

## COUNTRY REPORT .(2007)

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### PRINT VERSION

Traditionally country papers deal only with the latest developments in the disability history of a country. As a matter of interest however and to establish the continuing link in attitudes and approaches in ancient India towards disability and the scenario today I trace very briefly the disability history in India.

Looking back at the centuries of Indian history we find that people with disability have always found a place in society. Even as far back as 187 BC mention has been made of mental retardation in the Garba Upanishad, the Hindu religious text. Patanjali , who is credited with having been the one who put together the series of actions we call Yoga , included disabled persons for yoga therapy ,which he claimed benefited even those with intellectual impairments .In the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> BC India was ruled by the Mauryan Dynasty, and it is recorded that King Kautilya passed an edict banning both verbal and behavioral abuse of persons with any kind of a disability and even recognized their right to property and employment . Later King Ashoka, who is well know for his link with Buddhism established hospitals and asylums for all persons with disability. Learning was imparted through Gurukuls , which were centers of education available to all , disabled and non disabled .

But a significant milestone was around the 1<sup>st</sup> C B.C according to a legend, which tells us the story of a king who was told that his three sons were “dull witted”. The crucial question now was “Who would look after his kingdom after the king was no more?” So, he began a nation wide hunt for someone who would be able to tutor his dull witted sons. The search ended, we are told, with Visnusarman a courtier who assured the king that he would devise special ways of teaching the royal pupils .The legend goes on to tell us of how Visnusarman developed his strategy for education using a collection of animal fables, which taught the princes matters related to diplomacy and values honored universally This resulted in “The

Panchatantra ”, the ancient Indian collection of animal fables from around 1000 BC, and is perhaps the first book on special education and widely read even today..

So, in India, we have a rich cultural legacy for inclusion of people with disability and India has always been and is still an inclusive society in the sense that a very wide variety of cultural and religious beliefs exist side by side.

Skipping over the decades when India was invaded by the Muslims, the Mughals and later, the British, we see that during the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many changes were taking place and several initiatives are documented showing that the importance of educating and providing welfare measures for the intellectually disabled as well as other disabled was well understood and efforts were being made constantly to provide for them.

At the end of the second world, the visionary Kothari Commission recommended the inclusion of all children with disabilities in mainstream schools in their plan of Action (Gupta 1984: Jangira 1995)

When India became free of the British colonizers in **1947** the Indian government began to become formally involved in policy decisions at a national level and in **1953** the Central Social Welfare Board was formed which took up welfare measures for the population scarred by partition and disability formed a part of its mandate.

## INTEGRATED EDUCATION FOR THE CHILD WITH DISABILITY

In **1974**, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment achieved a major shift in education for the child with disability with the launch of the comprehensive Integrated Education for the Disabled Child (IEDC). This was the forerunner of later schemes that would focus primarily on the child with disability and not club them with schemes for children in general. To date, over 1.24 lakh children with disabilities have been integrated in over 20,000 mainstream schools under the Integrated Education for Disabled Children’s Scheme of the Ministry of HRD. In a bid towards the implementation of this project, the Government launched Project Integrated Education Development (PIED), which provided teacher training, methodology for identification of children and school facilities as support services.

Several measures established earlier, continue to be effective in the overall welfare of persons with disabilities. To name a few, these are the National institutes for the different categories of disability .For the Visually Handicapped in Dehra Dun, for the hearing handicapped in Mumbai, for the mentally handicapped in Secunderabad, for the orthopaedically handicapped in Kolkatta, and for the physically handicapped in Delhi. Apart from these the National institute for Rehabilitation and the other rehabilitation centers such as the Regional Rehabilitation Centers and the District Disability Rehabilitation centers continue providing services However a major change for the better is the involvement of State governments making them more responsible and participatory in the rehabilitation and welfare of persons in their respective States. From April 2006, The National Institute for the empowerment of persons with multiple disabilities has begun functioning in Chennai and caters to very wide range of service needs.

#### NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION (NPE)

In **1986** India adopted the National Policy on Education (NPE) that for the first time equality of opportunity was formally stated as a goal of education The DPEP the District Primary Education Program, which followed in 1994 focused on integration in the areas of teacher training, removing architectural barriers and in providing appropriate aids and to achieve the objectives of the Universalisation of Primary education It covers a total of 219 districts in 15 States and expansion of this scheme in 14 other districts is under way. Though it did not specify a disability focus it led the way to the formulation of the National Policy for Persons with Disability, which was announced by the Government end of March **2006**.

The National Policy focused on prevention of disabilities as also physical and economic rehabilitation .In a major shift from a single stakeholder for welfare of persons with disability, the policy is now being implemented by a number of stake holders including the Ministries and Departments of the Central Government, State Governments /Union territories, Panchayati Raj (Village level government bodies) Institutions and NGO's. An Inter-Ministerial Body at the Central, State and District levels monitors the implementation of this policy. Education of children with disability has been part of the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and the Programme of Action (1992)

# A DECADE OF DEVELOPMENTS

The last decade has seen the passing of three major legislations on disability by the Government of India. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for the implementation of these Acts

#### 1.The Rehabilitation Council of India Act (34 Of 1992),

The main achievements are the 56 long and short-term courses for 16 categories of professionals that have been standardized and are being provided by various universities. The foundation course for in-service teachers has also been implemented which will facilitate the SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN. A central rehabilitation register is being maintained and has registered 1176 professionals and 1791

This Act has been established to regulate and monitor the training of rehabilitation professionals and promote the research of rehabilitation measures.

#### 2.Persons with Disability Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act (1995), (01 of 1996)

The Government of India has enacted the legislation, Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and Full Participation) Act, 1995 (PWD Act) to achieve amongst other things, the goal of providing access to free education in an appropriate environment to all learners with disabilities till s/he attains the age of eighteen years. The Act endeavors to promote the integration of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Under this Act the office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities has been set up .Its mandate is to safeguard the rights and facilities to all persons with disability .The Act also empowers the Chief Commissioner to issue suo –moto notice on any non compliance of rules and regulations, violations and non implementation.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) has recommended inclusive schools for learners with special educational needs by making appropriate modifications in the content, presentation and transaction strategies, preparing teachers and developing learning friendly evaluation procedures.

### 3. National Trust

(The full title is National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy , Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities.)

The main objectives of the National Trust are to enable persons with disabilities to live as independently and as fully as possible, to extend support to registered organizations providing need based services, to evolve procedure for appointment of legal guardians for persons with disabilities. Rs 100 Crores has been provided by the Federal Government toward the corpus of the Trust.

The National trust is aided by the State Nodal Agency Centers (SNAC), which functions as Information centers, facilitators, Project mentors, Training Centers, and net workers. 13 Information Centers are presently functioning in 22 SNACS.

India is one of the signatories of The UN Convention on disability, which concluded in August 2006, as well as of the earlier Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) that emphasizes access to quality education for all. The Statement endorses the need for fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach to inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs by implementing practical and strategic changes.

The positive changes in the disability scenario in India augers well for future developments .A major plus is the fact that all policies and formulations of policies are now done with a majority consensus of stake holders such as NGOs and other service providers and the disabled themselves

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