

Need of Freirean Critical Awareness in Indian Society: Causes of Oppression in Indian Education

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Abstract

Social realism in India continues in the practice of discrepancy, domination, and discrimination. Generally, Indian education is largely considered in dearth of student-centred classrooms, in which teachers are usually not encouraging students from making inquiries or asking questions or from contributing in the classroom activities or in interactive discussions. In the present study, a qualitative approach was followed to understand how student-teachers of B. Ed. colleges make sense of Freirean pedagogy and philosophy of education and how it influences their ideas about critical and liberating education. It was based on the participants' lived experiences of oppression in Indian society and system of education in India and their perceived meaning and essence of Freire's theory of 'pedagogy of the oppressed' in the present day context. The research study used the empirical, transcendental phenomenological method. The intervention program of 24 hours was followed by focus group interviews for 6 hours at the same college with 15 B. Ed. student-teachers of a private aided college of education. Major theme emerged from the data namely 'Causes of oppression in Indian education'. This research paper emphasizes necessity of Freirean critical awareness in Indian society and his critical pedagogy to Indian classroom situation and discusses causes of oppression in Indian education to change for the better the education system and the society.

Keywords

Indian education system, social realism, critical awareness

Introduction

Undesirably, the Indian social realism maintains prevalent discrepancy, domination, and discrimination. Indian society displays passive demeanour, dearth of social awareness, inhuman attitude towards casteism, child exploitation, corporal punishment, corruption, untouchability, and issues on reservation policies, religion discrepancy and power imbalance leading to social discrimination. The oppression in Indian society manifests passivity in society and therefore the need to create human awareness to deal with societal problems and bring equality with social change. Generally, Indian education has a deficit of student-centred classrooms, wherein students are discouraged to ask questions, make inquiries, share ideas, and take part in discussions. In addition, students are given encouragement to learn by rote information word by word from textbooks and to stress on preparing the examinations where they will have to repeat this by hearted information. Owing to lack of social awareness in the society, the system of education in India reflects passive education broadly; unjustifiable acceptance to unjust situations by students, untouchability in schools mainly in rural areas, lack of critical awareness, submission to oppression in education, grave effects of corporal punishment and students as passive questioners and thinkers impeding educational progress.

In Indian education system, educational practices need to be seen as 'communication' as it is positive in nature so that it can generate critical awareness about the right kind of education and as a result both teacher and student can develop a self awareness to look critically at the world with mutual dialogical relationships. Hence, with Freire's critical and liberating education, critical awareness and thinking can be shaped in the Indian society and classrooms and moreover freedom can be given to students to think, question, act, show, share and criticize critically, creatively, and liberally in an active classroom of faith, humility, joy, love, and peace so that the student learns to question critically 'why'. In light of prevailing prospects and scope for substantial change in the Indian formal education system, Freirean critical pedagogy is of relevance and significance to students in the contemporary Indian education

and it can be re-invented and made realistic in the Indian context to bring social change in India and for global acceptance as a far developed country.

To this end, the purpose of paper is to present causes of oppression in Indian education and the need of critical awareness in Indian society and Indian classroom situations with relevance of critical pedagogy for dynamic societal and educational progress today and to promote critical, reflective, and creative thinking towards critical and liberating education.

Literature Review

Druliner (1992) developed a liberating Christian education that integrates the theological principles of Gustavo Gutierrez and the educational method of Paulo Freire. Guthrie (2003) found out the clear flaws in critical pedagogy which can actually encourage the critical consciousness that is the goal of the enterprise signifying Paulo Freire's theory of critical consciousness. Haley (2004) examined the creation, implementation and effectiveness of the guide-book, *Moving Forward: A Learner-centred and Participatory Approach to Teaching Community Adult ESL* in response to the need for lesson-plans and activities that help teachers focus on learner needs, applying Freire's praxiological method of teaching. Mireya Garcia-Durian Huet (2004) examined oppression and the reactions to it signifying the Freirean non-oppressive pedagogical method. Van Winkle (2004) studied Paulo Freire as a tool in proving why education is a human right because throughout his work he demonstrated the need for people to be literate in order for them to be considered "truly human". Daniels (2005) determined how and why adult women make meaning of credible, still photographs without the company of of text where they schematized and demonstrated Paulo Freire's theory of critical consciousness. Lee (2005) discussed Paulo Freire's Dialogical Pedagogy and the possibility of its transformation into Taiwan's education environment. Wee (2006) explored in detail the reasons for the low levels of successes of the ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) and how the centre can be viewed from a Freirean perspective. It is based on the

simple but fundamental Freirean technique of “problem posing” and the antithesis of “Banking” Education, which seeks solutions or gives answers. Andrade (2007) explored the possibilities in reinventing Freirean critical pedagogy in the context of Indian formal education, and to check the tensions and limitations that emerge and that would need to be addressed in such an attempt. Flood (2007) found out the ideas and educational theory of Paulo Freire to explore the notions of identity and musical agency within the Educational and Cultural Association Didá in the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Chem (2008) analysed the verbal interactions between teachers and low achieving students in class in junior high school applying Paulo Freire’s dialogic pedagogy. Linda (2008) found out whether the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire provided a framework for a better understanding of school bullying in the United States. Mehta (2009) found out the relevance and significance of the contribution of Paulo Freire to the philosophy of Education and its critical reflections and evaluations in the present Indian context. Felderman (2010) found the literacies produced in a second grade classroom, through podcasting, from critical literary perspective. Subramaniam (2011) examined how critical pedagogy can ease Latino students facing challenges in the schools of America. Diaz (2012) explored radical democracy in the thought and work of Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro. Kershaw (2012) examined the use of critical pedagogy in criminal justice higher education. Mazier (2014) explored the possibilities for enacting critical pedagogies within a neoliberal climate of educational restricting in higher education.

The preceding literature indicates that researches on Freirean philosophy are conducted extensively in different countries of the world; however, very few researches are conducted in India. Therefore, there arises an urgent need to conduct more researches on Freire in India, so that the relevance and significance of Freirean philosophy is known to prospective teachers and Freire’s model of critical pedagogy is adopted and implemented in the current educational practice in India thereby promoting critical education effectively for bringing a social change in formal Indian education system. The present study concerns itself with Freirean critical pedagogy and Indian culture of pedagogy, despite having originated in a very different context from that of Indian classrooms today, how Freirean critical pedagogy can offer a useful contribution to discuss the crisis in Indian education which yet needs to perpetuate critical literacy.

The present study attempts to find out whether Freirean thoughts on pedagogy can be put into practice in the educational system of India. The research is trying to find the influence of Freirean philosophy and pedagogy on the student-teachers and to what extent it promotes critical, reflective and creative thinking among them contributing towards critical and liberating education in the present Indian context. This qualitative study focuses on the student-teachers making sense of Freirean philosophy of education and whether they carry out his philosophy during the teaching-learning process and after to help students to be active questioners and critical thinkers and act towards a more inclusive society initiating critical education for democracy and social transformation.

The scope and success of the possible entry points of Freire in teacher education and schooling and the relevance and practicability of Freirean philosophy and pedagogy depends primarily on the teachers themselves and secondarily on the educational system, educational organization, family, society or the students after all.

Statement of the Problem

Educational Thoughts of Paulo Freire and its Relevance to Student-teachers in Contemporary Indian Education

Significance of the Study

The present study seeks to find out the relevance of Freirean pedagogy and philosophy to the student-teachers of B. Ed. colleges in the contemporary Indian education. Freirean critical pedagogy and educational theory and practice is important for the understanding of student-teachers, practicability and improving educational process and help to bring about social transformation in India gradually.

The research will generate awareness to the present education system to *not* produce mechanical students engaged in learning lessons by heart to pass the exams; instead, education will be utilized in their day-to-day life. The current Indian education tendencies to follow curriculum solely for garnering high examination results may well change and instead of rote learning, narration, memorizing, stereotype teaching and dominance of textbook, creative and critical thinking skills will be encouraged. Besides this, the education given in schools based on a unilateral approach where the emphasis is on teachers teaching and not on students learning might be disallowed. Through this study, opportunities and experiences will be provided to students to bring best out of themselves, as a result, students can critically apply knowledge to their lives or to the needs of the people. The students will benefit in education as learning becomes a practical application of knowledge and real cognitive activity which will lead to meaningful and purposeful transformative action in their lives. This research will prove essential to students, teachers and education system to make people think critically and create consciousness. The research will motivate teachers to carry out Freire’s concepts and ideas into the students, classroom and teaching styles and hopefully, Freirean liberating classroom would be generated in Indian classroom situation in the future.

The major significance of the study is to develop consciousness in the field of teacher education about Paulo Freire’s philosophy of education and to create awareness for the need to promote his revolutionary critical pedagogy so that student-teacher appreciate the fact that education is not reducible to a mechanical method of instruction. The research study will enable the student-teachers to appreciate Freire’s concept of education and comprehend that learning is certainly not a quantity of information to be memorized and instead of simply transferring facts and skills from teacher to students, the student-teachers could invite students to show critically on topic under debate, doctrines, the learning process itself and their society. The research would hopefully generate Freirean critical and liberating classroom someday in the present Indian classroom situation and the teachers would follow Freire’s methods and pose problems derived from student life, social life and academic subjects, in a mutually created dialogue.

The research study will thus create national consciousness on the need for teachers, student-teachers and teacher educators to follow Freirean philosophy and his methods in the regular classroom with the help of the Indian education system.

Minor Research Question

The study was conducted with minor research question as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences of student-teachers on oppression

in Indian society?

Methodology of the Study

In the present study, a qualitative approach was followed to understand how student-teachers of B. Ed. colleges, make sense of Freirean pedagogy and philosophy of education and how it promotes critical, creative and reflective thinking among them and influences them towards critical and liberating education. It was based on the participants’ lived experiences of oppression in Indian society and system of education in India and their perceived meaning and essence of Freire’s theory of ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ in the present-day context.

The research study used the empirical, transcendental phenomenological method (Moustakas, 1994), wherein, Freire’s philosophy and pedagogy was discussed and experiences shared along with the participants, thus, reducing the experiences to a central meaning of the “essence” of the experience. The task was accomplished through opinions and experiences of student-teachers of a private aided college of education, of diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, during the intervention program of 24 hours, followed by focus group interviews for 6 hours at the same college with the same number of participants. The categories were developed through constant comparison method of data analysis and obtained by unstructured focus group interviews. The data was analyzed by reducing the information to significant quotes and combining into codes, categories and themes and developing the textural description of the experiences of participants and structural description of their experiences. Finally, textural and structural descriptions were joined conveying an overall essence of the experience about the relevance of Freirean critical pedagogy to the student-teachers. This ultimately helped in answering the research questions. Moustakas’s approach was chosen and used as it had systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and guidance for assembling the textual and structural descriptions.

Participants of the Study

The research participants were 15 B. Ed. student-teachers of a private aided college of education affiliated to the University of Mumbai. Twelve of the participants were girls and three were boys from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The participants were mostly between the age group of 20 to 25 years. Eleven participants were graduates, out of whom six were science graduates, four were arts graduates and only one was a commerce graduate; other four participants were post graduates, out of whom three were science post-graduates while one was an Arts post-graduate. Only six participants had teaching experience ranging from one to four years in pre-primary school, junior college, coaching classes and tuitions, while others were mostly inexperienced to the field of education. The participants were from open and reserved categories both; nine participants were from open class while the rest belonged to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes’ categories. All except one female Christian participant, rests were Hindus belonging to varied mother tongue, but predominantly Marathi. The attire of most of the participants indicated that they were from middle-class families and with a simple bearing. All the participants were usually active throughout and ardent on learning. The entire group of the participant was attending the intervention program and focus group interview in lieu of the community work project. Ten participants were from English medium and five participants were from vernacular medium. The participants’ sensitivity was

overwhelmingly considerate.

Techniques of Data Collection and Research Instruments

An interactive intervention program of 24 hours on Freire’s educational philosophy, in-depth focus group interviews, videos, documentary evidence, and observations were used as data collection techniques and constant comparison method was used for data analysis. The research instruments such as intervention program plans, focus group interview protocol, observation notes, transcription analysis reports and video photography were used in the study.

Results

In the present study, the theme emerging out from the data analysis about the factors bringing about oppression in Indian society manifesting passivity in society was “Causes of oppression in Indian education” which is illustrated as follows.

Following table demonstrates categories from which the following theme emerged.

Categories	Theme
Acceptance of unfair situations by students Factors leading to power imbalance Oppressive aspects of education Existing casteism Untouchability in schools especially in rural areas Inefficacy of National Policy on Education Corporal punishment	Causes of Oppression in Indian Education

Theme: Causes of Oppression in Indian Education

The following theme of causes of oppression in Indian education with categories and codes is illustrated. This theme incorporated the following categories towards the causes of oppression in Indian education such as conformation to unfair situations by students, power imbalance, oppressive aspects of education, casteism, untouchability in schools especially in rural areas, the inefficacy of the National Policy on Education and corporal punishment.

The following section provides details of categories with indicators of student-teachers’ responses during the intervention program and the focus group interview discussions.

(A) ACCEPTANCE OF UNFAIR SITUATIONS BY STUDENTS

The participants’ responses on acceptance of unfair situations by students show that because of lack of awareness, orthodox mindset and need for concern toward social change leads to power imbalance and exploitation of the powerless, which leads to undue submission to unfair situations.

(B) FACTORS LEADING TO POWER IMBALANCE

The participants’ responses on factors leading to power imbalance could be broadly classified as being related to person, society, and government.

- The personal factors leading to power imbalance are related to people wherein fear within, external social pressure, passive belief, indifferent attitude, lack of fearlessness, cooperation, courage, patience and perseverance, inability to help in the crisis and submissive nature exist.
- The societal factors leading to power imbalance are related to

society wherein passive contribution of people toward education and society, lack of leadership, sense of duties amiss and communication and social barriers are customary.

- The governmental factors leading to power imbalance are related to government wherein unsatisfactory service, corrupt and inert population, misuse of power, need for strict actions and reinforcement of power imbalance creates insecurity, passivity, and dissatisfaction happen.

(C) OPPRESSIVE ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

The participants' responses on oppressive aspects of education encompass teacher, parents, society, educational organization and education system.

- The education system generally has impractical theory, lenient implementation of laws, incapability of education to prepare effective leaders, mechanical process of awareness campaigns, need for bringing on a change in the system and unjustified competition due to the ranking system.
- Teachers' partiality, dominance, failure to practice ethics and imparting of bookish and impractical knowledge lead to domination in education.
- The educational organization accepting illicit donations cause corruption.
- Parents forcing their will on children exhibit an act of suppression.
- In the society, people remain blind followers of the prevailing system.
- Parents and teacher both show indifference to child's interest and capacity.

(D) EXISTING CASTEISM

The participants' responses on existing casteism are segregated into opinions and suggestions.

- The opinions about Indian society on existing casteism are backing casteism by way of caste-discrimination, ignorance, lack of awareness and empathy, corrupt ways, anti-Dalits, bias toward higher classes, lack of awareness of constitutional rights and over-dependence on the government for social problems.
- The suggestions to check casteism in our society are for the government to check the execution of educational plans, collaborate with NGO on social problems in rural areas and actively work for social transformation and for people to find civic duties toward the society.

(E) UNTOUCHABILITY IN SCHOOLS ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AREAS

The participants' responses on untouchability in schools especially in rural areas incorporate causes and measures.

- The causes of untouchability in schools are mainly the rural area schools on education that fosters caste discrimination, favors higher classes, violates human rights, disregards high illiteracy amongst Dalits and misleads the population.
- The measures for untouchability issues are strict legal actions in intolerant areas, frequent awareness campaigns, show empathy toward humans, protection of Dalit students' dignity and monitoring caste inequality in the classroom by the teacher.

(F) INEFFICACY OF NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION

The participants' responses on the inefficacy of National Policy on Education include reasons, effects, and suggestions.

- The causes of inefficacy of National Policy on Education are syllabus-related, theory-based, non-empirical and exam-oriented education, impractical theory, emphasis on rote-learning as opposed to understanding, misconception knowledge, in part student-centred classroom, ineffectiveness in rural areas, status gap, practice of corporal punishment, lack of personal attention, de-motivation to average students, curb of freedom of expression, unpopularity of adult education, inability to manage student's personality development, indifference toward student's personal factors, gender bias by communities, un-informed teachers about minutiae of National Policy on Education, undeveloped academic courses and uncaring of backward class students.
- The effects of National Policy on Education particularly in urban areas are the development of modern attitudes with the utilization of educational technologies in advanced schools.
- The suggestions for the functionality of National Policy on Education includes the need of compulsion for elementary education, orientation about policy details to everyone, teacher's pivotal role in student-centred education, focus on influencing factors relating to self and improvement in co-curricular classes.

(G) CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The participants' responses on corporal punishment are associated to actions, repercussions and suggestions.

- The actions of corporal punishment as autocratic teachers terrorize students and parents endorse corporal punishment.
- The repercussion to corporal punishment is that teachers are not taken seriously and reverently by students.
- The suggestions to deal with corporal punishments is to stop humiliation of students, avoid halo effects of parents' agonic schooling history, do parents counseling and treat all students equally disregarding socio-economic backdrop.

Conclusion

The theme emerged in data analysis and synthesis of the research findings answers the minor research question, signifying the possible entry of critical pedagogy in Indian education.

Minor Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of student-teachers on oppression in Indian society?

Answer: The participants' lived experiences were concerned with factors causing power imbalance, the tradition of casteism, a discrepancy in freedom of religion and increasing child exploitation and reservation issues.

The following lived experiences of participants indicated causes of passivity, oppression, and discrimination prevailing in the Indian society:

- Individual factors about compliance with fear, submissiveness due to orthodox mindset, yielding to social pressure, retention of passive belief, keeping indifferent attitude, inability to help in crisis, concern towards social change amiss, lack of human awareness and inadequacy of fearlessness, collaboration

and perseverance leads to power imbalance, oppression and exploitation of powerless people.

- Social factors about passivity in the contribution of people towards education and society, lack of leadership, sense of duties amiss and communication and social barriers cause disproportion in society.
- Governmental factors about rising of sub par service, misuse of power, the growth of corrupt and inert population, dire need of strict legal actions against the wrong and inequitable support to power imbalance generates insecurity, passivity, and discontent in society.
- Parents offering ready-made solutions and trying to ease every hardship in child's life prevents coping mechanism to kick in and develops intolerance and poor life skills.
- Indian society backing casteism by caste-discrimination, an exhibition of ignorance, lack of social awareness, deficiency of empathy, corruption at large, agitations of anti-Dalits, bias towards higher classes, over-dependence on the government for social problems and absence of awareness of constitutional rights escalates social evils.
- Fostering of caste inequality, favoring higher classes, violation of human rights, disregard of high illiteracy among Dalits and fanatic subgroups of the population leads to untouchability in rural area schools.
- Lack of humanity and empathy cause unfair incidents in the larger society leading to social deprivation, discrimination, and domination.
- Undue political pressure, the division of humans in the name of religion and caste, sentiments of people hurt on sensitive religious issues and set back on child's psychology, behavior and intellect due to religious pressure sparks off controversies on religions and castes.
- Stagnant, de-motivating and indifferent society, over busy and stereotyping people and unscientific temperament causes passivity.
- Need for society to be more sensitive and appreciate the individuality of each student to break the mark-centric stereotype.

To end, the illustrations of lived experiences of the participants concerned with oppression in Indian society manifests passivity in society. Hence raise the need to create human awareness to deal with societal problems and bring equality with social change. The themes emerged in data analysis and synthesis of the research findings answers the major and minor research questions, signifying the possible entry of critical pedagogy in Indian education.

Implications of the Findings

The research study is expected to generate national awareness that critical education can contribute to a more democratic society and social transformation and Indian education can gradually lead to true democracy with the need to create more democratic classrooms. It will also prepare teachers with democratic vision or posture, to teach theory and practice by critical education, insisting on the critical capacity, curiosity, and autonomy of the student.

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