**“Contribution: Cultural dimension of the right to education”.**

In India, there is amazing cultural diversity throughout the country. The South, North, and Northeast have their own distinct cultures and almost every state has carved out its own cultural niche. India is a vast country, having variety of geographical features and climatic conditions. Indian culture is a composite mixture of varying styles and influences. With more than 4000 communities, 18 constitutionally recognized languages and hundreds of dialects, more than six major religious and hundreds of sects and more than 800 million people, India presents a very complex, plural culture which very nearly permeates every aspect of living from patterns of belief and values to hundreds of forms of creative articulation, from costumes and foods to enormous subtleties of refinement and participation. Nothing in India can possibly escape the impact of its culture, be it politics, technology, education or development.

The strong and inescapable cultural implications of education and development were recognized right from the beginning of the epic scale national reconstruction which was launched when the India gave to itself, in the early 50s, a new Constitution and the form of a democratic republic. In many ways India’s democratic ethos and its amazing survival owes as much to the political sagacity of its people as to their innate sense of culture, their unfailing cultural literacy in spite of their depressing poverty and widespread verbal literacy. Each linguistic and racial group has its own distinct cultural identity. Yet interaction has taken and continues to take place amongst regions, between different disciplines at various levels of society, from the most affluent to the weakest sections. Culture has always been an integral part of the informal process of an Indian’s education, contributing to the integrated development of his personality, sensitizing him towards his environment and his natural and cultural heritage.

Education in India is mainly provided by the public sector, with control and funding coming from three levels: federal, state, and local. Child education is compulsory. Education in India falls under the control of both the Union Government and the states, with some responsibilities with the Union and the states having autonomy for others. The various articles of the Indian Constitution provide for education as a fundamental right. Most universities in India are Union or State Government controlled.

In the present day scenario, it is now widely recognized that only the integration of our artistic and cultural with curriculum teaching will make the young aware of the aesthetic dimensions of life and sensitize them towards creative expression. Education plays a very important culturizing role. The education policy and drafted new education policy do not give space for the culture to play its important educating role. Though both the National Policy on Education, 1986 and the Approach to the National Policy on Culture (NPC) constantly emphasize the cultural consequences of education and seek to strengthen its cultural components ***educative system is not democratized and decentralized***. ***The syllabus and the pedagogy are not in accordance to the prevalent culture of the students.*** ***Though the benefits of education in Mother Tongue medium of education is known it is not supported sufficiently with funds and quality teaching standards in the schools.*** As stated in the NPE 1986, ***“de-culturalization, de-humanization and alienation are the consequences of the current craziness for English medium schools and the privatization of educative institutions.***

Education must bring about a fine synthesis between change-oriented technologies and the country’s continuity of cultural tradition. The inter-linking of education and culture seeks to discover the inherent talent and potential of a child and develop his personality. ***Right to Education Act has ensured the compulsory elementary education for children but it is at a threat as it is now challenged by the draft New Education Policy which aims at centralizing the education system and creating a gap between the students and the culture to which they belong.***

**Current Challenge and threat**

The Government instead of decentralizing and democratizing the education is now trying to concentrate all the powers to central government – centralization. This is a threat to the culture, the cultural identity of the people. The people of India are demanding from the Government of India to decentralize education as one policy is not applicable to every part of India. Under the Federal Constitution the State should be given more freedom more powers.

Our classroom pedagogy deprives children opportunities to learn in a collaborative, reflective manner that would have at least helped them acquire basic social skills. Our outdated system of examination has contributed to a mad rush for ‘ranks’, ‘seats’ and ‘jobs’…making us wonder whether we have, at some point in time, lost sight of the real objectives of education. We are bothered about the declining awareness among our children about their own cultural backgrounds.

Another cause for concern is the fact that education is looked upon by marginalized sections of the society to get ‘cultured’ in order to ‘get out of the rut’. Literacy, while opening up the entire world to these sections may also alienate them from their basic cultural 4 strengths. We need to ensure that children from these sections recognize the strengths of their own ethos…and build up on those. While the term ‘culture’ is universally considered to denote a reflection of the manifestation of civilized living, in India the term has come to be tainted with religious and communal connotations: so much so that there are suggestions that one needs to be cautious while using the term. The word ‘creativity’ or ‘creative arts’ could become more meaningful and relevant, especially when we think of the specific context of the needs of children. It was in this context that the reconstituted CABE’s Committee of ‘Integration of Culture Education in the School Curriculum’ was given the rather broad mandate: to look into the ‘what’, the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of inculcating cultural values through the School Curriculum.

**The suggestions for improving the quality of cultural awareness, would therefore include:**

• The entire schooling should be based on the culture of the locality / community. Learning should be made ‘culture sensitive’

• The school curriculum should be process based, and experiential, with sufficient flexibility to integrate local culture. The development of the curriculum should be taken up with the involvement of local resources: human and otherwise. The curriculum should have sufficient flexibility to accommodate the hopes, aspirations, needs and culture of the local community. Village Education Committees could be involved in developing the ‘school curriculum’, which could be designed to dovetail with the ‘general’ curriculum.

• The role of the textbooks and the manner in which they are used needs to be re-defined. The ‘dominant’ nature of the textbook should be toned down. There must be sufficient space for accommodating local art forms, practices, places, institutions, festivals, rituals, artifacts, literature, even local riddles and humour.

• The teaching learning process (and the teachers) should not thrust upon the students the values, beliefs and behaviours of the dominant cultures in such domains as religion and family life which only need to be learned for general awareness and understanding rather than for advocated active use.

• Conscious efforts should be made to ensure that the Teaching Learning process does not become culturally sterile: consciously or unconsciously promoting one particular culture / sub-culture.

• The teacher should become a friend and facilitator encouraging different cultural patterns and processes. Children enjoy talking about their own lives, their families, what they personally like and dislike and so on. Teachers should be sensitized to encourage children to explore their own as well as alien lifestyles.

• Different folk art forms, folksongs, stories, riddles, and games, should be included as ‘text’ material. Conscious efforts should be made to ensure that the Illustrations in textbooks reflect local culture. Decorations, embellishments in textbooks could use local forms such as local mural paintings, Rangoli, Kolam and others.

• The Teaching-Learning process should make use of a variety of ‘home-tongues’, dialects and other local languages. The Teaching-Learning process should make the best use of the diversity of local challenges. Ideally the teacher should be recruited from the locality and should be proficient in all the local languages / dialects for facilitating learning. What is relevant from the cultural point of view is that the teacher should be carefully guided to acquire attitudes, understanding and skills for utilizing the cultural and language diversity creatively (through even multi-lingual learning activities including drama, music and so on).

• For the pre-primary and elementary stage of school education the mother tongue shall be the medium of instruction so that children do not feel ‘threatened’ by an alien language thrust upon them. This will ensure that the thinking processes of the child, which happens in the mother / home tongues do not get hindered.

• The ‘terrain of culture’ should have sufficient free space for all local languages and dialects.

• The school PTAs and Village Education Committees could be encouraged to get actively involved in providing support to teachers for accessing and utilizing local ‘cultural’ resources both human and material. A small cultural museum could be set up in each Gram Panchayath displaying local art and artifacts. Visits to these museums should be built into the school curriculum itself.

• The school calendar should have at least two periods a week set apart exclusively for cultural activities. Local artists, musicians, painters, writers and storytellers could be guests and performers at some of these sessions. Children should be encouraged to directly interact with them.

• Each school should have a good library and use of the library should be made an integral part of the school curriculum. In the primary schools at least one teacher should be provided training to maintain the library in a meaningful manner. In the secondary grades a professionally trained librarian should be appointed.

• The school library should be the nodal point for all ‘cultural’ learning in the school. Every school library should have a carefully selected collection of literature and reference books. The school library should also have a collection of ‘renowned’ paintings, music, and so on. All teachers should be sensitized so that they can help children get gradually acquainted with the masters and their masterpieces.

• Every teacher should be trained to utilize collections of local folk stories, folk songs and folk ‘knowledge’ as part of the Teaching Learning process.

• Children should be encouraged to collectively and individually explore activities such as cooking, gardening, stitching, bird watching and even video and still photography.

• In the elementary grades, every child should be given opportunities to participate in activities including singing, dancing, developing stories from pictures, role play, amateur dramatics and so on. Thus children would get ample opportunities to practice music, drawing, dramatics and so on in a non-threatening atmosphere as part of the regular Teaching Learning process.

• At the Upper Primary stage, teachers could gradually introduce children to the nuances of the ‘general’ grammar of art forms (concepts such as rhythm, movement, melody, balance, harmony, general principles of drawing, painting and so on) and also organize direct exposure to these art forms. Even at the Upper Primary stage children should not be taught art in the usual manner…. for instance music should not be taught through ragas at this stage.

• Exposure could be through panels of local or other artists at the district, Panchayat and school level. Talented local storytellers and writers could be invited to visit schools. Possibility of using audio / video / multimedia could be explored in this regard.

• National and State-level bodies such as the Sahithya Academy and Sangeeth Natak Academy could be advised to provide assistance to the school education system in terms of providing resource support.

• By the Upper Primary stage children could be encouraged to get involved in creative dramatics in a much more ‘technical’’ manner. The school theatre could be used for getting children to imbibe and practice the elements of theatre: script writing, stage-setting, costume making and so on. Theatre has substantial potential in education. It is heartening to learn that some effort is already going on in this area. ‘Theatre in Education’ should be a compulsory subject in training institutes for DEd and BEd.

• The mechanical manner in which “Drill” teachers impart physical ‘education’ should be stopped. Yoga and other local traditional physical activities (Kalari, for instance, in Kerala) should be used instead.

• Children’s camps could be organized during vacations where ‘cultural’ activities could be freely explored in a non-threatening atmosphere. As indicated earlier, the school library could be the nodal point for ‘cultural’ activities including exposure to traditional, folk, classical and contemporary art forms.

• All the above-mentioned experiences should be carefully integrated into the school curriculum so that ALL children get to participate in them at least through the Upper Primary stage. This will ensure that all children get sufficient opportunities to explore their creativity and discover hidden talents.

• The system of assessment of learning should be modified so that the ‘quality’ of participation in these activities is adequately rewarded. Traits such as aesthetic sensitivity, leadership qualities, talent etc. should also be appropriately recognized.

• Children should be encouraged, right from the elementary stage, to critically evaluate the content of Television and films and so on so that they become discerning in their choice of programmes to be viewed. This approach could be extended to cover areas such as media-sensitivity and so on.

• The present Youth Festivals where children artificially ‘study’ certain snippets of art forms for extra marks (and glory) without understanding the basic philosophy behind the art form are to be totally prohibited.

• At the Secondary stage, talented children (identified at the elementary and Upper Primary stage of schooling) should be given the option to choose an art form for more detailed study, if necessary, giving up one of the regular academic subjects. At this stage professional artists and artisans should be used as teachers.

• The present teacher-exchange programmes should be substantially enhanced qualitatively.

• Exchange of groups / troupes of performers from other districts and even other states should be organized so that children (and teachers) get direct opportunities for learning the nuances of these art forms and the differences. It should be made possible for children to realize that there are other ways of speaking. They should get opportunities for understanding the others’ dance patterns, their singing patterns, their performances and also their ways of socializing, negotiating and so on. This would help in enhancing the students’ skill to ‘appreciate’ others.