

# NGO's And Inclusive Education in India - A Brief Review

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**Abstract**—Inclusive education is a process that addresses diversity of needs of all children and is one of the most pressing issues in the Indian educational field. Following the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtein in 1990, the Indian government started the process of providing a framework for inclusive education and incorporating the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in the mainstream education. At the same time various Non-governmental Organisations (NGO's) started to promote inclusive education and in the decades that followed, became major stakeholders in the field. The efforts of both the government as well as NGO's have ensured that inclusive education has acquired a wide reach and made it possible for the needs of diverse learners to be met. However, the role of NGO's is especially noteworthy and this paper is a humble attempt to review the role of NGOs in inclusive education in India.

**Index Terms**—diverse learners, inclusion, inclusive education, NGO's

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Inclusion' in education is one of the most pressing issues confronting the educational field in India. Inclusion in education refers to policies and measures that ensure that diverse learners' needs are met in an equitable environment and all forms of discrimination in the learning environment are eliminated. Inclusion in education was first upheld in the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtein, 1990 which promoted access to education by all children, youth and adult. This was followed by The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994 which put a special emphasis on Special Needs in education. The Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, reaffirmed the mission of the Salamanca Conference and placed special emphasis on inclusive education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity

of needs of all children, increasing their participation in learning and eliminating exclusion.

### A. Inclusive Education Legislation in India:

Governments play a crucial role in framing policies and providing a framework for inclusive education.

In India, the legislative journey of inclusive education began with the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. This Act provided for education, employment, creation of barrier free environment and social security to persons with disabilities. Then came the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act in 1999. This Act sought to create an enabling environment for Persons with Disabilities through comprehensive support systems, which will lead to the development of an inclusive society. The National Curriculum Framework, which promotes respect for learners' diversity, was adopted in 2005. It recommends the implementation of the policy of inclusion in all schools and suggests that this framework should be incorporated throughout the education system, ensuring equal opportunities and quality education for all students. This was followed by the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in 2006. It focused on creating an environment that provides them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. A number of rehabilitation measures were suggested, including in the field of education. Then in 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified. The Convention requires countries to prohibit discrimination against Persons with Disabilities and to establish specific measures and programs that will enable them to achieve the same level of equality as other persons. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed in 2009. It

stipulated barrier-free education for children with special needs and free education till the age of 18 years in integrated or special schools. In 2016, the Rights of persons with Disabilities Act was enacted. This Act imposed a duty on the government to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities in government-funded schools and to provide necessary facilities for their equal participation in education. The national flagship education programme 'Samagra Shiksha' was launched in 2018. One of its foci was increase in allocation of allowance and other educational facilities to CwSN. Finally, the National Education Policy 2020 was released. It aims to "provide inclusive and equitable quality education and encourage opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone" by 2030. The policy acknowledges children with special needs and advocates for their inclusion in the educational system.

#### B. Role of NGOs in Inclusive Education:

Though on paper the provisions seem substantial, government educational institutions for the especially abled are few in number. It is a fact that in our country, most of the efforts made for inclusive education are dependent on charitable organisations and NGO's (Non-governmental Organisations). Whatever success has been achieved in this field can be traced mostly to the activities of these organisations. Undoubtedly, NGO's play a large role in the advancement of inclusive education. They play an active role through research, awareness campaigns and lobbying for policies and programmes on inclusive education. They also contribute to capacity building through teacher training programmes that help educators develop the skills and knowledge for catering to the needs of diverse learners. They engage with the community through outreach programmes to increase awareness among various stakeholders and remove the stigma attached to those with special needs or disabilities. Marginalized students and families are often assisted by NGO's through provision of assistive devices, scholarships and learning materials that enable them to access education, thus encouraging inclusivity in education. Many NGO's also collaborate closely with various governmental and private bodies as well as educational institutions so that their collective expertise and efforts can better drive forward inclusive education. Innovative programmes and projects are often first implemented by NGO's as they have the

flexibility required in using new assistive technologies and teaching methodologies. If such projects are successful, they can be adopted on a larger scale by various governmental as well as private agencies and institutions. Monitoring and evaluating of inclusive education programmes are another area where NGO's play a crucial role. In this way deficiencies and gaps are understood and more effective strategies can be developed. Inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities are made accessible through the efforts of NGO's. The present-day scenario favours a more inclusive education format involving participatory and community-based approach where Government recognises NGOs as the source of innovators and professional resource centres. This helps build a partnership to acquire a macro-outcome.

#### C. Brief Overview of Impact of NGOs in Inclusive Education in India:

The role of NGOs in India in implementing inclusive education is worthy of note.

Jan Vikas Samiti is one such organization working extensively to eliminate barriers to education faced by children with disabilities. It was first registered as a society in 1998; since then, Jan Vikas Samiti (JVS) has been engaged in creating an inclusive environment for social and economic development of disadvantaged people by enabling them to have access to education, employment and equal rights. It has partnered with various governmental organizations and schools to develop model resource centers, training of teachers in special education and establish SSA schools.

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh has recognized the service provided by Jan Vikas Samiti to persons with disabilities by conferring it with "State Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities – 2020". The organization has also recently won the 'ZERO Project Award – 2022 for their project 'SAMBHAV' for tele-rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

In another major effort, Jan Vikas Samiti in conjunction with the Liliane Foundation, CBM, and Light for the World was instrumental for the five-year initiative named 'RAISE' in five states of North-East India through 15 partner organizations to facilitate and ensure inclusive education in 77 SSA schools in the region. The project's objective is to assist partner organizations and community-based non-

governmental organizations in becoming resource centres for inclusive education and to connect each organization with three to five neighbourhood Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) schools in order to improve the quality of their inclusive education.

JVS has been instrumental in helping 6000 children with disabilities in the north & north east.

D. The Regional Action on Inclusive Education (RAISE) Northeast, for providing holistic support to children with special needs is a project initiated to complement the programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) on inclusive education to improve the quality of education for children with disabilities in government and government-supported schools in selected districts of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura.

The project's ultimate aim is to stop special schools for differently-abled children as these provide education within a very limited ambit and only in the case of a child suffering from severe disabilities should they be sent to special schools

The project is supported by three international agencies — Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM), Light for the World and Liliane Fonds who have a strong presence in the north east and had conducted a situational analysis on the status of inclusive education and the capacity of organization supported by them in the five states.

RAISE NE was awarded the Zero Project Network's "Innovative Practices 2020"

According to UNESCO, "Education for sustainable development is a broad task that calls for the full involvement of multiple educational organisations and groups in bureaucracies and civil societies." These also include Non-Governmental Organisations. The goal of such collaborations is to achieve a universal provision. Various surveys show that such collaborations are quite successful where NGOs do not depend on limited sources of funding.

Mrinaljyoti Rehabilitation Centre is a partner organization in the Regional Action for Inclusive Education-North East (RAISE-NE) the project along with 15 NGOs and 3 INGOs and is working to promote inclusive educational environment in SSA schools. Through this project Mrinaljyoti is developing itself and growing as a resource centre. It is also responsible for providing hostel facilities to children with disabilities in various districts of Assam.

UTTARAN (Disha Project) is an early intervention and school readiness scheme for children in the age group of 0-10 years with the four disabilities covered under the National Trust Act that aims at providing training (specifically school readiness) and counselling to both children and parents. Disha at Mrinaljyoti until now has mainstreamed 13 Children with Disabilities.

Shishu Sarothi is an organization working for and with children and persons with disabilities in Assam and North-east India. It was an active member of the collaborative RAISE – NE project to promote and improve the quality of inclusive education in SSA schools in NE India and led the advocacy for the project in 17 schools in Kamrup Metro and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. It has established a Centre for Inclusive Education in Guwahati that caters to the needs of around 150 children with or without disabilities.

NGOs have played a major role in bringing development of **inclusive education** in the country. In India, government programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan(SSA) which is the Central government's flagship programme on universal elementary education, led to universalising of education which has brought several non-governmental organisations to work towards the cause by partnering with them. **Sightsavers** in India has partnered with state governments in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Odisha to work towards quality education for children with visual impairment. Sightsavers provided assistive devices to around 4,000 children with visual impairment in the year, 2017 and gave human resource training to 58,002 teachers.

In 2022 the programme supported more than 6,000 learners with visual impairments enrolled in mainstream primary and secondary schools. It is one of the programmes to win the Zero Project Award for Innovative Practices, 2024. - Eight -State Inclusive Education Programme. The project started in five districts in 2018, and by 2023 it has been scaled up to 20 districts in eight states.

Project Inclusion, an initiative of the Sri Aurobindo Society, was launched in 2016 as a nation-wide program designed to empower teachers and special educators in India to identify and create an inclusive learning environment for students with learning difficulties as a result of NDD (Neuro-developmental Disorders). The project works to promote inclusivity

in the classroom by following three phases - training and sensitisation of teachers, screening children for learning difficulties, and implementing interventions and remedial training.

Project Inclusion has been successful in training 70,000 teachers across 20 states and Union Territories and screened 18000 students with probable NDD so far.

Another stellar organization that works with children with special needs (CwSN) is Manovikas Kendra, a non-profit organization in Kolkata that provides specialized services for children with special needs. Manochetna Academic & Research Centre (MARC) is the educational wing of Manovikas Kendra, established in 2012. MARC's mission is to improve the educational experience of at-risk students in mainstream schools by creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. MARC offers therapy sessions for children with learning difficulties, including: Psychometry tests, psychological counseling, Coaching after school, and Free intervention in government schools. In the decade of its functioning Manochetna has trained over 1000 teachers in special education and has helped around 500 students with LD in mainstream schools to appear for board exams.

## II. CONCLUSION:

The above list of NGO's working in the field of inclusive education in India is of course not exhaustive. There are many more who are carrying on this work on a smaller scale; however, I have tried to include the more notable ones. CRY is a leading organization that works on advocacy and providing an enabling environment to children from all backgrounds including those with special needs. Sarthak Educational Trust is involved in identifying and screening children with disabilities in government schools. Sol's ARC provides educational support to those in need through creating inclusive content and methodology and then helping teachers to make use of these resources, as well as identifying and supporting those with learning disabilities through app-based solutions. Learning Curve Life Skills Foundation, Deepalaya, Sambhav Foundation, Raised Lines Foundation - all these NGO's besides many others, work in their own capacity to increase access to education and support children with special needs.

What comes through is the dedication and hard work of the NGO's that has made possible access to mainstream education by children with special needs. The model that seems to work well is a partnership between governmental programmes such as Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and different NGO's - in this way the reach of the programme is enhanced and many more children with special needs can be brought under the umbrella of education. A major barrier in the functioning of such NGO's is the uncertainty of acquiring sufficient funds for their various programmes. The Government needs to do much more in this regard. Financial support as well as other resources will go a long way in enabling NGO's to play an even more extensive role in implementing inclusive education in the country, as envisaged in various policy documents. The educational landscape in India has broadened as a result of the dedicated work of various NGO's that has increased accessibility to education by all, particularly by those children with special needs who would otherwise have been left out of the educational ambit.

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