

Inclusiveness and Equalitarianism - Values among Youth

Value formation among the youth is not only a socialisation process but also a very important responsibility of society. In the present context of India and the various crises the country has faced, the socio-cultural, economic and political fibre of the country is under tremendous stress and strain. The values proclaimed in our Constitution and scriptures are put to shame by what is happening in the country. It appears that inclusiveness and equalitarianism are the two important values challenged by the kind of socio-cultural, economic and political development and processes aspired by society at large. Human development is seriously jeopardised in the absence of these values.

The values of inclusiveness and equalitarianism are embedded in our Constitution and reflected in its various articles in different ways. The UN Charter of Human Rights points to the same in more than one way. No society can provide an environment where human beings can live and develop, much less the youth, the vital social capital of the country without the principles of inclusiveness and equality.

Understanding values

The youth read and hear much about values in scriptures, philosophy, sociology, films and media. Value is understood as a term that expresses the concept of worth in general, and is thought to be connected to reasons for certain practices, policies, behaviour and actions. Charles Morris (1956) has made some useful distinctions with regard to values. 'Operative values', according to him show preference for one object or objective to another - for example 'I value city life to village life'. This may be seen as a very narrow view of value i.e., what is desired. 'Conceived values', show the preference of an individual for a symbolized object, for example he suggests, 'Honesty is the best policy' is one such conceived value. Morris refers 'Objective value', to what is objectively preferable, whether or not it is sensed or conceived of as desirable.

People often mix up value with an attitude and a belief (see Kolasa, 1970). A thought and a belief remain in the realm of the cognitive sphere till it is embodied in emotion and manifested in an action. A value only in my thought, for example 'secularism', may be referred to as introjecting the value judgement of another (Roger, 1951). In other words such a value (mere ideal, concept) is merely a borrowed concept from others but not really made one's own. A value to be a value, therefore, needs to be embedded in all the three faculties, namely,



A value needs to be internalised and integrated as my own and not because someone else says so.



The given picture illustrates that cooperation can be a thought in my mind but it will not be a value for me till I logically and rationally accept the concept, strongly feel convinced about cooperation and then and act upon my rational belief begin to cooperate. Thus all the three faculties play an important role in value formation. Let me elaborate.

First, involvement of cognitive faculty, which means I understand the value, its rationale and implication. Second, involvement of emotive faculty implying that I feel strongly about the value I hold, and feel strongly convinced and committed to the value. And, finally, involvement of behavioural faculty, meaning I act upon the value I am convinced of. In other words, no one can boast about a value s/he holds unless s/he has practiced that value sometime in her/his life.

Therefore, something that I value dearly is also something that I would practice in my day-to-day life. Ask yourself whether punctuality is a value and examine carefully when I was I punctual last for any appointment or task I had. If I have no recent example to cite then punctuality is, at best, an ideal that I aspire for, but not a value which is integrated in myself.

Therefore, inclusiveness and equality can be considered as values of the youth and society when we include others (those who are different from us) in our lives, in our organisations, our events, decision-making processes and treat all with respect, dignity and as equal citizens of this country. Unless this happens, the values we proclaim remain textbook values, having no impact in our lives or the reality in which we live.

Defining inclusiveness and equality

Inclusiveness and equality make sense in a country like India where diversity and difference exists at various levels and in various aspects - physical, biological, psychological, behavioural, intellectual, ideological, linguistic, regional, socio-cultural (e.g. races, tribes, *jatis*, *gotras*, ethnicity, religious, etc.), economic and political.

Inclusiveness comes from the adjective 'inclusive', which is defined as "included, valued" by Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995). Include means to contain, to regard (Pathak, 2002). The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines 'equality' as often referring to "the right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment, regardless of their apparent difference" (1995).

It is important that we examine these values in relation to the ground reality in India and our Constitution, with which our youth is familiar.

The Constitution of India

Preamble

We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a [sovereign socialist secular democratic republic] and to secure to all its citizens:

Justice, social economic and political;

Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the [unity and integrity of the Nation]’;

The Indian Constitution throws light on this value of equality from the perspective of rights of citizens. It guarantees right to equality as equality before law, prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth, equality of opportunity in public employment, abolition of untouchability, abolition of titles.

Inclusiveness and equality - the ideal and the actual

Let us examine a few differences to understand the ideal and the actual of inclusiveness and equality in our midst. Differences like sex, caste, religion, regions, language, class and culture are encountered by all of us in our daily interaction with others. Let us cite this example, I go to buy milk from someone or someone delivers milk at my house. This someone could be a woman or a man (sex difference), belonging to one caste or the other (some of us may find it difficult to accept her/him if s/he happened to be from ‘valmiki’ community (a ‘scavenger’), from a poor class (easy to find out from her/his profession, in this case from a lower economic strata), the colour of the person will be obvious, s/he may be Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Christian, Jain or an atheist. None of the differences come into play as long as I get the milk as contracted upon. We need to ask ourselves then, why do we discriminate some - is it an affirmative action or a sick and prejudiced mindset?

The Constitution provides equality of status and opportunity and equality before law, however, the ground reality is far from it. Defiance of these values by civil society, the market and the state is galore. The differences among us as citizens are not respected but judged and evaluated unjustly, people are placed in hierarchy - man superior to woman, the so-called ‘savarna’ higher than the so-called ‘avarna’, ‘intellectual work’ superior to ‘manual work’, ‘Hindi’ as a superior language to ‘bhili’ (tribal dialect in Gujarat), ‘bhadra sanskriti’ (civilised culture) and ‘asabhiy sanskriti’ (uncivilised culture), the main stream culture valued and subaltern culture looked down upon. We constantly put labels on people, their language, their culture, their behaviour, their work, indicating inequality, and consequently treat them unequally based on the value judgements we have made (also see Ginwalla and Dabhi, 2003). Our goodness depends on what we have and what we have

achieved (physically, materially and intellectually) and not on the quality of our being, motives of our actions and values we practice.

In absence of these values

A woman is considered inferior to a man, and therefore, she is not paid equal wages to a man (see also Anker, 1998, Apruthamurthy, 1990). She cannot have the same freedom that a man has at home and outside home. An 'avarna' cannot be treated in the same way as a 'savarna' because s/he is not only an inferior being, but also polluting whose very touch pollutes others. Therefore, s/he cannot be allowed in our houses and temples, sit in the same classroom, drink water from the same pot and cook for us.

Some of our youth who have not seen the Indian reality beyond glamour of our cities might think that I am citing ancient history. Visit any village of Gujarat, MP, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh or for that matter any part of India and you will see for yourself that untouchability exists; a very inhuman form of inequality is practiced in our midst. Separate queues for scheduled caste persons when they come to deposit milk in milk cooperatives, separate pots for teachers and students of particular community in the village schools are all realities of our day. Houses not available to persons belonging to certain minority groups in some housing societies in towns and cities is not uncommon. If a sarpanch in the village happens to be a woman or from scheduled caste community the stereotype begins to be heard - 'they cannot manage, they are not competent'. Often the husband or father becomes a real sarpanch, the woman is merely a rubber stamp, or yet again 'No confidence motion' against the Scheduled Caste person (see BSC, 2003). Compensation packages in the earthquake shattered Kutch and the inequality in it (see BSC 2002), the tsunami and social discrimination reported in major newspapers prove beyond doubt that it is the poor, the SCs, the STs, and women who are victims of the absence of equality.

Our minds are influenced by our upbringing, the education we have received (religious, formal and non-formal) and our overall socialisation - This process of socialisation takes place at home, school, college, work place and at religious services, through oral and written traditions and symbols. Our beliefs, meaning system, our attitude, and approach to people and life are largely a product of our socialisation. 'Who' the person is (her/his sex, religion, region, caste) who delivers milk at my door, will determine and change my attitude and behaviour towards her/him - human or inhuman, inclusive or exclusive, and equal or discriminative. Physical inclusion or exclusion will depend very much on our attitudinal and emotional disposition towards the person.

Those of us who are not brought up or socialised to appreciate differences will have difficulty or serious blocks in including individuals and groups who are different from us. The blocks to include others may be different for different people - some may find it difficult to include women/men in their social gatherings, events, conversations, games, rituals, **cultic**

practices, management and governance, organisations. Some may have serious blocks to include people from a particular caste, class, disability or/and religion.

The situation becomes most dangerous when these blocks have religious and social sanctions ascribed to them. Often religious and traditional teachings and ideologies promote and perpetuate these blocks by making differences among people conceived as God-given, natural and unchangeable, thus further attributing value judgements to these differences. For instance women labelled as weak and men as strong, fair as lovely and black as ugly, so called high caste as like a 'ghoda' (horse) and so called lower castes as a 'gadha' (donkey), non-vegetarians as violent and vegetarians as peace loving are examples to prove the point forgetting that Hitler, a fascist, no less than the present fascists in our country was a pure vegetarian (also see Dabhi, 2005).

These social discriminative ideologies whether *brahminical* or *Varna*, gender, communal, class, and race have underlying principles of 'superiority-inferiority', and 'purity-pollution' which make these ideologies oppressive and inhuman. My purpose here is not to give details about these ideologies but it may not be out of place to highlight the underpinning principles in all these ideologies (see Franco and Sherry Chand, 1989).

The above discriminative and exploitative ideology tells us,

1. Who is a person and who is not: e.g. a man is a person not a woman, and therefore she can be used as an object, sold, bought and trafficked for a price. A scheduled caste person is less human and at worst not a person, and therefore, s/he can be used for scavenging work in society, they do not deserve respect and social status.
2. Who/what is good and who/what is not: to be a man, to be a 'high caste', to be white, English speaking is good; but to be a woman, a scheduled caste, black, no fluency in English is bad. Therefore, it is okay to do away with a female foetus, reserve gutter cleaning for the scheduled caste only, and people who are dark can be ridiculed and laughed at.
3. What is possible and what is not: it is not possible for a woman to be a man and it is not possible for a scheduled caste to be like a high caste and a black to be white. Therefore, a woman may dress up or behave like a man but she can never be like a man. A scheduled caste person can fully get immersed in sanskritisation, imitate all the caste customs and rituals but s/he would never be accepted in the so-called caste fold, you can continue to waste money on 'fair and lovely' and labelled 'not good looking'. You are not accepted for *who* you are but expected to imitate and *be like* other and yet excluded and discriminated.

Values Formation - challenge before the youth

We need to recognise that the Preamble of the Constitution provides both the context and validity to the values of inclusiveness and equality to be promoted in our society particularly among the youth, as they are more open to life and learning. It is the formation

of these values that will provide meaning, integration and direction for many young women and men to lead India into a process of an on going development, which is based on inclusiveness and equalitarianism.

It is obvious that value formation requires time, efforts and political will to act on our values. We know that values are influenced by human needs and that values change and/or become strong or weak with the passage of time. For example value for freedom may change if one experiences freedom and then value for freedom may be replaced by value for peace.

Cultivation of cognitive understanding and logical reasoning of inclusiveness and equalitarianism among youth at various forums will foster these values. It is important, therefore, that our youth and those who work with youth discuss and dialogue about these values, their practice and failure in various sectors within the society. Discussing the various nuances of these values, their perception and practice among various actors and agencies will help expand the understanding of these values among youth.

Exposing situations, events, and occasions where these values are upheld and where they are relinquished, the actors involved, and the consequences for people in those situations and events may help the youth to appreciate and monitor these values and bring to book those who misbehave especially those who are in high places at public cost and at service of the public.

The youth may be helped to identify the lack of inclusiveness and equalitarianism in interaction between people, in their conversations, arguments, words they use, assumptions they make and the behaviour they exhibit to learn. Let me cite an example through this statement, "I being a *brahmin*, do not observe 'untouchability' with this 'valmiki', and therefore, you as a 'Patel' have no reason to do so". Analysing the statement one begins to wonder what was the need here to proclaim that 'I am a Brahmin'. Second it appears in the statement as if by not keeping untouchability (not doing what is evil) s/he is doing a big favour to the Valmiki and society. Third, deep down the statement suggests a *varna* mindset which arrogantly boasts, "I as a Brahmin have the right to greater privileges (of practising inhuman ritual of purity and impurity) and still i am so humble" - greater than thou attitude is exhibited.

Identifying the forthcoming events, situations or created situations where inclusiveness and equalitarianism may be practiced and implemented is yet another way of promoting those values. Fantasy exercises in visualising such events and situations may help groups to visualise themselves and be in touch with their emotions and prepare for the real situation.

In the real situation some monitoring system can be set up where the youth groups may like to ask other groups to monitor their understanding and practice of these values and get an adequate peer feedback on the same.

Finally, the youth need to be constantly and consciously aware of the values they hold and act upon because as Paulo Freire (the educationist from Latin America) suggests that the

both - exploited and the exploiter are within us and so we must struggle for humanisation within ourselves as much as outside us (1972).

Let me conclude by saying that fostering exclusiveness and equalitarianism may be helped by the external support system but without personal commitment and will, these values will remain merely conceptual attributes enshrined in and Constitution, public rhetoric and religious discourse delivered from temples, gurudwara, mosques, churches, pagodas and Jain deharasers. I believe our youth deserve a more humane society from what is offered to them but it will not happen without sweat and toil. Choice is theirs - accept what is given and add to the value-pollution or face the challenge and create a healthy society where all of us can live with inclusiveness and equalitarianism as Indians as well citizens of this globe.

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