

Pedagogy in India: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Education is political, cultural and social action. It is bound up in the interplay between the state and civil society shaping who we are, what we do, how we think and speak; and, what we receive from and give to society. The business of education is the creation and recreation of culture, society and personal identity. Systems of education comprise networks of workers, practices and policies for nurturing learning capacity for the benefit of individuals and for the benefit of society. Education is seen both as a force for social change and as a vehicle for reproducing existing social hierarchies.

The Rig Veda is the nucleus of the education system in Ancient India. Composed orally by the priestly tribes among the Aryans between 1500 and 1000 BC, it is followed by the composition of three more Vedas- Sam, Yajur and Atharva. These four Vedas with six Vedangas or auxiliary sciences formed the core subjects of study in Vedic schools. These Vedic schools were managed by the priestly class now known as the Brahmanas as they were persons who had the supreme knowledge of the universe through their mastery of the Vedas. The dominance of the Brahmins was reflected in the creation of a new set of religious scriptures called Brahmanas. The 'Vedic' education was based on non egalitarian principles and its nature was exclusionary. For Shudras in the Aryan society, study of the Vedas was forbidden and they learnt their professional knowledge in agriculture and animal husbandry, spinning and weaving, fine arts and crafts through the expertise of their own families. The Shudras had not right to education.

The Indian epic Mahabharata tells the story of Ekalavya, an Adivasi boy. He was a representative of the marginalised strata of society. He was denied education and thus empowerment by Guru Dronacharya, who belonged to the high-born establishment. He also perpetuated a social order that was inherently unjust. The moral of the fable is simply that the power of the establishment will remain guarded by the position of the high-born, striving to ensure that an outcaste remains a lowly outcaste. Narendra Jadhav says, 'This is a story of traditional disempowerment of a Dalit-Bahujan in Indian society. The doors of empowerment through education were closed on these people'. Pedagogy

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