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## Multicultural Societies and Human Dignity: Human Rights Education

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### **Abstract:**

*As human dignity concerns "human", it has entered into interests of every society, every culture, every civilization and religion. However, it has mostly been discussed in the framework of human rights with the modern period. Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 1 stipulates "All human beings are born equal in dignity and rights and free." In this line, human rights refer to the innately given rights which humans are entitled to enjoy equally. These rights are expressed as the right to life, health, education, advocacy, confidentiality of private life, equal access to public services, vote and to be voted for, to acquire property and travel. This article highlights the prominent role of human rights education that defined as "a participatory process of empowering individuals and communities by raising awareness, changing attitudes and inspiring actions aligned with human rights principles" in the context of diversity and multiculturalism.*

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, human dignity, human rights, hate speech, discrimination

### **1. Introduction**

The idea of human dignity is as old as mankind and it has existed in various forms in all cultures and religions. For example, the high value given to human is seen in the African philosophy called *ubuntu*, and also in the protection of foreigners in Islam. The "golden rule" is shaped by humans' treating others as they want to be treated, is found in all major religions. The same is true for the responsibility of protection of the poor by the community and basic concepts regarding social justice (Benedek, 2014:39).

The tips of the concept of human dignity can be found in the Ancient Greek thought. Although sophists describe human being as a selfish existence that serves the interests of himself, it is known that they place human being in the centre of their thoughts and see it as the measure of all things. Stoic school of thought was held in the Roman Empire and was supported and adopted by the era thinkers in particular, including Cicero and Seneca. For example, Cicero stated that the source of law is in nature and emphasized that mind as a fundamental power reflected to humans from God can find the law. According to Cicero, all humans are naturally dignified, and their dignity constitutes the basis for the state defined as the "law society". Stressing that human being is the only living creature equipped with thinking and reasoning ability and thus uniqueness of human being, Cicero pointed out that humans hold similar rights as are similar in mind. In this context, Cicero thinks that all citizens hold a share in the public power, and honour means being ready for this public service and having the consciousness of responsibility. Thus, prestige and status of humans in public life come to the fore rather than self-worth of human. The understanding that humans, created as a reflection of God, equally have dignity became dominant with the Middle Ages. From this perspective, dignity is naturally a grace of God. Saint Agustin and Saint Thomas's approach reveals this clearly. Saint Agustin states that the Holy Spirit, composed of human memory, intelligence and the will, is in harmony with the holy spirit of God, which created the human being. However, he stresses that the mind and the will can be good or bad depending on behaviour, and praises the sacred, while denouncing other paths. Again St. Thomas indicates that human is free and the owner of dignity as a person. On the other hand, he emphasizes that he loses his dignity if he commits sin. Especially in the west and pre-medieval times, since human dignity depended on people's status, in general, the idea that everyone is not entitled to equal dignity was common. In the Renaissance period, the ideal of human dignity was not considered as an attribute of just a small elite group, but everyone has; in other words, it was transformed into an all-inclusive ideal. Indeed, first with the Renaissance and then the enlightenment movement, human has been seen as a value in itself and become a subject (Voyer, 2014).

Human rights are universal and it is based on human dignity. Recognition and legal safeguarding of human rights which target at protecting human dignity and ensuring physical and moral development also means to protect the value of human being. Yet, these rights of humans are not always accepted and protected. This situation can be clearly seen in practices such as slavery, violence and discrimination which deny human dignity and value.

In a multicultural society, protection of human dignity and protection and development of human rights is closely related to education. An educated society will inevitably look to the future confidently. Education in any area will develop knowledge, talent and experience. To raise an accommodating, tolerant, egalitarian generation which protects human dignity and human rights, the concepts related to "human rights" should be instilled via education. It is of importance to intensely instil human rights, the guarantor of human dignity for social consensus, mutual respect and living together; through education.

### 1.1. Democracy, Human Dignity, Human Rights

For some, rights and freedoms have always been there. This is another way of saying that all rights and freedoms are not always true for everyone. In the past most of the time some people were regarded more valuable and honourable than others because of their inborn or subsequently acquired properties. For example; poor, weak, common men, weak, people, peasants, women, the disabled, refugees, citizens or slaves were treated as second-class citizens versus rich, powerful, noble, urban, male, adult, strong, indigenous, kings or lords. However, with the development of human rights and freedom as a result of democracy, all these distinctions disappeared. That is the real triumph of the ideal of human rights.

Mostly discussed in philosophical and theological contexts, human dignity was started to be addressed in the context of human rights and freedom after World War II. Rights and freedoms took their place in universal legislation as protectors and guarantors of human dignity. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1949) also emphasizes on a few articles on the concept of human dignity:

- Article 1 : All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
- Article 5 : No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Article 22 : Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.
- Article 23 : (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
  - (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
  - (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
  - (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

It is seen that *The United Nations Charter* is also aimed at protection of human dignity. The nature of the treaty is described as “We have decided to willingly protect future generations from disaster of war which brought inexpressible suffering to humanity twice in a life time; to proclaim again our belief in basic human rights, the dignity and value of human dignity, and equality of rights of women and men and great nations and small nations; to protect justice and create necessary conditions for showing of respect for the treaty obligations, and to provide better living conditions in greater freedom; to facilitate social advancement; to decently behave and live in peace with each other in good neighbourly understanding, to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, to accept the principles that will prevent using of armed forces except for the common good, to benefit from international institutions to facilitate economic and social progress of peoples in order to achieve these goals; and to exert efforts to achieve these objectives” (United Nations Treaty, 1945:4).

In addition, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* states regarding human dignity that recognizing the human dignity inherent in all members of the human family and their equal and inalienable rights is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace on the earth”. Also Article 7 of the Property Rights section stipulates “Nobody shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”; Article 10 stipulates “Everyone who is deprived of his liberty is entitled to humane treatment and respect for the inherent dignity of human”. It is stated in Article 17 “No one's private and family life, home or correspondence shall be intervened arbitrarily or via violation of the law; their honour or reputation shall not be subjected to unlawful attacks” (Civil and Political Rights, 1966 :52). Also in the *European Charter of Fundamental Rights* in Chapter 1 Article 1 the principle “Human dignity is inviolable; should be respected and protected” is reminded (EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2000:9).

Jack Donnelly (2013) in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* makes the following statement regarding the relationship between human dignity and human rights: “Not for the life of human rights, but for a dignified life are human rights “needed”. As stated in the International Human Rights Conventions, human rights originate from the “inherent dignity of the human being”. Human rights violations deny a person's humanity; otherwise, they do not always obstruct humans’ satisfying their needs. Not due to the necessity of loyalty, but for an honourable life, a life for a human-specific value, due to the things “needed” for a life which would be tasteless without these rights, we have to human rights (...) Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not tell us much about what life is actually like in most countries; but indicates the conditions for a dignified life -a life valuable for a human being- and explains these requirements with all consequences in the form of human rights. Even in rich and powerful countries, these minimum standards are rarely met for everyone, however, such importance of having human rights fully manifests itself at this point, and perhaps the reason for this importance is this case. Human rights, as rights, require the social changes that are necessary for realization of the moral vision inherent in human nature.

With respect for human dignity, it is intended to protect the personal rights which is understood as as the first fundamental right of every human being. The principle of inviolability of human dignity is for the purpose of human beings’ making independent decisions and being effective in their surrounding in freedom consciousness as a spiritual being. Here independence and personality value of man is concerned, which is positioned at the focal point of the entire order. The principle of inviolability of human dignity vests to human the right to ask for being given of spiritual and social value and recognized due to being human. The principle is a value criterion for legal equality, and includes a behaviour conduct for everyone in order not to harm the human dignity of others (Gören, 2007:24-25).

### 1.2. Hate Speech and Discrimination: Violation against Human Dignity

Since hate speech and hate crimes are closely related to prejudice, intolerance and exclusion, they show their most devastating effect on individuals though they hit the biggest blow to the unity of the community and living together. Hate speech silences and passivizes its victims; thus, it directly wounds human, that is human dignity. Othering richness and diversity, eliminating respect and tolerance; hate speech takes its place among the major enemies of democracy.

The most obvious effect of hate speech includes restrictions on the victims, giving discriminatory messages, causing inequality and silencing the victims. Hate speech means escape from dialogue, silencing and thus marginalization of the victims. Through silencing of the target audience, the idea of diversity would be blocked as a result (Kınık, 2013: 3).

As Erol quotes from Zonana and Reyna, the people who have a tendency to hate speech can be evaluated in three categories: first, the ordinary citizen, neighbours and friends can be considered as those who use hate speech. Second, the groups and organizations can be counted that put actions in a more massive format. When individuals are afraid to express their prejudice and intolerance, they do express in a more relaxed manner under the umbrella of organizations and groups. Expressing hatred as a group, causes people to feel strong and feel their hatred more easily. The third category of hate speech is the 'state' (Erol, 2012: 6).

The presence of these situations, listed as the cause of hate speech, also has the potential to cause injustice, usurpation of the rights of others, and injuring the peace. One of the various aspects of hate speech, political aspect, is a "rhetoric is in pursuit of reviving all the reactionary ideas and theories which were defeated by the democratic struggle and of undermining the gains of the democratic struggle". Therefore, it would not be unfair to say that hate speech is corruptive and hurtful to the democratic order (Association for Social Change, 2010: 10).

It is a contradiction for the relationship between hate speech and democracy that freedom of expression which is both the requirement and return of democracy cover in its scope the freedom of expression which clearly harms democracy. For advanced thinking, the presence of 'others' are needed and perspectives of the others are also taken into account. However, 'otherness' is harmed and others' thoughts and evaluations are not taken into account because of hate speech. As a consequence, differences of opinion are harmed and humans are deprived of advanced thinking because of the hate speech (Kınık, 2013: 46). Advanced thinking, which is the need for a strong democracy, accommodates diversity and the views of others. On the other hand, hate speech harms democracy by trying to eliminate a requirement of democracy due to its intolerance to the other (Ozulu, 2014: 19-20).

Mahoney (1996) assumes the freedom of expression as an absolute value and emphasizes that it is basically wrong to disregard other human rights which may be in conflict of this freedom. He points out that freedom of expression should be balanced with other important values such as non-discrimination and human dignity. According to the approach which stresses the threat factor in hindering of the discourse; limitations could be introduced to expressions in cases where it is probable that the expression/discourse targets a particular person or group, the speaker has the intention of sending a message or releasing fear by means of speech and expressions, such fear is realistic, and violence may be realized. Considering unacceptability of intimidation, bullying and violence for human dignity and contradiction to human rights, prevention of expressions including such elements is emerging as a result of the necessity to balance freedom of expression with other important values (Ozulu, 2014: 19).

Prejudice and intolerance underlie hate speech. Prejudice, in general, can be defined as negative ideas based on preconceived judgements, intolerance or hatred directed at a particular group (Association for Social Change, 2010). It is not found reasonable that those who utter hate speech expect their hate speech to be recognized, respected and tolerated in the context of freedom of expression while they cannot show tolerance to those with diverse thoughts, religion, ethnicity, social class and so on.

Hate speech also paves the way in hate crimes. Hate crimes occur in different ways:

- Hate Speech: During the speech, the perpetrator forces the other group or person to change mind by insulting them due to their race, gender, age, nationality, religion, sexual preference or similar issues and by speaking menacingly.
- Moral Harassment: Could be made with the intention to exclude the victim overtly or verbally in a direct or implied manner.
- Threatening behaviours: Could be manifested in the form of threats, social intimidation, frightening persons by convening groups of people, or making unfounded complaints.
- Giving a name or nickname: Verbal insults and derogatory remarks, hurtful jokes.
- Attack via communication means; Harassing via mail, e-mail, telephone or, message,
- Graffiti; printing offensive publications; distributing such posters or leaflets.
- Physical attack against the victim: Harassment, rape, molestation, beatings, domestic violence, lynching, murder.
- Attack on the Victim's Assets: Vandal actions such as robbery, theft, extortion, arson or damaging the goods in any way (Gürler, 2010: 264-265).

Effects on the victims of hate crimes are also felt in many areas. For example; victims can experience negative feelings such as weaknesses in social relationships, anger-weighted intense emotions, depression, learning problems, and damage to the sense of professional integrity and self, one's increased doubt for the self, paranoia and confusion, the loss of trust, the victim's isolating himself, restlessness, fear, shame, anger, anxiety and defensive reflex and intimacy with those in the same situation (Gürler, 2010:267).

### 1.3. Education on Safeguarding of "Human Dignity" and Developing Human Rights

The success of living together in a multicultural society is exactly related with being respectful of human dignity and human rights. In this context, it is necessary to train individuals on human rights so as to improve the sensitivity of the community. Human rights

education can be defined as education, instruction and dissemination activities aimed at building a universal culture of human rights. A comprehensive education in human rights is not the provision of information about human rights and human rights protection mechanisms, but also the acquisition of skills needed for the use, defence and dissemination of human rights in everyday life. Human rights education should encourage acquisition of attitudes and behaviours to meet the needs of safeguarding human rights for all members of the society.

The United Nations adopted the "*Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*" at the *World Conference on Human Rights* held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993. The Declaration and the Programme of Action envisages undertaking of all kinds of legal and national measures and international cooperation in the field of education among all other things for the purpose of protection of fundamental human rights and cessation of violations. To this end, all governments are called for strengthening the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms; effective implementation of the existing human rights legislation; stopping human rights violations; eliminating all forms of discrimination including gender, racism and xenophobia, and improving and dissemination of respect for the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms by developing human rights education programs. According to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; the main purpose of the education should be to develop understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relationships among nations, racial or religious groups; to promote fundamental rights and freedoms in order to remedy the violations of human rights; and to adopt the understanding of the rule of law, democracy, public participation and civil society.

On 1 January 1995, The United Nations declared and put into effect the action plan *Decade of Human Rights Education*, referred to in the World Conference on Human Rights covering a period of 10 years. The Programme was extended until 2009 in a way also to include certain stages with a resolution made in 2005. *Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004— lessons for life* states as follows:

1. For the purpose of the goals for the decade; education should be designed to include equal participation of men and women of all ages and all parts of the society in both formal and non-formal education bodies through civil society organizations, families and daily media.
2. In order to enhance their effectiveness, human rights education efforts for the Decade shall be shaped in such a way as to be relevant to the daily lives of learners, and shall seek to engage learners in a dialogue about the ways and means of transforming human rights from the expression of abstract norms to the reality of their social, economic, cultural and political conditions.
3. In recognition of the interdependence and mutually reinforcing nature of democracy, development and human rights, human rights education under the Decade shall seek to further effective democratic participation in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and shall be utilized as a means of promoting economic and social progress and people-centred sustainable development.

The Council of Europe 21<sup>st</sup> Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, convened on November 10-12, 2003 in Athens, issued the "*Declaration on Intercultural Education in the Context of New Europe*" at the end of the conference. In the Declaration, it is stated that European societies are moving towards a growing diversity in ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religion and education systems, and stresses the necessity of maintaining the multicultural structure of European community. To this end, the Council of Europe, as a solution to the issues arising from diversity, democracy, is urged to focus their efforts on ensuring quality in education by making the main elements of education policies teaching of democracy and intercultural education. The European Council also produces a large number of materials and organize education programs under the "*Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights*" programme (Council of Europe, 2010).

Similarly, Amnesty International is performing training activities for "protecting the right to physical and rational integrity; respect for freedom of conscience and expression; and anti-discrimination" for developing human rights. In order to make effective and disseminate its activities related to human rights education, Amnesty International launched the Human Rights Education Programme of Action (REAP) at international level in 2004 (REAP). As an example of its actions to this end, opening of Amnesty International Turkey Branch of the Human Rights Education Office in Ankara can be mentioned.

The Council of Europe North South Centre Chairman Jean-Marie Heydt places emphasis on human rights education for living together. According to him; this education connects people to people, local to global, today to tomorrow, and connects challenges to opportunities. Also as pointed out by Heydt; it would be possible to say that, for example, the construction of a Europe respectful of human rights and human dignity depends on the educational experience. Heydt underlined that could happen with "education for a world-class citizenship":

1. Education for worldwide citizenship aims to encourage individuals to see the realities and advocate justice, equality and human rights for all.
2. Education for worldwide citizenship includes all aspects of education: development education, human rights education, peace and conflict prevention training, intercultural education.

Furthermore, Heydt says "Education in today's society should provide the tools necessary for interaction and taking action besides knowledge. The Council of Europe North South Centre of which I am a member develops activities to achieve these objectives. I got it at different channels for the development of education in the community in the school proficiency, it may be a source of inspiration and catalyst for change for the education at school and university. The key to success is linked to an education that will enable living together regardless of religion and culture. This training, on one side, requires adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights and the

European Social Charter, on the other hand, recognizing the different, the alien, the other. In other words, we need to know and accept our differences, while sharing our similarities and living space. The education capable of responding to today's and tomorrow's society's need for the construction of a new, optimist and encompassing Europe will add dynamism to the construction of the new Europe" (Heydt, 2016).

## 2. Conclusion

It is seen that basic human rights such as the right to life, house, to be fed, to have a nationality, to have freedom of religion and belief, to have a family, to participate in cultural activities are accepted by all, at least on paper. As an evidence, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been approved by all member countries in the United Nations. Nevertheless, it is a fact that there is still a very important difference between accepting that everyone has the same equal humanity honour and treating everyone equally.

In most parts of the world, many non-egalitarian and unfair personal or official stances and practices that undermine human dignity and value are often noted. This proves that everyone is not socially and culturally at an equal level yet. Discriminatory attitudes lead to experiencing negative emotions like "worthlessness" by individuals. In multicultural democratic societies, human rights are subject to deficiencies in some cases.

Hate speech and discrimination which are impossible to explain with freedom of expression, directly target human dignity. The rights called human rights are more fundamental than the right to freedom of expression. While *raison d'être* of the rights and freedoms is to protect the dignity and dignity of individuals; imposition could be introduced to these rights to the extent they are used to undermine dignity and freedom of individuals. Freedom of expression is an indispensable human freedom; however, it could turn into an attack against honour and dignity of individuals unless limits of hate speech are drawn. Hate speech also gives rise to discrimination and otherisation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has announced that every person is born free, and equal in human dignity and rights, and that everyone has is entitled to the rights and freedoms contained in this Declaration especially regardless of race, colour and national origin.

The fact that discrimination in many areas still continues in most so-called democratic societies despite the essential role of human dignity in human rights, raises the debate over how much human rights have been adopted and respected. Various international organizations have announced that the most effective method against human rights violations is education, and they carried out important activities in this direction. Human rights education foresees respect for ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in society without differences are marginalized. It aims to ensure people to comprehend and internalize human rights. In other words, human rights education provides not only people feel that human rights are important but also understand that they are to respect these rights and these rights must be protected.

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