturally deaf.
5. Membership of the deaf communities is for deaf people only.

#### **Answer in one word**

1. The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears is called \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Different people look at disability differently. The various ways society responds to the disability is called \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Deaf people either tap or wave to call for attention while hearing people call out. This can be called as \_\_\_\_\_ difference.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is an organization which is affiliated to UNESCO and UNICEF to spread awareness and campaign for deaf rights.

5. The deaf \_\_\_\_\_ may include persons who are not themselves deaf and those who actively support the goal of the community and but deaf \_\_\_\_\_ is at the center of deaf individuals.

### ANSWER KEY

1. Audism 2. Models of disability 3. Cultural 4. World Federation of the Deaf 5. Community

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## **UNIT 3**

### **CONCEPT OF IDENTITY AND THE D/DEAF**

**Total Hours: 14**

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

After reading this unit, the learners would be able to:

- a) Describe the term 'Identity' in general.
- b) Understand the definitions of 'Identity', general and psychological.
- c) Understand the characteristics and importance of 'self-identity'
- d) Understand the impact of awareness of 'self-identity' or lack of it in life of an individual.

#### **3.1 Identity: concept and its role in life**

#### **3.2 Language, culture and identity**

#### **3.3 The Deaf identity and Deafhood**

#### **3.4 Deaf communities and minority status**

#### **Introduction**

It is not uncommon that we use the word 'identity' in our normal day-to-day conversation. From school-going kid to office-going adult, each one has certain form of 'identity card' carried along with him / her. We carry our 'identity card' or 'ID card' wherever we go and we flash it to prove our identity in order to get an access to or derive benefits from something. At the moment of writing this unit, our 'Aadhar card' is one such socially controversial among many identity cards we have today which indicates not only our personal identity but also our national identity. However, the concept of identity is not as simple as the idea of an identity card explained above. The term 'identity' is more complex, more abstract in nature. So, in this first sub-unit we will elaborately discuss the concept of identity, its definitions, characteristics and importance in life of every individual. In the following sub-units we will also discover why 'Deaf identity' is important to a deaf individual and why 'Deaf communities' should deserve the status as a minority community.

#### **3.1 Identity: The Concept and its Role in Life**

Each one of us carries multiple identities, some known and some hidden. To recognize one's own identities is to know about oneself. A simple question to self, "Who am I?" can help every individual recognize his/her multiple identities. According to the

information available on the Wikipedia, one's **self-concept**, which is also known as **self-construction**, **self-identity**, **self-perspective**, or **self-structure**, is a collection of beliefs about oneself.

*Point to Ponder: What is your response to the question – who are you? May be you could begin with your name but then you will have to make a list of different roles you have in your life. That will show your affiliation to various sections. Here is my list of answers after my name:*

1. *I am a Deaf person.*
2. *ISL (Indian Sign Language) is my first language.*
3. *I am a Hindu.*
4. *I am a Marathi speaking person.*
5. *I am married.*
6. *I am a parent.*
7. *I am a young adult.*
8. *I am a hard core Mumbaikar.*
9. *I am a nature club member.*
10. *I am a vegetarian.*

Make your list. How many identities do you have? Anyone can have multiple identities at a given point of time. Your list will help you understand your affiliations to various sections and also your priorities in listing these.

### **3.1.1 Concept and Definition of Identity**

According to Your Dictionary, identity is defined as who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you. An example of your identity is your name. An example of your identity is the traditional characteristics of you as an Indian. Referring to the 'Identity' from the perspective of Social Science (Psychology) provided in the Wikipedia, identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a person (self-identity) or group (particular social category or social group). A psychological identity relates to self-image (one's mental model of self), self-esteem, and individuality. Identity and self-esteem are closely related; and developing self-esteem and a strong sense of identity are very important to good mental health. Your sense of identity has to do with who you think you are and how you perceive yourself. Self-esteem is how you value yourself. It has to do with your sense of self-worth.

*Point to ponder: How does a person with hearing loss identify himself/herself? It largely depends on the factors that may influence his/her perception and acceptance of deafness for life. What could be those factors?*

### **3.1.2 Characteristics and importance of having an Identity in life**



As indicated on the portal study.com, personal identity (self-identity) is defined as the concept you develop about yourself that **evolves** over the course of your life. This may include aspects of your life that you have **no control over**, such as where you grew up or the colour of your skin, as well as **choices you make** in life, such as how you spend your time and what you believe and where do you think you fit.

According to the University of Warwick, awareness about ourselves enable us to make choices because when we have a better understanding of ourselves, we are able to experience ourselves as unique and separate individuals. We are then empowered to make changes and to build on our areas of strength as well as identify areas where we would like to make improvements. As mentioned in the Bulletin of sociological methodology, the personal identity allows an individual to appear unique through a specific combination of personality characteristics, abilities, interests, physical attributes and biography. Personality and personal identity are **bio-socially determined**, which means that both are **genetically pre-defined and socially reshaped**.

### **3.1.3 Formation of identity and identity issues**

To have an identity is very important because failure to form one's own identity leads to failure to form a shared identity with others, which could lead to instability in many areas as an adult. Many people ask whether we are born with our identity or we can choose our own identity. Identity is created throughout the course of one's life. **Factors that influence personal identity are culture, language, gender, family, friends, media, interests and hobbies, your city, town or community etc.** Among all other factors, one's ability to make choices throughout the course of life is considered to be the decisive factor that continually reshapes and fine-tunes identities. However, not everyone is blessed with freedom to make choices. Identities are often shaped largely by other factors that are out of control of the individuals. But individuals can develop determination to reshape and fine-tune identities according to their desires by making conscious choices.

The particular stage relevant to identity formation takes place during adolescence (Erikson, 1968) when the child begins to consciously question the self in the context of others around it and gradually discovers himself/herself as a unique human being. It is this stage when adolescent child generally engages itself to make choices, consciously or unconsciously, and irrespective of consequences of choices, which directly involves in reshaping it's own identity whether or not the child has intended to change it. The choices made by adolescent children can change over time as they mature with the abilities to understand about consequences of their choices and their desire to modify and reshape their present identities.

As mentioned in goodtherapy.org, identity or parts of identity may be classified by any number of things such as religion, gender, or ethnicity. Some traits, such as race, are set at birth. Some traits may be modified later in life such as language(s) spoken or religious

preferences. **Struggling with various parts of identity is natural and normal. Developing an identity or sense of self and those traits a person desires to have can take time and may be challenging.** Not having a strong sense of self or struggling with identity issues may lead to anxiety and insecurity. Identity issues can lead anyone into depression, feeling hopelessness, getting into addiction and more. Psychotherapy offers a place in which people may discuss the issues related to their identity. Through psychotherapy, people may reduce their depression, find ways to cope with struggles associated with their identity issues, and ultimately find themselves in the process.

***Point to ponder: After having identified oneself with deafness, how does one cope with it for life? If anyone becomes depressed with his/her Deaf identity, what could be ways that can bring affected person to terms with his/her Deaf identity and carry it for life?***

### **Summary:**

1. Everyone is born without awareness about self. Developing a sense of self or an identity is an essential part of every individual becoming mature.
2. We are not born with our identity but it is created throughout the course of one's life. Although some of identity traits are preset at birth, successful author and blogger Dana Mr Kich however argued that it can be changed when she stated this in her blog, "Very little if any, of our identity is permanent part of us." Identity is dynamic and complex and changes over time.
3. The sooner the critical part(s) of identity is established in the early stage of adolescent life, for example, Deaf identity, the better the person is prepared to face the world with confidence for the rest of his/her life.

### **How far have you learnt?**

1. Identity is a static and permanent thing. (True or False): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Personal Identities are \_\_\_\_\_ (purely inherited / bio-socially defined) (choose appropriate answer).
3. Group identity comes before self-identity (True or False): \_\_\_\_\_.
4. There are no quick fixes to resolve identity issues (True or False): \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Which therapy can be used to treat identity issues? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Physiotherapy / Psychotherapy / Speech therapy).
6. **Assignment:** After reading this unit on the concept of 'Identity', reflect on your past times when you began your search for your own identity and write in your own words about your own personal journey of discovering, shaping and reshaping some of your parts of self-identity.

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**Model answers (to questions listed under ‘How far have you learnt’):**

1. False
2. Bio-socially defined
3. False
4. True
5. Psychotherapy

### **3.2 Language, Culture and Identity**

As mentioned in the sections 3.1 and 3.1.2, personal identity is a self-concept that is bio-socially determined. There is another dimension to one’s identity, known as ‘Cultural identity’ which refers to a person’s sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. Therefore, prior to discussing further about cultural identity of a person, we need to understand two most important factors, viz. Culture and language. We then will be able to understand how identity of a person is interrelated closely with culture and language.

#### **3.2.1 Understanding culture**

Culture, by standard definition, is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people encompassing language, religion, cuisine, clothing, social habits, music and arts. A further explanation of culture is provided by the Centre for Advance Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at University of Minnesota, which defines it as ‘shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization’. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a **group identity** fostered by social patterns unique to the group.



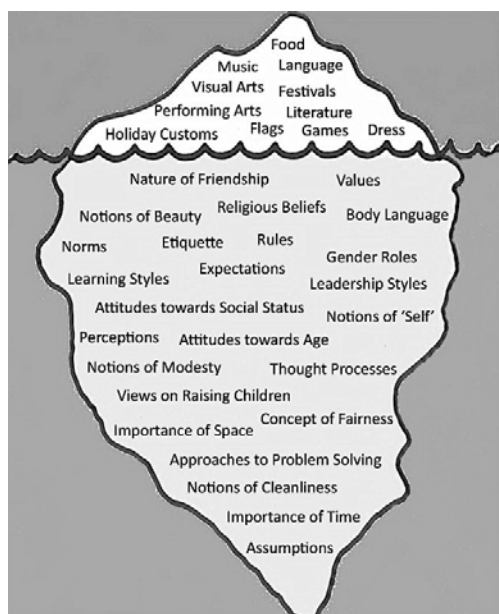
Credits: steemit.com

As mentioned in [simple.wikipedia.org](http://simple.wikipedia.org), culture is a word for the **‘way of life’** of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. Different groups may have different cultures. A culture is passed on to the next generation by learning, whereas genetics are passed on by heredity. Culture is seen in people’s writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking, and in what they do. The concept of culture is very complicated, and the word has many meanings. The word ‘culture’ is most commonly used in three ways:

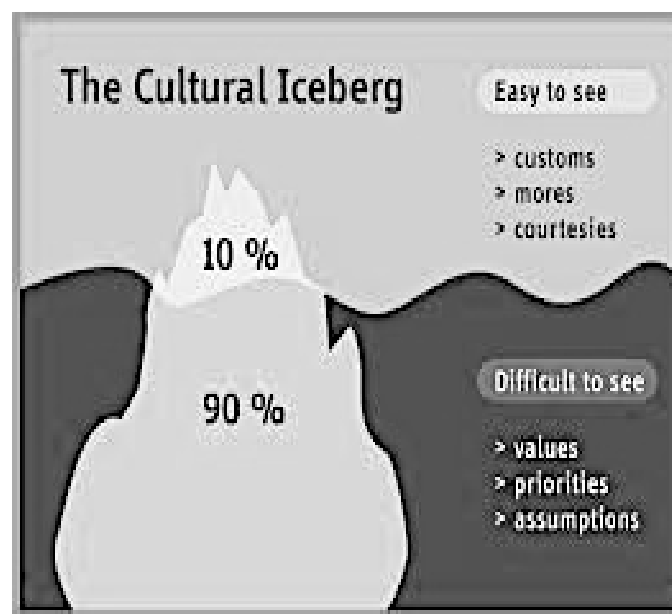
- Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities, also known as high culture.
- An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour.
- The outlook, attitudes, values, morals, goals, and customs shared by a society.

Most broadly, ‘culture’ includes all human phenomena which are not purely results of human genetics. The discipline which investigates cultures is called anthropology, though many other disciplines play a part.

Culture of a particular group is so complex that most of us know a little about cultures outside our own culture. What we know about other culture is just a tip of an iceberg. An iceberg is the best metaphor to understand about a particular culture that is different than ours. The 10% visible part of cultural iceberg may comprise of language, folklore, dress, fine arts, food, holidays and festivals. The remaining 90% invisible part of it may contain perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values and much more.



Credits: interculturalism.blogspot.com



Credits: <https://twitter.com/jamitha/status/986712120749449216>

### 3.2.2 Understanding relationship between Culture and Language

We also need to understand the relationship between culture and language. There are different worldviews on their relationship. One worldview says that culture is a wider system that completely includes language as a subsystem, akin to a relationship of “part to whole”. Another worldview held by Kramsch (1998) explains that language and culture are bound together in three ways:

- Language expresses cultural reality;
- Language embodies cultural reality;
- Language symbolizes cultural reality.

Moran (2001) believes that language and culture are two sides of the same coin, each mirroring the other. There are some thinkers who prefer to say, “language is culture and culture is language”, thus blurring the line between language and culture. According to them, language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship. Language is complexly intertwined with culture, meaning that they have evolved together, influencing one another in the process, and ultimately shaping what it means to be human. In this context, Kroeber (1923) said, “Culture, then, began when speech was present, and from then on, the enrichment of either means the further development of the other” (as cited in Nabi, 2017).

### 3.2.3 Cultural identity and the role of language

Apart from personal identity we discussed in the previous sub-units (3.1), we will discuss another term ‘cultural identity’ here. Cultural identity is the **identity or feeling of belonging to a group**. It is part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception and is

related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristics of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity.

A strong cultural identity is important to a child's mental health and wellbeing. Having a strong sense of their own cultural history and traditions helps children build a positive cultural identity for themselves, gives them a sense of belonging and self-esteem and supports their overall wellbeing.

It is important to understand how language facilitates cultural identity among members of a group. Language is both a vehicle for acquiring the content of culture and an aspect of content in itself. The importance of language in a cultural context lies in the fact that it is the vehicle for transmitting culture between members and from one generation to another (Kuhn, 1966 as cited in Kisanji, 1998). As such language fosters social cohesion and cultural identity. (Kisanji, *ibid*).

#### **Summary:**

1. 'Personal identity' and 'cultural identity' of an individual are not two separate concepts but are part of multidimensional aspects of the individual's identity. Carrying either one of the dimensions of identity without the other will not suffice to lead a sustainable life.
2. Culture and language are two essential factors that build cultural identity of an individual.
3. Culture and language are inseparable.

#### **HOW FAR HAVE YOU LEARNT?**

1. Cultural Identity is a product of language and culture of an individual. \_\_\_\_\_ (True/False)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is both a vehicle for acquiring the content of culture and an aspect of content in itself.
3. Give one word for 'way of life' of groups of people meaning the way they do things: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Explain the following statement in your own words: "Culture includes all human phenomena which are not purely results of human genetics".
5. Describe the relationship between language and culture.
6. How does use of language foster social cohesion and cultural identity?

#### **References**

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#### **Model answers:**

1. True
2. Language
3. Culture

### **3.3 The Deaf identity**

As explained in the previous sections, you are now aware that 'cultural identity' of an individual is built on the foundation of culture and language of community to which s/he belongs. Before we discuss the 'Deaf identity' we must first understand the 'Deaf community' and 'Deaf culture' because, without a community and its culture, the development of the sense of cultural identity in a person and among culturally identical group of members would not be possible.

(Please note that use of capital or big letter 'D' in the word 'Deaf' is purposeful and explanation is given in the last paragraph of the section 3.3.3).

#### **3.3.1 Deaf community:**

Unlike most other communities, the Deaf community is **not limited to a certain geographical region**. Take for example the connection between Maharashtra and Marathi language. This leads to a culture called Maharashtrian culture. Same holds good in India or elsewhere where the language and culture are linked with a geographical area to begin with. Later the people from next generations may travel and settle in various parts of the world, they carry some parts of their culture wherever they go. Like there could be Marathi clubs or groups in the USA or any other country abroad.

Same is not the case for Deaf culture. Deaf groups are formed and connected at various levels: at local level, at district level, at state level and at national level. Deaf communities are also connected globally. Various institutions and not the geographical locations facilitate the Deaf coming together. These institutes include: Deaf schools (both residential and non-residential and yes, both oral and manual), Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRCs), Non-Governmental Organizations for the Deaf, Deaf clubs, Deaf associations are part of the Deaf community and also a manifestation of Deaf culture.

Deaf people and others (non-deaf) associated with the Deaf **by means of sign language and Deaf culture** are part of the Deaf community. Anyone with some degree of hearing loss simply does not become a part of the Deaf community. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) stresses that a person is a member of the Deaf community when an individual identifies himself/herself to be a member of that Deaf community, and, if other members of that Deaf community accept that person as a member. This acceptance, very often, is strongly linked to competency in sign language.

Malenfant (2013) explains that there are four different categories of people in the Deaf community. Each category of people has different experiences that shape their participation and changes the makeup of the Deaf community. The four categories are: (a) Deaf of Deaf, (b) Deaf of Hearing, (c) CODAs/SODAs, and (d) allies. A short description of each category is given below.

The first category, Deaf of Deaf denotes people who themselves are Deaf, as are their parents. They are native sign language users and they grow up in a home environment that is culturally Deaf. This is only 10% of the deaf population which transmit deafness from one generation to another generation as a result of genetic differences. A few of these Deaf families are also referred to as “multigenerational Deaf” families as they can trace their Deaf heritage back to Deaf ancestors, creating a very tight network of Deaf families.

The second category, Deaf of Hearing is comprised of Deaf people who have Hearing parents, and they form the large chunk of the deaf population (90%). These deaf people typically grow up with a hearing culture within their homes and they do not necessarily share a common experience with their parents. They become deaf owing to illness or accident, at birth or in a later stage of their lives. They are generally categorized as pre-lingually deaf (i.e. their deafness is developed around the time a language is acquired during the critical period of language acquisition – age 0 to 5 years) or post-lingually deaf (i.e. their deafness is developed after the critical period of language acquisition, age 5 onwards).

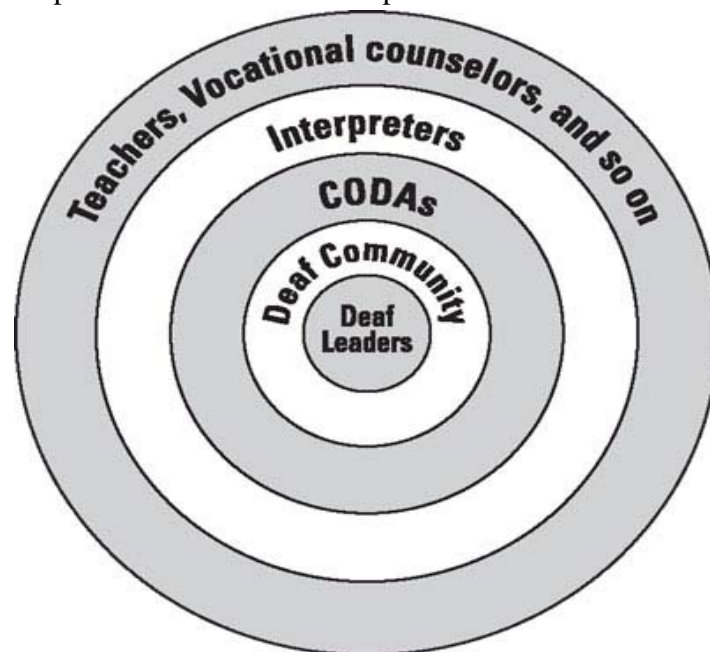
The third category, CODAs/SODAs which stands for Child(ren) Of Deaf Adult(s) / Sibling(s) Of Deaf Adult(s) respectively, are Hearing individuals who become part of the Deaf community through activities such as interpreting, teaching, advocacy, social service and so on. They acquire sign language through interaction with the Deaf adult(s)



for a long period of time, usually beginning from their childhood days. Their participation in the Deaf community is directly associated with their skill in the relevant sign language of the Deaf community as well as their attitudes towards deafness, the deaf people and their sign language.

Allies of the Deaf community, the forth category, include all hearing individuals who connect with the Deaf community through various roles such as sign language interpreters, Deaf educators, audiologists, vocational counselors, social service people and several other kinds of people. They play a supporting role by helping to either share knowledge about the Deaf community to hearing people and families who have deaf children who would be otherwise unaware, or provide services like interpreting and education.

Penilla II and Taylor (2016) offer a visual metaphor of Deaf community as a bull's eye (see image below). According to them, at the center of the bull's eye are the core Deaf community leaders who have very positive and strong Deaf identity (see section 3.3.3 for detailed explanation). They label these Deaf leaders as the movers and shakers of the Deaf world. The next ring is the Deaf community as a whole. The next ring is Children of Deaf Adults or CODAs who are hearing people who choose to become certified interpreters. Following them are trained and certified interpreters who have no deafness in their respective families. On the outer ring are those who provide services to the Deaf community members but still have the ability to sign. These are teachers at Deaf schools / Deaf institutes, and professional workers who provide services for the Deaf.



Think of the layers of the Deaf community like a bull's eye (credits: Dummies.com)

### 3.3.2 Understanding Deaf culture as subculture

Deaf culture, best understood as a way of doing things by Deaf people, should not be confused with other cultures we know. Deaf people do not wear different clothes, do not have different cuisine, and do not have different religion. Deaf people can form a Deaf community and practice Deaf culture in spite of the fact that they come from different communities and cultures their families belong to. Deaf culture thus can be seen as **subculture** of Deaf people where they practice shared values and behaviours within the Deaf community. As mentioned in Wikipedia.org, a subculture, by simple definition, is a group of people within a culture that differentiates itself from the parent culture to which it belongs, often maintaining some of its founding principles.

**Sign language is at the centre of Deaf culture.** Naming conventions (sign names), attention-getting behaviours (waving a hand, creating vibrations, pointing, gentle tap on the shoulder), use of certain technology, Deaf theatrics (mime, drama, poetry) and Deaf sports (tournaments played among deaf teams), Deaf histories, Deaf stories and humours passed from generation to generation are living proof of the existence of Deaf culture.

### 3.3.3 Deaf identity

Deaf identity is one of many identities Deaf people associate themselves with. **Deaf identity is the cultural identity for both the Deaf person and the Deaf group.** Those considering themselves as ‘proudly Deaf’ have strong deaf identity and others just feeling as ‘deaf’ have weak ‘deaf identity’. **This feeling of strong or weak deaf identity recognized by themselves has primarily to do with how much they embrace their Deaf culture.** There may be other contributing factors including self-awareness that weaken or strengthen their feelings about ‘being Deaf’.

A strong Deaf identity is understood as having a positive attitude about their own being as Deaf individuals, considering the sign language and Deaf culture as source of strength, taking pride in being a part of Deaf community of Sign Language Peoples (SLPs). A weak deaf identity is exactly the opposite characteristics of the strong deaf identity. It is very important to introduce **Deaf Role Models (DRMs)** to pre-dominant hearing society as well as hearing families who have deaf children. DRMs from deaf communities are source of healthy and positive Deaf identity who can help build positive cultural identity i.e. strong Deaf identity among deaf children and youths.

*The letter ‘D’ (big or capital ‘D’) in the word ‘Deaf’ has special meaning. Those deaf people having the characteristics of being Sign Language Peoples (SLPs) (Kusters et al., 2015) with positive sense of ‘Deaf identity’ are part of the Deaf community and they are identified with big or capital letter ‘D’. Other people with hearing loss and not as SLPs are identified with small letter ‘d’. If there is no special reference to the particular deaf group in the discussion then ‘deaf’ is used for all deaf people in general. This distinction of ‘D’ and ‘d’ is made necessary to create proper contextual understanding about particular deaf groups in discussion and is not intended to discriminate among deaf people with or without sign language skills.*

**Summary:**

- Members of deaf community are not concentrated in a particular region. Deaf people who use sign language and are part of Deaf communities are scattered all over and connected at various levels.
- Deaf culture is better understood as subculture, the shared values and behaviours which are practiced by Deaf members within their Deaf community.
- Strong or weak 'Deaf Identity' of a deaf individual is dependent on how much s/he takes pride in and embraces 'Deaf culture', including the sign language.

**HOW FAR HAVE YOU LEARNT?**

1. Deaf people practice deaf culture in their homes. (True/False) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Hearing people with sign language skills and practicing deaf culture are part of the Deaf community (True/ False) \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (Deaf Role Models / Doctors and hearing members of families) are source for building positive strong Deaf identity among deaf children.
4. Why is Deaf culture considered as subculture? Explain briefly.
5. Assignment: Take your time and make your own observations about deaf people with strong and weak deaf identities and write an essay in your own words: Why is building strong Deaf identity is important?

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**Model answers (to questions listed under 'How far have you learnt'):**

1. False
2. True

### 3. Deaf Role Models

#### 3.4 Deaf communities and minority status

Before we consider whether or not a Deaf community should be granted a minority status, we must first understand the characteristics of a minority community as well as the characteristics of a Deaf community. Deafness is defined as the condition of lacking the power of hearing or having impaired hearing. Hearing disability is thus defined as restriction or lack (resulting from hearing impairment) of ability to perform conversation in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. In that context, we will explain why Deaf SLPs should not be viewed as disabled but as a minority group.

##### 3.4.1 What is a minority group?

As mentioned in [courses.lumenlearning.com](https://courses.lumenlearning.com), Sociologist Louis Wirth (1954) defined a minority group as “any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.” **The term minority connotes discrimination.** In Sociology, Minority group is known as ‘subordinate group’ and the ‘dominant group’ is one that is in majority. As Wirth pointed out, it is important to note that **being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group**; sometimes, larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is **the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group**. For example, consider apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the white minority.

The portal, [courses.lumenlearning.com](https://courses.lumenlearning.com) also mentions that, according to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics:

1. Unequal treatment and less power over their lives,
2. Distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin colour or language,
3. Involuntary membership in the group,
4. Awareness of subordination, and
5. High rate of in-group marriage.

While considering Deaf community as a minority one we have to debate the point numbers 2 and 3 since these are not applicable here.

##### 3.4.2 History of Deaf community:

‘A journey into the Deaf-World’, a historical book written by Hoffmeister and Bahan will give you a complete account of Deaf history in American context. If you look at the Deaf history over last two centuries you will realise that Deaf SLPs have gone through oppressions from non-deaf communities. The relentless oppressions included banning use of sign language in deaf schools worldwide and deaf kids were severely, inhumanely

punished for using sign language for interaction among themselves. Deaf adults were oppressed, excluded, even abused physically and mentally in their social lives. The non-deaf communities tried to wipe out the Deaf culture. Deaf communities, however, endured and survived all forms of discriminations and oppressions by non-deaf communities. Even today, with the advancement in the medical technology, medical professionals including audiologists and speech therapists continue to discourage use of sign language by the deaf who had the 'CI' or Cochlear Implant done on them. Systematic prevention and eradication of sign languages of the Deaf SLPs is equivalent of linguistic genocide. Deaf communities worldwide have come much closer in this modern age of Internet and mobile phones and have intensified their fight for protection of their sign languages and Deaf culture. Moreover, Deaf – Deaf marriages within deaf community were and are still going strong even today.

### **3.4.3 Deaf community as minority group as well as marginalized group; and as disabled group:**

If you notice carefully, you will find that the characteristics of minority group explained in the section (3.4.1) are also present within the Deaf community / communities (See section 3.4.2). Most prominent feature of oppression throughout Deaf history is oppression of sign languages. Today the scenario worldwide is slowly changing that sign languages are now recognised and even made one of national languages in few countries. Indian Government has taken a positive step and has recently set up Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) in New Delhi to encourage research and training in Indian Sign Language. Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 has mentioned about the promotion of use of sign language and protection of deaf culture, in line with the provisions made in the UN's Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD 2006). There were no such provisions available in the previous Act, Persons with Disabilities (PwD) Act 1995 that no longer exists and is replaced by RPWD Act 2016. Like other minority communities which fight for their rights, the Deaf community in India has also demanded for inclusion of Indian Sign Language as 23<sup>rd</sup> Scheduled languages of India. At the time of writing this unit, they have started movement for Indian Sign Language Bill which they want it to be passed and turned into law by the Indian Parliament. All these developments indicate that Deaf communities worldwide can be viewed as **minority communities**.

Moreover, deaf communities are **marginalised communities** as well. Marginalisation is the process of pushing a particular group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity or place in it. To clarify this we take the example of other disabled groups. The working motto of the disabled groups has been 'Nothing about us, without us' to enforce Government and non-Government committees to include disabled members in decision making process of projects, schemes designed for disabled groups' benefits. However, **Deaf groups still find it difficult to fully participate in the committees due to lack of communication access and their voices are also muzzled by**

**non-deaf members** who make decisions themselves on behalf of deaf members, of projects and schemes designed for the benefit of deaf groups. There is also **no equity in benefits offered and schemes implemented** by the Governments for the deaf groups in comparison with other disabled groups. This clearly shows that Deaf members experience the **lack of power** and **by the same virtue** the Deaf communities justifiably acquire the minority status (as explained in the section 3.4.1) besides the marginalized one.

Again, one needs to understand why Deaf group is also one of disabled groups while it is claiming to be a minority group. In that context, we first need to understand the terms ‘impairment’, ‘disability’ and ‘handicap’. World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided most cited definitions of above three terms which are given below for ready reference:

- A. **Impairment:** any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.
- B. **Disability:** any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.
- C. **Handicap:** a disadvantage for a given individual that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal.

Every human being having one or more forms of impairment must be provided an access by means of appropriate provisions in order to take full participation in or to perform an activity in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. It is the responsibility of our society, our Governments to ensure accessibility for those people with impairment. Failing to do so thus make persons with impairment the disabled persons or even handicapped persons. Our society and Governments have so far failed or neglected to make adequate and proper accessibility provisions for the Deaf group. Hence the duality of their claim is appropriate in certain contexts that Deaf group is both a disabled group and also a minority group.

#### **Summary:**

- Deaf communities face discriminations, oppressions from majority communities comprised of people with the ability to hear.
- Deaf people do suffer from hearing impairment. However they turn into disabled or handicapped by denial or lack of provision of adequate and proper accessibility solutions by the society and the governments. It is the responsibility of majority communities and the governments to ensure full participation for Deaf people in day-to-day activities in the society.

#### **HOW FAR HAVE YOU LEARNT?**

1. A particular community is granted a minority status on the basis of low number of its population. (True / False) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Deaf communities suffered oppression of \_\_\_\_\_ (speech / sign language) in the past two centuries.
3. Write in your own words: Why is Indian Deaf community a ‘marginalized community’ as well?
4. **Assignment no.1 :** Justify with examples from your own observations that Indian Deaf community is both ‘minority community’ and ‘disabled group’ as well.
5. **Assignment no. 2 :** Read and compare both acts viz. Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act 1995 (not in force today) and Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 with respect to provisions on accessibility for the Deaf persons. Do some inquiries to find answers: Why is there differences between two acts and suggest how could present act be made better than now for deaf persons.

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Penilla II, A. and Taylor, A. (2016). American Sign Language for Dummies, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. ISBN: 978-1-119-28607-3. <https://www.dummies.com/languages/american-sign-language/participating-deaf-community/> (Accessed on 28 April 2019).

### Model answers (to questions listed under ‘How fare have you learnt’):

1. False
2. Sign language

## UNIT 4

### SIGN LANGUAGES

**Total Hours: 14 hours**

*"As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have signs."*  
(George W. Veditz, 1913, *"Preservation of the Sign Language"*)  
(NAD vlogs 2010)

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian Sign Language, usually abbreviated as ISL, is one of at least 200 natural sign languages which we know exist across the world. (There may well be others which have not been documented yet.) Some of these are national sign languages, that is, they are used more or less throughout their country, but not beyond the boundaries of that country. Other sign languages are used in more than one country. American Sign Language is an example of such a language, as it is used in the United States of America and also in Canada. It is the second sign language in the Philippines and the second sign language, in slightly modified form, in Singapore. Other sign languages are used regionally, and thus may co-exist with another sign language, or multiple sign languages within the country.

Of these 150 or more sign languages, some are recognised as official national languages. Others, while unofficial, are recognised in practice, even by the government. Nepali Sign Language is such a language, as it is used in all schools for the Deaf in Nepal, including those which are government schools, and it has also been allowed to be used in both the Supreme Court and in the national legislative assembly (previously, only Nepali, the official national language, had been allowed). Finally, others are given neither official nor unofficial recognition by the government, and in some cases, their use in the public sphere are even discouraged or prohibited (for example, in schools for the Deaf in countries where "Oralism" reigns as educational policy).

Indian Sign Language is the natural language normally acquired and used as the first and primary language by Deaf individuals living in India, especially those growing up in towns and cities. It is the language used by Deaf persons when interacting with other Deaf persons. It is also the language of preference used by Deaf Indians when interacting with hearing individuals, to the extent that the hearing individual is able to understand sign language, or to the extent that a sign language interpreter is available to mediate communication between Deaf and hearing. It is also the sign language used as the medium of instruction in schools for the Deaf in India if they use sign language (although it must be noted that most schools for the Deaf throughout India do not use Indian Sign Language, nor, in fact, any sign language as a medium of instruction. Some, in fact, discourage the use of sign language in general, not simply in an educational setting).



Indian Sign Language is the sign language used in Deaf organisations, whether at the national level, such as National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD), or in cities, towns and other communities by local Deaf organisations.

Although Indian Sign Language is not yet officially recognised by the Constitution (the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India recognises 22 languages, an increase from the 14 listed in the original Constitution), Indian Sign Language can be considered the national sign language of India in practice. It is also semi-officially recognised to the extent that the government of India established sign language courses at the National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped (NIHH) since 2001, and more recently established the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC). Among their activities is the teaching of Indian Sign Language as part of the training process for future sign language interpreters. Additionally, at the state level, at least one state, Madhya Pradesh, officially recognised ISL as a language (Ghatwai 2015).

#### **4.1 Myths and facts about sign languages and D/deaf communities**

#### **4.2 Diversity in sign language communities**

#### **4.3 Sign languages, education and literacy**

#### **4.4 Role and significance of technology for communication and learning among Deaf Community**

### **Unit Learning Outcomes**

In this unit the student:

- should be able to list a number of myths and misconceptions about Deaf and about sign languages which are common in the hearing community.
- should be able to understand and describe some of the ways in which sign languages vary
- should be able to understand and discuss a number of sources of diversity within the Deaf and Signing communities.
- should be able to describe Deaf education as it currently exists in India and should be able to compare this to the situation in other countries.
- should be able to explain the primary causes of the relative poor literacy among members of the Deaf community.
- should be able to list a number of recent technologies and technological applications which have greatly increased access to communication and improved the educational opportunities for members of the Deaf community.
- should be able to discuss some of the ways in which these new technologies are currently used in India, or might more effectively be used in India to provide better and more widely available educational models for the Deaf at all levels.

- should be able to explain some ways in which any or all of the above points might also impact on non-Deaf members of the signing community (such as sign language interpreters and hearing teachers in schools for the Deaf).

## References

- NAD vlogs (2010). *The Preservation of Sign Language by George W. Veditz*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XITbj3NTLUQ>)
- Ghatwai, M. (2015). Sign language gets status of separate language in Madhya Pradesh. *Indian Express*, November 30, 2015. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/sign-language-gets-status-of-separate-language-in-madhya-pradesh/>)

## 4.1 Myths and Facts about Sign Languages and D/deaf Communities

### Introduction

There are many mistaken ideas about both Deaf people and about their language (sign language) which are commonly (and sometimes almost universally) believed by hearing people. This includes hearing people who have never really met a Deaf person, but also quite often hearing people who are around Deaf people (including members of Deaf person's families, teachers at schools for the Deaf, and, yes, even government officials under whose authority organisations and institutes catering to the Deaf operate.

Rather than calling them “myths” (after all, a Christian may believe that the “myth” of the seven-day creation of the universe is literally true, and a Hindu may well believe that the Ramayana and Mahabharata are fact -- “history” not just “stories” -- and there is no easy way to convince such believers that these are only “myths”). Although it is easy to convince someone that the other religion's stories are myths, it is hard, maybe impossible, to convince someone that their *own* beliefs are “myths”.

However, as there is a tradition in introductory courses to sign language to refer to them as “myths”, we will do so below, but with the following proviso. When we use the term “myth”, we should understand the word in the sense that there are a number of misconceptions (wrong and untrue ideas) about the Deaf, the Deaf community and sign language(s), and that many of these misconceptions are widespread. In many cases these misconceptions are also commonly believed (and taught) by so-called experts who deal with the Deaf regularly. In their capacity as medical experts (doctors, nurses, etc.) and therapists, they see the Deaf individual as “something broken” and “needing to be fixed” without actually dealing with the Deaf person as a person. It should also be stated that these “myths” are held to be true almost exclusively in the hearing realm, although occasionally some Deaf people have been known to accept a couple of them as well.

## Eleven Myths about the Indian Deaf Community and Indian Sign Language

### • **Myth # 1:**

Sign language is the same everywhere.

Another version of this myth is that there is only one sign language, and that, therefore, naturally Deaf signers in India can easily converse with Deaf signers from anywhere across the globe. This myth is widespread almost exclusively among hearing people, and, unsurprisingly, especially among those who have never seen a sign language, and never seen Deaf people from different countries and cultures interact. A further corollary of this myth is that it would be *good* if there *were* just one, uniform and universal sign language, and that it is a shame that not all sign languages are the same (and thus not all Deaf people can automatically communicate with one another).

### • **In fact, however:**

The fact is, although we do not know exactly how many sign languages there are, linguists to date are aware of at least 150 sign languages around the world. As we discussed briefly in the introduction, many of these are national sign languages; others are regional sign languages; still others are very local, so-called “village sign languages” used only in their village of origin (Zeshan & de Vos 2012). Some of these sign languages share a common heritage, just like Hindi, Marathi, Bangla, Gujarati and other modern Indic languages share a common ancestry, belonging to the “Indic language Family”. Thus, for example, American Sign Language (ASL) used in the United States of America and most parts of Canada belongs in a sign language family with French Sign Language. Likewise, Japanese Sign Language, South Korean Sign Language and Taiwanese Sign Language all belong to the same sign language family (which is totally unrelated to American Sign Language or French Sign Language). Other sign languages appear to be entirely indigenous; that is, they are unrelated to sign languages elsewhere (aside, perhaps, from later borrowings from other sign languages, a phenomenon common to all languages when they come in contact). Indian Sign Language appears to be one of this latter type and is a sign language indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, and thus not derived from any other known sign language. It does, however, show an affinity, albeit an insufficiently researched one, with the sign languages in some of the neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh, for example, which has given rise to the label “Indian Sign Language Family” or “Indo-Pakistani Sign Language Family” (Woodward 1993a, 1993b, and Zeshan 2000).

Additionally, if this myth *were* true, if all sign languages *were* in fact the same, would that *not* make the world a *less* interesting place? Does not diversity, of any kind, but especially diversity in language and culture, make a valuable contribution to our common world cultural heritage, enriching us all...but in this case especially enriching the world of Deaf people, the world of Deaf communities?

### • **Myth # 2:**

All Deaf people know sign language.

• **In fact, however:**

Again, although we do not know how many Deaf people in India know Indian Sign Language, and what percentage of India's Deaf population that may be, we do know that not all Deaf people know sign language.

To begin with, India is a very large country, and most Indians live in a rural setting, in villages and small towns, and although India may have 500 or 600 schools for the deaf, this is far too few for there to be a school for the deaf close enough to every Deaf child to be able to attend. Thus, many isolated Deaf (Deaf people living in small villages or in rural areas without any other Deaf people nearby) have no access to sign language.

In addition, schools for the deaf in India have been, and overwhelmingly still are, “oralist” in their educational philosophy, believing the myth that using sign language impedes a child's acquisition of a spoken or written language. This means, in theory at least, that a Deaf child could attend a Deaf school and still not learn how to sign, if the school does not use sign language as a medium of instruction, and if it forbids students to sign among themselves while at school.

In practice, however, such an “oralist” approach is more loosely applied, and, although signing is not used by teachers or in classrooms, outside the classroom the pupils do communicate with each other (and often with teachers and school staff as well) in sign language. And, if the school is residential, and a Deaf child lives on campus/in a dorm, then they are certain to learn sign language -- and quickly-- from their fellow students.

Some Deaf, even in areas where there are schools for the Deaf and other Deaf from whom they *could* potentially learn sign language, are prevented by their families from doing so. This is usually the case when the family feels shame at their child's disability, which leads them to isolating the Deaf family member within the home.

Another group of Deaf who do not know sign language are those who are given access to sign language too late, that is, later than is normally considered necessary for full acquisition of a language to be possible. When this happens, often the Deaf person acquires an ability to communicate using signs, but is unable to fully master the intricacies of sign language grammar. When this is the case, although it may look like the Deaf person is using sign language, in a technical sense, they are not; they are using a sign language-based gesture system.

It is also true that sometimes the families of Deaf people, even without knowing sign language, develop an elaborated system of gestures to communicate with their Deaf children/family member at home. Such systems are usually referred to by the term “home signing”. Such systems, while elaborate compared to gesture, are rarely elaborated enough to be considered a “language”.

• **Myth # 3:**

Sign language is simply just another form of gesture.

Unfortunately, in some countries this myth is perpetuated by the fact that the word for sign language in the national language means “hand language” (for example: Chinese 手语 *shǒu yǔ* and Japanese 手話 *shuwa*).

A consequence of this mistaken belief is that often second language learners of sign language, and also inexperienced sign language interpreters, tend to focus their attention (and eye gaze) on the hands of signers alone. In addition, removing the focus from a wider range of face and body movements onto the hands alone results in an incomplete learning of the non-manual aspects of sign language making the signing of many sign language interpreters less than fully comprehensible and their signing is judged to be “boring”.

• **In fact, however:**

While the vocabulary (the “words”) of Indian Sign Language is formed with the hands (specifically by various rule-governed combinations of hand shapes, orientations of fingers and palms, movement and location of hands), the grammar of sign language is expressed not only by the hands, but also by the use of a larger portion of the body and especially of the head and face. Thus, for example, the distinction between whether a sequence of sign words, YOU DELHI GO, is a statement, a question, or a command is indicated, not by the hands (as the same signs may be used, and in the same order for all three types of sentence, but rather by grammatical features manifest in the head and face.

• **Myth # 4:**

Sign language is not really a language.

Another version of this myth is that sign language does not have “grammar”. Yet another version is that sign language is not a complete language, not capable of performing all the functions that “normal” languages do, not capable of conveying complex and complicated ideas.

• **In fact, however:**

Leaving aside the fact that this myth is held almost exclusively by people who have not taken the effort to actually learn sign language, let us ask what does this myth really mean?

It simply means that Indian Sign Language has a grammar which is different enough from the spoken language the person holding the belief speaks so as to fall outside their imagination as to what language, and what grammar, is. This lack of imagination is due, largely, to the fact that, in India at least, and even among bilingual and trilingual people, spoken languages are all remarkably similar. In addition, this lack of imagination is in part result of the lack of sufficient research, understanding, and publication on sign language grammar (and getting such information to the general population). If however they were to be exposed to a few of the structurally very different spoken languages

which exist in the world (for example, North American native languages, or languages of the Caucasus, or those of aboriginal Australia), they would quickly realise that languages vary considerably as to what “grammar” is (or can be), and that there are many spoken languages which differ from Hindi and English almost as much as Indian Sign Language does.

Whereas spoken language grammar is “one-dimensional” (that is, whether we are talking about the parts of a word strung together as morphology: prefix-foot-word-formative suffix + grammatical ending) or the words strung together in a sentence (the relative orders of subject, object, and verb in a sentence), sign language grammar is multi-dimensional. Not only do we have the dimension of time (sequence), but we also have the three dimensions of space. Although not all sign languages have been well studied, all sign languages which have been studied so far (and that is several dozen of them) use space grammatically.

For this reason, when well-meaning (or perhaps just ill-informed) hearing people, be they teachers of the deaf or poorly trained sign language interpreters, try to construct sign language discourse on the model of spoken language, what we get is a defective grammar.

• **Myth # 5:**

Sign languages have an impoverished vocabulary.

• **In fact, however:**

Commonly makers of sign language dictionaries and teachers of sign languages attempt to make it easier for hearing people to learn sign language, and therefore attempt to standardise the sign language. However, rather than using a model of standardisation which allows for natural variation (a phenomenon of *all* living languages), the model of standardising applied is most often one of exclusion, whereby all regional and other variant forms are rejected. This often results in only a fraction of the living vocabulary used by signers in the Deaf Community actually being documented and included.

Natural sign languages, Indian Sign Language included, are typically rich in synonyms, and even richer in inflected and modulated derivative forms of signs, wherein the meaning is variously and abundantly nuanced. While this is not the place to describe the grammar of ISL, we can, briefly look at the phenomenon of synonymy. Figure 1 gives an example of synonyms, wherein three different signs for the concept SAME are shown:

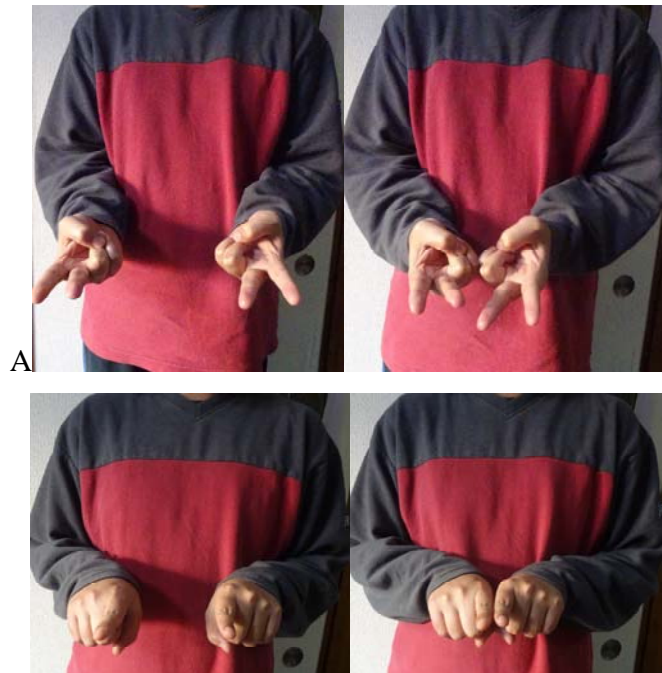


Figure 1: Three different ISL signs for SAME

One might argue that only sign A is indigenous (that is, “pure” ISL and non-borrowed), and indeed there is little question that sign C has been borrowed from American Sign Language (directly or via International Signs), with sign B possibly (but not necessarily) also being a borrowing (from a similar source). However, to exclude commonly used borrowings from the corpus of signs is to force limits on sign language which are not adhered to by any other minority language in the world, nor indeed even by many majority languages. Just think of the Hindi heard on the streets of any city or town in India, with the many English borrowings, but also with borrowings from minority languages as well.

In the case of the signs in Figure 1, all three forms are widely used, sometimes all three by the same signer, sometimes only two (either A and B and/or A and C), sometimes with different regional or local preferences, but in all cases with equal and no noticeable difference in meaning, nuance or usage. That is to say, they are all three pure synonyms.

• **Myth # 6:**

Sign language is a simple language... and therefore easy to learn.

• **In fact, however:**

As we have just seen in Myth # 4 above, sign language grammar is complex in ways that spoken languages cannot be. This is because sign languages make use of multiple

dimensions (of space) to manifest grammatical relations, whereas spoken languages have recourse to but a single dimension, the dimension of sequence (that is, one word after another, all proceeding from the mouth). This means that this aspect of sign language is structured entirely differently from spoken languages, and thus is rather difficult to master for speakers of spoken languages. It requires a rewiring, or at least a flexibility, of the brain.

On the other hand, since many individual signs are at least partially iconic, that is, they “look like” what they represent, learning sign language vocabulary, or at least the iconic part of that vocabulary, is often made easier.

Also, for native signers of one sign language, it is indeed usually easier to learn another sign language than it is to learn a spoken or written language. This, however, should not be overstated; anecdotal stories of a deaf person landing in a foreign country, meeting a deaf person from that country, and almost immediately being able to converse, are common folklore, but like much of folklore, not exactly true.

- **Myth # 7:** Sign language was created by hearing people for the “benefit” of the Deaf.

This myth is also often spread in slightly modified versions among Deaf people themselves, in celebration of the foundation of the Deaf School in Paris in 1755 by the Abbé de l'Épée, sometimes referred to as the “father of sign language” (WPDC n.d.).

Similarly, we sometimes see mainstream media articles even nowadays with headlines such as, “A New Language for Pakistan’s Deaf” (Shah 2015), where the writer claims that such-and-such individuals or such-and-such charity organisation or non-governmental organisation has “created” a “new language” and is gifting it to the Deaf people of this-or-that country.

- **In fact, however:**

It *is* true that most Deaf schools in India (and in many places in the world) were founded and are still being run by hearing people/teachers. Only rarely (for example, the Indore Deaf Bilingual Academy) are Deaf people involved at the top in establishing and running schools. It *is* also true that most Deaf people who learn sign language in most countries learn it at schools for the Deaf -- although this may be less the case in India, if it is true that only 5% of Indian Deaf have access to school as stated in Zeshan, Vasistha, and Sethna. (2005, 16-17).

In any case, in India at least, the hearing people who established and ran these schools for the Deaf were “oralists” and forbade the use of sign language in education and therefore would never have created a sign language or contributed to its development. It is true that there have been a number of cases where a sign language was first documented after a school for the Deaf was established and Deaf children from around the country were brought together (such is the case in Nicaragua starting in the 1980s). The use of sign language in schools can, and in some cases demonstrably has, contributed to the development of the sign language. The Abbé de l'Épée's Deaf School in Paris may have



been such a school. Gallaudet University in the United States is such a school, and the Central Secondary School for the Deaf in Kathmandu Nepal was also such a school. We can be assured, however, that the bulk of the development of the sign languages around the world, and most certainly the development of Indian Sign Language within India, has occurred naturally and among the Deaf themselves, with minimal input (and that often negative) from hearing individuals and groups.

• **Myth # 8:**

Standardising a sign language means getting rid of variance within the sign language.

A variant version is: There should be one and only one sign for each and every concept or spoken word used uniformly throughout the country.

• **In fact, however:**

No language is uniform. Just as this is true of spoken language, so too is it true of sign language. And, it is even true of standardised languages, where, given time, new variation frequently arises... naturally.

While it is true that a degree of standardisation might make it easier to train sign language interpreters and teachers of the Deaf (especially if training facilities are to be centrally located), and to produce materials including educational and informational materials in Indian Sign Language, it is not necessarily the case that this must be achieved by reducing the language to a minimalist norm. Standardisation can be achieved in many ways. Instead it might also be achieved by incorporating the regional variants on a more or less equal basis into an expanded, enriched norm.

If we look at the world's currently most successful not-quite-standardised language, English, we see that, to the extent that there exists a standard (or rather a variety of related standards), that standardisation has occurred largely without artificial intervention, by natural processes of interaction between speakers of the various variant forms (dialects), and with a tremendous degree of flexibility resulting in an enriched standard. This is why such words as “couch”, “sofa”, and “divan” all exist, are all accepted more or less by all speakers as equally valid, even though, in fact, they all refer to exactly the same piece of furniture.

Such is also the case with American Sign Language, a language which has been continuously used for almost two hundred years, including in all levels of education. As an example, Shroyer and Shroyer (1984) document six signs for DOG, seven signs for CAT, eight signs for HOSPITAL, fourteen signs for DELICIOUS, and twenty-two different signs for that most American of activities, PICNIC. While few Deaf people are likely to be familiar with *all* the variant signs, because of a long history of interaction by Deaf people from around the country, most Deaf people are acquainted with at least some of the most common variants despite not using them themselves.

However, the biggest argument against official standardisation is that such a standardisation is artificial, existing unconnected with the vast array of Deaf signers living in many communities spread across the country. Sign language interpreters trained only in a standardised Indian Sign Language yet attempting to practise the profession in localities where the local sign language variety differs significantly from that standard are doomed to fail at the task they are employed to perform.

• **Myth # 9:**

In order for Indian Sign Language to be recognised as a full-fledged independent language, all foreign signs must be eliminated and replaced by purely Indian signs. This is one of the myths which seems to be current not only among hearing people with little exposure to or knowledge of Sign language, but also among many in the Deaf community, including those in positions of power in Deaf organisations.

• **In fact, however:**

Languages are fluid entities. As old words die away, new words replace them. As new ideas and concepts, and new technologies, arise, new words must, by necessity, be added. One common source of new words in all languages is borrowing from other languages. Why should sign languages be any different? Borrowing from other languages is not a sign of language “weakness”, but is a phenomenon found in *all* languages, even the most strong, vital and powerful. It is true of spoken languages as well as signed languages, true of official national majority languages as well as unofficial minority languages. In fact, it is one of the sources of vocabulary richness which we have discussed briefly under Myth # 5 and which we shall discuss again in the next section.

• **Myth # 10:**

While the Deaf are individuals who suffer from a common medical condition (severe hearing impairment), they in no way form a community, nor identify as such.

This belief is widespread even among presumably well educated professional people working in the field of medical rehabilitation of the Deaf. They are key agents in spreading this myth because they are often the first persons of any authority that parents, who discover that their infant or child cannot hear, get advice and counselling from. To take but a single example from among hundreds of professionals' claims, Naik, Naik and Sharma state that “[t]he Deaf Community in India is not an organized entity. They lack a sense of common identity” (2013, 3).

• **In fact, however:**

Padden (1980), Padden and Humphries (1988), Lane (1995, 2005) and Senghas and Monaghan (2002) have, in the American context, shown the efficacy of replacing the traditional view of Deaf as medically/physically handicapped individuals who need to be “fixed”, by a cultural or cultural-linguistic model which sees them as a minority community, united by a number of , but primarily by, a common language (sign

language).

Similarly, as Morgan (2014) points out, Indian Deaf are often still referred to as “Deaf and Dumb” here in India (including by the government and in the mainstream media; for example, the Census Bureau of the Government of India (n.d); Malhotra, 2018). They are considered to be abnormal through the use of the term “normal” referring to hearing individuals. However, the Deaf are part of a community which is not only alive and well, but represents a vibrant culture which has withstood the onslaught of medical models of disability and oralist approaches to education of the Deaf. This is very likely to get even stronger in the future.

The existence of the National Association of the Deaf with several thousand members nationwide (National Association of the Deaf, 2018) and the All India Federation of the Deaf, established in 1966 and recognised by the government of India and by the World Federation of the Deaf. Even more indicative of the existence of a Deaf community in India, and the strong sense of community among its Deaf people, are the existence hundreds if not thousands of Deaf clubs in towns and cities across India, giving proof to the falsity of this statement.

Additional evidence of Deaf persons' own sense of Deaf identity, if any is needed, can also be found in the fact that on social media (such as Facebook) many young Deaf Indians have replaced their caste names with “Deaf” or “Df” (thus, for example, Sushil Kumar Sharma might use the Facebook name “Sushil Kumar Df” or “Sushil Kumar Deaf”).

Although sociological and anthropological (as opposed to medical) studies of Deaf in India are rare, this sense of Deaf identity, referred to as “deaf sociality”, has been discussed by Friedner (2011, 2015) in her work on the Bangalore Deaf community, and by Kusters (2017) in her studies on the Deaf community in Mumbai. Friedner (2015) found a very strong sense of common Deaf identity and community among Deaf Bangaloreans, expressed in sign language by one Deaf Bangalorean as “deaf deaf same” (25f). A brief summary of the Deaf communities in India and Nepal can be found in (Friedner, Green &Kusters 2016).

#### ***Myth # 11:***

Exposing young Deaf children to sign language and encouraging them to use it to communicate will inevitably result in lesser levels of spoken and written language development.

#### **• In fact, however:**

Deaf children, like children everywhere, are very adept at acquiring languages if the language is accessible to them. For Deaf children, sign languages are the only languages which are fully accessible in a natural way and as a first language, and for most Deaf, even those who have graduated “oralist” schools for the deaf, spoken and written language is never fully acquired.

In fact, evidence that the opposite is in fact the case can be seen from the fact that studies have time after time found that “deaf children of deaf parents have superior English literacy abilities compared to deaf children of hearing parents, despite the fact that English is not the native language of deaf children of deaf parents and that most children of hearing parents receive more intensive auditory-oral training in English.” (Snoddon, 2008, p 586). The only probable explanation for the greater levels of proficiency in literacy skills for written language is the fact that deaf children of deaf adults have the opportunity to fully – and naturally – acquire a solid first language (that is, sign language), the knowledge of which then can serve as a basis for acquiring a better (even if not perfect) knowledge of a second (written) language.

(For more on this topic, see section 3 on Sign Languages, Deaf Education, and Literacy.)

### **Summary**

In this section the student will have learnt that there are a number of commonly held beliefs (“myths”) about Deaf and about Sign language which are quite wrong. The facts to :

- Deaf people are every bit as diverse as a group as people from other groups in India are, and this diversity is reflected in the degrees to which they know and use Indian sign language and in Indian Sign Language itself. (More about diversity within the Deaf community, and in Indian Sign Language, in the next section!)
- Indian Sign Language plays a vital and central role in the life of the Indian Deaf community, and is one (and perhaps one of the most vital) which determines Deaf persons' membership in the Indian Deaf Community.
- Sign language is every bit as real and complete a language as Hindi and English, with a rich vocabulary and grammar. It has, however, not been researched to the extent as these spoken languages. In addition, what has been researched and what we do know about Indian Sign Language has mostly not been shared properly with the general population (and especially with the parents and families of Deaf children who would most benefit from this knowledge).
- Indian Sign Language has been underutilised historically, and continues to be so, in the field of education, a field which is vital to the development of the Deaf as individuals and to the Deaf community as a group. (More on this topic in Section 3.)

### **Exercises**

Exercise 1. T/ F or O.

In the space before each statement, identify the following statements as being TRUE (by marking a T), FALSE (by marking an F) or else not discussed in the above section (by marking a O).

- \_\_\_ 1. All Deaf people in India know sign language.
- \_\_\_ 2. All Deaf people are also unable to speak.

- \_\_\_ 3. Indian Sign Language is used uniformly throughout India.
- \_\_\_ 4. Indian Sign Language is related to British Sign Language.
- \_\_\_ 5. Borrowed signs should not be used when signing Indian Sign Language.
- \_\_\_ 6. Learning Indian Sign Language grammar fully means learning, not only how to use ones hands, but also how to use ones head and face.
- \_\_\_ 7. Indian Sign language has a complex grammar.
- \_\_\_ 8. Indian Sign Language is officially recognised by the Goevrnment of India.
- \_\_\_ 9. Deaf children of Deaf adults have a more difficult time learning a written language.
- \_\_\_ 10. Many Deaf people have a sense of common Deaf identity and belonging to a Deaf community in the way that Bengalis do, or Sikhs do.

### **Suggested readings**

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 JsaBtSnsAA-Pw7ZAdXzumCFO

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## Model answers

### Exercise 1.

1. F, 2. F, 3. F, 4. O [in fact this is False; although the two-handed manual alphabet used in India is borrowed from Britain, the sign language is not, and in fact has very few borrowed signs from British Sign Language], 5. F [while some people, including some Deaf believe this, it is merely a value judgement not a fact, and one which is at odds with actual usage – including often the usage of the people holding the belief -- and at odds with the reality of living languages], 6. T [although it is an oversimplification, to a certain extent the vocabulary of ISL is expressed by the hands, while the grammar is expressed by the head and face as well], 7. T, 8. T and F [while the GOI has set up the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre, and instituted and funded training courses for sign language interpreters, it has not yet given ISL legal status as a scheduled language], 9. F, 10. T.

## 4.2 Diversity in Sign Language Communities

### Introduction

India being the country that it is, vast and varied not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of ethnicities, cultures and religions, we are quite used to thinking in terms of diversity when it comes to ethnic and religious and even regional groups.

And yet, all too often, we think of members of individual groups as being homogeneous, stereotypical. And as in other parts of the world, considerable variation and diversity exist

between Deaf individuals, and, indeed, between various Deaf communities which exist across India. Although often thought of in uniformly stereotypical ways, and as we have seen in Section One of this Unit on “Myths”, stereotypically incorrect ways, the term “Deaf” converse a wealth of diversity.

For example, even in this day and age, not only uneducated and uninformed people refer to the Deaf as “Deaf and Dumb”, but one often sees or hears such terms used in the media and press (PTI, 2018, Singh, 2018), and in other public settings. Fortunately, however, awareness is gradually evolving, and, in some circles at least, the decision has been made to replace such terminology (Rai, 2017). The fact that “dumb” is no longer generally used in English to mean “mute” (unable to speak), and has taken on rather the sole negative meaning of “stupid”, it is rejected by the Deaf community as an unacceptable label. Even if we accept the word in its now antiquated sense of “unable to speak”, the fact is that many Deaf actually can and do speak (albeit not as clearly and often not as willingly as their hearing fellows). In addition, if by “speak” we do not restrict ourselves to one small organ, the mouth, but rather allow for this verb to refer to the conveyance of potentially infinitely variable and exceedingly complex intelligible bits of information from one individual to another with other organs, then, in fact, almost all Deaf *do* speak ... with their hands.

### **Content**

There are many ways in which Deaf people, and the sign language they use can and do vary within the confines of India (we have already discussed this briefly in Section 1 how sign languages vary between countries).

The most common type of language and cultural diversity that we are all familiar with is spatial diversity, that is, diversity based on locality. Such diversity also exists in sign languages in general, and Indian Sign Language in specific, and can be called sign language dialects. Leaving aside the question of whether the sign language used in various parts of India is one and the same language, there is no question but that there is a fair amount of regional (and local) diversity between varieties of sign languages in India.

As an example of regional variation in Indian Sign Language, consider the following signs in the so-called standard ISL (as generally taught to potential sign language interpreters) and the equivalent local Mumbai signs (note: all these and other signs illustrated in this unit also have a movement component not depicted in the photo. If you wish to see the signs in full, you can consult the online Indian Sign Language dictionary (Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, n.d.) or your ISL teacher for the standard ISL signs in each case.



SUNDAY

MONDAY



TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY



FRIDAY

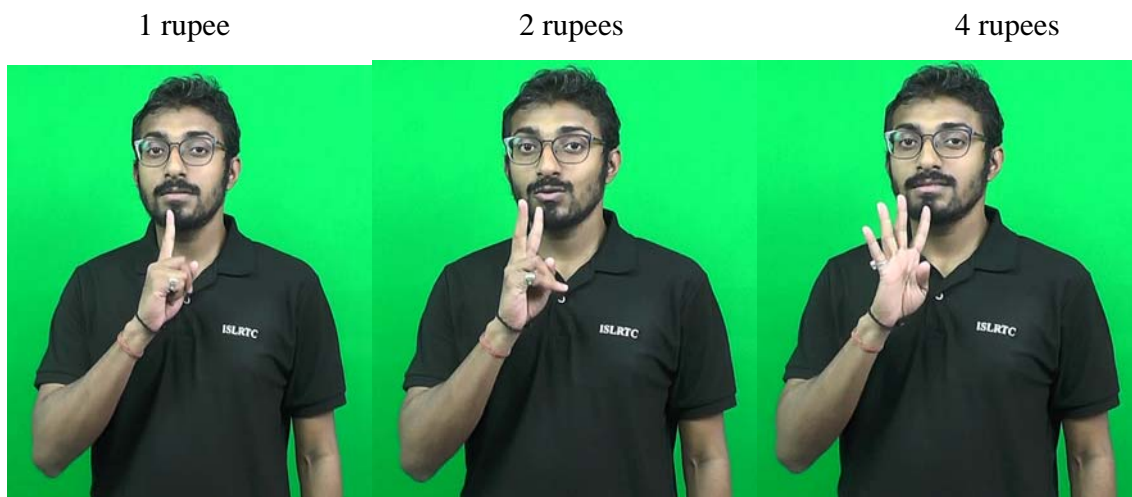
SATURDAY



Figure 3: Days of the week

This set is an extreme set, in the sense that only three out of the seven signs for the days of the week used in Mumbai (Maharashtra) are the same as in standard ISL. If such a low degree of similarity (42.9%) were the case throughout the vocabulary of the Mumbai variety, then it would be incomprehensible to signers from other locales throughout India and would doubtlessly be considered as a separate language. This, however, is not the case, and while there are other differences in signs used as well, for example, counting rupees (for which no unitary signs are present in standard ISL), and the sign for Delhi, both illustrated below, the overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of signs used in Mumbai are similar to those used elsewhere:

Figure 4: Counting rupees (Mumbai)



DELHI (MUMBAI)

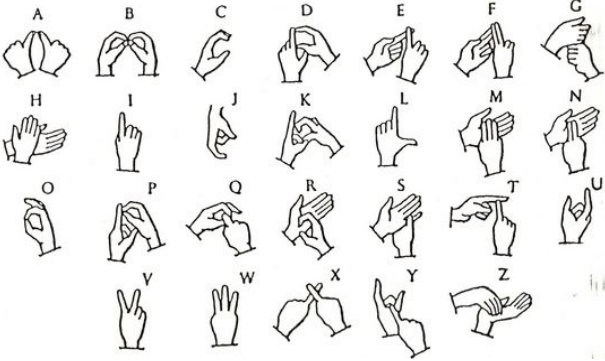
DELHI (ISL standard)



Figure 5: Signs for DELHI in Mumbai ISL variety (left) and standard ISL (right)

In the last example we see a case where the standard ISL sign is a simplex sign, whereas the Mumbai sign has an added element (in this case to distinguish “Delhi” from other place names which have “D” as the initial (such as, for example, Dadar, the location of the main commuter train nexus in central Mumbai)).

Variation among varieties of ISL also include whether a one-handed or a two-handed fingerspelling system is used. Although the two-handed system predominates (and is usually considered the standard throughout India), there are several locales where the one-handed system is commonly used, most famously, in Bangalore, where although the Deaf themselves call their language ASL, or American Sign Language, in fact, aside from the use of the one-handed fingerspelling system and a greater degree of usage of signs borrowed from American Sign Language, the language is, in its overall structure and also in its comprehension/intelligibility clearly a variety of Indian sign language (Friedner 2015, 169, footnote 19).

2-handed same as BSL: B1, D, F, G, H, J2, K, L, M, N, P, Q, R, S, T1, T2, X, Y1, Z1		1-handed same as ASL: L, O, V, W
2-handed differing from BSL: A, B2, E1, E2, E3, I3, U2, Y2		1-handed same as ASL AND BSL: C
		1-handed differing from ASL and BSL: I1, I2, J1, U1, Z2

(note, where a number follows the letter, this indicates that there are several ways in which the letter is manually represented in different places around India. The number 1 indicates the way depicted in the diagram (which is not necessarily the most common way))

Figure 5: Indian Sign Language two-handed manual alphabet and comparison with BSL two-handed and ASL one-handed alphabets

Notice that in fact the fingerspelling system most widely used in India is largely based on the British two-handed system. It does, however, (at least in many locales throughout India where it is used) make use of several one-handed forms, apparently borrowed from or influenced by the American/International one-handed system. In this way it can be described as being of mixed origin. While the manual letter C is one-handed even in the two-handed British system, L, O, V and W are not, and so the one-handed forms existing in Indian Sign Language could be seen as borrowings from the American/International system. I, U and Z exist in both one- and two-handed forms (although, it should be noted, the one-handed forms are indigenous to India, not borrowed from the American/International system).

There have been attempts by some within the Deaf community to try to stigmatise the local use of the one-handed fingerspelling system, perhaps to shame users of this system to abandon it in favour of the two-handed system. Discourse in such cases usually focuses on the foreignness (or, more specifically, the “Americanness” of the one-handed system), forgetting, however, that India's two-handed system is also foreign, in that it is



an only somewhat modified version of the British two-handed system.

It is also ironically the case that many, if not most, who try to stigmatise the one-handed system within India, use it themselves in the international setting.

It also includes the question as to whether there is a system of fingerspelling used for the local vernacular languages. In the case, for example, of Vadodara (Baroda) Gujarat, due to its use in a Deaf school there, there is fairly widespread use of a Gujarati-devanagari fingerspelling system. This is in addition to a system of fingerspelling Nagari-based vernacular languages, such as Hindi and Gujarati. To the author's knowledge, however, such non-English-based fingerspelling is only practiced at one school in Vadodara (Baroda), Gujarat, and by graduates of this school, when fingerspelling Gujarati words.







ka  क ख़	kha  ख फ़	ga  ग ॒	gha  घ ढ़	na ① ङ ख़			la  ळ फ़
cha  च ॡ	chha  छ ॢ	ja  ज ॒	jha  झ ढ़	ña ② ञ ख़	ya  य ॡ	śa  श ॑	kṣa  क्ष ५
ṭa  ट ॢ	ṭha  ठ ॣ	ḍa  ड ॣ	dha  ढ ॥	ṇa  ण ॑	ra  र ॑	sha(ṣa)  ष ॥	jña  ज्ञ ५
ta  त ॢ	tha  थ ॣ	ḍa  द ॣ	dha  ध ॣ	na  न ॑	la  ल ॑	sa  स ॑	tra  त्र ॣ
pa  प ॡ	pha  फ ॢ	ba  ब ॡ	bha  भ ॢ	ma  म ॢ	va  व ॡ	ha  ह ॑	gya ③ ग ॒

Figure 6: Nagari-based manual alphabet

In other places the author is familiar with, no separate finger spelling system is used for spelling the local vernacular language, and, whenever there is a need or desire to fingerspell in such languages, the English alphabet serves that purpose as well (just as the English alphabet often serves the purpose for sending text messages by mobile phone in Hindi, Tamil or any other vernacular language).

Another type of diversity is when we find various signs even within the same general locality. Such is the case in large cities, especially where there are a number of schools for the Deaf where pupils do not have frequent (or any) contact with signing. In these cases we might talk of School X's “dialect” (variety) of ISL or School Y's “dialect” (variety).

As an example of this type of local variation, see below the various ways Deaf people in Mumbai (Bombay) sign the concept GREEN:



Figure 7: various signs used in Mumbai for GREEN

All of these signers were born and grew up in greater Mumbai, however, they attended different schools (and signer B acquired ISL later). Of these signs, A is also the “standard” ISL sign for Green, and B can be seen as an American Sign Language borrowing, having entered some Mumbai Deaf people's ISL as a result of its usage in the school they attended.

In early studies of Indian Sign Language varieties (Vasistha, Woodward & Wilson, 1978) in urban areas, it was shown that Mumbai (at the time, Bombay) showed the greatest degree (9%) of internal variation, whereas Kolkata (then, Calcutta) was almost completely uniform (only 1% variation), with Delhi and Bengaluru (at the time,

Bangalore) were relatively uniform but with a certain amount of internal variation (4% and 5%, respectively).

In addition to vocabulary, Vasistha, Woodward and Wilson (1978) also studied a range of grammatical structures used in four major urban varieties of Indian Sign Language. They found that while again there is a large enough degree of similarity to conclude that all these varieties are varieties of a single sign language, nonetheless, there is a fair amount of variation as well, both between different localities but also, importantly, within each locality.

In some countries, the diversity of the sign language community is even recognised by the organisation responsible for certifying sign language interpreters. Since not all Deaf sign in the same way, and not all Deaf have similar fluency and comprehension in various varieties of signing, sign language interpreters (in the United States, for example) are certified according to their level of skill in any or all of the various options: (a) interpreting for Deaf who both sign and fingerspell (the norm for members of the Deaf community who have attended school), (b) interpreting for Deaf who do not know *any* sign language (this might well be called “gestural interpretation”), (c) interpreting for Deaf who know sign language but do not know fingerspelling (this is often the case of older members of the Deaf community who did not have access to education in their youth), or, (d) on the other end of the spectrum, interpreting for Deaf who know fingerspelling and who have a full (or good) command of Hindi or English (or whatever the written language is) but who does not know sign language (this may be interpreting solely through the medium of finger spelling, or else in written form).

In addition to the above sorts of diversity (based on geography and on schooling), there are many other types of diversity within the Deaf community, all of which, potentially at least, might be reflected, to greater or lesser extent, in Indian Sign Language. Unfortunately, though, none of these has been well studied. Among these other diversities we have:

- Diversity based on age. This diversity may in fact be reflected to some extent in Figure 7, as signer D is the child of Deaf adults, and also a member of a wider family with many Deaf members, and therefore her signs (at least some of them) may reflect the way her parents, and other Deaf members of the previous generation (or generations) signed GREEN. It can also be seen if we look at the signs recorded in Vasishtha, Woodward and de Santis (1980, 1985, 1986, and 1987) and compare them with the way younger Deaf in the same cities sign the same concepts today.
- Diversity based on membership in religious and/or ethnic communities. We do not actually know much in India about differences in signing between Muslims and Hindus, Hindus and Sikhs or other religious/cultural communities.
- Diversity based on gender and gender identity, or on sexual preference. This includes, of course, differences between the signing of men and of women. In addition, we might

also expect there to be some difference in Deaf who are also members of so-called subcultures: Deaf members of India's hijra community, Deaf members of India's gay community. Although hijras (and homosexuals) have been as much a part of Indian society as they have of societies everywhere in the world, and since until quite recently, homosexuality has been illegal in India, and hijras and homosexuals are greatly stigmatised, research into these sources of diversity have yet to be undertaken.

- And lastly it should be pointed out that the Signing Community does not only include Deaf people. The children of Deaf adults (often referred to by the acronym CODAs) are, even more so than the majority of Deaf children (that is, the 90% or so of Deaf who have only hearing family members) born into this language, and for them Indian Sign Language is quite literally their “mother tongue”.

Additionally, other hearing people who sign fluently and interact regularly with members of the Deaf signing community can also be considered members of the signing community, albeit more peripheral members (and even then only if they have, in addition to the language of the Deaf community, also accepted the Deaf community's system of values). These hearing members often use a form of Indian Sign Language which differs remarkably from the sign language used by Deaf people, due to the fact that it is heavily influenced by the hearing members' spoken language.

### **Summary**

In this section the student will have learnt that:

- India's Deaf community is diverse in a large number of ways, in fact as diverse as India itself is diverse.
- This diversity is manifest in a number of ways, the primary of which is through diversity in Indian Sign Language itself.
- One of the most apparent ways in which ISL manifests diversity is through regional and local varieties. Such varieties can be called sign language dialects, and they typically are used to communicate locally, while the standardised form of Indian Sign Language is used in communication between Deaf people from different localities.
- In addition to regional differences in sign language, there are also generational (age) differences within the signing community within the same localities.
- Although manual alphabets are a way to express spoken and written language through a visual medium, and as such are not actually a core part of sign languages, one type of diversity we see within the larger Indian sign language community is regional and local preference in some places. In Bangalore, for example, the Deaf prefer a one-handed -- so-called ASL -- manual alphabet, in contrast with a general preference for using a two-handed (BSL-based) manual alphabet across the country in the national context.
- In addition, even among Deaf who use the two-handed manual alphabet, regional and



local differences are manifest in how certain letters are formed.

- It should go without saying that the use of a manual alphabet and finger spelling is dependent on a certain degree of literacy in a written language. Whereas it appears that English is unquestionably the written language preferred in the national and inter-regional context, local Deaf may, with their local peers, also spell the vernacular language (and particularly the language used as the medium of instruction in whichever school for the Deaf they attended). A further consequence of this is that Deaf with little schooling will manifest a lesser frequency of finger spelling within signed discourse.
- There are a number of other ways in which we might expect ISL to display diversity: according to differences in religious and cultural/ethnic affiliation, according to gender (male vs female), to gender identification and sexual orientation. However, as research into variation in ISL is a new field, and at times is seen as at odds with the “political” goal of language standardisation, we know relatively little about such variation. However, given what we know about the Deaf communities and sign languages in other countries, we can expect that such differences, such diversity, might also exist in India.

### Exercise

#### Exercise 2. Matching.

Match the beginning of each sentence, found in the left column and preceded by a number with the best completion of the sentence, found in the right column and preceded by a letter.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ___ 1. Different members of the same Deaf community | A. is not widely used in India, but is used in Vadodara.      |
| ___ 2. Bangalore Deaf .                             | B. Is usually influenced by the spoken language.              |
| ___ 3. Not all Deaf know                            | C. have different signs for many of the days of the week,     |
| ___ 4. Deaf in Mumbai                               | D. have a variety of ways to sign the same concept.           |
| ___ 5. The ISL used by hearing people               | E. is used in a few places in India, including Bangalore.     |
| ___ 6. 90% of Deaf have                             | F. call their sign language variety “American Sign Language”. |
| ___ 7. A nagari-based fingerspelling system         | G. has not yet been well studied                              |



Exercise 2.

1. D, 2. F, 3.H, 4.C, 5.B, 6.I, 7.A, 8.G, 9. E

### 4.3 Sign Languages, Education and Literacy

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope.”  
(Kofi Anan, former Secretary General, U.N.)  
“To be succesful in life what you need is an  
education”  
(Jawaharlal Nehru)

#### Introduction

Article 24 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNDRPWD , United Nations n.d.), of which India is a signatory, “recognize[s] the right of persons with disabilities to education” and agrees to “ensure an .. education system at all levels and lifelong learning” so that “[p]ersons with disabilities can access ... quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live”, “receive the support required ... to facilitate their effective education”, and to that end “States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including ... [f]acilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community [and] [e]nsuring that the education of persons, and in particular children ... is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual.” In addition, the UNDRPWD “In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language.”

However, if you compare students and graduates of schools for the deaf in India with their hearing age-mates who have had a similar number of years of education, you will find, almost universally, that Deaf students and graduates lag, sometimes greatly, behind in terms of language skills (literacy) and also in knowledge and understanding of academic subjects appropriate to their levels of education.

Ultimately the question must be “Why is this the case?”, and although there will doubtlessly be a number of answers and a number of “whys?”, in most cases the answer will centre around the question of “language”, and in this case, sign language.

#### Content

The history of Deaf education in India is a long one, beginning in the 1880s when the first schools for the deaf were opened, firstly in Bombay (now Mumbai) and shortly thereafter in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Yet, despite this now almost 140-year history, little

progress has been made in providing quality education to the overwhelming majority of Deaf people.

The reason for this is clear, and is not primarily due to the quality and certification of teachers, nor due to lack of government oversight regarding concern with standards and quality. Rather it has to do with the fact that Deaf education in India has been, and largely still is, conducted in a language Deaf children cannot access. Oral-based teaching cannot be heard by deaf children (as they cannot hear), and also cannot effectively be seen either, due to the vast and confusing possibilities of mis-reading of lip movements, and equally great possibility of misinterpreting properly “read” lip movements (for example, on the basis of visual cues, “bat”, “pat” and “mat” all look *exactly* the same, as do “ate”, “hate”, “Kate” and “gate”).

In addition to the difficulties presented by lip-reading even to late deafened persons with full command of the language in question, prelingually deaf children typically come to school with little or no spoken language ... and, given that most have non-signing hearing parents and family members, typically they come to school with no language of *any* kind. Whereas hearing children acquire language in the family setting, by natural acquisition processes and have a vocabulary of several thousand words and a workable if not quite complete grammar by the time they enter school, deaf children when they enter a school for the deaf (if they are lucky enough to have one available) at the age of six or so (or often enough, eight, nine or ten) rarely have more than a couple dozen words, far below the fifty or so of the average two-year old hearing child.

Surprisingly to many perhaps, but completely logically, Deaf children born into families with Deaf parents, or even just a Deaf elder sibling, typically perform better in school and have a higher level of language skills (“literacy”) than their deaf peers who come from hearing families. This may be surprising since one might expect that Deaf parents, who also themselves has less than adequate educations at schools for the deaf, would not be able to provide their Deaf child with an equal academic support at home resulting in lower, not higher, levels of literacy and academic achievement. One would expect that this also applies to Deaf who later marry and have Deaf children. To the extent that the academic achievement of parents might add anything positive to the achievement of their children (for example, due to parents' help for children in schoolwork, or even merely in the parents' having a positive attitude towards schooling), one would expect that Deaf children of Deaf parents would be at an even greater disadvantage. However, studies have shown that Deaf children of Deaf parents consistently achieve higher than their Deaf peers born in all hearing families.

“These findings regarding the normal language development of infants exposed to signed language are supported by substantial research that documents the superior performance of deaf children of deaf parents, as compared to deaf children of hearing parents, on tests of academic achievement, reading, writing, and social

development” (Snoddon, 2008, p. 585)

The one thing they (the Deaf parents) *can* provide turns out to be the most essential thing... a first language -- sign language. With a firm command of sign language, the Deaf child of Deaf parents is able to better learn the second, written, language. Early and full acquisition of sign language aids both in the acquisition of literacy in a written language and also in academic achievement in other subjects.

In addition, another, albeit indirect, positive side effect of the use of sign language, even in written language literacy instruction, is that the use of sign language both increases interest in reading among students, and also increases the amount of reading students do outside of class (Tang et al 2004, 87-88). Both of these factors, and especially the quantity of reading, have shown to correlate with improved reading skills/literacy (Allington 2014).

First language use in early primary education is important and is a foundation stone in the development of literacy. Unfortunately, there is possibly no school for the deaf in India which is in reality fully compliant with the principles of “sign language as first language, written language as second language” bilingualism.

This is true for a number of reasons. Firstly, in a truly bilingual educational programme, students are not only taught through the medium of their first/primary language (often called mother tongue education, which term, however, is not fully appropriate for the majority of Deaf pupils, since their mothers speak a “tongue” which is inaccessible to the deaf child), the primary/first language is also taught as a subject, and formal instruction in the grammar and use of this primary language is included in the curriculum. As all schools for the Deaf in India follow, in theory, a common curriculum designed for hearing (so-called “normal”) students (to the extent that they actually follow any curriculum), without any provision for classes in sign language, none of them adheres to “bilingual education” in this way. Since there are no primary (or secondary) school-level textbooks for the subject, “Sign Language”, and since teachers in schools for the deaf have (with perhaps only a handful of exceptions country-wide) themselves never undergone formal training in the grammatical structure of Indian Sign Language, even if a deaf “sign language as first language” bilingual curriculum were created, it would be many years before implementation of such a curriculum, would be possible.

## **Summary**

In this section the student will have learnt that:

- Schools for the deaf in India have been, and for the most part still are, “oralist” in their educational philosophy, and thus do not use Indian Sign Language as a medium of instruction.
- Deaf students and Deaf graduates typically perform academically at levels far below that of their hearing peers, and have much lower levels of literacy.

- Deaf students with Deaf parents typically perform academically at levels higher than their deaf peers, and have higher levels of literacy.
- The late acquisition of sign language by deaf children with hearing parents, and the early acquisition of sign language by Deaf children with Deaf parents can be argued to be the primary reason for these facts.
- A bilingual educational approach which takes Indian Sign Language as the Deaf child's first and primary language provides the most practical way of overcoming the lower levels of literacy and academic achievement seen among students of schools for the deaf in India.
- Several hurdles remain before such a bilingual approach can be properly implemented in schools across India, among them being the design of a curriculum which accords with such an approach, and training of teachers at schools for the deaf in such a curriculum along with the teaching methodologies needed for its implementation.

### Exercise

Exercise 3. Exercise 1. Fill in the blanks.

Fill an appropriate word in the blank space in the following paragraphs.

In India only \_\_\_\_\_ (1) percent of deaf children attend schools for the deaf. Most of these schools for the deaf in India adhere to an \_\_\_\_\_ (2) philosophy of deaf education, and \_\_\_\_\_ (3) is either forbidden, or at the very least not encouraged, as a medium of instruction.

As a result, deaf students typically perform \_\_\_\_\_ (4) than their hearing peers, both in terms of literacy and in terms of overall academic achievement. However, deaf children of \_\_\_\_\_ (5) typically perform better than other deaf children.

The best approach to reverse this deficit is a \_\_\_\_\_ (6) approach with sign language recognised as the \_\_\_\_\_ (7) language of the deaf students. In order to implement such an approach several things are needed, among them a new \_\_\_\_\_ (8) and also \_\_\_\_\_ (9) of teachers to implement this approach.

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### **Model answers**

Exercise 3.

1. five (5), 2. oralist, 3. (Indian) sign language, 4. worse, 5. Deaf parents, 6. bilingual, 7. first/primary, 8., 9. curriculum, 10. training

## **4.4 Role and significance of technology for communication and learning among Deaf Community**

### **Introduction**

If the 20th century was the “Age of Technology” then the 21st century, so far at least, has been the “Age of On-screen Connectivity”. Both smartphones and computers, with their video capabilities and now available in ever smaller and portable sizes and with more and more capabilities, are widely available, and this trend is only likely to continue. With the new technologies have come new applications (and apps, or application software to facilitate such applications), and these too have experienced widespread acceptance and usage.

Such technological advances, both in terms of hardware and more importantly software, have already seen wide acceptance within (and by) the Deaf community. The promise and potential of such technologies to allow for easier and better communication among Deaf and also between Deaf and hearing, and the potential of such technologies in providing new and improved learning opportunities, have also already been seen, primarily from outside of India, but also, at least in small hints, from within India as well.

### **4.4.2. Technologies for Communication and Learning by Deaf**

Traditional written means of communication and dissemination of information such as postal letters and print medium, such as books, magazines and newspapers, were not accessible to Deaf to the same extent they were to hearing people, due to lower levels of literacy among the Deaf. Advances in sound communication, such as radio and telephones, revolutionising though they were among the hearing, provided little or no benefit to Deaf. Likewise, more recent advances such as text messaging (sms) via mobile phones, although widely used by Deaf, are also less than ideal, again due to lower levels of literacy among the Deaf. Visual media such as film and television typically rely on both sound and sight, and are thus partially accessible to Deaf; content which relies on sound (and the spoken message) are lost, and can be filled in only incompletely, by the imagination of Deaf viewers.



Video, which can be either with or without sound, is much more suited to the communication needs and habits of the Deaf. However, until the advent of telephone- and internet-based video, video was reliant on hardware media such film, CDs, and DVDs, and is largely limited to one-way dissemination of information, and was largely impractical as a means of two-way communication. However, with wider and more affordable availability of smartphones and computers, and with greater connectivity via internet speeds capable of transmitting video cheaply and almost instantly, telephone- and internet-based video has gained widespread use among the Deaf community.

Among those applications which are most widely used by Deaf people for person-to-person (and small-group) two-way long-distance communication are:

- video chat via mobile phone
- social apps like Facebook and Whatsapp

Returning to the potential of internet and telephone-based video for dissemination of information, and also as an educational tool, one widely used platforms by the Indian Deaf Community is Youtube, which is used to provide information in sign language. While there is no limit to the types of information which can be provided, several types stand out (listed here with the most notable examples, which should be accessed to better familiarise yourself with the nature of these sites).

- *News sites*

Whereas print media is inaccessible due to lower levels of literacy, and television news due to the lack of subtitling, Youtube, as well as home pages of individuals and organisations, have allowed for regular news and informational broadcasts in Indian Sign Language. Notable among ISL news broadcast channels are:

- Newzhook

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHTlbL5fdSMmzHIK3WIVJUA>

- MBM Vadodara (MookBadhirMandal)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCptUQkgBpyrvDK31d16lPmA>

- India Deaf Can TV

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC830RiHvLxste0LDCqM5SVA/videos>

- ISH News

<http://www.ishnews.tv/>

- Thirugnanam Video

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCA71fiJMpADkVk0fpczJ4zA>

- Flash News

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDnOUynNhVDyN5OfnYCCjg>

- Organisational Informational

In addition, the use of social media to publish and broadcast videos informing members of the Deaf community about important events

- DEF (Deaf Enabled Foundation)

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC80zWt1h\\_ycMov7WkAumDiA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC80zWt1h_ycMov7WkAumDiA)

- NAD India (National Association of the Deaf)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQJj3e2MVaqQ8afd0k929Pg>

- Education via Sign language on the internet and via television

Although there are a number of institutions in India famous for providing distance education, until quite recently none of them provided such educational opportunities for Deaf via video using ISL as the medium of instruction. Recently, however, the National Institute Open Schools (NIOS) has begun educational courses on television wherein content is provided to Deaf viewers via sign language interpretation. In addition they have begun to teach basic sign language, also on their television program, employing Deaf sign language instructors. Although such attempts at using sign language and visual technologies for distance education are still in their initial stages, and it is perhaps too soon to judge, at present, due to the outdated and media-inappropriate teaching methods, uninspiring content, and mediocre-at-best sign language interpretation, one cannot yet say that they have been entirely successful. However, with improvements, one can imagine a day when such methods would allow a much larger community of Deaf, both children and adults, to become better educated and better informed, and also for a much wider segment of the hearing population (hopefully also including the families of Deaf children and adults) to learn basic sign and Deaf communication.

#### • **Online Indian Sign Language Dictionary**

ISLRTC is currently in the process of producing a video dictionary of ISL which will be available online, and also as a mobile phone app, but until this work is complete, the best available video dictionary of ISL is that produced by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, which is available at [http://www.indiansignlanguage.org/dictionary/\(RKMVERI n.d.\)](http://www.indiansignlanguage.org/dictionary/(RKMVERI n.d.)).

#### • **Relay interpreting**

In addition to the above applications of visual-media technological advances, which have allowed for the dissemination of news, information and education, there is one further application, potentially of great benefit to Deaf, which has yet to be used in India: relay interpreting. A video relay service, also known as relay interpreting, was first used in the 1970s, but became available at a national level first in Sweden in 1997, and soon thereafter in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in North America and northern Europe (Wikipedia n.d.). Although telephone interpreting is a common practice in India, with the Deaf person signing to an interpreter who in turn communicates to the hearing party via telephone, there has as yet been no institutionalised application of technology whereby the Deaf person and the interpreter also communicate with each other remotely via smartphone or computer. However, as mobile phones, with their video capability, have now become nearly universal, and video chat allows for multi-party participation, one can

easily expect that such services could, and will, be provided in India as well. However, for this to happen there would probably have to be greater numbers of trained interpreters. Due to the remote-access capabilities of such services, which traditional face-to-face interpreting does not allow, demands in remote areas could be met by sign language interpreters working out of centralised urban areas, where sign language interpreters are already available in much greater concentrations than they are in the rest of the country.

### **Summary**

In this section the student will have learnt that:

- Since the latter decades of the 20th century, a number of technologies have gained widespread use which allow for, or potentially allow for, greater access to information and communication by Deaf persons through the medium of sign language.
- Although the widespread availability of mobile phones and sms/text messaging greatly benefited Deaf people, the advent of smartphones with such video-chat capabilities such as MSN messenger, Skype, Facebook, Google chat, and, in Indian especially Whatsapp, allowed for Deaf people to talk with each other in sign language, without regard to where they lived, with the same ease that the telephone had allowed hearing people to converse many decades before.
- In a number of, mostly European and North American, countries the potential for using video-capable telephones and video chat to provide sign language-to-voice and voice-to-sign language interpretation remotely has been effectively exploited. In India, with its small qualified and certified sign language interpreter base and its widely dispersed Deaf population, has not yet begun to explore the possibilities in this area, but presumably the potential is massive.
- The provision of sign language interpretation on televised news, and potentially other informative but also entertainment programmes, allows for a greater degree and equality of access to such television for the Deaf. At present though, the quality and limited scope of such interpreted programmes can be described, at best, as “better than nothing”.
- Of perhaps even greater potential is the provision of such news by Deaf themselves. At present, examples of such news, and good models for further development, exist in the form of such news bytes as Newzhook, MBV Vadodara, Indian Deaf Cab TV, and Ish News, widely available via the social media internet outlet youtube.
- Educational television provides for a means of reaching perhaps the majority of Deaf children living outside of areas with access to schools for the Deaf. In addition, such television provides potential for supplementary instruction and revision of instruction that was provided in schools for the Deaf but without sufficient and adequately trained teaching staff.

## Exercise

Exercise 4. Fill in the blanks.

Fill an appropriate word in the blank space in the following paragraphs.

Not all modern technologies and applications have provided benefits to the Deaf equal those gained by hearing people. For example, text-dependent technologies such as \_\_\_\_\_ (1) are of only limited benefit due to poor quality of education available at schools for the deaf and lower levels of literacy. Even technologies such as movies and television are only partially accessible due to their reliance on \_\_\_\_\_ (2) as well as sight. Applications which allow for effective two-way communication and dissemination of information include \_\_\_\_\_ (3) and \_\_\_\_\_ (4). One of the widest internet sites which allows for effective one-way dissemination of information via sign language videos, and which is being used effectively as a means of providing news in ISL, is \_\_\_\_\_ (5).

Modern video technologies which can also benefit those learn sign language include \_\_\_\_\_ (6) and \_\_\_\_\_ (7). Among the possible applications of video applications which will benefit Deaf who live in remote places is \_\_\_\_\_ (8). One organisation which currently provides educational opportunity using ISL via television is \_\_\_\_\_ (9).

## Suggested readings

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI) (n.d.). Indian Sign Language dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.indiansignlanguage.org/dictionary/>

The student should also access any of the news sites listed above (such as Newzhook, Ish News, etc) to familiarise themselves with the potential of such online video technologies for providing information to and among the Deaf via ISL.

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### Model answers

Exercise 4.

1. sms/text messaging, 2. sound, 3. & 4.list two of: video chat via mobile phone, whatsapp, Facebook messenger, or any other video-capable messenger app, 5. Youtube, 6. & 7. online video dictionary, courses in sign language via television (or internet video), 8. relay interpreting or video relay service, 9. NIOS

### 4.5. UNIT SUMMARY

In this unit you will have read about a wide range of misconceptions which are widely believed about Deaf people in India and their language (Indian Sign Language), and also understood the actual facts.

You will also have read about a wide variety of ways in which the Indian Deaf community is actually composed of a diversity/variety of individuals and Indian Sign Language is manifest in various locales, and also within locales by individuals from different social, cultural, ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds across India, by a diversity of varieties, focusing in this unit on differences in vocabulary.

You will have further learnt the basic situation of Deaf Education in India and the significant positive role (as yet merely a potential role in most schools for the Deaf across India) which first language, Indian Sign Language can play in developing literacy skills among the Deaf, and also other academic skills.

Finally, you will have read about a variety of ways in which new technologies of the last part of the 20th century and now into the 21st century have greatly changed the ease of communication among members of the Deaf community and also, to a certain extent, between members of the Deaf community and the people around them, and provide potential for even greater access and equality in the future to communication, information and education.

## **UNIT 5**

### **DEAF COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY**

**Total Hours: 14 hours**

#### **Learning Objectives**

After reading this unit, the learners would be able to:

- To discuss various legal rights of individuals with D/HH
- Enumerate various D/deaf organizations in India
- Describe the level of participation of D/deaf people in education and other spheres
- Discuss about various Deaf role models and their contribution in our society

#### **Introduction**

Disability refers to the restrictions caused by the way society is organized which takes little or no account of individuals who have physical, sensory or mental impairment. To reduce these barriers, the Government of India has launched many social security schemes for disabled so that there is generation of more employment opportunities for them. Several legislations, schemes and benefits for Individuals with Deafness or Hard of Hearing have come as a relief and have successfully served to provide equal opportunities and participation. In the first sub-unit, we will discuss various legal rights available for Individuals with Deafness or Hard of Hearing.

After understanding various legal rights of Individuals with D/HH available in India, we will be discussing various D/deaf organizations in our country. These D/deaf organizations work with an objective of training potential hearing candidates as Sign Language Interpreters in order to support the D/HH as well as Deaf community. These organizations also organize training in educational areas, vocational areas, leadership and personality development so as to empower Individuals with D/HH.

In India, we have various disability related legislations as well as various Deaf organizations working towards the empowerment of Individuals with D/HH through quality education as well as job-aligned training programs, which would lead to sustainable opportunities and independent living. You all will agree that, despite having law, D/HH individuals find it tough to be at a par with the rest of the populace when it comes to education and employment. Sure, there are some initiatives in this direction. In India, we have Mirchi & Mime, a restaurant in Mumbai, which is supported entirely by D/HH individuals as staff. Another Mumbai-based organization is Mirakle Couriers, which is run by deaf employees. In the third sub-unit, we will discuss and understand the level of participation of D/HH in education as well as in other spheres.

In the fourth sub-unit we will discuss about a few Deaf Role models. There are many deaf individuals who have achieved great things in life, in spite of various barriers and struggles. This is a place to collect their inspiring stories! Hope after reading this, we will be able to implement some of their ideas in our life also.

### **5.1 Legal rights of the D/deaf**

### **5.2 Deaf organizations**

### **5.3 Participation of D/deaf people in education and other spheres**

### **5.4 Deaf Role Models**

## **5.1 Legal Rights of the D/deaf**

### **Learning Objectives**

After reading this sub-unit, the learners would be able to:

- Discuss various disability related legislations in India
- State the rights specified in the RPWD Act 2016

### **Introduction**

In this unit we will discuss the current legislation provisions available for D/HH in the area of education, sign language as well as the role of sign language interpreters. Despite the legislation, the state of education of the D/HH is extremely poor. This can be because of various reasons, for example, teaching in deaf schools is not adequate and their needs are not met completely. We will also discuss various rights available for Individuals with D/HH.

### **Content**

Historically, deaf people in India have been denied equal rights as citizens. In the past, they were not even allowed to inherit property. Usually, the sibling took over their share in exchange for looking after them. The laws changed with time and deaf people, along with other disabled persons, have equal rights, including to inherit property. Human rights can be realized only through one's own language and culture. This is true for all people including deaf people. The term culture is a very broad concept that encompasses the lifestyle, traditions, knowledge, skills, beliefs, norms and values shared by a group of people. It also contributes to the artistic expression of members of that group. As many other different human groups, Deaf people have a culture of their own. They express it through their language: sign language, that is very essential part of that culture.

The Constitution of India under Article 29— protection of interests of minorities—has the following Clauses:

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve them.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

The First Clause applies to all minorities; however, since Deaf people are a linguistic minority, it applies to them also. The Second Clause covers educational right to all government supported schools.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) played a major role in getting rights of Deaf people. Its efforts to get deaf people to have driver's license took decades before it was approved. The NAD repeatedly demanded establishing positions for interpreters in government offices and public monuments for equal access to deaf people. These rights are included in various national and international laws.

India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007. The CRPD protects the rights and promotes equality of persons with disabilities at international level. The CRPD also sets a framework for deaf people's rights, filling an important gap in international human rights legislation and paving the way for India's own legislation – Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD Act).

The UNCRPD through its various Articles supports Deaf people's right to use sign language, have equal accessibility by availability to use sign language interpreters and equal access to all visual media by using closed and open captions. It also recognizes Deaf culture and their own language, sign language.

The RPWD Act follows the principles of providing respect for disabled people and their autonomy. It recognizes the importance of participation in all kind of activities in the society among other rights. Here is a summary of rights passed under RPWD Act:

- Under Chapter III (16v), the law assures that deaf people will be educated in the “most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication.” This means those who prefer and are able to communicate orally can go to oral schools. Other can go to programs that use sign language.
- Under 16 (c) of Chapter III, the law requires for training and employment of teachers who are qualified in sign language. This will allow Deaf people to become teachers.
- 29(h) Clause requires television programs to have sign language interpretation or captions. This will allow Deaf people to have full access to television programs.
- Four percent of jobs in all groups of government posts will be reserved for persons who have one or more of the following disabilities: blindness, deafness, locomotor disability, autism and other disabilities, multiple disabilities.



## **Summary**

1. Individuals with disability are also human. An ordinary citizen is entitled to several rights from birth; likewise an Individual with D/HH also is also entitled to the same rights, since s/he is also a citizen of a country, not a secondary person.
2. The Constitution of India is equally applicable to every legal citizen of India. The Individuals with D/HH needs some privileged rights rather than a so called a normal person which should be given them. The reason is that they are special and secondly we have ignored them and they were kept away from their rights.
3. PWD Act, 1995 had come into enforcement on February 7, 1996. It was a significant step which ensures equal opportunities for the people with disabilities and their full participation in nation building. The Act provides for both the preventive and promotional aspects of rehabilitation as well as research and manpower development. But this act is substituted now with RPWD Act, 2016.
4. In order to ensure all the rights of persons with disabilities, the United Nation convened a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which included articles of different aspects of disability related issues, and which was ratified by India in 2007.

## **Exercises**

### **A) Multiple choice questions**

1. Which of the following has been prescribed as penalty for discriminating against individuals with disability?
  - a. Fine up to Rs 5 lakhs and imprisonment up to 10 years
  - b. Fine up to Rs 2 lakhs and imprisonment up to 2 years
  - c. Fine up to Rs 5 lakhs and imprisonment up to 2 years
  - d. Fine from Rs 5000 and imprisonment up to 5 years
2. Which of the following is true regarding RPWD Act, 2016?
  - a. Office of Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) will be assisted by 5 Commissioners.
  - b. Office of State Commissioners of Disabilities will be assisted by an Advisory Committee comprising of not more than 20 members.
  - c. None of the above
3. Which of the following is true regarding RPWD Act, 2016?
  - a. Reservation in vacancies in government establishments has been increased from 3% to 6% for certain persons with benchmark disability.
  - b. Functions of district level committees would be prescribed the Union Government.
  - c. None of the above
4. Which of the following is true regarding RPWD Act, 2016?

- a. Every child with disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education.
- b. Trust Fund for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities will be incorporated with the National Fund for Persons with Disabilities.

**Answers: 1.C 2.C 3.C 4.A**

**B) Answer in brief.**

1. What is the procedure of getting a disability certificate in India?
2. Which act did the RPWD Act 2016 replace?
3. Enumerate the rights mentioned in the RPWD Act, 2016.

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## **5.2 Deaf Organizations**

### **Learning Objectives**

After reading this sub-unit, the learners would be able to:

- List the Deaf organizations in India
- Discuss the role and objectives of Deaf organizations
- Describe the contributions made by Deaf organizations in the field

### **Introduction**

This brief listing and description of major deaf organizations in India is not comprehensive, as many organizations start and fold up after a few years. The internal strife and lack of strong leadership does not provide longevity to most of these organizations.

### **Major Deaf Organizations**

History of deafness cannot be completed without including information about organizations of deaf people. These organizations play a very important role in social, political, educational and general lives of deaf people.

Compared to other countries, deaf people in India started to organize as groups much later. Education and employment are important for starting and maintaining organizations of any minority groups. The other major reason for this could be the rural nature of India. The fact that formal education of deaf children did not begin until the late 19th century also contributed to the late start of deaf organizations.

The first organization of the deaf in India was the West Bengal Association of Deaf and Dumb in Kolkata. It was also the first deaf social organization in Southeast Asia and was founded by the alumni of Calcutta School for the Deaf and Dumb. This effectively proves that there is a relationship between education and the emergence of social and political organizations of deaf people. The second organization, The Deaf & Dumb Society, was started in 1944 in Mumbai where the first school for the deaf was established in 1885. It functioned for a few years and then re-emerged in 1956 as the India Deaf Society.

In the beginning the main purpose of these organizations was to have a meeting place for deaf people for socialization and to organize sports and special events. However, due to the needs of their membership, the organizations slowly became another source of education and vocational training as well as an informal “employment exchanges.” These clubs and societies would always have hearing presidents and vice presidents with political or financial clout. These officers were figureheads and the general secretary of each organization carried out all administrative functions. The president would help them access a place for meeting and, later, establish a small reading room. The space would be used for classrooms to teach basic literacy to its members. Some organizations with good resources and leadership also started vocational training programs and small businesses to employ deaf people. The history of the education of deaf people would not be complete without including information about these organizations and their role in education and employment of deaf people.

A brief description of selected major organizations of deaf people is given below.

**All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD):**

The AIFD was established in 1955 by a group of young deaf people who had attended the Lady Noyce School for the Deaf and Dumb. These young people earlier had started the Deaf and Dumb Association of Delhi in 1953. Its first general secretary was Bans Gopal Nigam. He contacted an active member of Indian Parliament, Savitri Nigam (no relation) to be its president. The Federation, with the help of state grants and funds raised by its annual Flag Week, started a small photography school and a printing press for training deaf people in photography and the printing businesses.

The AIFD is the only national deaf organization affiliated with the World Federation of the Deaf. It published a bi-monthly magazine, Mook Dhvani, from 1968 to 1985. For a few years, this magazine also had a Hindi section called Vadhira Jyoti. This was the only publication by any deaf organization.

To help deaf people get employment, the AIFD started a small photography school in 1961 and a printing school in 1962. In 1975, the AIFD established the Multipurpose Training Center for the Deaf (MPTCD) and added training classes in fitter and turner work, basic computer skills and information technology and sewing technology to the existing photography school and printing press. With time, a hostel facility was also added to MPTCD to help deaf students from other states attend classes there.

The AIFD established the All India Sports Council (AISC) in 1960. This organization has been responsible for organizing regional and national sports meets and selecting athletes for participation in World Games of the Deaf also known as Deaf Olympics. Later, the AISC started to function as a separate organization.

Due to the lack of strong leadership, the AIFD has been mostly inactive since 1995. Its hearing president wields all the power and refuses to resign after being in the position for over 50 years. The general secretaries that came and went had virtually no authority and functioned as caretakers.

#### **National Association of the Deaf (NAD):**

The National Association of the Deaf was established in 2005 by Mr. Arun Rao, a hearing father of a deaf girl. Mr. Rao and his associates had been very active in advocacy and the vocational training of deaf youth in the Delhi area. The NAD has been involved in a variety of activities including getting deaf people driving licenses, and demanding the creation of and later helping in the establishment of the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre.

The NAD worked with other organizations of disabled people to get the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act passed. It has also been pushing the Indian government to implement various articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). One of the greatest achievements of the NAD was the establishment of the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC).

#### **All India Foundation of Deaf Women (AIFDW):**

The AIFDW was established in 2014 with the goal to rehabilitate and upgrade the status of deaf women in India. It has state chapters in Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Hyderabad, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The AIFDW coordinates the efforts of these associations and provides support as needed. This is a new organization and is focusing on advocacy and leadership skill development and training at present. It is expected to grow rapidly and work closely with the AIFD and NAD. Examples of its activities around the country are exemplified in the Deaf Federation of Deaf Women (DFDW), which was established in 1973.

The DFDW has a training center for deaf women in New Delhi where job-oriented training in the following areas are provided: information technology and computer skills, tailoring and cloth handicraft making, leather craft, book binding, beauty culture,

personal grooming and leadership skills. It also runs a small school for young deaf children as well as ISL classes for the general public. The DFDW organizes several events for its members, including Career Counseling, Legal Awareness and Women Empowerment Workshops, talent and sports competitions, beauty pageants, cultural festivals, talent contest for deaf children and Pranay Milan Sammelan (matrimonial assistance).

#### **Other Organizations:**

Several other state and city-level organizations work with and for the deaf. Some of them are affiliated with AIFD or NAD or AIFDW and some work alone. Most of these provide classes in English, computer technology and employment.

#### **West Bengal Association of the Deaf (WBAD):**

The WBAD might be the oldest deaf organization in India. It was established in 1935 by CSDD graduates under the leadership of BinodBihari Sen. It is still functioning as a club for the deaf with focus on sports and celebrating national and religious holidays as a group. It has not been involved in training or advocacy efforts.

#### **Mook Badhir Mandal, Vadodara (MBM) (Deaf Association of Vadodara) [1972]**

#### **Bombay Foundation of Deaf Women (BFDW) [1983]:**

The BFDW hosted and organized by All India Deaf Art & Cultural Society (Delhi) "Miss Deaf India" which held on 29th and 30th December 2012 in Mumbai for the first time. Winner will go to abroad for Miss Deaf World, which will be in July 2013. Awaiting more information.

#### **Deaf Enabled Foundation, Hyderabad (DEF):**

DEF was started in 2009 under the leadership of Mr. T.K.M Sandeep. The DEF provides vocational training, regular workshops, seminars and activities in the areas of advocacy and empowerment to the deaf community through services in Chennai, Vijayawada, Thanjavur, Puducherry, Tiruchirlappalli, Mumbai and Indore. DEF has 67 employees including 61 deaf and 6 hearing (as of June 2019). Its centers provide training in English literacy, computer programming, 3-D animation and multimedia and skills for market training in collaboration with the Tech Mahindra Foundation. It has trained more than 2350 deaf students. Most of them are working in prestigious companies. It has also started a restaurant, Talking Hands, in collaboration with the Telangana State Tourism Department. The restaurant with an all-deaf staff is a popular tourist site in Hyderabad. The DEF is considered the most successful organization founded and managed by deaf people themselves. It has won many awards for excellent services and being a model non-profit organization.

**NOIDA Deaf Society (NDS):**

NDS is one of the most active organizations working to bring about positive change in the lives of deaf people. It was established in 2005 by Ms. Ruma Roka. She started NDS from a small two bedroom flat, teaching the students how to communicate in English in the written form. The NDS has reached out to over 5000 deaf children and youth across the country. NDS is the only organization in the country that has created professional, visual vocational training curriculum for deaf students and has supported deaf youth through their training and into sustainable employment. All trainers at NDS are deaf themselves. Over 1450 youth are successfully working in the field of hospitality, retail, information technology, banking, print and publishing, education, textile and manufacturing among others. The NDS has centers in Rajasthan, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.

There are also some organizations that do not directly focus on education or vocational training, but provide a platform for deaf people for growth in the socio-emotional domain.

**Indian Deaf Youth Forum (IDYF Delhi):**

IDYF was started in March 2011 by AIFD. Its focus is on leadership development through workshops and summer camps. It has been recently resurrected after several years of inactivity.

**Yuva Association of Deaf (YAD) Mumbai:**

This organization was started in 2010. The goals were to unite deaf youth in order to increase their involvement in the Deaf community, organize lectures and discussion groups for self-improvement, organize sports and cultural activities, increase inclusiveness and hold leadership camps.

**The All India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD):**

This is the national apex body for deaf sports. It is one of the 55 sports associations recognized by the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, for the purpose of promoting sports in India. The AISCD is responsible for final selection of athletes to represent Indian in the World Games of the Deaf and Asian Games of the Deaf.

**Other Deaf Organizations:**

1. Deaf Youth Association in India
2. National Foundation of Deaf Women
3. All India Central Government Deaf Employees' Association
4. All India Deaf Bank Employee Association
5. Leadership Education Empowerment of Deaf, Pune
6. Indian Deaf Youth Forum
7. Religious Deaf Organisation in India
8. Deaf Way Hyderabad

9. Deaf Way New Delhi
10. Deaf Can Foundation (Bhopal) M.P.
11. Madhya Pradesh Deaf Sports Society
12. All India Art & Culture Society
13. State Level Association of the Deaf (SLAD), Pune

### **Summary**

1. As society becomes more familiar with the Deaf as a disability group, organizations have emerged to support D/HH individuals as well as their families. There are various Indian Deaf organizations that offer assistance for D/HH individuals and provide resources for the deaf community for education, employment as well as assistive products and services.
2. These associations and organizations have improved the lives of thousands of D/HH individuals as well as their families all over the country. More importantly, they have convinced the hearing community to understand and contribute equally to the empowerment of D/HH.

### **Exercises**

1. List the Deaf organizations in India.
2. Discuss the objectives of any two Deaf organizations in India.
3. Critically review the outcomes of any two Deaf organizations in India.
4. Visit any one Deaf organization and understand their working style.

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## **5.3 Participation of Deaf People in Education and Other Spheres**

### **Learning Objectives**

After reading this sub-unit, the learners would be able to:

- Discuss the contributions made by Individuals with D/HH.

### **Introduction**

Both the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and India's RPWD Act 2016 emphasize participation of persons with disabilities in programs serving them. Deaf people are heavily involved in deaf organizations and education in other countries. Unfortunately, the same is not true for India. Their involvement in deaf programs has been limited.

## **Content**

Due to strict practice of oralism in deaf education since the start of the first school for the deaf in 1884, deaf people played little or no role in education of deaf children. The normal departments of schools for the Deaf did not admit deaf people. The certification requirements with heavy emphasis on speech development and audiological training, effectively barred deaf people from the teaching profession.

Deaf people were, however, hired as classroom aides and dormitory workers. Some of them rose up in ranks due to their hard work, however, they were still known as aides or dorm workers.

There were some exceptions. During the early 20th century, four deaf persons, all graduates of Calcutta Deaf & Dumb School were able to establish schools for the deaf on their own in various parts of northeastern India. These schools operated for only a short period due to financial problems, but are important in that deaf people took the initiative to establish schools and teach there.

There is no information on curricula used in those schools. Did the deaf founders hire speech therapists or audiologists? Were those schools pure sign language schools? This is something that needs to be researched.

Bhola Nath Ghatak was a graduate of Calcutta School for the Deaf & Dumb. In 1923, a few years after graduating from CSDD, he started a school in Chittagong (now in Bangladesh). The school did well in the beginning, but did not get any support from the local and state governments. Due to financial problems, the school had to be closed after a few years.

Mr. Ghatak did not give up. He started another school in Rajshahi (also in present Bangladesh) in 1931 with 16 students. One of the teachers there, Sailesh Chandra Roy, was also a graduate of CSDD. This school was supported by the district board and did well. Bholanath Ghatak died in 1936. His goal was to establish a school in every district of Bengal, but his dream was not fulfilled due to his early death.

Debendra Chandra Bhowmic was a well-educated deaf person. After finishing his education, he established a one-room school in his own home in Suri, Birbhum (West Bengal). The school grew fast thanks to support by the district government officials. There were 12 students in the school with a trained teacher in charge. The financial support from the government was nominal, but the local businessmen and landowners pitched in to erect a school building and provide financial support.

Bipin Bihari Chowdhury was born in Orissa in 1905. He attended the Calcutta School for the Deaf and Dumb (CSDD) for his early education. In addition to excelling in academics, Mr. Chowdhury showed an extraordinary talent in arts. After graduating from CSDD, he joined the Government School of Arts in Calcutta and graduated from there



with honours. He was the only deaf student there and was able to finish the program without any support.

He worked hard to earn money and with his own money and some raised from the public, he was able to establish Orissa School for the Deaf and Dumb in Cuttack in 1938.

Chowdhury shared his observations with the CTDI in an article published in *The Deaf in India*. He strongly felt that “no general progress in education of the deaf has been made.” He blamed the apathy of society and the government for this sad state of affair (*The Deaf in India*).

Makhan Lal Majumdar also was educated at CSDD. He founded a school in Shayambazar in north Calcutta to meet the needs of deaf children in that area. This school had only a few students, however, as even the local children preferred to attend the larger CSDD for a more comprehensive education.

Unfortunately, the role of deaf people in their education is limited to these four pioneers. They were all from CSDD. No information is available on other deaf people starting schools or teaching regular academic subjects. As mentioned earlier, deaf people were employed in school dormitories in many schools. They were also allowed to teach vocational subjects that did not require teaching credentials. However, there is no written information about these teachers.

It would be interesting to find out what kind of curriculum was used by these schools managed by deaf individual. Did they follow the philosophy of oral education that was prevalent at that time? Given the very negative attitude toward deaf people, how did parents feel about sending their deaf children to a school managed by a deaf person? Establishing and managing any school is an uphill task and requires a lot of planning and personnel and financial support. The story of each of these pioneering deaf educators would fill a book, however, as usual, there is no written documentation about their schools.

It would not be out of place to mention another deaf person who was indirectly involved in education. Mr. Amulya Mukherjee started and maintained a magazine. As S. N. Banerji put it in the editorial of *The Deaf in India*, “We welcome the appearance of *MashikMuk-VadhirPattar* [Monthly deaf and Dumb Newsletter], a Bengali monthly journal. We offer our congratulation to him for publishing this magazine, which is the first and only publication of its kind in India, edited by a deaf person” (Banerji 1949). Unfortunately, I could not find even one copy of this magazine in the library of CSDD or in the deaf club in Kolkata.

### **Summary**

Individuals with D/HH face various challenges like lack of awareness about their diversity, lack of job opportunities, appropriate education, inaccessibility, etc. In spite of all these challenges there are a few D/HH individuals who have contributed and

participated in the process of empowering children and adults with D/HH. They could achieve their dreams of educating children with D/HH by overcoming the barriers.

### **Exercises**

1. List the Individuals with D/HH who contributed in developing schools for the Deaf.
2. Visit any Deaf school which was started by Deaf Individual.
3. As an interpreter or a Deaf person, what is your opinion about the participation of Deaf individuals in our country?

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## **5.4 Deaf Role Models**

### **Learning Objectives**

**After reading this sub-unit, the learners would be able to:**

- List the Deaf role models in India
- Discuss the background of Deaf role models

### **Introduction**

We all look up to people who have been successful in our society. This helps us model our lives on their examples. The Deaf community also has role models. Since calling someone a role model is subjective, I contacted about 20 people and asked them to nominate people who they consider role models for Deaf people in India. The response was overwhelming – I got over 100 names from my helpful contributors. After analyzing the input, I selected those whose names were recommended recurrently. In addition, I tried to balance the list by gender, geography and background.

The emphasis was on initiative, drive, hard work and innovation. Despite all my efforts to make this list objective, there might be some influence of preference by various helpers. Role models, after all, are chosen by personal preference!

### **1. BIPIN BIHARI CHOWDHURY**

Bipin Bihari Chowdhury was born in Orissa in 1905. He attended the Calcutta School for the Deaf and Dumb (CSDD) and later joined the Government School of Arts in Calcutta and graduated from there with honours. He has the honour of being the only deaf person from the Eastern Hemisphere to graduate from the famed Royal College of Arts in London. As a student in London, he held a one-man exhibition of paintings and one of his portraits of ex-Prime Minister Lloyd George was selected for permanent display at the India House Art Gallery in London.

In addition to being a world-famous artist, he was also able to establish Orissa School for the Deaf and Dumb in Cuttack in 1938. He also met Helen Keller in New York and was a life-long friend.

## **2. SATISH GUJRAL**



Satish Gujral was born in 1925 and is one of the greatest Indian artists. He became deaf at the age of 10 and is known as one of most famous Indian artists for his painting, murals and sculptures. He is a graduate of JJ School of Arts and did his apprenticeship under Diego Rivera in Mexico. Satish Gujral has organized solo shows all over the world. He has received national and international awards, too many to list here. Prominent among them are Padma Vibhushan, Leonardo Da Vinci Award by the World Cultural Council, Order of the Crown by the Government of Belgium, NDTV Indian of the Year and International Award for Life Time Achievement.

## **3. BANS GOPAL NIGAM**

Bans Gopal Nigam was the founding member of the Delhi Deaf and Dumb Association (now Delhi Association of the Deaf) and the All Indian Federation of the Deaf. He was a very dynamic leader and was the first deaf person to spread advocacy of deaf people across the country. He also served as the vice president of World Federation of the Deaf. Mr. Nigam helped start photography and printing institutes for training deaf people for employment. He initiated the National Deaf Flag Week in 1955 to make aware people about deafness and raise funds for various projects. He moved to the United Kingdom in 1967, but his work in India for about a decade still has its impact.

## **4. MADAN VASISHTA**



Dr Madan Vasishta was born in Himachal Pradesh and became deaf at the age of 11. After working as a farmer for 9 years, he moved to Delhi and became a photographer. He is self-taught and managed to get admission to Gallaudet University in 1967. He received BA, MA, and Ph.D. from Gallaudet University and worked as a principal and superintendent of several schools in the USA. He has authored six books and is working on two more after his Fulbright Fellowship in 2015-16.

Vasishta is credited with starting the pioneering research on ISL in 1977 and helping it get the rightful place in deaf education and is known as the Father of ISL. He helped many schools and organizations as advisor and pushed for passage of RPWD Act and establishment of ISLRTC, of which he served as the Chief Advisor. He is also the first Indian deaf person to earn a Ph.D. degree.

#### **5. RENEE KURIYAN**

Renee Kuriyan was born in Kerala and despite her deafness managed to receive all her early and higher education in regular school programs. She came to Delhi in early 1970's and worked in the All India Federation of the Deaf as an assistant and also helped edit the *Mood-Dhwani*, a journal published by AIFD. Renee strongly felt that the cause of deaf women was ignored in India and decided to establish All India Federation of Deaf Women. She moved out of AIFD and focused fulltime on AIFDW and was able to make it a forceful organization. She was one of the first major deaf women leaders in India.

#### **6. USHA PUNJABI**



Usha Punjabi is the founder principal of Indore Bilingual Academy, the largest residential school for the deaf in India. She is also the only deaf school administrator in the country. She received her early education in local government schools and continued there after she became deaf at the age of 10. She got her B.Sc. in Biology from Kasturba Gandhi Rural Institute, Kasturbagram and her M.A. from Government New Girls Degree College, Indore.

Mrs. Punjabi is also active in national and state organizations. She was a member of the executive committee of the All India Federation of the Deaf, vice chairman of the All India Sports Council of the Deaf, president of the All India Foundation of Deaf Women

and member of the General Council of the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. She also visited the United States to study bilingual education of deaf children and implemented the approach in her school.

#### **7. APURVA ATUL JOSHI**



Apurva Atul Joshi was born deaf and attended mostly public schools for her education. She received her BASLP (Bachelor in Audiology, Speech and Language Pathology) from AYNIIHH in Mumbai and is currently pursuing a Masters degree there. She is registered to practice as an audiologist and speech language pathologist with the Rehabilitation Council of India. She started her own clinic named “Apurva’s Speech and Hearing Centre” at Dahisar (East), Mumbai. She received many awards and was featured on various television programs for her achievements including “Zindagi Milegi Dobara.” Apurva Joshi is the only deaf audiologist in India and is in high demand for counseling parents of deaf children in India.

#### **8. A. S. NARAYANAN**



A. S. Narayanan is Deaf by birth and grew up in Kerala. After his high school education from St. Louis Institute for the Deaf and Blind, Chennai, he has been working with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community for the past 25 years. He is the President of National Association of the Deaf and was its general secretary for over a decade. He was a member of the steering committee of the Planning Commission, Government of India and was actively involved in the setting up and functioning of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. He attended the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in

South Africa, and the Leadership Institute at Gallaudet University, USA. He is working for the Central Government of India. Currently, he is fighting for the recognition of Indian Sign Language as one of the official languages of India, issuance of driving licenses for deaf people, captioning on TV, among others.

#### **9. SIBAJI PANDA**



Sibaji Panda was born in Odisha and had his early education in his village. He became deaf at the age of 10. After his high school, he moved to Delhi and worked at the Delhi Foundation of the Deaf as a computer teacher. He worked with Dr. Ulrike Zeshan in developing the ISL ABC level coursework for training interpreters and ISL teachers.

Sibaji completed MA in Applied Linguistics in UK and worked as a senior lecturer in the University of Central Lancashire for 10 years. He also worked on implementing the Peer-to-Peer Literacy Deaf Project in India. He was the founding member of Indian Sign Language Teachers Association and Indian Sign Language Interpreters Association. He has established a bilingual school for the deaf in his native village and is currently working on his Ph.D.

#### **10. SUNIL SAHASARBUDHE**



Sunil Sahasrabuddhe was born in Mumbai to deaf parents. He attended both deaf and regular schools for his early education. Sunil holds several gradate and postgraduate

degrees in diverse areas like computer programming, commerce, Deaf education, and teaching ISL. He also has a degree from England in research.

Sunil worked as director of education in the Ishara Foundation for six years and taught part-time in the BAASLS program launched in IGNOU. He also worked as the Project Coordinator of the ISL Interpreter and Teacher training program at the AYJNIHH, Mumbai. Sunil has started a social entrepreneurship called SIGNEX with a partner. The goal of Signex is to provide sign language accessibility services. He is currently serving as honorary Vice President for two national level associations: All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD) and Indian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ISLIA).

#### **11. Thota K.M. Sandeep**



Thota K.M.Sandeep is the Founder and CEO of Deaf Enabled Foundation (DEF). He is also Vice-President of the National Association of the Deaf. Under his leadership, DEF has set up 10 Skill Development Training Centers, which have successfully placed 2400 candidates in corporate entities over the past 9 years. He is a visionary Deaf entrepreneur and has set up the Talking Hands Restaurant in Hyderabad. The restaurant is a model of deaf entrepreneurship and provides an exciting template for other commercial ventures by the deaf.

Due to his sincere efforts DEF has received awards of Role Model NGO 2010 by NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Award and “Innovative Project” for Talking Hands Restaurant by Government of Telangana State Tourism Excellence Award, on World Tourism Day 2018.

#### **12. PRITI SHAH SONI**



Priti Shah Soni is the Founder and General Secretary of Deaf Can Foundation (DCF), Bhopal. She was born and brought up in Indore, Madhya



Pradesh. She completed her education from Indore Deaf Bilingual Academy (IDBA). She pursued her higher education and post-graduation from Barkatullah University, MP. She was the first runner up and got the opportunity to represent India on an international level at a beauty pageant held at Chicago. She was awarded “Women of the Year” in 2012 by a leading newspaper in India. She has been delivering training sessions in different cities of India to address the issues related to deaf women’s empowerment, youth and social service. She is also the recipient of the sixth NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award, 2015.

### **13. KAJAL DHAWAN**



Kajal Dhawan is the recipient of National Award from the President of India in 2007 for being an outstanding employee with disability. She has been outstanding in education, sports and other extra-curricular activities. She has represented India at Taiwan and Malaysia as member of the Indian Badminton Team. She has won a number of gold, silver and bronze medals at national and international levels in various sports. She was team captain of Delhi University Softball Team for Inter-College Championship 2000-2001. She won Delhi University Best Sports Woman Award for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001.

She is the Vice President and Former Sports Secretary of Delhi Federation of Deaf Women (DFDW) and Former Vice President of All India Foundation of Deaf Women (AIFDW).

### **14. MAHITA JARJAPU**





Mahita Jarjapu was born in Secunderabad in 1988. She joined Balavidyalaya in 1990 and completed the programme in 1995. She went back to Secunderabad and joined Sherwood Public School, a mainstream school. She did her graduation in B.Sc in St Francis Degree College for Women, Secunderabad. She then did her M.Sc in Chemistry from IIT Madras. She went on to do her Ph.D in the department of Computational Approaches to Protein Science (CAPS) - National Center of Biological Sciences, Bangalore. Her interest in this field was because she was a victim of administration of garamycin as an infant which seemed to have caused her hearing loss. Her thesis was on immunology – proteins ultimately leading to protein design and drug design. Now she is doing her Post Doctorate in Dartmouth, USA. Her work is interdisciplinary and interfaces among biology, computer application and chemistry. She is attempting to design proteins for better immunity which would ultimately be able to be commercialized to benefit society.

#### **15. SERI NIRATH SANJANA**



Seri Nirath Sanjanawas born in Vizagapattinam in 1992. She along with her mother relocated to Chennai and joined Balavidyalaya in 1994 and completed the programme in 1996. She then returned to her hometown Vizagapattinam and joined a regular school there. She joined B.Tech in Aeronautical Engineering in IIT Madras and did her Masters in Industrial Engineering and Management in the University of Arlington, USA. She is now a senior consultant in Booz Allen Hamilton, Washington DC, USA. She has worked on a project that helps people with visual disabilities navigate independently. This project was selected as the winner over 52 other teams in a challenge and resulted in a partnership with the National Federation of the Blind to develop a prototype of the device.

## **16. RAJESH KETKAR**



Rajesh Ketkar was born to deaf parents in Baroda. He received a B.Sc. degree in computer science and has been working as the director of Ishara Foundation in Gujarat and managing several literacy programs. Rajesh uses Internet and videos to teach students who cannot attend his classes. He was also president of Gujarat Association of the Deaf. He is a well-regarded leader at state and national level and has represented India in USA, Turkey, Malaysia and Spain. He is an also a movie producer and has shown his movies internationally.

Rajesh has won many awards including for producing and directing movies and for leadership and is a popular speaker and workshop presenter at various conferences.

## **17. SONU ANAND SHARMA**



Sonu Sharma was born on 8 March, International Women's Day. She attended the Balwantrai Mehta School where she received the Best All Round Student Award for excellence in academics and extracurricular activities. She was also 1st runner-up in Miss Silent Delhi Beauty Contest. She represented the Indian badminton team in several international contests and won bronze and gold medals. She became the coach of the Indian badminton team that participated in World Deaf Badminton Championship in 2015. She serves on the executive board of the All India Sports Council of the Deaf.

Sonu Sharma is a multi-talented individual. In addition to academics and sports, she also excels in mime and drama. In 2016, she received the award for Exceptional Achievers among disabled community in Delhi.

#### 18. V. GOPALAKRISHNAN



V. Gopalakrishnan was born deaf in Coimbatore and attended Little Flower Convent Higher Secondary School for the Deaf in Chennai. He passed eighth standard in 1958 and received an Advanced Diploma in Fine Arts from the Government College of Arts and Crafts. Mr.Gopalkrishnan worked as a draftsman in a private company. An avid sportsman, he was very active in organized sports for the deaf at state and national levels. He was the illustrator of the comprehensive Indian Sign Language dictionary, produced by Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, in 2002. He received training as an ISL teacher at AYJNIHH after that and taught ISL in Hyderabad and other cities.

At present, he is the general secretary of the All India Federation of the Deaf. In addition, he is a member of Executive Committees of two national associations, namely, the Indian Sign Language Interpreters Association and the Indian Sign Language Teachers Association.

#### Pause and think:

**What are the real life implications of the content you just read?**

.....

#### How far have you learnt?

1. Complete the following

Name	Qualification	Achievement	Things to learn from them
V. Gopalakrishnan			
Sonu Anand Sharma			
Seri Nirath Sanjana			
Kajal Dhawan			
Madan Vasishta			

Sunil Sahasrabuddhe			
Sibaji Panda			

2. As an interpreter or a Deaf teacher, what is your learning from knowing about Deaf models?

## REFERENCES

Deaf Role Models. Retrieved from <http://deafrolemodels.blogspot.com/> Accessed on 28/01/2019

Note: All the text for the sub-unit on Role Models is based on personal interviews.

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author / Editor</b>
UNIT 1	HISTORY OF DEAFNESS	Author: Dr. Madan Vasishta Editor: Dr. Gayatri Ahuja
UNIT 2	CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND THE DEAF COMMUNITIES	Authors: Vishwajeet Nair & Sachin Singh Editor: Prof. Asmita Huddar
UNIT 3	CONCEPT OF IDENTITY AND THE D/DEAF	Author: Sunil Sahasrabuddhe Editor: Prof. AsmitaHuddar
UNIT 4	SIGN LANGUAGES	Author: Dr. Michael Morgan Editor: Dr. Donna Fujimoto
UNIT 5	DEAF COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY	Author: Dr. Madan Vasishta Editor: Dr. Gayatri Ahuja