The Social Principle of Inclusive Education and Addressing Diversity in Indian Schools: An Appraisal of Post-Salamanca Initiatives in India

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Abstract
There are steps formally initiated by the Government of India to maintain its adherence to the norms of Inclusive Education. Such schemes, acts and policy drafts are brought into discussion in this paper along with an appraisal of their draft and scope. This include the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which became operational from the year 2001, The Right to Education Act, which is implemented from the year 2009 and the Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities of 2005, which was revised in the year 2009. The discussion is anchored around, though not limited to the aspect of 'Diversity' which is very pertinent to the Indian scenario and the philosophy of Inclusion. Cultural and geographical diversity of the Indian sub-continent provoke challenges in 'Doing Diversity' in classrooms and at the same time it is contributing for the teacher and the taught. Considering the scope of the concept of social inclusion and inclusive education, the paper argues that at an implementation level, inclusive education should be one that is responsive to diversities in a classroom and cultural space. Rather than reproducing social structures pertaining to the above mentioned social categories of class, gender, language etc., policy drafting and implementation of inclusive education should make certain attempts which are pro-inclusive. They need to be less privileging towards certain ways of learning and certain ways of evaluation, considering the physical and cultural diversities of the learners. In our discussion on these schemes and their scope in ensuring diversity in classrooms, questions pertaining to certain disadvantaged sections are covered including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Gender non-binaries, migrants etc.
Keywords: Inclusive Education, Educational Policy, Diversity.

Introduction

Inclusive Education has now emerged as a reformative paradigm in schooling both in global and national contexts. This paradigm shift has brought us to face challenges that is well documented by the educationists across the country. One such challenges include the conceptualization of inclusive education that inculcated dilemmas and confusions amidst the academicians. Considering the objectives of this paper, we go with the definition that considers inclusive education as "an approach and process which recognizes the need to work towards 'schools for all' − institutions which celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs" as stated in Salamanca Statement (1994). The principle motivates to include each and every child. However, particular emphasis was given to include children at risk of being excluded from education.

India, being a signatory of Salamanca Declaration of 1994 is technically committed to reforms in special education and the ideology of inclusive education. When we try to understand India's commitment to Inclusive Education from segregated models of schooling, we can see global and local

reasons behind this. Globalisation has a very important role in disseminating ideas related to education as a capital and demands for human rights. Here, the basics of educational prerequisites like the structure of a classroom, role of a teacher, who is being taught, what is being taught etc. were put under queries and debates. A paradigm shift from special schools to inclusive schools was in a way responding to these questions, marked by a liquidation of hierarchies in the schooling system.

When we search for the role of academia in this process, we can see how the shift towards inclusive education was always accompanied by the post-modernist critiques of science, a take on medical model of disability and debates from social disability studies. Thus, 'physical disability' as a valid ground for segregation was debunked followed by other sources of disabling and discrimination which includes one's race, class, gender, migrant status etc. These discriminating identities are often represented as sources of social inequalities. The portrait of inclusive education as a better paradigm to segregated schooling and its successor integrated schooling in the Western academia and Western countries could successfully inflect their educational policies and initiatives by international organisations like the UN. This intersected with similar debates on social factors of disability in developing nations like India along with a compulsion to adhere to those internationally accepted pedagogic norms. Being a dominant educational paradigm, inclusive education was favored and opposed by the academicians across the nation. However, India being a democratic nation-state hasn't drifted from its commitment towards Inclusion and Inclusive Education, at least in the domain of educational policy making and its schemes for schooling.

Inclusive Education: A Road to Social Inclusion?

The idea of 'Social Inclusion' owes its popularity to the work of Rene Lenoir in the early 1970s, which has now become a part and parcel of any commons ensical understanding regarding human rights framework (Peters and Besley, 2014). Philosophically, the concept includes requirements that ranges from "elimination of exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of

response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability"(UNESCO,2009:4).When we consider the idea of social inclusion and the realm of schooling as a site for global reforms on education, the idea of Inclusive Education becomes significant.

The term 'Inclusive Education' has now widened its room from its initial concerns linked with 'disability' (Burnett, 2009), carrying certain moral as well as political value rather than being a euphemistic term. Providing a critique formal education or the practice of inclusive education itself does not mean any total negation of these ideas. They can be function as enabling and disabling based on the actors (Giddens, 2003), the teachers, students are others involved in a learning environment.

Initiatives to implement the schooling models for the 'special needs children' have seen models of segregated education or integrated education. When the former adhered to the medical model of disability, the latter delineated from the medical model of disability demanded a more ideological commitment to 'equity' since the pre-existing conditions remaining to be the same and this was followed by the paradigm of inclusive education. Thus, inclusive education becomes 'better' to its predecessors only if it is placed in its wider scope than as a "cheap alternative" to other special education programmes,in case of the so-called developing countries (Kohama, 2012).

The impact which this idea can have on students,be it on those who receive better social status or acceptance or who are having less chances of getting fewer positive nominations in a general classroom is based on different factors. It need not procure the expected results for the 'less privileged' unless the 'acceptance' is provided by the system and in particular the teachers and the peers (Pavri & Luftig,2015),despite the arguments surrounding a standard based reform of education and schooling (Voltz, Sims & Nelson, 2010).

A shift of attention from the 'individual with the disability' to be corrected towards dealing with the 'disabling or excluding factors' means a lot when it comes to a principle of 'inclusive education'. Also, in an age characterized by overt Neo-liberal demands, such principles and activities committed

to inclusive education and concerns for the 'unfit' may help in turning against such dominant trends (Apple,2008).This could also be seen as a protective counter movement to resist the 'disembedding' of the economies proposed by Karl Polanyi, quite a time ago in his theorization of a double movement (Polanyi,1944). Yet, along with accepting the moral desirability of a paradigm like inclusive education, the power plays which accompany this idea or its practice need to be addressed, especially when it comes to India. This is primarily because, before the advent of democracy, India was never committed to the ideas of inclusion due to the cultural factors which ritualized exclusion not only in terms of physical disability, but also in terms of physical environment, societal structures and services as identified by Oliver under the model of social disability (Oliver,1990).

Even though the announced commitments of India towards inclusive education could be noticed with steps like, the country signing Salamanca declaration or other agreements, there were efforts to reduce 'othering' during the British period itself, along with literature hinting to the existence of a consideration of 'children with disabilities' even during the pre-British period in the 'Gurukulas' which are stated to be the spots of formal education (Kohama, 2012) This was realized through the toys which were made in a way accessible for such children who required special consideration. Even though the British government was in the mission of modeling 'British-style Indians' leaving out any philosophical inclination towards something like inclusive education or even special education, such efforts are noticeable from religious quarters .One of the reasons was the Christian missionary institutions committed to 'including' such children under the purview as the missionary education was not committed to administrative purposes as in the case of education instituted by the British(Ibid). Independent India's formal acceptance of the principle of inclusive education needs to be seen in the light of the Salamanca declaration of 1994, of which India was a signatory and the period owes its pertinence to a step towards explicit acceptance of what Appadurai calls as 'flows' despite the how cultural differences become apparent or disappear when interaction of different ways of living occur (Appadurai, 1990).

Efforts in the Direction of Inclusive Education

"India is a multicultural society made up of numerous regional and local cultures. People's religious beliefs, ways of life and their understanding of social relationships are quite distinct from one another. All the groups have equal rights to co-exist and flourish, and the education system needs to respond to the cultural pluralism inherent in our society" (National Curriculum Framework, 2005).

The aforementioned statement appears in the document titled National Curriculum Framework, prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training. The document underlines the significance of ensuring cultural plurality in our schooling practices, a concern that stands central to this paper as well.

Three significant policies with which the Government of India that meant for addressing the 'disability' question along with 'inclusion' in the post-Salamanca period are discussed here .This include The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2001, The Right to Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act(RTE Act) in 2009, The Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities, which was revised in 2005 and 2009 (Kohama,2012),even though there were plans and programmes which were in tune with the globally accepted standards on educational reforms which were being followed till then as in the case of schemes like Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme of 1974 or the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act of 1996 (Sharma & Das,2015).

SSA which was implemented in conjunction with the World Bank can be considered as a plan which actually marked a shift from integration to inclusion as a disability-inclusive program. This could be seen as an elaboration of the basic ideas which was promulgated by the District Primary Education Project in 1994-95. It "mandates that no child with special needs could be neglected or denied enrolment on the basis of a disability" (Kohama, 2012:10). A close notice of this program may point to certain contradictions with the philosophy of inclusion, for it continues to understand and approach disability as one of the programs which SSA collaborates, which requires medical certification of disability (Ibid), again adhering to the medical model of

disability. The idea of 'no rejection' fails to cover the disabling factors as identified by the social model which necessitates interference with respect to physical environment or the societal structures. A disorientation towards diversity-based initiative be it in terms of infrastructure or curriculum and a standardized monitoring rules by the World Bank denote inconsistencies towards achieving 'inclusiveness' and raise questions regarding the 'blacked out' factors which are extremely relevant ranging from peer influence to the steps from school leadership in a system of formal education.

The Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD), 2005 was followed and renamed as renamed as 'Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage', 2009 and from 2013 it is subsumed under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). "The IEDSS scheme provided the opportunity to all students with disabilities who had completed eight years of elementary schooling to complete four years of secondary schooling in an inclusive environment" (Sharma and Das, 2015). Under this scheme, assistance was provided "student oriented components"(as the scheme recognizes) which include "books, medical and educational assessment, stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance, stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials" and also "appointment of special education teachers, allowances for general teachers for teaching such children, teacher training, orientation of school administrators, establishment of resource room, providing barrier free environment, etc."(Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, n.d). This scheme also went with addressing 'disability' as identified by the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) with particular references on 'blindness' (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, n.d).

Coming to the Right of children to free and compulsory education act, 2009, just like the stress given to elementary education (in SSA along with modifying certain constitutional provisions which provided "the right of every child to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school".

The idea of neighbourhood schools, ifwe are following the same description provided by Kothari Commission, is"a common space, where all children cutting across caste, class, gender lines learn together in the best inclusive manner". Yet, unlike SSA with the instructions from ILO being binding on it, the state had made specific references on 'students with disability' which is to be "inclusive of students with disability. RTE Act mandates admission of students into age-appropriate class rooms, except those who are having 'intellectual disability'(Kohama, 2012) and also it makes elementary schools 'available' to all children in the prescribed age group along with certain recommendations proscribing teachers becoming part of other activities, without the consent of the state. Even though we can see RTE providing for learning in mother tongue and teaching through sign language for students who are having hearing impairments(in medical terms),the 'comfortableness' they may experience in a so called inclusive class room when compared with a segregated class room is a matter of ambiguity (Bhattacharya, 2010),unlike the arguments made by scholars like Tomilson, in environments of special education in his sociological critique of special education, where it can turn out to be a problem as well a solution(Florian,2008). Here, the "Provision of free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality to children from disadvantaged and weaker sections" (The Right of children to free and compulsory education act, 2009) clause could be seen as a manifest recognition of factors other than medical definition of disability ,which are pertinent to the concepts of 'inclusion' or 'exclusion'.

One can also see how the recent introductions like Samagra Shiksha (which could be translated as holistic education) proposed in the Union Budget of 2018-19 and National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 tries to adhere to the principles of inclusive education in their draft documents. In the case of Samagra Shikha, it is a:

> "sector-wide development programme which subsumes the then existing Centrally Sponsored Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) to help harmonising the implementation mechanisms and transaction costs at all levels, particularly

in using state, district and sub-district level systems and resources, besides envisaging one comprehensive strategic plan for the development of school education at the district level ("Samagra Shiksha" , 2021: para.1).

As one can understand from the draft, this scheme, unlike the aforementioned schemes, the concept of disability is being broadened where factors and conditions associated with social disability, along with physical disabilities. The framework does address the idea of social exclusion where one can find references children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, children affected from migration, Muslim children, urban deprived children etc. However, the framework does not engage with initiatives that call for a wider recognition of children with gender non-binary identities by terms of providing infrastructural assistance as well as recognition in the curriculum.

But, National Education Policy draft (NEP, 2020) responds to the principle of inclusion in a wider sense. Disadvantages faced by gender-non binary groups finds mention in this document. To cite an example:

> "the Government of India will constitute a 'Gender-Inclusion Fund' to build the nation's capacity to provide equitable quality education for all girls as well as transgender students. The fund will be available to States to implement priorities determined by the Central government critical for assisting female and transgender children in gaining access to education (such as the provisions of sanitation and toilets, bicycles, conditional cash transfers, etc.); funds will also enable States to support and scale effective community-based interventions that address local context- specific barriers to female and transgender children's access to and participation in education" (p.26).

Similarly, the policy draft gives special attention to children of certain socio-cultural identities like minorities, geographical identities like those from villages or students with disabilities are also addressed in the policy draft.

A Comment on the Schemes

Before making sociological analysis of the above-mentioned schemes, we move to make an appraisal of these plans, which aimed to address 'inclusion', and how far they fulfill the demands of different criteria of 'inclusive education' as proposed by international organizations as well as scholars who have worked on this principle. As referred above any commitments towards inclusion or in this case inclusive education, requires elimination of exclusion which can result only from a response towards diversity. A feasible way which can be opted as a criterion of inclusive education can be thus what many scholars identify as 'Doing Diversity' (Tuters, 2014). This diversity, we see ranges from those stepping from ascription to achievement. If to go with the philosophy of inclusion, the 'correction' is to be from the part of the system which includes the whole academic apparatus, which includes human actors as well as those areas like the curriculum or school infrastructure where the human actors can utilize their agency to achieve what is 'desirable'.

With respect to diversity, 'disability' finds particular mention in three of the above-mentioned programs,with the IEDSS and RTE announces its commitment towards inclusion. But what we can observe from the provisions provided by these schemes do not take any effort to question the concept of 'normalcy' as Peters and Reid would argue (Peters & Reid, 2006). Though Salamanca declaration tended to be critical of the system in its statements, the above mentioned schemes do not provide any room against the dominant trends which are actually 'embedded' in the structures of society. There is no remarkable shift visible in these efforts to ensure inclusion from "historically organized provisions of disability" (Florian, 2008),at the same time leaving less reference on how to work with the 'stigma' attached with those who are having HIV/AIDS or similar conditions. There are strong recommendations are given about other excluding factors or categories which we can depend to understand the structure and processes of society itself like gender,class,caste,language or locality. But a deep look at the way they are being addressed prove to be flawed especially when they become inconsistent with the philosophy of inclusion. This is evident when we consider the fact that that most of the schemes before RTE had identified exclusion with the presence of 'disability' as we can read from

their major objectives, be it in the case of SSA or IEDSS.

Even though these schemes view education as a right or requirement for 'every child', with respect to the way social category of gender is addressed in these schemes, it continues to restrict the same with the conventional binary or boys and girls. Thus, it leaves the question of marginalized gender identities, especially in the case of RTE where reference on discrimination based on gender was visible. Be it any of these schemes they, try to make affirmative statements on girls' education,girls' friendly infrastructure etc., and special references on the same since in India feminist scholarship had by that time started serious discussions on the same. Special attention was given to those pull factors which can cause hindrances towards girls' education. (Mobar, 2015) These needs understood and situated with the ongoing new social movements and debates over recognition and redistribution and importance of identities.

RTE may mandates for non-discrimination in the classroom on the basis of caste or class and it also mandates for consideration of communities which includes "Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes,Muslim minorities, migrants, children with special needs,urban deprived children,working children, children in difficult circumstances, for affected by civil strife, e.tc" (Right to Education Act,2009).But this venture towards inclusion in a classroom fails to address the certain things which may be diminutive to certain groups but at the same time significant to other groups which may become apparent in the curriculum. One can see a legitimization of those cultural specifics which could be identified as 'high culture' in Indian context or in the ways these are to be done inside the formal institution of school (Salam,2021). This ranges from school festivals and sports. An example may be cinematic songs and dance which are identified with 'low' or popular culture or working class' culture becoming not worthy of being considered for competition as in the case of school and college youth festivals in many states. Along with this the dimension of 'teacher' as someone situated in specific socio-cultural maps, also need to be addressed (Zulfia et al., 2013).

If the state has to work out the principle of inclusive education, it simultaneously demands negation of exclusionary tendencies, and this is in no way related to what could be termed as the 'mainstream' only. This should address exclusion that can begin from inter personal to inter group interactions,no matter whether they do or do not share elements of diversity like language or race etc.

This must be able to deal with prejudices and preconceptions about individuals or groups which are rooted in the social fabric and the correction of the same should try to address the coercive nature the kind of education prescribed by some for others, especially those who are the first generation school goers or those who are having customary practices and ways of living which may not go hand in hand with the formal schooling or residential schooling practices in India as in the case of local learning systems by indigenous groups etc., towards a formal schooling (Pfeffer & Behera,1997). Thus, inclusive education as an aim can be or cannot be the aim of the state or the activist in those regard. But those who want to execute this or those who wants to study the hindrances should not only be committed to studying inclusion but also exclusion and the anthropology of such factors without going with any empirical validity the term can claim.

An Analysis of the Principle of Inclusive Education in Indian Society

'India' in this context is to be understood not as a static entity and understanding the way the principle of inclusive education was being applied (or imposed)among the population of India is in no way to be studied as something relevant inside the geographical boundary of India. Because philosophy or at least its nomenclature claims a western origin and as referred earlier there were compulsions from within and without which Indian state had to deal with before introducing policies directed towards disability and now inclusion.

To start with the idea of formal schooling that idea of inclusive education may uphold without 'leaving' any child, does not induce them with power to have a say in the teaching and learning techniques. And to quote Illich in this regard "The increasing reliance onan institutional care adds to a

new dimension to their helplessness,psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves" (Illich, 1970:4) or as Barton(2013) said "innovatory and imaginative convictions stand in stark contrast to dominant official views of government and policy directives, that are based on assumptions concerning fixed-ability learning".

This hierarchizes learning with school-based education at its top and the bureaucratic acceptance and popularity this idea has received worldwide legitimizes that hierarchy without understanding the politics of inclusive education as well as the politics of possibilities it claims (Barton,2013), which is also equally important to understand it no matter what can be appropriate stand one should take.

All the schemes with this principle which we have discussed above focus on 'elementary education' or schooling and the principle of inclusive education leaves higher education. This actually stabilizes the 'triangle' which allows a few, who are by different means advantaged over others to pursue higher education and by having higher cultural capital than those who could not acquire it. This fulfillment of 'basic education' require to be investigated further. This 'diversity' of qualification reproduces the hierarchy of occupations which reduces any scope for mobility for those with less capital, be it economic, social or cultural to better their class-based status. This actually results in a reproduction and legitimization of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Recognition of mother tongue and the access provided by RTE and other acts as a way of student-centric approach does not attend to the links each language may have with the social status one may have as in Indian context English enjoys especially with the vast entry of MNCs and BPOs into the labour markets. This may be a cause as well as effect of how language reinforces class related divisions in the society (Mallinson, 2007).The idea of the 'disadvantaged' groups accompanied with the idea inclusive education needs a critical thinking and understanding. Addressing the homogeneity and heterogeneity within particular identified caste or religious groups in India should be seen with reference to geographical location and other factors, considering the similarities and diversities ,people in India, with India as a timely and geographical space may share.

Conclusion

As we discussed in the a fore mentioned cases, bringing in the idea of diversity as a core element of inclusive classrooms is always affected by how political discourses get translated into the realm of education. The analysis confirms attempts to broaden the idea of inclusion and inclusive education over years. We argue that bringing the diversities pertinent to geographies and cultural histories can help students broaden ideas related to one's race, class, religion or nation. This can help in broadening the aims of schooling and education towards transcending of boundaries, a shift one can see in the recently endorsed schooling schemes and policy drafts. As we could gauge from our analysis, the existing confusions regarding the scope covered by the term inclusive education can be attributed to a lack of definition/definitions in official documents, that is responsive to the social and cultural needs of Indian population. There is a need to endorse diversity practices as part of frameworks for general education, rather than addressing the case of particular groups in separate policy drafts. Bridging policy and practice gaps demand factors like inter-disciplinary collaboration in educational planning, focus on competencies of teachers, resource allocation, etc., which can help us achieve the goal of inclusive educational practices beyond homogenous perspectives based on physical disability.

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