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Denominators of Gender Equality in a Multicultural Society

Dr. Sushil Kumar Tiwari

PG Department of Education, Jamshedpur Women's University Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

India is suited to the exemplars of multicultural society where exists unity in extreme form of diversities. Even though, unifying processes do not meet with the issues of gender equality but denominators are quite active as barriers. Paper finds them through the minute analysis of multicultural processes. It also includes the data of an interview to reflect upon the problems posed by the respondent who belongs to a different country but multicultural society like India. The interview was conducted under semi-structured interviews of experts for doctoral research on 'an investigation into character education through multicultural teaching' to identify the themes of character education in multicultural i.e., Indian context however it was noted as the critical view of foreign culture on gender issues in India. The paper analyses the response with other feminists' views on the issue of gender discrimination in spite of the equality principles of multicultural societies. Through the different models of multiculturalism, the scope of gender equality was studied and a gap was found to deal with the issue. Paper identifies the denominators of gender equality in multicultural societies and suggests some measures to deal with them.

Key-words: multicultural society, gender equality, denominators, multicultural processes, models of multiculturalism.

INTRODUCTION

The inequality perspectives are quite common under multicultural dimensions and a quite impressive similar approach of changing mindset of masses to deal with them. Multicultural education is the field that informs, directs and reforms the inequalities not only of classrooms but of the whole society. A multicultural classroom imagines the multicultural world and the diversity as common phenomena in every form of society. Quite relevant to say, "both the length and breadth of schooling needs to include curriculum and instruction that has multiculturalism comprehensively integrated throughout." [1] The educated force of a society capacitates the changes that are required to change the inequality possessions of the suppressed. The educational institutions must be supportive in relation to gender, "Even at our institutions of higher education, it is becoming commonplace to hear or read about physical and verbal race and gender violence occurring on the campuses." It extends to the violence in the society and the institutions through multicultural education that tries to develop positive attitude towards all culture and so against women. Multiculturalism includes all the differences in one domain of inequality perspective and the multicultural processes like, through education, must attain this, "the literature suggests that at a minimum, candidates should learn about culture, ethnicity, cultural pluralism, educational approaches, language differences, power relationships between dominant and oppressed groups, social class, equality, discrimination, racism, sexism, classism, cross cultural interactions, values, gender differences, religious differences, dialectal differences, and bilingualism."[1] That's why the multicultural education is one of the best approaches to tackle the diversities however the improvement through this is yet to be recognized in the field of gender discriminations.

Gender is a social concept of the biological one i.e., sex. The selection of sex is not an individual's control and hence, like other cultural differences the gender also represents the diversity. In this way, treating gender as a multicultural phenomena and gender equality as a multicultural objective is justified. Moreover, the aim of changing mindset against women in all parts of world is the mostly desired goal. Progressive concept of multiculturalism and particularly, multicultural education seem to play the decisive role in this context however the doubts raised by the feminists with other evidences in practice discloses the denominators of gender equality in the same field. UNICEF informs on the barriers of girls' education, "schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls. In others, teaching practices are not gender-responsive and result in gender gaps in learning and skills development." Rightly pointed out further that it is not for girls but gender equality empowers the boys too, close the skill gaps and perpetuate the pay gaps to build the prosperity of the country.[2] For a progressive society, the gender-responsive teaching must be a part of multicultural teaching or culturally responsive

teaching. But due to the denominators identified through the study, culturally responsive processes do not support that of gender-responsive in similar fashion.

Meaning and concept

Multiculturalism is widely being used by a range of sociologists and educationists but there may be differences in the terminology like, culturally responsive, cultural sensitivity, 'other terms — "cross-cultural," "intercultural," "ethnocultural," and "transcultural" — all became appropriate synonym.' The meaning is "connected to the problems in using the term multicultural is the word "culture." The heart of the concept culture is "pattern," which carries the idea of something abstracted from the "real" world of the senses." [3] It is defined as natural understanding of coexistence of diversified groups based on religion, caste, class, gender and other grounds. Multiculturalism may be considered to provide common platform for existing diversified cultural groups in the society where cultural differences are not only recognized, but valued and that is free from a sort of injustice in the form of prejudiced, biased or discriminated behavior towards any cultural group. The education aims such type of justice and to promote overall humanity.[4] Gender equality is basically focused to the recognition and respect for the identity of women. The liberal feminism promotes this view around the world. Indian perspective is not lagging behind, "Liberal feminism emphasizes equality of gender and also believes that women are also human, not only sex object. Liberal feminist argue that society holds the false belief that women are by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus, it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum and the marketplace." [5] Denominator is a mathematical concept and a part of the fraction appears below the line to divide the numerator. If we suppose the fraction as a system then denominator is the cause of that division of numerator from the same system. Similarly, denominators in the particular study comes from the same multicultural system but instead of valuing the gender equality these diversities put forth more and more barriers. Thus, denominators can be defined as the barriers of gender equality emerged due to the complex phenomena of multicultural diversity and interaction among them.

Study relevance

Multicultural society represents inherent values of equality, coexistence and cooperation among the diversified members. Sometimes the diversity is caused biologically, like in case of male and female however the need of equality is a demand on social grounds. Thus, gender equality distinguishes itself from the other forms in a multicultural society. On this particular issue of gender, as many feminists believe, multicultural way of tackling the differences is not so effective and sometimes failed. Underestimated concept of gender as a culture of multicultural society or overlooking the different forms of insensitivities in this case is explored logically as one major cause in the present study. Present paper attempts to focus on that distinguished form of gender and also disclose the challenges of multicultural processes in society to tackle the diversity. It substantiates the view how multicultural processes overgeneralize the gender issues. A general perception in societies around the world is that women's major role is to cook food, take care of the children and the household. [6]

LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies are there in the field where gender differences are not making a significant difference on equality perspectives. A study conducted by **Cekin** on 78 teachers who were teaching religious, culture and moral knowledge, working in educational institutes of Kastamonu city center, Turkey in session 2013-2014. The study was focused to analyze the attitudes of teachers from religious culture and also from the field of moral knowledge towards multicultural education. 'Teacher Multicultural Attitude Scale' was used for the study carried out by General Screening Model. The findings were: "gender doesn't make a significant difference on attitude of teachers towards multicultural education, but place of job, educational status, and seniority makes significant difference." [7] However study conducted by **Ana Borges Jelinic** viewed that multiculturalism had important but limited impact on education. Her qualitative study conducted on 'Migrant Girls in Australian Schools: Voicing Their Mathematics Learning Experiences' employed Carol Gilligan's Listening Guide (LG). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participant girls (Patti, Idina, Bernadette, Sutton and Marin) and 10 with informants (the girls' parents, siblings and a childcare worker). Informants were interviewed to enrich the participants' stories. She found that 'the girls and their informants could not identify any attempt from their schools to challenge assumptions about gender and Mathematics including attempts to directly acknowledge the myth of a 'masculine subject' and concluded that "many of the issues identified seem to be a result of a combined difficulty to listen to these girls' needs and their stories because they are deemed not important in a neoliberal/market driven educational logic."[8] The problems to identify the gender in multiculturalism are more or less similar in all the processes including multicultural education.

METHODS

Present study is analytical one and qualitative in nature. It includes the analysis of the responses of women as representative and expert in the interview conducted for the Ph. D. study of the researcher entitled as, "an

investigation into character education through multicultural teaching." It analyses the present multicultural context of India with feminists' perspective on the issue. The study is delimited to the social equality among women studying gender.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

As a researcher in the field of character education and multicultural education, interviews were conducted on experts of the field. The purpose was to identify the themes of character education. One respondent was from Australia but living in India with other followers of a renowned religious leader of Hindu religion. She was an outsider for Indian culture and selected during the interviews for an unbiased reflection on emerging themes of character. Although, her responses were almost similar to other experts on various themes in Indian context excluding the particular response when, at first, she praised Indian culture by saying, *one thing that the Australian people lack their religion. They live a life of fun, but they don't live a life of God (comparing with India)* but on the other hand also raised the issue about one of the major concerns of increasing incidents of crimes against women. She pointed out on the basis of her few years' experience in India as, *you (for Indians comparing with Australians) look at a child as God you look at a girl child as a Godmother. But as they grow it goes away. If you look them equally throughout their life then women won't suffer exploitations and abuse. I think that is what you need to change. Respect each other, value each other. In Australia very high respect for women; they can wear anything and men, just they don't take notice any more. They are used to, so it's very different.* This view may be criticism but investigator had put this as major concern in Indian society. This was only one view of the expert, but undoubtedly the respect for women is needed in every society; and if there are lacunas we should improve. Indian history and culture are quite impressive in this regard, as she had also pointed out, but that should be maintained at all the stages of life, by everyone and at everywhere. The denominators identified here is '*leaving the religious character of India at the latter stage of girl child*.' Analysis suggests that culture and religion of India, somehow, supports and value the gender identity but it has not been incorporated in the society and particularly in education. Hence, gender sensitivity can be remained intact throughout the life if India lives with true religion but not superficially, with the institutionalized religion. The institutionalized religions are controlled by some of the individuals and defined in terms of rituals, dresses, rules and other boundaries while true religion is near to humanity. It supports emancipation of women with the men and develops the character to support each other. Indian society and multicultural education in India should incorporate these eternal human values to realize gender equality.

The inequality is caused by the complex feature of multiculturalism. The issue has been raised by the feminists, one perspective came while working on 'Critical feminist multicultural (CFM) qualitative research mentoring' and the barriers were discussed basically related to the complex realities of multicultural perspective, "qualitative research mentoring attuned to issues of power, privilege, identity, and marginalization may be particularly salient to researchers that embody marginalized identities. For example, racial discrimination, tokenization, and gender oppression have adversely affected the success of Women of Color in academia." [9] The views from India equally identify this type of barrier, 'different societies have different social norms and values. In some societies both men and women are assigned specific roles and duties. It was viewed as 'cultural factors therefore offer constraint to women participation'. [6] The denominator emerged here due to 'interaction of gender differences with already assigned roles for women and profoundly affected when belongs to the suppressed groups on the basis of racism, cast, religiosity, ethnicity, language etc. creates complex barriers for equality.' This is more or less true for all the parts of the world where discrimination is still a reality and gender equality is more difficult due to the systematic effect of the multicultural system.

Among the various models of multicultural perspectives viz., the Intercultural Education Model influences 'Self', the Multicultural Education Model integrates 'Self & Classroom' and Anti-racist Education Model, targeting 'Self, Classroom, Institution & Community', the denominators can be identified for gender equality. From all the models 'recognizing self for women in a multicultural society' is denominator itself as this is not so simple in compare and competing with already ahead men. Even applying to the classroom for first model, proposed by Chavez, A. F., Guido-DiBrito, F., & Mallory [10] consider this perspective, "manage to integrate their sense of self with their perception of the other, and continue to strive towards valuing and validating difference wherever they encounter it." [11] Feminists believe that the perspectives of women rely many times on others. Hence, sensitizing gender identity should be achieved prior to the classroom multicultural recognition. The second model was proposed by Banks and pointed out as, "There are also opportunities to integrate multicultural content into math and science. However, the opportunities are not as ample as they are in the social studies, the language arts, and music." [12] This is quite relevant when we discuss the prejudices attached with the gender on disciplines and professions. The 'disciplinary denominators' are the issues that need to be tackled by providing safe environment for women even to the masculine disciplines. The third model was supported by more than one multiculturalist. One view was analyzed for the third model which is extended to equalize the multicultural groups of the community, "when community members are invited to bring their specific knowledge and experiences into the classroom, it is important to recognize that very often these are experiences of oppression and marginalization." [13] Again the

denominator that works here is 'prejudices of community members against women', and due to this, the multicultural pedagogical interventions in classroom and other equalizing processes of gender equality works with limited extent.

CONCLUSIONS

Among the countries where range of extreme diversity and other differences exist, the complex feature emerge, like in India, where people live with huge amount of this and attached with their religion, caste, class, ethnicity, language, dialect etc., so that the issue of gender equality loose its attention. Moreover, one or other cultural issues becomes more influential than the gender, for example, when cultural system supports early marriage of a girl child and contradict the women's freedom then still today in many cultures early marriages wins at the cost of gender equality. Thus, in complex regimes of multiculturalism the denominators are from the multicultural system and gender equality is yet to be realized through multicultural processes. 'Culturally-responsive' or multicultural teaching in classroom and other equalizing processes of society needs to be integrated with that of the respectable identity of the 'gender-responsive'.

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