

EGALITARIAN PEDAGOGY: REVIEWING ANDROCENTRISM IN INDIAN HIGH-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Kashish Singh

Pathways School

ABSTRACT

This paper looks to bridge existing gaps by providing an objective review of different instances of sexist content, pedagogy, and learning styles in the Indian high-school education, to lastly attempt at thinking of what it means to have an equal, or egalitarian pedagogy - is it possible to think of writings and methods of teaching that are gender-neutral, gender-equal, or at the very least, accessible to people of different gender identities? The paper reviews representations of class, race, and gender in textbooks, and tries to find patterns in a well considered and thoughtful form. Moreover, the paper looks at existing studies by organizations such as Feminism in India (FII) of South Asian textbooks including those in India, and the androcentric representations in them, to try and identify the causes of such discriminatory forms of representations and what societal norms are being propagated in the form of an education, where most students consider what is written in textbooks as true beyond all doubt, thus influencing their mindset and ideology at a key stage of their growth and intellectual development, and specifically at a key transition phase of high-school. The paper further moves beyond mere considerations of gender to look at class and race in the lens of intersectionality.

Keywords: Pedagogy, High-school, Education, Teaching, India

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, there has been a direct rise in many discussions surrounding feminism and the need for removing sexism in different forms of life. Feminist movements propagate and advocate for equality of the sexes, and the removal of discrimination in different forms - direct, indirect, symbolic, and more, in different segments and sectors of society (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). However, as scholars have previously said, sexism and patriarchal forms of oppression are not only physical manifestations but are also about a colonialism of the mind.

This, in the case of education, is visible most with sexism being seen in three areas: firstly, the content itself, of what it taught, the curriculums; secondly, the way it is taught, the pedagogy, the method, and the teaching style; and lastly, of learning expectations and standardized testing, the way examinations are conducted and students are evaluated (Sircar, 2017). It is seen that not only is there a male-centric perspective with respect to high-school education, but rather that there is an expectation of masculinized standards of evaluation, of “rational” thought, efficiency, and quick response (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). Further, the representations of class, race, and gender are often seen to exist in largely troubling manners that haven’t been discussed by academic writing as of yet (Singh, 2012; Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017).

Thus, this paper looks to bridge that gap by providing an objective review of different instances of sexist content, pedagogy, and learning styles in the Indian high-school education, to lastly attempt at thinking of what it means to have an equal, or egalitarian pedagogy - is it possible to think of writings and methods of teaching that are gender-neutral, gender-equal, or at the very least, accessible to people of different gender identities? The paper reviews representations of class, race, and gender in textbooks, and tries to find patterns in a well considered and thoughtful form (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017).

Moreover, the paper looks at existing studies by organizations such as Feminism in India (FII) of South Asian textbooks including those in India, and the androcentric representations in them, to try and identify the causes of such discriminatory forms of representations and what societal norms are being propagated in the form of an education, where most students consider what is written in textbooks as true beyond all doubt, thus influencing their mindset and ideology at a key stage of their growth and intellectual development, and specifically at a key transition phase of high-school (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). The paper further moves beyond mere considerations of gender to look at class and race in the lens of intersectionality.

BACKGROUND

Feminist pedagogy is simpler than it sounds - it seeks, primarily, to reform the teaching and learning of different subjects to make them more equally targeted - to veer them towards in a gender-inclusive fashions (Elliott, 2010). Teaching methods, for instance, have been critiqued by feminist scholars as taking increasingly academic forms focussed on particular types of performance -- this is perceptible in standardized testing models that prioritize speed and quick responses, a Victorian-era education model that is a remnant of times when the focus on STEM fields was due to the particularly clerical training method required for labourers in colonial India, with limited to no emphasis given to the humanities and social sciences which the colonizers revelled in studying in their universities and schools. This is no small part in the fact that the

humanities and social sciences actively promotes critical inquiry, denial, debate, and critique, as a constantly evolving field of discourse and conversation which is not as clear with the falsely objective and factual narrative that textbooks and curriculums in India propagates (Elliott, 2010).

There is a need, thus, to reform not only the content but also the teaching and evaluation standards in Indian and South Asian education, not only for the purposes of more inclusive education structures but to further create systems that can effectively create a new generation of thinkers, leaders, and perhaps even educators.

DISCUSSION

Of the instances that exists with respect to the propagation of patriarchal standards and misogyny in textbooks, one specific situation includes a part of the curriculum that the Punjab Government in Pakistan wished to provide, giving girls in school with hens and a cage to teach them “kitchen skills” (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). This program restricts the kitchen and cooking to women, without prescribing the same for men; further, it directly contributes to the perpetuation of gender roles, limiting the role of the woman to the realm of the family and private sphere, with the man being brought to the public and professional sphere.

Another instance in a Pakistan textbook in the Sindh Board goes as early as for children of Class 8, portraying the schedule for the ideal woman to follow (with no such prescription for men), with the entire day’s schedule being tightly packed and centered around domestic labour, housework, and largely focussed on the cleanliness of the kitchen, the house, and the five daily prayers, with no time being provided for leisure or personal enjoyment (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). Such a narrative further not only contributes to a systemic perpetuation of the time poverty of women, a concept that states of poverty and unemployment also being linked to the lack of time (including time for leisure) due to a disproportionate allotment and norm of domestic and unpaid labour to women. It further goes to dehumanize the woman, removing all sense of autonomy and rendering them equivalent to a household robot, focused upon being the “perfect” housewife, up at 5 a.m. and work without any break or rest until 11 p.m (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017).

In the Indian scenario, instances exist at the high-school level, which this paper attempts to primarily considered, in comparison with the previously mentioned cases. A Class 12 Sociology textbook in Maharashtra, India, justified dowry on the basis of the appearance of the woman, stating that dowry is a compensation for “ugliness” (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). This not only serves to reinforce long held perceptions of dowry being a form of compensation and insurance, but further perpetuates regressive patriarchal beauty norms, alongside a focus on the male gaze to consider a one-sided androcentric perspective of the “value” of the woman,

fetishizing the beauty, and dehumanizing woman on the basis of the same androcentric evaluation of beauty, a subjective construct whose considerations of beauty have changed through time and for which a normative prescription, specifically in government supported school textbooks only encourages an environment where women are constantly under the judgement and evaluation of male standards; this, further, is alongside the more direct support of dowry, a practice that is illegal under Indian law precisely for the reason of it being regressive, patriarchal and directly oppressive towards women (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017).

Another example is of a Class 9 textbook for Hindi, in Rajasthan (India), of which an excerpt draws a parallel between the work of housewives and donkeys, stating that women are in fact worse than donkeys since the former have the capacity to leave the relationship, be 'disloyal', and 'disobey' their master/husband (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017). The description is crass to the point of going beyond an aspect of patriarchal mindset to be purely oppressive, teaching young boys and girls of a regressive scenario where men possess ownership over their wives and women, and that leaving relationships, however toxic or abusive, is in itself a morally disdainful and terrible act -- this further propagates a state of objectification, removing the rights and autonomies that women enjoy as equal human beings and citizens, thereby leading students (and teachers) to internalize these misogynistic ideas and considering their female peers as inferior because the textbook propagates that very idea (Singh, 2012).

Further, the politics of 'loyalty' is to be examined, specifically considering the multiple variables that either promote or prevent the leaving of an intimate space, something which under the feminist banner has meant acknowledging the toxicity of masculine and hypermasculine narratives of ownership, strength, loyalty, and disloyalty (Sircar, 2018). The comparison to the donkey as a form of insult is a furthermore interesting aspect to examine under a critical lens - - with such an equation (by male authors of the textbooks) only revealing a deeper masculinized glorification of certain animals, with a derogation of beasts of labour such as a donkey which bears larger loads of weight than most other more 'respected' domesticated animals such as horses or cows (Mansoon, Maryam & Srivastava, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Thus, considering the syllabi of high-school education boards at the high-school level in India in comparison and juxtaposition with those in Pakistan, one sees patterns in the instances pointed out that exhibit both directly visible forms of oppression and symbolic gender violence alongside more subconscious, below the surface manifestations of less apparent forms of gendered discrimination: specifically, these include the androcentric and masculinized lenses of 'strength' and 'autonomy', with the politics of choice being tailor-made in a historical sense to

the actions and behavioral attributes of man, specifically noted with traits such as logic, rationality, rigor, rigidity, unemotionality, aggression, power of ownership, and in an ulterior and innate sense, the de-subjectification, and removal of choice from women.

These curriculums result in the glorification of regressive and oppressive ideals and patriarchal standards that are taken at face value as true by the very nature of being in textbooks that are considered true beyond all doubt, depicted as fact and not issues to ever be considered critically, and further as moral normative prescriptions that would invariably trickle down to speech, everyday interaction between people of different genders, social behavior, workplace attitude, perception of women in art, literature, and film, and ultimately the male imagination of the woman, and the woman's loss of autonomy, self-worth and choice as a result of believing that such depictions and representations are truly the norm (Singh, 2012).

It is required, hence, that boards of education such as the Central Board of Secondary Education actively review not only such existing content, but furthermore the scholarship and authorship that resulted in such textbooks and curriculums in the first place, and the structural deficiencies within these governmental bodies that have resulted in such a mass misinformation among the younger segments of the population who will, in the near future, progress to make up the largest segment of the country's workforce, intellectual capital, and eventually - leadership.

It is important to deconstruct and integrate a constant act of not only equity, but active un-learning and tackling of such patriarchal norms, an act which must go beyond the deletion of androcentric sexist and misogynistic views to, in essence, clearly acknowledge and state that such mindsets are detrimental to the health and well-being of women and society as a whole, to further state the rights and liberties that women enjoy, to deconstruct patriarchal traditional and societal standards (Elliott, 2010).

Further, it is required that such education boards clearly prescribe, perhaps, the successes of women across centuries, the lack of importance given to domestic and care labour as a legitimate form of work that contributes to the economy in more ways than one, and to educate young girls who perhaps come from communities and families steeped in patriarchal thought that they, as equal citizens, hold the ability to leave relationships, obtain education, participate in the economy in a professional capacity, disobey their husbands (if they choose to get married), possess sexual liberty, and furthermore, outperform men not in the male-centric standards of performance, but rather by actively challenging those standards in a society that seems to consider them, much like these textbooks, as undeniable truths and laws (Sircar, 2017).

REFERENCES

- Elliott, K. (2010). "They Should Call It Homophosexism": Gender and Sexual Inequality in High School. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. doi:10.1037/e679242011-001
- Failures of Androcentric Studies of Women's Education in the Third World †. (2017). *International Feminist Perspectives on Educational Reform*, 75-88. doi:10.4324/9781315174785-7
- Gender Inequalities and the Curriculum. (n.d.). *Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum*, 214-223. doi:10.4324/9780203326893_chapter_20
- Karpowitz, C. F., & Mendelberg, T. (2014). Gender Inequality in School Boards. *The Silent Sex*. doi:10.23943/princeton/9780691159751.003.0011
- Mansoor, M., Maryam, & Srivastava, Y. (2017, February 21). Sexism In The Classroom: 7 Examples From Indian & Pakistani Textbooks That Reinforce Regressive Gender Stereotypes. Retrieved from <https://feminisminindia.com/2017/02/21/7-textbooks-reinforce-harmful-gender-stereotypes>
- Singh, B. (2012). Women Writers: Standing up against the patriarchy. *Think India*, 15(1). doi:10.26643/think-india.v15i1.7848
- Sircar, O. (2018). Doing and undoing feminism. *Men and Feminism in India*, 73-99. doi:10.4324/9781351048248-5