UNDERSTANDING THE RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION FOR PEACE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt examine the need and relevance for Education for Peace in educational institutions in order to create an environment of cordiality such that students ,teachers and the staff co-exist peacefully and in harmony with self and others around them. The paper delves into understanding the meaning of peace through a few definitions given by practitioners in the field of Peace Studies such as Dalai Lama and Galtung along with the values which are considered to be of paramount importance for being at peace. The author then tries to explore the need of nurturing a culture of peace in educational settings throwing light on the complexity of problems in the Indian context. Further the key policy guidelines to foster peace in educational institutions have been explored and examined in order to foster a climate of peaceful co-existence wherein there is love, compassion ,empathy, contentment and freedom from fear and greed.

Keywords: Peace, Education ,Teaching Strategies ,Interventions

Meaning of Peace : Any discourse on peace ,peace studies ,peace education, education for peace is incomplete to begin with without delving on the meaning of peace. Peace is not easy to define .In simple words peace is the absence of any kind of conflict or violence be it war in a larger context or a simple quarrel at the micro level and this undoubtedly a negative connotation of Peace as accepted by the practitioners in the field of Peace studies. On the other hand Peace as the existence of goodwill, harmony ,empathy, mutual love and understanding is a positive understanding of Peace as a concept.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama asserted in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (1989):

" People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of inner peace and contentment, which in turn must be achieved through the cultivation of altruism, of love and compassion and elimination of ignorance ,selfishness and greed"

If we analyse the above quote the essence of peace shall emerge. The first premise is inflicting pain on others for your happiness and contentment. This means this in all probability this shall either be a materialistic journey to feel superior and draw satisfaction or a unhealthy competition where you draw happiness by beating others in the race which we unfortunately teach our children very early in life or you harm the other because of a sense of insecurity or complexes in your own personality and lastly you are a person who is power hungry and you go all length on your power trip thus favouring hegemonic relationships where you rule the roost.

It is a usual sight that happy people create happiness and unhappy people create unhappiness. Now for happiness there is no doubt that we need to be at peace with ourselves and feel satisfied with life. This spirit also needs to be nurtured right from infancy wherein we engage in exercises of sharing and giving ,we ought to teach the value of being loving and caring to every living being such that the child gets the feeling of satisfaction by being in service to humanity .We have to put checks and balances such that children stay away from the feeling of 'Me' and stand for the collective good of 'We'. In others words we need to build the spirit of compassion such that greed and selfishness stay at bay

Now let us look at the values listed by Galtung who is regarded as the father of Peace Studies as essential pre-requisites for being at peace:"1.Presence of cooperation,2. Freedom from fear ,3. Freedom from want ,4. Economic growth and development ,5. Absence of exploitation ,6. Equality ,7. Justice ,8. Freedom of action,9. Pluralism ,10. Dynamism"(Theories of Peace: A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking By Johan Galtung International Peace Research Institute, Oslo September, 1967).

Looking at the above core values it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that for peace to prevail or for peaceful co-existence we need to nurture these values such that a culture of Peace prevails at all times .Let us now understand why we need to nurture this culture of Peace especially in educational settings in the context of the above listed values for peace.

Need to Nurture a Culture of Peace in Educational Settings: Whether it is the schools or the colleges there is a growing problem of student unrest. At the primary level in India this is seen in the acts of bullying in the classrooms, students facing marginalisation on account of their caste, gender, religion, socio-economic status etc .At the upper primary stage conflict manifests itself in the form of unhealthy competition between peers and there are reported cases of physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse too making the children a highly vulnerable group. As they

reach the secondary stage in schools there are a number of reports which highlight the rise in incidents of juvenile delinquency. A decade back we never heard of a 17-18 year olds raping minor girls or for that matter incidents of sodomy which are common place now. This stage is also a time when students are under tremendous pressure owing to performance anxiety related to examinations and of course the stress of carving out a decent career in near future .There are innumerable cases of students committing suicide owing to failing in examinations or falling prey to parental pressure and landing in a course in which they are least interested leading to these extreme steps. As they enter university life the newly found freedom along with peer pressure is seen manifested in the form of falling prey to smoking ,alcohol and drugs. You witness constant struggle for power in student elections often the colleges and universities becoming battle grounds with ugly display of muscle and money .Any conflict between students is seen to escalate into a brawl .You also witness students running away from homes and hostels in the name of love and then many a times seeking revenge as jilted lovers. There have been so many cases wherein young girls have fallen prey to acid attacks thus changing the course of their lives foever .You hardly see this young blood sit together and resolve issues through peaceful dialogues. Another thing which seems amiss in educational settings is the close bond between students and teachers such that they feel free to discuss their worries ,fears, concerns or struggles. Looking at the above picture which is pretty grim it is amply clear that there is an urgent need to nurture a culture of Peace in educational settings. Before exploring the curricular interventions which may be used in educational institutions to nurture the spirit of peaceful co-existence it is important that we look at some key policy guidelines given by international agencies and national bodies which are of prime importance to foster peace.

Policy Guidelines to Foster Peace in Educational Settings:

The United Nations adopted the following resolution with reference to Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace(quoted from 53/243 B. http://www.un-documents.net/a53r243b.htm) wherein actions to foster peace through the tool of education are given for clear understanding of the expectations from education across the globe .Section 9 which pertains to efforts needed to nurture peace is quoted below:

"Actions to foster a culture of peace through education:

Reinvigorate national efforts and international cooperation to promote the goals of education for all with a view to achieving human, social and economic development and for promoting a culture of peace;

a. Ensure that children, from an early age, benefit from education on the values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life to enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity and of tolerance and non-discrimination;

b. Involve children in activities designed to instill in them the values and goals of a culture of peace;

c. Ensure equality of access to education for women, especially girls;

d. Encourage revision of educational curricula, including textbooks, bearing in mind the 1995 Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy/3 for which technical cooperation should be provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization upon request;

e. Encourage and strengthen efforts by actors as identified in the Declaration, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, aimed at developing values and skills conducive to a culture of peace, including education and training in promoting dialogue and consensus-building;

f. Strengthen the ongoing efforts of the relevant entities of the United Nations system aimed at training and education, where appropriate, in the areas of conflict prevention and crisis management, peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as in post-conflict peace-building;

g. Expand initiatives to promote a culture of peace undertaken by institutions of higher education in various parts of the world, including the United Nations University, the University for Peace and the project for twinning universities and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Chairs Programme."

On careful scrutiny of the above recommendations it is evident that for peace to prevail equity and equality are important concerns .If we look at the implementation of the above in the Indian context the first major focus shall be providing Education for All .In India the context is indeed complicated due to the following facts:

• "A total of 1.7 million and 16 million Indian children are shown to be out of school at the primary and upper primary levels. By any yardstick, this is a very large number of children who are being denied their fundamental right. But if irregular attendance were included in the definition, the total percentage of children out of school would be much higher than the 1.4% and 23% that those numbers correspond to."(Kiran Bhatty ,https://thewire.in/5671/the-un-report-on-out-of-school-kids-is-bad-news-for-india-but-the-real-picture-is-worse/,July 07,2015)

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• "The National Sample Survey has estimated that three **out** of four **children** currently **out of school** in **India** are either dalit (32.4 per cent, 2 million), Muslim (25.7 per cent, 1.5 million)or adivasi (16.6 per cent, 1 million)."www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/...children-out-of-school/article7814794.ece,October 28,2015.)

Education indeed is a complicated affair. One we cannot claim for sure that there is equality of status or of opportunity .There are a number of remote pockets across the country where access to schooling is an elusive dream. On the other hand in many villages we still have single teacher schools running the show especially in the most crucial stage of primary schooling. Then a another worrisome trend is the differential quality of education across different types of schools .There are govt schools run by the state and also the Kendriya Vidyalayas and the Navodaya Vidyalayas, The Public Schools run by trusts or societies and the private schools run by individuals or groups and then there is a budding population of International schools offering global education. Looking at this gap in access to quality schooling due to schools not being at par in providing education which can be considered to be of considerable quality ,equality just remains a value to strive for only on paper.

On the other hand if we look at tolerance and non discrimination we have umpteen case studies which show that discriminatory practices exist in schools in the form of gender discrimination, caste discrimination, discrimination on account of religion and language etc. In India gender discrimination is a major issue due to the apathy of parents to send their girls to schools .Either the girl child remains at home looking after the other siblings or she is seen assisting her parents at work or in household chores .Till date a high incidence of violence is seen in the form of female foeticide showing that the attitudes towards the girl child have still not changed .Looking at close quarters it is clearly seen that girls are viewed as burdens on the family owing to the retrogressive practice of dowry at the time of marriage. Secondly traditionally boys have been preferred over girls owing to the belief that they are the ones who carry forward the family lineage and are important for performing the last rites in the Hindu religion for attaining salvation. Thirdly the families who are engaged in agriculture as a means of livelihood feel they need sons for looking after the fields .And it is also believed that if you have girls you need to be at guards to protect them at all times not understanding that boys are equally vulnerable to any kind of violence or abuse. Education and Schooling both need to work very hard to change the prevalent mindset.

On the other hand we see do not see much efforts on ground to mainstream the socially and economically marginalized groups comprising the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes ,Muslims and the Tribals through education.

Now let us look at the vision statement of the National Curriculum Framework 2005 in it's Position on Education for Peace applicable to Indian School Education .This paper provides a comprehensive guideline and enumerates the focus areas on Education for Peace as the following: "The major frontiers of education for peace are: (a) bringing about peace-orientation in individuals through education; (b) nurturing in students the social skills and outlook needed to live together in harmony; (c) reinforcing social justice, as envisaged in the Constitution; (d) the need and duty to propagate a secular culture; (e) education as a catalyst for activating a democratic culture; (f) the scope for promoting national integration through education; and (g) education for peace as a lifestyle movement."

To orient children towards peace we need to start right from the early childhood years of schooling to teach them the value of love and compassion through activities which nurture team spirit and wean them away from individualism to begin with. At this stage itself we should insist that they while they eat their brunch in school they share it with their peers which shall not only cultivate their social skills but also enable them to learn to live in harmony in a plural and diverse classroom and thus be socialized to live peacefully later.

In order to nurture the spirit of social justice we need to ensure that we distribute roles and responsibilities without any prejudice on a rotational basis to all students irrespective of their gender, caste ,religion ,age ,experience, socio-economic background so that they all feel at par with each other and do not house any ill feelings against each other or their teachers .Many a times in schooling it is observed that a teacher who is biased in his/her dealings with children is the start of the nursing of jealousy or hatred in children for one another. In order to teach respect for secularism as a value we need to reinforce time and again that all religions profess the same basic values of love, compassion, peaceful co-existence ,empathy ,tolerance ,truth ,non-violence etc. Teaching learning environment in the classroom ought to be without fear, dialogic and joyful in order to nurture the spirit of democratic living. For National Integration we shall have to rise above regionalism to begin with and cultivate the spirit of patriotism such that love for your own country is developed.

Conclusion: It is beyond doubt that we need to focus on education for peace in our educational institutions looking at the growing in tolerance at all stages of education. This intolerance manifests itself in the form of bullying, using abusive language in conversations ,use of muscle power for supremacy, not respecting diversity and pluralism ,gender related violence, discrimination on account of caste, religion, language, region or nationality and above all

engagement of young children in acts of violence such as murders, rapes and other forms of abuse. Looking at the policy guidelines at international and national level it is high time that we infuse Education for Peace activities across the curriculum at all stages of education in curriculum transaction instead of it remaining a mere lip service in documents.

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