

### The Concept of Global Citizenship in Asian Countries

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The concept of citizenship has changed over time. In fact, many enlightened people have thought beyond the narrow confines of kingdom, empire and nation, and liberated their minds to think universally. The ancient *Vedas* speak of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, meaning, ‘the world is one family’. Oliver Goldsmith, a well-known British writer, envisaged himself as a ‘Citizen of the World’. The Red Cross, an international organisation, provides succour to those who need it, irrespective of their nationality.

In this highly interconnected and interrelated world, it is all the more imperative to heed the call for global citizenship that goes far beyond national boundaries. Values, such as acceptance and respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence and development of scientific temper are the need of the hour, and hence, must be inculcated in young minds so as to enable them to grow into global citizens, who think and work for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

One of the values that global citizenship endorses is respect for diversity. Since most Asian countries are multilingual and multicultural, the concept of global citizenship is identical to them. An overview of the global landscape as regards the philosophy embedded in various countries is elaborated as follows.

#### INDIA

The word, *Vasudhaiva*, as in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, is composed of two words — *vasudha* (meaning ‘the Earth’) and *iva* (meaning ‘is’), while *kutumbakam* means ‘family’. Together it means ‘the world is one family’. The origin of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* may be traced to the *Maha Upanishada*. The translation of the excerpts from the *Maha Upanishada* is as follows.

“The World is a Family  
One is a relative the other, stranger  
Say the small-minded.  
The entire world is a family,  
Live the magnanimous.”

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Considering none as a stranger, but welcoming each person as one would welcome a relative is the gist of the deeply embedded philosophy practised in the Indian way of life. This excerpt from the *Maha Upanishada* best expresses the concept of the enlarging circle in human relationships as reflected in day-to-day life through care and empathy for people, animals and plants. It, thereby, goes on to expand the 'circle of the mind' to the fact that all human beings share the same home, same air, same Sun, and hence, should equally care for 'mother Earth'.

*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* holds even greater significance in today's times, considering the multi-faceted challenges faced by humanity in search of peaceful coexistence, contentment and prosperity. The three notions of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) — 'solidarity', 'respect for diversity' and 'shared sense of humanity' — are deeply embedded in the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, promoted 'unity in diversity' as an ideal essential to national consolidation and progress. Concepts, such as secularism, coexistence and celebrating diversity are found in the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks in schools all over the country.

## INDONESIA

An archipelago nation, Indonesia, is composed of thousands of islands with distinct religious beliefs, cultures, languages and traditions. After casting away the yoke of colonialism, the country adopted *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the national motto. It is an old Javanese phrase, which literally translates into 'out of many, one'. It is similar to India's 'unity in diversity'. It is enshrined in Article 36A of the *Constitution of Indonesia*, and is inscribed in the Indonesian national symbol — the *Garuda*.

In the process of nation building, many leaders recognised that such a diverse nation would need to have certain principles in order to unite people. Indonesia adopted *Pancasila* (five principles) on 1 June 1945. The *Pancasila* articulates five interrelated principles that represent Indonesia's liberal democracy. They are as follows.

- Belief in one and only God
- A just and civilised humanity
- The unity of Indonesia
- Democracy
- Social justice

The five principles are integrated in school education as they form the basis for the rights of the people of Indonesia.

## BHUTAN

A Buddhist nation, Bhutan houses a diverse ethnic population composed of *Ngalops*, *Sharchops* and *Lhotshampa*. With 53 languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, the country is rich in multilingualism. It is also known for its culture of respecting the elders. The government recognises education as the basic right of the citizens. So, it accords high priority to improving the quality of learning in primary schools and expanding access to secondary education. The *Bhutan Education Blueprint* (BEBP) 2014–24 focuses on transforming the country's education system.

Education is a prerequisite for achieving the country's social, cultural and economic goals. This is in consonance with the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index followed by the country. Bhutan is the first country in the world to use the GNH Index to measure the happiness and growth of its people. The idea is to balance one's time between work, leisure and rest. This has an impact on community vitality, cultural diversity, psychological well-being and making the best use of time.

This, therefore, reflects the Asian view of life — identity is significant within diversity.

## CHINA

Being the largest Asian country, China is rich in cultural diversity. Yet the Chinese share the idea of

'Great Unity'. This concept is found in classical Chinese philosophy, which gives a utopian vision of the world, where people are selfless, living together harmoniously, trusting and helping each other, having others' best interests at heart, taking care of the elderly and children, whether related or not. Those who are widowed, orphaned, childless, handicapped and diseased, would all be taken care of. The concept finds a mention in the *Book of Rites*. This fosters solidarity among people and encourages a shared sense of humanity. The philosophy of the Great Unity is also found in school education, public relations and sports. School education in China, keeping with its ancient cultural values, aims to foster mutual respect and support for global development and prosperity.

## SINGAPORE

The country, comparatively, has a short history. However, its commitment is to being 'one united people', regardless of race, language or religion, which is enshrined in its 'National Pledge'. The concepts of democracy, peace, progress, justice and equality are enshrined as stars in its national flag.

In Singapore, harmony and multiculturalism form the basic concepts of governance since the country's Independence in the year 1965. The official languages of Singapore are Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English, and everyone is free to use, teach and learn any language as one desires (Article 153A).

Education in Singapore is bilingual. English is the main medium of instruction and students are also taught a second language, which may be Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil.

The three principles that ensure social harmony in Singapore are multiculturalism, secularism and meritocracy.

Inclusivity and respect for other cultures permeate the society through education, celebrations of

important festivals and promotion of heritage sites.

### CONCLUSION

Values like acceptance, diversity, hospitality to guests and strangers, respect for elders, etc., are common to all Asian countries. Therefore, they are universal in nature and the education system of all these countries try infusing the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, i.e., 'global citizenship', in students.