

Critical pedagogy in practice: A case study from Kerala, India

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Abstract: Analysing teaching-practice offers an opportunity to answer questions like what is critical to making a pedagogy democratic, what are the factors that support a teacher to be critical in her teaching? Or what restricts the teacher in being critical in her work? This paper seeks to address some of these questions by presenting the findings of an investigation into the practice of teachers who are committed to the idea of critical pedagogy. The scope of the study is limited to understanding the critical aspects that are related to the teacher's work within the classroom. The paper analyses the theoretical arguments that are relevant to critical pedagogy in relation to teachers' practices as they emerged during the study. The study, conducted in the South Indian state of Kerala, reveals that teacher subjectivity and schooling situations interact in a dialectical fashion to shape the nature of classroom teaching. The political subjectivity of the teachers, shaped by their close interaction with the Kerala Science Literature Movement (KSSP) makes their pedagogy critical in nature. On the other hand, the standardized curriculum and mechanically disciplined school environment continuously challenge the teachers' efforts at being critical in their work.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, political subjectivity, teaching agency, campus culture.

The primary goal of critical pedagogy is guided by the goal of formulating educational practices that can contribute towards shaping a democratic culture with an anti-oppressive social vision in the classroom and society. The idea of critique and inquiry occupies a crucial role in such a pedagogy. Teachers are seen as *transformative intellectuals* capable of developing critical attitudes and skills among students. Following the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework–2005 (NCF–2005), which laid an overt em-

phasis on social transformation as one of the key aims of education, several state governments were encouraged to revisit the state curriculum framework in India. The Kerala Curriculum Framework–2007 (KCF–2007) was developed from NCF–2005, keeping in mind the contextual needs of the region. It suggested critical pedagogy should form the broader framework for teaching in schools. A number of teachers volunteering with the Kerala Science Literature Movement (KSSP) had an important role in campaigning for and implementing the KCF and new curriculum in the state of Kerala. The present study is an attempt to analyse the practice of two teachers – Samir and Rosa¹ – who are committed to the idea of critical pedagogy. The primary data was collected during six months of classroom observations and in-depth interviews with the two teachers. The classroom episodes, interviews and school observation are used in the final analysis. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) recommends critical pedagogy in its framework. As the post KCF–2007 reforms had a particular influence on the middle-school curricula in Kerala, middle school teachers were selected for the study. The researcher analysed field notes, interviews, observation, photographs and videos to examine the pedagogy. The school is observed as a space of interaction among subjects and the objective realities that exist in that space. The nature of classroom pedagogy is analysed to unravel the key factors that shape pedagogy within a context.

Educational Context of the Study

The contemporary education scenario in India is significant for the manner in which it bridges the interests of the middle class as they were consolidated during the nationalist phase with the emerging requirements of globalization. The new phase of globalization is primarily guided by the principles of the “Knowledge Economy²”. In this paradigm, control of technical innovations and production is pivotal in patent production and the monopolization of the market. To ensure control of the market, global capital influences the nature of industrial research and technical education. New skills development programmes³ initiated by the Indian state are indicative of

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for the participants. Samir is a government school teacher with ten years’ teaching experience and has been an active volunteer with the KSSP for the last fifteen years. Rosa has been teaching in a private aided school run by Sri Ramakrishna Math for the last eight years. She is regional secretary of the KSSP and has volunteered with the movement for more than fifteen years.

² In the globalization era, knowledge is considered significant in the production process. The knowledge-intensive market paradigm is termed the knowledge economy, in which knowledge became the prime factor in production.

³ The National Vocational Education Qualification Framework introduced by the MHRD

such trends. Thus, the economic character of education gained importance in globalized era. The market model not only supports privatization but also proposes that education should be an investment in human capital for economic growth. The 2000 report by Ambani and Birla confirms this: “We have to fundamentally change our mind set from seeing education as a component of social development to realizing that it is a means of creating a new information society with Knowledge, research, creativity and innovation. It is not a social expenditure but an investment in India’s future” (Ambani & Birla, 2000). Kerala has held the highest rank on the human development index in India for several years. The state education sector has a high literacy rate and enrolment. There are a number of historical factors that have contributed to Kerala’s educational achievements. The work of missionaries, initiatives by the princely states of Travancore and Cochin in the late nineteenth century and the social movements in Kerala in the early twentieth century all advanced these achievements. The backward community movements and working class, nationalist ideas and peasantry mobilization by political movements also strengthened the education process in the region.

However, the contemporary thinking being shaped in the education sector is not as hopeful as the state’s previous education visions and achievements. The education sector has always been impacted by the conflicting political visions of the two major political fronts (LDF and UDF) that have ruled the state since its inception.

The Kerala Perspective Plan–2030 (KPP), a vision document published by the UDF (United Democratic Front) government in 2013, argued for the development of competitive and tradable human capital in Kerala. The ideas of ‘human well-being’ and ‘social development’ have become ‘conventional’ for these policy makers. They firmly believe that welfare policies and education for social development are no longer important in Kerala. The end goal of education is to prepare competent ‘human capital’ for an efficient knowledge economy. There is no consideration of the complexities of third world situations and the detrimental effects of globalization on poor, marginalized people, nor of its exploitative features.

in 2012 with the support of international bodies supports different skills development programmes for higher secondary and university students across the country. The Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP) developed by the state of Kerala and the National University Student Skill Development Programme (NUSSD) initiated by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra are examples of such initiatives.

The state is facing the serious problems of ecological degradation, gender discrimination caste issues and consumerism. Provisional data from the 2011 census indicates that the literacy rate among the Schedule Caste (SC)/ Schedule Tribe (ST) group and fishing communities is much lower than that of Other Backward Communities (OBC) and the general caste. It has been noted that SC/ST communities' social mobility is restricted by caste hierarchy and poor land holdings and educational achievements (KSSP, 2004). However, there are no suggestions that address these issues. Gender disparities are increasing in the state. Kerala has a poor female work participation rate (FWPR) compared to national standards (KSSP, 2013). The Kerala Perspective Plan overlooks all these issues. The only suggested solution for developing the state is to work towards a strong knowledge economy. Education is considered merely as a tool to achieve this goal. In 2005, with the support of UNESCO and NCERT, Kerala SCERT under the Left Democratic Front (LDF) formed government hosted an international workshop on critical education. Prof. Michael W. Apple visited Kerala and gave the KSSP unconditional rights to publish his book *Democratic Schools* in Malayalam. By this time NCERT had formulated the 2005 National Curriculum Framework. The idea of critical pedagogy was starting to be used in the context of Kerala's education. The idea was explicitly used during the implementation of the 2007 Kerala Curricular Framework.

The KCF explains the conflicting nature of knowledge in society. It is said that the curriculum cannot avoid these issues. The KCF lamented the dominant social structures and 'development' thinking in our society. It recommended critical knowledge should be part of the school curriculum. It was explicit on the politics of education:

Globalization and commercialization too have weakened the gains attained earlier...Disappearance of agricultural and traditional trading practices is also seen. Corruption, aggressive tendencies, rates of suicide, communalism and superstition have multiplied manifold. At this point, the question of what the content of curriculum should be gains the ground. (SCERT, 2007)

KCF-2007 led to a rewriting of the school textbooks used in the state, based on local government (Panchayat) consultations and the identification of themes for curriculum development. Using critical pedagogy as the anchoring philosophy of the curriculum was a radical initiative. Education was explained as a process of creation and transformation. Thus, KCF-2007 proposed that critical pedagogy should be anchoring idea of schooling in the

state. The LDF returned to power in the 2016 elections. The KCF-2007 suggestions are still active in state education policy.

The Role of Teaching in Social Reproduction and Transformation

Classical Marxian inquiries analysed education as a superstructure and characterized schools as institutions of social reproduction. Bowles (1977) explained the unequal schooling that contributes to the social relationship in capitalist society. In his opinion schools reproduce the educational achievements and skills that maintain the hierarchy of social relations. The continuation of the social division of labour from generation to generation is achieved through schooling. His study of the American system of schooling indicated the role of schools in supporting the existing class relationships. Willis (1977) elaborated upon the school failure is related to the class positions of the students. He observed schools as an institution for the transmission of class inequalities. In Bourdieu's (1976) opinion schools propagate middle class culture. His writing elaborated the argument that school is a conservative force that favours the privileged in society through school's 'techniques' and criteria in academic judgment. He critiqued the notion of the school as an agency distributing 'cultural capital' so as to reproduce existing social relations. Scrace (1993) observed the influence of the cultural capital of the dominant Indian class in reproducing curricula, school rules and teaching style. His study on India draws attention to the social reproduction of existing hierarchies through textbooks and pedagogy. All these arguments show that schools are social sites where the younger generation are trained in order to maintain existing social relations and values. Whenever schools are involved in social reproduction, teaching becomes a dis-empowered labour that contributes to the process of social reproduction.

The interpretation of Marx's idea of the empowering notion of labour is important in understanding the act of teaching in modern society. It has been pointed out by Marxist theorists that labour is more than an alienating activity in the capitalist mode of production. Marcuse stated that "labour can only be adequately comprehended through concrete investigations of the distinct form it takes in each mode of production. The process of labour determines the essential structure of the society and therefore, the conditions for the possibility of the realization of reason, and freedom." (Quoted by Held, 2004, p. 237). This understanding of labour provides us with an opportunity to investigate the emancipatory potential of teachers' work in

the modern world. Apple acknowledged the possibilities offered by post-modernist and post-colonialist thinking. But he did not want to romanticize the idea of agency without reflecting on the dominance of structure in the era of 'crisis' (2013, p.14). He also theorized the resistance of labour in his book *Education and Power*. As he put it, "Rather than the labour process being totally controlled by management, rather than hard and fast structures of authority and norms of punctuality and compliance, one sees a complex work culture. This very work culture provides important grounds for worker resistance, collective action, informal control of pacing and skill, and reasserting one's humanity..." (2012, p.22). Thus, he moves beyond a structural functionalist analysis of labour. He lamented the efforts to fix teacher identity and professional development without considering the challenges of social transformation.

Freire (1996) argue for a pedagogy that liberates the oppressed from the social structures of oppression. He considered pedagogy to be the ontological vocation of humanization that makes the oppressed conscious of the objective realities that restrict their freedom of life. The Freirean pedagogy facilitates 'praxis' in the life of the oppressed. He critiqued the oppressive practice of 'banking education' that treats human beings as passive depositories of information and suggested 'problem-posing' and 'thematic' inquiry to critique and uncover the oppressive conditions of life. In the process of humanization a teacher's primary task is to build solidarity with students in the process of unveiling the reality. From here, teachers and students reflect and act to recreate the reality. Taking lessons from humanizing pedagogy elaborated by Paulo Freire, scholars like Giroux (1988, 1996, 1997, and 2003); Shor (1992); McLaren (1995); Kanpol (1999) and Kincheloe (2011) theorized different dimensions of critical teaching practices in classroom. These explanations are popularly termed critical pedagogy. The primary goals of such explanations were guided by the goal of formulating educational practices that can contribute towards the development of a democratic culture in the classroom and society.

Gore (1993, 1998) critiqued the capacity of radical pedagogy discourses to alter education institutions and society and its limited contribution to the project of empowerment. She proposed that pedagogic sites should be examined through the analysis of power and knowledge in educational discourse. Gore argued

In focusing on the aspects of the social reconstructionist tradition, my aim is not to destroy that tradition but to contribute to it by (1)

elaborating the local functioning of regimes of critical and feminist pedagogy and the regimes of institutionalized pedagogy in social reconstructionist teacher education, and (2) identifying ways in which teacher educators alter those regimes using their own practices to arrive at suggestions. (1993, p.141).

Her interrogations into pedagogic discourse are important in understanding the hidden notions of power in pedagogies. These theoretical positions leave us with a few questions. What is the position of the teacher as a subject in critical teaching processes? Does the teacher have “agency” in her work? If so, what contributes to shaping agency in teaching? The following section elaborates upon insights obtained from an examination of the pedagogic practice of two teachers committed to the idea of critical pedagogy.

Key Factors that Shape Pedagogy in Classroom Practice

A number of factors seem to influence the teaching practices of the participants in the study. The research has found that teaching practice is shaped in real life situations, impacted by the material realities of the site of teaching. Everyday realities sanctioned by education department to the teacher are guided by the ‘dominant’ education interests of society. These interests are manifested through the institutional structures of teaching-learning. On the other side the teacher is the subject who anchors the teaching-learning. Her subjectivity interacts with the material realities in a schooling context to shape the classroom pedagogy. Freire’s (1996) elaboration of the notion of ‘radical subject’ explained this dialectical interaction shaping the action. He explained the process of radicalization as begin equal to the process of liberation that humanizes the individual. He said, “Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality” (Freire, 1996, p. 19). He then continued, “A radical is never a subjectivist. For this individual the subjective aspect exists only in relation to the objective aspect (the concrete reality which is the object of analysis). Subjectivity and objectivity thus join in a dialectical unity producing knowledge in solidarity with action and vice versa.” (ibid, p.20). The teaching practice of the teachers in this study is understood as dialectical interactions of the structure of schooling and the subjectivity of the participants. These factors are further explained below:

Circumstances of schooling: Campus culture and curriculum

Althusser (2008) observed that the school is the dominant 'ideological state apparatus' that functions through the ideology of the bourgeoisie state. However, he did take into account the intellectual agency of the teachers. This is evident in his references to teachers' attempts to resist the dominant ideology. In his elaboration of the concept of ideological state apparatuses, including the school, he added, "I ask pardon of these teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they 'teach' against the ideology, the system and practices in which they are trapped" (2008, p. 31). This study provides insight into the position of teachers in institutional settings. The evidence from the field clearly shows that the structure of a school has a major impact on the shaping of teaching practice. However, the study also shows that this structure is not just determined by the ideology of the state. The 'campus culture' determined by the management also plays an important role in shaping the structure of schooling. The elaboration of the campus culture observed in the study indicates the impact of the specific context of the school.

Campus culture includes the actions and nature of interactions of the subjects in the site. It also explains the accepted norms and rules in the schooling site. It can act as an element that shapes the 'teaching habitus' in the school context. The culture of the government school where Samir was teaching was lively. In the study, campus culture is identified as an important factor that shapes the circumstances of teaching. The students and teachers were free to interact and move as they wished. The students never maintained their distance from their teacher. The researcher found barely any fear of the teachers among the students. They frequently visited the staffroom and had fun with their teachers. The teachers also spent time with the students on campus.

Parents and other school stakeholders frequently visited the school premises to drop their children off and interact with the teachers. The evidence from this site shows the local community participated in improving the standard of schooling. Greater local community participation in Kerala sought to promote and strengthen public schooling (Purushothaman, 2013). There was no restriction on outsiders entering the staff room. The office room was an informal space. The teachers in the room cracked jokes and discussed classroom and personal issues with ease. During lunch time they shared food and talked about personal and official issues. From the very first day they were very accommodating and provided the researcher with a seat close

to the participant. It is evident that the school campus and teachers were not “disciplined” by the school administration.

Samir was flexible and confident enough to call the researcher into the staff room and his classroom. The evidence from the field also gives an indication of the freedom that the teacher enjoyed in making his decisions. The dynamic and child friendly culture developed in Samir’s school can be observed as an initial effort to establish a democratic environment in the school. The nature of the behaviour between teachers on the one hand and parents and students on the other, and the participation of the local community in developing the campus can be identified as examples of such initiatives.

The situation in Rosa’s school was quite different from that of Samir’s. The students and teachers were given clear guidelines on maintaining the disciplining ethos of the school culture. No outsider was allowed to interact with teachers and students without official permission. There were no common spaces for the students and teachers to interact except in the classrooms. The school administration was strict in following the official standards. The school environment was strictly managed by a Hindu Religious Trust called Sri Ramakrishna Math. The events in the school and the movements of teachers and students were regulated by a school bell. The rules to be followed at assembly were very strict and students and teachers were expected to follow them. The students’ movements during the assembly sessions followed a pattern resembling a military march. The students were to follow strict norms regarding their actions in the school compound.

There were different staff rooms for male and female teachers. The male and female teachers were found in different groups on the school compound. The male staff room was near the principal’s office. All visitors to the school were asked to sit outside the principal’s office. The administrative methods were focused on improving ‘performance and efficiency’. The annual results are the standard for assessing the performance of the school. The rules and norms observed in Rosa’s school can be considered evidence of disciplinary techniques for achieving better results in the annual tests.

Both participants used the official curriculum and textbook in their classrooms. A major part of the content prescribed in the SCERT textbook was not child friendly (neither the language nor the content). However, the participant teachers made an effort to move beyond the textbook. Samir’s students were slow in grappling with the content. This made the teacher go with the pace

of learning in the classroom. A large number of children in his classes were from a working class background. He understood the diversity of students in his classroom. Nevertheless, he was not able to give individual attention to the students, especially to those children who needed more support. In the individual interactions with the researcher he was critical of the textbook and the system for restricting the poor and marginalizing students in their learning. His sessions were slow and he had fallen behind the time table.

Rosa did not have a co-operative staff room environment and schooling culture. There were clear behavioural norms in the school. The school was run by a religious trust. She talked about the difficulties she faced in sharing her thoughts and ideas with her colleagues. Her school placed repeated emphasis on the curricular achievements of the children. This can be understood as the standardization and disciplining of the schooling process. Rosa's classroom interactions were limited by these situations. She used small project work and assignments to connect the textbook content with social life outside the school. She created platforms for group work and presentations in the classroom and anchored critical discussions in her class.

Dean et al. (1987) explained the importance of analysing the impact of schooling circumstances in shaping the teachers' work. They criticized the tendency of academic writing to treat teachers as agents of middle class culture and social control without considering the circumstances of teaching. The present study shows that teaching situations are primarily shaped by the official curricular norms and practices, namely textbooks and examinations. These norms are supported by mechanical administrative practices. Disciplinary techniques are used in schools to ensure standardized textbook learning in order to produce 'good test scores'. These standards were legitimized by the school. The textbook and curricular norms can be identified as state initiated structures. But, we cannot conclude that pedagogic manifestation of curriculum and textbook is only shaped by the circumstances of schooling. The study shows that teacher subjectivity plays a crucial role in shaping the classroom pedagogy. The following section elaborates on the subjectivity of participants.

Political subjectivity of the participants

The primary nature of the subjectivity observed in the participants' teaching practices was political in nature. Political subjectivity indicates the conscious effort of the human subject to critically observe, understand and act in a socio-political context that conflicts in nature. It allows the subject to

learn and unlearn the knowledge that supports her in challenging and collectively working towards transforming the realities that restrict justice and freedom of humanity.

Samaddar's (2010) explanation of the political subject is relevant to understanding pedagogic practice:

...Like in any subject formation, a set of practices becomes significant in the formation of the political subject. Innovation in a new set of practices indicates the emergence of a new subject in politics who is a new author. This practice is both discursive and institutional. These practices are essentially collective, that is to say, relational (contentious on one hand, dialogic on the other), and because of this the emergence of political subjectivity is possible only in collective form. (Samaddar, 2010, xxiv-xxv)

He explained political subjectivity as the identity of practice not as the identity of self. For him political subjectivity emerges from the material realities of life. Analysing the subjectivity of a teacher as an 'identity of practice' can problematize the technocratic definitions of teaching. It also unravels the role of the 'subject' in the practice. Freire (1996) emphasized the importance of subjectivity in transforming society. He wrote, "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic: a world without people...This postulates people without world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (1996, p. 33). The present study has also noted the strong impact of political subjectivity in resisting the conservative structure of schooling.

Personal communication with the participants on a range of issues that emerged during interview and informal conversations indicate that the participant's subjectivity is primarily shaped through their solidarity with the political ideology and intellectual circle of the KSSP. The following excerpts from the interview shows the political reflections on the education process.

Researcher: What is education mean to you?

Samir: The training one gets to transform the society we live in into a place with better living conditions, and to interact in it with alertness. Both for the individual and for the society that includes him, at the same time. Tomorrow should be one step better than today. A training for that should be received at an individual level also, thus it should become a tool to change the injus-

tice today...Present education system is trying to create machines. (Personal Communications, July 25, 2015)

Samir's political consciousness and thinking can also be observed in his classroom interactions. The episode described below proves his ability to bring political thinking into classroom interactions. Rosa strongly argued for teaching that considers the socio-economic background of the children.

Rosa: The background of the students is an important issue for sure. There will be students who study well even when their social conditions are very bad. Students do have an understanding about everything, like what their house is like, what their father is, what their mother is, and all. We know such students. We give more attention to such students. When you spot such students outside the classrooms, if as you address them with affection, and inquire about the matters that concern him, like if his mom has a job now, whether his dad has a job now, what he is doing now...? Then they would be more attentive in the classes, and they would have the feeling that the teacher knows him and that she is noticing me. (Personal communication, October 13, 2015)

It is not just the textbook content that shapes the direction of the pedagogic practice of the participants in the study. Solidarity with pupils from an oppressed background and an affectionate approach that involves them in the pedagogical process is the highlight of her teaching. Knowledge about children from oppressed families informs their interactions with the neighbourhood communities and social activism. The interactions with material life situations within and outside school also have an impact on these teachers. As mentioned above, Rosa continuously engages with colleagues who follow Hindu right-wing politics and educational beliefs. She described how she dealt with such situations in her school:

Rosa: Lot of daily newspaper approach school for giving free copies to school. When *Madhyamam* (A Malayalam daily published by Jamal at e Islami) came in, a lot of teachers here opposed it. After a few days, it was asked to move the newspaper stand from where it was. It was said that *Madhyamam* newspaper was that of Muslims. After a week, they started bringing *Janmabhoomi* (A Malayalam daily Published by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)). Even though a huge cry hadn't happened, those who were related to this knows. So this year, I called the people of *Madhyamam* early itself and told them that we need

a paper here. A big event was organised within the assembly and *Madhyamam* was sponsored there. After that *Deepika* and *Mathrubhoomi* (Malayalam dailies) came. After a week itself, the sponsor of *Janmabhoomi* came and held an event in the assembly. So then everyone had this doubt whether Rosa teacher will put it up on the stand or not? The paper was brought to me, and I said, 'bring it; I'll put it up on the stand.' After 3 or 4 days, I was asked, 'teacher, today there is no *Janmabhoomi* found there.' So then I said that every paper is there. There are 59 copies of 4 papers altogether that come to the school. I am the one who distributes all these copies to each place. Then I said, 'Maash (male teacher), I am a believer of democracy. I don't think that by reading *Janmabhoomi* one will become a Hindu person, or that by reading *Madhyamam* one will become a Muslim, or that by reading *Deshabhimani* [Malayalam daily published by CPI (M)] one will become a Communist. Let the students gather all the knowledge.' I said I will put up any newspaper that comes there. (Smiling) (Personal communication, October 14, 2015)

The participants spent a lot of their time on campaigns and educational programmes organized by the KSSP. Both Samir and Rosa had a good aptitude for learning. They read a great deal and reflected on the subject that they taught and also about society in general. They understood the importance of the teacher in shaping the critical character of pedagogy. The impact of political subjectivity was quite evident in the practice of the participants in the school. The nature of their classroom pedagogy is described in the next section.

Nature of Classroom Pedagogy

The nature of teaching practice cannot be understood only by analysing 'mode of interactions' in the classroom. The underlying assumption is that knowledge is transacted and that knowledge positions (the knowledge of experience each subject has) are also important in analysing the nature of classroom pedagogy. In Freire's opinion, any critical dialogue in the classroom needs to respect the knowledge of the participants. For him dialogue starts with the "knowledge of experience had' in order to get beyond it is not staying in that knowledge" (Freire, 2014, p.60). Both participants went beyond the content and interacted with the students by raising questions and anchoring dialogues that have the potential to promote questioning of the prescribed content. The classroom episodes described are not directed by the content of the curriculum. The teachers brought their experience

and knowledge into the classrooms to shape the political dialogue with the students.

Samir integrated student's life experiences and know-how into his pedagogy. An important aspect of his teaching is the ability to connect socio-political aspects of life to classroom discussions in an organic fashion. He used students' life experiences and language in interactions to overcome the limitations of the standardized textbooks. This encouraged the children to begin a dialogue with the teacher. The following episode portrays Samir's ability to organically incorporate political insights into his classroom interactions.

Samir: Malayalam is our mother tongue. When I reached the classroom, what did you say?

Students: Good morning

Samir: Good morning. When somebody helps you, what do you say?

Students: Thank you...

Samir: When we do something wrong, if by mistake I hit on your leg what did we say?

Students: Sorry

Samir: Yes, if we ask permission to enter into the class what did we say?

Students: May I come in...

Samir: All these are Malayalam or what?

Students: No...

Samir: From where these words come?

Students: English

Samir: Why did we unconsciously habituate to these words? Where is the root of this?

Student: Sayippanmaar (Sayippu is the common local dialect in Malayalam that is used to address English/white males. This word is also used to make fun of English/whites)

Samir: Sayippanmaar ruled us for long time and they left the English here. Because they ruled, we followed them unconsciously, that is why English Medium School students wear coat and suit. We are pretending to act like Sayippu (English) by wearing coat and suit. We are trying to live like them. What is this? An English culture! Almost hundred years our place was a colony of English. Seventy years back they left. However, there is an influence of English on us.

This episode in the Malayalam language class depicts his ability to bring a critical dimension to the normalized use of English words in everyday life.

He uses the presence of English in the school and society to elaborate on the colonial impact in society. Samir uses a funny local dialect to critique the tendency of the elite, middle class Malayalis to follow the English. Students joined in his criticism in the classroom and enjoyed his jokes. There was no suggestion in the textbook or in the teacher's Malayalam handbook that the teacher should lead an interaction on the politics of language. After this classroom episode the researcher interacted with the teacher and he talked about his intentions during the pedagogic interaction:

I talk politics in a contextual way. Yesterday a student talked about Gujarat, he described what he saw there. It is being said that Gujarat is not like that. I tell the child that there is a Gujarat that he hasn't seen. That is a political act. The political level which the child should know about is that child should be able to identify the injustice that is happening in the society in which the child him/herself is a part of. He/she should have the ability to analyse it with all the facts and queries. Utilizing the contexts from the classroom is the important part. (Personal communication, July 26, 2015)

Samir acted as an emancipatory authority in his interaction with the students. He also used his creativity and 'critical imagination' to make his classroom child-friendly. Rosa primarily followed a lecturing and interaction mode in her classroom. She positioned her teaching within the framework provided by the curriculum and the timetable drawn up by the department. She was cautious about the time frame in each session. However, there was space for the children to raise questions and doubts. Her students were attentive and reflective in the classroom. She followed a uniform pace in teaching the content and finished her content within the stipulated time. She opted to give time to students facing learning challenges, even after the classroom sessions. Rosa also used her socio-political knowledge in her teaching practice:

Rosa: In 1990s, there was a literacy movement...To create awareness about literacy, KSSP did street-plays; they had some songs for it. It is in that; there was a song, which one? *'Enthinnathiratha, ippol thudangenam, ellaam nammal padikkenam...'* (Why fear, we will start it now, we will learn everything) (The teacher and students are singing).

Rosa:these people were made to get a just wage. Have you noticed the strikes that are happening in Idukki and in Munnar?

Student: Yea! Workers.

Rosa: Ah, look at the strikes being done by the workers of tea estates

in Munnar... so, what are they saying? They are asking for their wages to be increased. Because, they are unable to live with their current income. They don't get have a good treatment when they fall sick. They don't get education. These are the reasons they said. So in our Kerala, we could see a lot of women who work with a very low income, right?

Rosa stressed the importance of the teacher's political consciousness and elaborated on it during the interview. For her, a teacher should contribute to the social transformation. It is no different from the work of a political activist. She said:

Teaching involves transforming students. The task being done by a political activist is that of building a good society for tomorrow. That is what a teacher is also doing. Hence teaching is a political activity. My personal opinion is that everybody should have politics. Some teachers say that they don't have any politics. Then they also have politics. Being apolitical is their politics...I usually say that teaching is a job which should be done with more political sense than any other jobs. (Personal communication, October 12, 2015)

Rosa holds a political position on her life and work. She believes that living with scientific temper⁴, and the ability to critique are important characteristics of a progressive teacher. These are considered an important element in the political philosophy of the KSSP as well. Rosa considers education a tool for social mobility and empowerment.

Giroux (1997) suggested that, in transformative pedagogic practice, the teacher critiques the conservative, authoritarian practices of education. He argued for a democratic and emancipatory authority among teachers in the classroom, school and society. He opined, "The concept of emancipatory authority suggests that teachers are bearers of critical knowledge, rules and values through which they consciously articulate and problematize their relationship to each other, to students, to subject matter, and to wider community" (1997, p.103). Both participants went beyond the official curriculum to make their classrooms interactive learning spaces. This is evident in the observation that classroom pedagogy is anchored by the political subjectivity of these teachers.

⁴ Scientific temper is a word used to describe the attitude of an individual to follow logic of science in life. The word is first used by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946

Conclusion

Educational knowledge, values and relations are analysed in the context of the interplay between dominant and subordinate school cultures. The teaching practice is not shaped by the 'political beliefs' of the teachers, but by their political subjectivity that develops through their learning and experience in the course of their lives as teachers contributing to the practice. Both participants shared the formal and informal learning experiences that contributed to their political thinking during the interview⁵. For them, learning to teach is a continuous process. Thus, subjectivity cannot be articulated as a static identity. Such attempts define the subject as an object. They seldom consider the agency of teachers in their work. At the same we need to be cautious about romanticizing agency in teaching without reflecting on the circumstances of teaching.

The participants in the study continuously face challenges that are created by 'institutional norms and standards'. The schooling situations that were studied are highly standardized in nature. They are prescribed and implemented through mechanical ways. Textbooks and tests are unquestionable phenomena in schooling and teachers have no role in designing either. None of these situations are conducive to promoting critical teaching. It is true that classroom situations are highly influenced by the macro level standards set by the education system. However, the study of pedagogic episodes truly reflects the transformative potential of subjects who encounter rigid situations of schooling.

Samir and Rosa understand the political nature of teaching. They were able to critique and reflect on the guidelines that are forced upon them. Their learning and work is primarily shaped through their solidarity outside the formal schooling system; there were no official training programmes on critical education during the period of the study. The participants belonged to a community of teachers involved in critical pedagogic exercise within and outside the schools. The criticalness in their teaching is shaped through their everyday political practice and engagement with the political movement. Their expressions (through interpersonal communication and work) also indicate the elements of transformatory learning. The elements of transformation can be traced in the ability to 'critique' that is developed through their involvement in the political discourse in the people's science movement. A creative imagination and a critical rational approach guided

⁵ For details of the interview, see Kareepadath (2016).

by an anti-oppressive political vision are identified as the essential character of their work.

The potential of any pedagogy to be emancipatory is embedded in its ability to be 'democratic'. Such a pedagogy recognizes the power dynamic of knowledge and its relation to the knower. The primary task here is to unravel oppressive elements. This is done through collective rational inquiries. Finally the knower becomes involved in the process of humanization. The democratic nature of pedagogy can only be analysed in its evolving nature in relation to knowledge and knower. There is a thin line between the practice of any pedagogy and indoctrination. Critical educators like Freire (2004) warn that the practice of pedagogy cannot be imposed on the learner in the classroom. A critical pedagogue should start from the 'knowledge of the learner' (contextual knowledge) and not to stick to it but move beyond to become free of the knowledge positions. Freire's (1995) elaboration of the process of humanization indicates the attention to the evolving nature of knowledge (Rata & Barrett, 2014) and its importance in pedagogic practice in developing a political consciousness. Classroom pedagogy is a goal-oriented conscious act. There is always direction in its practice and that makes it political in nature. Thus, any arguments on the 'neutral' nature of pedagogy are naive. The democratic principles underlying its practice make any pedagogic act different from the act of indoctrination.

Critical pedagogy cannot be implemented mechanically in schools. As Freire opined, it is important to re-invent the practice in an organic fashion considering both the psychological and socio-political context. It is evident that KCF-2007 has not yet achieved its vision to create schooling circumstances suited to critical teaching. The Kerala Curriculum Framework-2007 proposed a critical pedagogy as the broader framework for schooling. The policy makers handed over all the responsibilities to the teachers to fulfil the ideal of critical pedagogy. The top-down bureaucratic approach seems to weaken the vision of KCF-2007.

Batra raised the importance of 'empowering' teachers to accomplish the transformative goal envisaged by the NCF-2005. She said, "The assumption is that teacher indeed thinks the way the authors of this document have thought or else, will start doing so soon after they are 'persuaded and trained' to do so. The NCF unfortunately appears to be committed to undermine the implementation of its vision by failing to address the need to restructure the teacher education to enable the process of pedagogical empowerment of the agency of the teacher and thereby of the radical new cur-

riculum vision it presents” (2005, p. 4350). Batra’s concern is about shaping and implementing the teacher education programmes that support the agency of the teacher in practicing critical teaching.

If we closely analyse critical pedagogy, it is evident that such practices cannot be institutionalized as per the bureaucratic standards of the education system in India. The present study shows that the community of teachers guided by a shared anti-oppressive political vision can contribute to the critical pedagogy movement. The critical pedagogy movement has the potential to deontologize the mechanical aspects of teaching practice. However, further investigation is required to examine the practices of teachers who are part of collectives with an anti-oppressive vision and their impact on critical education in India.

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