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प्रोफेसर वी. पी. सिंह

इलाहाबाद विश्वविद्यालय
प्रयागराज

सह-सम्पादक

प्रोफेसर परवेज अहमद अब्बासी

प्रोफेसर अरविन्द चौहान

प्रोफेसर राजेश मिश्रा

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प्रोफेसर सत्या मिश्रा

— सम्पर्क सूत्र —

प्रोफेसर वी. पी. सिंह

1205 ए, ब्लॉक बी, के. एम. रेजीडेंसी

राज नगर एक्सटेंशन, गाजियाबाद 201017

दूरभाष : 9235608187

ई-मेल: grefiplus2018@gmail.com

वेबसाइट: www.grefiglobal.org

Establishing Identity in a Globalized Context

Ruth I. Kharbamon*

Abstract

The world today is characterized by a rapid blurring and blending of cultures. Cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred. Cultures have become both more globalised but also more fragmented and decentred. "From the level of the individual psyche to the level of nation states, culture is not stable in the new world" (Rosenberg, 1995).

In the motivation to be assimilated into global club, local identities are disrupted, weakened and undermined to bring in a new patterns of identity-hybrids-with global features that reflect more of the dominant culture and less of the local. A global, leveling culture is in the process of engulfing all our local cultures, in all their rich variety (Maley, 1996).

The question of restoring and solidifying identity on local distinctiveness has assumed greater relevance in the wake of globalization with its intensification of worldwide social relations.

Camouflaged with the spread of trade, religion and cultural exchange in the name of development, globalization has manifested itself and has gained phenomenal success in our own context and situations. The diffusion of western values, consumer goods and lifestyles has affected the identity of the hill tribes through a neglect of whatever is local or traditional.

To have an identity is to have features that are both relevant and enduring. But today there is a threat that our tribal cultures are in the process of slowly and steadily sliding away into anonymity to be mere images of fantasized traditions and beliefs. We have to be careful indeed.

The paper attempts to study the inroads of globalization into the cultures of the Khasi in Meghalaya, a tribal community in the North Eastern part of India.

Keywords: globalization, culture, identity, tribal, traditional

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*Ruth I. Kharbamon is Assistant Professor, Sankardev College, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

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To have an identity is to have features that are both relevant and enduring. But today there is a threat that the tribal cultures are in the process of slowly and steadily sliding away into anonymity to be mere images of fantasized traditions and beliefs.

The present paper attempts to briefly highlight the inroads of globalization into the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya and to help establish identity through a classroom perspective. The pre-colonial tribes of the Khasi Hills in Meghalaya – the Khasi, the Pnar, the Bhoi and the War lived in isolation cut off even from the Indian mainland. They existed with a unique cultural social and political system governed by the geographical and ecological environment. They followed an authentic culture just as exotic and primitive as any tribal society. They had their birth naming ceremonies, their ancestor worship, their bone collection rituals and their megalithic culture. There were legends, myths and tales, dances and choral chanting. Theirs was a unique identity – untouched, uncorrupted by the forces of modernization and globalization

The process of change in the Khasi- Jaintia society began with the British and their annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833. Urbanization, new administrative orientations, the emergence of new trade structures and social contacts culminated in bringing about a radical social and cultural transformation. Then came the missionaries. The missionaries presented the gospel in its western dress and they were therefore apostles of the West as well as of the purer spirit of Christ. By their manners and conducts, by their very existence they were influenced in favour of western outlooks. They brought about changes in the society which were positive but also negative. True, the changes succeeded to a certain extent in eradicating the ill-fated practices and customs of sorcery, human sacrifice and superstitious beliefs among us, but it affected the traditional dances, music and festivals for the Christian converts withdrew from participating in the community festivities of dance and music.

Several social festivities, sport games and other aspects of cultural heritage have also been forgotten." Bareh in his "The History and Culture of the Khasi People" (1985) recounts the various losses incurred. When the old rites and rituals became taboos, the singing of folk songs suffered too. Earlier no occasion was complete or meaningful unless accompanied by the lore of folk songs and choral chanting. The theme of the songs is varied. They talk of war and peace,

proWess, of heroic characters and legendary lovers. This abandonment of folk singing among the converts robbed them of the knowledge of who they are and what they were.

The self service and dedication of the missionaries won the hearts of the people so much as that the Khasis openly expressed their keen desire of learning the language of '*U Dohlieh*,' (the Whites) and adopting their way of life. The findings of a mini project undertaken on the role of English in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills (Bamon 1996) revealed that the people have more favourable attitudes towards English rather than Hindi; and the local news broadcasts and English songs are more listened to, than either Hindi or even the local Khasi dialect. English dailies have a wider circulation, and English films and TV serials are a popular pastime and an entertainment to almost all age groups. There are besides no dearth of English magazines and literature. Road signs, billboards and advertisements are all in English catch words and phrases. "Learning English generated among the locals an 'aversion to culture, resulting in an alienation from its own rich and mythological heritage" (Bamon, 1996). Presently, the electronic media is playing a dominant role in bringing about maximal changes in the attitudes of particularly the young people. Oral discourse patterns, dress codes, food habits, social activities, bars, music are all influenced by western patterns. Of late of course, the Korean influence is making its mark too among the young crowd. Teaching in the classrooms was so designed that instead of helping a learner be culturally rooted it is directly responsible for a sense of cultural alienation among the tribes. Being thus exposed to the western culture and encouraged both by parents and the society to speak, dress and behave like the English, children grow up experiencing a series of cognitive and affective changes taking on a new identity – an identity incorporating mostly the cultural norms and values of the English-speaking world and ignorant of their own culture. It is clearly apparent that an instruction which has not been 'acculturalized' and shaped to fit the local needs can constitute a threat to identity. However, the classroom can provide the forum for the dissemination of local beliefs, values and traditions and can be part of the society's efforts at preserving the identity by strengthening the blending of indigenous and universal elements. It can be the context of cultural exchange and co-operation.

Bruner (1986) says that the language of education is the language of 'cultural creating' and this is absolutely true. The classroom can be an enterprise, a platform for the dissemination of values and traditions if its pedagogical practices are profitably associated with the teaching of not only other cultural ideas but of one's own as well. Teaching can be multi-disciplinary combining communicative, cultural and cross-cultural education. The teacher can be the bearer of a community's culture and identity by drawing upon the resources of the community to provide important learning materials which are culturally based, and which call for intercultural responsive teaching operations.

A curriculum in all disciplines that will take care of both individual growth and national and international awareness -something that will produce an individual with a strong sense of identity, yet will be an enlightened citizen of the world should be developed

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisages “that the curriculum and pedagogy of the institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one’s country, and a conscious awareness of one’s roles and responsibilities in a changing world. The vision of the Policy is to instil among the learners a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect, and deeds, 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”. It emphasises on the essence of rootedness and pride in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions and the teaching of life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience.

This is indeed absolutely required. It is only after learners have learned to identify with their own heritage and discover similarities in the ways they look at things, that they can explore another cultural horizon. It is important to design texts, in certain disciplines -sociology, social studies, geography and history so that the students are enriched by a knowledge of love for their own, yet are able to meaningfully engage with the ‘Other’ from their own standpoint.

Such texts can:

- Develop an awareness of the subtle areas of culture
- Expose components of culture as well as intercultural similarities and difference.
- Present aspects of local/regional culture.
- Stimulate discussions and conversational activities around culture-based themes
- Encourage appreciation of cultural diversity and the process of intercultural competence.
- Encourage the learners to compare their own culture and other and thereby arrive at a better understanding and appreciation of their own and the ‘Other’.
- Develop cultural and ethnic tolerance.
- The text for example can have translated versions of folktales, legends and myths. These are repositories of culture with a capacity not only to produce pleasure and amusement but also to inform and educate. In their own artistic and subtle way these materials can help students explore the moral concepts and values embedded in the society and stress on virtues like obedience, modest, love, diligence and charity. Folktales can perpetuate the historical changes and incidents, which took place.
- The records of the rise and fall of kingdoms can serve as powerful narratives.
- Other social related texts can highlight religious beliefs and rituals observed in births and deaths, marriage ties and megalithic erections, civil organization, customary, laws,

economic activities and statesmanship in keeping with the intrinsic and typical character of the society.

Materials such as these can provide texts, which are culturally, and cross culturally relevant to student's lives and can offer a great potential in stimulating the learner's interest and cultural awareness. Besides, the heterogeneous nature of the class, which is a common feature in most of the classrooms, might in some way positively contribute to effective learning, for the diverse cultural background of the students can become in the hands of an innovative teacher a potential resource for imparting lessons on cross cultural understanding and tolerance. Incorporating students' experience and awareness of and knowledge about various language cultures will only enhance culture teaching.

Teachers will have to be motivated to redefine their objectives and strategies of teaching. They will have to realize that they are not only professionals and academicians, but also responsible citizens with a moral accountability. Their task should be not only to prepare students for an economic citizenship but more so for a sound cultural citizenship with social, moral and cultural values. It is the task for teachers to instill into the minds of their learners not only respect and appreciation of other people's culture but to help them acquire aspects of behaviour that is in accordance with their own 'roots.'

To conclude, I would like to say that "We have been borrowers and imitators ready to use and made to order packages based on settings and experiences entirely different from ours. It is useful to have a good knowledge of the theories coming from the west – but we must have the courage and the confidence derived from our rich linguistic, educational and socio-cultural experience to change, modify and expand the existing models or to come out with a new model or a new system of models which will work in our setting.' This can make teaching a sound investment in preserving and establishing identity in a globalized context.

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