



## ROLE OF SCHOOLING IN FOSTERING COMMUNAL HARMONY AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

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### ABSTRACT

It is important to delve into the role of education in contributing towards communal harmony and peaceful co-existence in society looking at the growing intolerance. It is indisputable that education needs to play a very crucial role in terms of making students learn and accept diversity in all its manifestations. It is high time that students are introduced to values in different religions in the schools itself such that they are able to appreciate the commonality of all religions in totality. A large number of children and adults fall prey to the onslaught of propaganda owing to lack of any discourse in classrooms or at homes that provides them with factual information on religion. On the other hand the curricula taught in schools is far from being multicultural in letter and spirit. Multicultural curricula need to be there at all levels of school education in order to understand the mosaic of different cultures that exist in India since ages. Apart from this it is important that in a vibrant democracy principles of democratic citizenship are also taught such that students understand the fundamental rights and duties of a citizen. This paper is an attempt to look at the strategies and practices that should be a part of school education to inculcate the spirit of communal harmony and peaceful existence in students.

**KEYWORDS:** Classroom Practice, Empathy, Multiculturalism, Diversity.

### INTRODUCTION:

It is indisputable that most conflicts arise due to lack mutual understanding be it between individuals, communities or nations. Dialogue that fosters meaning making should be an essential component of any classroom discourse. Many a times in the past years, India has witnessed communal disharmony that has threatened social cohesion and peaceful co-existence both. Engagement in dialogue with students and most teachers and practitioners in the field of education reveals that most of the understanding about religions is based on propaganda and is far from any kind of authentic knowledge. We are repeatedly failing in cultivating respect for diversity and multiculturalism which is the essence of a pluralistic society like India. It is a land where different religions have been thriving since ages.

As a policy we have always taken a position that religious education should not be a part of the school curriculum except in minority institutions. A very important recommendation of the Education Commission 1964-66 with respect to cultivation of moral, social and spiritual values was to include the ethical teachings of all major religions in the curriculum of school education. However no attention was paid to this recommendation in terms of implementation. Many countries across the west are teaching about religion. The curriculum of teaching of religion starting from early childhood years includes many important aspects such as ethical practices, being a good citizen, respecting diversity, being tolerant of all faiths etc. This subject is taught through religious education classes taken by specialized teachers. The study of comparative religion enables one to appreciate the commonality of religions. It is important to look at few important research studies that have been conducted to look at the need relevance and impact of religious education on pupils. The same are presented below.

### REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES:

Dinham and Shaw (2015). Explored the ways and means through which education about religion and religious beliefs can be imparted in schools. The project recommendations suggested that there is a need to develop a curriculum for religion and belief learning at National level that will be applicable to all schools. The Framework should clarify the purpose of religious education, the content to be included and the processes to be used for teaching and learning both in the subject of religious education and in other subjects by integrating the same. Till the age of 16 years every child should be taught about religion and belief learning including the contemporary context of the same. Religious studies should also be offered as an optional subject. Teachers teaching religious education should be trained specially focusing on it in the pre service teacher education programmes. The non specialist teachers should also be trained in religious education through continuous professional development programs.

Gomez, M. et.al (2020). Studied the influence of religious education on a sample of 679 adolescents from communities in Spain. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Analysis of results showed that Muslim women and Christian men had more critical view of religious education. The two groups that reported religious education experiences in school to be positive included Christian women and Muslim men. Jewish and Christian women strongly felt that knowledge about religion supported their daily life. Jewish women felt that there should be more autonomy given to them in their religion. Students felt that the curriculum of religious education should include more practical components and

promote the development of knowledge about religion with greater autonomy. It is important to look at the management of religious education taking on board the perceptions held by parents, teachers, community leaders and students especially in a country like Spain where religion and state are strongly attached.

Kjeldsen, K (2019). This research makes a case for not only learning about religion but also from religion. Religion through its extra academic objectives should educate the students about meeting the challenges of discrimination, rising intolerance and poor cohesion in society due to plurality of religious and cultural identities increasing every day. It is important that religious education also includes citizenship education and stress be laid that respect for diversity and Human Rights is taught and inculcated. It is important that through the engagement in critical pedagogy in discourses on religious education a platform is provided for critical discussions based on scientific knowledge instead of subjective opinions. In order to enlighten the thinking citizens, the study of religion should contribute in developing knowledge, competencies and attitudes that are analytical and critical in nature.

Liagkis, M.K (2016). This action research was undertaken to find the contribution of religious education in education in Greece with respect to the social and emotional development of adolescents. The research findings indicated that religious education can contribute to the development of social and emotional well being of adolescents but it is important that the same is provided keeping the individual centered approach and knowledge-based procedures in mind. The study advocated for religious education as it supports students in interpreting the world around them. Religious education also promotes secularity and social cohesion therefore its potential should be fully utilized in pedagogical practices. Religious education should be used as an interface between education, culture, religion and society through the promotion of open discussions on their interrelationship.

Patrick, M.L. et.al (2017). This paper strongly advocates education about religion in the school curriculum. The purposeful omission, marginalisation and silence on education about religion leads to complexities such as over simplifications that can often become discriminatory. It is very important that teachers have accurate and unbiased beliefs about religion such that student experiences are impacted in a positive way. Social Studies is one domain where education about religion can be integrated in order to critically look at multiple perspectives. The most important agent for succeeding in imparting quality religious education is to equip the teachers with the necessary pedagogical content knowledge about teaching religion such that values of citizenship, secularism, respecting diversity and empathy are cultivated in students through the schools

### Curricular Changes for Fostering Communal Harmony and Peaceful Co-existence:

The value of peaceful co-existence and practice of communal harmony both need to be cultivated in students and for this it is important to think critically about including the following aspects in the curriculum of school education:

- **Religious Education Curriculum:** In India the religious education curriculum would have to be designed very sensitively keeping in mind that all religions are represented highlighting on the major values contained

in each one of them. The content to be included in the curriculum will need to be debated and reflected upon such that it achieves its purpose in terms of outcomes. Secondly it is important that safeguards are put in place such that no religious indoctrination takes place in the name of imparting religious education to students. For this teachers will have to be educated in the skills and strategies to be used in imparting religious education to begin with.

- **Multicultural Curricula:** The curriculum should reflect the diversity of India in terms of cultural practices of all cultures that are seen in India. This includes including the knowledge of the different art forms, languages, different attires worn in different states, representation of all histories that make the present, objectively and including study of the biographies of all great men, women and others who have contributed to building this great nation across all fields.
- **Citizenship Education:** In a democratic country like India it is important to acquaint the students about their rights and duties such that they are able to contribute fruitfully to the creation of a just social-economic order. Citizenship education can come to our rescue for creation of social cohesiveness by developing informed and compassionate citizens who are connected to each other and are committed to the well being of the collective. This education shall include the study of human rights education on one hand and life skills on the other hand such that they are able to think critically and make informed decisions. The young citizens need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values such that they contribute towards a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable society.
- **Peace Education:** Looking at the world ridden with strife, narrow mindedness and lack of tolerance it is high time that peace education is included in the school curriculum at all stages. The curriculum framework for peace education should include inputs in the area of development of mindsets that believe in non-violence and conflict resolution. Attempts will need to be made to inculcate the spirit of social responsibility and harmony through curricular interventions. This shall also include developing environmental sensitivity such that conservation values are developed in all students understanding the perils of climate change. Peace Education essentially begins with cultivating inner peace at the individual level which may be done by using yoga, meditation, prayer etc. It is also important to move students away from the culture of war by making them understand through brainstorming on case studies about the harmful effects of war on people and countries. In order to develop social solidarity and the spirit of service in students they need to be engaged in community development projects such as engaging in cleanliness drives, serving the elderly in old age homes etc.
- **Celebrating Diversity and Inclusiveness:** It is important that diversity is celebrated in all its manifestations. Some ways of doing it include: a) Celebration of all the festivals with fervour not just those representing the majority and by involving all students b) In the school assemblies in the morning, prayers from all the religions should be included c) Students need to be sensitised towards respecting all gender and sexual identities and not just gender binaries such that all of them feel equally safe and belonged d) Different languages should be offered for students to choose from in order to promote multilingualism, as language is the most important bridge to understand each other e) Respecting different cultures instead of trying to impose the supremacy of one culture over another by understanding that every culture is unique in its own way needs to be taught.

#### CONCLUSION:

For any community or nation as a whole the road to prosperity lies in living in harmony. Peaceful co-existence does not come automatically, it ought to be nurtured as a value right from early years of schooling. Looking at the growing intolerance, youth confusing patriotism with hyper-nationalism and indulgence of the youth in sectarian activities it is pertinent that attention is accorded to building a societal ethos that is founded on the values of non-violence, compassion, empathy, scientific temperament and sustainability. This paper has made an attempt to list some of the curricular and co-curricular additions that may help in this direction along-with a caveat that religious education is the key for communal harmony such that myths about religions are dispelled while keeping religious indoctrination at bay.

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