

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION- HISTORIC LANDMARKS IN INDIA

V. Madhavi, Ph. D.

Lecturer, Sweekar Academy of Rehabilitation Sciences, Hyderabad-500003

Abstract

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.



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Introduction

The first initiative was Wood's Despatch (1854), named after Sir Charles Wood, that imposed upon the government the task of creating a properly articulated scheme of education from primary school to university. One of the concerns expressed was the expansion of mass education and how to achieve the objective of providing useful and practical knowledge to the great mass of people. The government was ready to sanction a considerable increase in expenditure to attain this goal.

The Indian Education Commission (1882-83) also known as the Hunter Commission recommended amongst other things the provision, extension and improvement of elementary education of the masses to be a part of the educational system towards which strenuous efforts of the State should be directed. It said:

“We recommend that supply of normal schools whether government or aided, be so localized as to provide for the local requirements of all primary schools whether government or aided, within a division under each Inspector.” The commission also recommended greater proportionate aid for institutions in which large amount of self support cannot be expected, e.g. girls' schools and schools for lower castes and backward communities.

The Wardha Scheme, more popularly known as the Zakir Hussain Committee Report (1938) which was based on the educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, for the first time, recommended free and compulsory education to be provided to children for seven years on a nationwide scale, with the medium of instruction being the mother tongue. This was later

reflected in the educational plan formulated by the Central Advisory Board of Education, popularly known as the Sargent Report (1944). 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.

The National Committee on Women's Education (1957-59) chaired by Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh made a special recommendation on the education of women as a top priority in education and suggested bold and determined efforts to close the existing gap between the education of men and women in as short a time as possible.

The Kothari Commission (1964-66) undertook a comprehensive review of the entire educational system and recommended a common school system of public education. The report recommended moving towards the goal of a common school system of public education:

1. Which will be open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic sanctions or social status;
2. Where access to good education will depend, not on wealth or class but on talent;
3. Which will maintain adequate standards in all schools and provide at least a reasonable proportion of quality institutions;
4. In which no tuition fee will be charged; and,
5. Which would meet the needs of the average parent so that he would not ordinarily feel the need to send his children to expensive school outside the system.

The Kothari Commission also recommended the concept of neighborhood schools. It Stressed that

“The present social segregation in schools should be eliminated by the adoption of the neighborhood school concept at the lower primary stage under which all children in the neighborhood will be required to attend the school in the locality.”

The first National Policy on Education (NPE) that came into force in the year 1968 stressed the need to make efforts for the fulfillment of the Directive Principle under Article 45 of the Constitution. In addition, it emphasized equalization of educational opportunities for promoting social cohesion and national integration. It was especially concerned with the

education of girls and development of education among the backward classes and tribal people. Also, 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.”

Even the National Policy for Children (1974) made recommendations for children belonging to weaker sections of society—children who are socially handicapped like beggars or delinquents, children who are physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded—from the perspective of ensuring equality of opportunity. The initial attempts of the NPE, 1968 to create better educational opportunities for all children were further strengthened by emphasis on a National System of Education in the NPE, 1986. The new policy implied that up to a given level, all students irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, should have access to education of comparable quality. It recommended education for equality and attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far. One of the major concerns of the Ramamurti Review Committee (1990) that was set up to review the NPE, 1986, was equity and social justice.

It repeated the idea of developing a common school system for securing equity and social justice in education and proposed transformation of the existing government, local body and government-aided schools through quality improvement into genuine neighbourhood schools.

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.

The DPEPs were bought under a single programme called the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001-2002 in an attempt to universalise elementary education (UEE) through community-ownership of the school system. It was a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country and an opportunity for promoting social justice through basic education. In fact, this programme was an umbrella programme that merged Operation Blackboard, Teacher Education, Non-Formal Education (Education Guarantee Schools, Alternative Schooling Facilities, Balika Shikshan Shivir, 'Back to School' camps, etc), Mahila Samakhya, National Programme for Nutritional Support for Primary Education, State Specific Education Projects in Bihar, Rajasthan, UP and AP and DPEP in 248 districts of 18 States, and the Lok Jumbish Project.

In addition, the Ministry of Human Resource Development 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 marginalised 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 education is about embracing all 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 :

1. Every child of the age of six to fourteen years shall have a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education.
2. For the purpose of sub-section(1),no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing the elementary education:
3. Provided that a child suffering from disability, as defined in clause(i) of section 2 of the persons with Disabilities(Equal Opportunities, Protection and Full Participation)Act 1995, shall have the right to pursue free and compulsory elementary education in accordance with the provisions of Chapter V of the said Act.

Conclusion

It is clear that this move towards inclusion and social integration has required a major shift in our thinking. A focus on disability in global development not only raises questions of diverse local interpretations of the same issue, but also the need to accept the diversity of needs withing this group depending on both the nature of impairment and cultural context. Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interest of the students which promotes social cohesion, belonging, and active participation in learning.

References

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