

In Search of 'Relevant' Education

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Margaret Mead once cited an instance of how at the end of a lecture on primitive education, in which she described the learning of various skills by children of the Manus tribe, she was asked by a woman if they had any "vocational training". This question, according to Mead, ".....epitomized a long series of changes which stand between our idea of education and the processes by which members of a homogeneous and relatively static primitive society transmit their standardized habit patterns to their children" (Mead, 1974:19).

Apart from drawing a distinction between education in tribal and other cultures, the narrow perception of education as constituting only formalized processes such as vocational training brings to our attention that educational/learning processes take place outside the formal system as well. Rather than viewing education solely as a formal process, it is seen here within the gamut of socialisation. The latter thus includes processes that occur not only within the privacy of family settings or the community but in formalized educational contexts as well. While primary socialisation consists of knowledge transmitted in the course of life in the homes and community and not through special training, formal education, understood as secondary socialisation, is distinct from this. The formal processes of secondary socialisation pre-suppose a preceding process of primary socialisation and continuities between them are understood to make the former acquire a greater reality for those socialised. The more these techniques make the continuity between the original and new elements of knowledge subjectivity plausible, the more readily they would acquire the accent of reality.¹

Furthermore, an insight is also derived on the relationships of micro and macro processes of socialisation, represented by learning processes in the home/community and the school respectively for the latter represents a larger national (or possibly even international) entity. For this reason education is understood as a type of socialisation and referred to as secondary socialization learning processes in the home constitute primary socialisation.

The relationships of formal education and the culture of children's homes, have been explored by sociologists of education in India and the West. But they have often paid more attention to formal education and only secondarily looked at primary socialisation. Local

culture and processes of socialisation that come within its gamut, are examined inasmuch as they affect formal education (Tomlinson, 1984; Young, 1971; Kumar, 1989). Alternatively educational knowledge - in particular curriculum - is evaluated by the yardstick of relevance and/or being functional² (the latter in India) which are not always defined clearly but generally are understood in a normative sense. That is to say, a curriculum is considered suitable or relevant, and therefore appropriate, according to whether it matches/ confirms/ replicates/draws upon the experience of children's or adult's culture (Young, 1971, Kumar, 1989; Keddie, 1971, Midwinter, 1972). Since the issue of relevance in education has been raised in a few different contexts, I shall discuss its emergence in some of these. What is significant about this view of relevance is that it is common to academic statements, policy formulations as well as the practice of education. But relevance is not understood in terms of the aims and objectives of an educational message that may often be in contradiction with what peoples' cultural milieu and "needs" are. It can be taken for granted that an educational system and its goals have to take into account the lives, language and culture of those to be educated, yet it is not only inevitable but may also be important that education, as a process of secondary socialization stand starkly at odds with and criticise the local culture/cultural traditions that are transmitted through primary socialization.

The arguments for culturally derived and culture specific educational systems and knowledge have been made by scholars and policy makers. MPD Young (1971), for example, in justifying these assumed a relativist position in maintaining that there is nothing philosophically or scientifically superior as to be of greater educational value in what comes to be defined as school knowledge, instead of other alternative types of knowledge or thought systems. According to him: "Formal education is based on the assumption that thought systems organized in curricula are in some sense 'superior' to the thought systems of those who are to be (or have not been) educated". (Young, 1971:13). That all cultures are equally valid and adequate to be organised and included in school knowledge is the relativist view propounded by this stand point. Furthermore, it criticises the view that access to educational opportunity is significant and important for class mobility or for understanding - and resolving - the problem of educational inequality. This view is defined in terms of a concept of relevance, which is closely akin to familiarity. This position, has been critically analysed as:

an approach to educational reform from the direction of sociology of knowledge and curriculum which dignifies lower class culture ... and which arises from the learners own definition of what counts as educational knowledge If this means anything, it

means that those of 'low' social class are to be commended for wanting to hang on to their cultural identity. (Entwistle, 1979: 103).

Similar to Young, Eric Midwinter discussed the question in very similar terms in arguing against an Education that is "alien". Its desirable opposite would be "relevant" and "scientific" education, Midwinter suggested a multiplicity of curricula deriving from an egalitarian position and this implied the setting up of many types of schools, each catering to the local community (Midwinter, 1972). This view has been critically assessed as being inimical to the goal of equality rather than promoting it, for it would lead to something of an apartheid in education. As Mary Warnock puts it:

However much they may grow up happy, having enjoyed school rather than hating it; however much they may now understand their own community, having studied it rather than the history of the Italian Renaissance., still the fact will remain that few of them, if any, will earn as much money or wield as much power as their neighbours up the hill, who also studied their culture and community, but whose culture happened to be concerned with national rather than local politics, with international languages rather than neighbourhood patois (Warnock, 1977:83).

The multiple school systems catering to "Relevant" issues that are based on the children's own community and therefore are familiar would have an emotive aspect as well. This view of cultural relativism however does not recognise the very real hierarchy in knowledge and education. This is very clearly brought out by Delpit in the context of American education in examining the assumptions to two points of view of the middle class liberal educator and the poor Black recipients of education. The formers' view is characterized:

To provide schooling for everyone's children that reflects liberal, middle-class values aspirations is to ensure the power, the culture of power remains in the hands of those who already have it.

Some children already have the "Cultural capital" before they come to school to use a term use by Apple (1979). This is similar to the view held by Bourdieu in this concept of the habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).³ Therefore liberal educators are of the view that education must aim at making children autonomous and develop without forcing external and arbitrary standards. As part of the progressive education the approaches developed are the "process" methods of teaching writing, whereby supervision/ correction by teachers is kept to a minimum. Similarly the child-centered approach implies minimal intervention by teachers and allows children maximum freedom to develop in learning in a given environment.⁴ While this

a reasonable end for people for who are already the participants in the "culture of power, those who do not function within that culture want something else, namely, "to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles and spoken and written languages codes that will allow them success in the large society" (Delpit 1988: 285).

As an example the "dialect readers" introduced by White liberal educators in the US were seen as a means to "prevent the schools from teaching the linguistic aspects of the culture of power, thus "dooming Black children of a permanent outsider caste". As one Black parent demanded of her children's school: "my kids know how to be Black - you all teach them how to be successful in the White man's world". This is evidently a recognition of the existing participate in it. Thereby it asks that all students may be enabled to participate in the mainstream of American life.⁵ Delpit, however, makes the point that while all children, through schooling have access to the codes of power, "To act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same", but this does not imply teaching students "to passively adopt an alternate code" but also to "learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent" (Delpit, 1988: 296).

Access to prestige and power through education in India has almost parallel situations, for example, the advantage of those who have received English education is easily illustrated in the scramble for education in elite schools. Thus when rural women expressed the desire to educate their sons in English schools; they clearly perceived this to be a means of access to a higher status or elite culture (Khullar, 1989).

The mushrooming of English medium schools, courses that teach English such as the "rapidex" or English-in-one-month are all instances of the rush to acquire the culture of power in India.

These observations are important in understanding several spheres of education but particular attention is focussed here on the education of women and religious education within the gamut of education for equality in India. That education must be relevantly peoples' lives on the face of it seems a reasonable demand made by researchers and planners, but there is a need to closely examine its implications, which I attempt in the following pages.

Gender Relativism in education

The term "relative" is used in sociological/anthropological parlance as distinct from-an absolute or ethnocentric point of view. For example, Geertz argues, for a relativist framework for understanding cultures so as to guard against ethnocentric interpretations (Geertz, 1973).

Thus in this view cultures need to be understood within themselves rather than being measured by an external and alien yardstick of Western or other culture, by which they cannot be explained. The perspective thus defined is one of "cultural relativism".

That cultures of different classes in the same society should also be accorded equal dignity is a further elaboration of this, as in the views of the "new" sociologists of education briefly discussed earlier. By appending the term relativism to gender I am borrowing a usage to refer to theories and practices that seek to provide an education for women that is supposedly relevant for them and caters to their specific needs. In the name of doing so a segregated education for women/girls is justified.

A sphere where the question of relevance has often been raised is that of women's education in India and it would not be wrong to say that is a subject that has been plagued with biases as to what is relevant for them.

The, differentiation of curricula for men/boys and women/ girls in India, was first justified on the grounds that there were great disparities in their schooling and education (Hartog Committee, 1929). Thus the need to prescribe a suitable curriculum for women was emphasised so as to bring them to a common level. Further more, reasons such as differences in the roles of women and girls their intellectual and physical inferiority were attributed for legitimising the demarcation (National Committee, 1959, Basic Education Committee 1938-39). Concomitantly there were instances of reformist thinking and practice that made no distinction between the education of boys and girls. The writings and experiments of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were some such examples (Mazumdar, 1989; Mazumdar and Pandey, 1988).

While objectives of education for women and men were not differentiated in the Constitution of India, there is mention of "special provisions for women and children". The first Five Year Plan stated the purpose of women's education as no different from that of men's, but made note of "vital differences in the way in which this purpose has to be realized" (First Five Year Plan 1955, Chapter XXXIII: 357). Increasing the enrolment of girls in primary education and expansion and consideration of secondary and higher levels were considered to be the major purposes here.

The issue of girls' education was viewed within the framework of a "democratic society" in the Secondary Education Commission. It clearly refused to visualize a Differentiated system, "differences which may lead-to variations in the, standard of intellectual development achieved by boys and girls cannot be envisaged" (Government of India, 1953:56). The question of bringing the education of girls at par with that of boys remained, nonetheless and was

addressed by the National Committee on Women's Education in 1959. It outlined the issues of widening enrolment gaps; wastage and stagnation at primary and secondary levels; gender differentiated curricula; lack of special educational facilities, for adult women and the need to view women's education as a special problem.

The subject of differentiated curricula received specific attention from the Hansa Mehta Committee on Differentiation of Curricula for Boys and Girls in 1962. It saw differentiation as a perpetuation of existing traditions of an unequal division of labour, leading to corresponding subject divisions, and dubbed them unscientific (Government of India, 1959:15)

The Report of the University Education Commission criticised the existing education system as based as it is upon men's needs" and which did not in any way make women "fit for coping with the problems of daily life (Government of India, 1950).

While subsequent statements of policy on the subject have yet the intent and practice of making women's/girl's education a special category, different from that of men's has often been qualified as making it "relevant" to their needs. For example, the Ist Five Year Plan stated that the objectives of education for men and women are generally the same but "vital differences" were noted in the way it was to be realised. This statement of intent of giving equal treatment to boys and girls in education was reiterated in the Mudalier Commission on Secondary Education in 1958 to examine the factors hindering the education of girls and to bring it at par with that of boys. Curriculum for boys and girls was to be made common at the primary school stage. (The Committee on the differentiation of Curricula for boys and girls appointed in 1963). The Bhakta Vatsalem Committee (1964) sought to create special programmes whereby the education of girls was to be specially emphasized in the expansion and improvement of education. In a similar vein, the Kothari Commission Report (Government of India, 1966) also recommended more determined efforts to close the gap between education of men and women. While the problems besetting education of women were acknowledged, the Commission endorsed the views of the National Council of Women's Education (Government of India, 1959) and the Hansa Mehta Committee (Government of India, 1962).

In a stock-taking appraisal of the situation of women's education and literacy, the Committee for the status of Women in India (CSWI) (Government of India,1975) reviewed the role education has played and can do so in improving the status of women. That education has not been an instrument for improving the status of women has been amply demonstrated in the findings of the Committee.

There have been several indicators of the widening gap in the literacy levels of men and women (Pandey 1987), and more recently programmes to remedy this have been proposed. The scheme of functional literacy for adult women (1982) assumed that such a programme for women should "endow them with necessary knowledge and skills to perform the functions of a housewife, such as child care, nutrition, health care, home economics etc." (Government of India, 1982:1).

Clearly these are matters that are vital for the lives of all humans, yet, what is not quite evident is how (a) the eradication of illiteracy among women is to be achieved through such a scheme and (b) constitutionally conferred "equal rights and equal opportunities - political, social and economic" - are thereby to be gained by women.

While "attitudinal change" is one purpose set out in an introductory paragraph of the document, what is not clear is how such a. scheme will achieve this. What it sets out is possibly a scheme for skill formation for women at a higher technological level but cannot be taken to be one for achieving equality (not even in the sphere of education) between men and women. It reasserts the existing gender gaps, which may be perpetuated through and in education and literacy drives and marks a return to the view that women's educational needs are distinct and therefore education for them is not to be based on men's educational needs (Government of India., 1982).

Education as an agent of change in the status of women has been envisaged in several of these documents which have set out policy in India. By implication, there is the unstated acknowledgment that education of women must/ should endeavour to influence all spheres of their lives, not only within the educational system but also beyond. Clearly the influence of education should therefore attempt to change their situation in occupational settings, within familial contexts and thereby as a whole in Indian society. While the needs and situations of women and girls have necessarily to be kept in mind in formulating an implementable policy, there has been a tendency to water down their education as of a special category distinct and separate from educational needs of men. This has led to the tendency of treating women once again as a "purdah" category, to be scheduled and treated to an educational process that is different and unequal in terms of equality and quantity.

Experiments in women's education in India have often been based on the sane conception of their distinct-educational needs. Apart from the educational system provided by the state, other experiments in women's education have sought to provide education that was thought to be relevant for women. In fact, women's education in India inherited a legacy from

its nineteenth century beginnings and we need to evaluate to what extent its aims and objectives have changed since then?

As Mary Warnock put it "there is a world of difference between the equal right to education and the right to equal education" (Warnock 1977:26). However, it was neither one nor the other right which originally prompted the beginning of, women's education in India. It was the need of the day - stated often as the need of men to have "educated wives", in the nineteenth century. This is borne out by accounts from different regions, for example, nineteenth century Punjab and Bengal saw the introduction of Western learning through Western institutions. As part of the social and educational change there emerged the need for women to become the right kinds of helpmates to their husbands. Whether this emerged from the men internalizing Victorian attitudes towards women in Bengal, as Karlekar puts in (Karlekar, 1990: 14), for was part of the Hindu reformist movement of the Arya Samaj analysed by Kishwar, the instance of the Kanya Mahavidyala (KMV) in Punjab, a beginning was made to educate women so as to perform their supportive wifely roles.

It is interesting to note that in making out a case for motherhood and wifedom as the correct and legitimate roles for women, the Vedic Magazine of the Arya Samaj spoke out against women's education saying that "There is a world of difference between equal rights and same rights" (cited in Kishwar, 1986: WS-21).

This perception is so uncannily similar to that of Warnock's cited above but was meant to justify, an opposite end, that is, to state as legitimate the different - and therefore unequal - education to be given to women or for not educating them at all. To give an identical education to women and men was perceived as threatening to the male bastions of dominance. That similar education or work for women and men is seen to be threatening is borne out in reactionary/fundamentalist ideologies and practices such as those of the RSS and Jamaat-e-Islami, both of which recognize gender inequality to be an intrinsic component of their organizations (Mishra, 1987). Implied, in these views was the unequal difference that was recognised by educators of KMV and which must be maintained between men and women and what they are to be taught. Thus "gender relativism" very much colours the view that sees distinct and demarcated areas of relevance of knowledge for women and men. The difference is not an innocuous one but recognises the culture of power in which women must not participate, or even have access to, through an education identical to that of men.

However, it is argued by Kishwar that despite the purpose of the KMV experiment being that of inducting women and girls into the sup positive roles of wives and mothers, the educative process nevertheless led to creating preconditions for alleviating the "crippling

aspects" of women's oppression (Kishwer, 1986 WS-23). That education, even if it was for an adequate performance of supportive wifely roles led to liberating women to some extent, is acknowledged by Karlekar as well as in tracing the antecedents of women's education in 19th century Bengal.

It has been observed that the segregation of the sexes into unequal domains of knowledge acquisition, as well as the reinforcement of traditionally given gender distinctions, are often reasserted in school education in India, for example, it has been seen in a micro study that knowledge transmitted in school is quite in harmony with the existing gender distinctions of primary socialization (Kapur 1987: Chapter 5; Khuller, 1989). This ironically was noted to be most evident in the teaching and learning of Science in Municipal primary schools in Delhi, for boys are taught Vigyan or Science while girls are taught Greha vigyan or Home Science. The purpose of Home Science teaching, as stated by a reader used here is as follows:

"to make girls from the beginning interested and good at doing housework".

The crucial difference between the Science taught to boys and that taught to girls lay in that the former referred to the uses of science in the domestic sphere amongst others, while the latter mainly focussed on the home and the efficient performance of household chores by girls (Khullar, 1989: 561-62). Those arguing for educational systems and curricula that are relevant in terms of being in harmony and suiting the needs of the community or those to be educated can hardly label such instances as being irrelevant. Segregation the sexes and a different that is unequal - education is an ingredient of school knowledge and reaffirms the primary socialization of children whereby values and practices of a distinct and unequal sexual division of labour are transmitted to and internalized by children. As opposed to the rhetoric about education not being suited to the community needs, and having no relation to the lives of children, this gender relative education is very much in continuity with the division of labour practiced in children's homes.

Studies analyzing textbooks have found the persistence of stereotypes based on gender roles, for example, a survey of NCERT books in Hindi revealed that the, male child not only appears more frequently in the stories but is seen in active roles compared to passively depicted girls. The ratio of boy-centered to girl-centred stories is 21:0 and of the biographical references 94 out of 110 are to prominent men (Nischol, 1976). An analysis of thirteen English language texts, published by the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad, also revealed a similar bias: girl centred stories were outnumbered by boy-centered ones by eighty-one to nine (Nischol, 1978). English and Malayalam textbooks used in Kerala schools were also found to be similarly

stereotypical as most stories were male dominated and represented girls as passive and submissive compared to boys who came through as daring and assertive (Nischol, 1979).

These images of boys and girls are broadly in harmony with the values and messages that the socialisation of children in India transmits as part of communicating a certain culture of power. Therefore these are values that are most relevant to the lives of Indian children: they do not disturb or criticism the coherence of the original values given in primary socialization whereby girls internalize their inferior positions in familial settings. It has been similarly seen that Muslim girl children in Uttar Pradesh are socialized to be submissive and obedient (Bhatti, 1988). The gender based division of labour has been noted by Dube as an aspect of the socialization of girls in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh as well (Dube, 1988: 179-80). That gender-based division of work and roles are very deep rooted amongst urban upper and middle class children, is also evident from Parthasarthy's study of a leading school in Delhi. Furthermore, there is ample evidence of the difficulties encountered in combating these attitudes through formal education (Parthasarthy, 1988: 208).

Gender relativism, as practised in schools and through differentiated curricula, reinforces the culturally given practices. Existing educational systems are however, very much-based on the given-cultures of power, wherein women/girls are different, which is a clear recognition and justification of their inequality.⁶

Gender inequality thus has been attributed as part of the traditionally given inequality which is transmitted and perpetuated through the socialisation process. But the education system is acknowledged as the only institution which can counteract the effect of this process' (Government of India, 1975-CSWI 1975:282). That educational institutions and knowledge have contributed in strengthening and perpetuating gender inequality cannot be denied. Messages most inimical to gender equality have been transmitted in the process, replicating the primary socialisation of children and adding dimensions in work and study spheres, such as, streaming of girls and boys in different subjects (Khullar, 1988). Yet the prerequisites of literacy and education remain basic for women's equality, not only in a quantitative sense out also in a qualitative one. That is to say, education, its institutions and content have to combat gender relativism rather than mirroring and justifying it as being "suitable" and "relevant" for the needs of women/girls. The definition of relevance here has thus to be extended to include a critique of this culturally given ideology and practice, if equality between men and women is an ideal to be pursued by formal education.

Religious Education: Policy and Practice

Closely linked to the theme of gender differentiation is that of religious education, as religion has been seen to condone ideologies of gender relativism, while also being used for perpetuating nations relating to what is understood as communalism - exclusivism/separation of religious communities and imposing the dominance of a certain religious group (Mishra, 1987; Kishwar, 1986; Pandey, 1990; Chapter 1).

Opinions have varied as to whether religious instruction should be included in syllabi of formal education or not. Towards the close of the British era the question of religious education was discussed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (between 1944 and 1946), Moral and spiritual instruction in the "building of character" was recognized as important by the final resolution of the Board. But the responsibility for this was considered to be that of the pupils' community and not the school (Government of India, 1947:76). The next official statement relating to religious education was in the Constitution of India, adopted in 1950. The provision directly relating to the subject and to which all subsequent statements allude, is contained in Article 28. This states that no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds.

The report of the 'Radhakrishnan Commission' said that religious training cannot be left to the home and community as "communal bigotry intolerance and selfishness may increase" (Government of India, 1950, Vol.I: 290). The constitutional provision was interpreted as impelled by the multi-religious character of India and the impossibility of providing religious instruction in all the faiths. The intention was said to be that of banning dogmatic and sectarian instruction, but not religious instruction. Further comments on article 28 of the Constitution were made by the Mudaliar Commission, which was of the view that, being a secular state, does not imply that there is no place for religion. The imparting of religious education in some schools run by denominational agencies was acknowledged by the Commission. However, as a course for the future, being a secular state was not considered to imply that there is no place for religion. Nonetheless, it stated that religious instruction in schools cannot be given except outside regular school hours and on a voluntary basis (Government of India, 1965: 103),

In 1959 the Central Board of Education published the Sri Prakasa Committee Report which dealt exclusively with religious and moral instruction in formal education. It reviewed the constitutional provisions about religious education and also the resolution of the meetings held by the Central Advisory Board of Education 1944 to 1946. It made recommendations about making moral education an integral part of formal syllabi. In order to avoid "constitutional

difficulties", it spoke of "moral and spiritual values" in education and not religious values. It also mentions that it was responding to the need to

---develop some inner discipline and strength of character among our youth so that liberty is not debased into license, that mutual harmonious relations are established among men and women of all creeds, and that our educational institutions produce young men and women of good and sound character-disciplined, responsible and trustworthy- fit citizens' of a free counter (Government of India, 1959: 7-8).

Specific suggestions were made for the stages of higher, middle and elementary or primary education. For the primary stage suggestions included group singing at a morning assembly, inclusion of stories about the lives and teaching of prophets, saints and religious leaders in the syllabi of language teaching; showing of audio--visual material on art and architecture connected with religions of the world to teach Geography; setting aside of periods for moral instruction by relating interesting stories of religious origin and developing the attitudes of service and true sportsmanship.

The Report of the Committee on Emotional Integration was of the view that there was a need to promote emotional integration in national life. Some recommendations made on moral education were: the necessity to foster mutual appreciation of various religions through encouraging research on topics that help in greater understanding of and sympathy with, different faiths. Although religious education is said to have no place in the curriculum of schools in a secular state, yet it is considered here that education would be incomplete without appreciation of spritual values. This may be-provided through talks to school children on religious unity and that of all mankind, all of which may be introduced within the curriculum. The focus of this report is thus not only on religious values, but those of national integration as well (Government of India, 1962:7.20; 11.3.5; 11.15).

The Education Commission (Kothari Commission) 1964-66 reiterated in its report the broad proposals of the Sri Prakasa Committee. It pointed out a lacuna in the sphere of moral education and enumerated some areas where its transmission could be done, for example, the school assembly in the celebration of festivals of different religious groups team games; social service programmes. All these are said to aim at indicating values of cooperation, social responsibility and discipline. That religious stories and values may be included was explicitly stated as well:

There will be natural points of correlation between the moral values sought to be inculcated and the teachings of the great religions... All religions stress certain fundamental qualities of character, such as honesty and truthfulness, consideration for others, reverence for old age, kindness to animals, and compassion for the needy and suffering. In the literature of every religion, the story or parable figures prominently as a means of impressing an ethical value on the followers. The narration of such stories by the teachers at the right moment in the programme of moral education would be most effective, particularly in the lower classes (Government of India, 1966, Vol. III: 359).

In 1967 the Report of the Committee of members of Parliament on the National Policy of education was of the view that "moral, social and spiritual values" should be emphasised. The formation of character was said to be important in the process of education. Good reading materials, proper study of social sciences, humanities and the great universal religions; social service to communities, participation in games, sports and hobbies were said to be important in the contribution to the formation of "right attitudes and values" (Government of India, 1967:6).

On the importance of including moral - and often very clearly religious - instruction there seems to have been a degree of consensus. A subject of speculation, it has been often prescribed in writings and speeches of religious and social reformers. Dayanand Saraswati (1825-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, formulated a code of conduct to be incorporated within school and in-familial contexts for the correct education of children. In pre-school years the parents, particularly the mother, was said to be responsible for inculcating the "right values". He repeatedly stressed the moral side of education, recommending virtues of truthfulness, effort and asceticism in the life of students (Jordens, 1978: 115). In 1880 he published a booklet entitled *Vyavharbhanu* (The sun of Good Behaviour). This was a book of general ethics for children and simple folk and treated the relationship of teacher and pupil; husband and wife; parents and children; king and subjects and topics such as business ethics and brahmacharya (Jordens, 1978:245). The Arya Samaj was a reform movement within Hinduism and therefore the education - moral and/or religious - was located within its broader purpose. The D.A.V. Schools, as also the Kanya Mahavidyalaya and other schools run in different parts of Northern India by the Arya samaj were meant to embody these principles (Salamatullah, 1979). Religious leaders like Vivekananda and Aurobindo addressed themselves to the national aspects and purposes of education as well. Aurobindo (1872-1950) spoke of nationalism as an ideal and identified it with "the essence of religion, to live for God, for humanity, for country....." This was identified by him as the "spirit of Hinduism which should pervade schools in India (Aurobindo, 1924:21), Nationalism was defined as the end of religion and proposed as an alternative to

moral corruption resulting from purely mental instruction given through the English education system (Aurobindo, 1924: 15). Vivekananda (1863-1902) also spoke of "character making" education as opposed to giving of information. He too propagated a national ideal to have the education of the country "in our own hands, and it must be on national lives, through national methods....." (Vivekananda, 1964, Vol.III: 302).

For Gandhi (1869-1948) as well, education as a whole was tied up with religion and nationalism. He opposed "modern education", condemning the pedagogic ideas imported from Britain and amongst other things, he saw these as producing a close "forgetters of God" (Gandhi, 1953:31). He saw a close relationship between religion and education and this is evident in ideas about education of the heart; freedom that comes from discipline and humility; purity of personal life. The concept of brahmachari was understood as an equivalent for the word student and "searcher after God" (Gandhi.. 1953:38). His scheme of Basic Education or Nai Talim aimed at combining manual and literary education, as also the value of non-violence, for it rejected British Imperialism and industrialization.⁷

Value education has been considered as separated from religion in a few contexts, for example, a framework for a ten year school outlined by the N.C.E.R.T. (National Council of Educational Research and Training) reiterated the importance of values of the Constitution of India, stating that they ought to be reflected in the school curriculum (NCERT, 1975).

In 1978 a document prepared under the chairmanship of Justice Tarakunds suggested programmes to bring about educational transformation. This was of the view that the content of education should integrate intellectual and manual work, emphasize culture, science and technology; promote values of democracy, secularism and socialism. Furthermore it was recommended that students should be encouraged to be patriotic, take pride in their cultural heritage and yet be sensitive to modern, ideas and values. The necessity of fighting-traditional values of casteism, communalism, inequality of men and women and the authoritarian echos of the existing system was also emphasized. It called for the development of other values such as, tolerance, self-restraint, commitment to "basic human values" and cooperation (Citizens for Demography, 1978: 18; 20-21).

Included here are the development of national integration, international understanding and democratic values. Character building is yet another focus considered to be desirable and includes the cultivation of qualities such as compassion, endurance, courage, respect for others, truthfulness and so on. Teaching of social sciences is noted to be important for promoting values and ideals of humanism, secularism, socialism and democracy, while the teaching of language should aim at developing similar attitudes as well (NCERT, 1975: 24)

Influences at the policy level or even that of the school have been multiple. Programmes have been suggested periodically by a variety of forums, which have included religious leaders civil rights groups and socio-political movements. However, Gandhi had perceived the potential dangers of including religious education in formulation the principles of Basic Education in 1937 when he explained

"We have left out the teaching of religion from the Wardha scheme of education because we are afraid that religions as they are taught and practised today lead to conflict rather than unity" (Gandhi, 1951: 47).

There have evidently been efforts made to secularise education in India; at the same time religion enters from the back door. Statements are made on 'moral' education rather than religious education-as in the instances of Education Commission/ Committee Reports cited above. Further, textbooks written by state bodies have been noted to be biased in their representation of religion in India.

It has been observed in a micro study in rural Delhi - that values-pertaining to religion were transmitted in formalized school knowledge and these are in consonance and continuity with the primary socialization of children. In terms of religious background this was a homogeneous setting as all teachers and children in the school were Hindus and beliefs and practices associated with Hinduism constituted an important aspect of their primary socialisation (Khullar, 1990). values deriving from Hinduism permeated the domain of secondary socialisation or formal education in two ways, firstly through the children and teachers themselves who had an internalised set of beliefs, (for example, subjects such as karma, life and death, rebirth and vegetarianism), and secondly through formalised educational knowledge transmitted in the school, including textbooks. Both the contents and interactive processes of formal education constitute the transmission and internalization of these values. For example, major festivals of three religious communities were enumerated in a social studies book. Descriptions of the Hindu festivals were followed by a few sentences on their origin, associated legends and values symbolise Thus some space was accorded to the non-Hindu festivals but normative interpretations were drawn only from the Hindu ones.⁸

In a similar vein accounts of history in the social studies books laid greater emphasis on the Hindu kings of India,, making no mention of the Muslim rulers with the exception of Akbar. The Hindu heroes were dwelt upon, to the exclusion of those from other religious communities in recounting the heroic lives of national and regional leaders. The lines between history and

Hindu mythology were rather blurred as the stories included those from the Hindu epics and of actual personalities significant in the documented history of India (Khullar 1989).

Values associated with Hinduism are diverse and varied but both teachers and children viewed them as good and desirable precisely because they were derived from Hinduism.⁹ Hindu values were further seen in opposition to what stood for Islam; for example, a textbook was criticised by a teacher because it started with a lesson on the Taj Mahal, a Muslim monument (Hamara Desh Bharat, 1968). In her opinion all books should start with prayers. From the point of view of the teachers the books in general were not adequately religious, that is, Hindu, as even oblique mention of Islam was considered bad and the stress on what they termed dharmik (religious) elements should be greater. Occasionally children responded in similar terms to what they heard or read in school, for example in response to Home Science lesson that mentioned non-vegetarian food, Jat child expressed disgust saying that Muslims, and untouchables eat meat. On another occasion in discussing Indira Gandhi children collectively expressed their view that she was bad as she was partial to Muslims and they may one day become their slaves (Khullar,1989:551).

The prefaces of the social-studies books stated that the fundamental principles on which they are based is: "Our country and its unity" (Hamari Dilli, 1971; Hamara Desh Bharat; 1968; and Bharat Aur Sansar, 1968: Prefaces). This came through in accounts of the celebration of national festivals and the assertion of national unity despite differences; the co-existence of different religions in India; the equal rights of all to use and contribute to public institutions and in statements of the constitutionally recognised equality of all citizens. However, there is here also the intermingling of Indian nationalist values and Hindu imagery, in as much as only Hindu kings or leaders are mentioned in the struggle for independence. While some of the morning prayers chanted by children were secular and extolled the values of unity despite the differences of religion, still others had an overt Hindu religious slant to the values of nationalism, for example, in the identification of India with Bharat Mata. There have been some attempts made to foster secularism through education at the level of policy and even curriculum formulation in India. This however remains an area which is riddled with ambiguity. On the one hand there are values that counter caste and communalism and yet the latter are reasserted and reinforced through school knowledge and international patterns institutionalized in the school (Khullar, 1989). Textbooks, written by state bodies and used in state run schools continue to communicate these.¹⁰

The assertion of religious dominance comes through quite clearly nonetheless as a theme that is internalized by children, both in their homes and the school in this context. Some denials or criticism of this "communal" worldview can be gleaned from the school text books, which devoted several pages to the subjects of Nationalism, Secularism and Democracy. The values of secularism were dealt with in a somewhat contradictory manner in the books. While some mention was made of the harmonious coexistence of people of different religious faiths in India, and there were evident attempts at portraying the multi-religious character of India, yet the dominant normative interpretations drawn were from Hindu lore, mythology or accounts of Hindu kings and leaders from India's past.

Education for Equality?

Modern, as opposed to traditional, education has been stated as both the purpose and goal of the educational system in India. The promotion of equality started in the British era when access to educational institutions was opened and thus became possible to all citizens, While the British administration sought to do away with the-traditional inequalities, they created new ones for the effective functioning of a colonial and imperialistic system. Nonetheless the education of low and untouchable castes was initiated and first became possible by giving of access for schooling to these backward sections. Equality of educational opportunity being merely recognized as was done by the British administrators, did not however, suffice as an instrument for combating inequality. On the one hand, efforts were made to educate backward sections/communities, but on the other hand the British administrators concentrated on the education of the "classes" rather than the "masses" (Naik, 1975). The latter was done with a view to create a class of intermediaries to perform the functions of the middle level bureaucracy and filtration with the anticipations that a process of downward of education would occur; thus leading in time to the automatic education of lower/backward groups as well. That this policy led to a virtual neglect of education of the backward sections and an elitist system of education is fairly evident and established in the history of education in India (Naik, 1975; Naik and Nurullah, 1974).

In time this led to the establishment of a highly inegalitarian system in which the effective demand for education comes from educated and articulate, upper classes, (who are also politically powerful) concerned with the acquisition of status and power. (Myrdal, 1970). Furthermore, entry to the elite groups that control status and power some extent dependent on the type of education received (Di Bona and Singh, 1987). Thus access to a culture of power is

similar as for the American Black who is described by Delpit as wishing to acquire a white education and culture and not wishing to "learn to be black" which he/she not only knows already, but which will not take them closer to acquiring elite status and power.

That the education coveted by most in India is an education that is imported by English medium schools and is an example of the clear recognition of the culture of power that is transmitted through the educational system. Stratification of schools in India has been acknowledged as reflecting the persisting. Inequalities in education impart to children of different socioeconomic groups. Perpetuation of these inequalities thereby becomes a function of the educational hierarchy in India. (Dibona and Singh, 1987).

In Indian nationalist thinking however, education was viewed as an instrument for social change. Mere recognition of the rights of all citizens' access to education was thus enlarged by extending financial support to students; free education; measures for enhancing education of women, backward sections such as low castes or untouchables (Naik, 1975; Nurullah and Naik, 1974).

Developments however, have been largest in the sphere of higher education, rather than primary education or universalization of education and literacy (Chandrakant, 1982). These policies led therefore to the educational system supporting the existing inequalities and creating some new ones, rather than becoming an instrument for combating them. This has been so at the level of the system which gives priority by way of allocating substantially more funds for higher education and- the continuing dominance of the private sector in primary and middle education as opposed to higher education. That there is a stratification among schools is well known in India. This is part of the situation where concern with status is not only reflected in the different and unequal types of educational institutions existing in the country but also in the perpetuation of inequality within different types of institutions. For example in a primary in rural Delhi it has been seen that children of different castes (upper, and scheduled) were thrown together into a common arena and this gave them the opportunity for non-segregated interaction. They attended classes sitting together on the floor mats of the classrooms. But the observance of caste segregation did not cease, for everyone in the school teachers, children and the few other functionaries knew which caste each child belonged to. This was entered on the school register which entered the names of the streets on which children lived, which in turn bore caste names. Further, purity and pollution were operative principles in relationships between upper caste Jat and Brahmin children on the one hand and those of the low caste Chamars and Bhangis on the other. For instance the latter were not allowed to touch the water kept aside for teachers. Use of derogatory terms of refer to children of the low castes was

frequent. Interaction between children as was also guided by divisions of caste within the school sphere and outside. The obscene of peer groups that cut across caste lines, especially between the upper and lowest groups was further evidence of this phenomenon. (Kullar, 1989)

Criticisms of differentials in education, and particularly schooling, in America/Britain have focussed on the lack of sensitivity on the part of the education systems to cultures of the deprived and backward. That is to say, education there is seen largely as a middle class enterprise that imposes a set of meanings on children of black or ethnic backgrounds without taking their cultures into account. The latter are noted as well articulated and therefore should be addressed and incorporated into curricula and teaching. Thus the problems of educability are often attributed to education being at odds with local culture in these groups (Young, 1971, Midwinter, 1972, Tomilson, 1984). In a similar vein Kumar has cited the instance of a scheduled caste boy "testifying to his backwardness" simply because the tribal culture (tantricism) to which he belongs is dubbed as backward. This one instance constitutes Kumar's data on the interaction of caste/ tribe in schools that are otherwise class. He rejects analyses of Chitnis, Pawardhan and Isaacs as "spurious", saying that the problem of caste and backwardness in education would be solved by introducing more egalitarian curricula, whereby the middle class emphasis is replaced by one that is sensitive to children from different caste and tribal backgrounds (Kumar, 1989: 76).

These analyses make sympathetic overtures to low class/ caste/tribal backgrounds and culture and wish to dignify and incorporate them in educational texts and systems of schooling. Their view ignores: the existing hierarchy and cultures of power, that are part of school knowledge and educational institutions. It is all very well for radical theories of education, to criticise for example, English education and/or middle; class education, but that there is a demand and craving for it cannot be denied for it is seen as an avenue of upward mobility (Di Bona and Singh 1987).

This, in other words, is their definition of a "relevant" education. That is to say, education must continue and reassert the knowledge and value systems of those to be educated. While this is often a well intentioned view, that is, it seeks to improve upon the existing imbalances of inequality and discrimination, yet the problems are not adequately addressed in terms of what the local cultures of both the powerful and the not so powerful are. If these cultures articulate means to dominate women, a religious community or a class/caste/tribe should these be incorporated in an educational system or curricula? Cultures that are based on inequalities of gender; assertion of religious dominance; and class/caste/tribe differentials,

have to be viewed in terms of the present day goals of education in India or those of the Indian Constitution.

These notions of relevance therefore work against the principle of equality. Secondary socialization through formal education reinforces these retrogressive elements of primary socialization rather than combating them. That there is a need for countering them cannot be overstated in the present context of rising religious fundamentalism; the glorification of retrograde and anachronistic practices such as sati. "Relevant" education that seeks to dignify Cultures of people who are to be educated by being rooted in and incorporating their ideas, images and conceptions may thus only replicate and perpetuate some of these existing prejudices. These would be very much in consonance with the cultures of people as gender inequality is part and parcel of these but would constitute a step in a retrogressive direction.

Endnotes:

1. Berger and Luckmann have elaborated this distinction in developing a theory based on a phenomenological standpoint (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).
2. This has been a recurring theme and term, for that matter, in India. For example the Report of the Education Commission 1964-1966 spoke to "functional literacy" in the context of discussing the problems of dropouts and wastage in education. Providing functional literacy was therefore considered possible through part time classes which may follow elastic timings suitable in the local context. (Government of India, 1966: 7.28). Schemes formulated, for example, the Mahila Samakhya programme (Government of India, 1988) and the Scheme of Functional Literacy for Adult Women (Government of India, 1982).
3. Bourdieu argues that schools take the cultural capital for habitus, of the middle class, as natural and take for granted that all children have had equal access to it, but actually favour those who have already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle - class culture (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).
4. Both the "process" method of teaching writing and the children centred approach are supposed to be based on free choice and self direction by children. These are supposed to be liberating but instead are found to be problematic in the experience of some teachers/ researchers. For example, child centered and process approaches are found to legitimize - extreme forms of masculinity and femininity and perpetuate violent sexist images (Clark, 1989).
5. It is interesting to note a similarity in the views held by Gramsci in response to the educational reforms that sought to make education flexible in Italy of the 1920s I the "Fascist" reforms of Gentile (Gramsci, 1971: 35-36; Entwistle, 1979).

6. Difference as inequality is a continuing debate in the study of inequality (for example Dumong, 1972, Beteille, 1977, 1980) and among women's studies scholars as well (Chafetz 1988; Wallace, 1989: Introduction).

7. Education systems of the industrialized nations, therefore, were considered by Gandhi to be based on violence: in USSR, the whole national system based on force and in the USA and Britain based on wealth obtained through exploitation (Gandhi, 1951: 30).

8. Three stories from religious lore included in this book were on Lave and Kusha, the sons of Rama; Krishna; Siddharta, "the boy who grew up to become Gautama Buddha". Similarly, other social studies books and Language Readers included stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata and were presented as illustrating values of Ramrajya, belief and worship of Rama and Krishna as God of the Dharma (duty) of Kshatriyas (Hamari Dilli, 1971: 116-119; Hamara Pas Pados, 1976: 43-47; Aao Padhein aur Seekhein, 1968: 126-134; Khullar, 1989; Kapur 1987: Chapter 5).

9. For example, there was a poem Parshuram - Lakshmana Samvad by Tulsidas in a language reader, which was difficult to comprehend both for teachers and children and they made extensive use of guide books for simpler interpretations. However, it was considered a good exercise as it was a "dharmik kavita" (religious poem).

10. These are complex problems that have prefaced the realm of history writing in India and have been part of a long standing debate amongst historians, (Shakir, 1976; Thapar, Mukhia and Chandra, 1969; and Thapar, 1975).

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