



Psychosocial correlates of Inclusive Society and individuals with ‘Hidden Disabilities’

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Abstract:

This qualitative study examines the psychosocial correlates of an inclusive society. Here two case studies of girl children with ‘Hidden Disabilities’ have been illustrated and analysed from the perspective of differential parenting style and their respective educational trajectories .

Key Terms : Inclusive Society, Psychosocial correlates, Hidden Disabilities, Developmental Disorder

Introduction

The psychological and social climate of a society determines a successful interplay between an individual and society. Young children gain their self-esteem from the love and recognition that they receive from the family and other significant people in their lives that is society at large . In the early years as children are growing up their confidence is strengthened when they are understood and their interests are strengthened as a scheme of thought. They also become aware of themselves, their capabilities and the societal boundaries of approved behaviour through their successful interaction in the social environment. Self-confidence and self-awareness are key factors in personal development of an individual. A society that is ‘inclusive’, has place for diversity and provides a secured ‘nich’ for one and all is considered to enhance an individual’s growth as a loving and contributing member of a society.

Constructs of inclusive society :

An Inclusive Society is where ‘Social Inclusion’ is the practising norm .An Inclusive Society is a society over rides differences of race, gender, class, generations and geography and ensures inclusion,

equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction (Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, Helsinki, July 2008)

Societal inclusion involves formal (societal) level engagements, ensuring that other agencies in the society , uphold and respect the machinery of inclusion within the society .It is also mandatory for such societies to engage on informal (individual) level and thus to take into their psyche into account . Thus social inclusion reflects on an individual’s experiences on one hand and of and possibilities for self actualisation on the other hand .The multi -dimensional approach of social Inclusion is a understood as a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all , regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life. An important criterion of an Inclusive society is tolerance and appreciation for diversity .

From perspective of Challenged Individuals :

Challenged individuals are often marginalised and are considered vulnerable in any society.

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However there is substantial amount of variation from country to country regarding which group is marginalised . However globally it has been noted that persons with disability are considered to be vulnerable . Often prejudice and biases are present when an understanding and empathy is absent about a diverse group of individuals. The particular vulnerable group under discussion is the group comprising individuals with 'Hidden Disability'. When there are no physical symptoms of any kind of disabling features in individuals (in spite of challenges that they face in everyday life) which may ensue empathy, these individuals may suffer from a 'Hidden Disability'. The group of individuals with learning Difficulties in reading, writing and math in spite of average to above average intellectual functioning falls in this category . Casual factor is considered to be due to a developmental disorder associated with processing function of the brain. They often go unnoticed till they enter pre-school. Society often misunderstands these individuals as they look intelligent but may still show poor academic performances . Lack of understanding and neglect often leads to associate poor academic performance with non compliance and wilful disregard for decorum . There is evidence in educational research to show that if identified early and appropriate strategies of learning are advanced , this group of individuals go on to perform as well as their high-flying peers. However often it has been reported that these children are neglected in a mainstream school or otherwise face the wrath of teachers .This takes a toll on the parents . Misunderstood by parents, teachers and society at large this promising group of educable learners are often relegated to the oblivion.

Governmental support for Inclusion

'The Dakar Framework for Action' place special emphasis on ' Inclusive education' .A right based approach in education is reflected at present in India as well with ' Persons with Disability Act' as amended in 2016 and 'Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009'. However the true realisation of potential of all children with or without challenges can only happen when the society gives importance to psychosocial needs of children by listening to the 'Voice of Children'. **The**

Opening address at United Nation Special Session on Children (May 2002) declared in the *Voice Of Children: 'We are not the source of problem. We are the resourceswe are the children of the world despite our different backgrounds.....'*

In this backdrop educational trajectories of two little girls with 'Hidden Disabilities' (of same age group) with quite different family conditions and differential parenting strategies is sited. (Here names have not been mentioned for reasons of discretion.)

Case Studies

Case 1 : Child A , a middle child , was always a quiet child . Attention was given to the brother born soon after . Parents didn't realise her speech and hearing impairment till she entered a very competitive girls schools . Her learning difficulties soon became a source of humiliation in class . Parents were distraught with frequent parental callings . Her failings in school soon clouded her family life . She was barred from spending time with her brother and sister lest they learn her way of speaking and learning styles . Alienated and unloved she almost stopped speaking in spite of her speech therapy support. At this point a Remedial Learning Centre identified her Learning Difficulties and started supporting her educational needs. Parents were advised parental counselling sessions to guide her better at home . She was soon advised to be transferred to an 'Inclusive school'. Loving care at remedial centre along with appropriate strategies of teaching soon made her get over her speech inhibitions. Soon it was discovered she had superior grade IQ with a penchant for Math. In an 'Inclusive ambience 'in her new school she made friends and for the first time started enjoying her school life . Praises in her extra- curricular activities as well as in academic performance enhanced her self efficacy. Parents too changed their parenting strategy and for the first time the child developed a 'mother-daughter' bonding . This year her proudest moment was when she won ' General Proficiency Award' in her school !

Case 2 : Child B , was adopted by her parents when she was six months old . Her developmental

milestones were delayed . Both took turns in staying with her and adjusted their working hours to support her. Her school soon identified her Learning Difficulties and referred her to a Remedial Learning Centre. It was discovered she had above average intelligence and had exceptional verbal skills . However her written expressive skills along with math deficits made her perform poorly in Math . She had an exceptional confident personality and had unconditional love and support of her parents. Her school failings could not dent her unrelenting perseverance. She excelled in extra curricular activities and remained ever popular with her group of friends . She had an excellent relationship with her maternal grandmother and her extended family. Soon she started showing improvement in her academic performance . Her bond with her remedial centre teachers was strong but the unwavering love and support of her parents made her path to success a cake walk. At present her school is very up- beat about her progress in her academic performances.

Discussion :

The girls A and B both have Hidden Disabilities but the emotional support and the love and care provided by their respective parents seemed to create a huge impact on their educational trajectory. A in spite of having mild speech problem and hearing deficit, parental neglect coupled with her Learning Difficulties created a whole lot of problem in her first school that was totally unsupportive to diverse learners. Having an inclusive set up in her second school, loving care and appropriate learning support advanced to her from Learning Centre and school seemed to do wonders to her academically . However a change in parenting style created an ambience of security and unconditional love that helped her blossom almost overnight ! In contrast Child B always had the unrelenting support of loving parents. Her emotional well being was not grossly affected by any harsh treatment of her teachers either. However when her Learning difficulties were addressed she realised her true potential.

Both are success stories but parental unconditional love made facing educational challenges much easier for one whereas in the case of the other it was a bumpy ride as parental

love was wavering. Psychosocial climate of the schools played a part in the lives of both children. However, psychosocial ambience of the families of the children had a huge impact on their educational trajectories.

Conclusion :

Sensitization about different cohabiting groups in an inclusive society increases understanding of psychological and social needs of all. This eventually leads to a state of psychosocial wellbeing. Importance of sensitizing the society about the diverse group cohabiting in the society is well documented in David Eagleman's book : 'Brain'. Here he elaborated the experimental work of Lasana Harris of the University of Leiden. Harris, illustrated that brain's social networking especially in medial prefrontal cortex(mPFC) becomes active when we look or interact with people of 'ingroup' or people we connect and empathise with but with groups we do not connect with or 'outgroups' the brain is not active at all . As if we dehumanise people of so called 'outgroups'. Jane Elliot, a classroom teacher in a small town of Iowa (USA), conducted a path-breaking experiment on he classroom children to find out how people can commit prejudiced acts against one another. Jane Elliot's experiment showed that education plays a key role in preventing extreme acts of prejudice of one group against the other . A paradigm shift of the educational machinery from 'Market view of competitive education' to an 'Inclusive educational' policy is to be upheld.

Sensitization about different cohabiting groups in an inclusive society increases understanding of psychological and social needs of all. This eventually leads to a state of psychosocial wellbeing. When 'love , tolerance and acceptance' for all human beings is the 'mantra' of a society then parents will successfully create an ambience of love and security for their children with or without any kind of challenges.

Conclusion to this discussion can be drawn in the words of the greatest Philosopher and Poet of modern times, Dr. Maya Angelou : 'Nobody makes it out here alone. What really matters now is love. I mean ,that condition in human spirit that is so profound it allows us to rise.'