



Language and Sectarian Violence in Schools.

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Abstract

Sectarian violence in schools is on the rise in many states of India. The present study deals with the causes, motives, viability and magnitude of sectarian linguistic violence in schools (Government -Aided and Government Sponsored) situated in Paschim (West)Behala assembly constituency (particularly Behala ,Thakurpukur and Sarsuna) and Budge Budge in West Bengal in the light of linguistic pragmatics. This study collects relevant information and data from victims and victimisers of sectarian violence being fanned by racial invectives, scheming vindictiveness, seething and vitriolic misogynous language, communal sallies, 'homophobic slurs and semiotics of gestures and postures'. The increasing use of language to spark off and etch out violence in all forms, both psychological and physical, is largely due to the random access of almost everybody to the internet which has the paraphernalia like google chrome,WhatsApp , Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc. There are other factors like association, family background, illiteracy and school environment for an individual, which are instrumental to build up an environment of linguistic vulnerability that triggers off a congenial ambience of sectarian violence. This study also focuses on how caste-based violence is being deliberately conceived of and resorted to by some in schools as a counterblast to protect one's own vested interests. Recommendations and suggestions are there in this paper as to how this unhealthy environment and venomous tendency inside the school premises, in particular, can be curbed and eventually stopped to ensure man-making and value-prompting education in schools and peaceful symbiosis of all, irrespective of caste, creed ,sect, clan and religion without any linguistic incitement and motivated violence. This study provides more research scope to the curious aspirants with a broader spectrum too.

Keywords: language, sectarian, violence, schools, West Bengal

Introduction:

With the meteoric progress of technologies in the recent years, teenagers (the school - goers) form the main group of internet users at random without any specific academic and professional focus. This has been exerting tremendous impact on the Modus vivendi, thought-currents, ideological conceptions , ethics, etiquette and moral behaviour of the school children across the globe. The scenario is all the bleak and disheartening in Government and Private schools of West Bengal and other states of India. Some teachers are also resorting to the language of violence to create chaos in the name of caste, creed, religion and sex. Thank God that most of the school teachers and students in West Bengal are against this tendency to use language to provoke sectarian violence and imbroglios. This is high time for fortifying the governance of cyberspace and generating intensive and extensive awareness of the evils of using language to titillate and instigate sectarian violence in schools with children and teachers coming from multicultural, multi-idiological, multi-racial and multi caste societies (Miranda Hogsett,2020).The use of a violent language in a school vitiates the healthy environment of an educational institution. It manifests itself in the form of psychological and physical violence. Unfortunately this is functional even among teachers who use defaming language to disgrace some of their colleagues on the ground of caste, creed and religion. What is most alarming is that some teachers and non-teaching employees of schools use the caste-bias law falsely as a shield for their vested interest to malign their colleagues vindictively with untold mental harassment and trauma. This is found mainly between an assistant teacher and the Head of the institution who has to take some administrative steps against any erring employees working under his supervision , following relevant rules of the School Education Department. So sectarian violence for vindictive motive is also working. The present paper deals with some cases occurring in some schools in Paschim Behala assembly constituency in extended Kolkata and Budge Budge Circle of West Bengal.

Teachers working in schools located in urban areas have to envisage a plethora of challenges that range from poverty, violence, cultural diversity and a multitude of languages. Successful teaching in these low-income, urban, multicultural schools is different from teaching in suburban settings, which have more homogeneous student populations, more parental support and more stable student populations (Cullen & Sinclair,1996).

Methodology:

Students in urban schools need dedicated teachers who respect children and youth, who actually believe they can and will learn if properly taught, and who understand the types of homes and cultures from which the children come (Wright ,1981). Haberman (1992) argues that successful teaching in low-income, urban, multicultural schools is a different order of teaching. Maeroff (1988) seconds and advocates this contention by stating that minority students need teachers who inspire them, who have rapport with them, who have high expectations of them, and who can provide students with supportive environments which bolster their confidence.Maeroff further affirms that these teachers need to be able to communicate with the parents, to modify the curriculum where needed, and to have the skills and the time to talk with students about life and its problems.

Facts and information for the present study were collected from the Heads ,staff , students and guardians of some fifteen schools. First hand experiences are also there. One-to-one interviews, case study method, some open ended question-answer sessions and threadbare discussions with staff, students and guardians belonging to different castes and religions were conducted in separate groups to elicit the actual facts in regard to the use of language to create sectarian violence. Their problems were also recorded. Document reviews and observations were also duly considered. Everything was done maintaining research ethics.

Analysis and descriptions:

As a result of the easy accessibility to internet connections, students are getting addicted to watching videos, clips , reels and films that ladle out language of violence to profane a particular caste or religious community. Disruptive and defaming words are being used by a coterie of boys and girls to show their baseless high-handedness. They even do not spare the parents and teachers to call names. Students also use code language to show their dislike for

a particular caste or religion. This leads to quarrels and even serious scuffles with bloodshed and dire consequences. Communal and racial disharmony erupts, destroying the commonwealth of the environment of peace in schools and their vicinity. Fanaticism is one of the reasons of this problem. Intolerance is another vital problem. It was also reported that some students of a particular community attacked some others of a different school outside the school premises. Threats of dire consequences were voiced.

The Indian Constitution ensures Right to Religion and Right to Freedom. India even being a federal democratic country, lots of people in India are still caste biased and religion biased, which is very detrimental to the chariot wheels of progress of our nation. We hear about psychological harassment and even lynching of the Dalits by the people of the higher caste in different parts of India. On 4th May, 2023, several teachers were killed in an outburst of sectarian violence in Northwestern Pakistan. This kind of violence is largely due to staunch fundamentalism in regard to different sects of the same religious community or different religious communities. This study collected some alarming data in respect of how some employees of some schools were victimized because of the misuse of law legislated to advocate the rights and prestige of some particular sects like Scheduled Castes (S.C) and Scheduled Tribes (S.T). The other side of the coin is that those sects are sometimes, no doubt, mentally harassed and socially disgraced by some belonging to the higher caste. But information affirms that on many occasions, the relevant law is misused deliberately and vindictively to hit some others below the belt for their vested interest. The study revealed that in some schools of West Bengal, the S.C and S.T teachers were treated in a humiliating manner coupled with derogatory remarks. This was also found among the students too. Some Hindu students hated to mix with the Muslim students in schools and vice versa. Once again, lots of students mixed, talked and shared food among themselves without any prejudice. It was also found that the Muslim students and teachers along with their Hindu counterparts in some schools in Pujali and Budge Budge in South 24 Parganas participated actively in the celebrations of Saraswati (Goddess of Learning) Puja, making the schools look like a 'mini India' (truly 'a land of unity in diversity') with the presence of students, teachers and guardians forgetting their parochial and meaningless sectarian identity. It was also revealed that some guardians feared to send their wards to schools for sectarian violence which manifested through the use of offensive and humiliating language. The data and information received for the study indicate that the use of language to spark off sectarian violence among students is largely due to illiteracy without any fluidity of rational and sociable acceptance born of a stiff and staunch fanaticism.... 'a feeling of luxury by being an isolated and uncompromising sect'. It was also found that some teachers were in the habit of inciting the use of language, both inside the classrooms and outside with groups of students, to egg on to initiate and aggravate sectarian violence. Violence in schools can seriously hamper children's rights. In fact, children who study in a violent and caste-tossed environment achieve lower academic results than those who do not. Children who are bullied will often result in a marked decline in school performance and a strong reluctance to attend schools and to participate in school activities, causing irreparable harm to the society at large. Their mental and physical health is also assaulted. They suffer from depression and mental trauma, creating a complete chaos in the commonwealth of their daily life. The children in the Upper Primary sections are adversely affected by the language of violence in their formative stage. It also has an insidious and regressive impact on pupils who witness it, creating an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and insecurity incompatible with learning. Ultimately violence or the threat of violence may be such that children drop out of school or are kept at home by the parents being pestered and worried over this tendency of the far-reaching impact of linguistic violence.

Recent studies suggest that around half of all children involved in bullying are both victims and perpetrators, and that they are the most troubled of all children involved in this manifestation of violence. Among perpetrators, boys are more likely to engage in both verbal (use of language) and physical bullying, while girls are most often engaged in verbal bullying with the use of language.

Suggestions and recommendations:

The sectarian culture on educational processes is emerging to the surprise of all the academicians. The diversity of Indian society is a mosaic composed of its 'multi ethno-linguistic and multi-religious flavour'. It has been acknowledged that the richness of diversity can provide opportunities for experience and offer an enormous volume of knowledge about various customs, traditions, and cultures and, as the literature points out. Experience can be used as a tool to bring harmony in society. Evidences from the developed countries suggest that diversity is entertained as a source of learning from people of different backgrounds; therefore, their educational systems are

very explicit regarding the benefits of multiculturalism. Preparing teachers for challenging environments is a problem which many faculties of education are beginning to examine more closely (Cullen & Sinclair). "Preparing preservice teachers for their future classrooms becomes more complex as the school population becomes more diverse and changing demographics require changing teacher education strategies" (Fuller, 1994). Faculties of education are realising that prospective teachers need more than a general education. They need "specialised knowledge of the lives and learning styles of the urban child, first hand experiences in urban schools, and an understanding of the community from which the child comes" (Reed and Simon, 1991). Stallings, Bossung & Martin (1990) express the opinion that too often new teachers who have received their field experience in the suburbs are hired to teach in multicultural, inner-city schools with little preparation to serve this population of children and families. Throughout the literature there are exhortations to faculties of education to change and improve the teacher preparation programmes to address the special needs of teachers in rural schools so that teachers can understand the culture and language of the local students. Violence through language can be minimized only if teachers can understand the background and foreground of the students.

Some of the recommendations and suggestions are enumerated below:

i) Education has a unique potential to generate an environment where attitudes connected with the language of sectarian violence can be changed and non-violent behaviour can be inculcated and learned. From children's early years, schools are well placed to impart lessons on tolerance and non-violence and provide skills to communicate, to negotiate, promote, instill and support peaceful solutions to conflicts to eliminate tension and alleviate and dodge conflicts, among pupils and staff, and also beyond, in the larger community.

ii) The civics education classroom in West Bengal does not meet the diverse cultural and value-based needs of the students. Thus, there is a serious mismatch between the outcomes of academic curriculum and practising ethics and etiquette, necessitating the incorporation of Indian Culture in the school curriculum so that students, in particular, can get to know about the lofty heritage of India, a land that has always been a shelter to all, regardless of their caste, creed, cult, sect, religion, language and ethnology.

iii) Teachers should start important discussions freely and frankly with their children inside and outside the classes about violence, smoking, drugs, sex, drinking etc openly, even if the topics are embarrassing. Very often, to begin with, parents should also be involved in the discourse sessions.

iv) Schools have the pivotal role to clearly define and redefine rules and limits set for them so that they know what is expected of them and the consequences they have to bear for not obeying the same religiously. The school authority must make it clear to the students why they should respect these rules and how these rules or do's and don'ts would benefit them in their real life situations.

v) Discipline is more effective in schools to curb sectarian violence. All staff of school should show to their children through their actions how to adhere to rules and regulations, be responsible, have empathy toward others, control anger, and keep from using language that hurts their friends and creates barrier and division, that finally leads to the unhealthy ambience of schools that they never want. And this spirit should be inculcated among the students.

vi) Schools should organize occasions and festivals to promote multiculturalism and tolerance to all sects and religions.

vii) School authority must regularly conduct parent orientation activities and parent-teacher conferences in which parents, students and teachers should compulsorily join. It should be discussed how language creates sectarian violence in schools, and how this eventually destroys the ethics and education of all of us. Teachers and parents must try to provide consistent monitoring and support so that students are properly guided not to use the language that sparks off sectarian violence.

viii) Parents need to step in and intervene when children exhibit behaviour or attitudes or use language that could potentially harm them or others.

ix) School authority should be very much unprejudiced while dealing with the caste bias allegations of some vindictive employees against whom the Heads of the institutions are compelled to take administrative steps for their 'Misconduct' and ' Misdeeds' under the relevant rules of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and the School Education Department, Govt of West Bengal, and such disturbing and polluting employees should be severely punished and censored officially and lawfully for intentionally misusing the relevant rules to cover up their misdeeds and Misconduct to save their own skin by hitting others below the belt. Such school staff should better focus on their duties and responsibilities as paid employees and teach students not to fan the fire of violence through the use of language. Any genuine complaint should also be lawfully dealt with.

Conclusion:

Regardless of their affiliations with a particular sect, all the participants of this study had consensus that the said phenomenon has negative implications on the overall academic environment of schools, and measures should be taken to eradicate the said tendencies from the school premises and outside too. It is suggested that through education a cultural norm needs to be evolved, which values the religious ,sectarian and linguistic diversity as an asset and not as a burden for society. Many children still choose not to report violence due to the use of language which they experience, due to a combination of 'the normalisation of violence, fear of incomprehension' and even punishment in the event of 'annoying' the adults. The use of language to create sectarian violence has to be stopped and it is possible through consistent monitoring and orientation programmes in schools. The school authority will have to take up the cudgel in this regard. Parents along with the local administrations must come forward to curb this problem for greater good of the society. Teachers should be well versed with the cultural and linguistic background of the students to curb this tendency of linguistic violence.

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