Challenges of Deaf Education in War Khasi Village Massar, Meghalaya

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ABSTRACT: The present study exploresthe educational domain of deaf children, in a small village called Massar, in Meghalaya. The paper investigates the academic setup of the village against the backdrop of educational programmes, human resources, andthe physical infrastructure of the institutions. Ethnographic approach, being the mainstay of anthropological studies was implemented to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders i.e., teachers, deaf students, and their parents on the academic pursuit.Further, the paper also highlights the challenges encountered in the process of tutelage and the subsequentramifications. Numerous deaf students in the studies village drop outfrom schools during the early stages of edification, largely owing to the predicament imposed by hearingloss, in the absence of sign language and economic constraints. Thus, considering all these factors, the study attempts to address the possible provisions that can be instated for the successful operation of Inclusive Education (IE) in the studied village.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key determinants for theprogress of a country in general and an individual in particular. It empowers the peoplefor the overall development of personality, strengthens the respect for human rights, and helps to overcome exploitations and traditional inequalities of categories like caste, class, and gender (Baral and Meher, 2017).Thus, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic backgroundor functional ability of a person,access to education is a citizenship right anda responsibility (Hayes and Bulat, 2017). However, studies have continuously shown that access to this basic right, especially in rural regionsof the country,is largely inaccessible to the marginalized and minority communities like nomadic families, migrant children, disabled children,etc.(Census of India, 2013). Narrowing down the focus to education among disabled children, the statistics is staggering, given the fact that in India, only around 55% of the total disabled persons are literate while approximately 40 million disabled children do not attend school (Chatterjee, 2003; MoSPI, 2016). This scenario is also reflected in Meghalaya, where the number of illiterate disabled persons surpasses their literate counterpart.

TABLE-1

Education of disabled in Meghalaya (MoSPI, 2016)

Educational level of disabled persons	Total disabled population		
Meghalaya	Persons	Male	Female
Total	44317	23326	20991
Illiterate	23172	11455	11717
Literate	21145	11871	9274
Primary but below middle	4901	2627	2274
Middle but below matric/ secondary	3334	1926	1408
Matric/Secondary but below graduate	2938	1857	1081
Graduate and above	657	393	264

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Table1demonstrates the statistics on the academic performance of the state relating to disabled persons. The figures reportedly project that out of a total reported 44317 disabled individuals, 21145 persons (47.7%) fall under the category of literate, while the remaining 23172 individuals (52.3%) are reported to be illiterate. This margin is further widened as we approach the category of higher studies in the category of graduate and above, with a representation of just 657 individuals (3.11%) of the total disabled population indicating an incongruity in the structure (MoSPI, 2016).

In India, the Ministry of Social and Justice Empowerment alongside the Department of Education, and the Department of Women and Child Welfare collectively attend to the educational needs of disabled persons(Singal, 2006).Educational provisions for the deaf in India initially begun as special schools with the help of missionaries and NGOs (Wallang, 2016; Gulyani, 2017),and the same trend was also observed here in Meghalaya too, where church organizations and NGOs played a vital role in fostering the educational mission for the deaf (Wallang, 2016). The goals of thespecial schools are exclusively centered on thepedagogyand the overall development of disabled children. However, scholars like Oliver are skeptical about this special education regime and he states, 'Special segregated education has been the main vehicle for educating disabled children throughout most of the industrialized world in the twentieth century. Over a hundred years, a special education system has failed to provide disabled children with the knowledge and skills to take their rightful place in the world, and it has failed to empower them' (Oliver, 1996:93). Notwithstanding this, the contribution of special schools cannot beundervalued, as these schools provide an academic platform for many disabled persons who otherwise would have been completely cut out from the educational milieu.

Historically, literature evinces to us thateducation wasprovided to the deaf in isolation owing to their sensory condition which demands 'special' attention (Gulyani, 2017). However,deafnessin itself encompasses a variety of categories depending on the nature of the trait, which can be medically inclined or it can be considered asa distinct culture altogether.A major challenge in deaf pedagogy, therefore, lies in establishing a rigid communication structure which can accommodate individuals with different forms and degreeof hearing loss.To ease thiscommunication barrier, sign language was introduced as the most common mode of communique by the deaf/Deaf communities across the globe. Therefore, universally, educational institutions implement one of the recognized sign languages to impart education to deaf students.While legislations are imposed to sanction this provision, regrettably, sign language is not prioritized as the first language of the Deaf/deaf communities in India unlike the western nations (Wallang, 2016). Also, secondary and higher education for the deaf are further exacerbated owing to the vocationalized nature which stresses more on developing 'life skills' to qualify 'to enter into the world of work' (Thomas, 2007).While the importance of such vocational courses cannot be undermined, the primary focus should be toequip deaf persons through formal education as three-fourths of all jobs now require technical training beyond a high school diploma. In that sense, it is just not the availability of education but the accessibility, affordability, and appropriateness of the course offered that demands paramount interest (Dawn, 2014).

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Over the years, many decent strategies and policies have been initiated globally to underpin the importance of academic inclusivity, thereby broadening the horizon of opportunities for disabled individuals. However, a careful calibration of these efforts assertsthat the implementation of these regimes remains a challenge and to a large, ineffective, especially in the field of education in rural areas. It is a known fact that the development of a nation largely depends on the quality of educated intellectuals it produces and hence, many policies have been modified or revised to make practical calls for increasing the applicability.

Although programmes like the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced in 1974, ardent legislations for the disabled in India came into play only during the 1990s with the enactmentof the Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal

Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995, and the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation, and Multiple Disabilities Act 1999 (Gulyani, 2017). On the international forefront, a major respite came with the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2007) by the United Nations in which India became a signatory country in 2008.Additionally, India has also agreed to be a ratified member of the Biwako Millennium Framework(2002), Biwako Plus Five (2007), the Incheon Strategy(2012), the Sustainable Development Goals (2012), etc. to name a few.

The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Deafness (NPPCD) was launched specifically focusing on the needs of deafindividuals by the Government of India. This programme was initiated at the primary health care level and sanctioned aiming to reduce the burden of deafness as well as preventable deafness (Varshney, 2016).

In the domain of educational policies, the National Curriculum (2005) on school education primarily focuses on educational barriersresulting from disparities in gender, caste, language, culture, religion, or disabilities (Wallang, 2016). However, the deal sealer was the execution of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 also known as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was a momentous stride. It regularized free and inclusive education for children between the age group of 6-14 years, making education accessible for all, irrespectiveof gender, caste, religion, disability. In a parallel effort, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) launched an inclusive formal pre-school education or Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to accommodate children under 6 years to ensure holistic, physical, psychosocial, cognitive, and emotional development of young children to nurture a protective, child-friendly, and gender-sensitive family and community (Ministry of Women and Child Development. Government of India, 2013).This was further bolstered by the introduction of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD), 2016 which reinstated the importance of inclusive education pressing students with, and without disabilities to learn together. This right also mandated for non-discrimination in schools, accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, individualized supports, use of Braille and Indian Sign language in teaching, and monitoring among others (Sarkar, 2020). The recent implementation of India's National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) has been commended as a new era in educational reform. However, this too has come under the scanner because experts have assertedthat it exists within a framework of pervasive policy gaps in the education of children with disabilities (Sarkar, 2020). The existence of so many policies and programmes evinces that provisions are in place to attend tothe needs of deaf students in India. However, effective implementation of these programmes are also affected by a large number of factors like the infrastructure of the educational institute, the adeptness of the teaching staff, the modality, the background of the students'family, and to a large extent, the guidance provided to the deaf studentsto name a few. Therefore, even though legislations are employed and funds allocated, unless the mentionedissues are addressed at the fundamental level, the purpose of these provisions cannot be attained. In the ensuing passages, issuesconcerning deaf education in the studied community are discussed.

DEAF IN MASSAR

The present study was conducted among deaf individuals, belonging toa particular clan called *Nongsteng*, settled in a small War Khasi village called Massar, in Meghalaya. The clan comprises of two lineages. In one lineage, the sensory impairment has been reported in all the generations while in the other, the trait is absent. This segregation of lineage based on the hearing statuscan be traced back to seven generations when the hearing impairment was first recorded from a woman named Shilot Nongsteng. The trait was then subsequently expressed in all the generations that descended through her lineage. Thisinformation,on the nature and extent of the trait,was initially induced from a preliminary genealogy constructed by the headman of Massar, and later verified by the researcherduring her stay in the field.

In Massar, forty-five individuals (N=45) are reportedly either deaf or hard-of-hearing (HOH). The term deaf with a lowercase 'd' has been used as the

identity marker of the studied population, since they do not form a distinct cultural group as opposed to the 'D' which refers to a group of deaf people whose first language is sign language, and shares a cultural identity (Johnston, 1989). In the passages that follow, both deaf and HOH willbe represented by the word 'deaf' unless specification is further requiredasboth of them recognizes themselves with the 'deaf' community owing tosimilar shared experiences and immediate family ties. The expression of this particular trait, irrespective of sex is expressed in all the generations indicating a hereditary nature.However, the age of onset of the hearing loss varies from person to person with an average onset age of 11 years. The trait is largely post-lingual in nature, indicatingthat language acquisition ensues before the auditory impairment develops. This event is then followed by a gradual escalation of the degree of hearing loss in most of the cases. The biggest challenge faced by the deaf informants is during the early years of hearing loss as the transition demands major adjustments in communication patterns. However, there is no issue of identity conflict in the current study with most of them identifying themselves as *kyllut* (deaf),owing to the anticipated nature of the auditory impairment across all generations.Therefore, the studied community shares a similar experience to that of the rural deaf Mayan community (Johnson, 1991) where the villagers do not have a strong Deaf identity unlike the one found in Martha's vineyard(Groce, 1985), or across urbanized communities.

METHODOLOGY

The current research was piloted by immersing into aprolongedfieldwork that lasted for a stretch of eighteen months. Ethnographic approach, being the mainstay of anthropological studies was employed to describe and interpret the lived experiences of the deaf informants in the educational realm. Informants were selected by executing purposive sampling, and a semi-structured schedule was systematically constructed. Interviews were obtained from thirty-three (N= 33) deaf respondents from 12 years onwards by strictly adhering to the guidelines laid down by the ethical board; both at the university and the state level. Additionally, five teachers from the schools in Massar, and one Block Resource Person (B.R.P) were alsointerviewed to understand the progress and the challengesfaced by the teachers and the deaf students,both within and outside the classroom settings.Thus, interactive interviews were also executed in unconventional settings like fields, community gatherings, etc.to explore beyond the traditional one-way qualitative method of data collection as proposed in *Living Stigma* by Green *et al.* (2005).

Rapport with the deaf informants was established during my participation as a volunteer in a project with the ENT department of North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Shillong on the same community, earlier. Therefore, I was easily accommodated into my field, owing to the bond that I had earlier developedwhile mediating in the project. However, on my entry into the field, communicating with the deaf informants was still a demanding task despite the assistance of my interpreter and field guide, since it demanded a lot of time and patience from both the interviewing, as well as the interviewee's end, with some interviews stretching up to three hours. Deaf informants on many occasions could not understand the questionsowing to the auditory impairment. Therefore, questions were verbally reframed instinctively inalmost all the interviewsto make them intelligible.The write-up of this study was achieved by these lengthy interviews and further supplemented by pulling togetherseveral narratives from my field notes.

The interviews with the respondents were accomplished with the help of my key informant-cum-field guide, Bat, and my interpreter-cum-field-guide, Pyndap who are both residents of Massar. Bat,is the informal interlocutor of the deaf clanand two of the only'hearing'individuals among her consanguineous family of nine members; seven of whom displaya varying degree of hearing loss. Pyndap,who is a 'hearing', and adistant kin of the deaf clan was chosen on the recommendation of the village headman, as he could comfortably converseboth in English and Khasi,which is rare in the village.

DEAF PEDAGOGY IN MASSAR

In Meghalaya, the Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT) and the Directorate of

School Education & Literacy hold the baton of academic authority and is further assisted by the Ministry of social justice and empowerment in attending to the needs of the disabled persons. The state is well-informed about the policies/schemes and acts mentioned above. Additionally, programmess like the Meghalaya School Improvement Programme (MSIP) was proposed in the Meghalaya Education Policy, 2018 to scrutinize and improvise on the existing educational regimes. Over the years, the international community has pressed on the importance of shifting from special to mainstream schooling for disabled children in order to create an environment that fosters inclusivity resulting in the birth of Inclusive Education (IE)(MSIP, 2020). A legit reason for emphasizing on this outlookis due to the abilityof special schools to accommodate a limited number of students. Moreover, these schools are mostly located in urban regions, which is beyond the reach of many disabled families (Dawn, 2014).

TABLE 2

Completed education information of deaf informants till 2021

Illiterate	Reasons for illiteracy				Level of education Literate		Reasons for dropping out			
	Disinterest	Financial constraint	Hearing impairment	Distance of school	Primary	Secondary	Disinterest	Financial constraint	Hearing impairment	Absence of schools for higher education
11 Total: 11 (33.3%) Total: 33	2	5	3	1	20(60.6%) Total: 22 (66.7%)	2 (6.06%)	4	6	8	2

Currently, there are no private schools in Massar. Education in the village is addressed by 4 formal schools which comprise of3 lower primary (LP) schools, two of which are government-aided schools under the aegis of the SSA while the other one is fully sanctioned by the government. The lone upper primary (UP) school also comes under the SSA programme. Additionally, pre-school implemented by the ICDS is also functional with 2 teachers.

TABLE 3

Enrollment in Massar schools (2019-2020)

Name of school	No. of classrooms	No. of teachers	No. of students	No. of deaf students
Jingkyrmen SSA Upper Primary school	4	4	21	—
Massar Roman Catholic SSA Lower Primary school	4	4	31	8
Massar Government Lower Primary School	2	2	26	—
Dymmiew SSA Lower Primary School	4	3	15	—
ICDS implemented pre-school	1	2	38	1
Total	14	15	131	9

As evident in Table 3, altogether 131 students had enrolled in the schools of Massar in the session 2019-2020. Out of this,a total number of 8 deaf students, were registered in the Massar Roman Catholic SSA lower primary (RCLP) school and one under the ICDS pre-school respectively. The majority of the deaf students are enrolled in either one of the village schools, while only a handful of them, from a higher economic caliber can affordeducation in special schools outside the village. At present, 5 children from Massar attend the Ferrando Speech and Hearing Centre (FSHC), which is a special school for the deaf and speech impaired at Umsning, located17 kilometers away from Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya.Apart from these two options, only one student from Massar named Lis (13) resides with a relative belonging to the *kur* (clan)in another town called Mylliem. Lis, who is currently in standard 7 displays partial hearing loss and is enrolled in a private school.The relative bears the overall expenses of Lis, including education, owing to the poor economic condition of her mother who is a widowwith an income solely based on agricultural produce, and as a daily wage labourer.

Massar currently has a total number of 15 teachers in the 5 schools.Due to the imbalance in the teacher-student and classroom-student ratio as apparent in table 3, classrooms are often merged to accommodatestudents in different standards. For example, it was disclosed by one of the teachers at Massar RCLP SSA that owing to shortage of teachers,pre-nursery and nursery classes, pre-primary classes from1-2 andprimary classes from 3-4 were merged and taught by 3 teachers in 3classrooms while only standard 5 was taught separately in another classroom. Notwithstanding this, the syllabus for all these 5 classes differs and therefore demands separate attention. The mechanism adopted for teaching the combined classes involve providing a lectureto one class while the other is engagedin performing classwork. The teachers in all 4 formal schools have been appointed on a contractual basis and all of them have cleared the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed) exam. However, no pre-service training in familiarizingwith special education for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) was undergone by any of the teachers. In lieu to the contingencies of the SSA, the schools with registered CWSN students in Pynursla block, under which Massar falls, are looked after by two Block Resource Persons (B.R.P.) from the Block Resource Centre. The B.R.P.s visits the Massar RCLP SSA school once a week or month, depending on the need for assessment. My interview with one of the B.R.P. revealed that till 2019, she visited the schools weekly, however, due to the lack of resource room in the school, the visit was subsequently decreased.The B.R.P.s,whose primary duty is to monitor academic transactions, also provided tutelage of basic courses (alphabet and numerals) in sign language to both the teachers and deaf students in the school.

During my stay in the village, it was discovered that the deaf students did not have sufficient exposure to sign language. Their limited signing,as attested by the B.R.P was limited to the knowledge of the alphabet, numerals,andwords like fish, rat, cat, etc. However, this limited knowledge has gradually elapsed as the B.R.P.s were unable to come to the village during the covid-19 lockdown, thereby escalating the predicament.

MODE OF TEACHING

Education is provided free of cost in all 4 schools according to the contingency of the RTE Act (2009). The primary subjects offered in all LP schools are Science, English, Environmental studies, Math, Art, Khasi alongside co-curricular activities like SUPW and health education while theUP school offers Math, Science, English, Socialscience, Environmental science, Khasi, Health education and Computer. All the subjects are taught in Khasi up to standard 5according to the existing guidelines of theRTE, whichmandates schools to teach in theirfirst language. While liberty is given for English to be adopted as the medium of teaching from standard 6 onwards, the schools in Massar have resorted to continue teaching in the first language. This approach seems to be an effectivewayof interacting, but it also comes with its share of disadvantages too. Once the mode of teaching is stabilized during the early years of schooling, students get comfortable in this mediumandstruggle during the elementary and secondary level, especially if they move to the city, where the medium of teaching generally changes to English. For deaf students, this posits a greaterchallenge since they have to strengthen their command in English, which can only then be translated into sign language. While the RTE, as well as the MSIP, greatly emphasizes on the bilingual mode of teaching, implementation of this module remains a great challenge in the rural Massar. The benefit of the bilingual approach can be understood through Cummins' linguistic interdependence theory (Cummins, 1989) where proficiencies and skills developed in the first language mediates into the second language.

During my interaction with the deaf students of Massar, I discovered that many of themare unable to communicate inbasic English or compose simple sentences apart from the lessons that have to be memorized for their exams. On the other end, the exchange of text messages and further contact with students from FSH Cconvinced me of acomparatively better performance in this sphere than their counterparts in the village schools. This validated the advantage of an early exposure to the bilingual mode of teaching.

IE demands for the inclusion of both children with, and without disabilities to have equal participation in educational platforms. Not with

standing this, accommodating CWSN can be a challenging experience for the teachers and learners alike, if the institution is not adequately equipped with appropriate physical infrastructure and trained faculty. In Massar, all the schools exclusively rely on the traditional method of teaching on the blackboard. Advanced technological equipment like, interactive boards, projectors or visualizers, etc., are absent, which otherwise could be a potentway of engaging largely with the deaf students in particular and the hearing in general. Choosing how to communicate in the classroom also becomes tricky for the teachers in the presence of deaf students with varying a degree of hearing loss. In addition, since none of the regular teachers in Massar are skilled in sign language, oral lectures are the lone method through which explanations are delivered in the schools. However, with continuous deaf attendees in the school over the years,the teachers have adopted some ingenious approachesto facilitate communication with the deaf learners. The techniques involve increasing the vocal tone during lectures and decreasing the pace ofexplanation,which is simultaneously accompanied by hand and body gestures. Thus, we explicitly see an oralist mode of teaching in the village schools.Deaf students are therefore placed in the front rows of the classrooms,directly facing the teacher to increase the classroom interaction. Students with residual hearing are capable of following lip readingto a large extent by following the speaker's lip movements, provided they pay sincere attention to the lectures. This is possible due to the post-lingual nature of the trait, where languageacquisition for many occurs during the initial years of their life. However, the real challenge sweeps in as the hearing loss progresses and one is left to completely rely on the sense of vision. This transitionover time demands an exhilaratingamount of adjustment from the deaf individuals, eventually leading many of them to optout of school even before reachingelementary schooling.

Interviews with the teachers further highlighted the underlying predicament faced by both the teachers and the pupils. The academic performance of deaf studentswas found to becomparatively weaker as compared to their hearing counterparts as the teachers admit that sometimes it becomes difficult for deaf students to grasp the explanation despite the efforts from both ends. Additionally, one teacher remarked that somedeaf students enrollvery late for schoolingresulting in difficulty to catch up with the pace at which hearing children progress. The teacher presented to me the case of Sid, a deaf female student who is 20-years-old. Sid had joined the RCLP school in standard 1 at age 17 which seems to bevery late to begin primary schooling. However, Sid decided todrop out of school since she felt that she was too old for her age to be sitting in standard 3.

EXPERIENCES OF DEAF STUDENTS

The educational experiences of the deaf students in Massar are diverse owing to the nature of the sensory impairment.On one of my trips to Bat's field to assist in harvesting broom, Ani andher younger brother, both of whom are HOH and studies at the RCLP school accompanied us. During our lunch break, my conversation with Ani elucidated that she could follow oral lectures provided they were delivered 'loudly' and 'slowly'. This was confirmed when she responded to my repeated calls across the field, only after I deliberately increased the volume of my tone.During my re-visit to the village in 2021, I learned that Ani (11) and her brother (9) had left schooling in classes 2 and 1, while and their youngest maternal uncle (11) followed suit in class 1 respectivelyin the year 2020. The students had to give up on their academic journey since the extent of hearing impairment rendered them helpless to follow the classroom explanations. On inquiring from their parents, they disclosed their desire for the children to continue with their academic endeavours however, they did not want to enforce their decision on their children. When I suggested the mother of Ani to shift her to FHSC, she replied, '*poisaymdon*' which translates to 'no money'. According to A Nongsteng (53), whose ward studies at FSHC, an amount ranging from Rs 23,000- 25000 which is inclusive of hostel and school fees, after some concession from the schoolis expended annually. In the former cases of Ani, her brother and her uncle, their mothers areboth widows and the onlyearning members in their families, making special education unattainable.

Another episode is offered in the case of Mar (23), who is HOH. Mar studied at Laitlyngkot, the nearest town from Massar till standard 8, and left

schooling thereafter. He expressed his desire to study further however, he too, could not follow the oral lectures in the classroom and therefore,decided to give up on his educational venture. In one of our chit-chats around his hearth, he mentioned his aspiration to apply for the post of government driver. However, he was ineligible for the job profile since it required a minimum qualification of a matriculation degree.

The highest educational qualification achieved by the deaf in Massar is that of higher secondary education (standard 12) by two girls, whose cases are presented below:

Marbilous Nongsteng: Marbilous Nongsteng (21) is a deaf and speech-impaired girl from Massar who studied at FSH Cup to standard 12. After the successful completion of her class 12 exam in 2020, she aspired to join a nursing course. However, due to the lack of nursing or allied institutions within Shillong that attends to deaf students, her dream of becoming a nurse was thwarted. Currently, she teaches at Ferrando memorial secondary school which is a special school located in Williamnagar in East Garo Hills district, Meghalaya. She enjoys teaching and presentlyshe is the only deaf teacher in the institution. She wishes to go for higher studies and teach deaf/ disabled students, especially in Massar if given the opportunity.

Marbilous expressed that communication was easier in FSHC due to the assistance of sign language compared to her home where sign language has not been embraced yet. Her elder brother, who is also deaf communicates to her in sign language, although he is not as proficient as she is in signing. On deaf pedagogy, she opined that it will be of immense help if deaf students could be accommodated with hearing peers and taught simultaneously, both in sign language and in oral language.

B. Nongsteng: Another student who has attained this feat from the deaf lineage is B. Nongsteng. However, her case varies from Marbilous as she developed the trait only after the successful completion of her education. She along with another hearing student from the village were financially assisted by the village headman to study inShillong from standard 9 onwards. However, after the completion of her class 12 education, she was unable to continue with her studies. She stated that her mother, who was the sole breadwinner of the family then, could not afford further for her education as her motherhad to look after the educational needs of her other 9 siblings.

PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

Historically, parents of disabled children have not relied on government provisions (Alur, 2001 in Byrd) as earlier there was no or little legislation to look into the needs of the disabled population. Legislations for attending to the provisions of the deaf have come a long way, however, the gap is still pronounced in interior regions where many disabled individuals are ignorant of the entitlements which are instated for them to access. During my stay in the field, I interacted with the parents in formal interviews, while largely engaging in informal tête-à-tête, which in turn yielded a substantial amount of insights into their perspectives about education. All the deaf parents, numbering to 18asserted on the importance of education and also expressed their desire for their children to progress further, academically. However, the educational history of the deaf in the village reflected poorly at their academic prospects given the fact that 33.35% are illiterate while in the literate category, 66.6% haveattained primary education and merely 6 % could achieve secondary education. These numbersare comparable to the statistics projected in the state's academic progress and thus, demands a closer probe. The older generation stated financial constraints, unavailability of schools for higher education followed by the sensory impairment as the primary reason for their failure to obtain higher education while for the younger generation it was financial constraintsand the deterioration auditory impairment.

Each school in the village conducts a parent-teacher interaction (PTI) after the end of every half-yearly exam, where the teachers and parents meet to discuss on the performance of the students. On one of my interactions with a teacher from the Massar RCLP SSA school, she mentioned that during one PTI, on probing about the poor performance of a deaf student, the following conversation ensued between the mother and her deaf ward, '*Ngalahongia phi ban khrehkottangbaphimkhrehkot pat'* which translates

to, 'I have told you to study, but you are not studying'.

This incident reveals the effort of the parent in pushing her ward to devout towards her academic venture. However, the teacher opined that given the educational background of the parents, theywere helpless in lending academic assistance to their childrenresulting in the inability tocheck on the progress of their children's studies. Therefore, deaf students have to completely rely on the classroom teachings alone for them to complete the assignments or write their exams. A common pattern observed among the parents of the deaf children is the liberty given to them to make their own decisions for their academic journey, even at a very tender age. This is further convoluted once the hearing loss of the child worsens. In cases like these, there is little or no persuasion from the parent's end to keep their children on the academic track as the parent can foretell the repercussions of the sensory impediment, given their personal experience. In the face of obstacles spawned by the trait and the lack of financial means, the majority of the parents resort to employing their wards in the customary agrarian occupation, which does not demand specialized skills, scholarly knowledge or hearing ability. Deaf children also anticipate this outcome given the scope of edification in the village and therefore, consider this occupational practice as the best option for securing them financially once they are out of the educational ambit.

In one of the interviews, a mother of 4 deaf children who herself is deaf, expressed her desire for schools like FSHC to be established in Massar so that deaf children with lower economic income in the village could also get equal educational opportunities like those who make it to FHSC. She also disclosed that Marbilous taught at the Massar RCLP SSA school in 2017 for 2 months while waiting for her 10th exam results. The mother expressed that it was *sngewtynnad*(good) as their children could follow whatever Marbilous taught them in sign language. Another mother of a speech and hearing impaired child who herself displays the same condition expressed that she missed her daughter who studies at FSHC as a residential student. However, she is confident that sending off her only daughter to the FHSC was the best option for her ward's future.

DISCUSSION

In the current study, it was observed that educational policiesunder SSA and ICDS were functional. However, a lacuna was found in the functionality of the SSA programme, asthe number of teachers and classrooms were unproportioned to the number of students enrolled in the schools. The merging of classrooms invites distraction for both the classes who are taught on different topics owing to the difference in the syllabus. The study, therefore, suggests that provisions should be made for strict adherence to one classroom-one teacher policy so that the quality of education delivered and received is not compromised.

In lieu to the provisions offered by SSA, efforts were in place for providing B.R.P.s for deaf students in the Massar RCLP SSA school. However, a parallel facility like this one was absent in the pre-school level ran by the ICDS, although a CWSN student was registered under the pre-school programme. It was found that the B.R.P.'s role as an occasional special educator introduced the basics of sign language to the deaf students as well as the regular teachers in the school. However, the impact of this facility could not attain its maximum benefit as the limited knowledge of the language was not apt for tutelage.Despite the adoption of ingenious mechanisms by the teachers to deliver effective tutelage, owing to the lack of pre-service training to attend to CWSNduring their recruitment, their efforts were foiled. The study, therefore, opinesthatpre-service training to attend to the needs of CWSN has to be implemented in cases like this. Additionally, sign language has to be introduced from the start of the child's academic journey.

Another challenge faced by the schools in Massar is the rigid curriculum of pedagogy which is extensively delivered in the indigenous mediumduring the initial years of schooling.While this medium has effectively served the purpose of tutelage,it poses a challenge for students aiming to pursue further scholarships outside the village, as the medium of teaching changes to English which becomes overwhelming.The study believes that this issue can be overcome by adhering to the bilingual approachsanctioned in the RTI and MSIPsince both the indigenous and English mediums are

indispensable for getting the information across. Simultaneously, sign language as a teaching medium has to be strictly employed along with the oral mode. This will ensure the establishment of a safe linguistic base for the deaf and the hearing alike,making the classroom interactions more explicable and thereby assist ineffective incorporation of the same at the later phases of their academic life. However, for thiseducational euphorbia to be successfully functional, emphasis should shift from relying solely on the B.R.P.s as occasional special educators to training the existing faculty to become special educators themselves so that signing becomes a comfortable medium, both for the deaf and the hearing students alike.

The study also found that schools in Massar lacked the necessary technological infrastructure to facilitate effective tutelage and learning, further aggravating the situation of deaf children. Therefore, with the implementation of the NEP (2020) and the MSIP, the study is hopeful that provisions that were assured earlier in the RTE (2009) for the disabledwill be functionally reinstated forwell-equipping classrooms, to make education an easier process for deaf students in the village as well as across the country.

CONCLUSION

The study also stresses for the introduction of early intervention programmes and auditory training so that deaf students are equipped with rehabilitative measures. However, parents and their deaf children should be sensitized to look beyond the auditory disability as a medical conditionso that it does not delimit their outlookon life.Parsing the comments ofparents on education, it is clear that the educational perspectives of the parents in the village are nuanced, in the sense that it is neither trivialized nor prioritized. The extent of education of the deaf child is largely steered by the economic condition of the parent/ parents and the educational environment accessible to the child. Economic constraintin the study isa clear indicator about tradingthe scope of achieving academic accomplishments over the agrarian prospect owing to the medicalized viewpoint on the hearing impediment.While there is nothing wrong withjoining the agrarian economy, in the present scenario, this occupation is largely embraced as there are plausibly no other choices left. Unless Massar produces more students like Marbilous,the potential of education cannot be realized as education will merely continue to be normalized as an unattainable feat.

The study, therefore, suggests for the implementation of the discussed provisions above to be systematically streamlined so that effective education for the deaf is attainable. The primary goal of IE, after all, is to include students from diverse socio-economic and functional backgrounds and if any one of the mentioned provisions fails, the entire purpose fails.

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