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## **Dynamics of Teaching Practices in School System: A Case Study of Government School in Uttarakhand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the paper I have attempted to understand 'teaching' as a social practice in the Indian education system. Sociological study of the topic of 'teaching' in 'public school setup' is operationalised by taking teaching practice as units of the study. Contextualising teaching practices between reproduction and agency, I first understand the ongoing teaching practices and education process that are related with each other, by applying participatory observation, in which I spend my field work not only observing but also taking up the role of a teacher and meeting related responsibilities. From a reflective and autoethnographic research practice, I classify the current ongoing teaching practices as 'culturally socialised' while analyzing them from insights from structuration theory. Will this cultural socialization of teachers determine what teaching means to them and what education should mean for the society, is the real test.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Cultural Socialisation, Government schools, Sociology.

### **Introduction**

We begin with the crisis in Indian education today. To summarize; these crisis points can be divided into two:

1. Sociological and 2. Educational

Sociological crisis is the crisis of the still continuing colonial legacy and colonial educational practices in the education system in India today, whereas, educational crisis refers to the operationalisation and also of transforming of the practical problems in everyday educational context. The educational and sociological problems are however related and it can be said that the educational problems faced in the classrooms today are rooted in the sociological problems which means that it has colonial roots.

If we discuss some of the educational problems then the foremost issue is conceptualised and theorized in the research literature is that of 'banking concept' (Freire) which is similar to the concepts of 'Black Box' used by Giroux and the concept of 'received education' used by Krishna Kumar.

To quote Freire, 'Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teachers are the depositors. Instead of communicating, teachers deposit what then students memorise and repeat. This is the banking concept of education, in which the action allowed to the students extends only to receive and store the deposits.' (Freire, 2018). Banking concept is not focused on creativity and lacks the essentials of an enquiry mode of pedagogy. This results in lack of social transformation whereas education is understood as one of the prime means of social change.

In the context of the girl students, that too specially in the context of Indian society, where our study is located, the role of education in social transformation becomes more important because Indian society provides distinct experience to boys and girls based on their gender identity (Kumar, 2010). These distinct experiences are structurally located not only in the families but also continue to the school environment. It then becomes essential to enquire into the role of educational policies, curriculum and teacher pedagogy play in understanding the experiential aspect of existence of girls. In rural areas, the involvement of girl child in household activities starts from early childhood. This continues through out school- years and never receives acknowledgement (Kumar, 2010).

Also, girls have to face discrimination in many of the instances of life. The birth of a boy child is celebrated and appreciated more as compared to that of girls. According to several researches, the girls life and her socialisation centres around marriage and motherhood and therefore her education is not considered as important.

Within this background, it is necessary to enquire into what kind of education is being imparted to girls in schools. And to enquire into the nature of pedagogy that could take into consideration the societal

experience of discrimination and limited expectations from girls into consideration, it is also necessary to enquire into the nature of teaching practices undergoing in the school environment.

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

Within these broad dimensions of educational issues discussed above, the operational questions of this research were formulated and Giddens's structuration theory about human agency was found to be of foundational importance for this paper. Giddens's theoretical interplay between structure and agency is a further development of similarly oriented theories talking not particularly about agency but about structures as such; examples are Marxism and Functionalism. While applying these theories to study human action (further conceptualized as agency) the prime aim has remained to figure out the causes behind any action. While Marxism would lay emphasis on the structure in the task of analysing social actors and their actions but it owes the causal existence of actions upon structures assuming that there is no inherent human agency possible and all that is required to be altered for social change is in the structure itself.

Functionalism on the other hand emphasizes the collective and the social aspect of the social processes and social phenomenon in which an individual existence is not accounted for, hence no concept of agency in functionalism.

Giddens's agency in structuration theory is based on the duality of structures that paves way for agency in order to alter the internalized aspects of any social structure, thereby going deeper than Marxist analysis that bases its analysis on structuralism. Giddens theory defines agency as the nearest to life politics in the context of modernity and globalization impacting the everyday life of people globally. Applied to teaching practices in government schools, we saw teaching is also under the impact of modernity and colonial policies resulting in objectivist relations between teachers and students where experiences of students go unrecognised by teachers as teachers believe in transmission of knowledge and information as the only meaning of teaching and education.

The research is based on the interviews of the teachers which were part of ethnography in the selected Girls Government Intercollege, Uttarakhand.

### **Findings**

#### **A Basic Introduction of Teachers**

First of all, teachers in the selected government school have not

chosen their profession as a form of calling or vocation but due to the comfort it provides to the female teachers in meeting the dual demands of household activities and career related tasks. Teaching is considered as a soft category work and is often understood as less demanding in nature. Also, opting for teaching in schools is easy because it does not require the arduous task of clearing national level competitive exams that are quite popular in the Indian education scenario such as IAS, NEET etc. Given these predicaments, teaching is seen as job with having low status as compared to other jobs such as becoming a doctor, engineer etc.

Teachers in the school where the study was conducted were above 30 years of age and all of the teachers were female adding to the phenomenon of feminisation of teaching which primarily means that there are apparently large number of females in the teaching work force. A large number of female teachers in an all-girl school is an indication of a conservative inclination of administration. However, feminisation of teachers has been a phenomenon since after the independence when government pushed for more women in teaching profession. In 1882, the Indian Education Commission supported the training of women teachers in residential programs and also provided financial support to female teacher trainees (Jandhyala, K., & Ramachandran, V, 2015). Since then, the suggestion about increasing female participation in teaching has been part of five-year plans. Jandhyala and Ramachandran (2015) highlight that the first five-year plan suggested part time teaching for married women, second five year plan increasing girl education which could not be achieved in the subsequent five year plans.

### **Teaching Practices in the School**

Coming to the teaching practices in government schools, it was found that Teacher's pedagogy was tautological in nature under the effect of cultural socialization and influence of one's own educational experiences. This means that teachers practice the same teaching activities year by year and perceive the end of education as merely for clearing examinations of all sorts (in and outside the school premises). Instead of teachers as organic intellectuals, they see themselves as mere transmitters of information. This internalisation of teaching rituals and meanings about teaching activities do not allow them to believe that the teachers are most importantly, a link between the outer world/syllabus/curriculum and the inner world (emotions, perceptions, feelings) of the students. Teachers in the system are seldom made to realise this difference between the outer world and the inner world, a concept so popular in alternate education models. In contrast,

teachers see instructions as their pedagogy which becomes their source of authority to control the thought process of the students while misunderstanding their actions as educative.

### **Discussion**

The phenomenon of 'cultural socialization' of school teachers as discussed above, has implications upon public school teacher's teaching techniques, teacher student interaction, meaning making process about education etc. Atkinson and Delamont(1985) say that the socialisation of teachers happens in form of training that they undergo in pre-service and in-service training sessions. They highlight few essential features of occupational reproduction and say that like any other profession, teaching also replicates itself. What is problematic in this replication is that there is no change in this replication and the dominant forms of structures get replicated. For instance, in our case, patriarchal values that impact the lives of girl students, and are not broken or changed by school education.

This paper emphasises on the observation that these described phenomenon exist merely due to the socialization of teachers during their own time in educational institutions as students and as teachers in teacher training programmes and also the internalised ways of teaching that they were resorted to as enacted by their own teachers.

Moving further, the thesis also highlights the meaning making process with teachers and students about the purposes and aims of education. Education in the school is seen as confined within the four walls of the school and in transmission of the contents of the textbooks. Teacher's role and effectiveness is measured and recognised only in transmitting the information in textbooks.

### **Passivity among Teachers and Students: The Outcome of Textbook Centric Curriculum**

Because teachers have to focus on a prescribed syllabus (the basis of examinations and evaluation; both of the teachers and students); the agency that teachers can exercise over the curriculum is lost (Pinnar, 2004) resulting in teachers becoming passive.

Mary Koutselini (2012) acknowledges that textbooks have replaced the curriculum in many schools. Textbooks have replaced the curricula in various contexts, and teacher's preparation for teaching; they have downgraded student's autonomous learning and annihilated teacher's political sensibilities. (Koutselini 2012).

In the discussions with teachers it was difficult to question the

reliance on textbooks. Though textbooks have their important role but becomes a problem when teachers rely heavily on them.

In this article, we are highlighting the point of cultural socialisation of teachers. Cultural socialisation of teachers or the way teachers themselves have understood what teaching means by the way, they themselves have been taught whether in their educational years, pre-service or in-service trainings. In India specifically, education systems still continue to reproduce the colonial forms and purposes of teaching. Being an objectivist mode of knowledge production and dissemination, and with an intent to modernise education; the existing colonial residues of colonial structures, these relations have resulted in deep impersonalisation between teacher and student relations reproducing authority of teacher.

Apart from this, it was found that the prime focus of teachers in the school was to cover up the syllabus in an academic year. It was observed that teachers were in a mental rush because of the above pattern (focus on syllabus completion and exams results) since they had to complete their courses in time. When discussed, this aspect seemed as inevitable and obvious. But it took some time to get the point across that this entire phenomenon has reduced interaction between teachers and students drastically since teachers are worried about their performances and finishing up the syllabus in time. Education rather than being dialogical has become a one-way process in which teachers are continuously bombarding students with information and facts, what Paulo Freire called 'Banking education'. Moreover, the educational practice of the teachers tends to merely translate what is given in the text books. Nothing else seems to exist apart from the text books resulting in passivity and dormant teaching techniques.

### **Experience of Teaching in Government School: Agency Amidst Standardization**

I began with describing the overall 'essence' / 'education environment' of the school, generated out of the activities of teachers and students. Mostly teaching activities are follow up of the guidelines that teachers receive from their higher authorities or have learned in due course of their trainings and socialisation process. These individual activities define the meaning of the school, schooling, meaning of education in the minds of teachers and overall meaning of teaching as a practice. All the teachers share a common goal; to get what they like to call 'good result' (the most common theme of the interaction among teachers and the principle) which means the overall performance of

the entire school. This particular aspect is important for two reasons: First, the image of the school in nearby villages from where most of the students come to school and secondly as an indicator of the performance of the teachers. A good result is a reflection of schools performance and the measure of teacher and teaching quality. Therefore the conundrum of teacher and teaching activities in the school surrounds in achieving the set standards to be achieved by students. Teachers apply various methods to achieve these standards in the classrooms learning to answer the questions of each chapter under the prescribed syllabus.

The fear and crisis related to performing well in standardized tests and examinations, is reshaped by several publishing houses which thrive on the culture of specified syllabus and strategies to clear the exams sold in formats as quick success modules. These modules are only available and affordable to a certain class and section of the society thereby increasing the inequality gap. The limiting and restricting syllabus focuses only on few skills necessary for fulfilling utilitarian purposes. Reliability on the objective tests also demeans teacher's capabilities, judgements and potential to think on their own hence developing agency.

To summarize these impacts, deskilling, routinisation, alienation, detachment and disengagement are some of the experiences teachers undergo when teaching is understood to be a technique to suit an examination based system. To be able to act otherwise means being able to intervene in the world or to refrain from such intervention with the effect of such influencing a specific process. Means to be able to deploy a range of causal powers influencing these deployed by others. (Giddens 1986 pp. 14).

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