# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA: INTERNATIONAL CONCEPT, NATIONAL INTERPRETATION

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*Abstract*

*This paper examines the education of children belonging to marginalized groups within the Indian context, with particular reference to children with disabilities. Various educational provisions made available for children with disabilities are discussed on the basis of an analysis of post-independence government documents. It discusses the focus of the Indian Government on the establishment of special schools, its integration efforts, and its more recent emphasis on inclusive education. In addition, as understood in numerous official records, it seeks to explain "inclusive education. The article concludes by arguing for a need to develop a contextual understanding of inclusive education that is reflective of current educational concerns in India.*

*Keywords: Disability, Education for all, Inclusive education, India, Academics, Development.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is home to 16 percent of the world's population, making it the world's biggest democracy. With respect to landmass, India occupies 2.24 percent of the world's total area. Its education system is the world's second largest after China, with 108 million school-going children in the 6 to 10 age group. In terms of linguistic, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, it comprises a diverse group of citizens [1]. In 1947, the year of India's independence, education in the Constitution of India was presented as a directive principle rather than a fundamental right. While fundamental rights in the Constitution are guaranteed to all citizens and take precedence over any other law of the land, directive principles are asserted as being fundamental in the governance of the country but are not legally enforceable. Instead they are guidelines for creating a social order, as enunciated in the constitution's preamble [2]. The provision of education is stated in Article 45 of the directives principles as "the State shall endeavor to provide, *within a period of 10 years* from the commencement of the Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years".

This constitutional duty, however, has been repeatedly postponed by the government. Now, for the period 2002-2007, the 10th Five-Year Plan has set a goal for all children to complete 5 years of schooling by 2007. In 2000, of the 192 million children in the age group of 6 to 14, 40 million

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remained outside the school system [3]. A similar estimate of out-of-school children is stated in the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2005) report. Referring to the Multiple Cluster Indicators Survey carried out in 2000, it notes that approximately 27 million primary school children (6 to 11 years old) in India do not attend school. While both these documents indicate that about 21–25% of children do not attend school, the Planning Commission of India suggests that "the figure is higher; that out of approximately 200 million children in the age group 6 to 14 years, only 120 million are in school" thus stating that 80 million children remain out of school, or 40% of children in the 6 to 14 years' age group [4]. While these discrepancies in statistics could be due to a range of reasons, an in-depth analysis of the statistical data is not the focus of this article. Essentially it cannot be overlooked that India "has the highest absolute number of out-of-school children" (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005, p. 21), and it is one of the 35 countries most unlikely to meet education for all goals by 2015.

## II. STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

Although there is a uniform education system across India, in some of the 28 states, there are minor variations. The first five years of school education are provided by primary education, while the next three grades (11 to 14 years of age) are those of upper primary education. According to the 86th amendment of the Constitution adopted in December 2002 [4], these eight years of education together are now a constitutional right of all children. Pre-primary education is not obligatory and provisions differ considerably between rural and urban areas. India has also created alternative education systems, including Non-Formal Education (NFE) and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), alongside the formal school system (formerly the National Open School). Both of these systems will be addressed later in depth. The focus of curriculum at the primary level is on the development of basic skills of literacy and numeracy, study of the environment in terms of physical and social phenomena, and participation in activities that would develop productive skills, creative expression, and habits of healthy living [5].

## III. FINANCING EDUCATION IN INDIA

The Kothari Commission Report recommended that 6 percent of the nation's Gross National Product be spent on education, but public expenditure on education continues to be around 3 percent (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2000a) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2000a). According to the Human Development Report 2001, among the 143 countries listed, India ranked 104th with respect to the share of Gross National Product spent on education [5]. The central government accounts for only 12% of the total expenditure, and it is this money that is used to fund new projects for improving teaching. Ninety-seven per cent of the total expenditure on education incurred by a state is spent on teacher salaries, while libraries, consumables, teaching equipment, and furniture are allocated a mere 0.18%.

In the 1990s, several interventions such as Operation Blackboard, Lok Jumbish (1992), and the District Primary Education Program, were launched to improve the quality of education. These interventions were based on multiple strategies of improvements in infrastructure, human resources, curriculum, materials, pedagogical approaches, teacher capacity-building, and an

increased focus on specification and measurement of learner achievement levels. Due to the lack of rigorous evaluations of these programs it is difficult to make any assertions about their effectiveness with confidence. However, as suggested in the global monitoring report "Education for All: The Quality Imperative", the quality of education provided in countries of Southern Asia remains of significant concern. Additionally, in India, as in many other South Asian countries, there is evidence of continued disparities in the education of children belonging to different groups.

## IV. EXISTING EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS OF CHILDREN

Appasamy, Guhan, Hema, Majumdar, and Vaidyanathan (1995) note the continued existence of "multiple forms of inequality'market inequality' (poverty), 'status inequality', 'spatial and sexual disparity'which continue to render certain social groups incapable of achieving freedom from illiteracy and innumeracy". Government documents note that children belonging to certain groups—such as those from schedule caste (SC) groups/schedule tribes (ST), girls, children from various religious, linguistic and ethnic minority groups, and children with disabilities—are more likely to be excluded than others [6].

Of the total number of children not in school, Nayar (2002) estimates that 67% of these are girls. Nambissan and Sedwal (2002) note the considerable discrepancy in school attendance rates between boys from SC groups compared with those of non- SC groups. They state that in rural areas boys belonging to SC groups had an attendance rate of 64.3% compared with 74.95% for boys from non-SC groups. In urban areas SC boys had higher attendance rates of 77.5% (compared with their rural counterparts), however, there continued to be a lag of 10 percentage points in their attendance rates compared with non-SC boys, whose attendance rates stood at 86.8%. Similar discrepancies are evident in the education of children with disabilities in comparison with their non-disabled peers; these are discussed in detail later.

The Government has made various efforts to address these discrepancies. In the National Policy on Education emphasis has been placed on the "removal of disparities", along with an attempt "to equalize educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far". From 1990 onwards, the Government has approached these concerns by adopting a targeted approach, in which different ministries and/or departments have launched various schemes and programs. For the purpose of this study a review was undertaken of various annual reports of Government departments and the Program of Action [7]. The review found that educational concerns for different groups continue to be addressed by a number of departments and ministries. For example, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and the Department of Education are concerned with issues relating to the education of children from various scheduled castes or tribes. Similarly, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and the Department of Education are responsible for the education of children with disabilities.

initially, the NFE scheme was implemented in 25 States/Union Territories (UTs) and had a total coverage of about 7.4 million children. Several evaluations and assessments by state governments,

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institutions and, most notably, the Program Evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission indicated that the implementation of the scheme was unsatisfactory. Thus, as the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education, the scheme was modified and relaunched. Like the NFE system, it aims to provide flexibility for out-of-school children (6-14 year-olds who may be out of school for a variety of reasons [8], such as those living in villages or communities without any schools, children belonging to migrating communities, those living in streets or slums), in order to ensure their regular participation and completion of the elementary level of education. In the case of children with disabilities, this form of education can be accessed until they are 18 years of age.

The NIOS provides educational services in the distance education mode involving the delivery of printed materials and face-to-face programs in study centers. It also provides skills-based vocational courses and courses that lead to traditional school certification. Presently, the Open School has approximately 238,069 students enrolled. It has also launched the Open Basic Education, a three-level program equivalent to the Elementary Education Program of the formal education system.

Programs such as NFE and NIOS have been successful in bringing about a significant increase in enrolments, as suggested in the Education for All Assessment Report. While these programs have increased enrolment figures, there has been criticism of the quality of education they offer. For example, Dreze and Sen point out that second-track [9], sub-quality education is offered by these systems. Berntsen argues that until children can be enrolled in mainstream settings, these systems must be recognized as the last resort and as temporary stop-gap arrangements. The government, however, continues to put significant emphasis on them.

## V.    CONCLUSION

The government must, for example, become more aware of the historical, political, and social factors that have marginalized children with disabilities from the education system in its efforts to achieve education for all. In doing so, it must ensure that concerns are uniquely placed within the mainstream education system for children with disabilities and are not considered to be separate from them. As the Government of India makes efforts to achieve all objectives by 2015 in terms of education. It must concentrate on exclusionary factors in its mainstream education system that remain unaddressed. Efforts must be directed at developing a diversity-responsive education system in terms of skills, gender, caste and economic status, and at challenging existing arrangements that have led to the continued exclusion of a large number of children. The Government's essential point of departure is to re-examine its understanding of inclusive education, the objectives of an inclusive system, the processes involved in its development and the motivations behind such efforts. In doing so, a common understanding of inclusive education that represents the Indian background and is more sensitive to its educational needs is more likely to develop.

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