

How Far Are We From Achieving Inclusive Education Through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?

Ms. Deepika Rajawat

Ph.D. Scholar Department of Education [CASE], The M. S. University of Baroda, Vadodara
Corresponding Author': Ms. Deepika Rajawat

Abstract: Why when a child is born with disabilities s/he is considered a burden to the family? Why does the society treat them as a taboo? Is it the mistake of only parents? Or the entire system and society is to blame for? Which has till now not become strong enough to support such children and take care of their needs? Education to the children is neither a privilege nor a favor but a basic human right and these special needs children too have that right. In order to change the mindset of Indian society it is important to educate these children and grant them their right. Then only this taboo can be get rid of. These children need to be educated and that too in the way, that they don't feel sympathized nor a burden. They need to be treated as normal human beings along with normal children. Nothing gives them joy then playing and studying with other children in the schools. It is this where the Inclusive education plays an important role. Inclusive education means education of all students, where all students are equal participants in the learning process. But is it true? Are they really the equal participants? These are the children who need our love and humaneness from us, the family and society. And it's high time that we as a society take care of it. SSA is playing a pivotal role in inclusive education. But we are still quite far from achieving it. So what are the areas where we still need to ponder over?

Keywords: IE, SSA, RT, IEP

Date of Submission: 05-01-2018

Date of acceptance: 25-01-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

There are more than one billion "persons with disabilities" in the world, 10% of whom are children mostly living in developing countries (Sharma, 2015). Within the United Nations (UN) the term "disability" is defined as "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Negative societal attitudes founded on ignorance often cause children with disabilities to be perceived as different, dependent, and incapable, which leads to exclusion via marginalization, institutionalization, abandonment, or neglect. The magnitude of exclusion a child with disabilities faces depends not only on social attitudes, but also on contextual factors such as class, culture, location, disability type, and overall physical, political, and attitudinal barriers of their environment. Exclusion is also compounded by the frequent invisibility of children with disabilities as parents hide their children's disabilities to avoid ostracism or countries inadequately identify and assess children with disabilities. While the level and type of exclusion varies from child to child, the results are the same: children with disabilities are defined and judged by what they are missing rather than what they can offer. Inclusive Education is a step taken to remove all these barriers and discrimination and bring these children with disabilities or **Children with Special Needs (CWSN)** (having disabilities like blindness, low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, orthopedically handicapped, mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities (UNESCO, 1994)) into mainstream and change the curriculum and teaching methodologies in this way that it takes care of their needs along with other children in the class. This will make them feel normal and also been treated equally by other children in the class because then there will be no question of segregation or discrimination. This step will slowly and steadily also bring the change in the attitudes of the children studying with them and the society at large.

Inclusive Education:

The origin of Inclusive Education took place at Salamanca wherein The 'Salamanca Statement' adopted at the 'World Conference on Special Educational Needs: Access and Quality' called upon all governments and urged them to: Adopt as a matter of law or policy the principles of Inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (UNESCO, 1994).

In **developed nations** education is largely inclusive of girls, the disadvantaged and the ethnic groups. For them the centre of focus lies on including special children i.e children with disabilities physical, mental and learning difficulties, who were earlier getting education in separate special schools. Therefore, the discourse on inclusive education in developed countries mostly centers on the extension of special education, or at most a reform in special education. These nations believed medical treatments to these children and then fitting them into education, but now they have sensed that it should be the other way round i.e. Bringing children into the classrooms and changing the teaching and learning techniques and curriculum accordingly so that they easily fit into the classrooms along with other children.

But in **developing countries** the situation is not as clear as developed nations. Here since centuries the parents have been hiding special kids from the society and hence the society is not very used to seeing special kids or how to behave with these special children.

In India a majority of children with special needs do not receive any formal education. This is because children with disabilities and learning deficiencies are segregated from mainstream schools and other regular routines and social activities of normal children. The parents here are embarrassed and consider them as burden. The CWSN of poor families, farmers and labourers cannot earn and bring money at home and on the other hand require someone to look after them, which makes them burden for their families. The initiation of Inclusive Education in the schools is very heartwarming for them because they can leave their kids in the schools while they go for work and for that they don't even have to leave behind any member of their family. But still the Lack of flexibility in curriculum, lack of teachers trained in Special education, inability to fend for them and thus being bullied by others in the class and not getting adequate attention from the teachers are some of the common issues. All these may result in the child not getting a fair inclusive education and that too when India is already striving to achieve universal education goal and providing RTE to every child up to 14 yrs of age. As a result, the number of children with special needs receiving higher education is still not at par.

SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) is an initiative of the Government of India to Universalize Elementary Education. SSA is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. However, UEE cannot be achieved unless children with special needs are also provided access to education. Hence, education of CWSN is an essential part of the SSA framework.

Education of CWSN under SSA: SSA is an endeavour to provide eight years of quality education to all children in the 6-14 age group by 2010. The objectives of SSA mainly focus on increasing access, enrolment and retention of all children as well as improving the quality of education. The objectives of SSA can only be realized, if CWSN are also included under the ambit of elementary education. Realizing the importance of integrating special children in regular schools, SSA framework has made adequate provisions for educating CWSN.

SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy. This means that no child having special needs should be deprived of the right to education. This has also been strengthened by the 86th Amendment to the Constitution, which makes Elementary Education a fundamental right of every child. The SSA framework, in line with the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights & Full Participation) Act, 1995 mentions that a child with special needs should be taught in an environment, which is best, suited to his/her, learning needs. These might include special schools, EGS/AIE or even Home Based Education (HBE). SSA also offers each district, flexibility to plan for Inclusive Education (IE) activities, depending on the number of children identified and the resources available to effectively implement the IE programme.

Three aspects of IE in SSA:

- Zero rejection policy
- Education to CWSN in an environment most suited to his/her needs
- Flexibility for planning

There are certain interventions suggested under SSA for inclusive education of disabled children. Researcher has taken some of these components which come under SSA for Inclusive Education (IE) and has tried to find out what challenges and difficulties are being faced and what changes need to be brought in and how feasible is IE? The source used by the researcher is Monitoring Reports of SSA-RTE.

These components are as follows:

1. Awareness and Early detection and identification
2. Resource teachers (RT's)
3. Teacher's Role
4. Teaching and learning process

5. Aids and appliances
6. Environmental Issues
7. School environment
8. Sensitizing the children and community
9. Being Human
10. Safety and Security
11. Parents support

1. Awareness and Early detection and identification: Difficulties and disorders such as SLD, Autism, (and also retardations in learning) require detailed examinations, tests and diagnosis, which may not be available or accessible to the children and families that attend the schools for their learning and education. It is therefore important to be careful before labeling a child with a disability. Mislabeling or identifying incorrectly would result in a child's needs not being understood. In many of our settings not being able to understand how the child makes sense of the world and learns, often results in the student being discriminated against. These misunderstandings can prevent the students in our schools from getting the educational interventions that would otherwise help them. The SSA offers an overview of assessment guidelines in identifying children with special needs. It is important also to determine their relevance to the context of the child. **But is this kind of awareness and diagnosis in there, in the rural area schools? When these tests and diagnosis are even lacking in urban private schools?**

2. Resource teachers: Resource Teachers visit the schools once in a week. Majority of them meet the principal and leave the premises. A very few of them stay and enter the classrooms and reach out to CWSN. Here too they are taken in separate classrooms with no mouth of word with the class teacher about the child. The RT's have the freedom to form an individual plan for CWSN, but how many of them do that is a question? The IE under SSA talks of providing education to CWSN in the environment which suits to their needs i.e. using Art Integrated Education (AIE), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) as well as Home Based Education (HBE). Hence an RT has so many options to choose and use accordingly. Even through HBE very few have benefited from it according to the report. That means something somewhere is not working effectively.

But there's no way of finding out what kind of plans resource teacher uses? What kind of techniques, aids and appliances are used and when? And how does s/he decides which child is to be handled with what technique? Two children with same disability might have different needs, so whether s/he has the awareness regarding it? And does the resource teacher takes care of those needs? The resource teacher have been trained and placed in the field but how? When? What? Needs to be documented and presented through SSA, so these obstacles can be removed and better facilities and the right to education could be availed to these special children.

3. Teacher's Role: As mentioned above, the teachers are not aware, what the resource teachers are doing with CWSN? How are they handling them? Until and unless there's a bridge between Resource Teacher and the class teacher the things cannot be smooth for the special child. Because RT comes just for once in a week and the child is with the class and the teacher everyday, so the class teacher too should have a little training of special education so that s/he can facilitate the child. **The individualized Educational plan (IEP) developed by RT should be explained to the CT so that s/he knows how to include the child in teaching learning process.** Here the behaviour of the class teacher is also very important. S/he should understand that the child has special needs and they can better develop when they are accepted by the teacher herself/himself and the other students in the class. Inclusive education means all learners, young people- with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, schools, and community educational settings with appropriate network of support services (Draft of Inclusive Education Scheme, MHRD, 2003). **So the teacher's role here is to include special children along with the other children in the same classroom and design instructional strategies considering all.** The implementation of RTE requires that every classroom be ready to include a CWSN in its teaching learning processes, assessment and evaluation procedures and extra-curricular activities. For all this to happen the teacher needs to teach CWSN along with other children. **But in most of the schools CWSN are just found sitting with the class but there is nothing inclusive about it. It still remains integrated. Are all the teachers actually designing strategies to include them all? Do they even have the ability and training to pull that?**

4. Teaching and learning process: In order to include CWSN in the classroom with other children, the teacher should be aware of the learning styles of both the CWSN as well the other students of the class. The affirmation of learning styles and communication patterns encourages the children to participate better in the classroom processes. For example, tactile learners benefit from hands on activities and/or learning by doing, kinesthetic learners learn through movement and playing games, visual learners learn best through pictures and graphics and have the opportunity to see what everyone else is creating, auditory learners learn better through

dialogue, discussions and debates and by talking about what they are doing. **Have the whole class engage in an activity that the CWSN is strong at. This will be an actual inclusive education where the children with disability sit and learn along with other children. But have we reached to that level where the learning styles of CWSN are identified and then matched with other children in class?**

The implementation of RTE requires that every classroom be ready to include a CWSN in its teaching learning processes, assessment and evaluation procedures and extra-curricular activities. But is it really happening to that level?

When there is not even a connection between the class teacher and the RT, is it possible to help CWSN in his/her learning process? The teacher leaves everything on RT and the RT takes the child to a separate room, then where's the inclusion? The CT also has to know about CWSN needs and requirements and how to reach to that child? Then only the teaching learning process of the child can initiate and how to teach them along with other kids in the same classroom is a challenge for which the CT's are not prepared or trained enough. CT's should also plan the strategies and that should be under the guidance of RT's if they are not enough trained so that they can actually impart IE.

5. Aids and appliances: Under SSA- Inclusive Education, The various hearing aids, visionary aids, teaching and learning aids are sanctioned but it's not available at all the schools and even if they are, then not much of them are used. **How frequently these aids are used? Because it's only used by RT's who visit once a week and how relevantly used is unknown.**

6. Environmental Issues: Further, many children have different learning styles, or face demanding conditions outside of school such as poverty, illiteracy of parents, lack of adequate or appropriate care, taking care of younger siblings, household chores, labor or even abuse. These also impact their ability to stay attentive, focused, and/or learn. Every day is a new fight for such kids and their families. The government has started various schemes which try to counter these issues but there should be awareness too among the people, regarding various schemes and how they can benefit from them. Given the complexities surrounding the issue, various strategies should be designed in the classrooms, instructions and activities that are inclusive to different learning styles and needs. It is therefore important to first rule out any environmental issues that may be impacting the student's learning such as too many distractions, poor visibility, other health issues fatigue, nutrition deficiencies etc. **Does the system takes enough care to remove such environmental issues? Even if it tries to do it, are the parents having awareness regarding the various schemes that the government has initiated to help them? To what extent is it successful in removing these distractions?**

7. School environment: These children need to be educated and that too in the way, that they don't feel sympathized nor a burden. They need to be treated as normal human beings along with normal children. Nothing gives them joy then playing and studying with other children in the schools. The school environment should be a healthy environment including other children, teachers, staff, principal etc. When we are talking of inclusive education, all should be sensitized and little bit trained from lowest level to highest in order to provide a better and inclusive environment to the child.

8. Sensitizing the children and community: The teacher should sensitize the other students in the class for that special child (disabilities like blindness, low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, orthopedically handicapped, mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities.) Making them realize that these children being deprived of so many things, they still try so hard for learning, and so as friends they too should help them, respect them, include them but not sympathize with them. **So the readiness of help should be there but not sympathy. The children should realize the gift that they have been bestowed upon by god, a healthy body and they should value it.** The special children need to be educated and that too in the way, that they don't feel sympathized nor a burden. They need to be treated as normal human beings along with normal children. Nothing gives them joy then playing and studying with other children in the schools. This much sensitization should be there. Even the community should be sensitized so as to not consider CWSN as burden but a human being who has many other abilities which is quite difficult. The families of poor and disadvantaged groups or laborers and farmers consider CWSN as curse since their entire family earns. For them each and every hand counts, which might be children too, because they take their children on farms and for labor work, but with a CWSN they cannot do so. They have to leave them behind as well as another family member to look after them. So for the family, these CWSN become burden. **Can these problems be removed by inclusive education?**

9. Being Human: The teacher's first and foremost characteristic required here is being human. Teacher should go to that level where s/he can feel what a CWSN feels. They need special care, love and understanding. The teacher should be able to feel their pain, inability, frustration and above all their needs. Then only s/he can work for them. S/he should realize that they too are human beings and a disability does not deprive them of their right to live and get education. Whatever mindset a teacher has while entering a class s/he should not forget that they are CWSN and their families hope and they deserve the same respect and dignity.

10. Safety and Security: There are so many CWSN who are mentally ill or disabled and are in their teens. They undergo so much of physical changes and hormonal changes which they do not understand. They are unable to understand their opposite sex attraction and so they easily fall prey to physical and sexual abuse. They can be easily misled by the staff members of schools, peons, chaukidars (watchmen) etc. For such children their families prefer to keep them at home in front of their eyes. Orthopedically handicap has found great benefits from inclusive education but the visually impaired and MR females, they need different treatment and care. So the girls, once they reach the age of 10 and above, their families are forced to take them out of school, increasing the number of girl dropouts. Hence safety of such children is of utmost importance and should be at priority for the Government. Winning the trust of their families is very important, that they can trust the school with their children. **But has this kind of trust been developed and safety provided by schools?**

11. Parents support: The presence of a supporting parent and family is the most important thing in inclusive education. The CWSN child if given support and facilities; can do wonders, which has been seen in many cases. If the mother or sibling wants to accompany a child s/he should be allowed in the school premises to be with the child. The reason being that the parent can work as a shadow teacher, since the child knows and trusts a mother more and the mother understands her child better. Drastic development was seen in a case where a CWSN was accompanied by his mother for the entire year. (SSA Report)

12. Resources support:

- Visit of RT to schools and interaction with children, teachers and parents.
- Attending Medical camps
- Regular visits to resource room

are few of the tasks that comes in resource support. BRC has one Resource room for several schools where The RT's visit and train teachers how to handle special children? The parents are also taught several activities of their child's level. If a child is physically handicapped, certain exercises are taught to them, how to hold pencil, how to strengthen their gross and fine motor development etc. these parents along with CWSN has to visit resource room once in a week. Medical assessments are done in the medical camp which is organized once in a year. According to these medical assessments RT's can prepare their individualized plan for CWSN. Further visit of RT to schools once in a week is to work upon CWSN. IF RT wants s/he can also provide HBE to the child. **But is the change possible by the amount of time given to CWSN by an RT i.e. just once in week, especially where everything is mostly left in the hands of RT's?**

In the end I would say that a classroom will reflect the spirit of inclusivity when the students witness Teachers efforts to be inclusive of all and begin internalizing it themselves. This is demonstrated in teachers approach to the students, teachers' child-friendly and inclusive language, teaching practices and classroom organization. When all the students feel included, it will reflect in their own approach to each other, making teachers work at creating inclusivity easier. The questions raised by the author like: **Is there an Awareness in rural areas regarding Early detection of disability and identification? Even when the camps are being arranged, are they labelling them correctly? Are we ensuring the ways of finding out what kind of IEP's resource teacher uses? What kind of techniques, aids and appliances are used, when and how frequently? And how does s/he decides which child is to be handled with what technique? Two children with same disability might have different needs, so whether s/he has the awareness regarding it? And does s/he collaborate with Classroom teacher because that is a big question seeing the above scenario where RT visits school once or twice? Do the classroom teacher takes care of those needs? The resource teacher have been trained and placed in the field but how? When? What? needs to be documented and presented through SSA. The individualized Educational plan (IEP) developed by RT should be explained to the CT so that s/he knows how to include the child in teaching learning process. Have we reached to that level where the learning styles of CWSN are identified and then matched with other children in class? The implementation of RTE requires that every classroom be ready to include a CWSN in its teaching learning processes, assessment and evaluation procedures and extra-curricular activities. But is it really happening to that level, when there is not even a connection between the class teacher and the RT, is it possible to help CWSN in his/her learning process?** All these questions and many others raised above if answered can hopefully, enable in creating an inclusive classroom, where all in the classroom feel that they are equal participants to what the teacher, has to teach them.

REFERENCES

- [1]. UNESCO (1994). The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education. Paris: UNESCO. Sharma, A., (2015). Perspectives on Inclusive Education with Reference to United Nations. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 3(5): 317-321, 2015 <http://www.hrpub.org> DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2015.030502
- [2]. NCERT (2014). *Including Children with Special Needs*. New Delhi: NCERT

- [3]. 1st Half Yearly Monitoring Report of on SSA –RTE for the State of Gujarat for the period of 1st October, 2013 to 31st March, 2014
- [4]. 2nd Half Yearly Monitoring Report of SSA –RTE for the State of Gujarat for the period of 1st October, 2013 to 31st March, 2014
- [5]. 2nd Half Yearly Monitoring Report of on SSA –RTE for the UT of *DIU* for the period of 1st October, 2013 to 31st March, 2014
- [6]. 1st Half Yearly Monitoring Report of on SSA –RTE for the State of Gujarat for the period of 1st April, 2014 to 30th September, 2014
- [7]. 2nd Half Yearly Monitoring Report of on SSA –RTE for the Union Territory of DAMAN and DIU for the period of 1st October, 2014 to 31st March, 2015

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Ms. Deepika Rajawat "How Far Are We From Achieving Inclusive Education Through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 1, 2018, pp. 07-12.