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4 **Rethinking Multicultural Education Beyond Cultural Celebrations: Pedagogical Barriers in Indian school.**
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6 ***Abstract***
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8 Grounded in Banks' (2010) conceptualisation of multicultural education and the culturally relevant pedagogy of
9 Ladson-Billings (1995), this review paper highlighted the urgent need to integrate multicultural education in schools
10 beyond surface-level practices, such as celebrating different festivals, food habits, and traditional attire. The purpose
11 of this paper is to foster transformative multicultural education by critically reviewing the challenges in the school
12 and addressing the deeper social issues, inequities, and injustices. The study identified pedagogical barriers such as
13 a superficial understanding of multiculturalism, limited representation in the curriculum, inadequate teacher
14 preparation, pressure to complete the syllabus, and structural biases in assessment.

15 These discussions align with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by fostering equity, inclusion,
16 and Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs). Hence, this paper underscores the importance of
17 integrating multicultural education in schools without limiting it to festivals and celebrations. Thus, the paper
18 empowers the school environment inclusively.
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21 ***Key words: -***

22 multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, equity, socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs)
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24 ***Introduction: -***

25 In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding and appreciating the vibrant communities from diverse
26 cultural and socio-economic backgrounds is a social skill with an educational imperative. Multiculturalism as a
27 social philosophy questions ongoing social issues and tries to identify the crucial thread that still exists in society
28 and is the reason for the social inequalities. It also values the diverse cultural identities without neglecting one's own
29 cultural values. In such a scenario, multicultural education translates this philosophy into practice by integrating the
30 diverse perspectives and experiences into classroom practices. It has become a necessity in today's education
31 system. Multicultural education is grounded in the culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching,
32 which are the basis for making the school environment inclusive. Banks (2015) mentioned that pedagogy enriches
33 learning only when the teaching method acknowledges cultural diversity. Despite its importance, many schools and
34 educators view multiculturalism merely as the celebration of festivals and are confined to one specific day, and treat
35 all students equally in school. These assumptions are misinterpreted in schools and hinder schools from achieving an
36 inclusive environment. Though the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has focused on the need for equity and
37 equality in the education system, the implementation of the NEP vision needs to be critically reviewed and to
38 formulate effective strategies that are practically feasible. Furthermore, there is a gap in the need for the learners,
39 teaching methods, and classroom practices. Hence, this paper addresses that multicultural education is not only a
40 necessity for achieving educational excellence but also for creating a fair and just school environment.

41 ***Conceptual Framework***

42 The present study is grounded in the two interrelated ideas of Bank's Multicultural education and Ladson-Billings's
43 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic lens of understanding the structural
44 reforms and pedagogical adjustments in creating inclusive school environments.

45 The Bank's 5 dimensions of multicultural education serve as the guidelines for implementing the aspects of
46 multicultural education in the school environment and also help in addressing the misconceptions that people hold.

47 1. **Content Integration:** Content integration includes not only the festivals or lessons about a particular culture but
48 also all the culture-related aspects in the lessons. Also, it helps in clarifying that it is for all subjects, including
49 science and maths, and not just for the humanities.

50 2. **Knowledge Construction:** Knowledge construction helps teachers to build critical thinking in students and
51 examine assumptions and biases from the content that students study.

52 3. **Prejudice Reduction:** Prejudice reduction allows students and teachers to work on addressing stereotypes and
53 biases and helps in creating an inclusive environment.

54 4. **Equity Pedagogy:** Equity pedagogy helps teachers to adapt instructional methods that accommodate varied
55 cultural learning styles. It goes beyond awareness and ensures equal educational opportunities and academic
56 success.

57 5. **Empowering School Culture and Social Structure:** Empowering school culture and social structure stresses not
58 only the individual classroom but also the broader school environments, including school policies, institutional
59 practices, and teachers' roles.

60 Similarly, Gloria Ladson-Billing's culturally relevant pedagogy adds a critical understanding of multicultural
61 education that is embedded in teaching practices that promote equity, respect, and empowerment. Culturally relevant
62 pedagogy complements the Bank's framework by emphasizing;

63 1. **Academic success:** Teachers must set high expectations for all students without being biased and support all
64 students to do well in school.

65 2. **Cultural competence:** Teachers must integrate students' cultural aspects while teaching a lesson through
66 examples and stories. In doing so, each student feels proud of their own culture and, at the same time, is ready to
67 learn about others' cultures.

68 3. **Critical consciousness:** Education is not only about exams, but also a responsibility of the teachers to develop
69 critical thinking and reasoning in students. There must be open platforms and opportunities to have a discussion on
70 social issues and inequalities.

71 Together, these frameworks shape teaching approaches that empower teachers to lay the groundwork for cultural
72 inclusion in school.

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76 **Pedagogical Barriers to Multicultural Education**

77 1. **Superficial Understanding of Multiculturalism:** Many educators limit their understanding of multiculturalism
78 to the celebrations of festivals, food fairs, wearing traditional dresses, and cultural events. This assumption reduces
79 multicultural education to occasional events and fails to address social issues, equality, respect, and cultural
80 inclusion through its teaching.

81 2. **Limited Representation in Curriculum:** The Indian education system is mainly exam-oriented, where we find
82 limited room for cultural knowledge and critical engagement. Textbooks are more dominant, neglecting the voices
83 of marginalized groups. Thus, this lack of representation makes the marginalized groups invisible in the curriculum

84 and narrows their understanding of society. Teachers give less attention to integrating culturally responsive practices
85 in their teaching to complete the syllabus under pressure and reinforce inequalities.

86 **3. Inadequate Teacher Preparation:** Most of the teacher preparation programs in India lack extensive training in
87 multicultural education. Teachers enter the school with very little knowledge about their students' cultural aspects
88 and end up generalizing students based on their cultural diversity. This lack of preparedness weakens the school's
89 ability to produce an inclusive environment. Geneva Gay stresses that to have culturally responsive teaching,
90 teachers need to have a deliberative training where teachers easily connect pedagogy with the students' lived
91 experiences (2010).

92 **4. Pressure on completion of the syllabus:** The school often pressures teachers to complete the syllabus within
93 time. In such a situation, teachers avoid integrating cultural aspects in the teaching. Thus, there is little room left for
94 the teachers and students to have a culturally responsive classroom practice.

95 **5. Structural biases in Assessment:** Gloria Ladson Billings (1995) argues that equity pedagogy is violated when
96 the dominant language is reflected in the standardized tests, leaving the marginalized groups behind. As a result, the
97 academic performance seems weaker, not because of their knowledge and ability, but due to the structural biases in
98 the assessment.

99 **Reimagining Multicultural Education Beyond Barriers**

100 The pedagogical barriers identified in the practical application of multicultural education in classrooms address
101 systematic challenges and require deep structural transformation in schools and classrooms. Banks (2016) argues
102 that multicultural education must foster critical awareness and democratic participation against tokenized cultural
103 representation. Banks' five dimensions are a comprehensive framework for reducing the pedagogical barriers that
104 are identified. Most of the schools and educators limit their understanding of multicultural education to cultural
105 events, festivals, foods, and traditional dresses, and ignore the crucial social injustice (Nieto, 2002). Gay (2010)
106 extends this view by emphasizing culturally responsive teaching where teachers successfully connect the students'
107 home culture with the lessons. She further argues that teachers need to have extensive training in multicultural
108 pedagogy to avoid the unconscious biases and stereotypes in the classroom. Similarly, Vavrus (2002) mentioned that
109 teachers need to integrate multicultural education into the lesson as a core component and not just a minor topic in
110 the lesson. Ladson-Billings (1995) critiques that standardized tests bring more disparities among diverse cultural
111 students when it is dominated by the majority language and cultural codes. She further argues that culturally relevant
112 pedagogy enhances students' academic performance by promoting equitable pedagogy in the classroom. These
113 perspectives align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 vision of a demanding, flexible assessment
114 system and instructional methods. Also, NEP 2020 supports regional languages to bridge learning and inclusion.
115 Furthermore, the policy addresses the need for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) by emphasizing
116 cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion in the school. Banks (2010) explains that multicultural education should be
117 accessible to all students "regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics" (p.
118 3). This conceptual grounding echoes the NEP 2020 vision of learning for all, which included the SEDGs. SEDGs
119 are explicitly categorized based on gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, disabilities,
120 and socio-economic conditions (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 24). Considering these views significantly
121 highlights the importance of integrating diverse cultures into the curriculum, pedagogy, and teachers' training and
122 creates an inclusive school environment.

123 **Conclusion**

124 Multicultural education emerges as an essential pedagogical approach for promoting equity, inclusion, and social
125 justice in India. The paper highlights that multicultural education is not confined to superficial practices such as food
126 habits, celebrations, and traditional attire, but has much more significance that addresses prejudices, social inequities,

127 and unequal learning opportunities. The discussion further reveals pedagogical barriers such as superficial
128 understanding of multiculturalism, limited representation in the curriculum, inadequate teacher preparation, pressure
129 on completion of the syllabus, and structural biases in assessment that continue to hinder the practical
130 implementation of multicultural education in schools. The conceptualization of multicultural education and
131 culturally relevant pedagogy emphasised the need to reimagine school in such a way that respects students' lived
132 experiences and cultural identities. Such a transformation required not only academic and in-textbooks but also
133 sustained teacher training and institution-level commitment to an inclusive environment. Furthermore, this concern
134 is strongly addressed in the NEP 2020, focusing on equity, access, educational needs of socio-economically
135 disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). Therefore, the paper concludes that meaningful multicultural education is central to
136 building a democratic and inclusive school environment in India.
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