



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND INITIATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Education is the right of every child because it equips him to meet the challenges of life. The children with disabilities or the differently abled children in our society need this all the more, to supplement their differential talents so that they can prepare themselves for a happy productive and useful life. Efforts to educate children with disabilities began in the era of pre independence but it took a reality predominantly soon after independence in India. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the policies and legislations for educating the children with disabilities in India.

**Key Words:** Differently abled children, Independence, Policies and Legislations.

### INTRODUCTION

*"India is a multicultural society made up of numerous regional and local cultures. People's religious beliefs, ways of life and their understanding of social relationships are quite distinct from one another. All the groups have equal rights to co-exist and flourish, and the education system needs to respond to the cultural pluralism inherent in our society."*

*-National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005*

The genesis of special needs in education in India can be traced back to pre-independent India. There are instances in Indian history that show that people with disabilities had educational opportunities, and that disability did not come in the way of learning. However, during the colonial period, India increasingly looked at educational models existing outside the country. Parents of children with disabilities, mainly from urban areas and with exposure to approaches prevalent in western countries, started schools for their children. Since the government had no policy on the education of children with disabilities, it extended grants to these private schools. This approach of setting up separate schools, mostly residential, spread across the country, although it was largely concentrated in urban areas. For larger democratic country like India, the numbers were very limited and small.

For over a century, these schools offering special assistance to the children with special needs are spreading their branches irrespective of topographical boundaries. This allowed a restricted number of children to have access to education but did not help these children to enter the mainstream community after completing their education. It is important to comprehend the

framework in which special education policy was created and continuously emerges out of in India. Angela Kohoma (2012, P-11) rightly cited that although one can never generalize the beliefs and sentiments of an entire country, there are structural, historical, and religious facts that shape the course of special education and inclusion in India. India was colonized by Britain between 1665 and 1947, and their first constitution was created in 1950. It is important to remember that India has only been a republic for 62 years, which is extremely young for a country.

A significant feature of our classrooms in India is the learners' diversity as the society is multicultural. A multicultural classroom creates a different layer of complication in the matter including the learners irrespective of race, class and ethnicity. Over the years, the policy of inclusive education has become an important part of all the initiatives taken by the Government of India for the education of children, and has gradually replaced the earlier movement of integrated education. Many people who are working in the field, however, consider these two terms to mean the same thing. According to Anita Julka, "inclusive education means including *children with disabilities* in regular classrooms that have been designed *for children without disabilities*" (2012, P-10). From the complicated history and social structure of Indian society emerges an effort towards special education and inclusive policy that are fairly remarkable for a 62 year old republic whose education system was (perhaps detrimentally) controlled by another country for over a hundred years. However, Yogendra Pandey (2008, P-1) cited that decades of inclusive policy are not aligning with the realities on the ground. India is experiencing policy implementation problems, and as a result, policies which should produce an inclusive system of education for people of all ability levels are only resulting in fragments of inclusion scattered across the country. For a long time in our modern society Inclusive education is misunderstood with Segregation. Though in both the system we have to deal with the differently abled children but the educational system is vastly different. Anita Julka (2012, P-9) depicts that- *Promoting inclusion is about reforming the education system. Inclusive education is much more cost effective than a segregated system, not only in terms of the running costs but also the long-term costs on the society.* --Roger Slee (UNESCO, 2005)

In order to understand the segregation, integration and strategies for developing inclusive schools, it is also important to understand the historical context in which these changes are located. The educational policy of India was defined and redefined in many ways during the British rule and after gaining Independence. Some of the significant milestones for developments that informally supported education for all are outlined here.

### **INCLUSION IN INDIA: BEFORE INDEPENDENCE**

Documentation of efforts for or against special education in India remains sparse before India's independence from Britain. Archeologists discovered evidence of inclusion of people with disabilities in India from 2000 or more years ago in the form of adapted toys made accessible for children with disabilities. These small pieces of evidence are part of the "gurukul" system of education that existed in India for centuries before British rule. In this 'gurukul' system the realization of one's individual aspect was the basic tenets. In ancient times, the aim of education, according to Lall and Chowdhary (1952), was considered to be individualistic, as it advocated the self-realization of the individual by being one with God through education. One of the basic philosophical assumptions of individualism was:

*The individual is the reality while the society is created for his benefit. Hence the content of education is not so much to be decided by the activities in society as by the interest of*

*the pupil. The subject matter is not as important in education as the question whether it will result in individual development or not. As such the content of education cannot be standardized to a great extent: it may differ from individual to individual. At least, there should be sufficient flexibility in the curriculum. School methods should therefore consist in providing conditions for the free development of the individual* (Lall and Chowdhary, 1952).

Although there is not much documentation about students with disabilities in this system, the structure is seemingly inclusive. During the colonial rule of the British in India the indigenous education system came under the red eye of suppression, and new educational policies were coming into practices. This backgrounded the gurukul system of education. Therefore, this somehow sidelined the dominant issues like inclusion and its application in the case of education in rural and urban locales. Pre and post independence, the Government of India on paper supported various version of inclusive special education in policy. During this time period, the majority of children with disabilities were not in school. In the Pre-Independent India, the limited services for people with disabilities arose largely out of the private sector or from non-governmental organizations, which were often doctored by religious beliefs and dogmas. The first special school for people with disabilities in India was a school for the blind, which was opened in 1869 by Jane Leupot, with support of the Church Missionary Society (Umesh Sharma and Joanne Deppeler, 2005). We can get more evidences of schools for special children in the article named “People with Disabilities in India: from Commitments to Outcomes” by the ‘The World Bank Human Development Unit’ (2009), in 1883, a school for the deaf was opened in Bombay. 1887 marked the year when Christian missionaries opened a school for the blind in Amritsar. During the 1800s, all of the special schools for people with disabilities accommodated people with physical disabilities; it was not until 1918 that the first school for people with intellectual disabilities was established. All of these schools exemplify the type of special education services offered during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively: specialized and segregated. By 1900, special schools were springing up throughout the country. Until the 1970s; these schools were the primary method of service delivery for children with disabilities. Most were for children who were blind or visually impaired, and the majority was funded by nongovernmental organizations or private funders (Kohoma Angela, P-13).

The next section will examine the initiations taken in India for all-round development of the sense inclusion in the educational system specially highlighting the needs of children with special needs:

### **1. Sargent Report (1944)**

The CAGE report, written by John Sargent, The British chief educational advisor, observed that the Indian government had not done much for the education of the disabled. What had been done was due to the voluntary efforts and the country could ‘profitably borrow’ from the experiences and achievements of those countries which had been active in this field (CAGE, 1944, p.111). The report can be said to be a landmark in the policy on ‘Integration’ of disabled children in general schools, though it continued its recommendation for special schools, but ‘only when the nature and extent of their defect (made) it necessary. The report is also important from two points of view. First, it recommended that the provision for the disabled should form an essential part of a national system of education and should be administered by the Education Department’. Second, 10 percent of the budget for basic and high schools had been set aside for the (education) services of the disabled.

The Sargent Report by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1944 suggested children with disabilities should be entirely mainstreamed. Rather than debating the validity of inclusion, the Sargent Report stated that it was the only way to provide an education. Yet both the action and lack of action by the government of India in the 1940s completely contradicted this suggestion (Kohoma Angela, P-15). It is this report that proposed a system of universal, compulsory and free education for all boys and girls between ages of six and fourteen. Education, after this, was given a significant place in the *Constitution of India (1950)* with *Article 45* enjoining the State to endeavour to promote free, compulsory and universal education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years ( S. Hegarty and A. Mithu, 2002, P-56) .

## **INCLUSION IN EDUCATION: AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

The 1960s marked an important change in how special education was organized and funded in India. The Ministry of Education split, and a new branch called the Ministry of Social Welfare was created. The Ministry of Social Welfare was given the responsibility for the “weak and vulnerable” sections of society. They largely focused on rehabilitation, and not as much on education. Instead of supporting the current education system, the Ministry of Social Welfare began giving out grants to nonprofits that provided education for children with disabilities, inadvertently preventing inclusion of these children within the public or mainstream sector. The split of these two ministries has never been reversed, and is still this way at present.

### **2. The National Education commission (1964-66)**

The first education commission in India, popularly known as the Kothari Commission, began the section on handicapped children in the chapter ‘Towards Equalization of Educational Opportunities’ in its report in a similar tone as reflected in the 1944 postwar report. ‘Very little has been done in this field so far... any great improvement in the situation does not seem to be practicable in the near future... there is much in the field that we could learn from the educationally advanced countries, (Education Commission, 1966,p.123).

It was evidently in favor of making education of the handicapped an integral part of the general education system. The commission suggested educational facilities to be extended to these four category: The blind, the deaf, the orthopedically handicapped and the mentally retarded. The Education Commission further felt that children would be constrained by two main considerations: lack of teachers and financial resources. Furthermore, the Kothari Commission recommended a Cell, at NCERT, to study in this country and abroad, the work being done in the field of education for the handicapped and prepare material for their teachers. This commission was created because the Government of India wanted to create a plan of action to improve the education system. The plan of action created by the Kothari Commission included people with disabilities, but unfortunately, the Government of India never implemented it. It reads,

*We now turn to the education of handicapped children. Their education has to be organized not merely on humanitarian grounds of utility. Proper education generally enables a handicapped child to overcome largely his or her handicap and make him into a useful citizen. Social justice also demands it...on an overall view of the problem; however, we feel that experimentation with integrated programmes is urgently required and every attempt should be made to bring in as many children in integrated programs (S. Hegarty and A. Mithu, 2002, P-54).*

### 3. National Education Policy (1968)

The 1968, The National Education Policy followed the commission's recommendations and suggested the expansion of education facilities for physically and mentally handicapped children and the development of 'Integrated Programme' enabling handicapped children to study in regular schools. The vision for education of children with disabilities was articulated as:

*“Educational facilities for the physically and mentally handicapped children should be expanded and attempts should be made to develop integrated programmes enabling the handicapped children to study in regular schools.”*

Eight years later in 1974 a scheme for the integrated education of disabled children or, the IEDC was started by the welfare ministry.

### 4. The Integrated Education of Disabled Children Scheme (1974)

The Ministry of Welfare created the Integrated Education of Disabled Children Scheme (IEDC), not to be confused with the Integrated Child Development Scheme (above), in 1974. The program provided children with disabilities “financial support for books, school uniforms, transportation, special equipment and aids,” with the intention of using these aids to include children in mainstream classrooms. However, the government of India realized that providing structural changes to the classroom, such as adapted equipment, would not be enough to integrate children with disabilities into the classroom. Although it was encouraged and partly funded by UNICEF, fifty percent of the funding was supposed to go through the state governments. The responsibility was transferred to the Department of Education in 1992. Despite the fact that this scheme was supposed to be nation-wide, it was implemented in only 10 out of 29 of the states in India (Angela Kohoma, P-19).

### 5. National Policy on Education, (1986)

Twenty years later, the NPE (MHRD, 1986) which has been guiding the education system in India, under its broad objectives of 'education for equality' proposed the following measures for the education of the handicapped:

1. Wherever it is feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with others.
2. Special schools with hostels will be provided, as far as possible at district headquarters, for severely handicapped children.
3. Adequate arrangements will be made to give vocational training to the disabled.
4. Teacher's training programmes will be reoriented, in particular for teachers of primary classes to deal with the special difficulties of handicapped children, and
5. Voluntary efforts for the education of the disabled will be encouraged in every possible manner (Yogendra Pandey, 2008, P-3).

### 6. Programme of Action (1992)

The NPE/POA 1986 was modified and a new POA was chalked out in 1992. The 1992 POA made an ambitious commitment for universal enrolment by the end of the Ninth Plan for both categories of children: those who could be educated in general primary schools and those who required education in special schools or special classes in general schools (MHRD, 1992, p.18).

It also called for the reorientation of the pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. The 1992 Program of Action (POA), created to implement the 1986 NPE, broadens the 1986 definition of who should be included in mainstream schooling, that “a child with a disability who can be educated in the general school should not be in the special school.” It says that once children with disabilities acquire basic living skills, which would be learned in resource rooms or special schools, that they should be mainstreamed. The POA does not define what constitutes basic living skills. The POA envisioned and expected that schools across India would “accept responsibility by sharing their resources with other institutions” (Angela Kohoma, 2012, P-20). However, rather than including, or even integrating children with disabilities into their programs, these schools would open “resource centers for the underprivileged,” providing children with disabilities learning resources after typical school hours, but not during the normal school day, eliminating the possibility of inclusion for these students.

### **7. Centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (Revised 1987, 1989 and 1992)**

The Department of social welfare, Govt. of India launched the centrally sponsored scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled children in 1974 with 100% central assistance. The Scheme provided funding for rehabilitation aids and equipment, educational material, training of resource teachers, establishment of preschool and parent counseling centers, transport allowance, removal of architectural barriers in school buildings, etc.

With the coverage of education of children with disabilities in the National Policy on Education during 1986, the scheme was shifted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The scheme purports to provide educational opportunities for children with disabilities in common schools. A large number of State governments have already adopted the scheme. They have established Administrative Cells for monitoring the Scheme. However, coverage of visually impaired children under the scheme at present is negligible.

### **8. Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992**

The Rehabilitation council of India is established by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, India in 1992 for regulating the training of rehabilitation professionals, maintenance of a Central Rehabilitation register and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto which is again a right step in the right directions. It provides a regulatory mechanism for development of human resources in the field. For the visually impaired persons, various courses have already been started.

### **9. Persons with Disabilities Act 1995**

To give effect to the proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of the People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region, the Parliament enacted the Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995, which came into force with effect from 7<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

The Act desires the appropriate governments and local authorities to ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment until he attains the age of eighteen years. It encourages promotion of integrated, residential education, functional literacy, and non-formal education, education through open school or open universities. It desires initiation of research for designing and developing new assistive devices and developing human

resources. It also ensures reservation of at least three percent seats in the educational institutes of persons with disabilities. It also encourages preparation of comprehensive education schemes with a variety of facilities for such persons. The PDA strives to address all major aspects of the education sector that pertains to students with disabilities. It states that children with disabilities have the right to access education in a “free and appropriate environment” until they are 18 years of age, “promoting integration into normal schools” (A. Kohoma, P-21)”. The PDA is supposed to provide transport facilities, remove architectural barriers, supply free books and other study materials, grant scholarships, restructure curriculum, and modify the examinations system for the benefit of children with special needs. The act also addresses teacher training, for special educators and mainstream educators, by requiring adequate teacher training programs to train teachers to work with students with disabilities. Another extremely important part of this act was the clause that requires all parts of the country, urban and rural, to have facilities that accommodate students with disabilities and ensure that they are in school.

Although the idea of inclusive education was not openly expressed in the ancient writings, the thoughts emerging from the ancient literature and from the philosophies of Tagore and Gandhi, all supported the idea of an inclusive society wherein every individual was an important member of the society and education of individuals was a medium of creating a society that provided equal opportunities to all. Based on the policy initiatives and with an objective to decentralise education, a national initiative called the *District Primary Education Programme* (DPEP) was launched in 1993 to achieve universalisation of primary education (UPE). The main objectives were: to reduce the difference in enrolment, dropout and learning achievement among gender and social groups; to reduce the overall primary dropout rates; to raise average achievement levels and to provide, access for all children to primary schooling or its equivalent non-formal education.

#### **10. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)**

One major initiative that was born out of the PDA was the District Primary Education Program (DPEP). A joint venture between the Indian Government’s Department of Education and the World Bank, the goal of the District Primary Education Program was “education for all” by the year 2000 ( Sarvya Sikhsha Abhiyan Report, 2012). As many of the initiatives in India regarding education and children with disabilities, the DPEP focused on inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities.

Evolving from the national experience with area specific projects is an ambitious nationwide plan, popularly known as District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), to put local communities in charge of education in their area and enhance investments in primary education. As a first step, a five year plan for the selected districts has been chalked out. From the year 1995, the education of children with disabilities has also been included as integral component of the programme. All such children in the selected districts would be enrolled for inclusive education at the primary level. The DPEP envisages following measures in this regard:

- Providing all children, including children with disabilities, with access to primary education either in the formal system or through non-formal education programme.
- Facilitation access for disadvantaged groups such as girls, socially backward communities and children with disabilities.
- Improving effectiveness of education through training of teachers, improvement of learning materials and upgrading of infrastructure facilities.

- Appointment of special teachers at district and cluster level for providing support services to class teachers.
- Provision of assistive devices and educational devices to these children.
- Involvement of experts in disability development in the State Coordination committee. Orientation of Master Trainers at the State and district level in respect of educational needs of children with disabilities (S. Hegarty and A. Mithu, 2002, P-59).

### **11. Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) 2005**

The following framework of the Action Plan and list of activities has been developed as a result of the initial consultations. The plan covers the inclusion in education of children and young persons with disabilities. The different sectors to be covered in the plan are:

- Early childhood care education
- Elementary education
- Secondary education
- Higher and technical education and
- Vocational training.

The main objectives of Action discussed by the minister of Human Resource Development in Rajaya Sabha (Parliament) on 21/03/2005 were-

- (i) To ensure that no child is denied admission in mainstream education.
- (ii) To ensure that every child would have the right to access an Aanganwadi and school and no child would be turned back on the ground of disabilities.
- (iii) To ensure that mainstream and specialist training institutions serving persons with disabilities, in the government or in the nongovernment sector, facilitate the growth of a cadre of teacher trained to work within the principles of 'Inclusion'.
- (iv) To facilitate access of girls with disabilities and disabled students from rural and remote areas to government hostels.
- (v) To provide for home based learning for persons severe, multiple and intellectual disability.
- (vi) To promote distance education for those who require an individualized pace of learning.
- (vii) To emphasize job training and job oriented vocational training, and
- (viii) To promote and understanding of the paradigm shift form charity to development through a measure awareness, motivation and sensitization campaign.

### **12. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign)**

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a historic stride towards achieving the long cherished goal of Universalization of Elementary Education through a time bound integrated approach, in partnership with states. This movement promises to change the face of the elementary education sector of the country, assumes to provide useful and quality elementary education to all children including those with disabilities in the 614 age group by the year 2010. It makes a provision up to Rs.1200 per child for integration of disabled children as per specific proposal ( Sarvya Sikhsha Abhiyan Report, 2012).

### **13. National Policy for Persons with Disabilities**

The most recent policy specifically concerning education and people with disabilities is the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's National Policy for People with Disabilities. Although this policy was created in 2006, after the 2005 Action Plan, and the two policies were

created under separate ministries, they are very similar in both the ideologies that they were founded on, as well as the actual changes they are trying to make to the system. The National Policy for People with Disabilities utilizes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (in English, Education for All), also created by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as their main mode of implementation of the policy. This policy echoes the 2005 plan of action and 2005 (made official in 2009, The World Bank Human Development Unit, P-59) bill by changing special schools in resource centers for people with disabilities and teachers. In addition, the policy seeks to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas by creating more District Disability and Rehabilitation Centers (DDRCs), which disseminate information in terms of availability of aids and appliances, ensure the mandated 3% coverage of persons with disabilities in poverty reduction programs and target girls with disabilities (National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Govt. of India, 2006). The National policy recognizes that persons with Disabilities are valuable human resource for the country and seeks to create an environment that provides those equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. Last but not the least if we summarize the provisions about disability in the five year plans it shows significant step towards successful Inclusion. The issue of 'disability' has also found a place in all the country's five-year plans (Table-1). Various national/apex-level institutes were established to deal with problems of specific disabilities. These institutes have been set up for education, training, vocational guidance, counseling, rehabilitation, research and training in various aspects of disability.

**Table 1: DISABILITY IN FIVE-YEAR PLANS**

| <b>FIVE YEAR PLANS</b>       | <b>FOCUS AREAS</b>  |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>First five year plan</b>  | This witnessed the launching of a small unit by the Ministry of Education for the visually impaired in 1947. Subsequently, a training centre for adults with visual impairments was established.  |
| <b>Second five year plan</b> | Under the Ministry of Education, a National Advisory Council for the Physically Challenged started functioning to advise the central government on issues concerning education, training and employment of the disabled.  |
| <b>Third five year plan</b>  | Attention was given to rural areas. To facilitate the training and rehabilitation of the physically challenged, the government formulated policies around some services: (a) planning employment exchange for the physically challenged; (b) teaching and provision of work facilities in the home itself or neighbourhood for those who are not mobile; (c) Provision of recreation facilities for the physically challenged; (d) At least three per cent of job reservations and job facilities made available for the physically challenged. |
| <b>Fourth five year plan</b> | More emphasis was given to preventive work for people with visual, speech and hearing impairments. National centers for the physically challenged were instituted to serve as demonstration projects in various parts of the country and provide necessary training facilities.   |
| <b>Fifth five year plan</b>  | National policies were made around provision of community-oriented disability prevention and rehabilitation services to promote self-reliance, economic independence and social integration of the differently abled in the community, and comprehensive primary health care.   |

(Data retrieved from Examples of Inclusive Education in India, UNICEF, 2003)

## CONCLUSION

The discourse will conclude with our final focus on the endeavours taken by Ministry of Human Resource Development that developed a *Comprehensive Action Plan* for including children and youth with disabilities in education in the year 2005 and planned to implement it by making use of various initiatives taken by different departments in the Ministry. Along the same line, the *National Curriculum Framework* (NCERT, 2005) stressed the commitment to inclusive education. It stated:

*The ideal of common schooling advocated by the Kothari Commission four decades ago continues to be valid as it reflects the values enshrined in the Constitution. Schools will succeed in inculcating these values only if they create an ethos in which every child feels happy and relaxed. This ideal is even more relevant now because education has become a fundamental right, which implies that a millions of first generation learners are being enrolled in schools. To retain them, the system –including its private sector–must recognize that there are many children that no single norm of capacity, personality or aspiration can serve in the emerging scenario. School administrators and teachers should realize that when boys and girls from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and different levels of ability study together, the classroom ethos is enriched and becomes inspiring.*

The NCF (2005) underscores the importance of participation of all children especially the children with special needs, children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances in all spheres of life, both in and outside the school. It states:

*Schools must be conscious of the importance of creating equitable classroom environments in which students are not subjected to unfair treatment and denied opportunities on the basis of their sex or membership of caste, tribe or minority group. On the other hand, the culture of the school must be one that highlights the students, identified as ‘learners’ and creates an environment that enhance the potential and interests of each child.*

Finally, to further strengthen the inclusive education initiative, the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* provides for free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years, including the children with disabilities. In conclusion, India has made remarkable efforts to serve individuals with disabilities given its economic and social constraints. The nations must continue to make an investment to improve the lives of its citizens with disabilities.

In short, there should not be any barrier of policy for including special needs children in developing in nations. A single model may not be the solution and therefore, practices pertaining to inclusion should also be developed in specific context. The culture issue should not become a hindrance for inclusion of all children in developing nations. When the society is Inclusive, education, which is a small component of the society, would also become inclusive. Therefore, there should not be any attitudinal barrier in the minds of people for the promotion of inclusion. ‘How to unite with the differences’ should be our be-all and end-all life to ensure inclusion in the field of education.

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