

Decodingthe Field of Comparative Educationin South Asia

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Abstract: The field of Comparative Education has become important with increasing globalization. Over the past fifty years, the field of comparative education has been moving in the direction of examining education related issues as opposed to educational systems. This paper attempts to analyze some of the works on the concerns around history curricula in South Asia from the perspective of Comparative Education. It tries to draw the linkages between ideology, power equations and curriculum.

That there is a selective tradition in curriculum has become a commonplace observation. What counts as official knowledge is always a selection from a much wider universe of possible knowledge and ways of knowing. In most nations of the world, the defining pedagogic device to distribute this selection is the textbook. Textbooks can be produced, distributed and highly regulated by central authorities and ministries of education, or their writing, printing, and distribution can be decentralized through the complex mechanisms of both capitalist markets and loose state guidelines, as in the United States, for example. Often it is some combination of these ideal types.

There are good theoretical and political reasons for focusing attention on textbooks aside from the practical considerations usually associated with getting effective materials into schools. Anyone who is interested in the inter-relations among the economy, the state, and culture should pay close attention to texts since they are among the clearest embodiments of these relations. Textbooks are simultaneously economic goods (they are often sold to students, parents, and schools), political objects (they are subject to state control and regulation and hence are the result of political and ideological tensions and compromises), and cultural representations (what is included and not included, and how such knowledge is organized, is a form of cultural politics). Thus, one could think of few artifacts more crucial to examine than the textbook.

Unfortunately, most research on the textbook is either simply boring or conceptually, historically, or empirically naive. Even with the vast amount of scholarship on texts, much of it is not worth reading. However, sometimes there is written material that demands attention,

both because its topic is one of crucial national and international significance and because it provides an example of how such analysis might actually be done in ways that are illuminative.

There has not been any substantial research work, bearing direct relationship to any comparative study of curricula across borders. Comparative studies on various aspects of education have been made between India and other countries. Some of them are with reference to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Brubaker (1967) reflects in detail on the approaches to the histories in capitalist and communist schools and highlights that the majority position in all progressive countries is training of pupils for effective citizenship. Bielas (1973) in his pioneering work shows how to make an analysis of an educational system by defining the variables of that system and establishing their reciprocal relations in countries with a common historical tradition. Robinson (1974) shows the early stages of development of social sciences in Bangladesh and the need to have an approach with an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary work in the histories. His work highlights the general strategies and priorities for the histories and the need to have a strong History Research Council in Bangladesh.

The UNESCO Chronicle, (1976), explains the place of history in UNESCO's programme."It gives an overall view of the work done by the UNESCO in collaboration with various member countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.Rahman, Habibur&Nasiruddin (1979) give brief reports on around three hundred investigative research works on histories' perspectives in Bangladesh.Rahaman, Habibur&Nasiruddin (1980) have written under the sponsorship of the Division for International Development of Social Sciences, UNESCO. Their study is an important study for Bangladesh. It deals with various issues relating to planned development efforts in Bangladesh, development planning, history manpower, ways, degrees and effects of participation of social scientists in planning, implementation and evaluation of development programmes, problems faced by them and policy recommendations for making their participation more effective and useful in the context of situations prevailing in Bangladesh.

Ali (1992) has written a number of books and articles on Indo-Pak history, and has been widely acclaimed as an anti-establishment thinker and historian. He stated in an interview that "No authentic history has yet been written about Pakistan and its independence. There is a lot of confusion among the so-called pro-Establishment historians and educationists.

Whatever has been written so far is distortion of history and entirely unbalanced.” Mubarak Ali asks for the rewriting of the subcontinent’s history and correction of what he called “historical aberrations”, so that the hatred and misunderstanding prevailing between the people of India and Pakistan could come to an end. According to him, textbooks in the two countries had been systematically distorted and that the time had come to reverse the trend.

He further expresses that “any system based on oppression, coercion and authoritarianism [is] the first problem in the way of writing history”. Pakistan’s history has been dictated, he writes, by politics and the personal ideologies of autocratic rulers. He also reiterated his call for “history to be analysed and rewritten from the perspective of the masses instead of the viewpoint of rulers”.

Sarkar (1996) in her work has critically analysed the curriculum of Indian history textbooks. Her work deals in the approach to the formation and transformation of saffron identity in India. Zevin (2000) has attempted a general survey of reflections on histories in various countries including South Asia. His work shows how histories must be understood in relation to the other areas of study. Gupta (2001) meticulously compares development of higher education in India and China from the 1950’s and analyses the histories in these two ancient civilizations. Her probe that China reflects a parity between sciences and histories while in India, the histories have been marginalized, is very relevant for our understanding here. It would be meaningful to observe whether these three countries under study show the same respect to the social sciences as is shown by China.

Hashmi (Ed.) (2001) in his work highlights that lacking a systematic theoretical framework, the histories in Pakistan have moved mainly in the direction of ‘superficial speculative analyses’. Kumar (2001) presents an interesting comparative study which reveals the ways in which school-texts on the history of nationalism often inculcate chauvinistic, mutually hostile stereotypes about each other in both India and Pakistan. Krishna Kumar explains how the history texts of both these countries selectively narrate incidents or refrain from doing so for various ideological and cultural reasons. His analysis is based on a very close comparative reading of the two nations’ narratives of their struggles for freedom and self-determination. It also includes an informed discussion of the dominant pedagogic strategies incorporated into the materials, showing how pedagogic organizations can reproduce (or contradict, but not often), ideological positioning of particular kinds of less than fully informed citizenship represented in the historical narratives themselves.

Apple (2003)in his review of *Prejudice and Pride* says that:

What also sets Prejudice and Pride apart from other comparative studies of this kind is the quality of the critical reading strategies employed. Kumar does not limit himself only to his reading. The book contains some very interesting material on how students in Pakistan and India actually interpret for themselves the histories the texts construct. What are the students' interpretations of what the textbook authors construct? The inclusion of students' voices is rare in scholarship of this type. Kumar clearly understands what has been called the circuit of cultural production in which every commodity (including things such as textbooks) is involved in a circuit containing three moments: production, distribution, and reception.

Chatterjee (Ed.) (2002)in a report analyses various themes which occur repeatedly in most discussions about history today in South Asia. One is apparently a pervasive sense of crisis, an idea that the institutions and practices of history research are on the point of irretrievable collapse. The other-and associated-theme is the idea that the crisis is the result of the precipitous decline of major institutions of history research built mainly in the decades following the end of colonial rule.

Zaidi (Ed.) (2003)in his monumental work laments the dismal state of the histories in Pakistan. He highlights that much of the history literature in Pakistan is not oriented to cumulative growth of knowledge in the specific field or in the histories as a whole.

Rosser (2003)in her work highlights how at the cost of correct information and reasoned analysis, the history textbooks seem to have a ‘hidden agenda’ to further governments ideology. Assuming teleological imperatives of national identity formation inherent in social sciences curricula – that history textbooks are narrated with the intent of developing students into patriotic, productive citizens – she highlights the oppositional interpretations of history found in a selection of school textbooks from the Indian sub-continent.

Siddiqui (2004) takes a fresh look at the process of development undertaken in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and questions whether these countries have modernized or not. Siddiqui’s work show that despite differences in the size of economy and nature of polity, the situation in the three countries is quite similar and is reflected in their educational systems too. He points out that immense resources have been spent on theory building and project management of development but has failed to modernize these nations. It is histories which can bring the real social change.

Rosser (2004) in her work portrays a passionate writing on the increasing attempts, on the part of the political and religious establishment, to takeover young minds through the school textbooks. She studies the collective loss of memory in Bangladesh by years of military coercion and promoted by an accelerating influence of Islamisation, reflected in school textbooks.

International Crisis Group (ICG) in Asia Report (2004) examines theon Pakistan's deteriorating education system. The ICG, which is an independent, non-profit, multinational organization has worked through field based analysis and high level advocacy and laments that in the absence of state support, powerful Islamist groups have undermined the reform initiatives of Pakistan's civil society and affected the study of histories to a great extent. It points out that Histories in Pakistan remain highly fragmented leading to an inadequate and partial view of social reality. The history knowledge produced is primarily for the use by state agencies and only marginally for creating social awareness of societal problems among the people, most of whom being illiterate cannot understand and benefit from it.

Lall (2005) places the current issues facing education of India in a historical context. She highlights how Nehru's vision of modernization recommendations set up to form a coherent education policy for India but in which the study of histories lost out to that of sciences and technology. It was maintained in India for long that the development needs were met by scientists and engineers and less by historians and geographers.

Kumar (2007) writes that history helps when it is left behind. This is what Krishna Kumar marks out as the central theme of his book, Battle for Peace, intended as a way forward for peace between India and Pakistan.

Too narrow a focus on the shared history of the two countries, far from facilitating normal, peace-enabling exchanges, often sets up roadblocks in the search for peace. Understanding history is very different from living in the past, but even well-meaning peace advocates in India are often unable to see beyond the historical similarities between the two countries while looking to lay the basis for a peace dialogue and people-to-people contact.

Those in India seeking to establish peace with Pakistan by stressing on the similarities actually end up questioning the very basis of the Pakistani national identity. The starting point, then, must be a recognition of the differences, and not an understanding of the similarities. In Krishna Kumar's phrasing: "Difficult though it is, we have to appreciate that Pakistan might have been similar to us once, but it is different from us now."

The book takes the argument forward by drawing lessons, almost as if by chance, from ordinary life. An educational tour of Birla House; a school essay written by a girl in Lahore; and an interview given by the Begum of Bhopal who had migrated to Pakistan in 1949 — all these are used, not as exemplification of points made in the book, but as accidentally discovered sources of illumination. The reader thus gets the feeling of being allowed a peek into the author's thought-process, of being part of the same inquisitive journey.

The first question that Krishna Kumar throws up is through a teacher-trainee taking a tour of the Birla House. Why is the Birla House, where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, almost blacked out of the national consciousness, while Rajghat, where he was cremated, is an important stop for casual tourists and visiting dignitaries alike? A part of the answer is what the author describes as a “silent agreement” between two rival parties, one standing for pluralistic secularism, and the other for religious or cultural nationalism. The agreement is not to revive the painful memories of the Partition, the context of Gandhiji's assassination, and the battle of ideas with Gandhiji on one side and his killer, Nathuram Godse, on the other. Rajghat, the author argues, “seems eternal and without an immediate bearing on the passing moment.” Birla House, however, is a reminder that modern India “has not emerged from the battle in which Gandhi lost his life.”

Evidently, the overemphasis on the shared history and the similarities betrays an unwillingness or inability to come to terms with the reality of the Partition, the Hindu-Muslim divide, and questions of national identity. “When Gandhi died facing a fellow believer in Hinduism who shot him, he symbolised the folly of distinguishing those who are similar to us from those who are different.”

Indians fantasise that Pakistan would one day cease to exist as a nation, or that it would reunite with India. This, Krishna Kumar believes, is because of the continued, even if deeply-buried, anger over the Partition. Pakistan remains a “live wound” in the Indian national mind. The rise of the Islamisation ideology in Pakistan, and the Hindu revivalism in India, also prevented normalisation of relations between the two countries. Instead of opting for the path of progress and development, the two countries chose the path of nuclearisation, which, the author says, is an example of their “dependence on derivative policies originating from their colonial conditioning.”

Considering that the West has a vested interest in keeping the two countries warring with each other, the initiative for peace will have to come from the people of India and Pakistan.

“We who live in India and Pakistan must realize that the politics of war and the social mindset which supports it are our own creations, and, therefore, we are the only ones who can change them.” In this task, Krishna Kumar sees a vital role for education: not the civic education that “aims at identification with one’s own nation and loyalty to its sovereign state,” but an education that “enables a child to accept the validity of competing memories.” An obsession with education for building national identity can be debilitating; the focus, instead, should be on an education that will “stop serving as an instrument of exclusion and injustice.”

Linkages between ideology, power equations and curriculum:

Giroux (1984) starts this book from O’Neil’s famous quote “There is no neutral material in history”. This quote itself provides the whole essence of the chapter in which he has tried to explain that ‘culture of positivism’ is persistent in our school system which is leading to ‘death of history’.

He has explained that there are two most influential orientations which have been used to criticize the education system. One is phenomenology, which has a view that teachers are not sensitive towards the influences of the society and which shapes up and influences the classroom. Second is Neo-Marxism, which tries to project how classroom encounters are shaped by the dominant society.

According to Giroux, both the views are not enough to explain why education system today is focused on objectivity, efficiency and technique which are traits of positivist ideology. He further sensed that the prevalence of ideas of positivism has led to the loss of interest in history among American students. He has quoted many intellectuals who have criticized history as not being apt for today’s students. He quotes David Donald who holds the view that history is not relevant for today as it does not help in development of perspectives for future. According to him, present socio-economic universe has not so much to learn from our history.

“To put it another way, history has been stripped of its critical and transcendent content and can no longer provide society with the historical insight necessary for the development of a collective critical consciousness.” (p.39)

But, on the other hand there are many other intellectuals who see disinterest of students in the history as an alarming activity. For example- Russel Jacoby saw suppression of history as a form of ; social amnesia' as people are not able to learn about their past and the sufferings which is used as a tool by bourgeoisie class to promote their own ideology in the classroom. In this way, history can be misused by dominant class to promote their own ideas.

In this way, Giroux is pointing towards the issue that culture of positivism which is grounded on ideas like methodological madness and too much stress on objectivity and facts are leading to creation of an aura which denies due importance to history in the present context and this denial of history has led to development of false consciousness among the learners which further heads towards decrease in development of critical attitudes towards education and society at large. This false consciousness among learners is good for the dominant group as there are less chances of questioning when people are not critical about things and 'death of history' is helping in doing the same.

Bernstein (2000) in his book pays considerable attention is paid to illustrating applications of the theory by drawing on a range of empirical studies undertaken across the world. This should make the task of a reader new to Bernstein's work easier, though not easy. Part 1 of the book provides an overview of Bernstein's sociological theory of pedagogy connecting power and control, modes of pedagogic transmission and (the biasing of) consciousness. Apart from presenting the theory, the chapters in Part 1 cover a very wide range of substantive topics. These include the curriculum of the medieval university, forms of identity in later 20th century capitalism, vocational education and 'trainability', and the increasing role of the state in curriculum determination in the UK. There is a particularly interesting discussion of competence and performance in relation to the curriculum and its change over time. In each case Bernstein uses either directly or indirectly his concepts of classification and framing to offer an insightful interpretation of the topic. Chapter 4 is new to this edition, though it has been developed, in true Bernsteinian fashion, from the last few pages of Chapter 3 of the previous edition. This chapter maps out the range of pedagogic identities at play in the recent period of major cultural, economic and technological change. Part 2 of the book contains an extended account of 'codes and research' in which Bernstein usefully recounts the developmental history of his theoretical concepts, discussing relevant empirical work, often by his doctoral students, in the process. Alongside this is a methodological discussion of 'research and languages of description'. This is one of several places where Bernstein's view

of recent changes in the research economy of UK universities is made clear. Here Bernstein uses his concepts of recognition and realization rules to generate a useful discussion of coding issues in ethnography. Part 3 of the book previously reprinted several responses to critics. One of these, concerning Edwards' discussion of codes, has now disappeared, but Bernstein's response to Harker and May's discussion of his work remains. The chapter previously entitled 'Discourse, knowledge structures and fields' has gone, to be replaced by the more focused 'Vertical and horizontal discourse'. This chapter may well become a standard introduction to Bernstein's work on the relations between academic and everyday knowledge. A set of fruitful concepts are provided for both the internal analysis of educational knowledge and its external relations to 'common-sense' thinking and practice. The chapter on Harker and May, mixing humor and exasperation, responds to what Bernstein sees as a flawed attempt to categorize his work through comparing and contrasting it with that of Bourdieu. The reader who has reached this point is rewarded with two illuminating illustrations of classification and framing - taken from discussions of feeding babies and lavatory etiquette. Discussions of these contexts are used to 'interpret' the terms of his theory in order to illustrate the way in which he intends the concept of a 'rule' to be understood in his work. Part 3 also contains a discussion of sociolinguistics, including the work of Labor. In this book Bernstein points to differences between his work and that of various Parisians. Given his concern to relate the symbolic to features of the social division of labour rather than allow it to float freely this is not surprising. Especially important are his comments on Bourdieu's work and on the concept of habitus in particular (p. 133). Bourdieu is seen as more concerned with the social relations within and between symbolic fields than with the internal structure of knowledge itself. Bernstein sees habitus as possibly having solved certain epistemological problems concerning structure and agency. But, he argues, it is described in terms of 'what it gives rise to, and brings, or does not bring about it is not described with reference to the particular ordering principles or strategies, which give rise to the formation of a particular habitus. The formation of the internal structure of the particular habitus, the mode of its specific acquisition, which gives it its specificity, is not described. Habitus is known by its output, not by its input'. Bernstein argues that part of the solution to this problem lies in the provision of a theory of the acquisition of codes (p. 104). He provides arguments for seeing his theory as providing a way forward here. In Bernstein's work we have one of the most insightful accounts available of the relations between social structure and the general features of consciousness in societies with complex divisions of labor.

Indeed, Halsey, in a contribution to the Guardian after Bernstein's death, noted that he might be seen as 'the most thoughtful and inventive social scientist to emerge from the LSE since the Second World War'. Throughout the book, Bernstein makes pleas for a sociology informed by both theory and empirical work. He clearly believed the role of the sociologist to be primarily one of increasing our understanding of the social (p. 210), arguing that political failure is often the result of 'rhetorical solution or ideologically driven aspiration' not based in adequate understanding. He also argues, sometimes explicitly, for universalism against particularisms (p. 77). These stances seem to reflect the climate in which he began his theoretical development - the LSE as described by Halsey in No Discouragement. Bernstein has left us a rich account of the relations between material existence and consciousness.

Apple & Barry (2004) through their work have explained that school is a part of wider nexus of political, economic and cultural institutions; these are basically rooted in unequal power equations and the school only reinforce and reproduce those inequalities through curricular, pedagogical and evaluative activities. In other words, School controls meanings (legitimate knowledge) as well as people's selection.

"One important tacit function of schooling seems to be the teaching of different dispositions and values to different school population". (pg-65) for example- a prospective member of professional and managerial class will have the curriculum which will have focus on skills like flexibility, choice, inquiry etc. and a member of semi-skilled and unskilled worker will have curriculum which will try to incorporate the behaviors like punctuality, neatness, habit formation and so on among learners.

The Writers have provided a historiography of this differentiation of curriculum as they had the view that, understanding the historical underpinning of present schools is important to understand whose knowledge get into school. But in case of American schools it become tough as they are a-historical. Writers described that, in New York City in 1850s, public school system became increasingly solidified and its main focus was on maintaining the hegemony of a dominant group and to create a homogenized group of Americans' by ignoring any racio-cultural difference. Acculturation was important for school system rather than assimilation as population was increasing at that time due to large scale immigration of people. Many psychologists, educationists and philosophers also developed many studies which showed immigrants as having lesser capabilities of assimilating in the community, for

example Thorndike had equated intelligence with culture and genes so indigenous Americans were more intelligent than immigrants.

“The educators believed that individuals of high intelligence were more moral, more dedicated to their work and more willing to apply their talent to the benefits of the larger society than were the majority of people.” (p.75)

There was a basis for these kinds of researches as most of the sociologists, psychologists and educationists of America were native rural middle class, Protestants in religion and Anglo-Saxon in descent. So, the main focus was on decreasing infiltration in their culture due to large scale immigration. They feared that rural life might get vanished due to this. So, they equated the idea of community with the idea of homogeneity and cultural consensus. In that era, bureaucratization of school was done which gave importance to consolidation of schools and standardization of curriculum. This was done in order to create an aura of equality and equal opportunity. So, acculturation and standardization are intertwined.

“The bureaucratic ethic and the moral mission of the schoolmen arose from the same problem- The rapid expansion and diversification of population and that tended towards the same result- a vigorously conformist system.” (Pg-67).

Dewey (2010) comes up with the view that development of attitudes and disposition among young members of the society can't be done by direct passage of emotions, knowledge and belief. It can happen only through mediation of the environment i.e. physical and social environment. Physical environment consist of all the materials which are required for learning about all the activities done in social environment by the fellow community members, in other words we can say that physical and social environment are complementary to each other and provide space for young learners to learn about the beliefs, emotions and knowledge of his society.

Young learner engage in different activities with the fellow members of the community in a social environment, “By doing his share in associated activities, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, become familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skills, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.” (p.190)

When society becomes more and more complex and our daily activities and engagements are not enough for young learners to understand about the world and furthermore written symbols also get incorporated in our social environment, then society requires special kind of

environment which can train young learners to develop desired attitudes and dispositions. School is one such formal and controlled environment. The school has following roles to play:

Firstly, the school present complex issues of civilization before the students in simplest form as when the society matures many elements get incorporated in it, and it becomes tough for the members of the society to assimilate it in toto. So, they create schools where teachers have the responsibility of creating a simplified ‘environment’ for young. ‘It selects the features which are fairly fundamental and capable of being responded to by the young’ (pg-189).

Secondly, the school also try to eliminate unwanted influences which are put on the mental habituades of the young and try to create a purified medium where young can learn the things which are most relevant to them, rather than learning about all.

Thirdly, the school also provides opportunities to the learners to escape from their own social environment in which they are born and to engage with. The school provides space for young learners to interact with the members of other social environment.

Fourthly, school also plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony between different groups as society is becoming more and more diverse now a days due to advancement in commerce, transportation, emigration and inter-communications and school act as “Steadying and integrating” organization in this regard.

Thus, any attempt to decode comparative curricula in South Asian History develops a hindsight of the problem and explores new dimensions in the light of secondary and auxiliary sources. It shows how similar looking issue gets addressed in different contexts.

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