Education of Students with Disabilities: An Evaluation of the Indian Educational Policies

Tanmoy Bhattacharya

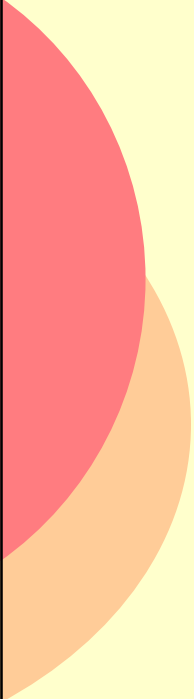Equal Opportunity Cell

University of Delhi

The Central Thesis

- Segregation as a political practice was already well established and therefore lend itself readily when Special Education emerged out of Enlightenment (18th C). Within the Indian context this is shown by:
  - Segregationist practices in Women's Education, 1948-49 University Education Commission
  - Consistent use of integration as the operative term
  - Emphasis on Special Education (e.g. B.Ed. (Special Education) of RCI)
  - Home-based education, Distance education
  - Encouraging NGOs as evading responsibility?

Disability in Ancient & Medieval Periods

○ Egypt: 3000 – 1500 BC:
  - Causes and Cures of disability
  - Personal and social well-being of afflicted individuals Greeks (3rd, 4th C BC)
○ Romans (5th C BC): Roman jurists created the social institutions such as guardianships
○ Early Romans (4-6th C): Hospices
○ 11th -13th C: Church law discriminated against disabled people; witch hunt

(Winzer, 1993)

History of Education of Disabled People

- Renaissance: 14-16th C: humanism art led to more focus on the 'body'; Gironimo Cardano (1501-1576)
- 1578 : Pedro Ponce de León
- 1620 : Jean Pablo Bonet
- 1662 : The Royal Society of London
- 1720 : Daniel Defoe: *The History of the Life and Surprising Adventures of Mr. Duncan Campbell*

History of Special Education

- Sociopolitical Origin: Ideas of Enlightenment (abolition of social classes and establishment of a just society)

- Middle of 18th C, in Britain, Europe, especially France

- By end of 18th C, special education became a part of education, but often with charity as the motive

Eugenicist Ideas

- Background:
  - Segregation
  - Special/ specialised education
- 20th Century (Eugenicist Ideas)
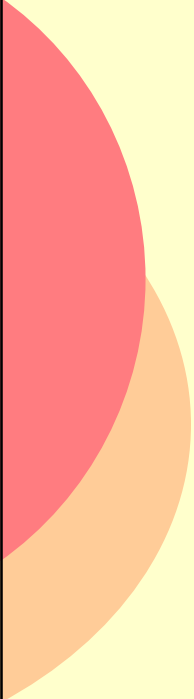- 1970s : Educational reform leads to greater segregation

The Indian Context

○ Emergence of the concept of Disability Rights in India through its National Policies on Education (NPEs)

○ Although, historically 'integration' has been the goal, segregation through Special Education/ Schools has found equal emphasis

○ University Education Commission, 1948-49 established the concept of "Special courses"

Examples of the Prevailing Attitude in Education

- "Children with special needs are unique individuals. Their uniqueness may be noticed in one or more of the following dimensions: vision, hearing, movement, …" (Dash, 2006: 3)
- Types of Exceptional Children → (negative direction): Visually Impaired, Blind and Low Vision, …. (Dash, 2006: 4)
- "… that the attitude of society towards the less fortunate children has changed over the centuries, … (Dash, 2006: 9)
- The "advice" given by the Governor of Uttarakhand, on the need for public awareness to awaken the people "to the love and not sympathy needed by these kids as God always compensates such people with extra abilities," (The Hindu (Delhi Edition), 4th Dec. 2009, page 5)

University Education Commission, 1948-49

○ Chapter XII: Women's Education:

"There cannot be an educated people without educated women. If general education had to be limited to men or to women, that opportunity should be given to women, for then it would most surely be passed on to the next generation"

○ Special Courses: Home Economics, Nursing, Teaching, Fine Arts

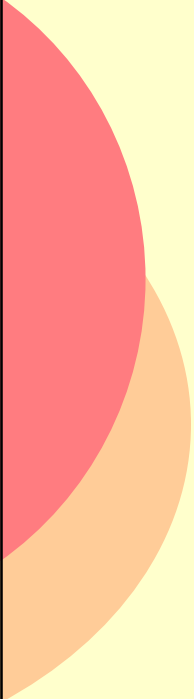○ The future of women's education

National Policies on Education

- National Policy on Education 1968
- National Policy on Education 1986
- NPERC 1991
- Programme of Action 1992
- IECYD
- PwD Act 1995

Integration Versus Inclusion

- The word integration is being used in the sense of inclusion in early NPEs

- In POA and later policies, integration is preferred and Inclusion kept out; also special education gets progressively more attention

- Advantages of Inclusive practices (example from Bhattacharya and Hidam, 2010)

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

(Bhattacharya, 2010)

- Problems with RTE
- How to make the RTE work *for* inclusion?
- A Three-Pronged Strategy