

Book Review

Politics of Education in Colonial India

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K. Krishnakumar, who took a break of his routine teaching to study in depth the aspects of education through the colonial times has structured his findings and presented in the book. Nine years before the first edition in 1991, during his association with JP Naik it first occurred to the author that the conventional story about education in India could be erroneous, out of which the idea for the book was born.

The book starts off with a story, where a school excursion trip is at a zoo, and gives insights into the thinking of the students and teachers. A progressive reasoning of the line of thinking based on the developments in education in the colonial period unfolds following the story.

The text is divided into two parts, the colonial aspect of education, where the author draws from the company and then the British government's perspective, and that of the freedom struggle from the nationalist perspective. The former asserts the relationship between colonial rule school knowledge to present day pedagogy and curricula. The latter is presented as three quests, one of justice, one of self-identity and the third related to a concept of progress. In the introduction, author remarks the role of an *enlightened outsider* who educates the backward local population, a role initially was taken up by British officials and later on by educated Indians. Further in the colonial rule aspect, author takes us into how the curricula was restricted to exempt any indigenous content and how the teachers were kept under a tight leash of which the effects are visible till date, even in the excursion trip to the zoo scenario. Like the traditional sources makes us believe, colonial education programme wasn't just a factory to produce office staff and clerks. The book shows a grander picture, whilst supporting the idea how education

created a small minority of property holders and skilled colonial rulers. The author terms this as aligned to a *dream of bourgeois individuality, equality and security of property*. The quest for justice details the upheaval of the downtrodden castes, which was enabled by education and brought about radical changes in the social order; one for self-identity depicts the nationalist movement, how Hindi was projected and used to create a sense of nationalism in the Northern parts; the quest for progress gives insights into the meanings of progress for several national leaders and focuses on industrialization presenting the contrasting sides on favour and not in favour of the Europe's model.

1 Dynamics of Colonization

The section starts with how, like Manheim debunked the notion of universal aims of the colonial clerk, office-staff producing factory presentation of colonial education gets debunked. What is presented before the reader is two aspects: one being theoretical feeble, as education did inspire rejection of colonial rule and two that of existence of homonymy against broader context of education in nationalist struggle.

A breakdown of the education in the period highlights a pursuit for order where the colonizer initiates a child native into new thinking. Rightly pointed out is how railways, public works, posts and telegraphs - the technologies of the state are often remarked also as educational agencies. The author refers to Lee Warner who drew this relation back in 1897. Minto's initial education bill is brought into discussion, where the colonial rulers remark how "ignorance of the people is subversive to good government and conducive to crime".

While people here mean only people of status or dignity, it does debunk the notion of pure office-staff generating factory.

More into the moral agenda behind education, while maintaining the colonial state being no welfare agency, arguments are put forth as to why educating the native was a necessity for the colonial state in order to support the administrative apparatus. We obtain a sneak peek at how christian ethics being injected was a hidden agenda for people like Trevelyan and Elphinstone, although things didn't turn out exactly in their favour.

Although education was aimed at uplifting the masses, it was the Brahmans of Bengal, Maharashtra and Madras who were the first to pick up the language. Author reasons this to be "capacity to renovate their repertoire of skills for maintaining status and power". Concluding the section, author reasserts how a competition was introduced in the social order, while the upper castes nevertheless maintained stronghold.

With the thoughts on education put forth, the book proceeds further to detail how the infrastructure for education rose throughout the country. Since the infancy of the education programme, a conflict between indigenous knowledge and colonial knowledge has been prevalent, as observed by several researchers. The system transitioned from the teacher being an authority around the local community to being a servant of the colonial government. The colonial government established its interest in running schools and gamed to obtain monopoly over school education.

A case study of Punjab, where William D. Arnold experimented with curricula and teaching methods is presented before the reader. Several inconsistencies noted by William was the ignorance of the pupil to deriving meaning, and to science, geography and mathematics, whilst capability of reading being present. William is particularly startled by the ignorance to geography, given that it was surveying and mapping which gave colonial rule upper hand. We take a look at how the teachers were trained. They focused rules of arithmetic, facts of geography. During training period they obtained one-third of their salary, while two-thirds went to the substitute teacher.

Establishing the premises and structure, the book shifts focus to the impact and resistance. The individuals who went for colonial education

were made scapegoats. Parents worried of conflicts with the traditions and conversion to Christianity. We see several examples of this across the book - few being W.C Bonerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal and K.P Menon.

Textbooks and examination systems prevalent today inherits from the colonial foundations. The secrecy of exams projected the government could be trusted and impartial procedures being the standard for promotion, scholarship and employment enhanced the image of the colonial government.

A section on colonial teacher's mindset, which even people today can relate to, the reader has no choice but to agree how the excursion to the zoo is explained. The teacher, once being a underpaid servant of the government stopped receiving gifts or payments from local population. The centralised exams implied lack of trust in teacher. Teacher being brought to follow rules reflected on the pupil as lack of creativity and focus on following rules. Not sticking to the rules lead to punishments. The raised platform where teacher stands established a psychological distance between the student-teacher. At home, independent decision making, questioning or criticism were not encouraged and parents were the only figures to be imitated - all of which is conjectured to have led to the lack of questioning by students in Indian classrooms.

2 Dynamics of Freedom Struggle

The colonial governing apparatus' role as the *enlightened outsider* was explored in depth in the first chapter, while the second chapter explains how the role transitioned to the educated Indian. Presented before us is the fact that education never disseminated in the lower strata of the society - enrollment figures indicated increase but not so great in proportion to the population. Ambedkar's idealistic stance and Gandhi's practical stance is noted by the author. The book brings us the account of Jyothirao Phule, who brought about reforms to end Brahman dominance in the society, using the education apparatus setup by the colonial government. The anti-Brahman movement

gathered enough momentum, that by 1920s activists managed reservations for the downtrodden castes. The lower-strata viewed competing with the English and other elites for positions in the ICS and other state machinery as means to uplift their status in society.

Gopalkrishna Gokhale's contributions get a special mention, where free and compulsory education was proposed. Krishnakumar observes - although it failed to materialize, similar bills got passed in several provinces following Montague-Chemsford reforms. It's found that Gandhi's contributions were engineered to be dissociated state and its machinery.

Parallel to the nationalist movement gaining momentum, a quest for self identity developed within the society where in the book connects how indigenous knowledge made way into the education system. Publications and institutions with focus on local knowledge came into being. The establishment of a national council of education (NCE) helped in this regard. Krishnakumar remarks that the Jamia Milia Islamia presents "an interesting example in the quest for self-identity". Gandhi's style of mixing a religious and cultural rhetoric to mobilize audience is a straightforward example of self-identity gained importance. *Saraswati*, started in 1900 played a major role in development of Hindi prose. In parallel, organizations like Arya Samaj, Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Brahmo Samaj started propagating Hindi as the medium of communication, which helped to unite population particularly in the United Provinces and nearby regions to come under the hood of one language, developing a sense of nationalism. The establishment of Banaras Hindu University is portrayed as a landmark in the process.

A contrast between Gandhi and Tagore is presented before us. While Tagore is accommodating and optimistic about the scientific progress and industrialization brought about in the west, Gandhi's case has no admiration for the aforementioned. The Congress' National Planning Committee is also given focus, whose reports and vision focuses on industry owners and adaptation of the western industrial progress into the country's scenario.

3 Conclusion

The author dives deeper into an aspect of history and colonial education that hasn't been touched before. The correlation the work proposes between the thinking of the teacher from colonial period and how its effects are prevalent even today is appealing. The books succeeds in covering several aspects in the sphere of its topic doing more than enough justice to a few, while touching upon the others. Breakdown of the perspectives as one of the colonial rule's and educated national leaders', both of who take up the role of educating the less informed native is able to create a proper structure within the work.

Often it feels the writer is taking us on a tangent from the main sphere of discussion and few don't backtrack. The work establishes that purposes of education was not "just" production of support staff for colonial government, but still finds itself in agreement of it being part of the agenda or at least, a by product of the process. The second edition has included a section on women's education, but fails to deliver anything substantial except cherry picked instances on how women didn't enter mainstream of freedom struggle or education process - like the Dandi March.

References

- [1] Krishna Kumar. *Politics of education in colonial India*. Routledge, 2005.