

KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY: ITS SYMBIOTIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

Cultural diversity is the quality or the existing phenomenon of diverse culture or difference among human society. It refers to the attributes that people use to confirm themselves with respect to others. These attributes include race, gender, age, values, cultural norms, language, dress, food, beliefs, traditions etc. It is to be seen as natural phenomena, not as an exceptional existence in human society. This recognition will foster acceptance and the ability to see diversity as a natural phenomenon. It will also enable society to build on those attributes for the development of not just knowledge society but an equitable knowledge society. A knowledge society will also reinforce respect for multiculturalism and its acceptance and positivity for society as a whole. This paper elaborates on these aspects.

Keywords : Diversity, knowledge, attributes, development, equitable.

INTRODUCTION

There are various interpretations of the terms culture, diversity and knowledge society. Universally accepted definitions or consensus regarding the meaning and definition may elude these terms. However, the richness and profoundness of the terms and its implications in human society in manifested its myriad and diverse interpretations. The relationship of cultural diversity and knowledge society from different angles and aspects affects and effects on each other in human society.

KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

The term knowledge society has several meanings. Social scientist used it to describe and analyze the transformation towards post industrial society. It is also seen as a vision (normative) that nations, country, state or companies should aspire to fulfil. Knowledge society is also often use as a metaphor (rather than a concept) under which various topics are examined. It is primarily used to refer to a society in which the creation, dissemination, and utilization of information and knowledge has become the most important factor of production. In such a society, knowledge assets are the most powerful producer of wealth, sidelining the importance of land, the volume of labour, and physical or financial capital. Human capital is seen as the prime importance and input for innovation and production in society.

A knowledge society differs from an information society. Knowledge society sought to transform information into resources that allow society to take effective action. Information society only creates and disseminates the raw data. Human beings have been engaged in gathering and dissemination of data from time immemorial. But the idea of knowledge society in this aspect does not refer to large dependent on data creation and dissemination through information and communication technologies. On the other hand, the idea of the present-day knowledge society is based on the vast increase in data creation and information dissemination that results from the innovation of information technologies.

Knowledge societies, according to UNESCO is a concept that refers to the capabilities to identify, produce, process, transform, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development. The building of equitable knowledge societies rests on **four key principles**: freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and quality education for all.¹

The application of the principle of freedom of expression must include new media, including the internet apart from traditional media. It is the basic premise of knowledge societies. UNESCO mandate is to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image. It is important to continue to mobilize energies and efforts to promote freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as a basic right indispensable to the exercise of democracy. Creativity, innovation, criticism and questioning can be brought into human society only through Freedom of expression. Knowledge societies do not rest on only single uniform model of knowledge to which all societies conform. The nature of knowledge societies should be conceived as plural, variable and open to choice, and freedom of expression is inseparable from this vision.²

The second principle, access to quality education for all is a basic right. It is essential for building and developing the necessary skills and capacities for development, progress and social peace in all societies. It aims at overall reform in society. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide immense opportunities for increasing access to education. It helps in collection, storage and transmission of knowledge in a large scale and size, which otherwise wouldn't be possible.

The third principle concerns respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. The aim is to foster the expression of cultural and linguistic pluralism, both in content and in the various types of production – news, documentaries and educational materials.³

For broader participation in development processes, the fourth principle i.e. universal access to information and knowledge especially information in the public domain is a prerequisite. Information should be abundantly available for everyone anywhere without much restriction to it. This will promote expanding of knowledge and will help promote development in various ways.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The definition of culture has long been a controversy and the term is used in various ways. One definition says that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by human being as a member of society. More specifically, it refers to the shared language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviours, and material objects that are passed down from one generation to the next.⁴ It refers to a group or community which shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. This includes groups that we are born into, like race, national, origin, gender, class or religion. It may also include a group we join or become part of. It is possible to acquire a new culture by moving to a new country/ region and by change in our economic status or by becoming disabled. When culture is perceived/understood in this broad way, we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.

Along with cross-border and intra border population flows, ideas, ways of living, practice and other attributes also move. Human and material movement led to increased diversity within societies. Diversity refers to the co-existence of a difference in behaviour, traditions and customs – in short, a diversity of cultures. Cultural diversity is a natural phenomenon that exists everywhere human society is found. It exists as a natural occurrence as human

¹Education in and for the Knowledge Society, <https://www.osce.org/fom/36398?download=true>. Accessed on 8.2.19.

²UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001. <http://orcp.hustoj.com/2016/03/19/unesco-universal-declaration-on-cultural-diversity-2001/>. Accessed on 5.2.19

³The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace, the new Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage.

⁴R. Schaefer, *Sociology: A brief introduction* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

society progress and become more diverse. Diversity in its different aspects moves from one place to another along with the movement of people. It refers to the attributes that people use to confirm themselves with respect to others.

The terms culturally diverse and multiculturalism are often used interchangeably. Multiculturalism is defined as a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.⁵ Sociologist Dr. Caleb Rosado described seven important actions involved in the definition of multiculturalism:⁶

- recognition of the abundant diversity of cultures
- respect for the differences
- acknowledging the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions
- valuing what other cultures offer
- encouraging the contribution of diverse groups
- empowering people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential by being critical of their own biases
- celebrating rather than just tolerating the differences in order to bring about unity through diversity

CULTURAL DIVERSITY VIS-A-VIS KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Diversity in any form itself is a resource. It gives dimension and shape to the earth and its inhabitants. Culture is that which shapes us; it shapes our identity and influences our behaviour. Culture is our way of being. Cultural diversity is a factor for development. It widens the range of options open to everyone. It is one of the roots of development which may be understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.⁷

Cultural diversity finds place in the UNESCO's four principles for building equitable knowledge society. It concerns respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. The aim is to foster the expression of cultural and linguistic pluralism - both in content and in the various types of production such as news, documentaries and educational materials. The General Conference (UNESCO's governing body) adopted the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001.⁸ This Declaration (the first of its kind within the international community) elevates cultural diversity to the rank of common heritage of humanity. The necessity and importance of cultural diversity for humankind is also emphasized here. Some important content are:⁹

- The Declaration promotes the principle that culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations." (Article 1)

⁵C. Rosado, What Makes a School

Multicultural? <file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/user/Desktop/BSSS%20march/what%20makes%20a%20school%20multicultural.pdf>. Accessed on 5.2.2019

⁶4. C. Rosado, What Makes a School Multicultural? Ibid.

⁷UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001. <http://orcp.hustoj.com/2016/03/19/unesco-universal-declaration-on-cultural-diversity-2001/>. Accessed on 5.2.19

⁸UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001. Ibid.

⁹UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001. <http://orcp.hustoj.com/2016/03/19/unesco-universal-declaration-on-cultural-diversity-2001/>. Accessed on 5.2.19

- The Declaration emphasizes the understanding of moving from cultural diversity to cultural pluralism. It states "in our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life." (Article 2)
- Thirdly, the Declaration delineates cultural diversity as a factor in development. "Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence." (Article 3)
- Finally, cultural diversity presupposes the respect for human rights. "The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope." (Article 4)

Rabindranath Tagore writing may also be quoted in this context



"... let us unite, not in spite of our differences, but through them. For differences can never be wiped away, and life would be so much the poorer without them. Let all human races keep their own personalities, and yet come together, not in a uniformity that is dead, but in a unity that is living"..

- Tagore on his visit to China, 1924

The natural existence of cultural diversity, mutual respect about each other culture and its link to protecting basic human dignity is acknowledged by UNESCO.

Promoting dialogue and deliberations on multiculturalism and cultural diversity in different platform like lectures, symposium as well as regional, national and international forum/organization will sensitize communities and societies on the natural existence of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. This in itself is a reservoir of knowledge. It will further enhance mutual understanding between different communities and societies build on the understanding and will give room to explore collaboration and means to enhance production in society.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge society is a way forward to build a better world in a post industrial society. In the face of fast depleting natural resources and increasing environmental issues, it will remain the mainstay for human survival. Its mutual relationship with cultural diversity as a factor enforcing and reinforcing each other will be of crucial importance in the dialogue for knowledge society.

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