

From Special Education to Inclusive Education: An Analysis of Indian Policy

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“Writers in past fifty years, both Indian and Foreign, have been poorly informed about Indian special needs education and disability care in the 19th century and for mental retardation and orthopedic disabilities, the developments up to 1947.”

-Miles, 1994, p.2

In India, the Education, Rehabilitation and other services for persons with disabilities have been seriously started from the nineteenth century. The first attempts of educating the handicapped children was made in the last two decades of the nineteenth century with establishment of the first school for the hearing impaired in Bombay in 1885, followed by the first school for the visually impaired in Amritsar in 1887. Growth of the schools for the handicapped in the sixty years until the advent of independence (1947) was extremely slow and sporadic. Till 1947 India had just 32 schools for the blind. The number rose to 170 in 1980. Now there are 400 schools for the visually impaired in the country. Today, there are Eighteen Braille presses available in the country.

The number of schools for the hearing impaired was only 35 in 1947 but had risen to 180 by 1980. Today, there are 900 schools for Hearing Impaired students.

The schools for the mentally retarded were just three in 1947, which rose to 200 by 1980 and at present; there are 1000 schools for mentally retarded children.

Teacher training programme, Rehabilitation etc. has also been started since 1981, by different organizations.

Indian Policies of Education, Employment and Rehabilitation for Persons with disability:

A reference to the Govt. of India report on Blindness “1944 in this context is very relevant. Most of the modern Educational programmes for the Visually Handicapped in this country owe their origin to the recommendations of this report. It was in accordance with its recommendations that the Ministry of Education established a unit for the blind in April 1947. In this connection the various commissions, committees, Acts, schemes have been made, implemented and constituted for persons with disabilities in India, for their education, employment and rehabilitation by collaboration with Government and Non-governmental organization. Some important among them are given below in chronological order:

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 1944, Sargent Report also referred to the 1936 CAGE recommendation, which had directed the provincial governments not to neglect the education of the handicapped.

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. Special education in India continues to be administered by the welfare ministry (now called the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) and is not a part of the regular system of education.

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 post-war 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 orthopaedically 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.

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

4. National Policy on education, (1986)

Twenty years later, the NPE (MHRD, 1986a) 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 re-oriented, 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.

5. Bahrul Islam Committee (1988)

The committee included education in the Draft Legislation. It mentioned that the state should endeavor to provide free and universal elementary education to children with physical and mental disabilities. The state shall also provide assistance to them for education and training at the secondary and higher levels. It also emphasized promotion of integrated education and continuation of residential education.

6. Programme of Action(1990,MHRD)

The Programme of Action (POA, MHRD, 1990) outlined the measures to implement the policy, which included massive in-service training programmes for teachers, orientation

programmes for administrators, development of supervisory expertise in the resource institutions for school education at the district and block levels, and provision of incentives like supply of aids, appliances, textbooks and school uniforms.

7. Programme of Action(1992,MHRD)

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.

8.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.

9.Project Integrated Education for the Disabled(PIED)

The National Council for Educational Research and Training implemented PIED during 1987 with the financial support from UNICEF, which provided support for the development of instructional material, training of personnel, mobilizing community support, training of parents and coordination of the project in remote and rural areas and difficult places. It also extended support for identification and assessment of children with disabilities, establishment of resource rooms, provision of aids and appliances and allowances for children with disabilities.

10.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.

11. Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, Protection of rights and full participation), 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 7th 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.

12. District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

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 Co-ordination committee.
- Orientation of Master Trainers at the State and district level in respect of educational needs of children with disabilities.

DPEP is an excellent and bold step towards promotion of inclusive education of children with disabilities.

13. National Trust Act (1999)

The National Trust is an established as a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, set up under the “National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities”, Act (Act 44 of 1999). This act is meant for strengthen the PWD Act, 95 especially gives provision for Persons with Autism, Mentally retarded and cerebral palsy.

14. 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:

1. Early childhood care education
2. Elementary education
3. Secondary education
4. Higher and technical education and
5. Vocational training.

The main objectives of Action will be:

- (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 non-government 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 form 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 from charity to development through a measure awareness, motivation and sensitization campaign.

15. 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 6-14 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.

16. National Policy for Persons with Disabilities:

This policy is released recently, by ministry of social-justice and empowerment of India, on 10th Feb 2006. The policy covers comprehensive areas related to persons with disabilities. 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. The focus of the policy shall be on the following heads:

1. Prevention of disabilities 2.Rehabilitation Measures 3.Physical rehabilitation strategies (a) Early detection and intervention, (b) Counseling & Medical rehabilitation, (c) Assistive devices, (d) Development of Rehabilitation professionals. 4. Education for persons with disabilities, 5. Economic Rehabilitation of persons with disabilities (i) Employment in govt. establishments, (ii) Wage employment in private sector, (iii) self-employment, 6.Women with disabilities 7. Children with Disabilities, 8. Barrier free environment, 9. Issue of disability certificates 10. Social-security, 11. Promotion of non-governmental organization (NGOs), 12. Research, 13. Sports, Recreation and cultural life. 14. Amendments &Existing acts dealing with the PWDs.

Conclusion and Suggestion:

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 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 attitude barrier in the minds of people for the promotion of inclusion.

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