Social harmony among Multi-lingual students population in Sri Lankan Universities- A research special reference to Eastern University Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Universities consist of multi religious, multi-cultural and multi lingual student population, where it is expected to have social harmony among those undergraduate. However there have been recorded incidences and evidence to prove ethnic friction and linguistic Barriers in sustaining harmonious atmosphere in university education. Therefore, it is understood that the existing administrative mechanism has not improved social harmony among undergraduates of multicultural and multi linguistic background. Eastern university is teaching social harmony is in English to have a common medium of instruction. Most of the Undergraduates who entered to the Eastern University come from rural area and poor family background and they learnt in their mother language at the schools. Though majority of the university programmes are taught in English, schools have their curriculum in Sinhala and Tamil. Therefore students enrolled in to the university where their programme is in English will have trouble both in understanding the subjects as well as in communicating with other. These students face some problems such as transferring ideas, communication and interaction, mutual trust. Highlighting one community culture might be perceived as threat to others. Even after teaching social harmony at the university there are notable incidents challenges normalcy between different students communities. The research intend; a) to learn how teaching social harmony contributes to make stability in the cohesive relationship among the students in the university; b) to learn what are the programme practiced in the universities; C) to learn what are the programme undertaken in other universities; and d) to identify the challenges to sustain the harmony between different students communities. Undergraduate population of EUSL are of Sinhala and Tamil in terms of language, where majority of the programme are conducted in English except, for faculty of Arts and Culture. Social harmony programme no exception. However informal communication is primarily done in their mother languages which might lead to misunderstanding and therefore will widen the gap between different undergraduate communities. Therefore more emphasis should be laid on social harmony programmes that will bring multi ethnic students together. Cultural activities should be encouraged in addition to teaching social harmony in class.

Introduction

Social harmony or social cohesion is fairly an old concept. It made a comeback with a neo-liberal outlook within policy circles in the mid of 1990s in Europe (Jenson, 2010:4). Academic of social policy define social cohesion as a hybrid concept operating within policy communities. Therefore scholars treat social cohesion as a multidimensional phenomenon or as a

latent construct with multiple indicators. The term is in conjunction with community cohesion, inter-group empathy and mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. In Sri Lankan context the terms harmony, disharmony, community harmony, communal harmony, ethnic harmony and social harmony are commonly used in tandem with those such as unity and national reconciliation. Existence of harmony in society relations which is the result of long process of adjustment and accommodation between different social groups. It builds on mutual respect, communication and understanding of the beliefs and value systems of the other social groups. That groups may be formed by caste, religion, language, ethnicity, etc. hence the concept of social harmony cuts through the entire spectrum of social diversity.

The term social harmony cannot be defined in single away. Definitions vary from one another. It is necessary to look at the etymological meaning of the term 'social harmony' for explicating the term. The word is combine with two words social, harmony. The word 'social' comes from the root word of French social or Latin word socialism /socius. It means 'friend' – the word relating to society concerned with the mutual relations of Human beings. Other part of the word is harmony. This comes originally from the root of Greek, 'harmonia', in French 'harmonie'- it means "Joining concord" thus harmony means a combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions. So the social harmony can be simply define as "a society or human being is living together with other societies on the friendly or cordial manner".(Oxford Dictionary p)

Further the social harmony is defined "Social harmony is about maintaining level of equilibrium in economic terms in civil society. Social harmony is a multi- tiered: it encompasses harmony between all ethnic groups and cultures (between dominant culture and sub culture and cultures of different social classes): harmony in the sense of respect for a country or a culture; harmony between different religion; and harmony between man and nature (Craig Valters, (ed), (2013). In Sri Lanka Ministry of National language and social integration provides explicit definition for "social harmony as Peaceful interaction among members of social groups" Based on this it was felt by the higher education policy makers that teaching social harmony becomes essential to maintain a cordial relationships among the students. To create more awareness and interaction among the undergraduate universities started the social harmony programme.

Objective of the Study:

The research intend: To learn how teaching social harmony contributes to the stability in the cohesive relationship among undergraduates of EUSL;To learn what are the programme undertaken in other universities; and To

identify the challenges to sustain the harmony between different students communities.

Methodology:

This research is conducted based on the information of literature reviews, and the telephone conversations with coordinators for ethnic cohesion in other universities and students. Participatory observation was executed when required. And, content related to social harmony on university websites was also consulted. In addition micro soft excel has been used for the data analyzing.

Research Limitation:

This research has a limitation that only five universities are included for the research namely Eastern University Sri Lanka, South Eastern University Oluvil, University of Jaffna, University of Keleniya, Open University Sri Lanka.

Role of Education in Developing Social Harmony:

There are several factors influence on social harmony. The education is consider the only tool to positively influence and contribute to create social harmony in a sustainable pattern. In Sri Lanka as the result of the free education policy, education is free from primary education to higher education. Sri Lankan education policy align with the declaration. "The UN Declaration of Human Rights Proclaim that everyone has the right to free and compulsory education (Art-26)

This is an ample opportunity to implement social harmony through the curriculum from primary education to university education. That will pay the way to promote ethnic or social harmony in the society. At this juncture the statement of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru is noticeable "He believed that compulsory and free education is essential condition for proper functioning of democracy that builds social harmony". (*National foundation for communal harmony,)*

Education is one of the causes for any change in the society and the nation though the economy, politics, religion, are also contributing the changes in the society and the nation the education is the prime catalyst. "Destination of a nation is being shaped in its classroom"(Raju T. Agasimani 2011, p32) -Education is preparation for living but more than that preparation for living well and coherently in the world. Since all the field and activities in some form or the other are shaped by education, it is the education that ultimately transform or shapes the whole society.

When educate the people those equips and socialized so the education brings enlightenment of head and heart enabling a human being to attain the greatest harmony, internal and external, spiritual, material and fullest possible development of human potentiality and capacities.

Role of education is explicitly important in the formation of characters and personality development for a human being: education develop every child's character personality and culture. It does not merely impart information but puts life in harmony. Mahadma Gandhi emphasis "education of the heart of characters shows the proper avenue of human perfection, which can bring about social coexistence. Further education is the spirit that enkindles the inward lamp of eternal light. It is a process of change, continual and dynamic, cautious and creative, critical and intuitive, which is capable of bringing about social harmony" (Raju T. Agasimani 2011, p34)

As Sociologist Emile Durkheim has pointed out that education is powerful instrument in process of socialization as it fosters social solidarity. There is a strong correlation between education and Social harmony. Modern education has two parts part one is the professional whereby a person acquires skills to be productive in society, and part two is moral part which teaches values. That is expected to improve cohesive life of the undergraduates.

So the education is a viable tool of developing social harmony especially in Sri Lankan context because education is free for all this is more suitable building up social harmony among the undergraduate and future leaders.

University Education and Social Harmony

After the three decades of war over peace and harmony were felt as urgent need to sustain peace and development not only in the politics but also in the education as well. In Sri Lanka, social harmony is considered as an essential part in the reconciliation process for which the education can contribute to develop the social harmony especially among the young generation. Thus the UGC and the ministry of Education commenced a social harmony progaramme in the university level in 2002. A mission team worked for the implementation of the social harmony programme at the UGC level and they prepared a report in 2002. According to the mission report: "social harmony is defined as "the creation of those conditions and relationships in society that enables the peaceful settlement of existing differences between different group in society or between such groups and the state" *(UGC: 2002, p 16).*

As the result of the above and the decision of ministry of higher education and UGC under the Mahinda Sinthenai, LLRC recommendation, social harmony component has been included as compulsory subject in the University education and taught and practiced in the universities. Then some universities included ethnic cohesion, social harmony, and peace education in their curriculum. Some universities conducted programme based on social harmony, some

university have commenced the department ex: the Eastern University set up a new Department "Department of Comparative religion and Social harmony in 2006.

Importance of social harmony was felt by the academics and policy makers in the higher education sectors and they implemented the decision to commence the awareness programs in the universities.

In addition, social harmony programme has been implemented in the universities under the IRQUE, and HETC Projects. Especially the universities incorporated social harmony component in the curriculum, staffs and students visit to other universities and make interaction, teaching other languages teaching Tamil to Sinhala students Sinhala to Tamil students. Conducting different Cultural festival among the students, food festival, etc. those activities are taking forward to implements social harmony among the students and staff. At this juncture, it is better highlighting some of activities of the universities regarding the social harmony for illustrating of this research thus we will look other universities:

Social Harmony Activities of University of Keleniya

Staff and students exchange programmes for multicultural exposure; Ex: Keleniya University staff members visited to Eastern University, Sri Lanka and engaged in the siramathana campaign and conducted social interaction programme with selected villages in the Batticaloa District.

Social harmony Programme in the Open University Sri Lanka

Open university Sri Lanka is conducting a certificate course in social harmony to assimilate knowledge and awareness among the undergraduates in both languages. And prepared a study manual for social harmony programme for the undergraduates which is in Tamil and English.

Social Harmony Activities in the South Eastern University

South Eastern University is conducting the activities such as inter cultural events, sports activities to promote social harmony among the undergraduates. But the problem is how the undergraduates apply the conceptual ideas in their social life and do they have enough knowledge regarding social harmony in their university education?

Social harmony Programme in the University of Jaffna

University of Jaffna also is conducting several programme to promote the social harmony among the undergraduates. For instance University of Jaffna had organized a workshop on social harmony and launch asocial harmony manual to teach social harmony in the University of Jaffna. Now the social harmony manual "Social harmony and Conflict

resolution participant manual" is being in operation which is prepared by the David L. Phillip, and Danielle B. Goldberg Director, Program on Peace-building and Rights Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University.

Social Harmony Activities in Eastern University, Sri Lanka

Students had organized a multi-cultural festival in 2013 for enhancing the ethnic harmony among the students. Students from different communities participated and performed their cultural events that creates awareness about the different culture.

In addition Certificate course is conducted for the undergraduate to improve their language deficiency for instances: Teaching Tamil language to Sinhala students and Sinhala language to Tamil Students is being conducted under the ethnic cohesion activities at EUSL.

Definitely some short of awareness prevails among the university students through this kind of ethnic cohesive activities. But in general, the need of social harmony is felt among the Sri Lankan. National level activities also is taken place to achieve the social harmony through various agencies.

Student's ratio in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka

As such other universities Eastern University also is making efforts to implement the social harmony among the students through it curriculum and other activities. But the clashes happened in the past after teaching social harmony in the university has posited questions why the students are engaged in clash? One of the reasons was medium of instruction / languages that has made hindrance in understanding social harmony properly. In the multi –ethnic, multi -lingual context exchanging ideas, making communications each other's properly is challengeable.

When we compare the Student's ratiowith past it has been increasedsuddenly in the Eastern University in the recent past. Most of the students are from Sinhalese community. Their language is Sinhala but the medium of instruction in the Eastern University except the faculty of Arts& Culture is English. When the students are taught in English they are facing difficulty. It may course to students clash. Table 01 is clearly shows that the students ratio particularly Sinhala students enrolment has been rapidly increased.

Table: 01 Students Ratio at the EUSL

Academic Year	Science faculty	Students Ratio /Sinhalese	Faculty of Agriculture	Students Ratio /Sinhalese	Faculty of Health Care	Students Ratio/Sin	Faculty of Com.Mang	Students Ratio /Sinhalese
2008/2009	24	0	36	1	69	06	170	64
2009/2010	87	34	42	17	60	24	163	64
2010/2011	247	185	73	50	76	43	169	90
2011/2012	151	79	65	38	101	55	180	104
2012/2013	214	171	83	61	80	56	201	131
2013/2014	171	134	110	86	89	45	190	120
Total	894	603	409	253	475	229	1103	573

Overall picture of students' enrolment in the EUSL has been increased during the period which also increased faculties' students' ratio specially which faculties are offering degree in English medium. Suddenly one ethnic community student's ratio has been increased in the system made a tense in the mind of the other ethnic community students among the whole university student's community as well as the individual /faculty level. Following examples illustrate the fact.

The following Table shows that the Faculty of Agriculture students ration during the last five year

ACADEMIC YEAR	Tamils	Muslims	Sinhalese
2008/2009	25	10	1
2009/2010	14	11	17
2010/2011	17	6	50
2011/2012	16	11	38
2012/2013	16	6	61
2013/2014	9	15	86
ETHNIC TOTAL	97	59	253

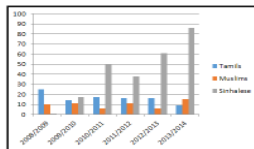**Table: 02 Students Ratio in the Faculty of Agriculture at the EUSL**

Academic Year	Total students	Bilingual/ Sinhala Students Ratio
2008/2009	36	1
2009/2010	42	17
2010/2011	73	50
2011/2012	65	38
2012/2013	83	61
2013/2014	110	86
Total	409	253

This table shows that the Faculty of science students ration during the last five year

ACADEMIC YEAR	Bio Science			Physical Science		
	Tamils	Muslims	Sinhalese	Tamils	Muslims	Sinhalese
2008/2009	6	8		10		
2009/2010	12	13	13	21	7	21
2010/2011	16	12	86	25	9	99
2011/2012	26	20	37	15	11	42
2012/2013	11	13	94	11	8	77
2013/2014	8	8	74	15	6	60
ETHNIC TOTAL	79	74	304	97	41	299

The following Table shows that the student's ratio of the Faculty of science during the last five year that has increased

Academic Year	Science faculty	Students Ratio Sinhalese
2008/2009	24	0
2009/2010	87	34
2010/2011	247	185
2011/2012	151	79
2012/2013	214	171
2013/2014	171	134
Total	894	603

Table: 03 Students Ratio in the Faculty of science at the EUSL

The following Table shows that the students ratio of the Faculty of commerce and management during the last five year

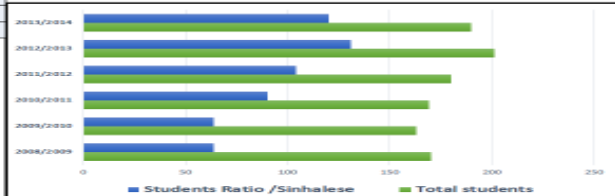| Academic Year	Total students	Students Ratio /Sinhalese
2008/2009	170	64
2009/2010	163	64
2010/2011	169	90
2011/2012	180	104
2012/2013	201	131
2013/2014	190	120
Total	1103	573

Table: 04 Students Ratio in the Faculty of Commerce and Management at the EUSL

Except the faculty of Arts & culture, student population of all other faculties have been increased after the civil war over in 2009. Due to this increase, 'Sinhala language' has become as interaction medium with the 'Tamil Language' among students communities. This is made short of unaware each other out of the class room. Even though EUSL has conducted cultural progammes and other activities to improve the cohesive relationship among the students, EUSL itself has not developed separate mechanism to let the students intermingle each other and keep a cordial relationship among the Sinhala and Tamil students to prevent the future clashes and bring the attitude changes.

Suggestions and recommendations

Based on the forgoing findings the undergraduates are being undergoing through the various training, teaching, and other programme in the Sri Lankan universities. As far as the Eastern University concerns separate department has been established for teaching social harmony, and the faculties are conducting social harmony for the undergraduates to fulfil the needs. But the language barrier still is hindering the understanding social harmony and blocking the interaction among the undergraduates. Let this process continues that barrier will be succeed by the time.

Teaching social harmony in the university level is not enough therefore Teaching Social harmony must be compulsory in Schools level. Opportunities should be created and given to the students to reflect the social harmony in their life time.

Even though the conflict resolution, peacemaking, value education and

peace studies are fairly new phenomenon in the education scenario, priority should be given in the curriculum for these course and Peace studies have to encompass the learning of non-violent communication, tolerance, acceptance of diversity and love as the basic low of life. That reflects on the deeper meanings of life and fosters the search the student's individual's potential.

The concept of secularization must be practiced among the student's communities as well as in the policy making level. In the same way, Governing Authority must direct every citizen to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of Sri Lanka beyond the short sighted looking of others in terms of religious, linguistic, and regional or sectional diversities. It must convey through its constitution like Indian constitution.

Further to above the conclusion can be strengthen through the statement "winning peace means not only avoiding armed conflict but finding ways of eradicating cause of individual and collective violence, injustice and oppression, ignorance and poverty, intolerance and discrimination". Because the undergraduates are from various communities and they have wound of war and grievances. Through teaching and conducting social harmony programmes all kind of challenges such as language barrier, discriminating mind set, and effect of war will be removed then only the social harmony among the undergraduate is possible.

Further to establish social harmony, it is must to construct a new set of values and attitudes to replace culture of war and communal violence. Social harmony or peace is not just the absence of mass destruction, but a positive internal and external condition in which people are free so they can grow to their full potential. With that I reiterate that the universities must try their level best to change the mind set of undergraduate and undergraduates also practice the social harmony with open heart.

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Figure 1: Students' Engagement in Social Interaction

Figure 2: Social harmony activities undertaken by the multi ethnic students

Figure 3: Cultural programme for Social harmony undertaken by the multi ethnic students