



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

Education is a right not a privilege, and every child should benefit from it. Education is one of the instruments of bringing about social equality leading to the formation of cultural milieu for social justice. Therefore, education, social equality and social justice together create an organic bond with other. The philosophy of inclusive education will add a new dimension to the formation of inclusive and equitable society. Despite several educational programmes initiated by the government of India, many children remain outside the formal school education system of India. According to the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), 2021-22, around 3.5 % of children belonging to the age group of 6-14 were out of school. Therefore, National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) impressively emphasizes on the need of extending the horizon of Inclusive Education. The objectives of this article are to study the needs and significance of Inclusive Education in India, to know the different provisions of Inclusive Education as stated by NEP 2020, to analyse the problems and challenges in the implementation of Inclusive Education in India and to study the Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education. The methodology of this paper is documentary-based analysis. Data were collected from valuable books, research articles, e-magazines, journals, newspapers and internet sources. The data used in this study are secondary in nature; logical analysis has been made on the perspective of qualitative mode.

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### Introduction

Indian education system was at crossroad during the aftermath of independence. However, the Government of India put emphasis on the necessity of mass education that would cater for the education of all sections of people of our country. Therefore, there has been a paradigmatic shift in the Indian education system in the post independent India. Efforts were given to bring about a qualitative and quantitative change in the overall infrastructure of education, syllabus and curriculum, textbooks, examination and evaluation system of education. Various Commissions and Committees were established with a view to get valuable recommendations for the overall development of the education system and education of the people of our country. It is found that recommendations of all Committees and Commissions centre round the philosophy that 'Education is a right and, every individual should get an equal opportunity to learn and grow.' The Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in Indian Constitution states that the state should provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. According to Article 21-A of the Constitution of India, all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years have the right to free and compulsory education. Before and after the introduction of Right to Education Act (RTE) of 2009, several key programmes and policies have been initiated to make room for Education for All:

1. **NPE 1968** – Based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission, NPE 1968 pronounced, 'Educational facilities for the physically and mentally handicapped children should be expanded, and attempts should be made to develop integrated programmes enabling the handicapped children to study in mainstream schools.'
2. **NPE 1986** – According to NEP 1986, 'the children with mild disabilities should be permitted to education in the regular school'.
3. **The Programme of Action-1992** - It is stated that 'the children with disabilities can be integrated in the regular school.'

4. **The District Primary Education Program (DPEP), 1994** – It is a joint venture between Government of India and the World Bank. DPEP states that ‘any difference that a child exhibited in learning was to be attributed not a problem with child, but of school system’. This was the first time when the emphasis was on the school preparedness for inclusion.
5. **Person with Disability Act (PWD- 1995)** - According to this act, every disable child will get free education in a good academic institution up to the age of eighteen years.
6. **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001)** - It is a flagship programme of the Government of India to ensure elementary education of children. Its goal is to ensure quality elementary education for all children belonging to the age group of 6 to 14 years, and to eliminate gender and social disparities in education.
7. **The Right to Education Act** - This Act was enacted under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. It ensures access to quality education, regardless of family income, gender, caste, or creed.
8. **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (2009)** – It was planned to improve access to secondary education. The RMSA is also designed to remove barriers based on gender, socio-economic status, disability that comes in the way of enrolment in school.
9. **Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (2010)** - The basic objective of this law is to provide eight years of elementary schooling and four years of secondary schooling for all students with disabilities.
10. **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** - According to this Act, every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 to 18 years shall have the right to free education.
11. **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan** - The Government of India launched the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in 2018-19. It was extended from 2021-22 to 2025-26. It is an integrated scheme for School Education covering children with special needs from classes I to XII. Various provisions are made available for the educational needs of the children with special needs. Transportation allowances and stipend for all girls with special needs, individualized support etc. are provided. Samagra Shiksha also has provisions for ramps, handrails and disabled friendly toilets for barrier free access to schools for all children.

Finally yet importantly, one very significant milestone in the area of inclusive education is the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) adopted by the United Nations Organisation (UNO) in September 2015. SDG 4 aims to:

- Ensure that all children complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030.
- Provide equal access to affordable vocational training.
- Eliminate gender and wealth disparities.
- Achieve universal access to quality higher education.

### **NEP 2020 and Inclusive Education**

‘Unity in Diversity’ is the cultural heritage of India. In India a number of cultural, religious, lingual, ethnic and minority groups live in a cooperative mind-set. In fact, inclusivity has been a part of national life of India since ancient period. The NEP 2020 emphasizes that, “Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality” which has direct impact on the development of an inclusive community and society. It aims at providing high-quality equitable and inclusive education to ensure that all students with diverse learning needs are able to thrive in an inclusive environment to realize their full potentials. In an unequivocal language, National Education Policy 2020, observes; “the aim must be for India to have an education system by 2040 that is second to none, with equitable access to the highest-quality of education for all learners regardless of social or economic background”.

### **Concept**

The inclusive education model serves as the foundation for education for everyone, irrespective of social community, caste, class, gender and disability of the child. It is a modern approach and a new methodology towards inclusion of children who are still outside the mainstream of education. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality” (Salamanca Statement, Spain 1994) which emphasized that: Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. It was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal 2000). Therefore, making the education system subservient to the needs of all learners is a genuine challenge to all stakeholders who are working at the ground level.

### **Definition**

According to UNESCO, “Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all.”

Inclusive education is a set of values, principles and practices that seek more effective and meaningful education for all students regardless of whether they have exceptionality labels or not. (Michael F. Giangreco, 1997).

According to Loreman and Deppeler 'Inclusive Education' is "complete inclusion of children with various abilities in all aspects of schooling that other children are able to access and enjoy". Therefore, Inclusion is a process, and over time, the education system gets improvement and maturity in providing satisfactory support for all learners. Inclusion is not a supplementary but an integral, cross cutting part of the strategy of extending all kind of meaningful learning experience for all out of school children.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the needs and significance of inclusive education in India.
2. To know the different provisions for inclusive education as stated by NEP 2020.
3. To analyse the problems and challenges of inclusive education in India.
4. To study the Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education.

**Methodology:** The methodology of this paper is documentary-based analysis. Data were collected from valuable books, research articles, e-magazines, journals, newspapers and internet sources. The data used in this study are secondary in nature; logical analysis has been made on the perspective of qualitative mode.

### **Discussion on Objective: 1**

#### **The Needs and Significance of Inclusive Education in India**

- In modern times, inclusion in education is must because it ensures all students have equal opportunities to learn and succeed, regardless of their abilities, financial background, gender, social category, religion. It paves the way for a fair and reasonable learning environment where everyone will get a chance to learn, grow, and develop his personality.
- Inclusive education encourages social integration by inspiring students to interact and collaborate with their classmates who have come from different social and cultural backgrounds. It will develop a sense of empathy, respect, and understanding among students. They learn the art of caring for each other.
- It eradicates social, cultural, religious boundaries and financial obstacles. That way it makes room for Education for All.
- Communication skill will also develop as students from different background join the same school and class. That way it removes the barriers to learning and participation for all students.
- As students participate in discourses with each other, they learn and develop skills like critical thinking, decision-making, and problem solving.
- In contemporary world, equipping the members' of national society with valuable education, skills and information is one of the responsibilities all governments. Therefore, inclusion is necessary condition for the education of all.
- It has a wider connotation in national life of a state. Inclusive education does not only stand for the inclusion of children in the mainstream of education, it also stand for the values of democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity and justice of all the people of a society.
- India with second largest population of the world cannot develop as a modern state without inclusion of all children in the mainstream of education system.
- In the era of globalisation, its significance may also be explained from the standpoint of economic man. Without basic elementary education and training, human beings are categorized as liability of the state and society, however, a man with education and training is considered as 'human resource'. Here in lies the significance of inclusive education, especially in the context of India. Without inclusion, it is a nightmare to bring about economic development in India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Discussion on Objective: 2**

#### **Provisions for Inclusive Education as Stated by NEP 2020**

While the Indian education system and successive government policies have made steady progress towards bridging gender and social category gaps in all levels of school education, large disparities still remain - especially at the secondary level - particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, NEP emphasizes equity and inclusion at all levels of school education. The NEP emphasizes that, "Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality" which has implications for development of an inclusive community and society. The provisions may be summarised thus:

- **Equal opportunities** - The policy aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities.
- **Accessible facilities** - The policy aims to make school buildings, campuses, and other facilities accessible to all students.
- **Inclusive education for children with special needs:** The NEP provides inclusive education for children with special needs. It covers all children with special needs with one or more disabilities, including hearing impairment, speech and learning disability, and more.
- **Individualized Support:** The NEP provides individualized support and other supportive measures for students. In accordance with this idea, Individualized Education Plan, awareness about two-way relationship between school and

communities, introduction of vocational training etc. will have to be developed to help students achieve self-sufficiency and economic stability. Technology is to be used to make room for individualised support system.

- **Recruiting special educators** - NEP 2020 aims to recruit special educators in all school complexes. In this regard, NEP 2020 provides training for teachers to identify learning disabilities in children early.
- **Special Education Zones (SEZs)**: It is recommended that regions of the country with large populations from educationally disadvantaged should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs).
- **Indian Sign Language (ISL)** - The NEP 2020 aims to standardize ISL across the country and develop curriculum materials for students with hearing impairment.
- **Appropriate communication**: The NEP ensures that education is to be imparted in the most appropriate languages and modes of communication. Accordingly, four major components of communication i.e. listening, talking, reading and writing should be highlighted in the process of interaction with the students.
- **Curriculum and examination system**: The NEP 2020 recommends flexible curriculum and examination system to help children learn at their own pace and leverage their strengths. The policy also wants to modify the curriculum and examination system to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.
- **Learning materials** - The policy aims to develop suitable learning materials and resources for students with disabilities.
- **Free Boarding**: Free boarding facilities will be given around school locations, especially to the girls and for students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The policy also aims to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities based on their individual needs.
- **Transportation facilities**: The NEP provides transportation facilities for all students. Besides, a special arrangement of transportation is required for students with disabilities and their attendants.
- **Training and employment**: The NEP provides for training and employment of teachers, teachers with disabilities, and teachers qualified in sign language and Braille.
- **Rational TLM for education and scholarship**: The NEP recommends for books, learning materials, and appropriate assistive devices. There is also a provision for scholarships.
- **Gender Inclusion Fund**: The NEP provides for a Gender-Inclusion Fund for equitable quality of education for girls and transgender students.
- **Research and Development** - NEP 2020 speaks about Research and Development activities, which is must to improve inclusive education.
- **Resource centres** - The policy aims to establish adequate numbers of resource centres to support horizon of inclusive education.

### **Discussion on Objective: 3**

#### **The Problems and Challenges of Inclusive Education in India**

Framing, articulation and implementation of a sound inclusive education policy, as part of regular education policy is a major challenge to the policy makers and academicians. UNESCO in its Global Education Monitoring Report (Paris: 2016) has observed that 263 million children and youth between ages 6 and 17 years are not in school today. Similarly, the World Bank in the World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise (Washington, DC: 2018) has mentioned that many marginalized children face barriers to learning even when they are in school. Following are the problems that pose challenges to the smooth implementation of the objectives of inclusive education in India.

- **Lack of Accessibility** – Improper infrastructure of the educational institutions at large is an obstacle in the implementation of the objectives of inclusive education. Schools do not have proper facilities that fulfil the essential needs of the students, especially, the need of disabled children.
- **Inadequate Funding** – Inadequate funding creates problems in the making of suitable infrastructure for inclusion in educational institutions. It was reported that the government of India spends on 4.12 % of its GDP for the education sector in 2022. However, the NEP 1968 and 1986 recommended for the allocation of 6% of GDP for education sector. The NEP 2020 recommends the same amount of money.
- **Lack of Resources** - The lack of essential resources can thwart the objectives of an auspicious program like inclusive education. It is also reported that there has been huge lack of physical infrastructure, teaching aids, digital resources, necessary assistive technologies, adaptive materials, trained teaching staff etc.
- **Inadequate Training** - Due to the lack of professional training in the areas of inclusive education, its materialisation is difficult for the teachers, and the classroom management from the perspective of inclusive education is equally tough for the teachers. A teacher may find it tough to teach a child with autism due to the lack of proper training.
- **Attitudinal Barriers** - In a culturally varied classroom, language and cultural differences can lead to additional difficulties. Marginalisation is also caused due to other factors such as *Varna*, caste, gender, and poverty. Negative attitudes and social exclusion pave the way for discrimination, which in turn causes isolation and creates barriers to inclusion. Children with disabilities are often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers.
- **Curriculum Constraints** - A rigid curriculum is a barrier to inclusive education. If the curriculum is not flexible, it may not meet the varied requirements of all students.

- **Inadequate Support** - Students with special needs may require additional support services, such as counselling, speech therapy, or occupational therapy. The limited availability of trained persons in this subject, hinders the implementation of meaningful inclusion.
- **Physical Barriers** - Schools need to ensure that their buildings and resources are easily accessible to all students. Ramps and Railings, Special Toilets, Rest Rooms and Class Rooms etc. are mostly unavailable in schools.
- **Assessment and Evaluation Issues** - Standardised testing and traditional assessment methods cannot address the needs of the students with diverse needs. For example, students with a speech impairment might struggle with verbal tests, even though they understand the material.
- **Social Stigma and Bullying** - Children with special needs may face social stigma and bullying in inclusive classrooms even from their peers without disabilities. An example is that a child with a physical disability being left out of group-games by other children, affecting his social and emotional health.
- **Ineffective Management of the Educational System** - Insufficient communication and collaboration among policy makers, educators, guardians, pupils, school administrators, and experts poses a challenge.
- **Large Class Sizes** - Overcrowded classrooms is normal in schools located at rural and mufassil towns. It is a challenging task for the teachers to provide individualised attention and support to all students, particularly those with special needs.

#### **Discussion on Objective: 4**

#### **To Study the Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education**

Teachers are the foundation of inclusive education. The role of a teacher in inclusive education is both fundamental and transformative. They are not just facilitators of knowledge but also engineers of making a substantive equitable learning environment. They are known as the pathfinders of inclusivity in education.

However, performance of a teacher depends on 'Teacher Readiness' that refers to teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and preparedness to meet students' diverse learning needs in inclusive classrooms. It includes teachers' understanding of inclusive education principles, knowledge of instructional strategies and accommodations, confidence, and self-efficacy in working with diverse learners (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). Teacher's readiness is one of the factors that allow a teacher to control the learning environment confidently, and allow teachers to be flexible and adapt to the changing needs of their students (Willingham et al., 2021). In the classroom situation, the role of teachers may be summarised in the following ways:

- **Identification of Strength and Weakness** - Teachers in inclusive education play a dynamic role in identification of academic strengths and weakness of all learners. Based on identification, he can design individualized learning plans to address the specific needs of learners.
- **Development of a Sense of Collaboration** – Teachers play a pivotal role in enabling cooperative learning by designing tasks and activities that encourage group participation. Group projects and peer tutoring are very much helpful. Through collaborative learning students will develop social skill and communication.
- **Collaborator** – The Parents have deep concern of their children. Teachers have to collaborate with parents, counsellors, and other educators to ensure the spirit of inclusive education. Through effective communication with the parents, a teacher comes to know more about the learners. That way students' learning outcome develops.
- **Assessor** – As an Assessor, a teacher has to prepare age-appropriate and individualized need-based assessment strategies for the future development of children.
- **Instructional Techniques** – **Instead of traditional method, the teachers are required to look for suitable teaching-learning and instructional techniques to address the inclusive classrooms.** Interactive whiteboards, paired learning, student-led presentations, etc. may be used for instructional purposes. Incorporating images, videos, infographics, and diagrams can help make complex information more accessible.
- **Positive Behaviour:** Encouragement through positive reinforcement is essential. Teachers should create a friendly and congenial environment in the classroom.
- **Communicator** – Effective communication is key to make inclusive education successful. Teachers must communicate in various ways to ensure that every student understands the material. They also play a key role in identifying and breaking down barriers to communication.
- **Manager of the Learning Environment** - The Teacher is also a Manager of the Learning Environment. Creating a nurturing and emotional learning environment is the prime responsibility of the Teacher. In an inclusive classroom, challenges are inevitable. Teachers must identify these challenges and develop strategies to address them.
- **Role Model** – It is expected that teachers are the embodiment of values such as perseverance, honesty, kindness, empathy etc. in our society.

### **Findings:**

#### **Findings pertaining to objective: 1**

##### **To study the needs and significance of inclusive education in India**

- The NEP 2020 in its various sections highlighted the equity and inclusion of education.
- Unlike the previous national education policies, the NEP 2020 has prepared a roadmap for the future education of India.
- Emphasis is given on the development of Inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational culture in school education system.
- The government has rightly decided to frame the National Guidelines and Implementation Framework on Equitable and Inclusive Education. In this endeavour, NCERT has been entrusted to do the needful.
- The present education policy makes room for maximum inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream education.
- It is reiterated to ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education which is a precondition of liberal society.
- Leave No One Behind (LNOB) is a new idiom in the field of inclusive education. It is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- 'Accessible India Campaign' i.e. *Sugama Bharat Abhiyan* has been emphasised to reach the unreached.

#### **Findings pertaining to objective: 2**

##### **To know the different provisions for inclusive education as stated by NEP 2020**

- There is an ambitious attempt to provide value, respect and celebration of students' diversity in the NEP 2020.
- Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) are broadly categorized based on gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions.
- Providing bicycles and organizing cycling to access to school have been shown to be particularly powerful methods in increasing participation of female students.
- The National Guidelines and Implementation Framework prepared by NCERT will provide a model map to the states for developing their annual work plan in respect of inclusive education.
- There is a provision of reservation of 3% seats for Differently Abled Children in all *Kendriya Vidyalayas* and *Navodaya Vidyalayas*.
- The audio books for visually impaired and ISL Dictionary for hearing impaired have been put up on *DIKSHA* platform.
- *Barkha: A Reading Series for 'All'* is a reading series developed by NCERT based on the principles of inclusion.
- The concept of e-pathsala portal and mobile app platform is made to incorporate technology in inclusive education. The e-pathsala portal and mobile app platform provide free access to the NCERT books and e-content for students, teachers and parents. NCERT textbooks are also available in audio format. More than 935 textbook videos, prepared by CIET, NCERT are available on DIKSHA portal. Presently, 4.81 lakh + users have registered on the mobile app.

#### **Findings pertaining to objective: 3**

##### **To analyse the problems and challenges of inclusive education in India**

- The 'National Guidelines and Implementation Framework' is prepared by the NCERT to meet the challenges of inclusive education.
- The inclusion of the children with special needs in the mainstream education is challenge to the policy makers of education.
- Establishment of Special schools and recruitment of qualified special educators is also a challenge to all stakeholders.
- The conditional cash transfer to incentivize the parents to send their children to school is a challenging experiment.
- The inclusion of children coming from the educationally disadvantaged regions and from the low-income group families is a big hurdle. To overcome this hurdle, the NEP provides for the creation of Special Education Zones (SEZs) in those regions.
- Gender parity in school education refers to the equality in the ratio of girls and boys in school. To overcome the problem of inclusion of female and transgender children in the mainstream education, Gender Inclusion Fund will be helpful.
- In the rural areas, students have to travel long distance to attend school. Boarding facilities around the school locations for students, especially for girls is an essential weapon to overcome this problem.
- Lack of awareness of parents and community as well, some time comes in the way of inclusion process. Therefore, sensitisation programme is to be organised to aware the parents and community as well.
- Caste system and Varna system are also responsible for huge number of out-of-school children. Age-old traditional value system of India sometime creates hindrance in the way of inclusion. To do away with the orthodox value system, the government has to take positive steps to ensure inclusion.
- There is a lack of short-term training or workshop for the teachers on the subject of management of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, providing necessary training to all teachers is also a challenge to the government.

#### **Findings pertaining to objective : 4**

##### **To study the Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education**

- The role of educators in inclusive education is challenging.
- Based on the Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), training and/or workshop on basic classroom management is to be introduced for teachers.
- According to Wang, Haertal and Walberg (1993) effective classroom management contribute to school learning effectively.
- To address the diversity in classrooms, it is necessary for regular teachers to work with special education teachers, school psychologists, para-professionals (such as Speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, recreational therapists etc.) and parents of students with disabilities.
- To ensure inclusion successful, individualized and adaptive instructions in teaching is required.
- The teachers shall not be left alone in this endeavour. Encouraging leadership, NGOs and other professionals available in the school or wider community must support them.
- Successful inclusion is impossible without rational and scientific training on inclusion. It is important that all teachers learn about inclusive pedagogy during their initial training. They also need enough exposure to teaching the diverse groups of learners in general education classrooms, thus promoting their efficacy and making their attitudes more positive towards inclusion.
- The application of success-oriented curriculum in place of knowledge-based and content-oriented curriculum is required.
- The application of Universal design for learning (UDL) will produce better inclusivity in education because it accommodates the needs and abilities of all learners and refers to a flexible learning environment for all. It stands for: (a) Multiple means of learning (why of learning), (b). Multiple Means of Representation (what of learning), (c) Multiple means of action and expression (how of learning).

#### **Conclusion**

No doubt, NEP 2020 is a roadmap to improve India's school education ecosystem. Based on the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of United Nations, the government of India has been trying to create an environment where everyone will have a chance to access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. However, the success of the programme of inclusive education requires a paradigmatic cultural and attitudinal shift in the existing mind-set of all stakeholders.

It is an ambitious attempt to bring about a substantive change in the ecosystem of school education system in India. However, build up a system for all learners requires clear and broad-spectrum attitudes and multi-dimensional creative plans and programmes.

NEP 2020 emphasizes upon developing Inclusive educational structure and instilling inclusive educational culture in our school education system through infrastructural support and corresponding changes in curriculum and evaluation. For this purpose, the interventions are categorised under five building blocks, namely: '*curriculum*', '*content*', '*capacity*', '*community*' and '*stress on the application of digital technology*'.

However, not all the above-mentioned interventions together can guarantee a mechanism for inclusive education, rather an equity based mind-frame of all the stakeholders based on liberal cultural and attitudinal perspective is the best way to materialise the philosophy of inclusive education. Allocation of funds is not a guarantee for inclusive education; a promise to make an equitable and enlightened society is a pathfinder of the practice of inclusive education in India.

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