

## LANGUAGE AS HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER HEGEMONIC ENTITY IN UNDERSTANDING PEDAGOGY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In 2007, when I was in Hyderabad Central University in Hyderabad, I went for an interview for the post of TGT Hindi in Oakridge International School, one of the reputed international schools of Hyderabad. Though they were pleased by my career and percentages, they did not want to offer me the job by saying that I was a student of NCERT course and so I was unable to teach in Cambridge model of course and if so possible they were negotiating with me to do work with least price or salary. They have also taken my interview in English and told me to show a demo-class in English only. One of this life experiences always pinches me to write about the so called privatized system of education which hampers the life chances of poor students and destroys the bright careers of good teachers by giving importance to the low paid Para teachers. Also after going through Krishna Kumar's book "The Political Agenda of Education" I got an understanding of such ideologies and thinking which is working behind the creation of such schooling systems and ideologies. Because according to Lev Vygotsky pedagogy is never and was never neutral and it is also true that textbooks are never written without any ideology, but it must be progressive in thinking.*

***Key words:** Ideology, Pedagogy, Language Textbook, Critical Pedagogy.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The patterns of teaching, once established during colonial period do not pass away easily. They become the culture of education or people make them as the culture of society, which is of course a sustainable dominant culture, having roots in past. While it is true that recognition in education is an agency of command of the language of Britishers, and eligibility for state employment and status were the components of educated Indian's new identity, which has been recognized by the historians. The norms of pedagogy that evolved under colonial rule did not weaken with the realization of national independence. Sitting in the classroom today one can still

observe the distinct features of teaching that are related to colonial legacy though the small minds are not able to distinguish between the differences in pedagogic practices of India and West.

There is crisis of values and while education is in this state, it is because of these social conditions and lack of political will to change. How is education expected to work within these opposing sets of claim-for excellence on one hand and democratic expansion on the other, is a great question for us. The break with the past and the discontinuity which has been affected by colonialism has not yet been bridged. It is only now that literatures and perspectives from the period of colonization are being recovered and subaltern histories being reconstructed. The challenges before education are to recover the past without necessarily essentializing it through monolithic interpretations.

In the contemporary world it is true that English has become an international commodity like the two other commodities of our life, like food and shelter. History has given us this advantage of English for living in highly competitive world. Moreover, it is the gift of Britishers who have gone but the forces that got united at that time are now struggling to establish their identities. The education system that also failed to respond at a critical time, now finds it difficult to formulate the goals of English education in post-independent India. As a result, English education in the country has become a large scale industry. The English medium schools and colleges are unable to teach English and the so-called 'English-medium' schools that have mushroomed all over the country are only exploiting the craze for English education and English. The quality of English sold is not the same for all; there is one for the elite class (who can afford) and another for the poor class who lives down the lane. However, it is a known fact that the quality varies according to the price paid. Not only this but this type of educational system also led to the production of culture of silence in the classrooms without addressing the real context and native language of a child. This is also understood from the visible and invisible pedagogy of Bernstein where in visible pedagogy, the teacher controls the structure in which students communicate, and there is one way of transfer of information directly from the teacher to the students with minimum or no student discussion whereas, on the other hand, invisible pedagogies involve less overt instructor's participation and more student action, which is actually the need of time. Thus, a little effort has been done through this paper to raise some of the issues of English language and the dominant language being used in the classroom which is actually a part of hegemonic dominant culture. It need to understand the term *English education*, which has three meanings, such as (1) *education* of the kind that the English offered through their system of education, or (2) *education* imparted in English language, or even (3) *education* provided through English as the medium of instruction.

We need to understand such issues by going back into the colonial India where the colonizer's design in teaching English language and literature to the natives was mostly to influence their morality. Actually the socio-historic roots of modern educational structure lie in the colonial period which reflected the power and educational needs of the colonizers. The curriculum for English literature and language education in India was reflected the hegemonic impact of the trends of curriculum of England and Scotland, where English education was intended for the moral, ethical and intellectual improvement of the working class. The history of literacy presented by British literature was within a universalistic framework. The language, grammar and content of such text books were followed the rhetoric of Greek and Latin models. In 1832, the literature courses of Hindu college, Dacca College and Madras University were usually consisted of Pope's *Homer*, Dryden's *Virgil* and Gay's *fables*, in addition to Shakespeare and Milton which reveals ideological, pedagogical and moral agenda of Christian associations of Britishers. On the surface, most are the works of descriptive poetry about familiar themes such as, the season, nature or daily objects to the British readers but unfamiliar to the Indian readers, because the choices of such texts have been based on the considerations that the genre made them suitable for teaching recitations.

Hegemony, however, was achieved through a two-way process. On one hand, there was the deliberate section of ideas, perspectives and texts as well as a systematic construction of England as the repository of culture, progressive social, political and ethical ideas and scientific progress. On the other hand, there was the willingness of the students to accept the potential benefits of their English education, though their own expectations may have differed from those of the rulers. Not only did these early developments set the course of English literature and language education in India, they also affected developments of contemporary Indian literatures. Such as histories of Hindi literature had adopted the periodization of English literature. Actually the curriculum of English literature in colleges and schools served a quasi-religious function in order to spread teachings of Christianity or religious education in the form of language-education.

This paper argues that the dominant cultural, social and economic values both patriarchal and capitalist, of the ruling classes are deeply embedded in the hierarchical design of the institution and instruction, making it a most significant source of inequality. Both the internal and external structural features and internal hegemonic processes act as the mediators of hierarchy and inequality. However, we need to analyze the things through the ramification of neo-liberal forces in producing costly privatized schools in general, which are on their way following a motto of alienating children of working class, and the language used in English textbooks in particular.

Actually today's education system has been affected both directly and indirectly, by the changes in the global economy in the recent past. These changes have included shifts, away from state control towards privatization and decentralization and it was again due to globalized neo-liberal economic regime. The direct impact is clearly seen in developing countries whose educational systems are increasingly shaped by the leading policies of World Bank and the demands of structural adjustment, particularly the shrinking of the public sector and the expansion of private, on which organization like IMF (international monetary fund) are making their support conditional.

## NEO-LIBERAL IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Now the question raises that whether the modern education system really providing any consciousness? And what type of knowledge is provided by such schools? It is also recognized from Spencer's famous question about - what knowledge is of most worth? There lies even more contentious question whose knowledge is of most worth? Because in low-income countries like India and China, the rate of illiteracy remains high. Whereas, illiteracy is negligible in high income countries. (World Bank 2000) In India a person is considered as literate who is able to read, calculate and write a simple statement. But this level of literacy is insufficient for the global knowledge economy, in which a secondary level of education is increasingly regarded as basic education. Performance in global economy and functioning in global society requires mastery of technical, interpersonal and methodological skills. Such as, **Technical skills** include literacy, foreign language, math and science, problem solving and analytical skills; **Interpersonal skills** include team work, leadership and communicational skills; **Methodological skills** include the ability to learn one's own, to pursue lifelong learning and to cope up with risk and change; and **Skill of an international language** is also one of their basic mottos with a need to ensure that young minds acquire a language with more than just local use, preferably one used internationally. Thus, many of the international schools of Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai like metro cities are providing English language including French and Russian as the second languages by eliminating Hindi and Sanskrit languages.

**National curriculum** is also followed in such schools where everything is a matter of centralized control leaves individual schools unable to react to the local conditions. Its very nature, must involve more bureaucracy than a school-based curriculum, where individual schools must slavishly implement everything according to the requirement, in a unified manner despite of any bad consequences that may follow from such implementations. So, how it is possible for them for taking into consideration all the life issues of working-class children, who are automatically segregated by several psychological and social-psychological theories of variations in intelligence and verbal-skills tests?

However, **the new labour's educational policy** or an anti-egalitarian policy of education modifies and shapes the life chances of working class children. Business wants education fit for business, so to make schooling and higher education subordinate to the personality, ideological and economical requirements of capital it is making sure that schools must produce compliant, ideologically indoctrinated, pro-capitalist and effective workers. Such policy creates **more competitiveness** between schools, parents, students and teachers and selection by schools and universities are a continuation. Market have exacerbated existing inequalities by making poor schools, by and large more poor (in terms of relative educational results and total income of the school) and rich or elite schools (in terms of same terms) become richer, which again stimulates the parental choice of elites, choice of curriculum and textbooks, by leaving the neglected class in terms of everything. Thus, we need to analyze such policies and practices through the politics used behind textbook writing.

### **POLITICS BEHIND TEXTBOOKS**

We must begin with the ideology which shapes the textbook, perhaps the single most defining recourse available to the teacher or student. In the absence of other support structure for teachers, and a system ruled by the all powerful examination process for students, the textbooks becomes the sole arbiter of what is worth knowing. For the purpose of this study I will give a brief description about the English textbooks used in branded English medium schools and their ideology where syllabus of Cambridge university is following and also quote some lines from NCERT English textbooks as examples, which are for cost reasons have a wider reach than those of private publishers and therefore impinge on the lives of a large number of non-elite students. These textbooks are actually focusing on the moral purpose of education than on the specifics of language acquisition. A central focus of all the education policies in India have been the construction of an ideal citizen, and a specific nationalist agenda is constantly initiated through it. The first National Curriculum Framework of NCERT, 1988 (The National Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Education: A Framework) gave enormous weight to the role of education in strengthening national identity and unity. It states;

*At this point of our history, the most urgent need is to consciously develop national spirit and national identity. Education, as an instrument of social transformation, should ensure that its beneficiaries and products demonstrate a national consciousness, a national identity which are considered essential for national unity.*

Furthermore, through the contents of textbooks and its language use we try to understand the colonial ideology in the form of nationalist ideology and several inequalities (i.e. caste, class and gender) which is their prime motto and being propagated since independence to resent times.

### I. On the context behind Cambridge University textbooks

The books which are followed in so called privatized international schools of metro cities are endorsed by University of Cambridge and following the syllabus of Cambridge. Such books are mainly used for preparing citizens for international markets through the international examinations called as Cambridge Checkpoint examinations. The book which I am referring here, named as “Cambridge Checkpoint English student book-2” is a type of skill development book in English followed from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. There are eight chapters in this book which is mostly for developing descriptive writing skills, dairies and journals, myths and legends, leaflets and reports, reading news paper 1, reading newspaper 2, writing summaries and the story of English. The passages or extracts which are giving for each chapter are mostly **depicting an international cultural scenario than the Indian one**. For example, in descriptive writing part, the first extract named as ‘The Winter Oak’ is a Russian story of Yuri Nagibin, second one is science fiction ‘The Time Machine’ of H.G Wells, third one is ‘The fair at La Linea’ an autobiography of an Gibraltar author, giving details of Spanish town, fifth one is ‘The fall of the house of Usher’ a supernatural story of 19<sup>th</sup> century of American writer Edger Allan Poe. Similarly, in the chapter myth and legends the book is revealing an international picture rather than the Indian. It is good that such books are providing international knowledge to the students but simultaneously it cuts the children from their own diversified Indian cultural context.

Though the nature of such books are very informative providing an cross cultural information such as the biography of Gerry Martin, mostly known for crocodile hunting in National Geographic Channel, but a very few number of **Indian folktales are described with its weakness**. Such as, the story of Kerala’s tribe “The two daughters” of Pratibha Nath and a story of Rabindra Nath Tagore “Return of the little” trying to **sketch a patriarchal or caste-class mindset**, because these stories are emphasizing upon the distinctions of rich and poor or lower and upper and the poor or servant have the responsibility to be loyal for their masters throughout their whole life. Whereas the foreign stories are represented with its multiple pluralities. Moreover, the books are providing a mindset or trying to reproduce a group having a colonized ideology.



## II. On the context of NCERT textbooks

After going through the NCERT English textbooks of class V, VI, VIII, X and XII it is clear that language textbooks are largely for inculcation of moral and cultural values in the students rather than the development of English linguistic skills. Class VI, X and XII textbooks are of 2007 edition and class V and VIII are of 2008 edition and reprinted in 2012. The chapters are arranged in such a way that they are basically showing ideological and religious distinctions within itself. If any chapter is explaining some facts of specific religion or culture then intermixing with other religion is prohibited within the specific framework of the chapter and spreading of religious belief is another aim of the chapter. For example, in class VI English textbook a chapter named 'A Pact with the Sun' shows an incident of Muslim family which does try to reflect a good tradition and belief of their culture but it also seem to propagate the religious belief that *allah* or God is only responsible for everything in our life and he even changes the weather or climate according to our requirements, which is a religious blind belief and must not be the issue of a school textbook.

A random overlooking of the chapters of textbooks reveals a plethora of sententious writing, clearly driven by narrowly defined '**nationalist ideology**'. There are for instance a multitude of chapters in which nothing of interest happens but somewhere the essence of nationalist ideology is well expressed. For example, a chapter of class V English textbook named as 'What happened to the reptiles' tries to show **unity in diversity** by giving importance to leading a life which incorporates cultural differences, by saying that,

"You may not believe this story. But I can tell you it is true, because I have been to Pambupatti, a village on the edge of the jungle. It is on a cliff, and the vast forest stretches below like a mossy green carpet. There are many kinds of people in the village- dark, fair, tall, short. They speak many languages. Some eat meat, some don't. Some pray in a small temple at the edge of the forest. Others pray in a mosque some miles away".

However, it tries to reflect the concept of unity through human beings and animals too and the whole textbook seem to be dominated by the stories of *panchatantra* and for the sake of inter cultural mixing some stories from Arabian and Iranian tales are given. It is good that all the chapters of different tastes would give diverse experiences to the students but when it is dominated with an ideology of a nation it becomes political.

Not only this the language which is used throughout the English textbook is also never innocent, because it itself is overwhelmed with **ideology of class, caste and gender** and several words like prestige, status, class, ashamed

off, mercy, proud etc are coming up in almost all the chapters in different forms. We have seen an example in this regard from the chapter named ‘*jalebis*’ of class VIII textbook-

“My mouth watered, but I wasn’t about to be swept away so easily. In the school I was most promising students. In the fourth standard exam, I had even won a scholarship of four rupees a month. Besides, **I came from a well-to-do family, so I enjoyed considerable prestige. I had never once beaten so far. On the contrary, *masterji* had got me to beat other boys. For a child of such status standing there in the middle of bazaar eating *jalebis*?** No, I wasn’t right, I decided”.

After analyzing the class XII English textbook of NCERT I came to know that out of ten chapters three of them are sharply sketching a clear **gender biased picture** which is ideologically reflected through different roles of women being displayed in the chapters, like

**The necklace, Bholi** and **The question of trust** sketches an ignorant picture of women who is always weak, traditional and jealous in nature which is not always true, so it must create such a consciousness in the students that they look and think behind that.

### 1. Lack of English linguistic knowledge

In class V textbook named as ‘Marigold’ there are about twenty chapters consisting of ten proses and ten poetries. Though the different chapters are trying to raise different issues such as some from tribal life of *santhals*, a story of Kerala, awareness about different kinds of personality- like talkativeness, quite people and brave people and also the translations from Hindi tales and fables of Arabian Nights, but the real essence of the chapters are somehow lost because of its number, which is actually more for a child of seven or eight years. Some chapters which are the direct translations from Arabian and Hindi tales shows several weaknesses in grasping the essence of real story, such as in ‘Talkative Barber’ –

“In the city of Chasghar, lived a barber who was a great talker. Once the sultan called the barber to **shave his head**.....The barber replied, “You **do me a injury** by calling me a chatterer”.

Another example from the chapter named as ‘my elder brother’ which is the translation of Munshi Premchand’s *Bade Bhaisahab*-



“Bhaisahab: Aren’t you ashamed to be playing **kites all day long**”?

“Munna: Oh! I love the green fields, the gentle breeze, I want to jump like a football, I like the **touch and go and hut tu tu sounds of the kabaddi and the hurry and furry of volleyball pulls me like a magnate**. As soon as I am on the field, I forget everything”.

It seems as if word by word translation from Hindi is being done due to which it loses its cultural understanding of the fact. The sentences are also too long to be understood by the children of seven or eight years. The real strength of any text actually lies in the construction and arrangement of words and sentences, which somehow sketches the whole picture in front of us and provides us a way towards analyzing the issues raised in the text. So, how is it possible that such type of stories would improve the English linguistic knowledge of the students when there are several mistakes of **articles, determinants and grammars**?

Lastly, the issues which need to be raised after class-wise analysis of the English textbooks from V to XII is mostly to signify the colonial ideology or power relations which is still continuing after independence in different forms.

Now question raises, do the knowledge development of children affected by such an ideology? If so then what type of knowledge we are actually gaining from our classrooms? These are all important questions which definitely enable us to critically think how the colonial power politically acquire or dominate the small minds by influencing their own tradition of western *Bhadralok* life style and ideologies. Thus, several privatized and international schools of India are following British council model of courses and Cambridge model of courses instead of CBSE, ICSE or any state board courses. So far we understand that English as a language in the classroom and also English medium school reflects all the configurations of class power in the manner in which it enables urban, westernized students and disempowered all ‘others’. Despite the fact that it is a compulsory language in curriculum, in effect those students who do not already possess what Bourdieu calls the cultural capital of a working knowledge of English, are unlikely to acquire in the classroom. In this way, textbooks and curriculum structure concretize and consolidate the social inequality which has been for decades and been perpetuated by English.

## HOW LANGUAGE AS A PART OF CRITICAL PRACTICES

Now the question rises, whether the English language classrooms or the English as the medium of instruction are able to address all the indigenous issues of common mass in such a plural and diverse country like India?, who have different languages, customs and traditions irrespective of different caste, class and gender. The very understanding of such issues are more or less imbibed in **critical pedagogy** which viewed us several instances to think critically and develop a general understanding about the hidden reality. Because, the literacy scholars of the New London Group (2000) argues that “the cultural and linguistic diversity is classroom recourse just as powerfully as it is a social resource in the formation of new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship. This is not just so that educators can provide a better “service” to “minorities”. Rather, such a pedagogical orientation will produce benefits to all. For example, there will be a cognitive benefit to all children in pedagogy of linguistic and cultural pluralism, including for “mainstream” children. When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (as cited in Winch, Christopher. & Gingell, 2004).

So it seems very important that all the diversities of a child must be addressed in the classroom by the teachers for creating a counter-hegemonic mobilization against the traditional schooling and neo-liberal forces, to help students develop illiteracies necessary for social, political and economic engagement in our new times. It is also true that without entering into the system and understanding the dominant language of the system how a child can survive and develop the skills of deconstructing it. Because for Freire language and power are inextricably intertwined and provide a fundamental dimension of human agency and social transformation (as cited in Giroux, 2005). Language which is shaped by one’s own historical and cultural formation plays an active role in constructing experiences and in organizing and legitimating the social practices available to various groups in society. Also in Gramsci’s terms, language is both hegemonic and counter hegemonic, instrumental in both silencing the voices of oppressed and in legitimizing oppressive social relations (as cited in Giroux, 2005). So, it is the duty of teacher to treat curriculum as a narrative or voice whose interests must be uncovered and critically interrogated and promote such pedagogical conditions in their classrooms that provide spaces for different student’s voices. The **critical pedagogy** being proposed here is fundamentally concerned with student’s experiences, by taking their problems and needs as their starting point and also suggesting and legitimizing the knowledge through which they will get the meaning to their lives.

## CONCLUSION

So far after the analysis has been done I come to know that the structure of existing textbooks promotes an archaic approach to language acquisition which marginalizes the interests and preoccupations of young minds in India. Currently used as an absolute demarcation of the limits of knowledge, textbooks need to be reinvented to focus on creating communicative and linguistic confidence rather lecturing on a flat and undifferentiated form of nationalism. Actually the non-English speaking students, who seek social mobility through English, define English as crucial for access to the job market. It is this which propels them to English medium schools or the English coaching centres. On the other hand the syllabus as it exists is weighted against them, pushing them into failure. Neither the textbooks nor the teaching strategies which the books impose, enable them to acquire English for life or even for success for examinations. A fundamental problem with the textbooks, as argued in this paper, is the privileging of a particular form of nationalist ideology over the children's minds, interests and learning patterns and side by side the wretches are segregating through class-caste and gender ideology of the system and market. Actually every textbook is written with some ideology but it must not dominant theme of the book rather shows a progressive and modern thought. Eventually the curriculum structure has remained as deeply mistrustful of the educational process as in colonial India.

So, it is needed to understand how the so called ideologies are kept separate from textbooks and not overwhelm the language acquisition process. Because English language has several importance in our life needed to live in this changing society and it is also good that knowledge of different languages provide us diverse cultural experiences. But it must be seen that the issues which are to be propagated through text books must address the life issues of indigenous mass and teachers must be aware of the native languages of the students, which is also said in **NCF2005**. Then only an effective language curriculum can be evolved in a diverse country like India.

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