

## CONTENTIOUS ROLE OF EDUCATION IN GENERATING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents a sociological analysis on the role of education in society. It argues that education acts as a tool of capitalism that creates socio-economic inequalities, injustice and stratification in society. The kind of education acts as a predictor of role and status of an individual in society. Education is also instrumentally used to create a social consciousness and an illusion of common good to maintain social control and power structure of society. The paper has also discussed a contradictory role of education with special reference to Subcontinent South Asia.

**Key Words:** Education; Capitalism; Social stratification; Division of labour

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Education prepares individuals to fit into the complex social structures and to play particular social roles in society. Education system acts as an agency of selection of individuals within the social structures. This selection determines the type of roles the individuals are likely to perform and the type of occupations they are likely to get entered. Thus, the type of education acts as a predictor of social status of individual in social hierarchy [1]. In this regard, education system creates and maintains social inequalities. [2].

Meyer investigated what education does in society, and found it creating classifications of persons and knowledge [3]. He noted that education allocates the ranks to the members of society greatly affecting their life chances. It grants some people access to the valued positions in society while others are denied [4]. Education actually processes the individuals for different roles under the division of material and mental labour in society.

The concept of material and mental division of labour is actually rooted in Dukhiem's work on 'division of labour for organic solidarity in capitalistic societies' [5]. Population density and the process of social development led to a division of labour in society. The division of labour means the division of professions and occupations, and further, the division of material and mental labour within the professions and occupations. A large section of population in each occupation discharges manual labour, whereas a small segment of privileged individuals deliver directions to this labour. Both these two classes are prepared through education to perform their distinctive roles. Naturally, to perform different types of roles they need different types of education. It means that 'division of labour' in capitalistic societies is regulated through the division of education.

Where the division of education creates social inequalities through unjust division of labour, its role in social development is critical. Engels, in this regard, noted that the process of social development necessarily calls for a greater division of labour in society [6]. He argued that increase in production and trade, advancement in science and arts, development of state and law was not possible without social division of labour. Thus, the presence of few privileged persons to direct masses discharging simple manual labour is necessitated for a smooth functioning of society. In this

process some people think and generate ideas; while the others act upon these ideas. This becomes possible through a specific and differentiated education and training.

However the process doesn't stop here. It further generates disparities in society. The class, who generates ideas, consequentially becomes occupant of public affairs of manual labour class. In fact, the generation of ideas by elite class primarily serves the interests of the same class. The powerful class which has occupation over means of material production in society also takes over the means of mental production of society. Consequentially, the ruling material force also becomes the ruling intellectual force of society. The ideas of ruling class also rules over the ideas of masses, and in this sense, these are ruling ideas. Thus, ruling class of society is also an intelligentsia of the society.

The relationship between power and knowledge, in this regard, has been precisely established by Foucault [7]. He observed that knowledge creates power; and power (re)produces knowledge. So, power and knowledge are coexistent in societies. Foucault, actually, has put emphasis on structural aspect of the phenomenon, in which power justifies its existence in society through knowledge. Knowledge becomes the symbol of power in society and vice versa.

The powerful and knowledgeable class of society produces and distributes ideas among the masses in such a way that apparently these seem as benefits of the masses. Masses see opportunities of upward social mobility for them within the system. They perceive the prevailing capitalist system a common good that can guarantee for the solution of their socio-economic problems. The emergence of such kind of consciousness among masses is itself an expression of success of capitalist rule in society. But such ideas are just illusions: rather these are for the continuation of rule of the same class in society [8].

The consciousness that supports the ruling elite to legitimize and regulate class rule in society is mainly created through communication means and educational institutions [9]. Consciousness, sociologically speaking, is a formation of mind [10], or a construction of self through the conceptualization of society, or an internalization of social norms through human interaction and communications [11]. The process of construction of consciousness moves from macro to micro level. The collective human phenomena and

cultural arrangements construct the certain consciousness in individual members of society. It relates to the social environment of individual. Consciousness is self-reflectivity and acts as a monitor of human activities. However, at the same time as a reverse process, consciousness of individual members of society transforms into, and takes the shape of, social consciousness.

Education, in this regard, is the most effectively used tool in creating such social consciousness that can organize society in a way that suits to ruling class. Freire calls this social consciousness a 'culture of silence' [12]. By 'silence' he doesn't mean an absence of response; rather he means a response deficient of critical quality. He argues that dominant members of society having control over educational process, control the thinking process, and thus, prescribe what people should speak and what not. This also becomes the base of class education in society (i.e. different education for different classes). Education in class societies, never has been, nor can be, outside or above the classes [13, 14].

Yechury, in this regard, has referred the first proposed education policy in United States initiated by Thomas Jefferson in 1779. The philosophy behind this policy was to divide young literates into two classes: laboring and learned. Jefferson suggested three years elementary schooling as a first phase in education at state expense. Then the few best would be proceeding to the next stage for further education in grammar schools on state expense. And at a third and final stage, one best student from each of these grammar schools would be granted admission in college where they will get all amenities and facilities like accommodation, clothing, and scholarships on state expanse. The policy implication was to separate a geniuses class of young generation from rest of society.

Where education, in class societies, serves the interests of ruling class and is considered as a necessity for strengthening capitalist systems: there, it is contributive to maintain a social control. It helps to keep the people distant from dissonance, crime, vagrancy, destitution, mobs, vandalism and other anti-social activities. The consciousness created through education plays a vital role in this regard.

No matter how much a state expense on its public education, it is always turned back in the form of saving money to be spent on recruiting sergeants to keep its people in order. The ruling intelligentsia always feels comfortable in spending on teachers rather than paying to watchmen. It is comparatively an easy track to maintain a status quo in society. In this sense, education act as a mean of capitalist social control.

However, imparting education beyond the confines of ruling class should not be confused with the likelihood of eradication of class differences in education. Educational difference between the classes will exist as long as classes will exist in societies. Essentially, the access to education for working class is bound to the extent and type of knowledge necessary to appropriate them in the form of a productive force for capitalism. Education does fulfill basic function for capitalism [15].

## **CONTRADICTORY SOCIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION**

Naturally, class societies run through capitalistic system. In capitalistic system bourgeoisies always try to exploit proletariats to maximize their profit and thus maintain their dominance. For this purpose, they need to keep proletariat deprived of intellect, courage and daring attitude that may cause menace for their dominance. They achieve this goal by creating consciousness among proletariats through the use of education. Their narrow class interests are strove as the interests of whole society, and their exploited morality as the morality of all mankind. Proletariats are indoctrinated in such a way that they accept existing social and economic system as an external truth: as it were from God.

Therefore, capitalist system demands specific necessary education of proletariats for the interest of bourgeoisie. With this education proletariats not only manually work for bourgeoisie but also can be instrumentally used against feudal and monarchs in favour of dominance of bourgeoisie. However, some times, with this education, the proletariat become aware of their exploitation, and thus, challenges the rule of bourgeoisie. In this regard, education in capitalistic system also has a contradiction on its part.

For example, science being a productive force for capitalism helps to maximize profit of bourgeoisie. Research in the field of natural science is necessitated by capitalistic society for its monopolistic survival in modern times. At the same time, bourgeoisie is sensitive of the fact that proletariat can use science as a weapon in its struggle against capitalist state. Therefore, to meet this apprehension, education is departmentalized in such a way that science students can not receive knowledge or training in the field of study of human society. They know nothing about Capitalism, Marxism, or Socialism. The scientists, thus, have to be used instrumentally in the process of strengthening capitalist system without knowing it. Actually, this conflict in bourgeoisie conscious between the effort to promote natural sciences and the attempt to mask over true relationship between labour and capital reflects also a contradiction on the part of education.

In capitalistic societies, capital is the real force behind state; and the bridle of state lies in the hands of capital. Capital controls the state. State acts according to the will of capital. State policies are subservient of capitalism. Education, science, and knowledge all are placed at the disposal of capital and acts instrumentally to sustain the rule of capital. In this milieu, if sometime proletariat uses their education to challenge the interest of capital, state comes forward to help out capital and protect its interest. In this process, state assaults on democratic rights of proletariats. The doors of higher and scientific education are closed for proletariat. This is also a contradictory face of education in this regard.

## **EDUCATION'S CONFLICTING ROLE IN SOUTH ASIA**

It has been argued in the above debate that education classifies human societies into mutually competing groups. The system of education is developed by ruling elite to skillfully serve its own interests and to continue its rule over masses. The education, which is delivered to the masses for the purpose to work for ruling elite or bourgeoisie, serves the

purpose at first stage. But finally it becomes a cause to challenge the continuation of rule of the ruling elite because it gives insight to the oppressed or proletariat class about its exploitation.

This framework can help to understand the recent educational history of India. The colonial masters developed here an educational system that could suit to prolong their rule in India. The kind of education they prescribed for Indian communities successfully fulfilled their need up to a certain period of time, and maintained their political hegemony over Indian subject. But over the years, a class of indigenous educated persons prepared and emerged through the same educational process, which began to challenge the rule of aliens over their land. These educated people got power in society through their knowledge and initiated a political process in India that caused to cease the colonial rule in India. Thus, political history of colonial India is closely associated with role of education.

In the beginning of colonial rule in India, British tried to consolidate their rule with the support of native elite class. They patronized the local educational system which was already serving the interest of native elite. Class society of India was divided on patterns of castes system and religions; and education was just privilege of upper class of society. The denial to access to education to the marginalized class of society was not just because of economic reasons, but also due to a faith-based social setting. To maintain Brahmin dominance and the religious sanctity of cast system, a large population was deprived of benefits of education. Wishing for education by a lower-caste Hindu was a sin and punishable crime.

In this background, alien rulers supported local education system to trap local upper class for their vested interests. They provided generous funding and established numerous new educational institutions on indigenous patterns, like Calcutta madrassa (1791) and Benaras Sanskrit College (1792). The British colonial system did provide support to oriental learning, and thus, strengthened indigenous educational patterns in one or another form till 1935 [16].

However, British rulers necessitated English-based educational system to prolong their rule in India. In this regard, the famous note of Lord Macaulay (1835) is worthy to understand the need of the ruling class to appropriate educational system for their benefit [17]. He wrote, "selective natives must be educated to act as interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, opinion, morals and intellect". Macaulay wrote this note as a president of General Committee for Public Institution, a committee to frame educational policy for India. This note was sent to the Governor General of India. It was followed by the government as policy guideline; and funds were appropriated to launch English education and European literature in India. A significant majority of Indian upper class swiftly followed this change.

This new educational policy served the interests of ruling class in several ways. One, under the influence of English language and literature, the degree of psychological

acceptance of English people among inhabitants rose; and their status of being aliens get reduced. It was essential to prolong their rule. Two, a class of English educated clerks were prepared to run administrative affairs of government at lower level against comparatively lower salaries. Previously, British clerks were doing these jobs with high salary packages. By this way, the rulers not only fulfilled their practical administrative need from indigenous resource but also cut down the administrative expenditures of the state. Three, English education developed English taste in Indian people. This created here an economic market for English productions. English firms did business and earned profit from this vast Indian market.

Over the years, a large number of English schools and Colleges were opened in public and private sectors, which apparently severed the interests of colonial bourgeoisie. However, conflicting role of education was also at work in the bottom, and a time came when local educated class began to think and put question on alien's rule over homeland. The end product of this process was that British had to wind-up their rule from South Asia. The education which had served them at first stage: defeated them at next stage. In fact, education caused to end-up colonial role from South-Asia.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Education creates a social divide. It prepares individuals to perform different social roles: that determine their social statuses as well. The type of education one gets today can predict his status and role of tomorrow. Education creates a division of labour in society in such a way that some people do mental labour while the others do material labor. Mental laboring class, which is limited in size, generates ideas. While the other class, which is bigger in size and consists on general masses, acts upon these ideas. These ideas rule over larger segment of population. It means ruling class create ruling ideas.

In fact, there is strong connection between knowledge and power. Knowledge generates power and vice versa. Powerful and powerless classes gain knowledge differently from educational structure of society. Powerful social classes possess superior knowledge. This maintains an intellectual hegemony of ruling class over general masses, which also contributes to prolong its rule.

Education also creates a specific consciousness among general masses that keep them contended regarding prevailing conditions. Their perception is built by powerful class. They perceive the policies made for benefit of ruling elite, as a common good. Education, in this regard, is a tool in the hands of capitalist. In other words, Capitalistic system uses education for its own benefit by creating an illusion of common good.

However, sometimes, the education provided to general masses, so as to work for the benefit of capitalist class under the illusion of common good, creates awareness among subordinate class about its exploitation. Then the same education constructs a menace for rule of privileged class. Exploited class starts thinking, questioning, and challenging

the privileged status of the ruling class. This is a contradictory role of education in society.

This contradictory role of education is also evident in the history of South Asia. British rulers established an education system in their South Asian colony to prolong their rule here. However, after some time, a segment of population educated from the same system put question on British rule over their homeland. They used their education and get people organized to abolish the British rule. In this context, the independence of Sub-continent South Asia from British rule is one of the miracles of Education.

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