



## MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION: A PATH TO COMMUNAL HARMONY

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### ABSTRACT

*This is a time of great challenge and growing possibility for teacher preparation. Major changes in the nature and contexts of schooling are linked to changes in the nature and contexts of teacher education - changes that are transforming its goals, processes, governance and outcomes. This paper describes how the context for teacher education is evolving and examines the implications of these changes for the development of a profession of teaching that can ensure well prepared teacher who can bring COMMUNAL HARMONY. Also, the paper recognizes multiculturalism as New Paradigm and establishes a framework for multicultural teacher education. Multiculturalism can be sustained, nurtured and celebrated if the state makes provisions for transmitting minority cultures and languages with in national education system so that the culture of the home is maintained, all cultures are shared, and the stability and cohesiveness of the society can be strengthened, thus reinforcing communal harmony in our society. For Banks, multicultural ideology is a more realistic approach of sustaining social cohesion and communal harmony while allowing freedom of cultural expression.*

### CONTEXTUALISING MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA - IN LIEU OF INTRODUCTION :

Multiculturalism in less than four decades has become a word immediately recognized by policymakers, social commentators, academics and general public in majority of democratic countries. Social fabric of India is characterized by multiculturalism and this multiculturalism in Indian context subtly encompasses related terms like cultural pluralism, social heterogeneity, diversity and composite culture.

However, in this paper, author attempts to explicate multicultural education in Indian Context. In a response to the questions : ***What would be defined as multicultural education in the context of India ?*** The following characteristics helps in conceptualizing multicultural education in Indian Context :

#### **1.Diversity centered and historically based curriculum :**

It is author perception that cultural diversity, history and contextual conditions are critical components in determining multicultural education for India. Cultural diversity need to

be highlighted in school curriculum in such a way students develop a sense of appreciation about Indian cultural diversity. Moreover, history need to be depicted in a realistic manner which conveys that historically people of this land are having a tendency of living together i.e. upanishadic ideal of '**Vasudaivakutumbakam**' which need to be reflected in curriculum.

## **2.Reform Oriented Philosophy :**

Multicultural education in Indian context need to be conceptualized in such a way that it provides a philosophical foundation for promoting educational reform. This reform should be based on social consensus (social policy makers, educators, communities) which emphasizes the importance of peaceful intercultural coexistence and communal harmony.

## **3.Diversity-directed instruction:**

Cultural diversity provides the direction for multicultural instruction and this presupposes policy reforms in teacher education i.e. a shift towards multicultural teacher education which will be discussed in details as this paper proceeds. In simple words, teachers need to be prepared to learn how to culturally integrate structural arrangements and curricular materials for teaching, to culturally diversify their instructional and assessment strategies, and to make democratic the environments constructed for learning.

## **4.Multicultural Curricular Reform:**

When educators acquire a multicultural ideology and conception of Indian culture, they are then able to view the experiences and contributions of a wide range of cultural, ethnic, language and religious groups as significant to the development of the Indian society. However, the author finds pressing need for curricular projects to be initiated by the apex bodies of education in India to transform curriculum into truly multicultural.

## **5.Permeative:**

In Indian context, multicultural education will have to penetrate all contexts i.e., social, cultural, political etc. and has to be widely applicable to Indian way of living as it is said in our tradition. Hence, multicultural education in India requires a permeative phase of introducing culturally appropriate content, teaching materials and methods across the curriculum.

## **6.Comprehensive:**

Multicultural education must encompass all levels of schooling which will further creative development of cultural diversity, simultaneously enhances the process of social cohesion and achievement of social justice.

However, multicultural education in Indian context poses a challenge to epistemological norms in Indian education. Transforming the school to suits the needs and demands of multicultural world order presupposes a substantial change in major components of school such as Teacher Education, Formalized curriculum, Teaching and Learning Styles and Assessment programs, etc. Here onwards, the crux of this paper lies in finding solutions to the questions : ***How should teachers approach this communal harmony characterized by multiculturalism?*** The criticism that the present day teacher education programs are facing is

that they lack an emphasis on culturally responsive curriculum and Pedagogy. For instance, the curriculum Development Centre in Education (1991) stated that '..... these courses of teacher education neglect the diversity, plurality and heterogeneity of Indian Society... neglect Social Reality'. Hence, it is important that those who prepare future educators realize the complexities of multiculturalism which will perpetuate and flourishes communal harmony.

Teacher Education in India has long been recognized as weak, as official documents at the national level, three decades apart, acknowledge :

The Syllabi used in training institutions are quite old and outdated. New items have been added to existing syllabi bit by bit. They do not cater to the needs of future teacher [....]. There should be a balance between theory and practice (NCERT, 1970, P. 117).

The system still prepares teachers who do not necessarily become professionally competent and committed at the completion of initial teacher preparation programmes (NCTE, 1998, P.5).

The Former Chairman of the apex National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) has also noted that the quality of teacher education programs has been 'a consistent concern', as they are 'Confined to classroom transaction strategies, some theoretical inputs and a few skills [....]. The teacher - learner relationship becomes trivialized' (Rajput & Walia, 1998, P. 146-147)

Based on the above observations and comments of apex bodies of education and eminent educationists, author would like to point out that any meaningful enhancement of the role of teachers in new world order of multiculturalism, involves two necessary pre-conditions :

- (a) the recognition and appreciation of multiculturalism as new world order.
- (b) re-engineering of education in terms of curriculum and Pedagogy of teacher education as well as organizational context of teaching.

Therefore, it is necessary to rethink and restructure our current teacher education programmes if we are to prepare teachers for nourishing multicultural society. However, this shift and transformation in teacher preparation program has also been called as Conscientization (Frier, 1970), emancipatory pedagogy (Gordon, 1985; Lather, 1991), critical teaching (Shor, 1980). In other contexts, this reform has been referred as multicultural education (Suzuki, 1984).

### **Multicultural Teacher Education: Preparing Teachers to Spread Communal Harmony**

Teacher trainees in under graduate teacher education programs acquire subject matter, knowledge; learn about the structure of the discipline and pedagogical approaches. So the curriculum and instruction that teacher trainees receive influence what and how they in turn transact, negotiate and engage among their students. Schools being the microcosm of the society, multiculturalism of Indian society have to be epitomized. In contemporary democratic Societies, teacher trainees are to be trained to transmit the values, attitudes and patterns of interaction to their students in consonance with the multi cultural ideals. Hence, the paper divides this multicultural teacher training in to four primary phases:

1. Self knowledge as cultural therapy.

- 2.Appreciation of differences in cultural values and behavioral codes.
- 3.Pedagogical skills
- 4.Public relations skill development.

### **1.Self Knowledge as Cultural Therapy:**

In this phase of teacher education, teachers will have to be made to become conscious of their own cultural values and beliefs and should become aware of the fact that how their cultural values and beliefs affect their attitudes and expectations towards students from different minority cultural groups which are habitually exhibited in school behaviors. They also need to understand the effects of their values and beliefs on students, relative to the student's self-concepts, academic abilities, educational opportunities, and achievement outcomes.

### **2. Appreciation of Differences in Cultural Values and Behavioral codes:**

Teachers will have to be trained to acquire knowledge about cultural backgrounds, life experiences, interactional Patterns, and learning styles of students from minority groups to replace the biases, myths and stereotypes about minorities. This will facilitate teachers to restructure the instructional process to better accommodate the students from minority groups. Here teachers will treat students equitably by accepting the fact that they all have comparable human worth and that differences do not automatically mean inferiorities.

### **3.Pedagogical Skills:**

The third focus of multicultural teacher education should be the development of pedagogical skills appropriate for use with students from diverse cultural and minority backgrounds. The point of departure for this training should understand the specific traits of different teaching styles and learning styles. This can be further explained through 'culture specific pedagogies' as conceived in NCERTS National Curriculum from work School Education: 2000. Teacher Education should incorporate learning to diversify teaching strategies culturally, to create more culturally diverse supportive environments for learning and demonstrating achievements, and to develop learning activities that are meaningful, involving, enabling and empowering for students from minority backgrounds.

### **4.Public relations skill Developments:**

A fourth emphasis in training multicultural teachers for educational equality is public relation skill development. Major reform is needed in how teachers are prepared to communicate and interact with parents of minority communities and to mobilize their community resources in the educational process. Currently, there is a strong tendency for educators to blame the school failure of students on the lack of involvement of their parents in school affairs. This buck-passing is counterproductive in improving the education of students from minority backgrounds. It is a form of blaming and indicating the victims and of educators abdicating their own responsibility to teaching minority students.

Furthermore, teachers do not fully understand and appreciate the fact that many parents do not have the time, the personal resources, or the technical skills to assist in the education of their children in ways the teachers typically expect, therefore, multicultural

teacher education should include the training process that will impart culturally appropriate Public relations skill development for use with different minority communities. It should start with acquiring an accurate knowledge base about the cultural dynamics of different minority communities. It should also include specific strategies and skills about how to establish credibility and trust with different minority communities and parents.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Teachers for communal harmony have to be empowered in specific ways in order to meet the challenges of education of minorities and their location in multicultural society. The need for teacher preparation for communal harmony will become clear once the problems of education experienced by minorities on ground level are analyzed. Rodolfo Stavehagen (Learning: The Treasure within) in Delors Report (1998) is of view that 'a truly multicultural education will be one that can address simultaneously the requirement of global and national integration, and the specific needs of particular culturally distinct communities both in rural and urban settings' (P.231). He goes on to say to achieve such a truly pluralistic education it will be necessary to rethink the objectives of what it means to educate and be educated, to remodel the contents and curricular of formal schooling institution, to develop new teaching skills and educational methods, and to stimulate the emergence of new generations of teachers / learners. Therefore, author in this paper visualizes a paradigm shift in preparing teachers in which education offered to minorities will be based on principles of equity and excellence, coexistence, peace and communal harmony.

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