

Reproduction and Contradiction of Cultural and Political Ideologies in Education

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Abstract: The role of education in the reproduction of the social relations of production, control and division of labour cannot be negated. School systems may reproduce class and status relations. It is in this context that this paper makes an attempt to look at wider political ideologies and cultural struggles that influence the school curriculum and textbooks. It aims to bring out holistic understanding of how various political and cultural ideologies prevalent at various levels of society perpetuate the educational system. The paper also highlights that schools need not be looked at as mere sites of reproduction but that of resistance as well.

Keywords: Social and cultural reproduction, ideology, hegemony, dominant classes, resistance.

INTRODUCTION

“If we do not transcend the idea of education as pure transference of a knowledge that merely describes reality, we will prevent critical consciousness from emerging and thus reinforce political illiteracy.” (Freire, The Politics of Education).

Since late 1960s, theories of social and cultural reproduction have been at the forefront of radical education and curricular research. Marxist critical educational research generated insights regarding the role of power and ideology within the schools and its relationship to the nature and function of education. The role of education in the reproduction of the social relations of production, control and division of labour cannot be negated. School systems may reproduce class and status relations. Education system needs to be viewed as a part of a larger economic and ideological configuration in terms of its relation to class and its control of production and distribution of economic and cultural power.

This paper firstly, discusses social and cultural reproduction theories in brief and then goes on to discuss wider political ideologies and cultural struggles that influence the educational system and curriculum. This is done through discussing various researches. While each research looks at only one aspect the aim of the paper is to relate the researches to bring out holistic understanding of how various political and cultural ideologies prevalent at various levels of society perpetuate educational system. The last section provides an assessment of reproduction theories in the form of Marxist approaches towards educational analysis.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION THEORIES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Marx states that the ideas of ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, as the classes that have the means of material production also own and control the means of production of ideas. Elaborating the Marxist view, Althusser points out that ideology is indispensable and that schools have become most important ideological apparatus of the liberal democratic state. While Althusser focuses on dominant ideology, Gramsci focuses on hegemony which is constructed with consent of different groups within the society. The notion of consent brings with it the acknowledgement of indoctrination wherein, educational institutions are the main agencies of transmission of a dominant culture.

While theories of social reproduction rightly recognised the link between schooling and ideology, theories of cultural reproduction attempt to focus the argument around social class and culture. Bourdieu argues that school curriculum serves the cultural and therefore, class interests of the middle and upper classes [1]. He states that the transmitted culture is closer to the dominant culture and that the mode of inculcation similar to that of the middle and upper class family. Thereby, middle and upper class students benefit from the school system. According to Bourdieu and Passeron, the cultural capital of dominant classes is reproduced in school through language, curriculum and pedagogy. Within the Indian education system, English language—the language of dominant classes—acts as a barrier for subordinate classes to overcome.

This brief discussion of theories will serve as a background for the discussion on the educational system and curriculum. Most researches that focus on the reproduction of dominant culture and ideas within the education system and curriculum, analyse textbook content for biases and ideologies. This emerges from the fact that texts serve to be tangible and influential tool of curriculum. Kumar [2] states that texts contribute to wealth of symbolic forms that people use to bind themselves together. This act of 'binding themselves together' may also be seen as exercising ideological influence, hence the focus on textbook. This aspect is discussed in the following section.

IDEOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The researches that focus on the reproduction of dominant culture and ideas, attempt to answer questions such as 'Are textbooks determined by ideological and cultural forces?', 'Do textbooks reproduce social division of labour?' and so on. In 'Image, Ideology and Inequality', Scrase [1] looks at Bengal textbooks and analyses their content to find that the cultural capital of the middle class is validated through the textbooks. The legitimization of culture of the dominant classes occurs at dual level in the textbooks—overtly and covertly; overtly through bias, stereotype and distortion of subaltern culture and covertly through omission of and silences about subaltern culture. Various examples of these are provided such as, 'the stories of contemporary village/peasant life tend to idealise village as the peasant appears to own land and the burden of their labour and limited opportunities are not discussed at all'. In many stories subaltern classes are portrayed as lazy, foolish and deceitful for instance, in one of the stories—The dishonest watchmen—the watchmen steal their employers' fruit. The stories on India's history and nationalist struggle deny the role of subordinate classes as none of the stories discuss them. In textbooks the subaltern are without their voice and so are their deeds.

The dominant classes defend and retain their vested interests in deciding the content of school curricula and textbooks. In 1980, the Bengal government decided to introduce new primers in place of books called *Sahaj path* on the basis that it was written for the middle classes and was not suitable for peasants. The wide criticism led the government to back down on its own attempt. Thereby, Bengali *bhadralok* managed to maintain their control over what they perceive as their institution—education system.

The textbooks reflect the worldview of dominant Indian social classes. It prevalently discriminates against the social and the cultural interests of the subaltern. Textbooks serve as tools for the

reproduction of both class and class relations and thereby reproduce established hierarchies of social order and prestige within contemporary Indian society. The research data indicates that the middle class occupations are predominantly presented in contemporary urban setting while peasant labour set is in historical village time. Textbooks portray class and cultural differences as 'natural'. This type of symbolic violence promotes taken-for-granted view of the social order while real relations of power and dominance remain hidden.

The ideological components elucidated in textbook content reproduce cultural hegemony where oppositional forms of ideology are not presented. Scarse [1] states that middle class children are constantly being exposed to this type of ideological bias and distortion and will carry the 'cultural baggage' reproduced at school. He voices his apprehension about the fact that the majority of these children will end up employed as administrators and government employees.

Besides dominant class ideology, the ideology of the State also influences school curriculum. The role of the State is not only to provide the funds for building the educational infrastructure but also keep in check any vested interest of a particular group as far as curriculum is concerned. The State has to ensure that the fundamental values enshrined in the constitution are not violated. It is the duty of the State to ensure that in no school is any child exposed to any kind of prejudice and hatred. Kumar [3] while analysing Indian and Pakistan history textbooks found that the teaching of history arouses only political concern in both the Nation States. It never translates itself into a concern for the children who are at the receiving end. Through the study he shows how nation- building assumes so dominant a position among the aims of children's education in younger nation states that there is little opportunity to pursue its other aims such as intellectual development. In Pakistan, during the regime of Zulfikar Bhutto there were numerous initiatives to construct an ideological apparatus under the banner of 'Islamisation'. While Pakistan authorities used the State education to harness political support of the *Ulema* (here State reproduces itself through religion) in India Kothari Commission advocated education as prime instrument of propagating nation-building.

During this period, publication of textbooks under State run bodies gained approval. Thereby, both countries strengthened State control over education and made it into a tool for nation-building. Each State moulded history according to its process of identity building. Items that seemed worthy of elaboration in textbooks were the ones that suited the state's 'nationalist' ideology. For instance, most Pakistani books discuss the biography and contribution of Syed

Ahmed Khan at great length while Indian textbooks confine their description to his educational efforts. Another instance is that of the sketchy presentation of the period 1937-1939 in Indian textbooks; the period of controversy is eliminated in order to sustain congress's impression as a moral force. The late 1930s occupy significant place in all Pakistani textbooks.

Also while Indian history ends with the attainment of Independence, Pakistan's post-Independence history—Pakistan Studies—frequently mentions Kashmir. In Pakistan and India, textbooks represent the grammar of national ideology. Through these examples it is more or less established that Indian and Pakistani schools attempt to socialise the young into rival ideologies of nationalism. This politics of history writing serves as a means to understand contribution of schooling to indo-Pak conflict as representations of the past dispersed by institutions such as schools and the State serve as mental maps which guide children and people in shaping their responses to the present times.

Even in contemporary times re-writing of history as well as textbooks takes place with change in government at the Centre. The textbooks seem to be politically neutral objects but in reality, these 'neutral representations' propagate political ideologies. The State is supposed to be free of prejudice and bias but it indeed pursues ideological goals by forming committees and through their representatives as discussed above. The policy which the State makes translates easily into curricular and textbook practices. The way in which knowledge is selected, organised and transmitted is largely defined by goals of educational policy of the state. Therefore, the State plays a crucial role in influencing education.

CONCLUSION: INSTITUTIONS AS SPACES FOR RESISTANCE

The studies discussed above show how ideology is reproduced and how in turn students get influenced and the bias in the ideologies is reproduced in the minds of the young. These studies overlook the fact that social structures are the result of human activity and not the source, these studies tend to deny humans their agency. They do so by ignoring important issues regarding the role of consciousness, ideology and resistance in schooling processes.

Hegemony is produced (and contested) by everyday cultural practices in and out of education [7]. Schools are not 'black box' and children are not merely waiting for necessary information to be fed with. Theories that assume students passively accept what the school teaches undertheorize resistance in and out of schools. The difficulty with reproduction framework is that it fails to deal with 'deviations' and chart how they occur. Students often reject or contest the overt and

covert messages of institutions. Therefore, reproduction and contestation go hand in hand, for instance, Willis' [4] study of working class kids shows that schools may not always be successful in reproduction. According to Gramsci, in the institutions there will be countervailing tendencies too. To study knowledge in language of reproduction is to deny meaning of symbolic representation and human activity in terms of construction of knowledge [5]. Knowledge is a process of transformation and not a 'natural' fact. Knowledge as transformative social activity implies that the 'system' is our own doing and hence one becomes aware of the reality. The next step is to take control of knowledge. To be aware of reality is to gain class consciousness and thereby participate in remaking of text. Such kind of open texts engage humans and make them into subjects—active. The aim of the education, which reproduces class ideologies and class relations, is to make humans passive and immobilise them. Here, education becomes a cultural commodity at the hands of the State and the dominant class. Wexler [5] points out that it is through schooling only and the spaces that are carved out for resistance that humans (students) learn to want more space.

Education needs to be seen as a part of a struggle that constantly changes as a result of previous struggles. Education system is a State apparatus that is both the result of social and economic contradictions and a space for new struggles. The theories of reproduction while emphasising importance of textbooks overlook the influence of family, media, peer group and popular culture in harbouring countervailing ideologies. Gupta [6] shows how perceptions of children about life or the 'other' are influenced by the family and the socialisation that takes place through it. Similarly, Willis [4] documents influence of peer group where the 'lads' as a group show resistance to schooling practices and produce a counter culture and ideology that is oppositional to dominant middle class culture. Therefore, culture is also produced in schools and not merely reproduction of culture takes place.

The influence of textbooks also depends on the material conditions in which text is transmitted and the pedagogic practices. Therefore, to say that text will influence the students is not sufficient. The idea is to demystify educational and textbook practices and processes and enable them to become a tool of resistance to domination instead of their current construction as instruments of domination and control. Here, it becomes imperative to understand the role of family, state, dominant class and mass media outside the school, the actual social relations (peer group and teachers) and knowledge within the school and finally the way people respond (acceptance and resistance) to the ideological and cultural messages that these institutions are presenting.

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