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EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED PEOPLE OF ASSAM, INDIA

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(An Abstract)

In Assam differently abled people are less employed than those of the overall population. One of the vital reasons of unemployment is the lack of proper education. The differently abled people are unable to attain formal education and training to enhance their skill for entering labour force. Moreover discrimination and misconceptions prevailing in the labour market about their productivity also act as a barrier for this kind of people. Thus their low employment rate is directly related to exclusion from education system. This study examines the variation in number of disability and non workers by gender, disability type and among rural-urban people of Assam. It also explores the challenges of inclusive education. The data is secondary taken from Census 2011. Inclusive education does not only mean putting differently abled children in mainstream school but also creating a positive environment for these special children to learn with its peer. Thus for the all round development of this kind of people it is high time to review and strengthen the existing inclusive education.

Key words: Assam, Differently Abled people, Inclusive education, Non workers.

Introduction: "It is evident that there is a strong international trend towards developing education systems to become more inclusive. . . . The transformative inclusion agenda is based on the assertion of the same right to a quality education within their communities for all learners.

Thus it can be seen to concur with the task of Education for All." --(UNESCO, 1999, p. 21) [1].

The prime focus of the present study is the status of differently abled people of Assam. In spite of their mental and physical challenges, these people are very

much normal section of our society. Being a fellow citizen we should have humanistic outlook towards these people and should keep a vigilant effort for their welfare and upliftment. Inclusive education may be a window through which such development may be achieved.

The growth of differently abled people of India has increased from 2.13 percent in 2001 to 2.21 percent in 2011. [2]The differently abled people are more in rural areas than in urban areas. According to 2011[2] census the differently abled people in Assam is nearly 1.75% of the total population which is somehow lesser as compared to 2.21% of India. (Differently abled and disability are used synonymously in this study.)

The disability issue is considered as a measure of welfare rather than human rights issue. However differently abled people face differences in several key areas like; employment, education etc. The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994)[1] states that “Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover, they provide an effective



education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system”. In the same statement (UNESCO, 1994) [1] “Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and “shattered hopes,” which often occurs in classrooms that are “one size fits all.” In 1999 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[3] concludes that “there is no reason to segregate disabled students in public education systems; instead education systems need to be reconsidered to meet the education needs of all students”. Further they shows that “all students, whatever the type and extent of their disability, can be successfully included in mainstream schools, as long as certain safeguards are ensured.” (OECD, 1999).[3] Inclusive education thus means education for all irrespective of any disparities under one roof with restructuring of physical infrastructure of school and attitudinal changes of parents, administrators,

teachers, and other students towards these differently abled students.

The Government of India enacted various laws addressing Persons with Disability for eliminating disparity in education, employment and other opportunities etc. The constitution of India also guarantees equality, freedom, justice and dignity to all people including persons with disabilities. Hence it believes in an inclusive society. Further the Constitution put direct responsibility on the State government to empower the disabled people.

Objective and Methodology: The present study examines the variation in disability by gender, rural urban area and disability type in Assam. The paper is based on secondary data extracted from Census 2011.

The data on disability were collected since 1872 to 1931 census. However there was no question on disability between 1941 and 1971 and 1991 census. In the 1981 and 2001 Census, data on three and five types of disability respectively were collected. In 2001, information regarding visual, hearing, speech, locomotor and mental disabilities were gathered. The 2011 Census contain information on eight types of disability viz. seeing, hearing, speech,



movement, mental retardation, mental illness, any other and multiple disability.

According to the World Health Organization, "Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being". In our study we use the definition used in Census 2011 according to different disability type.

Seeing: In Census 2001 one eyed persons were treated as disabled but in Census 2011 the enumerators were asked to apply a simple test to ascertain blurred vision.

Hearing: Persons using hearing aid have been treated as disabled in Census 2011 but it was not so in Census 2001. If one person can hear with one ear but having problem in hearing through other ear then it was considered under hearing disability in Census 2001 but it was not so in Census 2011.

Speech: A person who is dumb is considered under speech disability. Those persons are also considered under speech disability who can speak in single words but not in full sentences.

Movement: In Census 2011 following categories of persons are considered under movement disability :

- a. Paralytic persons
- b. Those who crawl
- c. Those who are able to walk with the help of aid
- d. Have acute and permanent problems of joints/muscles
- e. Have stiffness or tightness in movement or have loose, involuntary movements or tremours of the body or have fragile bones
- f. Have difficulty balancing and coordinating body movement
- g. Have loss of sensation in body due to paralysis, Leprosy etc.
- h. Have deformity of body like hunch back or are dwarf.

Mental Retardation: if a person fails to do her/his studies/ work appropriate to her/his age then it is considered under Mental Retardation in Census 2011. However this

was covered under the category of Mental disability in Census 2001.

Mental Illness: Mental Illness was newly introduced in Census 2011 where as it was under the category of Mental disability in Census 2001.

Any Other: This is another new category introduced in Census 2011 and those disabilities are listed where enumerator was not sure about the type of disability.

Multiple Disability: if a person suffers from two or more than two types of disabilities then it is recorded under multiple disability. (Source: CENSUS 2011)[2]

Results and discussion: The following section discusses the status of differently abled people of Assam under various categories.

Table1: Disability by gender, rural-urban and according to disability type of Assam in 5-19 age group (in percentage)

Seeing	14	15	13	13
Hearing	20	23	19	21
Speech	13	12	12	12
Movement	14	11	11	9
Mental retardation	6	6	8	6
Mental illness	3	2	3	2
Any other	20	21	24	27
Multiple Disability	10	10	10	10

Source: Computed from Census, 2011

Table 2: Percentage of rural non workers as students and dependent members by gender and disability type of Assam

Type of disability	Male Students	Female Students	Male Dependents	Female Dependents
Seeing	27	15	53	48
Hearing	36	21	46	42
Speech	30	18	54	47
Movement	17	11	60	59
Mental retardation	17	14	64	54
Mental Illness	6	5	71	59
Any other	41	27	44	38
Multiple Disability	9	6	73	71

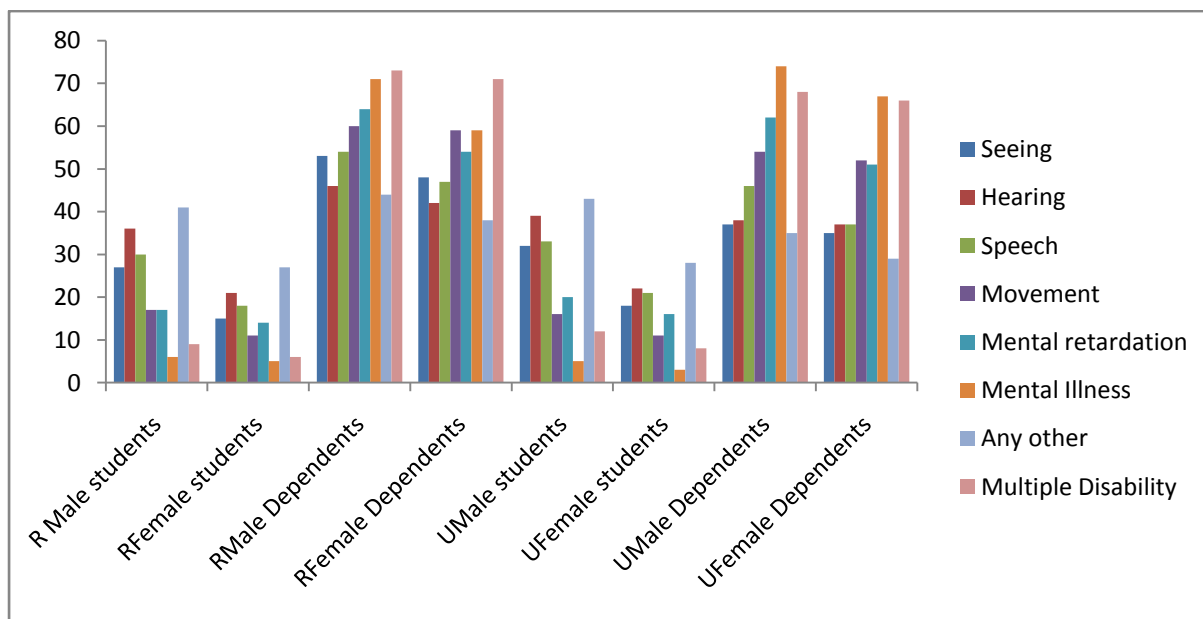
Source: Computed from Census, 2011

Table 3: Percentage of urban non workers as students and dependent members by gender and disability type of Assam

Type of disability	Male Students	Female Students	Male Dependents	Female Dependents
Seeing	32	18	37	35
Hearing	39	22	38	37
Speech	33	21	46	37
Movement	16	11	54	52
Mental retardation	20	16	62	51
Mental Illness	5	3	74	67
Any other	43	28	35	29
Multiple Disability	12	8	68	66

Source: Computed from Census, 2011

Figure 1: Status of Rural-Urban, Male-Female workers as Students and Dependent Members by Disability Type In Assam



Source: Census 2011

From table 1 it is observed that disability is more among rural mass as compared to its urban areas for almost all disability type except mental retardation and mental illness. Again it is seen that rural females disability are more as compared to its male counterparts. Table 2 and 3 represent the gender wise and disability type non workers who are either students or dependent members in rural and urban areas. The percentage of rural students is small in all disability type. Further a very

small number of children who have mental problem goes to school in rural areas. A considerable higher number of children having any other disability except the above seven disabilities went to school followed by children with hearing, speech and seeing in both gender. A similar trend is observed among urban students. Again from figure 1 it is observed that urban children irrespective of their disability type and gender went to school in more numbers as compared to its rural

counterparts. A large proportion of male and female rural and urban disabled people are out of labour force and living as dependent members. People who have multiple disability followed by mental illness and mental retardation are more as dependent members both in rural –urban and male -female population. The male dependent members are more as compared to females both in urban and rural areas. Disabled people are still far away from getting a meaningful employment and the employment opportunities are also very low. The government and its society decide the employment avenues of disabled though The Disability Act 1995 provides 3% reservation in all categories of jobs in government sector.

In India it was only during British rule the first special school for blind in 1869, and then School for deaf in Bombay in 1883 and in 1887 School for blind in Amritsar was opened. In 1909 Gopal Krishna Gokhale introduced a bill on inclusion and education but it was later discarded. A School for intellectual disabilities was opened in 1918. The Sargent Report of 1944 suggested that disability children should also bring under mainstreamed. (Kohama, A, 2012).[4] In 1950 the constitution of India guarantees ‘free and compulsory education for all children



regardless of ability level between the ages of 6-14’. In 1970 UNESCO recommended “inclusive education as a cheap alternative” to other special education programs, specifically for developing countries. Again in 1981 UN recommended that “education should, as far as possible, be provided within the ordinary school system, without any discrimination against handicapped children or adult”. (D. Leandro, United Nations, 1993).[5] The Kothari Commission of 1964 and The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) of 1974 also tried to bring people with disabilities in the mainstream school system. In 1981 United Nations declared Year of the Disabled Person and in 1982 adopted the action plan of inclusive education for people with disabilities. However in 1986 The National Policy on Education (NPE) stated that ‘children with mild disabilities should be taught in mainstream classrooms, while students with moderate to severe disabilities should be taught in segregated schools’. The UN General Assembly in 1989 prepared an action plan on ‘Human Resource Development in the Field of Disability’ by early intervention and inclusive education. In the same year rules were made on the ‘equalization opportunities for persons with disabilities’. In 1994 The Salamanca

Conference in Spain discussed the importance of inclusion. The Article 253, No.13 of the Constitution of the Union List enacted 'The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995' for Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation in nation-building for persons with disabilities to the whole of India, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The People with Disabilities Act (PDA) of 1995 provides disability children the right to education in a free and appropriate environment until they are 18 years of age and also stresses on teacher training.[6] The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or Education for All Scheme of 2001, was introduced to execute PDA. [6] In 2005 the action plan for including children with disability in the mainstream education regardless of ages was considered an important legislation.[7] The National Policy for People with Disabilities of 2006 convert the special schools into Resource centers for people with disabilities and teachers and try to bridge the rural - urban gap by opening more District Disability and Rehabilitation Centers. India also emerged as one of the strong participant in 'Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People' with Disabilities in the Asia-Pacific Region and in 'the Biwako Millennium Framework working towards an inclusive, barrier free and rights-based society'.



Further India signed the UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities on 30th March, 2007 and the UN Convention on 1st October, 2008. The 2008 Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS) scheme rectify 1974 IEDC. The Right to Education Act of 2009 drafted in 2005 included people with disabilities. (Kohama, A, 2012).[4]

The aforesaid section discusses many programs taken to improve the life of differently abled by recommending early childhood intervention and of inclusive education at all levels primary, secondary and higher levels of education, including vocational training. Thus policies were made to impart life skills beyond formal education for independent living. This is necessary for both inclusion within the mainstream classroom, as well as life after school. Further inclusive education is considered as cost effective in compared to segregated schools but societal prejudices still exist. The needs of differently abled people and challenges of inclusive education can be discussed as follows:

- Physical Barriers: The infrastructure for differently abled is inadequate and ill-functioning and the needs of these heterogeneous groups also vary from person to person. The



differently abled people face problem in going to school in absence of proper transportation facilities. In absence of ramp or improper building design they feel difficulty in moving in wheel chairs.

- Attitudes of the Parents: The parents should also play an important role in imparting education to their wards by early intervention. They may increase their role by getting special training to deal with their wards. They should not fear the societal stigma associated with disability and should not prevent their child to go to school.
- Urban-Rural disparity: The awareness programmes regarding disability were concentrated more in urban areas than in rural areas. As a result rural people still consider disability as a stigma and sometimes unable to identify the disability and hence their needs.
- Attitudes of Community members: The involvement of community participation is essential to tackle the stigma and discrimination specially associated with mental disability and in turn promotes human rights.
- Attitudes of the Teachers: The attitude of the teacher towards this

differently abled children also determine the success of inclusive education. Teachers require proper training to tackle the problem of differently abled and impart education to them like other children in the class.

- Administrators and government: The regular teachers should be provided proper training for identifying and screening people with disabilities and including them in the mainstream classroom. They can appoint a sign language interpreter and purchase a computer with specific programs for people with differently abled. The books may be converted to tapes or Braille or create some other formats that will help people with differently abled to learn the same material as the other children in the classroom. A flexibility in the curriculum and availability of the study materials in different forms enable to include everybody in one classroom. The salary of the teachers should be increased to motivate them. More teachers should be employed or some assistants should be appointed to assist the teachers in the classroom teachings. This may also include employment of teachers



with disabilities that know braille, sign language, and other alternative forms of communication, and can spread their knowledge to mainstream teachers including information regarding disability awareness. This will also somehow lessen the indiscrimination in the grounds of disability in the labour force. Some children may require extra individualized instruction or may need to pull out of the class for some part of the day. This may be possible in a mainstream school by opening resource centres. Another requirement for making education system inclusive is changing assessment procedures and introducing extracurricular activities.

Conclusion: Inclusive education does not only mean putting differently abled

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children in mainstream school but also creating a positive environment for these special children to learn with its peer. The notion of individual disparity in learning is to considered by the teachers in providing education by using various learning modalities and assessing them in various ways. The schools should also create academic environment by framing standard curriculum and monitor carefully that everyone with academic support can address the curriculum. The employment of differently abled people as educators may also create a more responsive learning environment. The responsibility of inclusive schools is also to support behavioural disparities and welcoming them with all their differences. Thus this leads to acceptance of all children and their families for who they are.

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