NEP 2020: SOCIAL ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

REKHA BADSIWAL

Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Miranda House, University of Delhi

==

Introduction

Studies in education establish the significance of teachers as prime players in the next generation's education and any transformation in education and schools. The responsibility of executing all innovative practices and policies for meaningful learning of the child in the classroom is dependent on the role played by the teacher.

It is also found that teachers, like all other individuals in society, are products of their socialisation and reflective thinking. Studies in education establish the continuance of stereotyped social practices related to gender, caste, and religion in schools and classrooms. These practices range from allocation of tasks based on gender, caste and expectation deficit as per the social location of the child and his family.

All policies of education, including teacher education policies from time to time, have emphasised the role to be played by teachers in addressing social issues in the classroom. With this in view, the teacher education programmes have also undergone changes that accommodate conceptual understanding of social issues and provide space to reflect on the same during practice teaching. While detailing the above-mentioned context, the present paper explores the significance of social issues in teacher education in NEP 2020.

The Context: Experiences in Classroom, Curriculum and Textbooks

Various studies have highlighted the prejudiced behaviour of teachers and fellow classmates towards students from marginalised gender(s), castes, tribes and religious minority students. There is reinforcement of gender roles in school at all levels by the teachers, administrators and also the students. It has been found that roles like rangoli making, board decoration, movement of furniture, etc, are allocated as per the gender stereotypes in society. Also, girls are not expected to do well in mathematics and science as these are considered the domains of males.

Some of the discriminatory practices related to castes and tribe, being followed in the schools as documented by various researchers, include refusing to touch the copy or slate of students from scheduled castes and tribes backgrounds, their segregation at the time of mid-day meals, discriminatory nature of task allocation like cleaning the class/washrooms and fetching water and tea for the teachers, targeting with verbal abuses and physical punishment, undermining their language and other cultural aspects (Nambissan,1996; Venkatnarayan, 2014; Desai & Kulkarni, 2008; Ramachandran & Saihjee, 2002; Sujatha, 2002; Kumar 1983; Bindu, 2014; Ramachandran and Naorem, 2013). Among the minority religions studies point to exclusion faced by Muslim children and continued harassment, ridicule and hostility towards themselves from classmates, teachers and school authorities. They are questioned for their loyalty to the nation. (GOI, 2006; Farooqui, 2012, 2019)

There are also negative stereotypes regarding the mental capabilities of females, scheduled castes, and tribal and Muslim children. The assumptions reflected in teachers' and administrators' attitudes about the student's background, and their potential to learn undermines the basic premise of constructivist pedagogy and the 'learnability' of students that the National Curriculum Framework 2005 emphasises.

The textbooks and curricular practices also reinforce gender, caste, tribe and religious stereotypes in overt and covert ways. In India, textbooks become the operative curriculum. School curriculum is a reconstruction based on available knowledge involving selection and reorganisation of knowledge (Kumar,1991). Studies by Kumar (1983), Bhog (2011), Darak (2012), Nawani (2018) emphasise that Textbooks are an important Ideological State Apparatus that are instrumental in promoting certain kinds of values in the schools whereas discouraging some others. Nawani (2018) states "Knowledge is indeed socially constructed and decisions of inclusion or exclusion of a particular content in the school curriculum, its organization and presentation reflect distribution of power and principles of control in society".

The school curriculum does not adequately represent the existence of marginalized sections in the society both in terms of a number of representations and the kind of representation. As the lives and culture of the marginalised sections do not find an adequate place in the curriculum, it becomes difficult for the children from the marginalised groups to relate to it. To be successful in schools, they need to accept the backwardness of their lives and culture.

Thus, the school curriculum not just alienates but also makes children from marginalized groups accept their own culture as backwards (Kumar,1983). This is reinforced through various other messages that children receive from school and society. Textbooks provide a skewed representation from the perspective of a child belonging to a particular sociocultural context, which is a sort of "symbolic violence" against other children coming from diverse social backgrounds (Nawani, 2018).

Nambissan (2000) observes that the school curriculum is completely silent on the issue of caste inequality and oppression of Dalits in our society. Students and teachers do not discuss anything pertaining to caste inequality in the classroom and this way the system continues in the society without acknowledging the elephant in the room. Farooqui also points out that school textbooks and curriculum does not represent the culture of minority religion.

Kumar (1983) says that in terms of number of representations, the marginalised communities are almost invisible from the curriculum. He says that the messages conveyed about the tribal characters from the textbook stories, Eklavya and the boy who saves a forest officer is that these people are important only to the extent they sacrifice or help the dominant community. He also points to the insensitive way in which topics related to the life of tribal people are taught in the school. Another study of language textbooks of four states throws some light on the formation of idea of the 'other' in the process of searching for and expressing a nationalist self (Bhog, Bharadwaj, Mullick, 2011). The authors point out that the Urdu textbooks are quiet about the matters of minority politics, partition and conflict between religious communities. It has also been noted that Muslim personalities in the NCERT Urdu textbooks do not find any place in their Hindi and English language textbooks. The selection of the textbooks assumes " a world familiar to only a certain Indian child – middle class, 'upper caste' and fairly well exposed".

The Teacher and Teacher Education

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 recommends that constructivist pedagogy be employed in the classroom. It emphasises that all children have the intrinsic urge and capability to learn, which should drive the teaching-learning process. The document tries to build the trust of the nation, especially of the teachers, in the 'learnability' of all children irrespective of their gender and family background which is based on various affiliations such as religion, caste, tribe and economic status. The underlying assumption is the 'active nature of the learner' in

the entire learning process as well as the "confidence in the teacher community" to engage meaningfully with all students in the school setting.

The teacher is the crucial link in the teaching-learning process that goes on in the classroom and school. The teacher is the prime actor in implementing all innovative practices and policies in the school. Most of the curriculum processes are mediated by the teacher in the school. The teacher is the one who connects with the child directly on a day-to-day basis. The teacher also facilitates making rules about the way of life in the classroom. These rules inform students' conduct in the classroom with the teacher and with the other classmates. This influences the way the entire class views the teaching-learning process and fellow classmates. It sometimes also leads to categorising students as good, mediocre, poor, or some other traits that can be used for this labelling. So, the teacher is the most influential person in the classroom or school for the students (Batra, 2006). The teacher has also been called a 'meek dictator' by Kumar (1991), who displays the traits of a dictator in the classroom but doesn't have any say in curriculum and other academic and administrative matters.

The teaching community cannot be considered a homogenous community. All teachers have their own perspectives about society and education. Teachers are individuals who are a part of our society (Batra, 2005). As an individual, everyone grows up with the values and belief systems of their respective family and other socialising agencies in the environment. Individuals are socialised in certain ways of thinking and behaving. Individuals' ways of thinking and conduct are embedded in one's social affiliations, consisting of gender, caste, tribe, religion, economic status, and other related identities. (Dubey, 1988; Kumar,1989, 1992; Gupta, 2008; Shrimali, 2017). These family and social affiliations influence all aspects of individual behaviour, ranging from language and food habits to occupational roles. All individuals entering the teaching profession are also influenced by socialisation through these affiliations.

The school experiences of children are not only based on their engagement with the teachers. Although it forms a major chunk of their memories, which is carried forward for the rest of their lives. Other components also influence children's school experiences, like textbooks and curricular or co-curricular activities. Textbooks and curricula form the Ideological state apparatus to influence the education process. The studies of the textbook analysis point to the

reinforcement of various gender roles, caste and tribe prejudices through textbooks (Kumar,1983; Bhog, Bharadwaj, Mullick, 2011; Darak, 2012; Nawani, 2014).

The teacher is the key person in transforming the teaching-learning process (NCF, 2005; Kumar,1991; Batra,2005). The textbooks, good or bad, pass through the hands of the teacher. (Batra, 2006).

As the central actor in the education process, the teacher bears the onus of transforming the situation (Fabionar, 2020). However, it cannot be put on the teacher alone as systemic and policy-level provisions and actions are as much desired. For the teacher to play any transformative role in making education an instrument of change in society, teacher education has to play a significant role in sensitising the teachers about social issues.

The National Focus Group on Teacher Education emphasises that the teacher functions in a larger context, and its concerns and dynamics impinge upon the functioning of the teacher. This means the "teacher has to be responsive and sensitive to the social context of education, the various disparities in the background of learners as well as in the macro national and global contexts, national concerns for achieving the goals of equity, parity, social justice as also excellence"(NFG TE, 2006).

NCF 2005 situates learning in the larger social context of the learner. It also emphasises the importance of practising equality in the classroom and advises teachers to function in a non-discriminating manner in the classroom. The 'National Focus Group Position Paper on Problems of Schedule Castes and Tribes Children' (2006) also notes the inadequacy of teachers and teaching transactions both in terms of quality.

NCFTE 2009 pronounces the need for reflective teachers and states that 'the importance of competent teachers to the nation's school system can in no way be overemphasised.' It recognises the importance of teacher education in the 'quality of teacher performance in terms of its impact on the learner and indirectly on larger social transformation.'(NCFTE, 2009)

NCFTE (2009) also raises the concern about "..the values that teacher education adds to the prospective teacher's abilities to face challenges of facilitating the development of critical and creative students..". In the section on Inclusive Education, NCFTE registers its concern

regarding the social exclusion of children coming from the margins of society and the need to equip teachers to overcome their prejudices and develop social sensitivities for positive work in this direction. It suggests that TEP should provide opportunities for interns to understand themselves and others, including their beliefs, prejudices, assumptions and emotions, examine social reality and relate subject matter with the social milieu.

The social aims of education lay the foundation for incorporating social issues in the teacher education programme. The TE programmes mention a few aspects related to social aims, including 'understanding the societal context of education', 'nation building through inculcating constitutional aims' and 'understanding the link between the school and society, life and school experience'(B.Ed. Syllabus 2024, pg.). The same has been reiterated by different policies and their recommendations in the country.

Batra (2005) emphasises the importance of voice and agency of the teacher in the classroom. The essay also notes that teachers also carry their social baggage of understanding about caste, religion, gender, etc, which is a part and parcel of their socialisation as individuals in the society. The teachers, as individuals of the society, cannot be expected to unlearn all societal norms, which might consist of prejudices against others in the same society, overnight. It requires a process of engagement with the teacher at various levels- pre-service education, in-service programs and providing them adequate environment and inputs to develop professionally. (Batra, 2005)

Grace (2006) also says that most effective professional development occurs when there are meaningful interactions not only amongst teachers but also between teachers, parents and other community members suggesting a model of teacher professional development rooted in the societal context.

Barton & James (2010) emphasise that teacher pre-service programmes overlook the significance of preparing teachers to address religious thought in history and social studies. They advocate that teacher educators require to help prospective teachers think over the reasons that makes religion a significant aspect of understanding social world. Barton & James (2010) advocate for balanced and comprehensive treatment to all religions in teacher education programmes.

The above discussion mandates that any teacher education policy or guideline should necessarily build on the societal context in general and make prospective teachers reflect on their own prejudices about concerns related to gender, caste, tribe, religion and financial status.

NEP 2020: Social Concerns in Teacher Education

National Education Policy 2020 projects itself as the pioneer in indigenous education. It has brought about some key changes in the education structure and processes. These include extending preparatory classes for one more year, making it a total of three years, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy and asserting that the medium of instruction is the student's mother tongue till completion of primary school. The section on higher education focuses on multidisciplinarity and flexibility with multiple entry and exit points and establishing the Higher Education Commission of India and the National Research Foundation. For teacher education, it mandates a four-year integrated B.Ed. degree by 2030. A four-year Integrated Teacher Education Program (ITEP) has been introduced in universities nationwide for the same.

This section analysis NEP 2020 for its concern regarding social issues such as gender, caste, tribe and religious minorities in the teacher education section. Some of the key points outlined by NEP 2020 for teacher education include a holistic approach to teacher education by situating and nurturing it in a multidisciplinary university/institution, introducing dual major B.Ed. programs in the form of ITEP and provisions for attracting outstanding candidates to teacher education programmes through scholarships. The policy stresses the significance of quality in teacher education through rigorous regulatory systems.

The section on teacher education does not engage with concerns related to social issues of gender, caste, tribe and religious minority in the context of the teacher-educator and the to-be teacher. It does not seem to be informed by the experiences of children from the above-mentioned marginalised communities in the school and also the role of curriculum and textbooks in the process of exclusion and ill-treatment.

It advocates grounding the to-be teachers in Indian Values and traditions. The document states, "Teachers must be grounded in Indian Values, languages, knowledge, ethos and traditions including tribal traditions, while also being well-versed in the latest advances in education and pedagogy" (sec 15.1, pp. 42). The above statement leaves the reader wanting more details about

the values, ethos and traditions mentioned. The label of Indian values and traditions cannot be attached to a particular set of values and traditions in the larger society. Indian society is diverse, as are the values and traditions of each community in the larger society.

Here, the question that needs to be addressed is which values, knowledge, traditions and whose values, knowledge and traditions (Kumar, 1992). Without answers to the above questions, the statement remains vague and untenable. The answer to these questions will provide one with an understanding of the direction in which the curriculum will function and whether space will be provided for the values, knowledge and traditions of the marginalised.

The statement above clearly mentions the inclusion of 'tribal traditions' but fails to widen the scope to include values, knowledge and traditions of other communities from our diverse, multicultural society. This reflects the implicit understanding of ignoring the 'marginalised' while pronouncing the expectations from the teachers.

The policy highlights the importance of promoting participation from socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), including groups based on caste, tribe, gender, religion and economic criteria. The sections on 'Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' and 'Equitable and Inclusive Education' mention provisions of funds for scholarships for students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups and other promotional programmes like giving bicycles and making hostels.

The thrust of the document is on financial provisioning and schemes to promote the participation of children from SEDGs. It mentions the statistics related to dropping out of school but does not engage with the reasons suggested by researchers for school dropout. It seems to consider financial and access related issues of the families and communities involved. It does not recognise the systemic issues related to the functioning of schools and implicit messages from the curriculum, textbooks and teachers, as explained in previous sections of this paper.

The section on 'Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' states "ensure sensitisation of faculty, counsellor, and students on gender-identity issue and its inclusion in all aspects of HEI, including curriculum" (GOI, 2020, pp. 42) . It is heartening to read this statement in the policy, and I wish that the same would have been extended to other SEDGs. It further mentions "strictly enforce all no-discrimination and anti-harassment rules" (GOI, 2020, pp. 42). The

context of the above statement is not explained further. It is mentioned in the steps to be taken by all higher education institutions. The policy does not acknowledge the implicit ways of discrimination and harassment that do not form part of any rules.

Concluding Words

As mentioned in the initial sections, the context and the teacher, curriculum and textbooks influence the daily experience of children belonging to SEDGs. The previous teacher education policies and teacher professional development theories consider it important for the teachers and to-be teachers to engage with social issues.

NEP 2020 does acknowledge the importance of inclusivity and equitable education. However, when viewed from the lens of social issues in teacher education, the policy falls short in addressing deeper concerns related to gender, caste, tribal and religious discrimination. Its provisions mainly focus on financial and logistical support, failing to tackle implicit biases in textbooks, curriculum and school practices. Furthermore, NEP 2020 calls for teacher sensitization on gender identity issues but neglects the same level of focus on caste, tribe, and religious issues, which are equally critical.

In conclusion, while the NEP 2020 introduces essential changes to the education system, it does not adequately address the social issues that permeate the classroom and teacher education. A more holistic and in-depth approach is required to prepare teachers who can foster inclusive classrooms, engage with diverse student realities, and challenge entrenched social prejudices in the education system.

References:

Batra, Poonam. 2005. "Voice and Agency of the Teachers: Missing Link in National Curriculum Framework 2005" Economic and Political Weekly, New Delhi October 1, 2005. New Delhi

Batra, Poonam. 2006. "Building on the National Curriculum Framework to Enable the Agency of Teachers" Contemporary Education Dialogue, Vol 4, No. 1, Monsoon 2006, pp. 90-118

Bindu, R H. 2014. "Quality of Education in Tribal Areas – A Case study of Khammam District of Andhra Pradesh", Proceedings of the Indian history Congress, Vol. 75, Platinum Jubliee: pp 1317-1323. Indian history Congress

Darak, Kishore. 2012. "Prescribed Marginalisation" Seminar Volume 638, October 2012, pp 63-68, New Delhi.

Desai S. & Kulkarni, V. (2008): "Changing Inequalities in India in the context of Affirmative Action", Demography , Vol. 45, No. 2: pp 245-270.

Dubey, Leela. 1988. "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol 23, No. 18, (April 30, 1988). Pp 11-19. New Delhi

Fabionar, J.O. (2020). Responding to the Moment. Teacher Education Quarterly, Summer 2020, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp 145-150. Caddo Gap Press. Stable URL: https: //www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26977519 accessed on 14 July 2024

Farooqui, Farah. 2012. 'Encounters' and telling silence of children. Economic and Political Weekly, May 19, 2012, Vol. 47, No. 20, pp. 55-63

Farooqi, Farah. 2019. "Silenced and Marginalised: Voices from a Sarkari-aided school of Delhi" Economic and Political Weekly, Volume LII No. 38, September 23, 2017, New Delhi

GOI. 2006. Social, Economic and Educational status of the Muslim Community in India. New Delhi: Government of India.

GOI, 2020. National Education Policy 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of Indi

Gupta, Latika. 2008. "Growing Up Hindu and Muslim: How Early Does It Happen?" in EPW Vol. 43, No. 6 (Feb 9-15, 2008), pp 35-41. New Delhi. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40277100.

Kumar, Krishna. 1983. "Educational Experiences of Scheduled Castes and Tribes" Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 18, No. 36/37 September 3-7, 1983, pp 1566-1572, New Delhi

Kumar, Krishna. 1989. "Learning to be Backward" in Social Context of Learning. Sage, New Delhi

Kumar, Krishna. 1991. "Meek Dictator: The Paradox of Teachers' Personality". Political Agenda of Education: a study of colonialist and nationalist ideas. New Delhi: Sage Publications

Kumar, Krishna. 1992. What is Worth teaching? New Delhi. Orient Longman. New Delhi

Nambissan, G. (1996): "Equity in Education? Schooling of Dalit Children in India" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 31, No. 16/17:pp 1011-1024

Nambissan, G. 2001. "Social Diversity and Regional Disparity in Schooling: A study of

rural Rajasthan" in A Vaidyanathan and P G Nair (ed.), Elementary Education in Rural India – A Grassroots view (New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Nawani, Disha. 2018. "Modifying School Textbooks: Disregarding Children's Experiences" in Economic and Political Weekly, Volume LIII, No. 29, July 21, 2018, pp 12-15, New Delhi.

NCERT. 2005. National Curriculum Framework, New Delhi. National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2005, New Delhi.

NCERT, 2006, National Focus Group on Teacher Education for Curriculum Renewal, NCERT

NCERT, NCF Position Paper: Problems of Schedule Castes and Tribes Children, New Delhi. National Council of Educational Research and Training 2005.

NCTE. 2009. National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, National Council for Teacher Education, 2009, New Delhi.

Ramachandran V. and Aarti Saihjee (2002): "The new Segregation: Reflection on Gender and Equity in Primary Education", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 17:pp 1600-1613.

Ramachandran, V. & Naorem, T. 2013. "What it means to be a Dalit or Tribal Child in Our schools: A synthesis of a Six-State Qualitative Sudy", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, No. 44 :pp 43-52

Shrimali, K.M. 2017. "The Formation of Religious Identities in India" in Social Scientist, May-June 2017, Vol. 45, No. 5/6. Pp 3-27. Social Scientist Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26380477

Sujatha, K. (2002). "Education among Scheduled Tribes". India Education Report, edited by R. Govinda, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Venkatnarayan S (2014): "Casteist Pheromone in Elementary Schools of Tamilnadu" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 49, No. 26/27:pp 26-28.