

Education for Civic Learning: Need to bring it at the Centre of Learning

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Goals of Higher Education

Among the multiple goals of education, the one related to preparation for active democratic citizenship has been now increasingly recognised as necessary. Education for quite some time has been dominated by vocational goals and increasingly indifferent to the idea of goal of preparation for citizenship. It is now increasingly recognized that higher education, in addition to human capital for economy, can develop capacity to live and act in diverse socio-cultural world through civic learning. UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century (1998) underlined the mission of Higher Education as training young people in the values which form the basis of democratic citizenship (Article 1e).

Citizenship education has been primarily developed for schools, but now most countries officially recognise the important role of higher education to prepare students to become effective citizens by enhancing students' knowledge regarding issues pertaining to inequalities, poverty, discrimination, injustices, and inculcating democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity and skills needed to participate in effective democratic engagement. At the heart of the education for democratic citizenship is to equip students with the ability of solving conflicts and differences of opinion in a non-violent manner.

The educationists believe that education has a great potential to cultivate democratic norms of behaviour and positive citizenship. Education is a social route or channels through which most of the children pass through schools. A sizable portion of them also go through higher education institutions. Late adolescence and early adulthood, that is, the college age (17years), are unique times when the sense of personal and social identity is formed. Colleges can be the space that supports young adults through this identity development stage. Colleges can help students to acquire knowledge, abilities, skills and 'habits of mind' to cultivate multicultural competence and ability to work, interact with people who represent diverse cultures and perspectives, and civic skills to participate in citizen action that bridges the gap between ideals in the Constitution and lived realities.

The need of education for civic learning and democratic engagement for building citizenship is particularly relevant for societies which are characterized by high degree of diversity in its social, ethnic, racial and religious belonging. Although the diverse groups are obliged to

respect and practice the common constitutional principles and values, the community determined values, often contradictory to democratic norms and practices influence the behaviour of people from diverse groups. The behaviour of people is shaped in their formative stages through socialisation in the family and society. In diverse societies the values which shape the social personality in early stages through informal learning often remained at variance with the Constitutional principles of equality, fraternity, non-discrimination, democratic behaviour, and respect for differences. In diverse societies, therefore, the role of education in harmonizing the behaviour of people around common values assumes far greater significance, particularly to sensitise the youth to democratic values of equality, liberty and fraternity to cultivate democratic norms of behaviour (Thorat and Sabharwal, 2013). In this context, Martha Nussbaum (2003) observed that ‘it is relatively easy to construct a gentlemen’s education for a homogeneous elite. It is far more difficult to prepare people of highly diverse background for citizenship. This enterprise requires learning about, racial, ethnic, and religious and gender differences. It requires learning on how to situate one’s own tradition within a highly plural and interpedently world’. Thus challenges of developing positive citizenship are lot more difficult and complex in diverse society than homogeneous society.

Civic Education in other Countries

Civic learning is pivotal when dealing with diversity in societies. We can draw some insights from the United States, Scotland and Greece. This section provides a brief overview of civic learning and community engagement initiatives of higher education institutions in these countries.

USA developed education policy in 1995 to deal with diversity by bringing about reforms in curriculum and pedagogy for civic learning and democratic engagement in colleges and universities. The education for diversity has four elements: knowledge, values, skills and action. Reform in knowledge includes a new curriculum with themes that deal with diversity, inequalities, racism, sexism, religious oppression, classism, anti-Semitism and heterosexism. To develop individual capabilities and skills, it introduced new pedagogical methods like inter-group dialogue and mixed peer group, where students from diverse groups interacted and learned to respect differences. Through new knowledge and skills, they unlearned many things that they had imbibed from family and society and also developed skills and capacities to deal with diversity and differences in a democratic way. The third component was to motivate the students for action. The institutions were recommended to foster democratic ethos and a civic ethos on campuses through ‘service learning’ and ‘community engagement’. The reform also includes changes in the orientation of teachers and their sensitization for the new education reforms.

The new reforms also refer to the necessary change in the organizational aspects of the education institutions that would facilitate the teaching for civil learning and demographic engagement. These reforms were expected to enhance the ‘civic capital’ among youth for

enhanced citizenship. Sixteen years later, in 2011, a review indicated positive outcomes not only in civil learning and engagement but also in their academic performance.

Similarly, in Scotland's 'the curriculum for excellence' (2006) for the age-group 3-18 years, citizenship education permeates the curriculum with a clear goal to enhance the capacities to be a responsible citizen and effective contributors. The curriculum 'aims to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the knowledge, skills and attributes' to be responsible citizens and effective contributors (Scottish Executive, 2006). While, there is no separate subject on citizenship education, the curriculum content is infused with the right-based approach and ethos. For example, to enable students to be a responsible citizens, the guidance for teaching of Science emphasises values that guide scientific endeavour – respect for living things and the environment; respect for evidence and the opinions of others; honesty in collecting and presenting data; an openness to new ideas. The Social Studies curriculum includes knowledge about the values, beliefs and cultures of societies at other times and other places with the aim that students become more willing to question intolerance and prejudices and develop respect for other people. The knowledge and understanding is complimented with group-work with diverse peers and volunteering, which aims to develop the skills and attributes to be active participants in civic society (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Greece, traditionally viewed 'civics' as the method of imparting citizenship education. More recently, the European Union funding influenced the higher education curricula towards modernizing traditional views on citizenship education. Greece adopted cross-curricular themes in disciplines to impart citizenship education as well as interdisciplinary optional subjects related to citizenship education such as Human Rights and Bio-ethics. Democratic pedagogical methods were introduced such as debates and inter-group dialogues that aimed to foster respect and democratic values.

Civic Education for India-Missing Goal

Indian society is characterized by high degree of diversity across caste, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender each influencing the behaviour of the people in diverse ways. The diversity as long as remain generally in conformity with principles enshrined in country's constitution and the behavior is non-exclusionary in nature, it creates less gaps between constitution ideals and practice. However if diversity assumes a character which generate wide gap in actual behavior of people (determined by customary rule and values) and the constitutional ideals , and at time quite contradictory and opposite to each other , as is the case in India, it results in to exclusionary tendencies , group divide and group disparities. Acts of gender, caste, racial and religious discrimination and violence are all examples of exclusionary practices, group divide and hence undemocratic behavior. This evidence indicate that what prevail in society is also reflected on education campus as it's a mirror image, characterized by diversity, division and exclusion. The patterns of behaviour are reflection of the values and norms of society which determine civic behaviour of the citizens. In turn, these are indicative of deficiency of civil capital resulting in poor citizenship and gap in constitution ideals and practice. It implies that education for democracy, which prepares college students for a

meaningful participation in a pluralistic society and diverse democracy is critical and necessary.

While, there is an agreement on the transformative potential of education in Indian high education policy, however, this goal has remained at the margins. At present school and higher education for civic learning has not become the main component of civic teaching. Not that the civic learning is totally absent in higher education institutions, but it is largely confined to service-learning programmes, courses on human rights and gender which are being selectively implemented. To build good citizens out of men and women it is essential that civic learning constitute the core of the curriculum and teaching.

What is then the meaning of civic learning? Banks, talk about the meaning and essence of education for civic learning and democratic engagement. Bank observed '*the role of education in the 21st century is to prepare students 'to know, to care, and to act in ways that will develop and foster a democratic and just society' and to 'develop a commitment to personal, social, and civic action, as well as the knowledge and skill needed* (Bank, 2007). This definition has three main components namely knowledge, skill, and action.

Knowledge: Taking the knowledge component of civic learning first, the reform in knowledge includes making student aware about the positive constitutional principle and values which form the basis of good citizenship, content which make students aware about the problems of society and sensitize them to the problems. The new curriculum thus includes the themes that deal with diversity, inequalities, poverty, discrimination associated with caste, ethnicity, gender, race and colour; use of examples to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of wide range of groups from a variety of cultures and groups within a pluralistic society. This knowledge could be imparted through special courses to all students irrespective of their discipline, science or social sciences or humanities and also by incorporating a relevant portion in each of the courses. Building the knowledge base of the students in higher education institution is the first important component of the civic learning.

Democratic Skills and capabilities enhancement: The second component is to develop individual capabilities and skills among the students to deal with diversities and disparities. To prepare democratic citizens, higher education institutions must help students to be able to develop skills to engage in critical thinking and make reflective choices of democratic actions. Democratic skills involve ability to identify and openly, in a non-violent manner discuss cultural differences and issues. (Pope and Reynolds; 2005, as cited in Banks 2007). Therefore, skills that develop students capabilities to clarify their thinking logically, consider the extreme of two actions, defend their moral choices within the context of democratic ideals, and base their actions on rational assessment of a situation will prepare just and humane citizens (Banks, with Clegg, 1990; Stephenson, Ling, Burman & Cooper, 1998). Such skills will help to interrupt one's own prejudicial thoughts about likely discriminatory behaviour against stigmatized groups, induce fraternity and desire for care, develop

commitment to personal, social and civic action and develop multi-cultural competences/skill.

Developing such skills require *new pedagogical methods and teaching strategies* that help students from diverse, racial, ethnic and cultural groups to attain skills and attitudes needed to function effectively within and to help create a just, humane, and democratic society. New pedagogical methods include inter-group dialogue and mixed-peer group, where students from diverse groups come together and interact and learn to understand and respect differences. These pedagogical methods promote multi-cultural friendship, inter-group communication and mutual interaction. Activities like ethnic clubs, cultural affairs and social events promote harmony and help in eliminating prejudice and superstition.

Through new knowledge and skills, students unlearn many things that they learn in family and society and also develop skills and capacities to deal with diversity and differences democratically. The knowledge, skill and value of care is expected to enhance the ‘civic capital’ among the youth for enhanced citizenship.

Democratic Action: The third component is to motivate the students for action and democratic engagement. The three elements, namely knowledge, and new values including that of value of care and skill is expected to inform actions, induce students for community engagement and collective action for public good. The new pedagogical ways necessarily include assignment that includes study and engagement with deprived groups and minorities which will motivate them to engage in communities and groups. Collective action will help to , a) help the commitment to participate constructively with diverse others and to work collectively to address common problems, b) the practice of working in a pluralistic society and world to improve the quality of people’s lives; and c) actions to achieve a greater public good.

Taking these elements of new civic learning together namely new knowledge which make students firmly believe in positive values, sensitize them to the problems of society, imbibe the value of care, respect and civility, improve skill and competency to exercise informed action to address public problems with diverse partners and induce motivation to engage with communities - all of these in combination, in fact, has a great potential for positive transformation and social change. The new civic learning is a lifelong process and has in itself a potential of being transformative, in the sense that it motive students for action to bring changes from a situation of inequality, poverty, discrimination and similar issues into more equality, non-discriminatory behaviour and just society. It is in this sense that the educationists believe that new education for civic learning and democratic engagement can be *transformative involving positive social change*. The enhanced “civic capital ‘through civic learning and democratic action expected to generate potential for *transformative social change for more democratic, egalitarian and just society*.”

Civic Education and Institutional Autonomy

The issue of academic autonomy is important in civic education. The United States probably is the first non-Communist country which has implemented the courses in Civic learning in the Universities and colleges. As mentioned above the American Association of Colleges and Universities prepared the report in 1995 and with the support of Department of Education build up the case for Universities and Colleges to incorporate the Civic learning in their teaching. The process of acceptance and implementation by the Universities began around 2000. Decade later American Association of Colleges and Universities did a review of the impact of the education for civic learning and democratic engagement in 2012. This report provide us a idea as to how the civic learning was undertaken by the Universities. The Universities in USA are fairly autonomous with respect to the introduction of curriculum. Therefore while civic learning and citizenship education is conceived as national policy to be adopted by the Universities, it is left to the Universities to devise it the way they seem appropriate. The autonomy of university with respect to course content and the methods of implementation is maintained. So we find a considerable variations in the practiced of civic education by individual universities. Therefore in Indian context, while at one level there should be a national policy applicable to all education institutions, the Institution autonomy with respect to the actual practice will have to be left to maintained, respecting autonomy within the overall framework of national policy.

Need to bring Civic learning at centre stage

Education for Civic learning and responsible citizenship is a missing goal in Indian higher education policy, and although it is recognised, it remain at margin and lack a prominent place in the goals of higher education. It is opportune time to bring this goal at centre stage of higher education teaching. Education for democratic engagement will involve knowledge and active democratic engagement with teaching of values of liberty, equality, humanity, individual worth and willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds. The purpose of cultivating such democratic values is also to promote equitable, non-discriminatory and just society. US study observed that 'civic knowledge and capability are not bestowed at birth. They are hard won, though education at all levels. Democratic insights and competence are always in the making, always incomplete. Therefore, civic learning needs to be an integral component at every level of education, from school to all fields of study'. It goes on to add that 'we dare not be passive about revitalizing civic capacity any more'. Campuses can be critical sites for honing students civic knowledge, skill, values, and actions, and preparing them for lives of public purpose as well as employment. This is a crucial moment to use higher education and the pathways to it as 'carrier of democratic values, ideals, and processes', and narrow the gap between ideals of constitution and reality of our daily lives of people. If it is crucial movement for education in USA, it is crucial movement for India, when we have hardly made beginning in education to deal with diversity, discrimination, and sexism (American Association of Universities and Colleges, 2011). It is also necessary for developing value of democracy. Ambedkar emphasised that education is an instrument that cultivates democracy in the society, strengthens the roots of

democracy and bring about social transformation. Democratic engagement includes a way of life for people that will promote equality, justice and fraternity. Therefore, to become democratic institutions and to contribute to democratisation of society, higher education institution in India must help students acquire knowledge, values and skills needed to participate in citizen action and help build just society.

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