Multiculturalism and Education

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Abstract: *Multiculturalism is commonly used to describe societies which comprise of different religions, races, castes, languages, cultures, traditions, customs and so on. The term is often utilized loosely to refer the existence of 'many' without realizing that the terms are discrete concepts with distinct meaning, parameters and space and provide distinct conception of 'many'. It can best be understood as a perspective or a way of viewing human life, rather, as a political doctrine or philosophical school of thought. The global perspective of multicultural education recognizes cultural pluralism promoting equity and respect among the existing cultural groups and thus extends beyond equity pedagogy. The article tries to explain multiculturalism in global perspective and how institutions can use it to remain models of academic excellence in pluralistic and democratic societies.*

Key words: Multiculturalism, education, cultural pluralism, equity pedagogy, global perspectives

Introduction:

The Latin root of culture is *'cultura'* which means to cultivate or to nurture. Cultivation or nurturing can not be done in monotonous ways. Therefore, the term culture is utilized in many senses giving distinct meaning of 'many' which can be understood as a perspective or a way of viewing human life. This conception is derivatives of how culture is viewed and understood. The political scientists MacIver says *"Culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and our thinking. Intercourse in our literature, in religion, in recreation and enjoyment."* Further, Sorokin conceive it as an achievements in terms of man's moral, spiritual and intellectual aspects where as Bogardus sees culture as a composition *'of integrated customs, traditions and current behaviour patterns of human group where every individual takes birth, grow, develop and mature with time'*. Therefore, it necessarily includes all those elements for which ceremonies

and their consequent impressions are required. This is why, in its wider meaning it refers to *'inclusive habits of thinking which shape human behaviour'* in totality and in *'all fields of human activity'*. This is why, when we talk of culture, we mean *'entire human beliefs system, patterns of behaviour and all academic, artistic, moral, religious functions and beliefs together with all achievements in all fields of human life'*. However, in the narrower sense, it means *'a man-made social organization which promotes specific habits and patterns of behaviour which cumulatively satisfy various needs of human beings'*. Therefore, I believe, that only a political doctrine or philosophical school of thought do not do justice while explaining multiculturalism in its comprehensive sense.

This is because, culture does not particularize to an individual. It is rather transmitted through sharing and participation within the group where the cultural distinctiveness provides the most important identifying characteristics. This does not mean that members of the group will be identical in their thinking, acting, social class, family patterns and so on rather, the distinctiveness and variations with individual differences will always exist. In plural societies such as India, there reflect another distinctive feature i.e. the dominance of majoritarian culture. The dominant majoritarian culture by virtue of its numbers, settlements, political, economic and other agencies often influence the policy and functioning of any institutions. The subordinate minority culture on the other hand, remain at the margin, and often have limited access to resources, policy making and functioning within the institutions.

Culture also plays a vital role in socializing an individual. Therefore, the process and direction of socialization differs from society to society. American Anthropologist Ralph Linton (1955) in his book *'The Tree of Culture'* suggests three ways in which an individual participate in culture. The first is, *'universal participation'* by adopting the habits, ideas and emotional patterns prevailing among the group. The Second is *'specific participation'* where an individual adopts those elements of culture which are found among some specific organization or specific group of people. Finally, in third place, an individual turns and adapts those alternative elements which are found only in a small number of individuals.

Thus, to say, every individual is born into a particular culture. Right from the birth itself, an individual receives a definite patterns of behaviour and values. These behavioural patterns and values guide their conduct in different walks of life. It is the culture that determines the patterns of social control. Hence, the advantage in

communicating the culture of a group to a child through education is that he/she must be acquainted with the customs, traditions, values and other patterns of behavioural conduct prevailing in his group. Such knowledge enables him to adapt to the social environment through his socialization.

Peculiarity of Indian Society:

Looking to the Indian society, we can say that it shows peculiar characteristics in many senses. Firstly, it is highly stratified, not only on the basis of socio-economic status, but also with regard to caste, community, languages, religious affiliation, geographical areas, cultural, political and ethnic divisions and so on. This is why, due to such differences in the natural environment of different communities, several differences in Indian cultures reflects. This is why, Indian society is referred to be a multicultural plural society.

However, providing balanced and emancipatory education in a plural society where the fabric of society rest on mutual co-existence is not an easy task. This is because educational practice abrasive to any communitarian culture often becomes disastrous and alienating. This also repel several community members to get involved in educational practices in real sense. This is because, education remains important in as much as it helps an individual to adapt to their natural and social environment, develop their social personality and enable to conduct fruitfully and intermix freely with other members of the society. This is evident from the cultural role of school across the globe where it performs the function of educating the child according to their own cultures. Further, through text books, school tries to acquaint the child with values, mores, ideas, customs, etc. The curricular programmes also intend to inculcate culture among children through different games, community songs, dances, discussions, tours of various parts of the country and so on.

Golnick, (1980) suggests that it is often seen in societies where remains the dominance of single distinct majority group along with a number of minority groups, the minority cultures are often pushed down upon and becomes a sub-set of the majority culture. However, in any society, where cultural differences persist, two types of pluralism i.e. *dominant monism* and *hybrid monism* reflects. Under the '*dominant monism*' all the individuals, irrespective of their communitarian cultural, are expected to adopt the norms of the dominant culture and to give up their own cultural heritage. However, since India adopted secularism as one of the basic principles of the constitution, therefore, the

'*dominant monism*' in terms of culture can not be followed at least in theory due to constitutional commitment. This is why, every individual is permitted to follow their own religious and cultural beliefs. Further, the state does give patronage to any particular religion or culture at least in principle. Therefore, another form of cultural uniformity i.e. *hybrid monism*-where cultural blending or synthesis reflects may be followed . However, it is very difficult to follow *hybrid monism* as welding together the existence of different cultures in the society will make it '*monistic*' i.e. with a single culture in nature. Therefore, the solution to such problem lies in the adherence of cultural pluralism.

Cultural pluralism:

We see both- separatism and multiculturalism as cultural pluralism that exists in the plural society such as India. One is the coexistence of distinct cultures within the same society with a separate compartments and a very little interaction among them. Second is the category made up of minority adhering to their communitarian traditions and showing indifference to the majoritarian culture due to various reasons. However, it may also be possible that their children may not adopt their own cultural traditions but join the majority group. Even though society would be pluralistic, the members of majority as well as minority may remain largely within the confines of their own ethnic cultures. No doubt, the society in this sense will remain pluralistic but hardly at the level of individual. Therefore, such culture will be a separatist type of culture which will loose the cohesion of the society.

Cultural pluralism further can be seen as a characteristic- not only of a society as a whole, but also of its individual members. Such society with such characteristics is called a multicultural society. Hence, multiculturalism means that the minority group members would be allowed and encouraged to maintain and develop their native tradition and cultures alongside the dominant one. This is why we call that multiculturalism provides opportunity to the majority and minority both to foster their cultures in their everyday lives.

Multiculturalism as a movement:

Multiculturalism emerged as a movement in Canada and Australia during the early 1970s and later expanded to the USA, UK, Germany, and other regions. The term is typically used to refer to societies that include various religions, races,

castes, languages, and cultures. Other terms like "plural" and "diverse" are also used to describe such societies, but they are often used interchangeably to indicate the presence of "many" without recognizing that these terms represent different concepts with unique meanings, parameters, and contexts, each offering a distinct understanding of "many." Multiculturalism is best viewed as a perspective on human life rather than merely a political ideology or philosophical framework.

Understanding the other two related terms- plurality and diversity and its relations with multiculturalism is very important. Although pluralism is defied as 'many', it does not explain what many actually refers to. As a result, it can be said that it represents multifaceted depiction of 'one'. However, 'many' can be distinct and unequal entities that occupy various locations along a continuum and can also be ordered hierarchically. As for example, 'Hinduism' in India is a pluralistic religion with numerous hierarchically ordered castes and multiple gods that merge into 'one' supreme god-Brahma. Another example is India's democratic system of government which is pluralistic as it has several functions or sub-groups that ultimately aim to sway the 'centre'- the 'one' that makes up the core. Thus, several variety highlights the existence of 'many' that are distinct and varied, whereas plurality only implies the presence of many. However, diversity may be defined as 'many' that cannot be reduced to 'one' as in plurality. Therefore, the 'many' in variety are distinct and independent entities that differ from one another. When the west emphasized the distinction between Asian and Western European civilizations, they were referring to diversity rather than plurality. Similarly, the idea of variety or non-collapsible difference serves the foundation for the arguments made by ethno-social sciences. They contend that the internal organizations, institutions and values of every society are distinct. Therefore, in the frame of 'diversity' the presence of difference is significant for the vital test of democracy and tolerance in society.

The very idea of variety that embodies the idea of difference and heterog entity is actually sanctioned by the concept of multiculturalism. This is why, we often classify it into dominant and minority groups when we discuss cultural community. Since the state is typically remain associated with the majority culture therefore, the communities that shows difference from the mainstream culture are referred to as minority. While non-discrimination is the most

significant democratic norm, multiculturalism calls into the question whether the various entities that make-up the 'many' are given equal standing within the state? Therefore, the notion of multiculturalism differs hugely from that of plurality and diversity and often supports the goals of democratization and non-discrimination. Thus, multiculturalism indicates the presence of 'many' that are equal in the public sphere, whereas, plurality only indicates the existence of 'many'. in other words, the existence of numerous distinct communities is insufficient on and of itself; what matters is whether the state treat them equally?

Multiculturalism as a way of viewing human life:

Another way of conceptualizing multiculturalism is to look at the human life. This is because, both-the majority and minority have chance to use multiple culture in their daily lives whether language, family life, social manners, ideology and so on. Further, since every people are reared up in culturally structured society therefore, they remain culturally rooted. This is one of the major reasons why different cultures embodies different conceptions of a good life. Further more, everyone recognizes a small portion of human potential and feeling, other culture aids in conceptualizing and broadening perspective horizons and fostering mutual growth more effectively than individual cultural development. This is because, every culture inherently are multiple in nature, as it represents various customs, traditions and ideas. The contact with one-another, conscious or unconscious contact shape culture in becoming multi-culture. However, any attempts to impose a single identity and homogenize a culture, are often viewed with suspicion. Through eradication of "others' " culture and indoctrination in the majority's traditions, schools are purposefully viewed as one of the most successful means of accomplishing cultural assimilation.

According to multiculturalism, no political philosophy or theory can fully capture the reality of human existence. For instance, liberalism as a powerful political philosophy downplays human solidarity, community, selflessness and other virtues while emphasizing human dignity, autonomy, liberty and critical thinking. Therefore, according to multiculturalist viewpoint, a good society values diversity and promotes communication between its various cultures and moral perspectives. It must avoid making the same mistake as its mono-cultural counterpart by assuming that all of its communities should become multicultural.

Predominant view of multicultural education:

The prevailing concern with multicultural education is that it is used in order of micro-cultures to be integrated or be assimilated into the dominant mainstream society. For this there is ample of chances that it will have to sacrifice their unique identities. This is because, members of micro-cultures are only accepted if they relinquish their original identity, values, behavioural patterns, language and so on. This is known as the 'melting-pot' perspective. These assimilation viewpoints are seen as undesirable and a danger to national cohesion. The popular culture makes every effort to stifle the contributions and cultures of other groups (Bennett, 2003). Actually, the original goal of assimilation was to create a common culture. But the culture that emerges as a result does not represent the range of cultures in the country (United States Census Bureau, 2002).

Conclusion:

Education and culture are so intimately and integrally connected that it conditions the whole educational patterns. A society devoid of any culture will have no definite educational organization. Hence the culture of a country has a very powerful impact on its educational pattern. Thus, education must supplement knowledge of one's own culture with the liberality of approach for other cultures which is so essential for understanding and sympathizing with them. In the absence of this liberality members of one culture believe themselves to be either superior or inferior to members of other cultures, with the result that tension is enhanced. This tension can even find violent expression. This is a major cause of many communal riots that frequently disrupt the peace in India.

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