

Inclusive Education in India and Its Present Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION: India is one of the few countries world over where the education of children with special needs doesn't fall within the purview of human resource development ministry. The prime focus of HRD is rehabilitation, not education. In fact, till today it does not have education as part of its agenda and the issue of education of children with disabilities remains imperceptible. But the segregation of children with challenging needs from scholl surroundings is morally unjustifiable and a violation of human rights. Indeed over 36 million disabled children need special education which will ensure 'equalization of educational opportunity'-a prime objective taken by the Kothari Commission. It is perfectly observed that Seventy-eight percent of Indian population lives in rural areas without provision for special schools. Therefore, steps from all concerned need to be taken to make main stream schools inclusive and the central and state governments have to train their teachers to manage inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It implies all learners – with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common school provisions and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. A flexible education system of diverse range of learners is needed to meet these needs. Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. All the children whether they are disabled or not have the right to education as they are the future citizens of the country. In the prevailing Indian situation resources are insufficient even to provide quality mainstream schools for common children, it is unethical and impracticable to put children with special needs to test or to prove any thing in a research study to live and learn in the mainstream of school and community (Dash, 2006). The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the "World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality" (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000).

Aims and Objectives of Inclusive Education: Inclusive Education emphasizes on Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disability Proclaiming Participation and equality for all. The term “Special Need Education” (SNE) has come into use as a replacement for the term “Special Education”, as the older one was mainly understood to refer the education of all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties. The Statement affirms: “those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs”. Moreover, the concept of “Special Need Education” extends beyond those who may be included in handicapped categories to cover those who are failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons that are known to be likely to impede a child’s optimal progress.

Inclusive Education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. To develop curriculum for special education and its inclusion in general teacher preparation programmes, Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) made a historic collaboration with National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) on January 19, 2005. In Indian scenario it is observed that over 40 million children in the age group- four-sixteen years with physical and mental disabilities are being excluded from mainstream education. It is because of callous school managements and over-anxious parents of abled children who have consistently discouraged children with disabilities from entering the nation’s classrooms. But Social justice and equity are ensured in the Constitution of India which guaranties that India’s 35 million physically challenged and the 5 million mentally challenged children should be given preferential access into primary and secondary schools. Fewer than five percent of children who have a disability are in schools.

Historical Perspective: In India special education as a separate system of education for disabled children outside the mainstream education system evolved way back in 1880s. The first school for the deaf was established in Bombay in 1883 and the first school for the blind at Amritsar in 1887. In 1947, the number of schools for blind increased to 32, for the deaf to 30 and for mentally retarded to 3. The number of special schools rose to around 3000 by the year 2000 (Department of Education, 2000). The Govt. of India designed a scheme of preparing teachers for teaching children with visual impairment and other disabilities. However, the quality of the trained teachers was in question because of lack of uniform syllabi of various courses and also due to large extent of non-availability of teacher educators and literatures in the field. In 1980s the then ministry of

Welfare, Govt. of India, realized the crucial need of an institution to monitor and regulate the HRD programmes in the field of disability rehabilitation.

The Constitution of India (26 November, 1949), clearly states in the Preamble regarding 'the right to equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all'. The Article 41 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution supports the right to work, education and public assistance in certain cases including disablement. Further, Article 45 commits to the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. By the Constitutional amendment (86th Amendment) the Act 2002 has been enacted by the parliament making education a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Moreover the 93rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (now renumbered as the 86th), passed by the Lok Sabha on November 28, 2001, makes it mandatory for the government to provide free and compulsory education to "all children of the age of 6-14 years", with its preamble clarifying that "all" includes children with disabilities as well. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) stresses the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The NPE, 1986 emphasized on the integration of the physically and mentally handicapped with general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence" The concept of integrated education in India has emerged during the mid 1950s.

School Based Approach: The Government launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December 1974. It was a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed to provide educational opportunities to children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention. The scheme become popular for the extension of the integrated education in the school scenerio. The scheme provides facilities in the form of books, stationery, uniforms, and allowances for transport, reader, escort etc. Though IEDC met with limited success and only a little more than 100 thousand CWSN have been covered but it was successful in creating awareness on the importance of integrating CWSN in the mainstream of education. a fact noted in the National Policy on Education, 1986.

Composite Approach: Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) was another experiment on integrated education in India. In this connection a combined effort of the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) and UNICEF, the PIED came into existence in 1987. This project was implemented in one administrative block each in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Mizoram, Delhi Municipal Corporation, and

Baroda Municipal Corporation. The approach is an improvement over the special schools in many ways and appears to be the only way towards universalizing education of the disabled children.

Inclusive Approach: In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). Moreover, DPEP also addressed core issues related to curriculum especially the child-centered pedagogy. The thrust was on imparting quality education to all disabled children.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 : It is mentioned in the NPE-1986 that“...Future emphasis shall be on distance and open learning systems to provide opportunities and access to all the major target groups, especially the disadvantaged, viz., women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the adult working class, and people serving in the far - flung remote areas.” There after Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 was passed by the Parliament in 1992, this act makes it mandatory for every special teacher to be registered by the council. This Act also lays down that every child with disability had the right to be taught by a qualified teacher. In fact it provided punishment for those teachers who engaged in teaching children with special needs without a license. The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 stresses the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old. It further emphasizes on the right of the disabled on the following measures:

- a) Transport facilities to the students with disabilities or alternative financial incentives to parents or guardians to enable their students with disabilities to attend schools;
- b) The removal of architectural barriers from schools, colleges or other institutions imparting vocational and professional training
- c) The supply of books, uniforms and other materials to students with disabilities attending school
- d) The grant of scholarship to students with disabilities
- e) Setting up of appropriate fora for the redressal of grievances of parents regarding the placement of their students with disabilities
- f) Suitable modification in the examination system to eliminate purely mathematical questions for the benefit of blind students and students with low vision
- g) Restructuring of curriculum for the benefit of students with disabilities

h) Restructuring the curriculum for benefit of students with hearing impairment to facilitate them to take only one language as part of their curriculum.

The National Trust Act (National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability), 1999 also came in to existence. This landmark legislation seeks to protect and promote the rights of persons who within the disability sector, have been even more marginalized than others. It was first of its kind in the category of persons addressed. It recognized the range of independence in skills, daily living and financial management. It is prime decision making body for persons with disabilities and aims to provide total care to persons with mental retardation and cerebral palsy and also manage the properties bequeathed to the trust.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) emerged as a result of deliberations held by more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations in June 1994. For furthering the objectives of Education for all, it considered the fundamental policy-shifts required to promote inclusive education. It emphasizes that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. India was a signatory to the Salamanca Statement. In this perspective the Human Resource Development minister of India Sri Arjun Singh on the 21st March 2005 assured in the Rajya Sabha that MHRD has formulated a comprehensive action plan for the Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities. The government is now committed to provide education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities in accordance with PWD ACT, 1995 and all the schools in the country will be made disabled friendly by 2020. Rupees 10 billion have been outlaid to fulfill the needs of disabled persons between the ages of 14 and 18 years through a revised plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD). In 2005-06, the Project Approval Board has allocated an amount of Rs.187.79 crores under this component for a total 20.14 lakh Children With Special Needs (CWSN) identified. The commitment of the Government of India to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) cannot be fully achieved without taking care of special educational needs of the physically and mentally challenged children.

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (MHRD) ACTION PLAN:

An outline of MHRD action plan is presented below:

Action Plan includes: • To complement and supplement IEDC and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programmes in the movement from integration to inclusion.

- Enrolment and retention of all children with disabilities in the mainstream education system. (Free and compulsory education from 0 to 14 under draft Bill/free education 0 to 18 yrs under PWD Act).

- Providing need based educational and other support in mainstream schools to children in order to develop their learning and abilities, through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource and partnership with their communities.

- Support higher and vocational education through proper implementation of the existing reservation quota in all educational institutions and creation of barrier free learning environments.

- Disability focused research and interventions in universities and educational institutions.

- Review implementation of existing programmes, provisions to identify factors leading to success or failure of the drive towards enrollment and retention of children with disabilities in mainstream educational settings. Address administrative issues arising out of review.

- Generating awareness in the general community, activists and persons working in the field of education and more specifically among parents and children that the disabled have full rights to appropriate education in mainstream schools and that it is the duty of those involved in administration at every level including schools to ensure that they have access to education.

- Ensure enrollment and intervention for all children with special needs in the age group 0-6 years in Early Childhood Care and Education Programs.

- Facilitate free and compulsory elementary education for children with special needs in the age group 6-14 (extendable to 18 yrs.) in mainstream education settings currently under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (SSA is a governmental program shared by both union and state governments for achieving universal elementary education in India by 2010) .

- Facilities for transition of young persons with disability wishing to pursue secondary education.

- Ensuring physical access of children and youth with disabilities in schools and educational institutions by enforcing the requirement for provisions of universal design in buildings and provide support in transportation.

- Development of national norms for Inclusive Education, to set standards of implementation, training, monitoring and evaluation for the program.
- Provide inputs in all pre-service and in-service training for mainstream and special education teachers to enable them to work with children with disability in an inclusive education system.
- Appropriate Resource Services support through appointment of special educators, rehab professionals, provision of resource rooms, etc to support mainstream schoolteachers in the classrooms.
- Put in place an effective communication and delivery system for specific delivery of TLM, aids and appliances, hardware/software.
- Participation in sports, co-curricular activities, to promote all round ability development.
- Ensuring physical access for young persons with disabilities (18 plus age group) in all colleges and educational institutions by enforcing the requirement for provisions of universal design in buildings and provide support in transportation.

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) aims to provide Universal Elementary Education by the end of the plan. It also aims to provide basic education for the un-reached segments and special groups. The special interventions and strategies like pedagogic improvement and adoption of child centered practices are focused on the groups like the girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, working children, children with disabilities, urban deprived children, children from minority groups, children below poverty line, migratory children and in the hardest to reach groups.

National Curriculum Framework, 2005: A policy frame work of 2005 envisages inclusion that needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout Indian education system. The participation of all children needs to be ensured in all spheres of their life in and outside the school. Schools need to become centers that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education. Opportunities to display talents should be provided and peer group learning needs to be implemented as the peers are powerful tools in nurturing motivation and involvement among children. In our schools we tend to provide these opportunities which is becoming more self-confident and visible in the schools. Opportunities provided need to be given to all children and their specific abilities need to be

recognized and appreciated. This includes children with disabilities, who may need assistance to complete their assigned tasks. It would be even better if the teacher discusses with all the children in the class to ensure that each child is given an opportunity to contribute. When planning, teachers must pay special attention to ensuring the participation of all. This would become a marker of their effectiveness as teachers. Excessive emphasis on group competitiveness and achievement is beginning to mark many of our schools, especially private schools. As soon as children join, houses are allocated to them. Thereafter, almost every activity in the school is counted for marks that go into house points, adding up to an end-of-the-year prize. Such 'house loyalties' seem to have the superficial effect of getting all children involved and excited about winning points for their houses. Teachers need to reflect on the extent to which they want the spirit of competition to enter into performing more of a function in regulating and disciplining than in nurturing learning and interest. Schools generally undermine the diverse capabilities and talents of children by categorizing them very early, on narrow cognitive criteria relating to each child as an individual placing them in the classroom as the 'stars', the average, the below-average and the 'failures'. The demonizing effect of such labeling is devastating on children as it segregates them in seating arrangements, and even creates markers that visually divide children into high achievers and low achievers. The school needs to send out a strong signal to the community, parents who pressurize children from an early age to be perfectionists to encourage their children to spend their time reading storybooks, playing and doing a reasonable amount of homework and revision.

The ideal of common schooling advocated by the Kothari Commission four decades ago continues to be valid as it reflects the values enshrined in our Constitution. Schools will succeed in inculcating these values only if they create an ethos in which every child feels happy and relaxed. Education has become a fundamental right for the age group of 6 to 14 years. School administrators and teachers have to 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 more inspiring. A child has special educational needs if s/he has difficulty in learning requiring special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child may have learning difficulty because of a disability which hinders her/his from making use of the existing educational facilities provided for all other children of her class. A child may have learning difficulty because of some other reasons too.

Inclusive Education in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education. The key objective of SSA is

Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) which has three important aspects -access, enrolment and retention of all children in 6-14 years of age. A zero rejection policy has been adopted under SSA, which ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability. The policy covers the following components under education for children with special needs.

They are: Early detection and identification, functional and formal assessment, Educational Placement, Aids and appliances, Support services, Teacher training, Resource support, Individual Educational Plan (IEP), Parental training and community mobilization, Planning and management, Strengthening of special schools, Removal of Architectural barriers, Research, Monitoring and evaluation. Girls with disabilities are provided up to Rs.1200/- as per specific proposals, per year. The programmes taken under SSA for inclusive education are identification, functional and formal assessment, appropriate educational placement, preparation of Individualized Educational Plan, provision of aids and appliances, teacher training, resource support, removal of architectural barriers, monitoring and evaluation and a special focus on girls with special needs. Children with disabilities are educated in India through special schools. There exist a few schools exclusively for blind and deaf under government sector as there is no any special provision in mainstream government schools for education other disabled children like low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impaired, locomotory disabled, mentally retarded, mentally ill, autism affected, cerebral palsy affected and multiple-disabled.

Steps taken for Inclusion: Inclusion is a complex issue. The curriculum is a powerful tool (Swann, 1988) and may be part of the problem. On inclusion Reuven Feuerstein viewed that "Chromosomes do not have the last word". However, his view on inclusion are challenging for everywhere. He argues there are three pre-requisites: a) The preparation of the child, b) The preparation of the receiving schools, c) The preparation of parents, but it could not be achieved without d) The preparation of the teachers.

Some children with special needs may require some prior training before they are placed in a regular school. Special educators made available for the purpose can provide such training and thereafter CWSN (Children With Special Needs) may be admitted in mainstream schools. States of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have conducted exclusive residential bridge course for CWSN to prepare them for regular schools but in rest of the states it is not yet to be done. From 683 thousand, 100 thousand CWSN were identified in 2002-03. By 2006-07 3 million 38 thousand were identified. From 566 thousand CWSN enrolled in schools in 2002-03, the enrolment of CWSN

currently in SSA stands at 2 million 20 thousand (Dec. 2006). In India total 222 thousand schools have been made barrier-free countrywide under SSA. It has been seen that the parents/guardians of CWSN generally face problems, both social and psychological resulting into marginalisation and exclusion of CWSN in mainstream schools. Hence, it is important to undertake widespread awareness among the people especially parents of CWSN. They should be counseled so that they may prepare themselves to send his/her ward to mainstream schools.

Teacher Training Programme for CWSN: In India teacher training in special education is imparted through both face-to-face and distance mode. I) Pre-Service Training: In India, there is provision for pre-service teacher training in SE, but it is mainly concentrated in secondary level training. There are 159 institutions of secondary teacher training in SE whereas there are only eleven institutions in the country that imparts pre-service training at elementary or primary level in SE. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is the apex authority to develop, recognize and regulate the course curriculum of SE. The Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal is the single university in the country, imparting B. Ed. (SE) through distance learning mode. Recently, it has launched Post Graduate Professional Diploma in Special Education Course for general B.Ed. students. The successful candidate of this program becomes equivalent to B.Ed.-SEDE degree holder with specialization in opted disability area. A MOU has been signed between the National Council for Teacher Educations (NCTE) and the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) leading towards a convergence so as to sensitize all teachers and resource persons. The NCERT (2000) has set up a group under the National Curriculum Framework Review to examine the pedagogic inputs and classroom reorganization required for CWNS. Even, UGC National Educational Testing Bureau has already included "Special Education", in curriculum of its Educational discipline. It includes details about special education, integrated education, education of mentally retarded (MR), visually impaired (VI), hearing impaired (HI), orthopaedically handicapped (OH), gifted and creative children, learning disabled children and education of Juvenile delinquents. The Postgraduate Departments of Education in India is on way to strengthen the disability element in their respective curriculum. Residential Bridge Courses for CWSN in A.P., U.P. & Rajasthan: Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have developed a roadmap to implement residential Bridge Courses to develop skills of readiness for successful integration in regular schools. The other objectives of the course are: (i) equip with required skills among students with severe disabilities to use special equipment independently, (ii) develop adequate 3R's skills as well as academic competencies required for immediate inclusion in the regular classroom appropriate to the child's grade level and (iii) develop sense of independence, self-confidence and motivation for personal growth, to orient

the children with various environments, not only for school inclusion, but also community and social inclusion. II) In-Service Training: Different kinds of teacher training programmes are being implemented under SSA to orient elementary teachers towards Inclusive Education (IE). The component IE has been incorporated as a part of 20 days mandatory training of in-service teachers under SSA. This aims at orienting every teacher to the concept, meaning and importance of inclusion. Further, the state SSA programme also taken up a 3-5 or 5-7 day teacher exclusively in I.E. Total 2 million 45.2 thousand teachers have been covered through regular teacher training programmes, which includes a 2-3 day capsule on inclusive education. 1 million 400 thousand teachers have been provided 3-5 days additional training for better orientation to Inclusive Education. 39816 teachers have been trained in 22 States with Rehabilitation Council of India for 45 days and act as Resource Persons in districts/blocks. 23 States have appointed 6147 resource teachers and 671 NGOs are involved in the IE programme in 31 States. Schools are being made more disabled friendly by incorporating barrier free features in their designs. 444 thousand schools have been made barrierfree and the work is on. 575 thousand CWSN have been provided the required assistive devices

Summary and conclusion: Inclusive education (IE) is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. Inclusive Education aims at integrated development of children with special needs and normal children through mainstream schooling. To develop curriculum for special education and its inclusion in general teacher preparation programs, Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) made a historic collaboration with National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) on January 19, 2005. The Government launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme in December 1974. It was a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aimed to provide educational opportunities to children with special needs (CWSN) in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention. In late 90s (i.e. in 1997) the philosophy of inclusive education is added in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). By 1998, many DPEP states had conducted surveys, assessment camps and evolved strategies to provide resource support to those children with special needs who were enrolled in DPEP schools. The thrust was on imparting quality education to all disabled children. The government is committed to provide education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities in accordance with PWD ACT, 1995 and all the schools in the country will be made disabled friendly by 2020. The special interventions and strategies like pedagogic improvement and adoption of child centered practices are focused on the children with disabilities. At present 20 thousand 30 thousand CWSN (66.84 percent of those identified) are

enrolled in schools. Further 88009 CWSN are being covered through EGS/ AIE in 15 states and 77083 CWSN are being provided homebound education in 19 states. At present all the educational schemes of inclusive education tend toward universalization of primary education. IE is not only the alternative measures for CWSN for want of separate special schools for these children but it is a scientific well thought strategy for their overall development; of course it is cost effective and doubly suitable for a developing country like India. Integrated Education programmes are being taken at different levels but still 95 percent of CWSN are out of mainstream schools. Even the schools where IE is in operation, infrastructural facilities required for inclusive teaching-learning processes are poor. Capability of teachers required to deal CWSN along with normal children also appear to be poor reflecting the poor quality of training for IE. The only point of satisfaction is that importance of IE has been recognized and government is working hard to provide universal education to CWSN under IE.

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