

EDUCATION HARBOURING NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN INDIA

*Siddiqui Saima Jarrar Alam**

Abstract

India has unique diversity in its population and cultural and social traits. The onset of 21st century has ushered tremendous opportunities for India to reach the position of development however, many problems has grappled the socio-economic conditions of the nation. Violence, crimes and conflicts on the lines of religion, race, caste, communities and gender has become a common phenomenon in the Indian society. Such disharmony has posed a challenge to the national integration which is the most cherished goal of the Indian Constitution. In this backdrop, education is the most instrumental force to foster national integration in the era of 21st century in India. Education is not only process of overall development but a potential tool for bringing social solidarity in India.

Keywords- education, national integration, social solidarity, collective will, basic structure, brotherhood, fraternity.

I. Introduction

Compared to any other nation in the world, the Indian demography is uniquely diverse. A magnanimous population of 1.22 billion resides across different climatic conditions and diverse landforms. Every part of the nation including giant Himalayas, long coastlines, fertile plains and ghats are inhabited by people who follow cultural traits and habits peculiar to their lifestyle. Considering the paramount diversity in the population, the framers of the Indian Constitution has laid down substantial features that strive to preserve the harmony amongst the people. The essence of preamble and provisions mainly the fundamental rights and directive principles of state policies assures equality, liberty and fraternity amongst the people. The fundamental duties, inserted by the Forty-Second Amendment Act, 1976, remind the citizens to abide by the Constitution and its cherished ideals. It encourages the citizens to promote harmony and spirit of common brotherhood amongst all people transcending religious, linguistic, regional or sectional diversities.¹

* Research Scholar, Hidayatullah National Law University, New Raipur.

¹ Article 51A (e), The Constitution of India, 1950.

Constitutionally and theoretically national integration is a recognized virtue and happens to be the most protected aspiration of the constitutional makers. However, pragmatically this virtue and aspiration has become the most vulnerable reality of the nation. National integration has paved way to parochial interests and selfish motives. Violence, hatred, conflicts, riots constantly occurs across the nation on the lines of religion, gender, region, castes, race, and communities and so on. The media covers many such incidents on the local or national basis almost regularly.

Moreover, there is a shimmering discontent amongst the people because of the fragmented development. The rich are becoming richer and the poor are turning poorer. Notorious land acquisitions from poor farmers for industrial corridors, especially in the National Capital Region; failure of the government to fairly compensate the aggrieved land losers; escalating farmer suicide in regions like Maharashtra exhibits the uneven development in India. Many times the political classes also rifts tension between the sections of population to serve their parochial aims.

A nation on the path of development cannot afford contradictions that mar the national unity. The onset of 21st century has brought tremendous opportunities in arena of trade, commerce, politics, and social welfare for the wholesome growth of India. In such a dichotomous situation where India has avenues for development and simultaneously faces the underlying disharmony amongst people, education is the best instrument to foster national integration. Education is not only a process of learning; it is mechanism of social change and social solidarity. Education has the potential to foster national integration at the primary, professional and research level. Similarly, education can realize the constitutional goals of equality, liberty and fraternity by ushering integration and sense of brotherhood amongst diverse population of India.

II. The Importance of Education in Harboring National Integration in India

1. Proliferating role of education

Education is generally understood as a form of learning in which knowledge, skill or habit of the group of people is transformed from one generation to another through teaching,

training or research. In its functional sense, education is a change in man's conduct of life. It is a form of upgrading in man's ability to choose the best alternative in any circumstances. Education does not only mean a mere schooling or a formal training at institutions, it is process that occurs even informally at home/surroundings/workplace and so on.² Education instills training in man which cannot be easily disassociated from the human behavior and practices at large. In a non-stereotypical sense it can be said that a man can forget concepts, theories, practices but he cannot forget the training that education gives him to adapt and grow in any given situation.

The sociology of education, relatively a new concept, explains the inherent link between education and society. It features the aims, methods, objectives, institutions of education in relation to the social, political, economic, religious and cultural forces of the society. Education is an activity which goes on in a society. Its aim and methods depends on the nature of the society in which it thrives.³ For instance during the Nazi regime in Germany, particularly from 1918-1939, the German education system laid utmost thrust on nationalist preaching, racial doctrine and gave lesser emphasis on the intellectual pursuit.⁴ Contrarily, the democracies of the Western countries like United State of America, Canada, United Kingdom, and France have an education system which is based on the concept of freedom, liberty, participation of populace in governance and harbouring scientific temper.

Traditionally, education has always been preoccupied with the pressure of dealing with the present situations rather than focusing on the future goal.⁵ However, in the present scenario education has become a tool for ushering changes or reforms that have direct bearing on the future. Education has become a drive to achieve many changes on the individual and social front, in socio-economic-political arena and at the local and global platform. Apart from these broader aspects, education has been pivotal in preventing and mitigating many maladies that directly affects the people like crimes, delinquencies, environmental hazards, epidemics, corruption and many more. Garnering awareness amongst people through education to avert some of the above

² Educating for a sustainable future, A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action, UNESCO, November (1997).

³ A.K.C. OTTAWAY, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION 02 (1st ed. 1953).

⁴ Paul Brown, *Education in Nazi Germany*, CTR. ON MODERN HISTORY, (May 15, 2015), http://hsc.csu.edu.au/modern_history/national_studies/germany/2429/

⁵ Raja Roy Singh, *Education for the twenty-first century: Asia-Pacific perspective*, Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID), 1991.

named menaces has become an important agenda at international level and domestic laws and policies.

The meaning and importance of education has changed with the passage of time and needs of the societies. Education in the formal and informal sense has become a necessity and primacy for individual, society and state. This necessity is driven by many objectives, goals and circumstances. A nation as diverse as India has to treasure the integration amongst its populace. In the 21st century marked with different phenomenon and happenings across the social, political and economic spectrum, education has become a primacy for harbouring national integration in India.

2. Historical account of education promoting national integration in India

An analysis of role of education in India gives some diverse and interesting historical facets. Throughout the freedom struggle education played a pivotal role in garnering unity amongst the people to challenge the British hegemony. One of the major objectives of the early Congress was to create a common political platform wherefrom political workers could engage in political activities and also educating and mobilizing people on all India basis. The modern politics of popular participation, involving participation of the people at large, was phenomenally new to India then. In order to effectuate the modern politics it was necessary to arouse, organize and consolidate the public opinion. The initial efforts of early nationalism in India were geared towards this end. The first step was seen in form of unification of the opinion of the educated class followed by other groups.⁶

The historical account of the Indian freedom struggle shows that education, in sense of efforts of the educated class, paved way for eradicating religious superstition and social obscurantism. Education emerged as a tool to counter evils like gender bias, violence against women, sati and caste discrimination⁷; it also ushered socio-religious reforms which were crucial in fight for India's independence. The renowned social reformer Raja Ramohan Roy believed that change in religious and caste practices were quintessential for political advantage and social comfort. Spirit of reformation embraced the whole of India beginning with the efforts of Raja

⁶ See *infra* note 8

⁷ Ranade, Jyoti Phule, Narayan Guru has been the stalwarts who opposed caste system i.e. Chaturvarna, Guru believed that such system is based on superficiality and has no essence.

Rammohan Roy in the early 19th century.⁸ Following the course Jyotiba Phule, Savitri Bai Phule strove for many reforms, prominent amongst them being the girl-child education in Maharashtra. Vidyasagar staunchly propagated the idea of widow remarriage by himself indeed setting an example in this regard. The two important criteria that informed the socio-religious reform movement then were rationalism and religious universalism.⁹

The swadeshi movement, which emerged as an agitation to the partition of province of Bengal in 1905, undertook the agenda of ushering national education to undermine the British administration. Demand for national education had been an important aspect of the swadeshi movement. The swadeshi movement had supported the formation of National Education Council which was finally set up in 1906. Vernacular was adopted as the medium of instruction from the lowest to the highest level of education. The important goal of the movement was to strike national unity by such unconventional method of education to prevent the partition of Bengal. The spirit of swadeshi along with the vigor of national education spread like a wave from Bengal to Maharashtra, Madras and other provinces in India depicting a unique sense of unity.¹⁰

The discussion on role of education in galvanizing Indian masses against the tyrant Britishers would be incomplete without the mention of M. K. Gandhi. M.K. Gandhi was the first highly educated Indian Barrister who went to South Africa in 1893. He fought racial discrimination in South Africa and offered to educate the Indians reeling under racial hatred in South Africa. As a western-educated barrister he never took discrimination as it is, he was aware of rights and timely advocated for the same. After returning to India his efforts were to unite different sections of Indian society and give their demands a wide publicity. Gandhiji's abilities as an organizer, fund-raiser, journalist, and propagandist came to the forefront during the early struggle for independence. The Indian freedom struggle was continuously strengthened by his passive resistance in nature of civil disobedience¹¹ and non-cooperation movement that united people cutting across regions, religions, castes and creeds.

3. Education harbouring national integration in contemporary India

⁸ BIPAN CHANDRA, *INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE, 1857-1947* 82 (1st ed. 1988).

⁹ *Id* at 85.

¹⁰ Meshram Pradhnya Prabhu, *Swadeshi Movement in India: With Special Reference to Maharashtra II* Multidisciplinary Research 2(6), 194- 95 (2012).

¹¹ Bipin, *supra* note 8, at 155.

Twenty first century has brought tremendous opportunities for India to accelerate its pace for achieving the stage of development. Globalization has widened the avenues to trade, share and promote ideas with other nations of the world. Industrialization has opened doors for production, marketing and financing diverse products and goods. Scientific development has boosted the major occupation of India i.e. agriculture and animal husbandry. Intensive mechanization has facilitated the utilization of natural resources, raw materials, infrastructure and construction in India. The urban landscape of India is continuously expanding to support the developmental activities in housing, industries, and conveyances to name some. The implication of development in 21st century is cogently evident in form of the economic progress of the nation.

In parallel to the rapid economic progress in urban India, the country is still plagued with many social menaces. Caste system, gender bias, crime against women, juvenile delinquencies, corruption in public life, communal riots and tensions, health hazards and many more evils have affected the overall development of the nation. These evils have challenged the on-going development process of India and have also posed a severe threat to the prospective progress of the country. The instances of these evils have become a phenomenon in the Indian society. No statistics and sources are required to testify the prevalence of these evils in the Indian society. Every citizen of this country undergoes or witnesses some or many of these evils in the ordinary course of his/her life.

Some of the evils like caste system, gender bias, communal disharmony, racial and religious hatred have created a ruthless divide amongst the populace of the country. It is a matter of day to day life that people in India are divided on many issues like religion, race, region, caste, gender. The sharp divide amongst the people have penetrated the social life. The divide has posed a challenge to the constitutional ideals of the country thereby threatening the national integration.

India has the lengthiest constitutions in the world. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution, which is the key to open the minds of the framers of the constitution,¹² has set cherished goals and ideas to be followed and complied by the citizens in public life. Amongst other features the Preamble declares India to be a secular and democratic nation. India, unlike other western countries like United State of America, does not negate religion in public life.

¹² Keshavnanda Bharti v. State of Kerala, AIR 1973 SC 1461.

Secularism in India implies a solemn respect to all the religions practiced by the people. The Supreme Court of India has declared secularism to be the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.¹³ The Preamble ensures justice- social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity to all the people residing in India. It also envisages promoting 'fraternity' that assures the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. However, in reality the values enshrined in the Preamble have distinctly faded in the socio-economic and political set up of India.

The disharmony in the Indian society persisting in the 21st century needs to be addressed urgently. Though the state and its instrumentalities can be the best means of ushering social harmony; the social change in form of national integration must originate from the people to be more effective. Nothing else but education can be a parameter of ushering this change. The role of education in the 21st century has been tremendously expanding. Education has acquired the status of wisdom, skill, knowledge than being customarily understood as just a form of learning.

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim saw the major function of the education as the transmission of the society's norms and functions. He maintained that society can only survive if there exists amongst its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity. He believed that education perpetuates and promotes such requisite homogeneity in the society by fixing in the child since beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands. Without such similarities cooperation, social solidarity and thus social life would be impossibility. Education has the potential to nurture a sense of belongingness to the society as a whole. Education, Durkheim believes, provides a link between the society and individual.¹⁴

The American education system best follows the Durkheim's approach of harbouring national integration through education. The common education curriculum in America has helped to instill shared norms and values into the population with diverse backgrounds. It has provided a shared language and common history for the immigrants from every country in Europe. The American students learn about their founding father, Constitution, Abraham Lincoln who personifies the American values of equality of opportunity and the humble struggle. The

¹³ S.R. Bommai v Union of India, AIR 1994 SC 1918.

¹⁴ MICHAEL HARALAMBOS & ROBIN HEADL, SOCIOLOGY THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES 173 (1st 2008).

school children take oath on the stars and stripes of the American flag as commitment to socialize in the American society.¹⁵

India needs to take some more active incentives and measures in addition to those carried by the American education system. Indian society is more diverse than America and is heavily oriented to customs, usages, culture, ethnicity, language, dialect, regions, religion, caste, gender and many more. Education system in India at the primary level has tried to inculcate a sense of social solidarity by prescribing syllabus that imbibes the history of freedom struggle filled with incidents of harmony to achieve independence. The civics syllabus includes certain portion of the Constitution like machinery of state, branches of government, function of the state, local bodies to name some. The literature section of school books also covers the life of some stalwarts like Gandhiji, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhash Chandra Bose who worked for humanity unconditionally and propagated national unity. So also moral science texts preach quality human values like unity, sharing, love, peace, humanism and many more to the children.

Education as an instrument of national integration has an important role to play at the level of primary education in India. In addition to the textual preaching in the school curriculum, the teachers must practically demonstrate the above discussed values before the children and encourage them to do the same. At the inception of the training in school the budding citizens must be taught that national interest and integrity is secondary to none. A person born and residing in India is recognized by his nation and not by the religion, race, caste and gender. Children must be instilled with the feeling of patriotism which demands nothing more than affection towards the motherland and brotherhood for fellow citizens.

At the level of professional teaching too the educators must remind the youth that unity in diversity must be reflected as a part of professionalism. The Indian Constitution enshrines the fundamental duty of every citizen to show allegiance to the Constitution, its ideals and cherished goals which also includes fraternity and integrity. The youth of the country must abide by the fundamental duty even at the professional front. The government, varsities, institutions and organizations must encourage research that aims to find out the causes of disharmony, communal tension, hate crimes amongst different sections of the society. Empirical studies which focus on specific regions and causes of national disintegration must be promoted by the above stated bodies. The results of such studies must be utilized for formulating policies and agenda by the

¹⁵ *Id* at 156.

government to overcome the maligning situations. The state must work on the constitutional goals by encouraging quality education for students at all levels and for public in general in form of awareness.

III. Conclusion

Education is an instrument of social change and social solidarity in the functional capacity. It is a means of ushering and sustaining national integration however, the dismal performance of education system at the primary and higher level has questioned its credible functional role. A recent survey of rural schools in 2012 has shown that school going children cannot recognize digits and read simple text. In spite of the enactment of Right to Education, 2009, the drop outs from the schools have sharply increased in rural India. The drop outs from the government schools have rising continuously in the rural areas.¹⁶

The National Education Policy, 1986 has prescribed five principle goals namely- greater access, equal access, quality & excellence, relevance and promotion of social values for enhancing the quality of education. However, these goals have failed to materialize due the lack of transparency in the education system. The Indian Universities are facing acute shortage of teachers with 40% and 30% vacancies of teaching staff in the Central and state universities respectively. Compared to other countries in the world India lacks in reforming and updating the curriculums and course structures. India has not reached the global landmark in field of research in comparison to United State of America, China, Japan and Germany. Along with the rigid approach towards imparting education, the system has also been lethargic in improving the infrastructure of the schools/colleges/institutions in the urban and rural areas.¹⁷

Thus, education shall be a distant reality if the state and its instrumentalities fail to upgrade the system imparting and delivering education. In such scenario the society shall remain stagnant and devoid of any social change. Values like social solidarity, national integration and wholesome development of the nation shall be stalled without meaningful education at all levels. Education has the incentive and force to materialize the constitutional goals including national

¹⁶ Pratyaya- Indian Education Policy, *The deteriorating quality of our primary education system* (Jan 29, 2013), <http://pratyaya.nationalinterest.in/2013/01/29/the-deteriorating-quality-of-our-primary-education-system>.

¹⁷ J.D. Singh, *Higher Education for 21st Century*, University News, 53 (16), 19-20 (2015).

harmony only and only when collective will of the state and people adopt a changed attitude towards organizing, imparting and grasping education.

