

Role of Multilingualism in developing spirit of tolerance and harmony

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ABSTRACT

In the interconnected and globalized world, multilingualism has a great role to play in creating a peaceful global society based on mutual understanding, solidarity, tolerance, affection and compassion. We know that the world has witnessed two World Wars, and continues to witness international conflicts, regional disputes, local unrests and sectarian clashes. Have we contemplated why all these happen, here and there, now and then? If we ponder upon, we will find that most of these conflicts and disputes occur due to linguistic, ethnic, religious, ideological or economic differences. And the reason behind it is that everyone refuses to recognize the other, his language, race, religion, and ideology. On the other hand everyone – individual or community or state - wants to achieve his own goals and objectives at the expense of the other. This is where clashes and disputes emanate from. This is what called "unilateral theory" where one party does not recognize or respect the other leading to the marginalization of the weaker by the stronger, which further leads to sowing the seeds of hatred and hostility, clash and conflict. So, to my belief, the recognition of pluralism - linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic and ideological - can prove to be the only solution to many conflicts and disputes. Hence, this paper will focus on why we should encourage and promote multilingualism and how it develops the spirit of tolerance and understanding in the multilingual personalities.

Keywords: marginalization, pluralism, tolerance, mutual understanding, linguistics, ethnic, religious, ideological.

➤Introduction:

What is Multilingualism?

Multilingualism can be defined as use of more than one language by an individual speaker or by a group of people. It is opposite of monolingualism which means use of one language only. So, by multilingual we mean the speaker who is proficient multiple languages.

Multilingualism can be at individual level; when a person is able to speak more than one language, or at community level; when a particular community uses more than one language in their lives, or at government level; when a state adopts multiple languages for official purposes.

Significance of multilingualism and its benefits:

There are multiple scientific researches that highlight the significance of learning multiple languages. Some researchers even tried to compile the benefits of learning multiple languages. So, they have enumerated more than 70 benefits of learning multiple languages, which impact the personality, mental faculty and thinking ability of the learner. I will mention below some of them which are directly and indirectly related to the topic. Then, I will explain some of the important ones; so that I can establish the fact that multilingualism leads to creating a sense of tolerance and harmony within the learner.

The multilingualism:

- Helps in developing the mental faculty and intelligence of learners of multiple languages.
- Develops the ability to memorize, listen, reflect, and be creative and innovative.
- Helps in increasing employment and career opportunities.
- Helps to create new friends from different societies or countries.
- Helps in efficient decision making.
- Helps in learning and enjoying the different cultures found in the world.
- Assists in the exchange of ideas and information between different cultures and communities.
- Helps in increasing global awareness and international understanding and bringing closer the people of different faiths and beliefs.
- Helps in managing time and work.
- Assists in learning and understanding the world arts and cultures.
- Makes travel and journey more knowledgeable, useful, enjoyable and entertaining.
- Assists in accessing original and primary sources and high-quality information while conducting research works.
- It encourages the learner to engage in a constructive dialogue directly with others.
- Teach the student the spirit of teamwork.
- It increases the student's ambitions so that he yearns to get more...

➤ **Role of Multilingualism in developing spirit of tolerance and harmony:**

Through the following lines under different headings, I will try to highlight how multilingualism leads to developing a sense of tolerance and harmony, and paves the way to achieving peace and security in the world.

Multilingualism leads to global citizenship:

Multilingualism plays an important role in making a person a global citizen because when a person learns a new language or multiple new languages, he learns the cultures of the speakers of those languages, familiarizes himself with their economic and social conditions, reads their news and reports, and feels their pains and problems. Subsequently, a sense of universal humanity develops within the learner. This feeling of belongingness to a broader community, transcending geographical and national borders, is called the global citizenship. So, a global citizen belongs to a broader global community, and is tolerant of language, religion, culture and ideology of the others. He interacts with the global societies, is affected by whatever negative is happening in the world, shares responsibilities and duties, feels the pain of those affected, and shows solidarity with those who need it. He also recognizes and fully respects the existence of multiple languages, diverse cultures, different religions and various ideologies. For example, if someone learns the Arabic language he reads the news in Arabic, speaks it, interacts with the people of the Arab world and shares their feelings and emotions. The same thing applies to other languages. Thus, this sense of global citizenship makes a person feel as if the people of the entire world are like a single body. If a part of the body complains of pain, the rest of the body feels the same.

It is worth mentioning here that the United Nations plays a considerable role in strengthening the values of global citizenship through its various programmes, especially the "Global Education First Initiative" launched by the then United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in September 2012 AD. Similarly, UNESCO is making strenuous efforts in order to educate people regarding global citizenship, which is one of the three priorities for the above initiative, because education in general and multilingual education in particular will act as a catalyst in promoting the values of global citizenship.

Unity in diversity, India as an example:

The slogan "Unity in diversity" is not new. It has been in use since long time. The term means maintaining unity and harmony between dissimilar individuals or communities; the dissimilarity may be in terms of language or culture or religion or ideology or race or colour and so on. But in this paper, I will focus on diversity in the context of language.

There are more than six thousand languages in the world which have equal values in the eyes of their speakers. So, the government should give equal attention and importance to all the languages because suppressing any language and related culture will lead to marginalisation of its speakers which is not good for a harmonious environment. Instead, promoting the languages and encouraging to learn additional one or more languages apart from mother tongue is beneficial for the students in many aspects; psychologically, socially, politically and economically. So, I mean to say that diversity is not against unity. Unity can be

maintained while preserving diversity. India can be cited as a good example in this regard where 780 languages are spoken in different regions according to the first comprehensive language study in independent India conducted by the “Bhasha Research and publication Center” in 2014. The number of scripts reaches up to 86, and out of 780 languages, there are 122 languages spoken by more than ten thousand Indians, and the rest of the languages are spoken by less than ten thousand speakers. And there are more than 1600 local dialects originating from various linguistic families such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asian, and Tibeto-Burman.

India is a country where the multilingualism runs in the arteries of all its citizens, and where most of its citizens speak two or more languages. If I take my example, I am bilingual since childhood. And till I reached university level, I learnt four more languages. I now speak 6 languages. India is truly a wonderful example of multilingualism, whose diverse populations, linguistically and culturally, is living in peaceful coexistence based on understanding, cooperation and mutual respect, because they recognize each other and respect their language, religion and culture. So, I strongly believe that India can serve as a good example of unity in diversity and should be selected by UNESCO as an example for spreading awareness in the world that multilingualism is not contrary to unity but paves the way to the friendly relationships between linguistically and culturally diverse people.

Role of Multilingualism in global understanding and bringing people together:

As multilingualism promotes unity in the context of diversity and pluralism, it leads to international solidarity, understanding and rapprochement among global citizens. Multilingualism may be in the local and national context, and may be in the international and global context. But I mean multilingualism in the international context as it is the most needed to gain international understanding. Scientific studies have shown that learning foreign language or languages contributes greatly to developing the spirit of tolerance, affection and compassion in a multi-lingual human being for the people of those languages in particular. Thus, the spirit of understanding, cooperation, solidarity, and humane sides of the foreign language learners develop gradually. I experienced it personally and observed it as a student of a university. I studied in Jawaharlal Nehru University, which occupies a distinguished position among Indian universities, the most famous of which is the Faculty of foreign languages. The Faculty of Languages in this university is teaching many languages of Asia, Europe, America and Africa. It really looks like a mini world within the campus, full of multinational students, languages, cultures, religions and civilizations, who are learning languages, talking to each other, exchanging views and ideas, and understanding each other. There is no difference between male and female, black and white. I observed there that the students of foreign languages have been influenced considerably by learning foreign languages leading to change of ideas and views towards the world or at least towards the country whose language they learnt, because they not only learn foreign language but also learn its culture and social values. They also follow the political, social and economic news of that state and find themselves associated with this and that. And also when a foreign language learner meets any native speaker of the language he feels as if he met his brother or his friend who was waiting for him. In this era, the era of globalization one does not need to meet the native speaker physically, but one can interact through the modern means of communication sitting at home in any corner of

the world. Thus the significance of multilingualism increased manifold. The essence of the statement is that learning the second language creates a means of communication and dialogue at the global level and helps in understanding the issues and problems of international community, and thereby developing the spirit of solidarity, cooperation and global understanding.

The role of multilingualism in the economy:

As the multilingualism plays a key role in mutual understanding and tolerance. It contributes to the economic development as well, by facilitating economic activities as the world has become like a small village due to the globalization of each and every aspect of life. Subsequently, multilingualism helps to create economic diversification on the one hand, and plays a leading role in economic globalization and trade exchange on the other, because the great influence that globalization has brought in our present era encompasses various areas of our lives. The importance of languages has increased also due to the modern means of communication and mode of information. In today's globalised world, there is pressing need to promote the multilingualism due to its immense role in business activities as it supports the competitiveness of trading companies in multilingual markets. So, researchers think that countries which actively promote and nurture different languages reap a range of rewards and benefits from more successful trade and exports to a more profitable place. Thus it leads to increased economic returns to those who promote or adopt policies supporting multilingualism.

Respect for multilingualism is the key to security and peace in the society:

In this era of war of words, acquisition of multiple languages and knowledge of different cultures and civilizations can be a great tool to end many conflicts and clashes in the world which arise due to non-recognition of one another's language, religion, culture and race. However, when one learns the language of others, he gets the opportunity to exchange ideas, understand and interact with the people of that language, and thus gradually develops the spirit of tolerance and the mentality of reconciliation and respect for others. His mental horizons and faculties expand, and he learns how to accept different points of view, and starts to build connections with people from different cultures and nations, and discovers the beauty of diversity. Subsequently a multilingual student develops the sense of belongingness to universal citizenship, and considers himself to be an integral part of the international community, and sympathizes with the global citizens, and feels their joy and pain. So, if this kind of sense and humanity develops in every citizen, there wouldn't be any place for hatred and enmity, conflict and clash. Thus multilingualism has great role to play in promoting international peace and security.

➤Multilingualism between strategy and implementation:

We came to the conclusion from the above facts that multilingualism plays a significant role in establishing the principle of global citizenship by developing the spirit of tolerance and understanding and cultivating affection and love. But the important question that comes to one's mind in this regard is "what are the strategies to promote diversity and what are the fields of implementation?" In this regard, we must note the efforts that the United Nations has made and still continues to make great efforts to promote the values of linguistic and cultural

pluralism. This is clear from the fact that the UN has adopted six languages as its official languages, which are used in its meetings and official documents, and it celebrates the International Day for all these languages to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism, and earlier it has held competitions to write articles in these six official languages i.e. the “many languages one world” (MLOW) contest. Having been part of the MLOW 2015 contest, I can say that this competition has also played a significant role in highlighting the importance of multilingualism, encouraging pluralism, and motivating those who want to acquire the second language or third language or fourth language and so on. UNESCO also adopted the term "multilingual education" in 1999 to invite member states to choose a curriculum that promotes pluralism adopting at least three languages, one of which is the mother tongue, a national language and an international language. There is no doubt that these initiatives by the United Nations are much appreciated. But we need to expand scope and areas and take further steps and initiatives to promote and benefit from multilingualism in promoting global citizenship, and subsequently creating a tolerant and harmonious environment. The scope and initiatives can be as follows:

➤ **Some important areas in which multilingualism can be expanded are:**

▪ **School system:** Most often universities, educational institutions and special language centres contribute more to the production of multilingual human resources. But, the Government can devise policies to adopt multilingual education system from the school level as proposed UNESCO. UNESCO believes everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, culture and regions, has the right to get education in their own language. Getting education in mother tongue improves the learning outcomes and socio-emotional development. But unfortunately, around 40% people do not have access to education in their own language. That is why “UNESCO has been promoting multilingual education as a means to improve learning and learning outcomes and give life to linguistic and culture diversity since 1953 when a meeting of specialists in vernacular languages led to the Organization publishing the Use of Vernacular languages in education. Its position was strengthened in 1999 when the UNESCO General Conference adopted a resolution crystallising the definition of ‘multilingual education’ as the use of at least three languages: the mother tongue(s), a regional or national language and an international language”.¹

▪ **Digital World:** We know very well that English dominates all languages in the digital world i.e. the Internet world. This vast world must be multi-lingual for the benefit of all people. And the people of all languages must have an opportunity to access the digital information and connect with the global citizens and take advantage in the concerned field. In this regard, a recommendation “Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace” was adopted by UNESCO General Conference at its 32nd session in Paris on 15 October 2003.²

▪ **Economic activities:** Due to economic globalization, economic activities are in urgent need of multilingualism to expand its areas and spread its benefits to a wider and broader world.

¹ UNESCO website: <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/languages/need-know>

² UNESCO website: <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information/multilingualism-cyberspace>

▪ **Social networks:** Social networks should be multi-lingual because they are more popular and useful these days, and they are of great importance in different areas of human life. Som all the countries should make the social networks multilingual.

▪ **Media:** The media is a vast area and an influential means in human societies. Multilingualism must be implemented in all kind of media in all countries so that its imapcata and effects reach and touch each and every class and groups of the society.

Some important steps and initiatives that can be taken to promote multilingualism are:

Opening of offices and branches: The United Nations should take initiatives to open offices and branches in Member States that are interested in promoting multilingualism. These offices and branches should conduct competitions in different languages in writing, speech, debate to create interest in the students of languages.

▪ **Use of existing institutions and educational institutions:** The United Nations can benefit from existing educational institutions and centres located in different countries in creating awareness or conducting competitions in different areas related to languages and cultures.

▪ **Opening a special language section at embassies:** Member States should open a special section in their embassies in different countries to teach their languages and promote them by taking minimum fees. There is no doubt that some countries use their embassies to promote their languages, for example France and other European countries, but embassies of many countries are not providing facilities to teach and promote their language and culture.

▪ **Encouraging multilingualism:** Embassies should encourage the learners of their languages by holding competitions, awarding prizes and certificates to winners, and give them the chance to spend some time in the native countries to improve their language skills and hone their speaking abilities.

▪ **Training language teachers:** The concerned authorities should take care of training the language teachers in the countries concerned for short term or long term courses.

In conclusion, linguistic pluralism is an effective means for developing the spirit of globalized citizenship and mutual understanding. The Governments and States should pay particular attention to the promotion and development of multilingualism, because the multilingualism and knowledge of multiple languages can play considerable role in increasing the income and trading activities of the country. In this regard, we recognize that the United Nations has made commendable efforts in this area. But cooperation of member states in this regard is very essential to take some positive steps and initiatives in this regard as indicated at the end.

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