Towards Inclusive Learning

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The Notion of Inclusion and Related Ideas

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The term 'inclusion' has been used widely in scholarly discourses and policy debates. It has also been the focus of practitioners working with persons with disabilities, including children, and those working with marginalized sections of society. However, the notion of inclusion, especially inclusive education, has evolved over the years and has multiple interpretations. Inclusion is also conceptually and empirically linked to the ideas of disability, disadvantage, equality, non-discrimination, and equity. This article attempts to discuss the notion of inclusion and related ideas, and draws attention to potential areas of work.

Idea of Inclusive Education

The usage of the term 'inclusive education' is relatively more recent in the Indian context. The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), popularly known as the Kothari Commission Report, significantly shaped the education policy landscape. However, it did not use the term 'inclusive education'. The Commission used the phrase 'equalisation of education opportunity' to reaffirm the social objectives of education, values of social justice, and the role of education in guaranteeing an egalitarian society.

It recognized the presence of inequalities of educational opportunities, particularly in the context of the 'handicapped', girls, and the 'backward classes' including the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, denotified communities, and nomadic and semi-nomadic groups.

For each of these groups, the Report broadly suggested a two-fold strategy of 'integration' into general programs of education expansion and improvement, and 'special' provisions focusing particularly on education needs of the specific group.

This goal of 'equalisation of educational opportunity' was subsequently included in National Policy on Education 1968. Thereafter, the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Program of Action, 1992 also called for special efforts to be made to address different disadvantaged groups, including the minorities.

The idea of equalization of educational opportunity was operationalized through different programs and schemes for different groups. Almost fifty years ago, the term 'integrated education' came to be expressly used with the central government scheme promoting integration of children with mild and moderate disabilities into regular schools.

The 2009-10 revisions of the scheme continued using the same term, although it aimed to enable primary and secondary education of children with disabilities in an 'inclusive and enabling environment'. Although the term 'inclusive' was not

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explained, the scheme referenced international commitments like the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (2002), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006).

The RTE Act requires all authorities to ensure that there is a non-discriminatory school environment...

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was a landmark document. It pushed the imagination of inclusive education beyond the disability-focus. It emphasized the need for fundamental and radical shifts in education policy and paradigm as well. It suggested a guiding principle that "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions ... schools have to find ways of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities".

It also recognized that "human differences are normal and that learning must, accordingly, be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to preordained assumptions regarding the pace and nature of the learning process." It highlighted the importance of child-centered pedagogy.

Rather than the child having to adjust and fit-in a school, "inclusive schools need to respond to diverse learning needs and accommodate differences in learning styles and pace by developing appropriate curricula, teaching strategies and offering a continuum of support services to children". This idea of inclusive schools has been a powerful one, and has greatly influenced advocacy work on how schools should be imagined.

Inclusive education, as such, has not been defined by international covenants. But Article 24 of the UNCRPD recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to education and the State obligation to provide an inclusive education system at all levels, without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Subsequently, the General Comment 4 on this provision issued by the Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016 held that inclusive education is a fundamental human right, a principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, and acknowledges individuals' requirements and their ability to effectively be included in, and contribute to, society.

In the Indian context, the phrase 'equitable and inclusive education' is used in the National Education Policy, 2020. It recalls the role of education in achieving social justice and equality. In addition to specific measures for full inclusion and equity for all Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), it calls for change in school culture, changes in school curriculum, and sensitization of the school education system. This loosely aligns with the idea of inclusion purported under the Salamanca Declaration.

Disabilities, Disadvantages, Equality, Non-discrimination and Equity

A closer reading of the above-mentioned national and international commitments shows that the idea of inclusion is closely linked to the ideas of disabilities and disadvantages (who is the target group) and the ideas of equality, non-discrimination, and equity (what is the state obligation).

Disabilities and Disadvantages - The target of inclusive education is not limited to children with disabilities but includes children with certain disadvantages as well. The definitions of these terms provided under international covenants and national legislation give a useful explanation of these categories. According to the preamble of UNCRPD,

"disability is an evolving concept and ... [it] results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" implying that disability does not refer to a medical condition but is created due to the barriers that hinder equal participation of some categories of persons.

It further defines those with disabilities as having long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (based on Article 1 of UNCRPD). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) (2016) was framed on the same lines as the UNCRPD and uses the same definition. However, the RPWD Act also provides for a category of 'benchmark disability' which includes those having not less than forty percent of disability, from a list of 21 specified disabilities.

In the Indian context, the phrase 'equitable and inclusive education' is used in the National Education Policy, 2020.

What is important to note here is that disability implies presence of barriers and the specified list of disabilities provided in the Schedule can be amended by the central government. Although persons with disabilities also face multiple disadvantages, the idea of disadvantage is different and defined under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) (2009). This Act says "child belonging to disadvantaged group" means "a child with disability or a child belonging to the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, the socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage owing

to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor, as may be specified by the appropriate Government, by notification."

The state governments have further defined additional categories of children that fall under this category vide the State Rules under the RTE Act. These prescribed categories are similar to those acknowledged under the Kothari Commission and are referred to in the policy documents with the explicit aim of 'equalisation of educational opportunity'. Thus, as per the idea of inclusive education proposed by Salamanca Declaration, children who are defined as having disabilities as well as disadvantages would be entitled to inclusive education. Inclusive schools would be those that cater to the learning needs of children with disabilities and those with disadvantages.

Equality, Non-Discrimination, and Equity – If inclusive education is a right, it is important to identify what are the obligations of the state. The state has a duty to respect the right by recognizing it in its legislation, which it has done by way of adopting the RTE Act and the RPWD Act. The state also has the duty to protect the right from being violated by others, as well as the duty to fulfill the right by taking measures and making provisions for realization of the right. As per the RPWD Act, the government is required to make provisions that would allow persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights on an equal basis, receive equal protection and safety, have a right to equal recognition before law and enjoy equal opportunity.

Similarly, non-discrimination is recognized in both the RPWD Act as well as the RTE Act to protect equality of those with disabilities and disadvantage, respectively. The RPWD requires the government to ensure that there is no discrimination in terms of distinction, exclusion, restriction that curtails the enjoyment of rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities. The RTE Act requires all authorities to ensure that there is a non-

discriminatory school environment and discrimination or harassment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is eliminated.

If the government is committed to inclusive education, it would have to go beyond mere enrollment of all children in its schools.

However, the right to equality and non-discrimination requires the state to protect the rights-holders and ensure that transgressions do not take place. It does not require the state to fulfill or do anything proactively to bring children with disabilities and disadvantages into the schools, or provide additional resources that will enable inclusion.

It is in this context that the idea of equity becomes critical when talking about inclusive education. Equity is neither mentioned or defined in any of the international frameworks, including UNCRPD and Salamanca Declaration, nor is it mentioned or defined in national legislation like RTE Act or RPWD Act. Even the Kothari Commission Report and the national policy frameworks refer to equality of opportunity and not equity.

Thus, the law does not seem to see equity as being integral to the realisation of inclusive education. Equity is understood as fairness. But in relation to inclusive education, it would require governments to recognize that children with disabilities and disadvantages do not have a level playing field because they have to struggle with barriers as well biases. It would require governments to not only open schools for all, but also provide additional resources for those who are fighting barriers and biases. It requires not only provision of equal opportunities, but additional support that will help all children to participate equally.

Potential Areas of Work

In the Indian context, the understanding of inclusive education is yet to be fully operationalized. Although legislation has adopted the language used in the international commitments, it falls short of actual translation of the rhetoric into practice. For example, post-Salamanca and UNCRPD, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan mentioned inclusive education. But this was limited to the 'zero-rejection' policy, whereby no child could be rejected from a government school. However, 'zero rejection' only protects children from being removed from a school. It neither requires schools to become inclusive nor does it make the experiences of the children who are 'included' in the school enjoyable and wholesome.

If the government is committed to inclusive education, it would have to go beyond mere enrollment of all children in its schools. It would require an extensive exercise of educational planning that pays special attention to infrastructure, curricula, teacher training, learning resources, assessments, and taps the expertise and experience of special schools, parents, and organizations of persons with disabilities. Given that the idea of inclusive education goes beyond disabilities and also includes disadvantages, it would be particularly important to focus on the needs of those with multiple disadvantages and provide for their equitable participation in schooling.

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स्कूल को बच्चों के अनुरूप ढालने का एक उदाहरण
जीवन शिक्षा पहल

ब्रजेश और सविता सोहित

मुस्कान एक गैर सरकारी संस्था है जो 'जीवन शिक्षा पहल' नामक एक नवाचारी स्कूल का संचालन कर रही है। यह स्कूल उन बच्चों के लिए संचालित किया जा रहा है जो विभिन्न सामाजिक व राजनैतिक कारणों से स्कूल से छूट रहे हैं।

स्कूल में आनेवाले बच्चे भोपाल के कोटरा और एमपी नगर की बस्तियों में रहनेवाले मुख्यतः आदिवासी, दलित और अतिवंचित समुदायों के हैं। इन बस्तियों में जरूरत की मूलभूत सुविधाएँ जैसे— पानी, बिजली, शौचालय भी मुहैया नहीं हैं। लोग शौच के लिए खुले में जाते हैं। घर कच्चे-पक्के हैं, कहीं पट्टे हैं तो कहीं नहीं हैं। बच्चों के पालक दिहाड़ी मजदूरी या कबाड़ चुनने और अन्य ऐसे धन्धों में जुड़े हैं जो कि उनकी अस्थिर दैनिक कमाई के साधन हैं। दिहाड़ी मजदूरी के लिए पीठे (लेबर पॉइन्ट) पर जाकर काम की तलाश करना उनकी रोज सुबह की दिनचर्या का हिस्सा है। उन्हें कभी काम मिलता है तो कभी नहीं मिलता।

स्कूल के लिए एक अहम सवाल यह रहा है कि वह एक बराबरी और बेहतर समाज के निर्माण में योगदान दे जिसमें मेहनत-कशों को उनका स्थान मिल सके।

इस अस्थायीपन के चलते कई परिवारों के बच्चों के लिए नियमित चलने वाले स्कूलों में पढ़ना मुश्किल होता है। बच्चों का अधिकाँश समय खुद कमाई के जुगाड़ में, अपनी बसाहटों के आस-पास खेलते हुए या घर के कामों, जैसे— पानी भरने, चूल्हे के लिए लकड़ी ढूँढने, इत्यादि में जाता है। आधे से ज्यादा बच्चे कबाड़ बीनते हैं। बच्चे परिवार की आमदनी में महत्त्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाते हैं।

प्रारम्भिक वर्षों में किए गए प्रयास

प्रारम्भिक वर्षों में हम बच्चों को बस्ती में ही पढ़ाकर उन्हें मुख्यधारा के स्कूलों के लिए तैयार करते थे; जब बच्चे अपनी उम्र अनुसार स्कूली कक्षा के लिए तैयार हो जाते थे (जिसमें बहुत वक्त नहीं लगता था) तो हम बच्चों का स्कूलों में दाखिला करवा देते थे। स्कूल जाए बिना भी बच्चे एक साल में ही तीसरी और चौथी के स्तर तक की पढ़ाई पूरी कर लेते थे। सरकारी और प्राइवेट दोनों ही प्रकार के स्कूलों में बच्चों को दाखिल कराया गया। स्कूल में बच्चे खुश और सहज महसूस करें यह सुनिश्चित करने के लिए मुस्कान और बच्चों के परिवारों की ओर से बहुत कोशिशें की गईं।

माता-पिता की ओर से की गई कोशिशों में बच्चों को तैयार करके स्कूल भेजना, उनके लिए टिफिन तैयार करना, सीमित आमदनी के बावजूद स्कूल के खर्चों को पूरा करना शामिल था। बच्चे मुस्कान के अनौपचारिक केन्द्रों में स्कूल के पहले या बाद आकर कक्षा की पाठ्यचर्या पूरी करते थे। इन प्रयासों के बावजूद बच्चे स्कूलों से पूरी तरह सहज नहीं हुए थे। स्कूल जाने की शुरुआती खुशी जल्द ही स्कूल से भागने में बदल गई थी। कई बच्चे स्कूल में टिक नहीं पा रहे थे। जिन स्कूलों में बच्चे टिक रहे था वहाँ बच्चों को स्कूल से मिल रहे अनुभव को शिक्षा का नाम देना न तो आसान था और न ही वाजिब था।

स्कूलों से दूरी क्यों?

मुस्कान ने अपने स्तर पर बच्चों के स्कूल नहीं जाने के कारणों को समझा और महसूस किया। इसके लिए हमने बच्चों से बातचीत की जिससे हमें समझ आया कि स्कूल में ऐसा कुछ भी नहीं हो रहा था जो बच्चों को अपनी ओर आकर्षित करे। बच्चों के ज्ञान, उनकी भाषा व संस्कृति का कक्षा में कोई स्थान नहीं था। बच्चों को कक्षा में चल रही गतिविधियाँ समझ में नहीं आती थीं पर वे डर की वजह से चुप रहते थे। डर की वजह से वे सवाल-जवाब में भी हिस्सा नहीं ले पाते थे।

शिक्षकों का नकारात्मक रवैया, सहपाठियों का उपेक्षित व्यवहार व उपहास इन बच्चों के आत्मसम्मान पर सीधी चोट करता था जिसकी वजह से वे स्कूल आने और स्कूल में रुकने के लिए प्रोत्साहित महसूस नहीं करते थे। इन सबके बावजूद भी वे स्कूल जाने के लिए अपनी तरफ से भरसक कोशिश करते थे किन्तु एक दो साल तक स्कूल जाकर भी बच्चे कुछ सीख नहीं पा रहे थे। ऐसी जगह जो बच्चों को ना तो सीखने के अवसर दे रही हो, ना उन्हें प्रोत्साहित कर रही हो और ना ही उनके आत्मसम्मान की रक्षा कर रही हो, बच्चे वहाँ जाने को लेकर भला कैसे उत्सा-हित हो सकते थे? स्कूल के अन्दर की विषम परिस्थितियाँ व एक खास पृष्ठभूमि का होने के कारण बच्चों के साथ होने वाला उपेक्षित व्यवहार उनको स्कूल के बाहर धकेल देता है। अभी तक इसके बारे में हमने किताबों और शोध पत्रों में ही पढ़ा था लेकिन हमारे बच्चों के अनुभवों ने भी हमें इसी सच से रूबरू करवाया।

इन परिस्थितियों से जूझते हुए हमारे मन में कई सवाल उभर रहे थे, जैसे :

1) अगर बच्चे को स्कूल से इतने सारे नकारात्मक अनुभव प्राप्त हो रहे हैं तो क्या हम एक व्यवस्था के तौर पर स्कूल के अस्तित्व को नकार सकते हैं? क्या हम ये मान सकते हैं कि इस व्यवस्था से बाहर रहना ही बच्चे के जीवन के लिए बेहतर है?

2) जब वंचित तबके के बच्चों का एक बड़ा प्रतिशत स्कूलों में दाखिला लेता है और वहाँ उनके साथ दुर्व्यवहार होता है तो शिक्षा में काम करने वाली संस्थाओं का क्या प्रयास होना चाहिए?

3) अनौपचारिक शिक्षा बनाम औपचारिक शिक्षा का रास्ता क्या होना चाहिए? क्या स्कूली शिक्षा, 10 महीने, 6 घंटे, साल दर साल विषयवार पढ़ाई का मॉडल ही शिक्षा का एकमात्र मॉडल है?

4) क्या स्कूल के बाहर रहकर शिक्षा प्राप्त की जा सकती है? क्या यह अमल में लाया जा सकता है और क्या यह काम करेगा?

5) वंचित समुदायों के बच्चों के लिए किस प्रकार की शिक्षा उपयोगी होगी?

प्रारम्भिक स्तर पर बच्चों की भाषा व उनके परिवेश के शब्दों का प्रयोग कर लिखित भाषा से पहचान कराई जाती है व इस प्रक्रिया में छोटे-छोटे वाक्यों या छोटी कहानियों का प्रयोग किया जाता है।

इनमें से कुछ सवालों के जवाब तो हमें मिले और कुछ के जवाब ढूँढने के लिए मुस्कान ने जुलाई 2005 से जीवन शिक्षा पहल स्कूल की शुरुआत की जहाँ हम बच्चों को एक ऐसी शिक्षा देने के लिए प्रतिबद्ध थे जो बच्चों के लिए न केवल रोजगार उन्मुख हो बल्कि उनमें अपने समुदाय के प्रति गर्व और अपने जीवन के संघर्षों को लेकर समानुभूति की भावना रखते हुए उन्हें अपने अधिकारों के लिए आवाज उठाना सिखाए। साथ ही वे समझ के साथ सीखते हुए जीवन में आगे बढ़ सकें।

स्कूल के लिए एक अहम सवाल यह रहा है कि वह एक बराबरी और बेहतर समाज के निर्माण में योगदान दे जिसमें मेहनतकशों को उनका स्थान मिल सके। एक अन्य चुनौती ऐसे पढ़े-लिखे लोगों की खोज रही है जो शिक्षक हों और रचनात्मकता के साथ कक्षा में इन मूल्यों का समावेश कर सकें। पाठ्यपुस्तकों के रूप में हमें ऐसी किताबों की जरूरत थी जो एक विवेचनात्मक नजरिया विकसित करें।

इसके लिए एनसीईआरटी और एकलव्य की सामाजिक अध्ययन और नागरिक शास्त्र की पुस्तकों का इस्तमाल किया जाता है। हम चर्चाओं के माध्यम से महिलाओं की बराबरी से सम्बन्धित मुद्दों, विकास के मॉडल, जो गरीब को और गरीब कर रहा है, आदि पर सवाल-जवाब करते हैं। ये चर्चाएँ फिल्म, बस्ती में अध्ययन और वाद-विवाद आदि माध्यमों की सहायता से की जाती हैं।

सीखने-सिखाने के तरीके

यहाँ शिक्षक अपने तरीकों से बच्चों को सिखाने के लिए स्वतन्त्र हैं। वे शैक्षणिक तरीकों में कुछ बदलाव के साथ अभी भी अर्थपूर्ण शिक्षा के अलग अलग मायने और आयाम खोज ही रहे हैं।

सीखने-सिखाने सम्बन्धी कुछ पहलू इस प्रकार हैं :

1) स्कूल में बच्चों को कक्षावार नहीं बाँटा जाता क्योंकि हर बच्चे की सीखने की अपनी गति होती है, कोई बच्चा किसी विषय को धीरे सीखता है जबकि कोई अन्य बच्चा उसी विषय को तेजी से सीखता है व किसी अन्य विषय को धीमी गति से सीखता है। स्कूल में 20-25 बच्चों का एक मिश्रित समूह होता है जिसमें शिक्षक सीखने की प्रक्रिया को संचालित करते हैं और बच्चे की प्रगति का तय मापदण्डों के आधार पर मूल्यांकन करते जाते हैं। बच्चे आत्मविश्वास के साथ अपने समूहों में सीखते जाते हैं और आगे बढ़ते जाते हैं। औपचारिक स्कूली कक्षाओं में बच्चों से एक निश्चित व सीमित पाठ्यक्रम को एक सीमित अवधि में सीखने की अपेक्षा की जाती है जबकि इन कक्षाओं में बच्चों को अपनी गति से सीखने के अवसर मिल पाते हैं।

2) शिक्षक बच्चों की नियमितता और शैक्षणिक प्रगति को नियमित रूप से पालकों से साझा करते हैं। पालकों और बच्चों से गहन सम्पर्क किया जाता है। बच्चे के स्कूल नहीं आने पर शिक्षक बस्ती जाकर पालकों से मिलकर बच्चे के स्कूल नहीं आने के कारणों को समझते हैं और बच्चे को पढ़ाई से पुनः जोड़ने का प्रयास करते हैं। कई बार बच्चे एक-दो माह के लम्बे अन्तराल तक स्कूल नहीं आते हैं किन्तु यदि इसके बाद भी वे पढ़ाई शुरू करना चाहें तो हक से अपने स्कूल में आते हैं। स्कूल में हमेशा बच्चों की स्वीकार्य-ता होती है। जब उन्हें पढ़ना होता है तो वे स्कूल आ जाते हैं।

3) कई बार बच्चे कचरा बीनते-बीनते स्कूल आ जाते हैं और स्कूल के बाहर अपना थैला रखकर सीखने की प्रक्रिया में शामिल हो जाते हैं। स्कूल में कुछ समय बिताने के बाद वे अपना थैला लेकर निकल जाते हैं। काम से थके बच्चे थोड़ी देर पढ़ाई करने के बाद कोने में सो जाते हैं और अपनी थकान मिटाकर फिर पढ़ाई में शामिल हो जाते हैं। इसी प्रकार जब बच्चों के माता-पिता भी कचरा बीनते हुए स्कूल के करीब से गुजरते हैं तो वे स्कूल आ जाते हैं और बच्चों से

मलकर या कोई कहानी सुनाकर चले जाते हैं। वे इस जगह को अपनी जगह मानते हैं।

लिखित और मौखिक अभिव्यक्ति के अवसर

कक्षा में ऐसे ज्यादा से ज्यादा अवसर होते हैं कि बच्चे अपने अलग-अलग अनुभवों को लिखकर या बोलकर व्यक्त कर सकें। शिक्षक भी बच्चों की बातों व अनुभवों को सुनते हैं जिससे बच्चों को खुलकर अपनी बात रखने का प्रोत्साहन मिलता है। शिक्षक बच्चों द्वारा मौखिक या लिखित में बताए गए अनुभवों को टाईप करके बच्चे की पाठ्य सामग्री के तौर पर उपयोग करते हैं, जिससे बच्चों का आत्मविश्वास बढ़ता है। बच्चों के परिवेश से जुड़ी बातों और उनके अनुभवों को कक्षा में स्थान देना शिक्षण प्र_क्रिया का महत्त्वपूर्ण हिस्सा है। ऐसा करने से बच्चे कक्षा से जुड़ाव महसूस करने लगते हैं और सीखने की प्रक्रिया में उनकी सक्रिय भागीदारी होने लगती है।

शिक्षण में बच्चों की भाषा को स्थान देना

बच्चों में अपने समुदाय और अपनी पहचान को लेकर गर्व का एहसास हो और वे इससे दूरी न बनाते हुए अपनी वंचितता को राजनीतिक नजरिए से समझ पाएँ इस उद्देश्य की प्राप्ति के प्रयासों में से एक प्रयास बच्चों की भाषाओं को कक्षा में महत्त्वपूर्ण स्थान देना है। इसका अर्थ यह है कि बच्चों को क्षेत्रीय भाषा (हिन्दी) और वैश्विक भाषा (अँग्रेज़ी) सिखाने के लिए उनकी मातृभाषा को आधार के रूप में प्रयोग किया जाए।

प्रारम्भिक स्तर पर बच्चों की भाषा व उनके परिवेश के शब्दों का प्रयोग कर लिखित भाषा से पहचान कराई जाती है व इस प्रक्रिया में छोटे-छोटे वाक्यों या छोटी कहानियों का प्रयोग किया जाता है। जैसे— नावा दाई हाटुम ताल मीन तत्ता। यह गोंडी भाषा का वाक्य है जिसका अर्थ है मेरी माँ बाजार से मछली लाई। ऐसा ही एक अन्य वाक्य है— नावा दाई भारी बूता केता जिसका अर्थ है मेरी माँ बहुत काम करती है। शिक्षक इस तरह के वाक्यों को बोर्ड पर लिखकर बच्चों से पढ़वाते हैं और उससे सम्बन्धित चित्र बनवाते हैं। जैसे उपरोक्त वाक्यों के आधार पर दाई (माँ) का चित्र बनाना इत्यादि।

चूँकि बच्चों का अपनी भाषा पर अधिकार होता है व उनके पास अपनी भाषा के शब्दों का असीमित भण्डार होता है इसलिए वे अपनी भाषा की समझ के आधार पर कक्षा में सुने वाक्यों से खुद को जोड़ पाते हैं और यह जुड़ाव उन्हें सीखने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करता है। वे कक्षा में अपनी भाषा में अपने विचार व अनुभवों को प्रस्तुत करते हैं। जब कोई बच्चा किसी विषय को समझने में कठिनाई महसूस करता है तो उसके सहपाठी उसे अपनी भाषा में आसान तरीके से समझा देते हैं। साथ ही बच्चे एक दूसरे की भाषाओं को भी सीखने की कोशिश करते हैं जिससे बच्चों में एक

दूसरे की भाषा के प्रति सम्मान बढ़ता है और उन्हें सीखने का एक सकारात्मक माहौल मिल पाता है।

स्कूल में अपनी संस्कृति का निर्वहन होते देखकर समुदाय के लोग स्कूल से जुड़ पाते हैं और उनमें सहयोग की भावना विकसित होती है।

बच्चे की भाषा को कक्षा में स्थान मिलने से एक तो बच्चों में अपनी भाषा व संस्कृति के प्रति सम्मान का भाव आता है, दूसरा उनकी अभिव्यक्ति का कौशल बढ़ता है, सीखने की गति बढ़ती है और सीखने-सिखाने की गतिविधि में सहभागिता का स्तर भी बढ़ जाता है। उनमें यह भाव जागता है कि उनकी भाषा भी महत्त्वपूर्ण है और बाहरी दुनिया में उनकी भाषा का भी एक वजूद है इस प्रकार वे स्कूल से खुद को जोड़ पाते हैं तथा खुद को स्कूल जाने के लिए प्रेरित कर पाते हैं।

कक्षा-कक्ष को बच्चों के जीवन और अनुभवों से जोड़ना

बच्चा अधिकाँश चीजें कक्षा के बाहर अपने जीवन के विभिन्न अनुभवों से सीखता है। अतः बच्चों को कक्षा के बाहर ले जाकर खुद अनुभव करके, परिवेश से अन्तःक्रिया कर सीखने के अवसर उपलब्ध कराना और कक्षा की गतिविधियों को उनके जीवन से जोड़कर समझाने का प्रयास करना सीखने-सिखाने का एक महत्त्वपूर्ण हिस्सा है। इसके अलावा बच्चों के साथ उनकी जिन्दगी को प्रभावित करने वाले विभिन्न मुद्दों पर चर्चाएँ भी की जाती हैं जो बच्चों में अपनी व अपने आस-पास की परिस्थितियों पर प्रश्न करने की क्षमता का विकास करने में सहायक होती हैं।

विषयवार पढ़ाई में विभिन्न अवधारणाएँ सिखाने के लिए बच्चों के अनुभवों और समुदाय के अनुभवों को शामिल किया जाता है। बच्चों के अनुभवों में पानी बेचने, कबाड़ बीनने व बेचने, बेल पत्ती बेचने और शादियों में बत्ती लेकर जाने के दौरान हुए अनुभवों को शामिल किया जाता है।

शिक्षण में समुदाय की भागीदारी

समुदाय और स्कूल का आपसी जुड़ाव जरूरी है ताकि पढ़ने-लिखने की दुनिया, बिना पढ़े-लिखे लोगों की दुनिया से दूर न हो जाए। इसके लिए कभी-कभार समुदाय के सदस्य कक्षा में आते हैं और अपनी भाषा में कहानी सुनाते हैं। इन कहानियों में समुदाय की अपनी यात्रा व इतिहास भी शामिल होता है। वे कभी अपने जीवन के किसी समयकाल की घटना को साझा करते हैं तो कभी कोई कौशल। बच्चों की मौलिक अभिव्यक्ति में उनके अभिभावक उनकी मदद करते हैं। बच्चे अपने अभिभावकों से कहानियाँ सुनते हैं और फिर उसको कक्षा में आकर सुनाते हैं।

इसके अलावा हम समुदाय के लोगों से बात करके बुजुर्गों द्वारा सुनाई जाने वाली कहानियों को संकलित करते हैं व उनको बच्चों की भाषा में अनुवाद करके कक्षा में उपयोग करते हैं। बाल मेलों में भी समुदाय के लोगों की भागीदारी होती है।

स्कूल में अपनी संस्कृति का निर्वहन होते देखकर समुदाय के लोग स्कूल से जुड़ पाते हैं और उनमें सहयोग की भावना विकसित होती है। इस तरह पालकों के लिए स्कूल एक अजनबी जगह नहीं रह जाती, उनमें स्कूल के लिए अपनापन विकसित होता है और वे अपने बच्चों को स्कूल भेजने के लिए प्रेरित होते हैं। वे सीखने की प्रक्रिया से खुद को जोड़कर देख पाते हैं। उनके मन से यह भावना दूर होती है कि वे पढ़ाई-लिखाई के काम में किसी तरह का योगदान नहीं दे सकते। इस तरह उनका सम्मान और स्वाभिमान भी बरकरार रह पाता है और उनका आत्मविश्वास बढ़ता है। समुदाय का बच्चों व शिक्षकों पर भरोसा बच्चों के सीखने और स्कूल में टिकने में बहुत ही मददगार होता है। अभिभावकों के शिक्षकों से जुड़ाव का एक उदाहरण एक अभिभावक द्वारा मुस्कान शिक्षिका से कहा गया यह कथन है, "हमको तो आप हमारे समाज की ही लगती हैं।"

बच्चों के आपसी रिश्ते

बच्चों के आपसी रिश्ते और दोस्ती (अपने और अपने समुदाय से अलग समुदाय के बच्चों के साथ) बच्चों के सीखने की प्रक्रिया पर असर डालते हैं। कामकाजी बच्चों में पारधी बच्चे ज्यादा कचरा चुनने का काम करते हैं। कई बार अन्य बच्चे इन बच्चों का मजाक बनाने लगते हैं या समूह में उनको शामिल नहीं करते। इससे ये बच्चे हतोत्साहित होते हैं, उनका मनोबल टूटता है और वे समूह में सीखने की प्रक्रिया से बचने लगते हैं। समूह में उनकी स्वीकार्यता के लिए सायास प्रयास करने की जरूरत होती है।

इन बच्चों को सीखने की प्रक्रिया में शामिल करने तथा उन्हें कक्षा में खुद को अभिव्यक्त करने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करने की जरूरत होती है। बच्चों के साथ लगातार चर्चा और कक्षा में समूह कार्य, अलग अलग बस्तियों के दौरे सभी बच्चों की कक्षा में स्वीकार्यता और भागीदारी को बढाने में बहुत उपयोगी होते हैं। धीरे-धीरे बच्चों में दोस्ती होती है और वे सीखने में एक दूसरे की मदद करने लगते हैं, जिससे कक्षा में सीखने का समावेशी माहौल निर्मित हो पाता है।

शिक्षक और बच्चों के आपसी रिश्ते

सीखने-सिखाने की गतिविधि बेहतर तरीके से संचालित हो सके इसके लिए कक्षा का माहौल भयमुक्त होना बहुत जरूरी है क्योंकि भय की स्थिति में सीखना कठिन होता है। इसके लिए शिक्षक और बच्चों के आपसी रिश्ते का अत्यन्त सौहार्द्रपूर्ण होना बहुत

जरूरी है। शिक्षक और बच्चों के बीच उनकी व्यक्तिगत जिन्दगी के बारे में भी बातचीत होती है। बच्चों के साथ सर्किल टाइम (गोल घेरे में बैठकर चर्चा करना) में अलग अलग विषयों पर चर्चाएँ होती है, जैसे— पिछले कुछ समय में आपको अपने आप में क्या बदलाव महसूस हो रहे हैं, अगर आपको अपनी कक्षा के किसी बच्चे या टीचर को उनके किसी व्यवहार को ठीक करने के लिए कोई सुझाव देना हो तो आप क्या सुझाव देंगे?

इसके अलावा बच्चों के परिवार के सदस्यों से बच्चों के रिश्ते पर भी बातचीत होती है, बच्चे अपने विचार और जीवन की परिस्थितियों को शिक्षक के साथ बेझिझक साझा करते हैं। कई बार जब बच्चे समूह में अपनी बात कहने में सहज महसूस नहीं करते तो शिक्षक अकेले में उनसे बात करते हैं। शिक्षक संवेदनशीलता के साथ बच्चों की बात सुनते हैं और उनको मानसिक सम्बल देने का प्रयास करते। इन चर्चाओं से शिक्षक और बच्चों के बीच गहरे रिश्ते बन जाते हैं और बच्चे शिक्षक से खुलकर बात कर पाते हैं। शिक्षक और बच्चों के बीच एक बराबरी का रिश्ता सीखने की प्रक्रिया को बहुत आसान बना देता है।

पालकों को उनके बच्चों की प्रगति से अवगत कराने के लिए शिक्षक प्रति शनिवार बच्चों के घर का दौरा करते हैं और पालकों से मिलकर बच्चों की प्रगति साझा करते हैं।

समुदाय और स्कूल का आपसी जुड़ाव जरूरी है ताकि पढ़ने-लिखने की दुनिया, बिना पढ़े-लिखे लोगों की दुनिया से दूर न हो जाए।

शिक्षक अपनी समझ और ज्ञान के साथ साथ बच्चे की समझ और ज्ञान को भी कक्षा में स्थान देते हैं। भाषा-शिक्षण के दौरान जब शिक्षकों को बच्चों की भाषा समझ नहीं आती तो वे बच्चों से उनकी भाषा सीखते हैं और हिन्दी के वाक्यों को बच्चों की भाषा में अनुवाद करने की प्रक्रिया में बच्चे ही मुख्य भूमिका में होते हैं। इस प्रकार सीखना एकतरफा न होकर दोतरफा होता है। कभी बच्चे शिक्षक से सीख रहे होते हैं तो कभी शिक्षक बच्चों से।

हाशिए के समुदायों के लिए वर्तमान शिक्षा व्यवस्था की प्रासंगिकता

वर्तमान शिक्षा व्यवस्था एक खास वर्ग की जरूरतों के अनुरूप तैयार की गई है। किन्तु हाशिए के समुदायों के ज्यादातर बच्चे आज भी इस व्यवस्था से लगातार छूटते जा रहे हैं। और जो गिने-चुने बच्चे खुद को इस मुख्यधारा की शिक्षा व्यवस्था के अनुरूप ढाल पाए हैं, वे ज्यादातर अपनी जड़ों से दूर जा रहे हैं। मुख्यधारा की यह शिक्षा-व्यवस्था इन समुदायों के लिए उपयुक्त नहीं है। स्कूलों में इन बच्चों को जो अनुभव मिलते हैं, जिस शिक्षण

सामग्री का प्रयोग कक्षा-कक्ष में किया जाता है, वह इन बच्चों के लिए न तो प्रासंगिक है और न ही अर्थपूर्ण। हमें इन समुदायों की आवश्यताओं और अनुभवों के अनुसार शिक्षा-व्यवस्था में मूलभूत बदलाव करने की आवश्यकता है।

बच्चों के आपसी रिश्ते और दोस्ती (अपने और अपने समुदाय से अलग समुदाय के बच्चों के साथ) बच्चों के सीखने की प्रक्रिया पर असर डालते हैं।

हाशिए के समुदायों के बच्चों की शिक्षा

सीखने की प्रक्रिया में व्यक्ति का खुद का प्रयास जितना अहम होता है उतना ही सीखने की जगह का वातावरण और सी-खने-सिखाने की प्रक्रिया भी इस पर असर डालती है। सीखने की प्रक्रिया जितनी समावेशी होगी, बच्चे सीखने के लिए उतने ही प्रोत्साहित होंगे। हाशिए के समुदायों के बच्चों की शिक्षा बेहतर हो पाए इसके लिए हमें शिक्षण पद्धतियों में बदलाव करने होंगे व पाठ्यक्रम में लचीलापन लाना होगा।

स्कूल को एक ऐसी जगह बनाने की जरूरत है जहाँ बच्चे गर्व से अपनी पहचान, अपने काम और अपने अनुभवों को बता पाएँ। बच्चे सीखने की प्रक्रिया में आत्मविश्वास और खुशी के साथ शामिल हो सकें इसके लिए कक्षा को बच्चों के जीवन से जोड़ने और उनके जीवन्त अनुभवों को कक्षा कक्ष में लाने की बहुत जरूरत है। स्कूल की कोशिश होनी चाहिए कि वह एक बराबरी वाले और बेहतर समाज के निर्माण में योगदान दे, हमारा स्कूल इसी दिशा में एक छोटा सा प्रयास है।

स्रोत

बच्चे की भाषा और अध्यापक, कृष्ण कुमार ।
भाषा शिक्षण— माया मौर्य व सविता सोहित ।
*उत्पीड़ितों का शिक्षाशास्त्र— पॉलो फ्रेरे ।*

ब्रजेश वर्तमान में मुस्कान संस्था द्वारा संचालित स्कूल जीवन शिक्षा पहल में शिक्षक के रूप में कार्यरत हैं। हाशिए के समुदायों मुख्यतः आदिवासी, दलित, विमुक्त और मुस्लिम समुदायों के बच्चों के साथ सीखने-सिखाने की प्रक्रिया में शामिल हैं। बच्चों को कहानियाँ सुनाना, उनके साथ खेलना पसन्द है।

सविता सोहित वर्तमान में मुस्कान संस्था के साथ कार्यरत हैं। शिक्षक के रूप में काम की शुरुआत की। बहुभाषीय कक्षा लेने और बच्चों के साथ भाषा के नियमों को समझने और उनका विश्लेषण करने में खास रुचि है।

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शिक्षण में समुदाय की भागीदारी

the pardhi rule

story tasvir parmar
art swati addanki
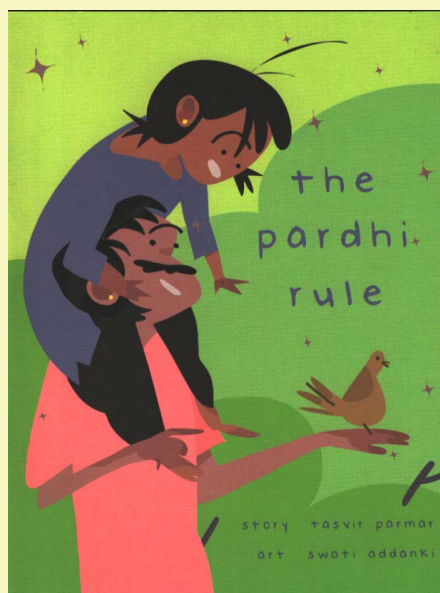
मुस्कान द्वारा प्रकाशित पुस्तक। इस पुस्तक में पारधी समुदाय के शिकार से जुड़े नियम का उल्लेख है। इस नियम के तहत शिकार के बाद पारधी समुदाय के लोग पकड़े हुए तीतरों में से एक-दो मादा तीतरों को छोड़ देते थे ताकि वे प्रजनन कर सकें और वे लुप्त न हों। इस पुस्तक के माध्यम से बच्चे पारधी समुदाय के इतिहास, संस्कृति और रीतियों के बारे में समझ पाते हैं।

The Underlying Problems of Inclusive Education of Tribals

B. Ramdas

It is my opinion that there is a civilizational difference between adivasis and the rest of us Indians. When we talk of 'inclusion' many other communities come to mind – SC, Muslims, Christians, and so on. But in the case of adivasis, there is a world of difference. And if we do not understand that, and what excludes them, we cannot include them either. I do not want to get into the differences between adivasis and others as that is not the purpose of this article. Rather, I want to highlight what is excluding adivasi children from accessing education. I am trying to put all this as simply as possible so that this article can be translated into any language of the adivasis and they can decide whether I am right or not. I do not feel I have the right to speak on their behalf. I take this liberty only because I have had close contact with them over the last three decades. But I still leave it open.

We cannot but look at the kinds of exclusion taking place before we begin to look at areas and possibilities of inclusion. So let me begin with the most obvious of these – social exclusion.

Unlike other communities who have had to suffer exclusion, the adivasi community has a quiet dignity about them. They have never been assimilated into the social hierarchy of Hindu society and so have never suffered indignities as many others have. In spite of the fact that they are economically poor, they do not feel that they are in any way inferior to the rest of the society.

The first instance where they are made to feel different and inferior is when they enter school. Non-tribal children have so many misgivings about them and the way they live,

that they gang up and harass adivasi children, eventually leading to their leaving the school altogether as they seem to get little or no support from teachers. So much so, those who have managed to finish school, say that they have survived mostly because they have never admitted publicly that they are adivasis.

If we really want the tribal child to feel even a little included in the process of learning, then somewhere we need to bring in content of learning which has something of their lives.

In one instance, a girl in college had to admit to being an ST when the HoD asked about scholarships in public. Her classmates were shocked to know that she was a tribal but did not tease her although relationships changed. But it was the lecturer who was present who started to harass her on every possible occasion.

In fact, she says, that it became so unbearable that one day she screamed at the top of her voice, bringing the whole department into her class. She then complained to the HOD about the harassment.

In another instance, right on day one, when one of the girls in the college was found to be a tribal and showed her dance, the management appreciated it and from then on it was smooth going. Therefore, the outlook of the institution really sets the culture of the

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institution with regard to social inclusion and other aspects as well.

However, we realize now that this is also not necessarily enough. Teasing subtly or otherwise seems to happen for various reasons. Since the parents of the children belonging to the ST communities are usually the labour force working in the lands of the locality, non-tribal children have little respect for them.

This is an area that needs to be addressed. Just like we have gender sensitization programs, we also need to have programs that sensitize both children and teachers about adivasis and the richness of their cultures. We need to go to teacher education colleges and ensure that they have a course on adivasi culture.

Now we come to the tricky part which is in many ways out of our control, as it is the system itself which has set out to exclude these people. Let us take the first of these which really hits hard at the 6-year old adivasi child entering school for the first time. Unlike many other language groups in India, the tribal child finds it difficult to transition

from her mother tongue to the state language. In many instances the two are quite different – Gondi and Marathi for example. Given the fact that tribal communities live fairly secluded lives, their children are not exposed to any other language sufficiently to be able to use it in a classroom.

Unlike other communities who have had to suffer exclusion, the adivasi community has a quiet dignity about them.

There is little assistance provided to these children to make the transition. Teachers have little patience with these children and continue to give instructions in the school language making them feel alien to the school altogether and very uncomfortable, and compelling them to leave the school. Language is taken rather lightly by teachers, given the fact that they have very little understanding of the learning process. Language is essential for anyone to think. If we do not have words or concepts that can ascribe meaning to things, we cannot think.

In the case of tribal children, they are situated in an alien space, where the language that they use is so different. So they cannot make meaning out of the texts and what the teachers are trying to make them understand.

The context is so very different that the children do not have words for them. How can such a child feel included in the learning process at all? Can teachers, especially at the primary level, be made to have some understanding of tribal languages and be made able to communicate effectively to the child and make her feel that she is wanted in that space?

For the young child, the confined space of the classrooms, the manner is which the teacher holds forth, the strict discipline, often the use of the cane, the reprimands, are all deterrents to an inclusive approach. Somehow teachers need to be orientated to the lives and values that tribal societies hold dear.

For instance, adults in tribal communities never insist on their children doing something. They never scold them or instruct them with lectures. All these are alien to tribal cultures, where children are given equal place in all aspects of their lives, unlike in non-tribal cultures where children are separated from adults, as we see in schools.

The next alienating aspect of schools is that of the content of textbooks. If we really want the tribal child to feel even a little included in the process of learning, then somewhere we need to bring in content of learning which has something of their lives. The content of the textbooks is often very deprecating of their lives and leaves them with a feeling that they are not wanted.

These are matters that are brought into play by authorities that are in charge of education. Unless there is a serious attempt at redeeming the situation through an inclusive process, more and more children are going to be left out of the learning process. Added

to this is the administrative establishment. I am not aware of how this happens in other states; but if you look at Tamil Nadu, you find that the tribal schools are all under the Tribal Welfare Department. This department has no idea of education and does not take any interest in the children whether they study or not. I suppose they are not equipped either.

Being a separate department, the education department does not enter any of these schools. So the child is left high and dry. The teachers have no accountability, as no one really supervises their impact on the children.

In the case of tribal children, they are situated in an alien space, where the language that they use is so different. So they cannot make meaning out of the texts and what the teachers are trying to make them understand.

The Tribal Welfare Department is separated from the SC ST Department only at the Directorate level and not at the Secretary level. For the last decade and more the Director of Tribal Welfare has always been from the Forest department; we all know how inimical the Forest Department has been to the cause of tribals in India.

Therefore, we have a long way to go to influence the state to provide inclusive education, as almost everything that has to do with it is alienating the tribal child from entering the learning process.

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Inclusive Education Works Better for Typical Kids Too

Jo Chopra McGowan

At Latika Roy Foundation, we believe that when we plan for the most vulnerable, the world works better for everyone. It is one of those things we say so often it's become a truism for us – almost too obvious. But we call them truisms because they're true. Here's one example of how this particular truism works.

Many parents, many teachers and many school principals fear that bringing disabled children into mainstream classrooms will lower educational standards for the typical students. The reverse is true.

Look around the room at any meeting of educated people. Look around in your own office. A minimum of 30% of the people you see – always – will be wearing glasses, contact lenses or have had corrective surgery. You can ask for a show of hands to check on the ones who aren't obvious. No one minds admitting to the surgery or the contacts because this is a disability which has been successfully mainstreamed. There's no stigma.

But now go into a government school. I can guarantee you that you won't find more than one or two children (if that) wearing glasses. I've confirmed this again and again.

What happens when an obviously visually impaired child comes into that classroom? The teacher, finding that writing on the board or referring only to written text in a book isn't working for her student, has to do things differently. Maybe she brings that child right up to the front row so she can be sure he's following what she's saying. Maybe she assigns another child the task of verbally conveying what she's writing on the board. Maybe she asks him to repeat back what she's said. Whatever she does, she has

recognized that every child doesn't learn the same way. Now that her class of 50 kids has one child who is blind, she knows that there are 15 more who are struggling with vision problems in some way.

Once she has made that breakthrough in her thinking, she may start to look at the other children in her classroom with more compassion. She may start to realize that some of her kids actually can't hear what she's saying because they were born with an undetected hearing loss or they've had repeated ear infections which weren't treated effectively. They aren't deliberately ignoring her.

Latika Roy Foundation

She may begin to understand that asking a class of 6-year-olds to sit still for 45 minutes is asking too much or that the child who keeps putting his hands over his ears isn't being naughty. He's feeling overwhelmed by the noise and the chaos of being in a crowded room with 50 other children. That's the power of inclusive education.

The Latika Roy Foundation is a three-decades old NGO based in Dehradun. We started as a school for disabled children because my own daughter wasn't welcome at the school her elder brother and sister attended. I didn't want her to go to a special school. But 30 years ago, there was no other choice. Today, while there are more choices for disabled children, these are still far from being enough.

So, a large part of our work is training mainstream teachers to be more accepting

of differences, and to cater to all kinds of learners. We continue to provide specialized education options for children with ASD, Down Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy, along with the physical, behavioral and occupational therapies they need. But more and more we are successfully transitioning kids into mainstream classrooms.

When teachers and principals have the right attitude, it really isn't that difficult. True inclusion means giving every child the benefit of doubt. We assume that every child wants to learn, that they're hard-wired for learning, and that if they are struggling, it's up to us to identify the problem and work around it. There's always a work around.

When we give teachers strategies to help the particular child they're worried about, they often find that the same strategies do wonders for the rest of the children. I remember Vishal – a class 3 student in a government school in Delhi. Vishal used to shout out answers whenever he felt like it, never waiting to be called on and often answering questions that hadn't even been asked.

There could be many reasons for this, but one of them was that Vishal didn't understand how to wait for his turn. We suggested that his teacher make up a rule that he could only speak when he was holding a ball that she would toss to him if she wanted him to answer. It became so popular that all the children wanted to hold the ball while they were answering.

For Sara, who fidgeted constantly, making it difficult for her to concentrate, we suggested giving her a squeezy toy to hold. The excess energy was thus channeled and she was better able to focus.

Aslam used to constantly ask to leave the class on one pretext or another. If he wasn't given permission, he would just walk out anyway. We suggested that the teacher present him with three 'get out of class'

tickets. Any time he felt he needed a break, he could simply place one of the tickets on her desk and leave. No questions asked, no explanations required. But he only had three tickets. She explained that he should save the tickets for when he really, really needed to get out. Because, if he used them all in the first 10 minutes, he'd be stuck if later in the class he felt desperate.

The knowledge that he had the control in his own hands was remarkably liberating for Aslam. As the days went on, he was able to wait longer and longer without leaving the room. Just knowing he could leave if he wanted to, allowed him to relax.

For Aslam, being forced to sit in class with no hope of escape felt like being thrown in jail for life. Paradoxically, by giving him an actual escape plan he stopped needing to escape. For other children, extra time to complete assignments, having a scribe or being allowed to take tests orally can all be helpful.

Yet one of the most common responses we get when we talk about such strategies for disabled kids is outrage on behalf of the other children. "It's not fair to them," people insist. The belief in fairness is deeply-held but often misunderstood. Fairness doesn't mean that everyone gets the same. Fairness means that everyone gets what they need.

Inclusion helps us understand the truth about fairness because the needs of disabled children are more obvious than those of typical kids. It would be ridiculous to deny Moy Moy the wheelchair she needs because we aren't giving all the other kids wheelchairs.

The other kids don't need wheelchairs. And if a child needs not a wheelchair, but extra time, alternate testing arrangements or a 'get out of class' ticket, that's what they should get. Whatever it takes.

Inclusion moves us out of a competitive, anxious view of education focused on marks, seats and the dog-eat-dog world of getting

into IITs. It allows us to see education not as a transaction for material gain with winners and losers, but as a process of opening up the world for every child, at a pace that is enjoyable, and in a style designed for learning, not crushing the opposition.

Like the ramp that allows wheelchairs, prams and suitcases easy access to buildings, and the visual timetable at traffic lights that allows us to calm down while waiting for the green signal, there is no downside to inclusion.

So the next time you enjoy an audio book, read captions on a TV news broadcast or use Siri on your smart phone, thank a disabled person. While such innovations were created for them, we're all on the inclusion gravy train now.

Jo Chopra McGowan is the founder and Executive Director of Latika Roy Foundation. Jo has worked on disability services, rights and awareness for over 28 years. She believes in the power of ordinary people to change the world, and she brings photography, love and passion to her work.

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Latika Roy Foundation

Inclusion and Diversity

Exploring Relationships and Linkages

Samuhik Pahal Team

Dr. Annie Koshi is the Principal of St. Mary's School, New Delhi, where she has done pioneering work in creating an inclusive educational institution. She also undertook doctoral work on inclusive education at IIT Delhi. She has consistently advocated the cause of the disabled and has worked towards legislative changes that foster their educational rights. She is the winner of many awards including the prestigious National Award for Teachers, the National Child Care Award, and the India Development Education Award, amongst others, for her contributions towards education.

Samuhik Pahal: Can you please share the genesis of your work in the space of inclusive education? Are there any individuals or incidents who influenced or inspired you to enter this space?

Annie Koshi: What is education if it is not inclusive? Any process of learning that is not inclusive, can it be called education in any real sense of the word? Inclusion is not only for the challenged, it benefits all children. This needs to be said upfront. Inclusion is a way of life that needs space and place of honor first and foremost in our thinking.

While I feel there is no individual or incident that actually influenced or inspired the school to move down a particular trajectory, I do feel that the kind of people who were at the helm of affairs at the beginning of the school were a different breed. The founders of the school were people from an age when everybody lived together. We all looked after each other. They influenced the trajectory of the school through their view of an inclusive world where quality education needs to be offered to everyone.

We must remember that inclusion is not a destination. It is a journey. You never actually reach being inclusive. You have to be constantly working at it.

You know the popular adage these days that, "It takes a village to raise a child." We were raised by the village. And the village did not say that we'll not raise this child, or that child. All children were raised by the village. We'd run around in the streets because the streets had spaces for us to run around and play. The next door aunty would scold us if we misbehaved. And the other aunty would give us khana [food] if we were there at that time. So everyone was like that. So in such a context, the school was born and raised.

When we started, we had a child in school whose brother was a CP [Cerebral Palsy] child. The parents stayed just across the gate of the school. The mother came to us and said, "Komal ghar pe hai; woh kuchh der ke lie school aa sakta hai kya?" – "Komal stays at home. Can he come to the school for some time?"

He was severely challenged. He came to us wheelchair bound, his speech terribly compromized, with no hand movements. But he had a very good mind, all locked up in that body. And he would come on his wheelchair to the school. He was across the road. And we said, "Ane do – Let him come."

When you have a student, you automatically start making adjustments to the ways in which you tackle things. When Komal came to us, we could see that Komal can't write; but Komal understands what we say. Children were able to understand him, although teachers might have had a little difficulty in the beginning. The more time we spent with Komal, the better we were able to understand what he was saying. And we could see that he was a very bright fellow.

There were no special educators in the school in the older days. And all the students were the resource people. Teachers also had to learn how to create inclusive methodologies. So lectures were recorded for Komal so that he could go home and listen to them again. He had a writer. We didn't have a lift or a ramp at that time. So Komal would be carried by the children up and down the staircase. That took great bravery on Komal's part, as his was not some flashy wheelchair.

Komal would be given a whistle for football matches where he would blow the whistle if somebody had done a foul while everybody else was running around. So he was made participative of many things. And we learnt how to change strategies to suit the individual.

You have to be aware that inclusion is just not about special needs. It's also about including the excluded.

Samuhik Pahal: Given the relative lack of awareness on inclusion (as we currently understand it) when your school started, what were the important shifts in your journey towards inclusion?

Annie Koshi: We learnt that when methodologies change for an individual you knowingly also help some quiet child in the classroom. For instance, we had a visually

challenged child. So you need to have more experiential kinds of activities. So that quiet child in the corner who can't say that, "Madam I cannot understand what you are saying, when you are doing this drawing on the board," he benefits from the changed methodology. When you adapt for one, you also tend to adapt for someone who is not presenting apparently with a challenge.

So, inclusion is really an attitude and understanding of diversity, and to understand that we have to adapt. Now standardization is the greatest goal, I feel, of the modern world. On the other hand, inclusion is all about responding to diversity to allow a child to go on an individual trajectory if necessary.

So we might think that there are forty children in the class and if they have forty individual trajectories, how we'll manage. Any teacher will know that your trajectory and my trajectory somewhere have commonalities. A teacher would recognize these commonalities and work on them. She will use the children as resource people.

So, through our experiences we recognised that diversity is actually a positive thing. If you have the economically challenged, the tribal child, the north-eastern child, children from Jammu & Kashmir, some from top of the economic pyramid, and those with various challenges related to mental and physical cognition in the school - teachers benefit and are better teachers when they are dealing with this diversity, rather than having a standardized format of pedagogy. When you learn how to deal with diversity, you are allowing your child a rich environment of growth and understanding.

In our practice we have moved from charity to rights. When we brought Komal in, it was like "Bechara Komal, ane do – Poor Komal, let him come." But it wasn't Komal who was bechara, it was we who were becharas who did not have good thinking. Till we realized that these are your rights, rights that have been given to you by the constitution, and

How Inclusion and Diversity Are Like Two Wheels of the Same Vehicle

Annie Koshi

In our school, we have children from different Homes such as Jeevan Jyoti - a Home run by the Sisters of Charity that looks after children with challenges - Tara Homes and Rainbow Homes. Rainbow Homes was started for children on the streets.

In the holidays some of them are sent to their parents on the streets. Every child in school gets a book bundle, clothes, bags, and these are given to them when they leave for holidays because they are supposed to revise their lessons. So these children go home and when they come back they are invariably without their books.

We would get upset, and say, "How irresponsible is this!" But really it was our thinking that was problematic. They live on the streets. Their bags are hanging on some little nail under some flyover.

Other children are running around. They will pick up the books and throw it here and there, scribble on it, tear it. So it was stupid of us to think that they could take these books and not lose them. We have learnt from our own mistakes to how to do things better.

Similarly, this whole idea of cleanliness. You are in a home with a hundred kids. You have to get up yourself in the morning and get clean. Because nobody is washing your clothes for you, you have to wash them yourself. Even if, you are a five-year-old, you have to wash your clothes, you have to have your bath and come.

We started to say, have your bath in school. We'll put water and oil and shampoo and everything and get their clothes washed and ready for them. As they grew older, they would say, "We won't bathe in the school." Because they must be conscious that other children are seeing that they are doing this.

Then we negotiated and said that, "If you come here clean, that's fine. But if you are not, then we'll have to bathe here." Then they managed on their own.

We have had around sixty children from Rainbow Homes coming to our school. They have been with us for ten to eleven years now. All these children who came to us are a little older than the class.

There have been lots of people who were willing to give them time and energy. It was a period of generosity of one's own time. We are very proud that this year one of our students from the home passed out. He has gotten into NID (National Institute of Design). We are very thrilled.

As an organization it is important to work with your staff, with your parents. We work with our parents from the very beginning with the understanding that generosity of spirit is core to the philosophy of the school.

So even though we are a Christian minority institution we work on celebrating all religions. We work at accepting all people and understanding the differences. We work on a cooperative model.

The minute we tell our parents about the needs of our children from the home of uniforms and books etc. they generously take it on. We do not take donations from outside. Our own parents pick up the tab. When we ask what is inclusion, it leads us to the larger question about what is education.

now the right to education for which people have fought for. The minute you see that it is the right of the child to a quality equal education, that is rights-based inclusive education.

Samuhik Pahal: What has been your experience of working with various stakeholders such as teachers, students, school management, parents and community members on issues related to inclusion?

Annie Koshi: If you want creative staff, then you need to give them that kind of environment. If you give them a monochromatic kind of set up, well then, don't expect anything from them. Why would they want to change? See... A school is made up of students, parents, teachers, and of course the society as well. But society we can leave out for the time being because impacting society is a different ballgame altogether. But the school has to work on its parents, teachers and students to get a certain philosophy into place.

While this was not a conscious decision on our part, slowly the special needs children started coming to us. We always used to admit children from economically challenged backgrounds. You have to be aware that inclusion is just not about special needs. It's also about including the excluded. Who is a school excluding – when we talk about organizational practices, schools have to consciously see who are you excluding.

You have to do this exercise. What are my practices that exclude and who do I exclude? For example, if you have an entrance test, if it is a time-bound, written examination, it excludes people who can't write, people who need more time to do things. If your school has steps up to the reception area or the principal's office, you'd exclude those who cannot climb the steps. If your school has high fees, then you'd exclude those who cannot pay those high fees. So you have to look at all these areas very carefully. Presence of lifts, assessment practices,

methodologies, admission practices, scholarships, these are all areas or methods to circumvent exclusion.

Samuhik Pahal: Given that ramps and similar elements of physical infrastructure are the visible, accessible means for most people to understand inclusion, what, in your view, is the invisible story of inclusive education that people need to appreciate? Can you please share a few key challenges in this regard that need to be widely discussed and the ways in which we can meaningfully address them?

> In our practice we have moved from charity to rights...The minute you see that it is the right of the child to a quality equal education, that is rights-based inclusive education.

Annie Koshi: Including the excluded is important. There is a book called 'The Index for Inclusion: A Guide to School Development Led by Inclusive Values' by Antony Booth and Mel Ainscow which works out the ways in which we can move into a more inclusive scenario. The first method it discusses is to identify the modes of exclusion that you have. We must remember that inclusion is not a destination. It is a journey. You never actually reach being inclusive. You have to be constantly working at it.

We started with no special educators. Some children are able to sit in a class. Some children need a one-to-one for some time. Some children require one-to-one all the time. So there are segregated schools, there are inclusive schools. I find all schools catering for a different kind of scenario. And I'd not like to run down special needs schools.

Training your staff, interacting with your parents constantly, talking to your students are important. Organizationally your

practices have to be democratic. Teachers have to be always questioning themselves to see how they could be better. Cultivating the environment of reading and questioning in the school is important. Working with all stakeholders constantly; that is the key.

So, inclusion is really an attitude and understanding of diversity, and to understand that we have to adapt.

I don't think money is an issue with respect to being inclusive. It is really the thinking that is the issue. Society itself is so exclusionary. Inclusion impinges upon all areas. When you start being inclusive, you realise that there are so many reverberations of being inclusive.

Samuhik Pahal: In the many decades of your work in this space, can you please share your observations of key milestones in the ways in which thinking and practice related to inclusion have shifted in the education space in India?

Annie Koshi: Recently there has been a big shift away from inclusion in India. With Corona for instance, look at the way assessment has gone. If CBSE does MCQ examinations, nobody in their right minds can think that it's an inclusive set up. We may think that the problem is only for class X or XII.

But the fact is, what happens with CBSE at the Board Examinations starts to have a washback into the lower classes. And then everyone starts thinking, "Oh MCQs are a great way of doing this." For teachers to stand against the tide and hold out on their own is a very hard job. Congratulations and kudos to those who are able to do it.

You have to continuously think about why are you doing what you are doing. Why are we so set on having textbooks? How do

textbooks actually help my child to get an education when we know that there has been a knowledge explosion and knowledge is everywhere.

Will I teach my child to understand that one textbook and to mug it up, or will I teach him to read, comprehend, and analyse what he is reading is correct or misinformation or wrong information? In such a situation, where will the textbooks come into play?

Now you'll say what has that got to do with inclusion? But everything is part of it. The crux of the matter is to get your thinking correct. As an educator you should always be asking what am I here for, why am I doing what I am doing. Let's say assessment, why am I doing assessments like this? Can learning be assessed differently?

If these questions can be addressed, then you can answer why you didn't admit a child or what is the role of the parents in this process, how do you deal with emotions.

We have a child whose mother is in the red-light area. She gave up this child to the home [from where the child comes to attend school] so that he'd not be influenced by her environment.

She promised to call him every Sunday. But Monday is a bad day for that child because he does not get the call from his mother. And then he is violent on Monday. Because he cannot deal with that betrayal and that sorrow, he is violent with other kids.

So someone may ask, "Why have this child in the school?" Some parent might possibly question, "Why should I send my child to a school that has such children?" So, courage, we have not talked about courage. That's a very important thing. So when you say what are the necessities, I'd definitely say courage is a core value, in order to stand up for what you believe in and do it.

Samuhik Pahal: If someone were entering this domain now, how do you feel she can

meaningfully engage with this space? Can you please suggest resources - movies, books, courses, etc. - for people who want to start exploring the space of inclusive education?

What is education if it is not inclusive? Any process of learning that is not inclusive, can it be called education in any real sense of the word?

Annie Koshi: If people want to be educators and if they want to be more inclusive, they have to allow themselves the experience of dealing with challenges. I'd say try and teach some street children. Try and teach some challenged children. Go out into the villages and see and understand what are the needs and necessities. Problems arise when we want to be inclusive educators, or rather educators in the true sense of the term, and we do not allow ourselves this exploration and learning for reasons such as money.

When you are young and do not have any responsibilities, give yourself the chance to roam the country, understand the diversity, and think about methodologies that may work – up in the hills, down in the plains, in the coastal areas – what are the changes you'll make in places where there is no electricity and no Wi-Fi, internet, photocopier all of which we take for granted.

What do you know of the world? It's like being in a hot room. You open the window and the cold breeze hits you.

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unsplash.com/Aaron Burden

Inclusive Education

A Reading List

Bookworm Team

Bookworm team recommends a list of books on the theme of 'Inclusive Education'. We understand that inclusion centers around identity and the markers for this could be all of the following - geographic origin, sexual orientation, race, caste, class, religion, age, ability/disability, language, family, living conditions, etc. To recommend a book list on 'Inclusive Education' we focused on inclusion in the light of ability/disability. This list includes picture books on this theme.

A Helping Hand

Author: Payal Dhar

Illustrator: Vartika Sharma

Publisher: Pratham

Language: English and Hindi

Recommended Age Group: 7-11 years

When a new girl joins class, the teacher asks another child to be her friend and show her around. But the child is not sure she wants to, as the new girl is not like the rest of them. A fascinating tale of friendship and fitting in, which tells its story through letters.
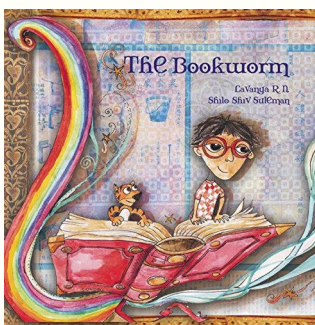
**The Bookworm**

Author: Lavanya R.N

Illustrator: Shilo Shiv Suleman

Publisher: Karadi Tales

Language: English

Recommended Age-Group: 7 and above

Sesha is a silent boy who reads all the time... and he has a little brown book that no one has ever seen the inside of. One day, Sesha speaks, and no one understands why he speaks differently. But when they see his brown book and the magic he can create, Sesha becomes a whole new person.
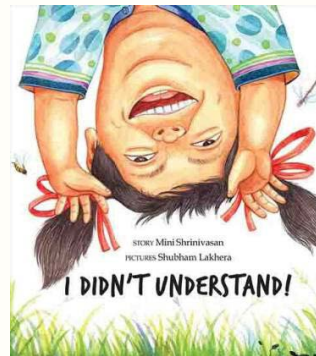
I Didn't Understand!

Author: Mini Shrinivasan
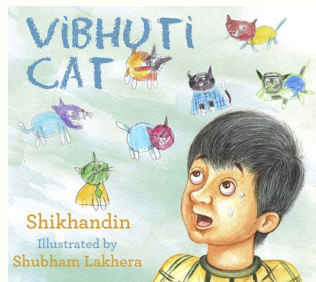
Illustrator: Shubham Lakhera

Publisher: Tulika

Language: English, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali

Recommended Age Group: 7 and above

The story gently takes the reader to a day in Manna's school, who has Down Syndrome, and how she experiences three things in school that she doesn't understand. The expressive illustration complements the text and makes the story powerful.

Vibhuti Cat

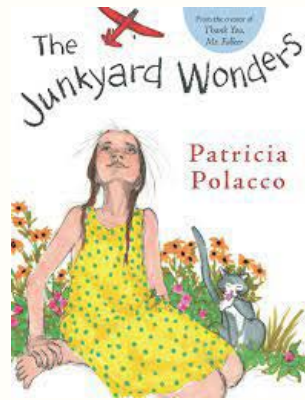Author: Shikhandin

Illustrator: Shubham Lakhera

Publisher: Duckbill Books and Publication Private Limited

Language: English

Recommended Age Group: 7-10 years

Magesh is different from other children. He's no good with words. And when he is misunderstood he gets upset and his movements get jerky. But there are two things he loves: playing with his brother Vignesh, and his Vibhuti Cat. But what will happen when Magesh starts going to school? Will he take Vibhuti cat along?
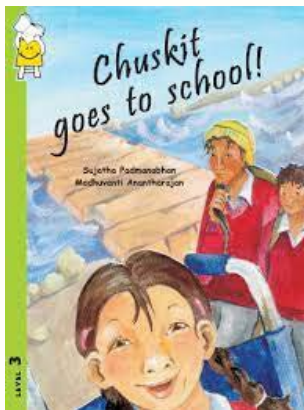
Chuskit goes to school!

Author: Sujatha Padmanabhan

Illustrator: Madhuvanti Anantharajan

Publisher: Pratham

Language: English, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Assamese & others

Recommended Age Group: 6-10 years

A story of a nine-year-old girl Chuskit who longed to go to school, to make friends, learn math and play games. But she could not... until Abdul decided to do something about it.

Junkyard Wonders

Author: Patricia Polacco

Illustrator: Patricia Polacco

Publisher: Philomel Books

Language: English

Recommended Age Group: 10-14 years

Trisha, who has just joined a new school, is disappointed when she is once again placed in a 'special needs' class along with a group of other children who are 'different'. While the story covers feelings of grief, discrimination and exclusion in its narration, the overall theme that shines through is one of uplift and belief in oneself.

Bookworm is a charitable trust based in Goa that works intensely with library engagement and education. With a vision to inspire and develop a love for reading as a way of life, nurturing humane engagement in every girl, boy and others, Bookworm works with children, youth, adults and the larger community in diverse and varied contexts.

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Towards Inclusive Learning

A Maggu

In this story, we discuss how the current public-school system falls short on the promise of delivering inclusive education to children hailing from varied social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. The non-profits we spoke with are devising strategies to respond to the diversity in the classrooms by tailoring curriculum, pedagogy, teaching-learning materials for the specific contexts they work in.

Encouraging Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

Unnati Institute for Social and Educational Change (Unnati ISEC) works in Maharashtra, in the Akot and Telhara blocks of Akola district and the southern tip of the Melghat region of Amravati district. This region is home to the Korku tribe that forms the majority and a small population is from the Nimadi, Gond and Bhil tribes. Children are exposed only to Korku, their mother tongue during the formative six years since birth. Hindi and Marathi are used to communicate with people outside their community. The formal school system does not have learning materials in Korku. The emphasis on using Marathi as the medium of education has forced the usage of Korku to be limited only to the community.

Hemangi Joshi, Chief Functionary of Unnati ISEC shares, "We live in a democratic country where individuals and communities are guaranteed a dignified life. However, what we have seen is that the languages and culture of disadvantaged groups are pushed to the periphery. Further, plurality in experiences and practices is essential for any democracy, and our nation can thrive as a democracy only if diversity is acknowledged and encouraged."

The Anganwadi centers in the region are restricted only for nutritional and welfare services and fail to provide foundational education to children. Primary school teachers are mostly from different socio-cultural backgrounds, and often have little or no knowledge about the culture and worldview of the tribal communities of the region. Teachers' reluctance to learn and interact with children in Korku, and a curriculum that fails to incorporate their practices and contexts, have resulted in high dropout rates and low literacy levels.

To ensure that the young acknowledge and preserve diversity, we need to have an education system that accords dignity to diverse social groups.

Hemangi shares, "During the pandemic, for seven-eight months, we had the opportunity to work with children who had never been to schools. When we used Korku as a medium of education and interaction and contextualized the curriculum, these children showed keen interest in learning. We have observed that children who had started going to schools and came to our learning centers were visibly underconfident in the classroom. This was because the classrooms failed to be inclusive and tailor the education to suit the experiences of young learners."

To respond to the learning problems of children from the Korku community, under their program 'Shiku Anande (Let's Learn with Joy)', Unnati adopted a mother-tongue-based multilingual education approach. This multi-pronged approach includes facilitating improvement in Korku (mother tongue)

literacy in tribal children, and in Marathi which remains as the school's medium of education, tailoring instructional strategies accordingly, making textbooks available in Korku, and creating spaces in school where the culture and language of each child are given respect. For instance, the team started contextualizing books for children by using popular sayings in their language, stories about cooking delicacies with pictures, photo albums of vegetables that can be foraged from forests, etc.

Unnati ISEC runs two learning centers where trained local youths conduct two and half-hour-long sessions five days a week before school time throughout the year. For the first two years, the focus remains to develop literacy in the Korku language and create opportunities for listening and speaking Marathi. In the third year, strategies are used to develop Marathi reading skills. Hemangi adds, "To date, Korku remains a non-scripted language. We use the Devanagari script for the Korku language. Since Devanagari script is also used for Marathi, the learning journey of a child in both languages remains smooth."

The Unnati ISEC team is now expanding their work to two district schools and is hopeful that the model of mother-tongue-based multilingual education will be successful in the school setting. Leveraging the evidence gathered on the model in these two schools, the team wishes to push for its adoption across the state.

The National Education Policy, 2020, mentions that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother-tongue/local language/regional language. Strangling linguistic and cultural diversity is not an option. We will have to devise an education system that responds to diversity.

Using Sports for Inclusion

Violence is not foreign to the people of Manipur. Tensions between the two major ethnic groups in the hill districts of Manipur - Kukis and Nagas - have brewed for decades. This conflict got severe in 1992-97 with villages being burned down by armed groups belonging to both tribes. The relationship between the groups continues to be strained.

Recognize, Rise and Empower Association (RREA) is a non-profit based in Manipur, working for the socio-economic empowerment and sustainable development of communities in and around the troubled peripheries of North-East India.

Mathanmi Hungyo, CEO and Director of RREA says, "I was born in the backdrop of the conflict between the Kukis and Nagas. In the Kamjong district where we work, the two groups are almost in equal numbers. In villages, we continuously heard about the tension between the two groups from our elders. It became difficult to develop cohesion between the Kuki and Naga students in schools as they carried the biases of their elders."

The team was working in the Kamjong district school for a while and they noted that children did not have any dedicated play space. The RREA team decided to conduct a pilot introducing sports in the Kamjong district school. They started with football and saw the children enjoy playing. Later, badminton and table tennis were also introduced.

Rohit Aggarwal, from the RREA team, says, "We did not introduce the sports program with specific outcomes in mind. We wanted the children to have a space to play. We did not want their learning to be limited to classrooms and got them some basic sports equipment. We encouraged the students to come to play before or after school. The Sports Educator and Sports Coordinator in each school oversaw the activities."

In the classrooms, children hailing from the two tribes kept to themselves and barely

RREA

interacted with each other. Mathanmi recounts, "When the 'Sports for Social Development' program was launched, if a team member belonged to the other tribe and was part of their team, children still refused to pass the football. Children wanted to elect the team captain from the same tribe as theirs. Our team never interfered in these decisions. We wanted the children to unlearn the biases on their own."

Both Mathanmi and Rohit shared that it did not take long for the children to start befriending each other. They started passing the football to children from the other tribe and they elected the captain who they thought will be a good leader. The team noticed that there was a spike in attendance of the children who engaged in sports activities, and they demonstrated leadership capabilities. The sports program was later introduced in schools where the efforts could be supported by a fellow from Teach for North-East, a program anchored by RREA.

The RREA team does understand that the violence and historical differences between Nagas and Kukis force the communities to

treat each other with suspicion. The team is optimistic that it will take a while for the children to erase the bitterness. Mathanmi adds, "There are instances when students from different schools question a student from Kuki or Naga community on the need to play and befriend students from other communities. It is reassuring to see our students explaining to them to not let the differences divide us. They would even invite these students to play with them. It is only with patience and love that these constructed differences can be addressed." There are still stray instances of violence between the two communities. The bitterness percolates to the lives of students too. It can only be hoped that by kicking the ball, serving on the table tennis table, or the badminton court, these children can learn to be together.

The Necessity of Listening

The Amma Social Welfare Association (ASWA) is an organization that for decades has led community initiatives. In the last few years, they have pivoted their focus to education, and they are working in the multilingual and multicultural peri-urban community of Shadnagar, near Hyderabad.

The community predominantly comprises of families of migrant laborers hailing from the states of Bihar, Karnataka, Maharastra, and Uttar Pradesh and also from families of the Lambanis, a nomadic community that has now settled in parts of Telangana and Karnataka. The medium of education is Telugu. The children who attend the government schools come from multilingual backgrounds, and find it difficult to achieve minimum proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy in Telugu.

The ASWA team uses a balanced approach in teaching language and literacy. The curriculum incorporates day-to-day experiences of children, and it is tailored to the needs of each child.

To strengthen the primary school education of children from the migrant labor families in Shadnagar, ASWA had launched initiatives for improving linguistic competence and literacy. Haritha from ASWA engaged with children enrolled in the nearby government primary school in Ramnagar. When Haritha started engaging with them in 2018, she observed that the children of the migrant labor families found it difficult to understand lessons. The teachers and school management discouraged the children to converse amongst themselves in their mother-tongue. They did not take any extra efforts to help the struggling children to cope up with classes. This resulted in higher dropouts amongst children in the region.

The ASWA team uses a balanced approach in teaching language and literacy. The curriculum incorporates day-to-day experiences of children, and it is tailored to the needs of each child. Haritha, shares, "In 2018, when I started engaging with the children in grades first to third, I encouraged them to express their views. I asked mundane questions such as how their family is, what did they do or whether they had any food or not. I used to tell them that they could share in their mother tongue which included Bhagirathi, Lambadi, Bhojpuri, Hindi, Marathi, and Urdu, and I will try understanding what they were saying. This was the first time a teacher was trying to understand their language. Often, words such as 'mother', 'father', or 'home' would be used by them, and I would try learning those words." Sreenivasa from ASWA adds, "Once Haritha gave them a space to express themselves in their mother-tongue, the children showed interest in learning activities."

Haritha says, "To build their interest in learning Telugu and numeracy, we use methods such as the arts, learning through rhymes or storybooks, and we encourage children to take part. All these methods are participatory, and children can learn new concepts by expressing themselves. It is heart-warming to see children humming the rhymes they have learned."

In the school, other teachers are hesitant to adopt these methods. Haritha shares, "The teachers used to tell me that the kids are noisy in my class, and I should be strict with them. Our team spent sufficient time in understanding each child's social, economic, and cultural background, and we gave them space to express and discuss their daily experiences, which is key for the children to connect with the teacher and learning process. The students regularly started coming to school and their learning abilities also improved. Once the teachers saw children taking an active interest in learning, they became open to giving space for children to express themselves."

In the wake of the pandemic, children found it difficult to cope up with learning. The ASWA team set up a Children Learning Center in Ramnagar slum in October 2020. The team

ASWA

followed the same learning methods for children who enrolled and saw a similar positive response.

The ASWA team recently set up a Children's Library to encourage children to build their interest in books and reading. It believes that the education system falls short in giving avenues for children from diverse backgrounds to express themselves. They are confident that if we listen to what the children have to say, they will be happy to learn.

Unlearning Biases

Maarga is based in an area with working-class families with multilingual and multi-caste backgrounds in urban Bengaluru. They work with primary and middle school children on literacy and numeracy. They run a library for children as well.

Bengaluru is home to migrant families from Karnataka and the neighboring states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, among others. The adults in the families are mostly engaged in daily wage labor and reside in the slum areas of the city. The mother tongue of the migrants happens to be Telugu, Urdu, or Tamil among others.

According to Rajendran Prabhakar, General Secretary of Maarga, children from slums of Bengaluru are mostly enrolled in schools run by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the administrative body overseeing civic amenities in the city, and in schools run by linguistic or religious minorities, and private schools. The schools run by BBMP have a reasonable infrastructure and human resources, but the teachers lack the will to deliver quality education.

Some parents believe that enrolment in private schools can ensure better education than public schools. Prabhakar says, "Parents are duped by these private schools promising better education and learning outcomes. These schools are levying high fees. The parents even go to the extent of borrowing money to cover the costs of the education

of their children. Schools run by linguistic or religious minority groups do not provide better education either."

The Maarga team believes that poor learning levels of children in any language – Kannada which is prescribed by the state government, the mother tongue(s) of children, or English, have resulted in them being unable to write or express themselves well in any language. Teachers taking lessons in Kannada often think that since the mother tongue of students is different, there is no merit in improving their fluency in Kannada.

There are poor efforts towards helping children learn their mother tongue and their command over English also remains weak. Teachers lack empathy for students struggling to learn these languages and seldom provide any remedial measures.

Maarga has launched two education programs to address these problems. The first program has two learning centers running for two hours six days a week in classes one to four in Bengaluru. The team facilitates learning in four subjects - languages, mathematics, art and crafts, and environmental sciences. Their methods heavily focus on experiential learning.

Prabhakar shares, "For an exposure visit we took the children to a lake. When we returned, we asked them to share the things they observed and their experiences. All of them had different responses. The problem in language learning is that seldom it is about expressing. Here, since we emphasized experiential learning methods, they were able to express themselves well. We later asked them to write what they had observed. We aim to develop critical thinking abilities in children and not treat them as passive receivers of education."

The Maarga team is also closely working with two nearby government schools in the neighborhood to support systemic changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher support in

foundational and middle school literacy and numeracy.

It has also launched its library program in the learning centers where the library is envisioned as an enabling educational space. The slums hardly have any libraries that expose children to new ideas.

Another important aspect of Maarga's approach is that all facilitators in the learning centers hail from the communities residing in the slums.

Through interactions with other organizations, the team expanded their understanding of libraries and books and the multiple learning possibilities from library activities. For instance, in any story narrated in the learning center, facilitators through their creativity would request children to reflect on certain aspects.

In these learning centers, the Maarga team conducts social education sessions that expose children to the Indian constitution's preamble, and its values such as equality, the meaning of independence for them, or the works of Ambedkar. These sessions aim that each child learns to critique the systemic injustices meted out to them.

Prabhakar shared that in public parks located in the neighborhood of National Games Village, children from slums are often turned away from playing there.

He says, "These are young children who are angry or confused about the discrimination against them. We orient them to understand these systemic biases against people from the slums and encourage them to protect their rights such as in this case, the right to access these public spaces. We also reassure them that there are people in the world who do not subscribe to such values."

The team continuously works to remove biases against different religious communities or genders. Stereotypes against children from certain religious communities being considered unclean or rowdy are rife. Prabhakar shared that in these instances, they made the children realize that poor water supply does not allow them to bathe every day, and poverty forces them to have two-three pairs of clothes.

The National Education Policy, 2020, mentions that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother-tongue/ local language/regional language.

The boys in the slums also have deep patriarchal notions about girls being dull and inefficient. They think that there is no need to educate them well and they need to focus on household chores. Prabhakar adds, "The team dispels these notions through engaging with them in discussions or using audio-visual media such as showing children videos of successful women such as Kalpana Chawla."

Another important aspect of Maarga's approach is that all facilitators in the learning centers hail from slum communities. Prabhakar shares, "The facilitators are aware of the socio-cultural realities of the slums. For instance, a child in a slum might have to help their parents with household chores or take care of their siblings. The facilitators from the community are aware of these situations and are sensitive in dealing with children on this. The facilitators do not come with any high-headedness. These facilitators are later trained with our teaching methods. The children need empathetic facilitators who are interested in their learning."

Through an approach that is sensitive to the diversity amongst the children they work with, Maarga works to enable children to attain their potential. By enhancing the critical learning and thinking abilities of children, Maarga is ensuring that these young leaders question layered inequalities, and the skewed organization of resources and opportunities in our society.

In Conclusion

We cannot allow India to become a monocultural society that acts as an echo chamber for similar thoughts and experiences. To ensure that the young acknowledge and preserve diversity, we need to have an education system that accords dignity to diverse social groups. The constitutional ethos of celebrating diversity and fostering inclusion must be enforced in letter and spirit. These efforts could begin by ensuring a responsive education system.

You can reach out to the organizations featured in the story at: Unnati Institute for Social and Educational Change (Unnati ISEC) - unnati.isec@gmail.com, Recognize, Rise and Empower Association (RREA) - rrae4438@gmail.com, Amma Social Welfare Association (ASWA) - info@aswa4u.org and Maarga for Social Transformation - maarga.karnataka@gmail.com.

Recognize, Rise and Empower Association (RREA)

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