

Relevance of Traditional Indigenous Systems of Schooling

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Abstract— The paper examines the acceptance, relevance and utility of TISE. Based upon available literature, field survey, and observation, in the Western Uttar Pradesh region of India, socio-economic and educational relevance of TISE is being assessed. The intuitive significance of TISE is tested against empirical information. Specific gains attributable to TISE are discussed, along with critical evaluation of the problems, paradoxes and prejudices against traditional learning in a macro social, political and economic environment.

Keywords— Indigenous schooling; Madarasa; Cultural schools; Sub-altern Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The economic base of a society, which includes the relations and the forces of production, determines the superstructure of social institutions and relationships of that society, and hence determines the ways in which the society is divided into classes and the matrix of relationships that obtain among these classes. The dominant class always appropriates all institutions in order to further its own purpose. The structures express the will of the class in control of production forces. In a market oriented capitalist economy, the forces of production are in the control of bourgeois, who is always keen to exploit subordinate peasant and working classes, whenever and by whatever means possible.

It is an outcome of the forces of determination that in the framework of liberal democracies the ruling structures essentially take the form of agencies of the invisible hand- the market, the self-interest and the private property. Likewise, the control of education is also, necessarily, in the hand of bourgeoisie dominant class, which, directed by its vested interest, will always take the process of schooling, too, as a means of exploiting the interest of subordinate class and enhancing that of itself. The school will act as a means of diffusing and inculcating those values among the children of working class, which would help foster the existing production relationships. Bourgeois education in its aims and operations is determined by the economic structure of which it is both a product and a tool. In reality the school was wholly an instrument of class domination in the hands of bourgeois.

As an historical reminisces, the children working in factories and alleged to get education in factory-schools were from their earliest years riveted to the simplest manipulations, and exploited for years, without being taught a single sort of work that would afterwards make them of use, even in the same manufactory or factory. The system would deny the chances of equal education to all classes in a capitalist society for it would harm the interests of dominant class. Therefore, universal education, and that of the same standard is impossible in that kind of societies.

As far as modern democratic welfare state resembles the capitalist organization, the above mentioned hypothesis can serve as a reliable indication of existential reality, in the form of oppression of the weak and subordinate fellowmen by the strong ownership of authority and resources resulting in further marginalization and alienation, of the former, to the extreme nihilism of existence, by the latter. Education in such a situation becomes a ploy to usurp the position of dominance or class monopoly by capturing and confining quality to the selected few and compelling the 'others' to servitude. Equality of educational opportunity, in such a case, must become the sole responsibility of the state ensuring minimum quality input entitlements of schooling skills to all, rank and file.

The 'subaltern' hypothesis values the traditional indigenous forms of schooling (TIS) as a structure maintained by the society for the spread of knowledge and furtherance of education among the members of the society and to preserve the historical identity of that particular system. All the stake holders take motivated interest because it serves the most common cause affecting each and every member of the society. The facilitators, providers, managers and teachers of traditional schools, along with the pupils, share convergence of the purpose. It benefits all in one or another form.

Traditional schooling may be characterized by its manifest and implicit features. Traditional education has various dimensions and multiple implications. It is an educational structure having roots in socio-cultural milieu of target groups. It gets strength from the specific construct of a particular socio-economic-cultural frame work. It represents, for example, Islamic way of life in case of Muslim traditional schooling, and Hindu cultural manifestation in case of Hindu system of indigenous schools. "There are numerous types of religious indigenous schools, and considerable similarities among them. Indeed, it is probably not by chance that the great religious traditions also made use of literacy as a way of maintaining continuity across generation, and in order to go beyond the limits of human memory" (Wagner 1989) [1].

Traditional schools present a paradigm of schooling well confronting the materialistic high cost modern school system. The alternate capacity and capability make them peculiar. They consume less. They consume rationally. They consume minimum of the minimum. They produce maximum out of the minimum.

Traditional schools of deferent denominations provide a sort of education focusing upon basic tenets of respective religious philosophical streams. They propagate conflicting ideologies and ideas and put opponent sets of closed idiosyncrasies. The conflict of viewpoints may be severely divergent and damaging, at times. As far as the ideological details are concerned a general lack of convergence is manifest. As regards the objectives of a better world and service to humanity, traditional schools present a shared purpose. They teach goodness of human behavior and spread the light of education.

Traditional schools serve to those who are either un-served or out of the provision of schooling for whatsoever reasons or deliberately choose to stay away from modern education thinking that it is non-contextual, non-relevant, unimportant and confronting their own set of values and morality. Traditional schools also serve those who are extremely deprived and marginalized.

Traditional schooling does not have far going linkages with further educational avenues. Usually it stops all of sudden at a dead end. Only a very few fortunate ones found it possible to pursue higher level studies. Their pass outs or graduates, therefore, carry limited accumulation of skills and knowledge; often this 'limited' amount being enough for future life.

2. SOCIAL RELEVANCE

Social relevance of educational structures lies in preservation, perseverance and furtherance of socio-cultural constructs. Traditional schools were observed to be better performers in respect of continuity and enhancement of comprehensive social existence of relevant mode of community life in a larger context. These schools inculcate key values of truth and goodness of intrinsic as well as extrinsic modes of behavior. They strive to achieve piety of ideas and actions bossed upon the prescribed morality perspective. These schools do teach, observe and spread the cultural ethos on a wider dimension. Particular ways of life, style, function or in a nut shell the 'collective personality' of society gets manifested through these schools. Children come with a sense of socio-cultural bond and go out with communitarian affinity.

Children learn to cooperate and complete with another. They learn values of patience, helpfulness, truth, honesty, integrity, faith in the almighty and so on. Whatever they learn here in traditional schools, they exercise it in social practice and carry it over to the future. These schools therefore have been performing as institutional agents of perseverance and continuity along with stability and change of socio-cultural milieu.

Traditional school can be observed performing socially useful activities and services on a visible scale. The schools in themselves take on various roles from teaching to extension activities. Schools act as problem shooters at micro level. The teachers perform many roles in society. They are teachers. They may be spiritual and local leaders. They may be available and accessible in case of need. The teachers may fill in the role of the Imam, Pujari, Ustad, Guruji etc. Pupils also perform many social and cultural services and rituals on behalf of society.

TISE schools were found to have individualized, personalized and informal set of functional autonomy, interaction and intervention. They were observed rendering multiple socially useful services like spread of literacy, civic awareness, social hygiene, socio-economic change, religious rituals etc. Table 6.1 shows the contribution of TISE as social participant. Majority of TISE were found having high scores on literacy, character and civil awareness, socio-economic progress and religious or ethnic functions. Majority low scores were in case of health and hygiene and modern values.

Table 1: Scores on social service variable

S. No.	Social Service variable	High score	Low score
1	Literacy	70%	30%
2	Social hygiene	40%	60%
3	Civic awareness	60%	40%
4	Spread of modern values	35%	65%
5	Socio-economic development	60%	40%
6	Religious/ethnic services	95%	05%

Source: Survey Data

Pupils performed lots of services, including religious services to their community. One such service is spread of literacy. Teachers also served the society in multiple ways. They remain available to society at almost all occasion of need. They interpret religious treatises. They act as leaders, commentators and ceremonial performers. They may be the persons to look upon when intellectual and serious decisions are made. They can, if they desire or they may be put to, become agents of change for better.

The premise and physical infrastructure of traditional schools constitute community asset and can be used respectively, for social purposes like congregations, festivals, meetings, functions and as community space.

From beginning to end traditional education seems to have got a social character reflecting itself via mutual give and take. It has got immense relevance and received acceptance from the society as a long lasting tradition.

3. ECONOMIC RELEVANCE

Economic rationale depends on the structure of costs and benefits along with developmental linkages. Cost of traditional schooling apparently puts a temptation in its favor. The cost of education to pupils of TISE vis-à-vis modern schools can be observed to be very low in terms of various items of fees, books and stationery, travel, uniform, other inputs and social overheads. It costs less to the institutions and to the society because the overheads are minimum and inputs are cheaper including, significantly, low emoluments paid to teachers, who function more as missionaries. Formalities being less total cost of physical space and time remain low. Wagner (1989) concluded that "the fiscal base of indigenous schooling varies as a function of the type of school and local cultural context...there can be little question that indigenous schools cost a small fraction of what a government school would cost for an equivalent number of hours of teaching on a per pupil basis"[2].

Institutional flexibility allowing the pupils to perform at their pace and pay as per their capacity- from non-payment to payment, is highly progressive and democratic phenomenon of traditional schools. It provides autonomy and opportunity to all and focuses on inclusiveness.

Basic elements of benefits of traditional schooling lie in grass roots human resource development and human capital formation at ground level. Primary schooling in every form is a tool for creating basic 'receptivity' and 'adaptability' in the students. Traditional schooling creates basic literacy and adeptness in the pupils. It, therefore, provides scope for the rates of return far in excess of higher levels of schooling and higher cost constructs. It has development linkages of vital importance like enlightened decision making, connectivity, adaptability, skill formation etc. Traditional schooling can be very effective for women esteem especially if they are supposed to and empowered to do so.

Equity and equality of opportunity based upon an objective criterion of performance as adhered to in traditional schools, may become a step forward towards an inclusive paradigm of growth and development.

It was observed that the incidence, number and ratio of students as per enrolment, retention and pass out of TISE can be significantly compared to those of any alternative channels. Quality of pass outs and status of post literacy engagements was quite impressive and deeply attuned and directed toward the trained role.

4. PEDOGOGICAL RELEVANCE

Educational relevance of TISE shall lie in the incidence and impact of literacy and skill formation along the learning continuum. Traditional schooling provides a paradigmatic shift from monolithic to competitive structures. It provides a democratic liberty to choose from different options as per one's needs and resource constraint. It provides educational inclusion of masses at a larger scale.

A peep into the income-group configuration of students showed that MSE, and TISE, respectively, had 12.09% and 2.95% pupils from high income groups; 44.54% and 27.72% pupils from middle income groups; 29.54% and 36.54% pupils from poor families; and 13.27% and 32.54% pupils from very poor families. Neither the MSEs nor the TISE attract the rich (who go to costlier, hence deemed to be better, private schools) significantly. They serve the lower strata. Relatively TISE have major enrollments from poor and very poor social background of students.

Traditional schools seem to be nearer to nature as such, and to the nature of the subject students. As far as child psychology is concerned traditional schools give the students a familiarity of context, provide flexibility of time and routine, and keep the baggage to minimum. The course and content seem to be within limits keeping child's mental capacity in view. Teaching methodology present both the teacher centered as well as the child centered education. Some of quite important aspects may be monitorial and 'help your co-fellow' approaches along with 'Bahas-o-Mubahisa', 'taqrar' and observance of basic tenets of good conduct etc.

Post literacy retention of what was learnt in the schools is a major problem, especially for primary school students who drop out or complete a particular stage but cannot continue further education. When the imprints are dark and deep retention will follow. Otherwise, as in case of government primary schools where learning performance does not rank significantly, retention of learning is quite weak. Traditional schools teach focused curriculum and deliver it in thin and thick. Practice, exercise, observance and learning-by-heart-memorization make Post-literacy retention of learning strong and durable.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Traditional schools function at periphery of educational structure. They perform basic roles at grass roots level. They constitute the 'bottom to bottom' horizontal network of primary literacy.

Traditional schools, since tradition, follow a bottom line of curricular relationality and contextuality. They do not and cannot function in a detached manner. By definition they carry a tradition of socio-cultural embodiment deep rooted in

practicality. They found audience in local population and contextual relationship with local environment. An ashram school, for example, will provide a picturesque serenity. A madrasa will give a different kind of scenario. But both shall be rooted in nature and natural context ranging from non-human to human dimensions.

Traditional schools have traditional prudence and thrift inbuilt in their personality. They have had to face persistent crisis of survival and continuity. They represent relatively poor sections. It is their beauty as well as compulsion to have spiritual outlook and be spend thrift and prudent as far as material consumption is concerned. They take less. They use less. Hence they produce no wastage and dangers to environmental sustainability. A 'wooden' pen and a wooden plate (Qalam aur Takhti), for example, are reproducible and more than replenishable. They inculcate non-materialistic outlook among pupils and produce wise and prudent social participants.

6. CONCLUSION

The discussion attempted to evaluate the utility of TISE against available empirical inputs. Comprehensive relevance and acceptance of traditional schooling was discussed. TISE were found socially embedded, economically cost effective and educational supplement as well as complements. Specific utility of TISE was debated in the context of macro socio-economic-political background. Traditional schools face the crisis of survival due to pathetic lack of resources and extremely apathetic policy environment, biased against them. A positive sign might be seen in the acceptance of change by the traditional schools.

REFERENCES

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