SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT :
Indian society is characterized as multi ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. There are different forms of social exclusion associated with social identities such as caste, class, tribe, gender, religious, etc. In India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been socially underprivileged, educationally backward and economically deprived for centuries. Historically both the groups were denied the social access to education. Scheduled Castes socially designated as 'untouchables' were systematically segregated from the village and were denied to access to education. The exclusion of the Scheduled Tribes on the other hand based on different set of social and cultural factors. One of the studies they were defined as the "double disadvantaged group" owing to their marginalization. (Kaur, Amritpal, et. al. 2014). Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

Inclusive education is a process of increasing the participation of all students in school, including those with disabilities (Ainscow 2000). It is about restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality. It is an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It implies all learners, young people- with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common preschool provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. By focusing on inclusive education, researcher's aim to bridge the gap between marginalized groups and the broader society, providing access to quality education and fostering an environment of fairness, respect, and equal rights for all. This study will investigate the broader societal benefits of inclusive education, including its potential to foster social cohesion and strengthen community ties by integrating marginalized groups and understand to the teachers how inclusive education practices contribute to creating equitable educational outcomes for marginalized students.

KEYWORDS *: Inclusion, Disability, Social Exclusion, Inclusive Education, School and learning*

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INTRODUCTION

India is the seventh largest and the second most populous nation of the world occupying 2.4 % of the total world area. It contains about 16.0 % of the world's population living in a variety of social, economic, geographical and ecological conditions. It has a long history spanning over five thousand years after Christ. It has a cultural heritage handed down by the immigrant Aryans from across the Himalayas, the native Dravidians, and the invading civilizations. Its social, economic and cultural diversities are also reflected in habitat conditions in rural, urban and semi-urban areas. (Bhati, A. K. et al. 2013). Inclusion is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non-formal educational settings. Rather than being a marginal issue on how some learners can be integrated in mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims towards enabling teachers and learners both to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment, rather than a problem. Inclusion emphasizes providing opportunities for equal participation of persons with disabilities (physical, social and/or emotional) whenever possible into general education, but leaves open the possibility of personal choice and options for special assistance and facilities for those who need it.

National Curriculum Framework, (NCERT, 2005) reiterates the importance of including and retaining all children in school through a programme that reaffirms the value of each child and enables all children to experience dignity and the confidence to learn. It States "Schools, therefore, have a responsibility of providing a flexible curriculum that is accessible to all students. Teaching and Learning processes in the classroom should be planned to respond to the diverse needs of students. Teachers should explore various strategies to provide education for children having disabilities". The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) a centrally sponsored Scheme is implementing many Programmes and innovative Practices with an aim to fulfill the objectives of Universalisation and quality in education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education is an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It implies all learners, young people- with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common preschool provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services.

THE SALAMANCA STATEMENT

Reaffirming the right to education of every individual, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renewing the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences,

Recalling the several United Nations declarations culminating in the 1993 United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which urges States to ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the education system?

PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION

➢ Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
➢ Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
➢ Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
➢ Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,

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➢ Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The main objectives of this study are:
- To examine the relationship between inclusive education and social inclusion: This includes understanding how inclusive education practices contribute to creating equitable educational outcomes for marginalized students.
- To analyse the barriers to achieving social inclusion in education: This includes identifying systemic, infrastructural, and social challenges that prevent full inclusion in educational institutions.
- To investigate the role of teachers, policymakers, and communities in promoting inclusive education: Understanding how various stakeholders contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive education practices in educational institutions.
- To develop strategies for promoting inclusive education in diverse contexts: Offering practical recommendations for overcoming challenges and enhancing inclusive education systems globally.

Methodology
This study was adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Research Design
- Quantitative Methodology: Surveys and questionnaires were distributed to educators, students, and parents to collect data on their experiences and perceptions of inclusive education. Data will be analyzed statistically to identify patterns and correlations between inclusive education practices and social inclusion outcomes.
- Qualitative Methodology: Interviews and focus groups were conducted with teachers, school administrators, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. The qualitative data was allowed for a more exploration of the personal experiences and challenges faced in inclusive educational environments.

Sampling
- Selection of Population: The study was focus on educators, students (both with and without disabilities), parents, and stakeholders of the educational institutions.
- Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives from different stakeholders involved in inclusive education.

Data Collection
- Surveys and Questionnaires: These was included both closed and open-ended questions to collect the data. Key topics will include perceptions of inclusivity, challenges faced, and outcomes of inclusive practices.
- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, parents and stakeholders. The interviews will allow participants to share their personal insights into the challenges and benefits of inclusive education.

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SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Indian society is characterized as multi ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. Despite the provisions in the constitution to meet the educational requirements of groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the likelihood of exclusion is compounded if the children live in rural areas and are female. The recent statistics reveals that there is a wide gender and social disparity in enrolment, retention and learning achievement at the primary stage. (Kaur, Amritpal, et. al. 2014)

Social exclusion can be defined as "the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society in which he or she lives" (Papadopulos, 2001). More concisely, it is "the denial of equal access to opportunities Imposed by certain groups of society upon others" (Behrman and Others, 2003).

Education exclusion is a facet of social exclusion and manifests itself in a spectrum of social and psychological inequalities. The stronger form of educational exclusion arises when the individuals and groups are denied the resources and facilities within the educational system. The other and soft form of exclusion occurs by manipulation of the delivery of educational goods and services to favor some individuals and groups at the expense of others or discriminatory attitudes towards particular children (Das, Pankaj, 2010).

Education is considered as one of the most important tool of human and social development. Basic Education in India is a social good because of its unique characteristics of non-excludable and non-rivalry in nature. Therefore, the general assumption is that education is for all and no one is excluded from the access of the privilege of this type of social good. Though education is a social good and if access to education is a necessary pre requisite for access to a range of other social opportunities, then who can be educated and how became a fundamental concern of the policy makers at the policy level. Owing to its nature of democracy, just after independence much emphasis was given to formulate an inclusive education system in the country for achieving the universal primary education along with the universal literacy for achieving the political agenda of nation-building on the part of a newly independent country like India. As a result, along with the constitutional commitment to free and compulsory education to all children, the State had to focus on the extension of physical access to schooling, i.e. by establishing new schools and raising the social demand for education among the masses.

Although the expansion of education began rapidly in the initial years of planning and later in the subsequent years, but it failed to ensure the universal access and full participation of children in the educational process across the castes, classes and regions. Yet, access to education was not easy even then and now under all circumstances and where it is made easy, the quality of education provided often leaves much to be desired (Beteille, 2008).

ANALYSIS OF POLICY CONTEXT FOR INCLUSION IN INDIA

The concern for equity in policy making in education are addressed through the concept of inclusive education. But the concept of very inclusive education is based on inclusive growth. The term inclusive education implies the development strategies to focus on the poor, the marginalized, the neglected, and the disadvantaged and deprived sections of society and the backward regions of country. Thus inclusive growth presupposes education-good quality education that is accessible to all (Das, Pankaj, 2010).

TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

It is very interesting to visualize a functional inclusive classroom in the system. When we talk of inclusive School or an Inclusive classroom in the system we tend to visualize a Heterogeneous group of students, which is dynamic interactive and engaged in various kind of activities being performed by the teacher and her students. Inclusive Approach does not mean the fulfillment of special needs in

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classroom. Everybody thinks that Inclusive Education is only possible where there are disabled children. To be a good teacher means reacting to the interests of different children and building teaching on what the children already know, which may sometimes prove to be difficult. Inclusion basically is an attitude of acceptance of diversities.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH
Research suggests that the teachers must have the:

- Ability to learn how to give values all kinds of skills that students bring to a class, not just the academic skills. In doing this, teachers will make it explicit that in their classrooms they value all skills.
- Ability to make appropriate expectations for each student regardless of the student's capabilities. If teachers can do this, it allows all students to be included in a class and school.
- Ability to take advantage of children's individual interests and use their internal motivation for developing needed skills.
- The teachers must be able to develop the inclusive education practices contribute to creating equitable educational outcomes for marginalized students.
- Recognize and respond to the diversity of students in their classroom.
- Accommodate to students different learning styles and rates of learning by employing a range of teaching methods, including cooperative group.
- Seek to enhance the self-esteem of all students
- Create an inclusive community that extends beyond the walls of the school.
- Learning, peer tutoring, team teaching and individualized instruction.
- Identify and overcome barriers to learning.
- Inclusive Education should be made as a compulsory subject at curriculum of teacher Education. Orientation programs should be conducted for in-service teachers.
- Be aware of the rights of students with education support needs.
- Developing community-school mechanism to identify children not in school as well as develop activities to ensure that children enroll in school and learn.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion takes in everybody; reject nobody on any basis whatsoever. However, it believes to taking in children with disability or from different religious community or SC, ST or any other minority groups and trying to make them adjust to the existing routine of the existing school. Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). To meet this challenge, teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a classroom culture where all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn. India has travelled a long distance since the days of special schools and now the entire contemporary education scenario in the country is responding to the call of the hour. Inclusive Approach does not mean the fulfillment of special needs in classroom. Everybody thinks that Inclusive Education is only possible where there are disabled children. But in reality, Inclusive Education is an approach through which variety of learning needs are covered it may be of normal or special children. Inclusion is to be achieved in its true sense and it emerges as an equation i. e. ACCESS + COMMITMENT= INCLUSION.

Inclusive education serves as a fundamental tool for achieving greater social inclusion, equity, and justice. By addressing the barriers to inclusion and promoting effective strategies, education systems can play a critical role in creating a more just and equitable society for all. This study will

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contribute to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education, providing practical insights and recommendations to stakeholders committed to creating inclusive learning environments.

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