Sustainable Development through Education for Peace: An Appraisal of Indian Policies and School Education Curriculum

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THE WORLD TODAY is sitting on the edge of the volcano of violence, discrimination, aggression and oppression that erupts every now and then, de-stabilizing the peace and harmony of nations. Violence has permeated the fabric of all communities around the world so deep that we have accepted it as part of our daily life. Education was thought to be the major instrument to inculcate values, tolerance, harmony and living together in our children but seems to have failed miserably in this objective. The problem of today's education is its alienation from the realities of the world around with the result that instead of being a process of liberation, it is often visualized as an instrument of oppression, manipulation, process of thought control and indoctrination. That is why Ivan Illyich called for De-Schooling society and Paulo Freire suggested the Pedagogy of the Oppressed. A desperate need is being felt by educationists, philosophers, scientists and political leaders to rejuvenate the human values which may bring long lasting peace on this planet. The insistence of Delors report (1996) on "Learning to live together' as the central pillar of education is a sad reminder of the current state of affairs, and also a realization that education must be geared to promote a culture of peace, tolerance, democratic values, human rights and duties among students. It is right time to evolve a system of education that is more humane and liberating. Education for peace therefore should be the integral component of both overt and hidden curriculums of the education system. The concept of peace however needs clarification as distinguished from religious education, moral education or value education, and should cut across various subjects taught in institutions. The culture of peace needs to permeate the entire school experience of the child instead of being taught as a subject. Sustainable development can only be ensured through education for peace.

Education for Peace: The Indian Context

The Indian society highly diversified in terms of caste, class, religion and regions faces the greatest challenge of ensuring equality, equity and social justice to all its citizens and considers education as the major tool for promoting these values enshrined in the Constitution. Education has been accepted, in this context a tool for nurturing interdependence of thought and action, sensitivity towards others, participation in the democratic process, ideals of living together and social change, etc. The combative role of education in eliminating discrimination, religious fundamentalism, violence and superstition, and promoting some core values such as India's common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy, secularism, equality of sexes, observance of small family norms (two-children family norm is encouraged in order to control population explosion), and inculcation of scientific temper, etc. have been emphasized in various educational policies of the country from time to time. Promoting peace, social justice, and equality of human race has always been one of the major concerns of Indian education system and addressed by the curriculum framers through integrating various values promoting peace, social justice and sustainable development in the entire school curriculum and across all subjects. Consequently all the Curriculum Frameworks formulated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) for school education in 1975, 1988 and 2000, respectively emphasized developing certain values among students that are in conformity with the educational policies and help promote a peaceful society (school curriculum is periodically reviewed and modified to keep pace with the ever changing knowledge base). *The Curriculum for Ten Year School: A Framework* (1975) published by NCERT for school education states (para 2.5, page 4),

> The awakening of social consciousness, the development of democratic values and of a feeling for social injustice and national integration are extremely important. The promotion of national consciousness and the development of international understanding should be one simultaneous process. Tolerance, friendship, cooperation and peace between nations are possible only through a proper appreciation of each country's contribution to the world. National Integration can be achieved only through a proper understanding and appreciation of different sub-cultures of India and the common bonds that hold them to-

gether...All subjects should be taught in such a manner so as to foster the spirit of scientific humanism.

The *National Curriculum Framework for Elementary and Secondary Education of 1988* visualized value education as integral part of school education curriculum. Values, emphasized in this framework, were drawn from national goals, universal perceptions, ethical considerations, and character building. This framework strongly advocated the need for generating awareness among students of the necessity of promoting peace and international understanding for prosperity of human kind and interdependence of nations in different spheres. Emphasizing on encouraging students to learn to live together by promoting the concept of "*world as a family of nations,*" this framework maintains [1]

> The curriculum should reflect some of the major issues facing the world today such as disarmament, avoidance of nuclear war, prevention of violation of human rights, etc. ... The school curriculum, while enabling the pupil to root oneself in the abiding national cultural traditions and value frame, should also enable him/her to learn and appreciate the richness and to see himself/herself as a member of the new and emerging international community of [h]umankind.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE, 2000) stresses that [2]

> education has to play its dual role of being conservative and dynamic —bringing about a fine synthesis between change-oriented technologies and the country's continuity of cultural tradition. While on the one hand, education should help in promoting a global world order, on the other, it should be seen as developing a national consciousness, a national spirit and national unity essential for national identity. At no point of time can the school curriculum ignore the inclusion of specific content to forge national identity, a profound sense of patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* [world as a family], non-sectarian attitudes, capacity for tolerating differences arising out of caste, religion, ideology, region, language, sex, etc.

Accepting truth, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence as the core universal values, the NCFSE (2000) maintains, "schools can and

must strive to restore and sustain the universal and eternal values oriented towards the unity and integration of the people, their moral and spiritual growth enabling them to realise the treasure within."[3] In this context, "education about religions" and not "religious education" had been emphasized by the NCFSE (2000) in order to help students to understand that the "essence of every religion is common only the practices differ."[4]

These frameworks adopted the behaviouristic approach of teaching and learning and integration as the method for promoting education for peace. In addition, certain values had been identified and considered essential for promoting peace. Consequently, values related to peace and human rights had been integrated in textbooks of all subject areas at all levels, instead of teaching them separately.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005): The Epistemological Shift

A major epistemological shift is witnessed in the approach towards school curriculum reforms in India in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) in the concept of learning as well as integration of peace education in the school syllabus. This was in response to the shift in the concept of learning from traditional behaviorist perspectives, where learning is considered mechanical, to constructivist perspective where the experiences of students become more important. Constructivism involves active participation of students in the process of exploration and discovery. Throughout the learning experience meaning is constructed and reconstructed based on the previous experiences of students. In contrast to behaviorist epistemology, learning in constructivism is no longer a product but the process of learning itself, and students learn concepts while exploring their application. During this application process students test several hypotheses and explore alternative solutions and learn through discovery. The 2005 curriculum reform in India has responded to this global shift in the concept of learning and two significant paradigm shifts can clearly be identified in the NCF 2005 that have bearing on promoting education for peace:

> i.   The NCF 2005 is based on the Constructivist approach to learning, while all previous curriculum reform efforts had been based on the behaviorist approach, and,

ii. Shift from traditional value-based approach to peace-based approach. The National Focus Group on Education for Peace was constituted to help develop NCF 2005.

Twenty one National Focus Groups were constituted in different areas of education to suggest their recommendations in order to facilitate the development of NCF 2005. Each focus group developed a focus group paper on its recommendations. The group on education for peace considers that[5]

> value education is subsumed in education for peace but is not identical with it. Peace is contextually appropriate and pedagogically gainful point of coherence for values. Peace concretizes the purpose of values and motivates their internalization. Without such a framework, the integration of values into the learning process remains a non-starter. Education for peace is, thus, the ideal strategy for conceptualizing and operationalising value education.

Education for peace, according to NCF 2005, "seeks to nurture ethical development, inculcating the values, attitudes and skills required for living in harmony with oneself and with others including the nature."[6] It is therefore, a concern cutting across the curriculum and is the concern of all teachers.

The NCF's thrust on Constructivist epistemology provided ample opportunity to integrate peace concerns in education as constructivism considers students active partners in their knowledge construction process and not passive receivers of knowledge like in the traditional epistemology. There are several instructional practices commonly attributed to the influence of constructivism (Brooks and Brooks 1999, Hirtle, 1996; Poplin& Weeres, 1992; Roblyer, Edward, & Havriluk, 1997; Schifter, 1996) using problem-oriented learning activities relevant to students' interests. These include:

- Encouraging active, not passive learning;
- Providing learning environment that utilizes variety of learning resources;
- Encouraging creativity;
- Encouraging collaborative and cooperative group work;
- Encouraging learning through exploration;

- • Emphasizing the process of problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills;
- • Using authentic assessment methods along with quantitative methods.

These processes are also very effective in negotiating conflicts and finding solutions acceptable to the conflicting parties. In contrast to traditional classrooms where learning is so decontextualized that it bears little resemblance to meaningful authentic activity, the constructivist classroom learning relates to real life experiences involving collaborative group work, exploration and discovery where students' existing knowledge base is challenged and reconstructed again and again. The guiding principles of constructivism are

- » Posing problems of emerging relevance to students;
- » Structuring learning around primary concepts;
- » Seeking and valuing students' points of view;
- » Adapting curriculum to address students' suppositions;
- » Assessing learning in the context of teaching.

These principles not only ensure better understanding of content but also facilitate students to think critically, reflect on problems and issues at hand, collaborate with others, work in groups, negotiate conflicts and contradictions, and make informed decisions and choices. In the process they develop as more independent, thoughtful, and humane individuals. For a diverse and multiethnic country like India developing humane citizens is the only way to ensure sustainable development.

The NCF (2005) provided wide scope for utilization of the personal experiences of students in day-to-day school activities. Expressing concern over lack of opportunities for students in the present system to share their personal experiences, the NCF (2005) strongly recommends "the curriculum must enable children to find their voices, nurture their curiosity—to do things, to ask question and to pursue investigations, sharing and integrating their experiences with school knowledge—rather than their ability to reproduce external knowledge."[7] And schools must "provide opportunities to students to question, enquire, debate, reflect and arrive at concepts to create new ideas."[8] These are the important steps of value clarification and conflict

resolution process also, which help in removing apprehensions, mistrust and doubts about others and encourages living together.

Pedagogy for Promotion of Culture of Sustainable Peace

Education for peace brings together multiple traditions of pedagogy and theories of education. It is fundamentally dynamic, interdisciplinary and multicultural in nature and aims at developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to achieve and sustain global culture of peace. It encourages developing skills among students for active listening, critical thinking, reflection, problem solving, and conflict resolution. These skills need to be developed early in students and nurtured continuously. The personal experiences of students have to be honored and treated as a base for dialogue and new learning. It is essential to note that when we talk about peace we expect at least three basic conditions—communication, cooperation and confidence—the process of making these three conditions work is peace building. Therefore, peace is like the bridge that facilitates the process of communication and helps in developing closer relationship between people. Both constructivism and Peace education are associated with the humanistic philosophy, which is dedicated to developing more mature and self-directed learner who is conscious of his/her rights as well as the rights of others and his/her duty towards others, and emphasizes lifelong learning. Peace education does not teach students what to think, but rather how to think critically and had been the central focus of NCF 2005. In the process, its holistic and participatory approach draws more from the constructivist than traditional curriculum designs as it aims not to reproduce but to transform, and is a continuous process dedicated to the enormous task of improving the spiritual, as well as material quality of life of people.

Nevertheless, we cannot ensure sustainable development by merely engaging the curriculum or textbooks as promotion of culture of peace calls for a transformation of motivational orientations of students from competition and conflict to cooperation and mutual understanding. In such cooperative orientation, the sense of interdependent communality of interest, mutual understanding, tolerance, cooperative conflict management and resolution are encouraged through effective communication, problem solving, and negotiating behavior. All these pedagogies help in knowledge construction; development of deeper understanding and insight into the

problem. Unfortunately, the whole ethos of the existing educational institutions is more geared towards competition which encourages a win-win orientation among young students that fuels competition and conflict in school eco-system and the carry over effect remains with the students throughout their life. Education for peace represents a humanizing process whereby individuals overcome their violent instincts. It teaches respect for life and living together, it helps to develop among students a positive self-image, sense of dignity and self-worth, sense of responsibility for self and others, and a capacity to trust others.

The learning process in peace education is understood primarily as experiential and activity-based rather than by rote memorization or by repetitive conditioning. It should be very clear in our minds that we cannot indoctrinate peace. The learning models for peace are logically built on the assumption of human nature, i.e., students are sentient beings who actively participate in the learning experience, they also learn through reflecting cases, reading and examples (J. Synott, 2005). To put it precisely, they learn, both by, practical engagement and interaction, as well as, by processes of reflection and abstraction.

The National Education Policy 2020: a step towards sustainable Peace

The Indian government has recently brought out New Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) that provides ample opportunity to develop humane, equitable, inclusive and sensitive society that can contribute to global peace and sustainable development. The NEP2020 envisages reconfiguring the entire education system to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all Indian citizens. The vision of the policy is to develop global citizens through education who are well aware of their traditional Indian culture and values and their fundamental duties towards the nation and also have the awareness of their responsibilities in changing the world. The vision of the policy is "to instill among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian ... as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living, and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen."[9]

The reflection of the spirit of *from local to global* can be observed in the vision of NEP2020. Widespread reforms in the education system have been

suggested and the entire system right from pre-school to higher education level has been reconfigured to ensure inclusive, equitable and sustainable quality education for all by the next decade. Consequently, the focus of education is not only to develop the cognitive faculty of students but also to build character and create holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key twenty first century skills.[10] Efforts are being made to revise and modify the curriculum at all levels of education to achieve this aim. With an eye on the multilingual background of Indian students, three-language formula has been proposed in NEP 2020 with total freedom of states to choose any language, however, two languages should be Indian. The provision for instruction in the mother tongue of the child and bilingual textbooks are expected not only to promote the culture of togetherness and better understanding of the other but also to facilitate retention of children in the education system for a longer duration who otherwise drop out or fail due to their language comprehension issues. India has not only the linguistic diversity but Indian languages are considered to be among the richest, most scientific, most beautiful and most expressive in the world, with huge body of ancient and modern literature. This vast treasure of knowledge and its dissemination through various activities and projects such as "languages of India" under the "EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT" (One India, Great India) scheme is expected to promote national unity and integrity in this multicultural and multiethnic society. The emphasis on Indian classical languages such as Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Persian, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya and many more other classical languages is a significant step in the direction that would ensure the integrity and unity of nation and develop the feeling of "world as one family" among students.

One of the major distinguishing features of NEP 2020 that is significant for promoting the culture of living together is that on the one hand the policy strives to restore the dignity of the forgotten ancient Indian knowledge and languages, on the other hand students will also be exposed to many foreign languages such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian as well from the secondary level (Standard IX onwards). This provision is expected not only to facilitate better understanding in students about the culture of other countries of the world, enrich their global knowledge to make informed choices about their career and life in the future but also develop them as global citizens.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world to realize the tremendous potentials of information and communication technology (ICT) and other digital technologies/platforms which are continuously being used now for not only educational purposes but for other aspects of life like online medical consultations, helping others and keeping citizens abreast with latest developments in all walks of life. No education system in the contemporary society can afford to be oblivious of these technologies and its impact. NEP2020 recognizes the importance of various technologies and the crucial role it can play in emancipation of human life. Hence considerable attention has been paid on emerging disruptive technologies, various digital platforms, online and blended learning, etc.

To develop a culture of peace and sustainable development, the pedagogy of education needs to be broad, diverse and oriented towards lifelong learning. NEP 2020 strives to promote 4Cs, i.e., critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication along with 3Rs through various pedagogical approaches which are a prerequisite for developing any peaceful society. Experiential learning, cross-curricular pedagogies such as art integration, and sports integration may provide suitable opportunity to students to imbibe Indian ethos and culture, as well as develop self-confidence, self–control, self-initiative, self-discipline, team work, responsibility, collaboration, and citizenship. All these skills promote the culture of peace and sustainable development.

The recommendation for introduction of subjects like Artificial Intelligence, Holistic Health, Organic Living, Environmental Education, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), etc. at various stages of education have rich possibilities of not only promoting healthy mind in healthy body but also living in peace and harmony with nature which is a basic prerequisite for sustainable development and being emphasized in the latest UNESCO initiative of *Learning to Become.* Keeping in view the diverse and heterogeneous nature of Indian society, NEP2020 envisions equitable and inclusive education and development opportunities for all marginalized sections of society to ensure learning for all. The importance and role of teachers in promoting the culture of peace and sustainable development has also not been ignored, and widespread reforms have been suggested both at pre-service teacher preparation level and further their continuous professional development periodically.

The Way Forward

Promoting the culture of peace and sustainable development calls for active engagement of students in the process of peace-building and peace-making. Such participation in turn can be ensured only when our educational institutions motivate and activate students engaging their interest, thinking and creativity through various participatory, innovative and constructive teaching-learning processes and develop a community of practice among the students. Classrooms for promoting the culture of peace and sustainable development needs to be more open, collaborative, participatory and creative with teachers as facilitators of knowledge through dialogue, discussions, debates, value clarifications, narratives, role play and other participatory approaches utilizing all available multimedia. Such broad perspective may help to address the menace of violence, discrimination, cultural and religious biases, prejudices and fanaticism, and help our future generation to become global citizens in real sense. There is an urgent need to develop critical and reflective thinking among our students, address their cultural and religious misconceptions and biases; facilitate them to distinguish and accept statements based on fact instead of individual opinions; develop their ability for intelligent reading and decoding the hidden agenda behind the news, reports, papers and magazines, etc.; develop the capacity to enter into others point of view , and most importantly help them realize that majority is not ***always*** correct so everything should not be accepted merely because majority say so. Unless we succeed in developing such facilitation and institutional eco-system and sustainable peace will remain a Utopia.

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Endnotes

1 National Curriculum Framework for Elementary and Secondary Education of 1988, page 6.

2 National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000, page 12.

3 Ncfse 2000, ibid., page 18.

4 Ncfse 2000, ibid., page 19.

5 National Curriculum Framework, 2005, page 1.

6 Ncf 2005, ibid., page 61.

7 Ncf 2005, ibid., page 13.

8 Ncf 2005, ibid., page 18.

9 National Education Policy, 2020, page 6.

10 Nep 2020, page 12.