

Inclusive Education And Social Justice: Indian Context

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Abstract: Education is the foundation of a civil society. It is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. In other words, education is the means of developing the mind for the betterment of the individual and society. But the inclusive education is an urgent need of the time to be recognized. It suggest that no child or young person should be excluded from mainstream schooling because of learning differences, language, cultural, racial, class, caste, religion or behavioral differences.

Inclusive education is a global movement in the world of education. The introduction of inclusive education brings with it a shift in the paradigm of thinking within the education system and the social world. Inclusion is about enhancing social values and practices that influence the ecological aspects of human beings to support recognition of human rights. Inclusive education supports the social models and is meant to promote inclusiveness in all aspects of human life. However, for total human development and social justice, the Right to Education Act has been enacted by the government. At the global level Article 13 of the United Nations recognizes a universal right to education. But the Act is still not implemented. Thus the objective to social justice is far away. The school which are highly selective do not allow for development of the communities. Besides, the government schools' teachers are far away from the passion of educating the children and the policy of the government is job oriented education too. Therefore, the inclusive education for inclusive society is far cry. In this context, this paper seeks to study the social aspects for inclusive education in order to achieve social justice i.e. justice to larger number of people. The methodology apply in his study is narrative and descriptive. Basically, this paper is based on secondary sources.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Social justice, human-rights, Right to Education Act

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a global movement in the world of education. The introduction of inclusive brings with it a shift in the paradigm of thinking within the education system and the social world. Inclusion is about enhancing social values and practices that influence the ecological aspects of human beings to support recognition of human rights. It is also about diversity and change in attitudes and instructional methods of teaching. It is a process that involves a change in the thinking pattern of the educators.

Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together. This education system

allows all the children to develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate expectations for each child. It works on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students in their own age. Inclusion is the opposite of segregation and isolation. Segregated education creates a permanent underclass of students and conveys a strong message to those students that they do not measure up, fit in or belong to. It assumes that the right to belong is an earned rather than an unconditional human right. The inclusive education describes that the right to belongs is every person's birthright. Its services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. This circumstance is of vital importance to their personal development. Interrupting a

disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself.

In this context, it is important to stress the role parents have. They have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.

As a rule, there are a number of practical problems that have to be solved before a child with special educational needs can go to school or take part in school activities. The arrangements it takes are fairly simple, provided co-ordinate local and unconventional initiatives are stimulated. One should also remember that the child's schoolmates represent a valuable potential partner who is ready and able to help in overcoming some of these problems. Any child may experience a special need during the course of educational years. Some children feel 'left-outs' and never enter school or enter only for a few years and, as repeaters, become 'drop-outs' or, more correctly 'pushed-outs', without their needs having been met. These children are a vivid illustration of the failure of schools to teach rather than the pupils' failure to learn. A school system emphasizing 'Education for All' should ensure the right of all children to a meaningful education based on individual needs and abilities.

Ultimately, it can be said that inclusion is the way of life - a way of living together that is based on a belief that each individual is valued and belongs.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1970, the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) recommended "inclusive education as a cheap alternative" to other special education programs, specifically for developing countries. About ten years later, the UN made 1981 the UN year of the Disabled Person. The discussion generated by the year of the disabled person resulted in UN Resolution 37/52, which was adopted by the general assembly on the 3rd of December, 1982. Paragraph 120 of the World Program of Action discusses inclusive education.

In terms of education-specific policies or changes that occurred in the UN decade of the disabled person, in 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the Tallinn Guidelines for Action on Human Resources Development in the Field of Disability. These guidelines detail the importance of early childhood intervention and of inclusive education at all levels (primary, secondary and higher levels of education, including vocational training).

Further, The *Jomtien Conference* on Education for All, held in 1990 at Thailand, was clearly a major milestone in the international dialogue on the place of education in human development policy, and the consensus reached there has given renewed impetus to the worldwide drive to provide universal primary education and eliminate adult illiteracy. Despite the repeated use of the rhetoric "education for all," throughout the conference, people with disabilities were not mentioned in the Declaration and Framework for Action at all. This was extremely disappointing to activists for inclusion.

Four years after the Jomtien Conference, another conference on Special Needs Education was held in Spain from June 7-10th, 1994, by the United Nations and the Government of Spain. This is known as 'Salamanca Conference' which is centered entirely on inclusion and the importance of inclusive education, rather than segregated special schools. The Framework for Action discusses the needs to change education systems from systems of segregation and separation to systems of inclusion. Emphasis is placed on using existing infrastructure and knowledge, especially around already-existing special schools and resource centers, and using them to help create and maintain an inclusive system of education.

The regular schools will now increasingly play a major role in making provision for children with special educational needs available nation-wide. Making the school system flexible and adopting an inclusive approach may, however, prove the most challenging task of all, a task calling for deep reflection and discussion of the two fundamental questions: "What is the overall role of education", and "What is it we want children to learn in school?" It might lead to the need of reforming the school system as a whole from a traditional, examination-oriented to an inclusive, child-oriented approach.

After independence, the Constitution of India and the educational policies envisaged in post-independent India reflect a perseverance and commitment to the fulfillment of 'Universal Elementary Education'. The Constitution states that 'free and compulsory education should be provided for all children until they complete the age of 14 years'. The first education commission in India (*Kothari Commission, 1964-66*) addressed issues of access and participation by all. It stressed a common school system open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic condition and social status. In 1968, the *National Education Policy* followed the commission's recommendations and suggested the expansion of educational facilities for physically and mentally handicapped children, and the development of an integrated program enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools. Two decades later, the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) (1986) stressed the 'removal of disparities' in education. It stated 'the objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth, and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence.' In 1987, to fulfill the provisions for disabled children in the NPE, the government launched the *Project for Integrated Education Development* (PIED). It states 'wherever feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be in common with that of others.' The program of action outlined measures to implement the policy including massive in-service training programs for teachers; an orientation program for administrators; the development of supervisory expertise in resource institutions for school education at the district and block level. The NPE underwent modifications in 1992 (MHRD, 1992). It made an ambitious commitment to universal enrolment by the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan for both categories of disabled children: those who could be educated in general primary school, and those who needed to be educated in special schools or special classes in general schools.

Another significant policy development in India took place following the ESCAP Proclamation on Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia and Pacific Region in 1992. The Equal Opportunities and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 1996 called for the education of children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years in an appropriate environment. The act grants 'equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation' to people with disabilities. Although there is no specific mention of inclusive education in the act, it is judged to be breakthrough legislation relating to education and economic rehabilitation of people with disabilities. And now, the issue of 'disability' has also found a place in all the country's five-year plans.

In recent years, two major initiatives have been launched by the government for achieving the goals of universalization of elementary education (UEE): the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1994. But this programs have been able to make only a limited impact in terms of increasing the participation of children with disabilities in formal education. This situation needs to change; a focused effort is required.

Further, the Government of India, in conjunction with the World Bank, created the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) in 2002. SSA is not a disability-specific program, but rather a disability-inclusive program, with specific aspects that benefit people with disabilities. The program seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching-learning materials and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. In addition, SSA has a "no rejection" policy, meaning that children between ages 6-14 cannot be turned away from schools for many reasons, including for having a disability. The "no rejection" policy is inclusive. One positive aspect of SSA is the Government of India and World Bank's attempts to accurately monitor the effectiveness and results stemming from the program. Although these attempts are seemingly thorough and good intentioned, there are still discrepancies between SSA data on inclusive education and data from other agencies, such as DISE, NSS and the Government of India census.

In 2005, the *Right to Education Act* was drafted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. This bill, framed through a "social justice and collective advocacy perspective" rather than through a framework of individual rights, is not disability-specific, but is inclusive of children with disabilities, with specific sections that address the educational rights of students with disabilities. Therefore, it is important for inclusion that students with disabilities have specific clauses within the bill that ensure their rights as students, and exciting that this particular bill is addressing this group. The act specifically prohibits schools from charging any type of fee that, if not paid, would prevent children from completing their elementary education. Second, if a child turns six and is not in school, the child will be admitted into an age-appropriate

classroom, and will not be admitted into a classroom based on their perceived level of education. Third, if there is an area where children live that does not have a school, the government will be responsible for creating a school within that area within three years of the enactment of the Right to Education Act, or alternatively, to provide transportation or residential facilities to an adequate school out of the area. Last, both the state and central governments hold joint responsibility for carrying out the responsibilities. In addition to these four important clauses, the act also states that teachers cannot be hired on a contractual but they must be hired on as permanent staff, giving them full salary and benefits. The Right to Education Act was passed in 2009 and put into full effect in 2010. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the act on April 12, 2012. One of the main reasons for this was section 12 (1) (C) which allocated 25% of all seats in private schools to children from dalit and marginalized sections of society.

In the same year, the Ministry of Human Resource Development also drafted the Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD). This action plan envisions that all children with a disability will have access to mainstream education; in order to facilitate this, the government, specifically collaborating between the Rehabilitation Council and the National Council for Teacher's Education, will ensure that there are adequate numbers of teachers trained in inclusive education. The plan specifically looks to move from integration towards inclusion. A unique aspect of this plan is that it steps outside the Indian constitution and includes students with disabilities outside of the 6-14 age range. Thus we see that the education policy in India has now leaned towards inclusion.

III. ANALYSIS

From the constitution to the Kothari Commission in the early days of the republic, to the 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities and the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities recently, the Indian government tends to write inclusive policies on education. However, these policies often are not perfectly inclusive. Many of them tend to discriminate against people with "severe" disabilities, or people with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of mainstream versus special schooling. Still, at present, the policies governing the education system are inclusive. At present, the problem is with implementation.

It is important to have a holistic, comprehensive and intersect oral approach where all pieces are put together. An inclusion policy cannot stand-alone and "cannot be a substitute for careful planning of interventions and systematic capacity-building for the implementers of these interventions".

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. Often, especially in "developing" countries, segregated education takes place in the form of

special schools created specifically for the education of students with disabilities. This separation in school often creates separation within other areas of life as well.

We have seen progress in governmental policies that point toward efforts of inclusion in mainstream education in India. Yet in the past decade, there have been several promising pieces of legislation and schemes: 2005 Action Plan for Children and Youth with Disabilities, the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities, the 2008 Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) and the 2009 Right to Education Act—as well as continuing with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme. The policies of the new millennium are the most inclusive of those to date. But, just as the policies of the past, will these policies remain words on paper? The Government of India has fallen short of their goal for all of the policies of the past 68 years. So is there a lack of political will that is preventing full implementation of policies, or lack of governmental resources and capacity? It seems to be a combination of both the Consolidate responsibility and the Dual Administration. To enable an inclusive system of education, the Government of India needs to consolidate the responsibility for education under the Ministry of Education, and abolish the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Although the 2006 National Policy for People with Disabilities mandated the change of special schools into various types of resource centers, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan states that people with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment, which could potentially be a special school. Therefore, this scheme and this policy actually contradict each other. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment could still support students with disabilities by continuing to provide grants for these resource centers, but ultimately, it is imperative for inclusion that students of all ability levels are receiving services under the same ministry. This directly relates to the definition of inclusion and the social model defined above, because the Ministry of Education will have to adjust to accommodate people of all ability levels, including everyone. Accountability of the Government of India and its implementing partners is imperative for ensuring successful implementation of policy. One of the best ways to do this is to ensure that citizens are well informed about these policies and schemes. This includes all members of the community—teachers, administrators and students; but also shopkeepers, farmers, lawyers, engineers, stay at home mothers, and all of the other people, including people with disabilities. It is important to disseminate information about the rights that people with disabilities have under these laws through public awareness campaigns that reach people across the country.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Inclusive education must respond to all pupils as individuals, recognizing individuality as something to be appreciated and respected. Inclusive education responding to special needs will thus have positive returns for all pupils. All children and young people of the country, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that

have a right to a certain type of children. Therefore, it is the school system of country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all its children. That is a big and difficult task, but "where there is a will there is a way!"

It is argued that the only adequate education for people with disabilities is mainstream education, and that general education authorities are completely responsible for the education of people with disabilities. To foster this, adequate support and accessibility services should be provided at all schools to children of all sexes, regardless of their gender. States should have a policy in place, allow for flexibility in curriculum to include everybody, and provide materials in a variety of formats. Parents should be a part of their child's education at all levels, and special attention should be given to early intervention for young children, as well as adults with disabilities who may have not received the education they deserved at a younger age because of a lack of public services or for other reasons. In situations where inclusion is impossible, people with disabilities should be in special education programs with the goal of including these students in the mainstream education system as soon as possible.

But what is typically more challenging for mainstream schools who are trying to become inclusive is converting their curriculum to fit students of all ability levels. While this may seem time consuming, complicated, and perhaps expensive, it is important to remember that having an accessible curriculum does not only benefit students with disabilities, but also all other children in the classroom, because it is taught with the intention of reaching all students equally. It is a fact that, India has two separate curriculum, "plus" and "general." A truly inclusive system of education would have just one type of curriculum that was accessible to all of the students. The Government of India is trying to improve their education system and make it completely inclusive. However, it is important to be realistic about the time span in which this change will occur. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or the Education for All initiative, was created not only for people with disabilities, but because of discrepancies in the general education sector. In the country with the second largest population in the world, with 25% of the population living under the poverty line, with a complicated social hierarchy, implementation might take a bit longer in comparison to countries with less poverty and more infrastructure for change. The importance of intention and effort should be recognized in this situation, as well as the immense improvements that the country has already made toward inclusion. It is time for policies to start aligning with realities on the ground, and for students of all ability levels to receive the education they deserve.

It is true, the budgetary allocations are not enough to make significant impacts in the field of education. Unless state governments allocate funds for inclusive education at different levels, it will be difficult to achieve the goal of UEE because children with disabilities will continue to remain outside the reach of primary education. In addition to the lack of resources available, societal attitudes towards disability are also a hindrance and need to be changed. Besides, there have been demands for bringing issues regarding education of all children under one ministry, namely, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, rather than keep children with

disabilities under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as is currently the case. Such a merger will assist in better planning for all children. There is also a need for convergence of services in special schools, integrated schools, home-based services, and community-based rehabilitation programs for promoting inclusive education in India.

Bearing in mind this scenario, the following recommendations need to be considered in order to move towards education of children with disabilities in inclusive settings.

- ✓ Inclusive education should be flexible. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum.
- ✓ Inclusive education, Special schools begin to function more and more as resource centers. They involve in outreach programs, where they draw on their vast experience and knowledge. They link their activities with those of the regular schools, the families, and the communities.
- ✓ The attitude that 'inclusive education is not an alternative but an inevitability, if the dream of providing basic education to all children is to ever become a reality' needs to be cultivated among all concerned professionals, grassroots workers, teachers and community members, especially in rural and remote areas.
- ✓ Public policies, supportive legislation and budgetary allocations should not be based on incidence, but on prevalence of special education needs.
- ✓ The existing dual ministry responsibilities should be changed. Education of children with disabilities should be the responsibility of the Department of Education. The Ministry of Welfare should confine itself to support activities only.
- ✓ It is essential that issues related to infrastructural facilities, curriculum modification and educational materials should be addressed. Besides, Regular evaluation should be based on performance indicators specified in the implementation program.
- ✓ The program should be based on stakeholder participation, community mobilization, and mobilization of NGO, private and government resources.
- ✓ The training of general teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should address the issue of education of children with disabilities, so that teachers are better equipped to work in an inclusive environment. In addition, there is a need to develop on-site support systems for teachers.
- ✓ In order to strengthen inclusive practices, networking between existing practitioners (i.e., IEDC, DPEP, SSA, etc.) would be useful. Simultaneous implementation, and consistent monitoring, reinforcement and coordination between government departments and NGOs at national and state levels will promote inclusive practices.

Obviously, in this way the inclusive education supports the social models and is meant to promote inclusiveness in all aspects of human life. Social justice can only be achieved if the marginalized people know how to manage themselves into

society. The training for acquiring the art of blending into the social world should begin during the early part of this life of the marginalized people and the most appropriate period would be during the school days.

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