

NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN INDIA (IN SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EDUCATIONM OF DIVYANGS)

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ABSTRACT

The major source of evil in our country is illiteracy. It lies at the root of everything that hinders the progress of our country. Light of knowledge unites people to agitate for their demands. But illiteracy keeps people in darkness. They fail to unite and demand what they really want. It is not merely necessary to carry the torch of education to all the corners of the land, but also to people of all the ages. The main cause of the sufferings of the people is not at all their lot, but ignorance and illiteracy lead them to suffer so much. Indian Constitution lays down universal compulsory education as a directive principle of the state. But little has been done so far. The children of today no doubt have some chances of getting education – at least the torch of it. But the grown up adults never had the opportunity of feeling the light of knowledge and blindfolded they move about their orbit of life. Education is the right of every child because it equips him to meet the challenges of life. The children with disabilities (CWD) 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 soon after independence in India. An attempt has been made to examine the policies and legislations for educating the children with disabilities in India after post- constitution era. In the final section, challenges for providing education to CWD and in that light some recommendations were made.

Key- Words: Inclusive Education, Special Needs, Human Rights, Children, Disabilities

INTRODUCTION

According to Census 2011, there are 1.2 billion people in the country, out of which, about 833 million people live in rural areas. Census 2011 data on disability has not been announced yet. United Nations observes that 10% of the population has

disability and there are about 120 million people with disabilities in India. Disability is difficult to define since it varies in type, form and intensity. Understanding disability will require understanding of these differences. As per the World Health Organization; Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, impairment is a problem in body function of structure; an activity limitation is difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

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Thus disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the first legally binding disability specific human rights convention, adopted by the United Nations gives two descriptions of disability.

Again it emphasizes that "Persons with disabilities include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".¹ Both the expressions reflect a shift from a medical model to social model of disability. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) considered disability as "Any restriction or lack of abilities to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being".² It excludes illness / injury of recent origin (morbidity) resulting into temporary loss of ability to see, hear, speak or move. "Presently, there has been a considerable shift in the understanding of disability, from earlier medical interpretations of seeing disability as a deficit within the individual to that of viewing it in the context of a Human Rights issue".³ Education is a human right with immense power to transform. "Education of children with disabilities (CWD) has been a part of policy developments in India for the past few decades. The policies of the government of India towards the education of children with disabilities have been reflected in the enactments, schemes and through institutions established for various relevant activities."⁴

Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992): states that CWSN will be taught by a trained teacher.

- *Persons with Disabilities Act (1995):* educational entitlement for all CWSN up to 18 years in an appropriate environment.
- *National Trust Act (1999):* provide services and support to severely disabled children.
- *The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2007):* free and compulsory education to children, up to 14 years.

"These legal mandates have also helped shape the comprehensive National Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of the Children and Persons with Disabilities (MHRD, 2005), and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in 2006 (an MSJE initiative). While some have argued that India has one of the most progressive disability policy frameworks amongst the developing economies, I would note that there remains a huge challenge in operationalising this vision, which is in itself marked by contradictory and conflicting messages. Thus, there is a need to critically re-examine some of the assumptions that have underpinned these frameworks. For example, while the PWD Act makes an attempt at purporting a rights-based approach, the guidance in achieving the vision it offers is very weak, and there remain too many caveats. Additionally, the Act lacks any strong enforcement mechanisms".^{5,6}

Annex to the manual where different kinds of disabilities, which are the focus of inclusive education (IE), are listed:

- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental retardation
- Locomotor impairment
- Learning disability
- Cerebral palsy
- Multiple disabilities and
- Others

Home Based Education (HBE)

Heralded as “New paths in Inclusion” HBE has a central place in SSA, and is defined as:

The education of children with severe intellectual/physical disabilities, who can be educated in the combination of home-based and alternate educational settings to enable them to achieve independent living skills.

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

As per Census 2001, there are approximately 60 million children in the age group of 3-6 years. While the 86th Amendment to the constitution does not cover children less than 6 years of age, the government acknowledges that there is a need for early childhood care, crèches and pre-school initiatives for this group, especially for those belonging to deprived communities. The government has been attempting to meet this commitment through the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). ICDS along with a few private initiatives covers approximately 34 million children and discrepancies in provision are widely varied according to location (rural-urban divide) and quality. Because of the involvement of the unorganised private sector (alongside the state sector largely through the Department of Women and Child Development) for

which no statistics are collected, the data on early childhood is extremely inadequate (Aggarwal, 2008).

On one hand, highlighting these groups (for example, girls, children with disabilities) as being in need of specific attention may ensure that their needs are being met. However, making them stand apart also exposes them to marginalisation from mainstream developments, and there is a danger that they are not accounted for within the framework of general education.

Such a concern highlights the classic “dilemma of difference”,⁷ where the stigma of difference may be recreated both by ignoring it and also by focusing on it. This is further complicated by how the very notion of ‘difference’ is construed. Difference might be seen as celebration of diversity, but is more often construed as undesirable, thus leading to stigma, rejection or denial.

This is even more of a concern in relation to people with disabilities because of their unique historical, socio-cultural and economic marginalisation from mainstream. The dominant medicalised understanding of disability further reinforces this difference, hence it seems convenient to make a distinction between children who can access educational opportunities available to the majority, while others are limited by their own restricted (disabled) capabilities, and therefore must attend special schools with little regard to possible lifetime of existence on the margins of society. Current efforts must address issues of equity in consonance with quality for the education of children with disabilities.

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