

Emerging of Inclusive Education in India and Gandhian Views

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ABSTRACT:

Children with disabilities are a minority and they are not prioritized in the context of educational programme in India, although they are often found in many marginalized groups catered for if non-disabled, for example, girls, scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, and other backward classes children. The ideal derived from Gandhian philosophy 'education for all irrespective of caste, class, creed, colour, race religion and disabilities' is the basic tenet of inclusive education. Inclusive education may be a way of merging these children's needs in order to improve school education in India elevating negative attitude towards the disabled and marginalized children. This paper analyses the interpretation and implementation of inclusive education in India keeping in view of the goal of Fundamental Right to education of children of 6 to 14 years age (21A) and Fundamental duties of parents of children of this age group (51A).

INTRODUCTION:

The new challenge of the country in the 21st century is to set up of a new flexible system of education that will assimilate the needs of a diverse range of learners and will lay the foundation of an inclusive society accepting the diversity of nation. The education system of a country does not properly function in isolation of its society. Hierarchies of caste, economic status, gender relations as well as uneven economic development influence issues related to equity in education. The constitution of India provides affirmative discriminatory actions to uplift the socially disadvantaged groups, educationally backward classes, minorities and women sect. Universalisation of education and equality in educational opportunity being the motto of educational policies, inclusive environment of education is a crying need today. Gandhian philosophy of education serves the ideals of inclusive environment of education and the spirit derived from his ideals moulded the shape of inclusive education that has now emerged in India.

Inclusive education is an approach seeking the learning needs of all learners, young people, youth or adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and

exclusion. It implies all learners with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. Children in special schools were seen as geographically and socially segregated from their peers. These students need to be shifted to one where the whole school was encouraged to become more adaptable and inclusive in its day-to-day educational practices for all students ('inclusive education'). Pedagogy in particular is to be highlighted as the key to meeting all students' educational needs by making the curriculum flexible, and so more accessible. Teaching methods which make curriculum accessible to children with disabilities can also make learning accessible to all students (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow, 1991)

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER:

1. To clarify the concept of inclusive education
2. To assess the importance of inclusive education to create equal opportunity in the main stream of school education
3. To recognize the Gandhian views that moulds the concept of inclusive education
4. To study the growth and evolution of inclusive education in India
5. To recognize drawbacks and suggest remedies for implementing the programme of inclusive education.

What is Inclusive Education? -UNESCO sees inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. According to Prof Gary Bunch Ontario, "Inclusive Education refers to the educational practice base on the philosophical belief that all learners, those with disabilities and those without, have a right to be educated together in age appropriate class groups, and that all will benefit from education in regular classrooms of community schools. Within these settings teachers, parents and others work collaboratively using

appropriate and sufficient resources to interpret and enact the regular curriculum in a flexible manner in accordance with the individual abilities and needs of all learners.”

It means the doors to schools, classrooms and school activities are open to every child and they are afforded every opportunity to be included with their non-disabled peers. The focus is on giving every child the help he/ she needs to learn.

Inclusive Education is not:

- Dumping kids with disabilities into general classrooms without the supports and services they need to be successful.
- Cutting back special education services as a “trade off” for being in the general education classroom.
- Sacrificing the education of kids without disabilities so kids with disabilities can be included.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

1. To enable children to think of a sense of belongingness and a sense of oneness.
2. To reach the goal of Universalization of education.
3. To serve the equal educational opportunities to all students irrespective of caste, creed, colour, religion and race.
4. To establish the truth that disabilities or retardation cannot be the barrier of receiving general education
5. To enable the children of disabilities to develop appropriate and desirable social behavior
6. To set up the national pattern of education to grow national awareness and nationalism of our country

BASIC TENETS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

1. Equal participation of all students in educational environment
2. Shared ownership of all students

3. Necessary supports for all students
4. Positive & rich learning environment for all students
4. Expectations for all students to learn neglecting the barriers of disabilities

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT OF DIVERSITY:

India has the second largest education system in the world, with 200 million children aged between 6 and 14, around 25 million of whom are out of school (World Bank, 2004). However, bearing in mind that apparently only 35% of children are registered at birth (UNICEF, 2004), others estimate between 35 to 80 million out-of-school children (Singal, 2005a).

This inevitable diversity and complexity in a context of this size must be taken into account. India's 1.3 billion people speak 18 different languages (GOI, 2002), and 844 dialects (Singal, 2005a), worship varied religions, have unique customs, differ in their exposure to disease and access to types of nutrition which affect their health and socio-economic status, and also communications which influence their access to government resources such as education or healthcare.

This diversity is further reflected in disparities of educational achievement. For example, in Kerala the literacy rate recorded in the 2001 Census was 90.92%, while in Bihar it was 47.53% (GOI, 2002). As a result, the overall (average) literacy rate for India was 65.38% which, while a representative figure is a national aggregate and so cannot reflect the complexity of context (Govinda and Biswal, 2006). However, it is worth noting that according to the PROBE team (1999) 40% of India's population lives in the educationally worst performing states, suggesting that a significant proportion of Indians are under-served by their education systems. Added to this issue of averaging out statistics in such a vast country is the fact that when census data was collected, there were some areas which were cut off by "disturbances" or "natural calamities" (GOI, 2002: 11) such as the Kashmiri conflict, floods or landslides. This shows how despite best intentions, there may be un-surveyed people whose issues are therefore invisible to policy-makers, and so they perhaps do not have access to government resources.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY IN INDIA:

Recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the Surgent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission (Julka, 2005). Despite this, change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. Several education acts and promises have been passed or mooted by central government in India in the past twenty years, although they do not seem to tackle the roots of attitudinal barriers to inclusion. For example, in 1993 the Delhi Declaration on Education for All promised to "...ensure a place for every child in a school or appropriate education programme according to his or her capabilities" (cited in Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2002: 96). This issue of 'capabilities' is key to the varied interpretations of 'inclusivity' of children, the focus on the child's abilities diverting attention away from inadequate teaching methods (Singal, 2005b). The 1995 Persons with Disability Act (PDA) states that disabled children should be educated in integrated settings where possible.

Implementation of Inclusive Education: If inclusive education came under one ministry alone, most probably the MHRD, potentially both conceptualisation and implementation could be clarified and promoted, while the needs of children with disabilities could finally be mainstreamed.

The absence of accountability mechanisms, which results in poor policy implementation, suggests that in order to ensure implementation of 1995's rhetorically positive Persons with Disabilities Act, some kind of legal enforcement mechanism needs to be created (Alur, 2002),:

GANDHIAN THOUGHT AS THE SOURCE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Mahatma Gandhi, a great philosopher in the world, synthesized the three important philosophies- Idealism, Naturalism, and Pragmatism and on the basis of such a basic ground he propounded his educational thought for the development of mankind. Gandhian Philosophy and thought on education had brought a new dimension and fundamental changes for building up of a new social order based on tolerance, truth and non-violence. After the attainment of freedom in 1947, the main perspective of our national development was education and education was given more emphasis because education is the most important means of national and emotional integration. Education should not only aim at imparting knowledge but should develop all aspects of students' personality. It broadens the outlook, foster the feeling of oneness, nationalism, spirit of sacrifice, tolerance. Gandhi emphasizes on the humanistic approach to education than mere accomplishments in scholastic Endeavour. Basic Education undeniably expand the heart and mind It fosters humanism and cultivate the spirit of total human welfare. A child receiving craft centric, purposeful, useful, meaningful education will be truly prepared for the peace and prosperity of the humanity. Education in course of undergoing Basic Education programmes will ensure total development of manhood. Gandhi elucidates this philosophy of making 'the full man' characteristically. His idea of Basic education was considered as spearhead of social revolution. He wanted to break the social stratum and brought the downtrodden to the forefront of education. So the so called untouchables were given the opportunity to receive education irrespective of caste, creed, colour, religion, rich or poor etc.

He said, "My idea is not to teach a particular profession or occupation to the children, but to develop the full man through teaching that occupation. I want to bring about equalization of status. The working classes have all these centuries been isolated and relegated to a lower status. They have been shurdas, and the word has been interpreted to mean an inferior status. I want to allow no differentiation between the son of a weaver, of an agriculturist and of a school master."

The Principle of equality - a fundamental aspect of humanity through the introduction of spinning wheel in schools can cause the inner awakening in mankind. As a humanist Gandhi desired to bring about a change the wretched condition of India and to develop true humanity through self-dependence. He uncompromisingly fought against the British Yoke and showed the spinning wheel as the only alternative to save the yoked humanity. He wanted to spread craft centric education among all the students belonging to different sects, class, race and religion. To him disabilities could not be the barrier in receiving education because hands on activities enable them to grow confidence, self-reliance and above all self-realization. Inclusion of all into the main stream was earlier advocated by Gandhi which is the main tenet of inclusive education.

CONCLUSION:

Many academics in the field of inclusive education point to teacher education and school leadership as essential for the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom (Ainscow, 2005; Sandhill & Singh, 2005; Booth et al, 2003; Ainscow, 1991), yet the standard of teacher training courses across India varies hugely, and they usually approach the inclusion of children with disabilities from a deficit perspective. In the general teacher education diplomas and degrees available nationwide, there is an optional ‘special needs’ paper to train and ‘prepare’ teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However, it is not an integral part of the training, and it does not train teachers to deal with diversity or challenge negative attitudes (Singal, 2005a). This reinforces the ‘difference’ of children with disabilities who, some believe, can only be taught by teachers qualified specifically for them (Singal, 2005a). However, it is ultimately teacher treatment of students in the classroom, rather than the training per say, that would reinforce this difference.

Interestingly, distrust in both the special and mainstream education systems leads some parents to keep their children with disabilities at home for fear of their abuse or neglect in the classroom (Julka, 2005), which may then be interpreted by teachers as a lack of community interest in education for their children, as demonstrated in the PROBE Report (PROBE, 1999). This raises the question of how teachers are being trained to include children with disabilities and to what extent they put this training into daily practice.

There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students (Mukhopadhyay, nd). Many government programmes have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a ‘special needs’ focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom status quo, especially when responsibility is shifted on to a specialist resource teacher rather than methods altered to suit all students (Mukhopadhyay, nd).

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