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Oppressed, Other and Pedagogy

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Abstract

Educational Pedagogy; a process inculcating skills and knowledge to human beings needs to undergo a constant process of changes in order to cope up with the new challenges of the dynamic world and new aspirations human beings. The existing policies and pedagogies of Nepalese universities call for serious revisions in order to produce human resources who can cope of with new challenges of twenty first century with keen sense of awareness of social justice. The issues of the marginalized, suppressed and 'othered' should be incorporated in the very process of educational pedagogies not only in the content of the curriculum. This present article proposes theoretical approaches like breaking hierarchy, self- exploration, multiculturalism and interculturalism, inclusiveness and interdisciplinary approaches with the help theoretical perspectives of Edward Said's "Other", Paulo fierer's "Pedagogy of Oppressed" and the Postmodern concept in order to address the present need of our universities education.

Keywords: Orientalism, ideology, banking model, postmodernism, heterogeneity, interdisciplinary, inclusiveness

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Introduction

Education needs to inculcate a sense of justice to the students who will contribute for making a better world with peace, justice and harmony. For this, they should be aware about the plight and suffering of the historically marginalized and suppressed group of people. Moreover, the students who belong to the marginalized group need to find the representation of their group in national educational process which renders a sense of belonging in them. In order to ensure the representation of the marginalized people, our present educational system of our universities need to rethink its educational policy along with instructional pedagogies. What are the strength and weakness in our traditional educational policy, how it should be revised to accommodate the new realities and aspirations of people in local as well as global context and what sort of manpower we need in future are some prominent issues that should be discussed critically. This short article tries to discuss our higher education system especially the universities educational pedagogy and curriculum in this changing context. The focus of the discussion is on theoretical perspectives to provide space to the dream and demand of

oppressed and marginalized people. The discussion relies on the critical ideas of “Other” developed by Edward Said “, Pedagogy of Oppressed” propounded by Paulo Fierer and the concept of “mini narratives”, “hierarchy” and “divided self” by Post-modernist thinkers.

Edward Said and the Other

Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) explores the historical imbalanced relationship between the ‘Orient’ (Eastern) and European and America imperialism. It tries to unmask the ideological disguises of colonialism and imperialism. Said applied post structuralist thinker Michael Foucault’s ideas to analyze the political, cultural, literary, and material realities of colonization. He uses the theory to analyze the condition of exclusion and deprivation in both colonial and neo colonial situation. Commenting about the scope of the book Leela Gandhi remarks:

Orientalism represents the first phase of post-colonial theory. Rather than engaging with the ambivalent condition of the colonial aftermath – or indeed, with the history and motivations of anti-colonial resistance –it directs attention to the discursive and textual production of colonial meanings and, concomitantly, to the consolidation of colonial hegemony (64-65).

Orientalism uses the concept of discourse to re-order the study of colonialism. It examines how the formal study of the ‘Orient’ (what is today referred to as the Middle East or Eastern), along with key literary and cultural texts ,consolidated certain ways of seeing and thinking which in turn contributed to the functioning of colonial power.

Discussing on Said’s ideas and the book Ania Loomba observes:

Knowledge is not an innocent but profoundly connected with the operation of power. This Foucaultian insight informs Edward Said’s *Orientalism* which points out the extent to which the knowledge of the ‘Orient’ was produced and circulated in Europe was an ideological accompaniment of colonial power. This book is a book not about non-western cultures, but about western representation of non-western people and culture particularly in scholarly discipline called Orientalism. Said shows how this discipline was created alongside of European penetration into the near east and how it was natured and supported by other disciplines such as philology, history anthropology, archaeology and literature (42).

In fact power works through language, literature, culture and the intuitions which regulate our daily lives. Using this expanded definition of power Said move away from a narrow and technical understanding of colonial authority and show how it functioned by producing a ‘discourse ‘ about the ‘ orient’. It generates a structure of thinking which manifests in artistic and literary production, in political and scientific writing. Said brings together a range of creative writers, statesmen, political thinkers, philologists and philosophers who contributed to orientalism as an institution which than provided the lenses through which the orient would

be viewed and controlled. Then the knowledge about and power over colonized lands is related enterprises. In this regard Elleke Boehmer remarks:

Therefore orientalism was a systematic discipline and discourse about the ‘orient’ and function as a corporate institution for understanding and controlling other people. ... Orientalism was a western’s style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient (351).

So colonial discourse is the vehicle through which colonial ideology is expressed. The colonial discourse claimed colonizers superiority which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native people or the original inhabitants of the land they have invaded. The European people and culture are defined as civilized, sophisticated, rational, progressive, advance and the natives are depicted as uncivilized, backward, emotional, barbaric, weak-willed, effeminate and unable to rule themselves. Such practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called “othering”. It divides the world between “us” (colonizer/European) and “other” (colonized). So the Colonizer saw themselves at the center of the world; the colonized at the margins.

Said also criticized the attempt of universalizing the European (colonizer) culture and literature as a standard bearer. Said called such attempt of colonial discourse as “Eurocentrism”. European later on American culture and literature are regarded as universal. All other culture and literature are judged whether or not they meet the standard set by colonizers’ culture and literature. Thus the assumption was that European ideas, ideals and experience were universal and standard of all humankind.

Freire and the Oppressed

Influenced by Marxist ideology and anti-colonialist thinkers, Brazilian educationist and social activist, Paulo Freire has proposed a pedagogy with a new relationship with teacher, students and the society. His radical concept of education has brought the marginalized people at the center and related the process of education with power dynamic of the given society. The key concepts raised by him are briefly discussed here.

A) Education is a political practice:

He argues that education is a political practice. No educational practice is neutral and free from biasness. Political motive can’t be separated from pedagogy. This is the main tenet of critical pedagogy. Teachers and Students should be made aware about the politics that surrounds the education. Moreover he asserts that the way students are taught and what they are taught serves a political agenda. Teachers are also not neutral beings. Consciously and unconsciously they bring political notion which they bring into classroom.

b) Banking Model

Freire strongly criticizes the traditional pedagogy which he calls a banking model. The traditional pedagogy treats the students as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like a piggy bank. Teachers are regarded as a reservoir of knowledge and unquestionable authority.

They act as if they know everything and they should supply all knowledge needed for students. Such practice, according to Freire, attempts to control thinking and action of students. It leads students to adjust in the existing power relationship of the world and inhibits their creative power. The banking model results in the dehumanization on both students and teachers. It stimulates oppressive attitudes and practices in society. Like Jean Jack Rousseau, he regards a child as an active learner. So he regards the learners as a co-creator of knowledge. He advocates for a more world- mediated, mutual approach to education that considers people incomplete. According to him, education must allow people to be aware of their incompleteness and strive to be fully human. This attempt to use education as a means of consciously shaping the person and society is called “ conscientization”; a term coined by him.

c) Objectives of Education

For Freire the sole objective of the education should be to educate the mass of people how to change this world. To change this world, people have to know the actual reality of the world in due perspective and thereby to transcend the reality. If they know it, they will automatically want to change the undesirable societal condition of the world. On that condition, the teacher cannot parrot some methodological ideas which are barren and inefficacious. From the teacher a student will learn something and then he should be promoted to ask questions one after another to get plausible answer themselves with the proper help and guidance from attending teacher.

Freire champions that education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity by overcoming their condition. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the oppressed must play a role in their liberation.

d) Culture of Silence

According to Freire, the system of dominant social relations creates a culture of silence that instills a negative, silenced and suppressed self-image into the oppressed. The learner must develop a critical consciousness in order to recognize that this culture of silence can cause the dominated individuals to lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them. Social domination, class and race are interlaced into the conventional educational system.

e) Education for freedom

Freire argues that education should ensure freedom for the oppressed. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of a man; nor it's an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. Freedom is the result of praxis; informed action.

Postmodernism, heterogeneity, Mini narratives

In Western philosophy late twentieth century movement is characterized by skepticism, subjectivism, relativism, a general suspicion of reasons and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power. Such philosophical ideas

and practices are known as postmodernism. It appeared in various disciplines and fields so it is very difficult to demarcate its ideological as well as practical arena. However “postmodernism emerged in reaction to the certain claims of Enlightenment” (Bhandari 88). Enlightenment was a cultural and intellectual movement which developed in Western European during the seventeen century and reached its height in the eighteen century. Commenting on the Postmodernism’s relation with Enlightenment Tim Wood writes:

Postmodernism represents a decline of faith in the key – stones of the Enlightenment – belief in the infinite progress of knowledge, belief in infinite moral and social advancement, belief in teleology- and its rigorous definition of the standard of intelligibility, coherence, and legitimacy. Consequently postmodernism seeks local or provisional, rather than universal and absolute form of legitimation. (11)

Thus Postmodernism denies the universality of reasons and logics. They are conceptual construct and valid only within certain time and space. Similarly, it rejects that logics and reasons can be instrument of human progress, freedom and justice. There are various instances of misuse of technological advancement based on human reasoning power. Likewise, it refuses to “the notion of human possessing an undivided coherent and stable self which acts as the standard of rationality, and guarantees all knowledge claims irrespective of time and space”(Woods 10). It believes that Human beings possess divided, unstable and fragmented self and identity.

Jean Francois Lyotard argues that the faith and trust on all grand narratives and meta narratives; are lost in postmodern era. Such narratives offered by religions and political ideologies are ambitious total explanation of reality. Such narratives mask the contradictions and instabilities inherent in human conditions, organizations and practices. Instead there is growing interest and preference in smaller scale and smaller issue, what he calls mini narratives. Such narratives explain small practices and local events rather than large scale universal concept. They are always “situational, provisional, relative, contingent and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth and reason and stability” (Bhandari 90). Lyotard proposes a postmodern world in which decisions are made on the basic of local conditions and are applicable only in the limited context. The beliefs, lessons and practices of one side are not transferable to another. Thus post modernism deconstructs the basic aim of Enlightenment that is the unitary end of history and of a subject. It actively searches heterogeneity, pluralism and constant innovation. Likewise, it deconstructs the hierarchical structure. The cultures, disciplines, occupations etc are not superior or inferior to others. They are simply different from others. Their relevance, utility and significance differ according to time and space.

Post modernism is also concerned with the question of knowledge. Knowledge becomes functional in postmodern society. We learn things, not simply to know them rather to use them in our real life. Utility is important factor in knowledge gaining and disseminating

area. Similarly, the process of arranging, storing and distributing and consumption knowledge is also revolutionized in postmodern era due to computer and information technology.

Postmodern also denies that there is an objective natural reality; a reality whose existence and properties are logically independent of human beings- of their minds, their society, their social practices or their investigative techniques. Post modernists think that all realities are construction of human beings so they are subjective and relativist. There is nothing as truth and universal.

Proposed Educational Policy and Pedagogy for Higher Education

1) Hierarchies: The present education policy and practices of our Universities are based on hierarchical structure. Chancellors are higher than Vice-Chancellors; Vice Chancellors are higher than deans, deans higher than chairs, chairs higher than instructing faculty, instructors higher than students. Hierarchies also exist in the relationship of higher education disciplines to each other (sciences being higher than arts), credentials (doctoral degree over master's degree) and institutions (university over university- constituent college over community college).

These hierarchies set up definitions about whom or what qualifies as being “in” or “out” or as “top” or “bottom”. Making space in a hierarchy is making room for someone to be superior and someone to be inferior. Hierarchical institutions seem to be useful in maintaining system order and balance.

Hierarchy might not be such a good thing if those who lead us are unaware of the interweaving of hierarchy, power and knowledge. Who is allowed to ask questions? Who is allowed to generate and disseminate knowledge? Knowledge creation is political. Who in higher education presently asks the questions that promote the generation of new knowledge? It is not the students. It is the professors and the granting bodies who are interested in the creation of questions. Who has defined that we study disciplines as they are presently arranged? The persons who hold superior position have power and responsibility to take decisions in such critical and crucial issues. So their interests and ideology are explicitly or implicitly reflected and reinforced in education policy. The oppressed, marginalized and the other are always outside of the mainstream. They are silenced and victimized. The true democratization of education is not possible.

There is another side to this same coin. If the academy and its work are given over to the vagaries of individual choice, chaos will prevail. How do we respond to both sides of this coin? How do we maintain the aims, the benefits, the stability and the once-removed authority of the status quo, while allowing for emerging needs and inspirations?

Our universities should undergo structural reforms. A horizontal structure, in which there shouldn't be any issue of superiority and inferiority, should be introduced. Every stake holders should have equal access in decision making. They have equal power, right and responsibility. Everyone's concerns, interests and aspirations will find space in policies and programs. The confusions about chain of command will be managed by well negotiated regulations.

2) Map making not Map reading: What curriculum is, how it is related with learners and how it is used and followed in the learning process needs to be discussed. The curriculum should address need and aspiration of learner and should be related with the students' life and society. Important learning, says Stan Lester, is not extrinsic to the learner; it is intrinsic and develops capacities for a sustainable society and for individual needs. Learning and learner are not separate. They are inextricably tied together. Similarly, learning needs to be accepted as natural and endemic rather than as something which occurs as a result of discrete learning events or through following a curriculum. Lester proposed two paradigms for learning. Model A learning which is piecing together chunks of information about the world. Hopefully, the learner will be able to chain these chunks together for an understanding of the greater picture. Model B learning is concerned with this creative, critical activity of mapmaking rather than reading the content of any specific map.

Whereas Model A learning is specific and technical, Model B learning is holistic and creative. Model A relies on the assumption that learners are citizens who will refer to existing standards to build on the existing knowledge base (primarily engaging deductive and analytic reasoning). Model B, on the other hand, sees learners as unique individuals who judge not by existing standards, but by fitness for purpose (how does this fit or suit this situation) using inductive and abductive reasoning (intelligent intuition). Using Model A, learners are being trained to solve problems using logic and proof. With Model B, learners are being educated in understanding problematic situations, and in framing desired outcomes using values, ethics, systemic interrelationships, theory, and a faith claim that any curriculum has an underlying learning by-product. He further explains:

The Model B meta-curriculum is concerned with fundamental processes such as enquiring, reflecting, evaluating, and creating, enabling the individual to continuously develop abilities which enable content-learning appropriate to purpose and context. It is also reflexive as the self-managed, self-evaluated learning processes are capable of being applied to themselves to generate an upward spiral of metalearning, as well as facilitating development of situational knowledge and ability. (Lester 8)

Our traditional learning process follows the model A of Lester. Now it's the time to revise such process and shift to the Model B of Lester. If such radical shift in totality is not possible at once, the partial shift in certain elective areas of learning shall be introduced.

3) Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Historically and socially many cultures have encountered with and got influenced by each other. In this age of globalization, information technology and migration, no culture can retain its historical purity and originality. On the other hand, the identity relating with culture has become a prominent issue in politics. So how to address and incorporate the issues of such cultural encounters, amalgamations and hybridity in educational policies and pedagogy are very sensitive and critical matters.

There are basically two approaches of dealing with cultural representation; multiculturalism and interculturalism. Multiculturalism follows the "Salad bowl" model in

which different type of cultures retain their own unique identity like in the display of salad. The ingredients of salad such as cucumbers, radish, carrot etc. are together and they are also different. They have their own both individual and collective identity. But there is chance of prioritizing particular culture as a main stream culture and the others as ethnic cultures in such approach. This also creates hierarchy and reinforces the notion of domination and subordination.

The other approach is interculturalism. This approach believes in borrowing and mixing, and appropriations. This is also known as “melting pot” approach. One culture borrows from, and mixes with other cultures and appropriates the new hybridized form as own. In this approach, there is danger of cultural colonization of dominant culture over the cultures of minority groups. The culture of powerful groups tends to homogenize the minority cultures in this approach.

In such context educational policy and pedagogy should not prioritize any culture. No culture should be present as main stream culture and standard bearer to judge others. Other cultures which do not conform should not be presented as inferior, savage, backward and the like. In other words there should be practice of othering. Every culture should be treated equally. There should not be hierarchy between and among them. They are simply the different. Educational policy and pedagogy should create such sort of awareness among students.

4) Inclusiveness: We live in a diverse society. There is diversity in language, race, nationality, culture, tradition etc. Moreover there is diversity among human beings. Every individual is unique in themselves. Educational policy and pedagogy should reflect, promote and facilitate such diversities. Both curriculum and content should recognize and affirms the life experiences of all students, regardless of their gender, race, and religious, and nationality, cultural and linguistic background. Inclusive pedagogy means recognizing, accommodating and meeting the learning needs of all students.

Oppressed and marginalized should be visible and their needs also should be addressed in pedagogy. “Every child needs to be reflected in curriculum if learning is to be meaningful. Identity and self-image are integral to learning” (Burney 204). Moreover, the oppressed and the marginalized should be made aware about their condition and the need for change. Such awareness would lead them to renegotiate their space in society. Only then they develop the sense of belonging; a part of the society and educational processes.

5) Interdisciplinary: No subject is inferior and superior. Every subject has its own importance. Their significance lies on different contexts. They equip students with different perspectives to view, analyze and interpret the reality. The interdisciplinary approach applies in education and training pedagogies to describe studies that use methods and insights of several established disciplines or traditional fields of studies. The strict compartmentalization of disciplines and subjects may make students narrow minded. They may follow the single

perspectives to the problem. They may develop the professional specialization which might be useful in limited context and might offer single perspectives.

Instead an interdisciplinary curriculum should be introduced to students. Such curriculum makes them aware about the multiple perspectives and possibilities to a problem. Then they will be wide, open, and tolerant and will realize the limitation of single discipline. Moreover we are living in such postmodern context in which the traditional boundaries of discipline, genres, practices etc. are erased out. A new hybridized and mixed form of style in our daily life as well as our academia is in practices. Such curriculum will help our students to cope with daily challenges.

Thus education is a political and social process. Education policy reflects and reinforces the exiting power dynamics of the society. Nepal is undergoing a social, political and economic transformation. The process of the transformation demands serious restructuring in policies and programs of various sectors including university education. The present discussion with certain relevant theoretical bases tries to initiate the process of fulfilling the demand. The proposed pedagogies and policies ; breaking hierarchy, self exploration approach of map making ,awareness ; space and respect of cultural diversity , inclusiveness and interdisciplinary will help to address the aspirations and demands of Nepalese people and felicitate the present process of transition to reach in logical conclusion.

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