International Journal of Academic Research and Development
ISSN: 2455-4197
www.newresearchjournal.com/academic
Volume 1; Issue 2; February 2016; Page No. 53-55

Representation or marginalisation of working class in formal schools under British India CA:-1880-1940s

Radhika Mishra

Ghanshyam Memorial Public school, Jhandapur, (C.E.L) Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract
In this paper I will be focussing on three main themes with respect to the education of the working class in colonial India from the late 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century. First, I briefly emphasize the similarities of this policy in the metropolis while pointing to the significance of the specificities of the colonial context. Second, the colonial policy on education of the working class was neither coherently chalked out nor consistent. Third, I argue that the notion of education for the working class was geared towards the need to produce industrial workers. In other words, instead of a means of social change such education was directed towards reproducing working class identity, albeit in newer ways.

Keywords: Marginalisation, policy making, working class, technical education, industrialisation.

Introduction

Contextual

Historical criticism of colonial rule points to the sheer neglect of education both quantitatively in the numbers of students enrolled in schools and qualitatively in the type of education offered which has been considered an exercise of colonial power that sought to discipline indigenous modes of teaching and learning. Marxist historians criticise colonial education systems as tools used by capitalists to exploit underdeveloped colonial countries and perpetuate colonial subjection. For instance, there was an uneven distribution of school provision throughout the colonies. Dual standards were encouraged because on the one hand there were urban colonial schools for the indigenous elites, usually conducted in the language of the colonial rulers (e.g. English), while on the other hand there were poorly functioning, rural, vernacular schools for those peasants who could avail themselves of the opportunities so provided. Much of what was taught was irrelevant for the real social, psychological or employment needs of the pupils who attended these schools. There was too little concern for developing mass education, adult literacy, vocational education and certainly higher education.

However, it is important to be careful in our approach towards criticism of the British educational system. We need to take into account the fact that colonial power too was working in accordance with their educational experience and conventional educational wisdom of the time. The truth of the matter is that colonial educational policy was not clearly thought out and there was no coherent policy towards the working class in England too. For example Working class education made considerable progress by 1870, and a majority of children were attending school by then, though for varying periods, but attendance was still not compulsory, and the education provided was of the most rudimentary kind.

Having said that, I will now focus on the nature of efforts made by the colonial state in order to incorporate the working class (ESP those related with manual work) under formal schooling system, importantly, for programmes of education which sought to prepare those of a particular class to work in industry either through technical education or through industrial schools.

The state was intermittently engaged in policies for instituting industrial education. For instance, a school of Industrial Arts was opened in Madras in 1850; it was later taken over by government in 1855. In 1856, the Bombay government started the J.J School of Arts and Industry with the aid of Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy Tata, who provided a huge endowment for the school. These schools had small enrolment ratio and a carefully designed curriculum which stressed on drawing and mensuration under craft training, while carpentry, blacksmithing, and allied callings were the subjects of teaching.

In an attempt to introduce practical flavour to elementary education the regular curriculum was modified to incorporate some elements of scientific education. It was believed that there was a real need to develop Industrial or commercial education corresponding with the framework of literary education. The report of the Indian Education commission 1882 therefore recommended that high schools should have two divisions, one leading to the Entrance examination of the Universities, the other of a more practical character intended to fit youths for commercial or non- literary pursuits The report of the Hunter Commission stated, "We see only a small percentage of the population went to schools beyond the elementary level and those who continued were aimed at college entrance with a literary programme altogether."

However we see that the implementation of this policy in itself was filled up with a lot of problems as most of the time either the government was not ready to give funds for such education or sometimes tried to do away with the opening of technical and industrial schools by stating examples of previous failures of such efforts. For instance, arguments put forth in discussions surrounding the opening of an Industrial school Berar district went as follows:

"It (an industrial school) would be a very difficult institution to create or to fill with ``````pupils and also expensive. We can

scarcely hope to overcome caste prejudice and make our *Kunbis* or others of the cultivating class carpenters or blacksmiths, and those who are by caste either of these will scarcely leave their homes, where they help to feed the family, in order to be taught to become more clever in supplying the simple wants of villagers than their fathers had been."

Similar arguments were made with reference to the industrial school at Dharwar which was closed in August 1883. Likewise, about an Industrial school in Ratnagiri, teaching carpentry and smith's work it was stated:

"It is learnt from a reliable source that they had to spend about 14,000 rupees for the initial expenditure and the bringing out of machinery, &c. the recurring charges for its maintenance are also heavy, but the results are very poor. When this is the case with such educationally advanced places as Surat, Dharwar, and Ratnagiri, we cannot perhaps expect very satisfactory results from an industrial school in this province, at least for some years to come. We may however, profit by the experience of others and avoid the mistakes committed by them, and it is not quite improbable that a school started with an efficient establishment will succeed in Berar." (A proceeding, August 1887, 129 to 144, pg 7).

The colonial state's attitude towards technical and industrial education explains why the Review of education in India in 1886 observed:

"There is not as yet in India anything like a general or systematic provision of technical instruction. The provision that exists is partial and fragmentary, directed by no guiding principle."

By 1886, with a population of more than 257 million, India had fewer than 4,300 students enrolled in secondary schools providing training in art, medicine, engineering or surveying and Industrial pursuits. At this time there were approximately 220,000 students enrolled in secondary schools in India. Here many of those recorded as being industrial schools were, in fact, being trained in a craft such as carpentry. In many of these cases, the school staff consisted of *mistris* (skilled craftsmen) who had been employed to show boys how to handle the tools of the trade.

On this Government's views were as follows:

"At present the difficulty is twofold: capital waits for skilled labour; skilled labour waits for capital. There is no demand for technical education because there is no existence of industries which could utilise this labour. The final if not very satisfactory, conclusion seems to be that technical education can only advance rapidly in a country where the industries and manufactures are highly developed; that India is not such a country; and that it is a fallacy to suppose that any scheme of technical instruction will open out a royal road to industrial prosperity, the attainment of which depends upon far different conditions".

Nevertheless, despite these apparent financial difficulties Lord Curzon wanted to give, if possible, a new direction to Indian education and, therefore, turned his attention to the question of technical schools. In 1900 he appointed Sir Edward Buck to advise him on this subject. However, Buck's' recommendation that technical and industrial schools should be placed under a separate technological department was never carried out. The side-lining of Buck's' recommendation finds resonance in other contemporary discussions. To a circular letter sent out by the Government of India in 1903 on the question of an additional grant for technical education the lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab replied that he proposed no immediate establishment of a large number of industrial schools at Government expense. The united Provinces on the advice of the Upper India chamber of Commerce, considered technical schools 'unnecessary' and were of the opinion that industrial schools for local handicrafts 'would serve no useful purpose'. Only Bengal and Bombay wanted some sort of scheme.

If we look at why was it so then we find that given India's fledgling industrial economy, opportunities for qualified technical personnel were limited. What Curzon had hoped to encourage were industrial schools. There were two classes of such schools- technical schools which were established with a view of improving local methods and processes, and industrial orphanages and mission schools, the object of which was to train poor children to earn a livelihood. However most of these technical schools could not live up to the expectations on which they were founded. Moreover, there was not adequate co-ordination between the courses of instruction and the needs of special local industries. It was urged that the Education department should take steps to bring technical institutes into closer touch with local industries.

However, an important outcome of these efforts can be seen in the Simla resolution. The Simla educational conference was of the opinion that it was outside the sphere of Government to take any part in the industrial development of the country, beyond the provision of facilities for acquiring technical education and of providing information regarding commercial and industrial matters. An important outcome of the conference was the establishment by the Government of India of scholarships to enable Indians to travel to Europe and America for special training. The scholarships were of the annual value of $ 150 and were granted in the first instance for a period of two years, which could be extended for a further year. Under this scheme more than 100 students were sent for foreign training. The average cost to all revenues of the Government of India of each student who had completed his period of training was about $550.

Lastly we also see that British were not only concerned with providing technical education but we also see that their focus was driven towards the fact that the people trained in these technical schools should get employment in the related field. This concern can be seen in the statistical summary of education in British India for the year 1892- 1893 T. W Holderness, Secretary to the Government of the N. W provinces and Oudh wrote to the Director of Public instruction:

"The industrial school at Lucknow is the first attempt in these provinces to combine manual training for native boys with elementary general education. So far as admissions are an evidence of success, the school is succeeding. But the real test of success will be the extent to which the students, on leaving the school, prove able and willing to engage in handicraft trades, and this cannot be known for some years. In rigorously restricting admission to the sons and near relatives of artisans, and in insisting that most of the school hours shall be spent in the workshop and the drawing room, the Government has done what it can to prevent boys resorting to the school for the gratuitous instruction which it gives in English and vernacular. The progress reported to have been made by the pupils in carpentry and drawing is encouraging; and if the school proves able to turn out cheap and suitable apparatus for elementary

science teaching and gymnastic appliances, it will be of material service."

Same was the concern of Indian Industrial commission in 1919. The commission put special emphasis on the employer's demand for labour, both skilled and unskilled, that had at least received a primary education. However there was a fear that once taught beyond the primary stage the pupil tended to reject their traditional craft in favour of a clerical job. In its assessment of these possible consequences, the report of the commission stated, "This could be due to the fact that the employers of labour have not worked towards imparting such kind of education which provide them with more intelligence and self-respect."

It further stated

"The sons of employees are taken on at the request of their fathers and turned into the shops to pick up a knowledge of the trades as best they can. They are paid small wages to begin with, and the amount is gradually increased as they grow older and more useful. There is no regular apprenticeship, and not infrequently the boys are tempted to leave long before they ought, by the offer of slightly higher wages outside. We point out elsewhere the risk of boys, who have received a little education, leaving their hereditary manual occupations for small clerical posts. The only remedy is to improve the social status and prospects of the skilled artisan."

The Commission's report suggested that efforts were needed to counteract the tendency among young students of the working classes to seek clerical occupation, by a revision of wages, the provision of opportunities for further education, and the institution of better terms of agreement.

It was argued that From the time a boy enters a workshop to learn a trade, he should be paid wages at least equivalent to what he would otherwise earn in the bazaar; from which in order to secure his regular attendance and to provide inducements to him to go through a complete course of training, there should be placed to his credit every month a certain amount of deferred pay; and this under the initial agreement, should only be due to him on the completion of a specified period of service, which should usually be about five years.

These attempts by the policy makers to continuously seek the particular labour from particular class suggest that working class and their education hardly found representation in the education system of colonial education.

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