

STUDENTS SUICIDES IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: *This paper critically attempts to present education as an emancipator not as employment. It presents critical frameworks of Indian philosophers Buddha in general and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar in particular. This article mainly examines the Indian higher education system and academic killings of Dalits and the practice of social exclusion. It also presents the nature of academic knowledge production at Indian higher education system. It critically argues how far the production of knowledge its past, present and future is owed to “human agency”? In terms of its order, content and control? It challenges the dominant paradigm of knowledge production by suggesting a critical pedagogical practice and social inclusive apparatus. It questions the caste hegemony and academic encounters of Dalits in higher educational institutions*

Keywords: *students; suicides; educational institutions.*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality. My final words of advice to you are educate, organise and agitate.” – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

“New times” in the university are marked by narratives that bemoan a “decline in plurality and standards” especially in places where a new generation of scholars and students from historically disadvantaged sections in Indian society is posing challenges to the social homogeneity of the classroom, boards of studies and other academic bodies, leading to obvious frictions on issues related to standards and merit. A new generation of Dalit scholarship has raised questions both about the accessibility of higher education and the limitations in making it enabling for those who struggle to gain entry into it. This has enabled an open debate on the absence of transparency in higher education and the nexus of networks of exclusion that operate formally and informally on campuses to reproduce caste inequalities in the metropolitan university.

Just imagine the repercussions if Black students were to die half as routinely in Harvard or in Oxford as Dalit and Adivasi students die in AIIMS, IITs and IISCs. When Indian students in Australia, predominantly students with surnames like Gupta and Sharma not good enough to make it to IITs, IIMs and AIIMS are attacked, it is “racism”; it even becomes a diplomatic issue. When Dalit and Adivasi students on Indian campuses (one’s own motherland) are hounded to death, there’s not a murmur. What makes Indian society so shameless as to not just deny but even justify such prejudice against Dalits that lead to murders? The faculties from certain institutions and universities are subjected to ‘burden proof’ where their consensus best to restore the institutional reputation and managed to ignore the victims and their solidarity by their collective conscience. But nobody turns up to extend solidarity to victims and hitherto excluded communities who have been fast unto death in the University of Hyderabad (the students initiated hunger strike due to a series of Dalit students’ suicides by caste discrimination, December 2013). Professor Mungekar Committee remains to be seen whether the recommendations will

be followed in letter and spirit, or whether symbolic action only will be taken against the perpetrators, leaving them unscathed despite their deliberate role in wasting the academic years of these students and causing them and their family members tremendous mental trauma. Will the authorities show enough courage in filing cases against the guilty teachers and their accomplices? Or will they be content to simply disburse compensation?

Sharmila Rege's critical framework challenges the hegemonic nature of teaching at higher education and presents a dialogue with fellow teachers on addressing caste and gender in the metropolitan classroom. The comments they half scratch out from these sheets, questions raised in class and those asked hesitantly outside the class, their silences that one rushes past in the business-as-usual mode during peak periods of the semester and gestures that defy narrative expression.

II. ACADEMIC ENCOUNTERS

The debate on Dalits joining the Durban Conference against discrimination based on race and caste underlined the ways in which sociologists in the name of objectivity valued the opinion of experts while rejecting perspectives emerging from the lived experience of caste and the horror of atrocities.

Venkatesh, a PhD scholar (Chemistry), Raju Puliyala, an IMA (Linguistics) at University of Hyderabad and Linesh and many more young minds in higher educational institutions' suicide is just one more addition in the growing list of Dalit students committing suicides in the country's educational institutions, especially that of sciences and professional courses in recent times. Most of these institutions are considered to be 'top class' and have 'All India character'. However, the disproportionate numbers of Dalit and Adivasi students committing suicides, especially, in premier institutions also points towards the kind of caste

discrimination prevalent in these campuses where students have to face harassment due to their caste background on a regular basis from not only their colleagues but more from the faculties and even from the administration.

What came out of our interaction with victims parents and other family members were shocking tale of how a young and bright Dalit students from very poor background were victimized so much on caste grounds in one of the premier educational institutions of the country that despite his entire record of struggle all through his life, they finally lost their willingness to even live. The Documentary 'The Death of Merit' is based on these testimonies asserts and is a result of our amateur efforts to bring out the truth behind the kind of caste oppression suffered by Dalit and Adivasi students in higher education and the resulting suicides of bright students.

"The Kozhikode-based Centre for Research and Education for Social Transformation, CREST, has even prepared some 'packages'. When solicited, it conducts weeklong on-campus 'self-enrichment' programmes to help Dalit/Adivasi students 'integrate' into IIMs and IITs like it did in IIT-D last year. What they do not do is sensitise the predominantly 'upper' caste faculty and students the Dronacharyas and Arjunas at these institutes who insist on hacking the thumbs of Eklavyas. It is those who discriminate who need help" Outlook (India), 16 April 2012.

Madal Commission and aftermath have intensified higher education just creating a new space for India's backward class but also hatred-ness by the caste Hindus. The caste discrimination and harassment peaked during the anti-reservation protests of 2006. They were always trying to start fights so they could bash us up. Derogatory remarks were common: 'Yeh chamar log kya karenge?' (Jun 02, 2007 Tehelka).

‘Even if I never become a doctor, I will not give up this fight’: Ajay Kumar Singh (Tehelka, June 2, 2007) presents facts “Nirpat Singh, the auto driver, and Munni Devi, the nurse, were very proud of their son. It was a big moment for all of us when we entered the campus of India’s premier medical sciences college. As soon as my parents left, I was summoned by my neighbour, a senior, who asked me to introduce myself. Among other things, I told him I had stood first on the Scheduled Caste list. The next moment I found myself outside the room, on the ground; he had pushed me out. That was just the first day. The next time he tried to insult me”.

III. CASE STUDIES

Almost twenty five young buds (mostly from poor families) lost, and that’s just in the last five years. How tragedy was it for them that they took their own lives?

Malepula Shrikant, Jan 1, ’07 Final year B.Tech, IIT Bombay.

Ajay S. Chandra, Aug 26, ’07 Integrated PhD, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

Bala Raju, PhD, third year, Telugu literature, University of Hyderabad.

Jaspreet Singh, Jan 27, ’08 Final year MBBS, Government Medical College, Chandigarh.

Senthil Kumar, Feb 23, ’08 PhD, School of Physics, University of Hyderabad.

Prashant Kureel, Apr 19, ’08 First year B.Tech, IIT Kanpur.

G. Suman, Jan 2, ’09 Final year M.Tech, IIT Kanpur.

Ankita Veghda, Apr 20, ’09 First year, BSc Nursing, Singhi Institute of Nursing, Ahmedabad.

D. Syam Kumar, Aug 13, ’09 First year B.Tech, Sarojini Institute of Engineering and Technology, Vijayawada.

S. Amravathi, Nov 4, ’09 National-level young woman boxer, Centre of Excellence, Sports Authority of AP, Hyderabad.

Bandi Anusha, Nov 5, ’09 B.Com final year, Villa Mary College, Hyderabad.

Pushpanjali Poorty, Jan 30, ’10 First year, MBA, Visvesvarayah Technological University, Bangalore.

Muthyam, 2009 PhD, 2nd year, English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Sushil Kumar Chaudhary, Jan 31, ’10 Final year MBBS, Chattrapati Shahuji Maharaj Medical University (former KGMU), Lucknow.

Balmukund Bharti, Mar 3, ’10 Final year MBBS, AIIMS, New Delhi.

J.K. Ramesh, Jul 1, ’10 Second year BSc, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore.

Madhuri Sale, Nov 17, ’10 Final year B.Tech, IIT Kanpur.

G. Varalakshmi, Jan 30, ’11 B. Tech first year, Vignan Engineering College, Hyderabad.

Manish Kumar, Feb 13, ’11 IIIrd Year B.Tech, IIT Roorkee.

Linesh Mohan Gawle, Apr 16, ’11 PhD, National Institute of Immunology, New Delhi.

Anil Kumar Meena, Mar 3, ’12 First year AIIMS, New Delhi.

Raju Puliyala, final year, Integrated M.A. Linguistics, University of Hyderabad.

Venkatesh Madari, third year, PhD, Chemistry (ACHREM), University of Hyderabad.

(Information courtesy Insight Foundation)
Caste and Higher Education

For Bhalchandra Munekar, ex-vice chancellor of Bombay University and ex-member of the Planning Commission, the exercise of looking into allegations of caste discrimination faced by scheduled caste students at Vardhman Medical College, Delhi, has been extremely disturbing. As the single-member committee appointed by the National Scheduled Caste Commission, it was important that he examine every aspect of the case and ensure that the guilty were brought to book.

Dr Mungekar discovered to his dismay that not only were the 35 scheduled caste students failed repeatedly in one particular subject physiology but the authorities had not even bothered to meet them to look into their complaints. As his report puts it, the faculty of the said department 'resorted to caste-based discrimination and neglected the duties assigned to them, not by omission but by commission'. Even other administrative people, including the head of the institution, had not seen fit to intervene. Not only did the students lose years because of this apathy, shockingly, the same authorities were guilty of showing leniency towards general category students. While they had no qualms about barring scheduled caste students from taking their examinations due to lack of attendance, four students from the general category, who were detained for inadequate attendance, were allowed to take the examination.

Dr Mungekar has demanded that legal action under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 be taken against former Principal V K Sharma and his then colleagues Professor Shoma Das, head of the physiology department, Principal Jayshree Bhattacharjee and Raj Kapoor, professor of physiology, and a liaison officer.

Two years ago, the Delhi High Court intervened on a writ petition filed by aggrieved students of the college. Twenty-five scheduled caste students who had taken admission in 2004 and 2005 approached the court when it was discovered that they were deliberately being failed in physiology. Under instructions from the high court the college was forced to conduct fresh examinations; 24 students out of the 25 passed.

Last year too, a committee of experts belonging to the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Lok Nayak Jaiprakash Narayan Hospital (LNJP), headed by Dr L R Murmu, noted in his report how a student had failed three years

consecutively only by one mark. Other members of the committee also noted how all the students who had failed the physiology paper had performed well in other subjects and had got admission in the college because of their high marks.

Take the premier medical institute in the country, AIIMS. The committees have critically acknowledged that scheduled caste students did face discrimination and made some recommendations. It has been a long time since the reports were handed over to the government, but there have been no concrete moves to end the discrimination. Despite the commission's strong recommendation that action against the then director be initiated under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, AIIMS preferred to junk the report citing the strange logic that, "the institute had come over the phase of unrest and a congenial atmosphere was prevailing".

All these votaries of a 'congenial atmosphere' would not like to be reminded about the herding together of reserved category students which a leading daily reported about 'Parts of AIIMS hostels are turning into SC/ST ghettos. Reserved category students said they were being "hunted out of the remaining rooms" by upper-caste students and driven to two floors of the hostels,' (The Telegraph, July 5, 2006).

A Supreme Court bench of K G Balakrishnan and P Sathasivam asked the IIT administration to arrange special classes for the students so that they could catch up with general category students. The said petition had specifically mentioned how callousness on the part of the administration had made the whole system of reservations meaningless as neither were such students provided with the necessary facilities nor were they given special coaching which resulted in over 90% of scheduled category students either failing their first or second years and leaving the institute, or being expelled because of 'below par performance'.

Social Diverse in Education

A close look at the academic atmosphere at other IITs makes it clear that IIT-Delhi has been no exception. A story in Tehelka (June 16, 2007), that focused on IIT-Chennai, explained how the institute had metamorphosed into a 'modern-day agraharam' (in Tamil, a brahmin's house is called an agraharam). The author gave figures explaining how the quota of seats meant for reserved category students always remained underutilized. The figures were 11.9% for SC students (2005) when it should have been 15%. At the higher education level, the ratio is further reduced, in research one finds merely 2.3%, and for PhDs, 5.8%.

This discrimination is not confined to the student level, the authorities or higher-ups, with their Varna mindset, also see to it that eligible candidates from socially oppressed sections are not allowed to become teachers. Take IIT-Kharagpur (Times of India, September 12, 2012, 'Quotas Fail to Break Caste Ceiling in IITs'), one of the oldest IITs; it has only three scheduled caste professors, two associate professors and two assistant professors. There is not a single scheduled tribe person at all the three levels. There are two OBC (other backward classes) professors and seven assistant professors but no associate professor. Coming to the general category, there are 227 professors, 105 associate professors and 165 assistant professors.

Despite the fact that Tamil Nadu has a background of social movement, under-representation of marginal castes and scheduled tribe members prevails. While there are 212 professors, 91 associate professors and 177 assistant professors in the general category, the figures are 3, 3 and 44 for the SC category. A lone ST is assistant professor; there are seven assistant professors from the OBC category.

The plea of 'absence of suitable candidates' while making selections under the reserved category is regularly invoked when there is a lapse on the part of the

higher-ups in sticking to their constitutional responsibilities. In fact, the reason lies elsewhere. There have been reports (Times of India, September 6, 2012) providing details of SC/ST teaching slots lying vacant in central universities. In fact, just over 32% of sanctioned teaching posts for SCs and 41.8% for STs in 40 central universities are occupied. The list includes premier institutions like Delhi University (DU), Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Benaras Hindu University (BHU) and University of Hyderabad.

Backlog posts in varsities

Universities	SC quota	Filled	ST quota	Filled
AMU	283	1	142	0
DU	255	44	128	14
JNU	109	24	55	9
BHU	362	115	181	30

It is worth emphasizing here that to promote equality on campus, the rules have been formulated in such a manner that overt and covert acts of casteism are identified. The UGC Regulations 2012 (Prevention of Caste-Based Discrimination/Harassment Victimization and Promotion of Equality in Higher Educational Institutions) which were approved by the human resources ministry and were applied to all colleges and universities. Provisions have also been made to make it mandatory to appoint an 'anti-discriminatory officer' from amongst the staff and to establish a grievance redressal committee.

The Indian higher education sector boasts of 42 Central universities, 243 State universities, 53 State Private universities, 130 Deemed universities, 33 Institutions of National Importance (established under Acts of Parliament) and five Institutions (established under various State legislations). The number of colleges has also registered manifold increase with just 578 in 1950 growing to be more than 30,000 in 2011- (MHRD Annual report

2013). The literacy rate of Scheduled Castes for all India was 54.69 per cent according to the 2001 census data which is far below the national average but according to the Human Development report of India 2011, the growth of SC literacy rate is 8.7

Despite constitutional provisions and safeguards, Dalit representation in higher educational institutes and in the workforce remains largely minimal. State initiated programmes and policies apart, it is also essential, as a recent conference in Bhopal highlighted, to instil respect for diversity and a greater understanding of the disadvantaged. The conference arrived at a '21point action agenda for the 21st century', which is a kind of landmark in the Dalit liberation movements in recent times.

Our experience so far has been that the more an institution gains reputation for excellence, the more likely it is to restrict the access to a highly selective group of students both socially and academically. Such institutions are engaged in creating a class of 'potential elite' and drawn from the highest strata of society.

The Nehru's legacy of educational reforms have could not guarantee the excellence in education with hitherto excluded communities. Eventually, the technological advent in educational appraisals have could not meet the inclusion of Dalit education. India might celebrate its innovation of technological advances in educational sectors but failed to guarantee a basic education for women and Dalits. Indian education system from Kothari commission (1956) to Sam Pitroda commission (2007) lacks the social inclusion of education. All these commissions have presented the homogeneous production of knowledge and they ignored women and Dalits participation. Sam Pitroda on behalf of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) on January 12, 2007 is a significant departure from the usual policy discourse

which managed to ignore an institutional lapse over social equality.

Indian Knowledge production and Dalit experiences

"Knowledge is power. Power as domination, it reproduces itself in different locations and employing similar apparatuses, strategies and mechanisms of control Michael Foucault.

"The Shudra must not acquire knowledge and it is a sin and a crime to give him education. - If the Shudra intentionally listens for committing to memory the Veda, then his ears should be filled with (molten) lead; if he utters the Veda, then his tongue should be cut off"- The Code of Manu (Manusmrithi which is still one of the scriptural basis for contemporary Hindu civil law in India).

It is worth beginning with words, written by Mukta Salve, a 14-year-old, a girl student of the Mang caste in Jotiba and Savitribai Phule's school, and Tarabai Shinde, a young Maratha woman trained in the Satyashodhak (Society of Truth Seekers) tradition.

"O learned pandits wind up the selfish prattle of your hollow wisdom and listen to what I have to say" – (Mukta Salve, About the Grief of Mahar and Mangs, 1855)

"Let me ask you something oh Gods...You are said to be completely impartial. But wasn't it you who created both men and women?"- (Tarabai Shinde, A Comparison of Men and Women, 1882).

For these words of fire with which students talked back to the injustice of their times are embedded in writings and practices that addressed the complex relations between culture, knowledge and power and sought not only to include girl students and students from the ex - untouchable castes but also to democratize the very processes of learning and teaching.

These and several other efforts are seeking to challenge disciplinary regimes of caste, opening up new ways of looking at the present of our disciplines and pedagogical practices and suggest that critical teachers

should be “listening” rather than bemoaning the loss of better times. “I wish to argue that these are “new times” in the university, the suicides and other forms of “routine” pedagogical violence notwithstanding. Men and women from excluded castes and classes are entering higher education for the first time and those for long considered “unteachable” are talking/writing back” Sharmila Rege. This makes it possible to throw back the gaze of the students who have long been “invisible” and “nameless” in the classrooms on to disciplinary and pedagogical practice.

Towards an alternate pedagogy for inclusive education for all

Phule-Ambedkarite perspectives on the project of education and the probable reasons for the exclusion of these from imaginations of “alternative” perspectives on learning and teaching. Historically, we can read in the colonialist and nationalist discourses on Indian society, a battle over the function and nature of knowledge. While the colonialist project represented India as the spirit of Hindu civilisation and therefore distinct and disjunctive from the west, the regime of classification and categorisation of “Indian tradition” created norms for colonial rule enhancing the status of brahmans as indigenous intellectuals.

The nationalists imagined alternate knowledge by reversing the claims of superiority of the west, locating the superiority in the Vedas. Phule and Dr.Ambedkar in different ways by weaving together the emancipatory non-Vedic materialist traditions (Lokayata, Buddha, Kabir) and new western ideas (Thomas Paine, John Dewey, Karl Marx, for instance) had challenged the binaries of western modernity/Indian tradition, private caste-gender/public nation and sought to refashion modernity and thereby its project of education.

Phule and Dr.Ambedkar in several writings and speeches but more particularly the former in Gulamgiri

(1873), and the latter in Annihilation of Caste (1936), The Riddles on Hinduism (compiled and published in 1987) and The Buddha and His Dhamma (1957) undertake a rational engagement with core analytical categories emerging from Hindu metaphysics which had been normalised as “Indian culture and science”.

Throughout the text of Gulamgiri, Phule stresses that Hindu religion is indefensible mainly because it violates the rights and dignity of human beings. He turns the “false books” of the brahmans on their head by reinterpreting the “Dashavataara” of Vishnu to rewrite a history of the struggles of the shudras and atishudras. He moves swiftly between the power and knowledge nexus in everyday cultural practices, myths and history.

Phule, in his “Memorandum Addressed to the Education Commission” (1882) for a more inclusive policy on education and in his popular compositions like the short ballad on “Brahman Teachers in the Education Department” (1869), Phule demonstrates how state policy and dominant pedagogical practices are intrinsically interlinked. He comments at length on the differential treatment to children of different castes and the collusion of interests of the Bombay government school inspectors and teachers. He calls for more plurality in the appointment of teachers and the need to appoint those committed to teaching as a truth-seeking exercise.

Dr.Ambedkar in Annihilation of Caste (1936) argues against the absolute knowledge and holism idealised by brahmanical Hinduism and critiques the peculiar understanding of nature and its laws (karma) in the Shastric texts. Both Phule and Dr.Ambedkar underline the preference for truth enhancing values and methods through an integration of critical rationality of modern science and the scepticism and self-reflection of ancient non-Vedic materialists and the Buddha.

It is clear both in and through their works that they see organisation of knowledge as

complexly related to the interlocking connections of different identities. This leads them to value-situated knowledge but such that they do not collapse all experience into knowledge but do highlight how certain experiences (oppression based on caste, gender) do lead people to certain kinds of knowledge's.

Dr. Ambedkar, debating the Bombay University Act Amendment Bill, highlights the linkages between issues otherwise thought to be disjoint, namely, understaffing, dictation of notes and the lack of adequate representation of backward castes on administrative bodies such as the senate. Countering arguments regarding examination-centric education as a safeguard for promotion of standards; he underscores how this exam-centric mode in fact reproduces caste inequalities in the university. He underlines the significance of combining efforts to increase access to education for vulnerable sections with those to reconceptualise administrative and curricular practices of higher education.

Recently, a Dalit doctoral student and colleague narrated to me his experiences of the school and the university, the ways in which the curricular, extra-curricular and academic success (lesson on Dr. Ambedkar in the textbook, elocution competition, becoming a UGC-Junior Research Fellow (JRF) scholar) were all instances that reproduced caste by reducing him to a "stigmatised particular". Pointing to a paradox, he asked "why do even sociologists whose 'object of analysis' is caste, believe that caste identities do not matter in academic practices"?

Why are "we" afraid of "identity"? Why do we assume neutrality when it comes to identities of caste, ethnicity, and gender and presume that they do not affect the content and practice of our discipline? Do we disavow caste – say it does not exist in our context and talk of it in other terms and codes – like standards, language and so on? It is common for many of us teaching in state universities and colleges.

Probably because caste, gender, and ethnicity are explicitly stated objects of inquiry and they have been the first to include courses and modules on women, Dalits and Tribals in the sociology curriculum? Yet as we just saw, it is sociologists more than others who seem to be afraid of any claims to caste or gender identities. They appear to assume that avowal of gender and caste identities will lead to feminification of theory or demise of merit – in other words to "pollution" of academic purity.

Alternative perspectives for inclusive higher education

Women, Dalits, Adivasis, may be included as substantive research areas of sociology and in optional courses but this inclusion keeps the cognitive structures of the discipline relatively intact from the challenges posed by Dalit or feminist knowledge's. Thus "good sociology" continues to be defined in terms of the binaries of objectivism/subjectivism, social/political, social world/knower, experience/ knowledge, tradition/modernity and theoretical brahman/empirical shudra.

Kumud Pawade's story of her Sanskrit, Kancha Ilaiah's comment on the sameness of the English and Telugu textbook, Chandra Bhan Prasad's counter commemoration of Macaulay, Pragnya Daya Pawar's interrogation of the power of the printed word over the spoken word and Meena Kandaswamy's dream of a global English in small letters offer immense possibilities for wedging open the "language question".

Now if you want to know why I am praised – well it's for my knowledge of Sanskrit, my ability to learn it and to teach it. Doesn't anyone ever learn Sanskrit? That's not the point. The point is that Sanskrit and the social group I come from don't go together in the Indian mind. Against the background of my caste, the Sanskrit I have learned appears shockingly strange. That a woman from a caste that is the lowest of the low should learn Sanskrit,

and not only that, also teach it – is a dreadful anomaly -(Kumud Pawade 1981:21)

It is not merely a difference of dialect; there is difference in the very language itself, What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook which talked about Milton's Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained, or Shakespeare's Othello or Macbeth or Wordsworth's poetry about nature in England, or a Telugu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's Meghasandesham, Bommera Potanna's Bhagvtam. We do not share the content of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. (Kancha Ilaiah 1996:15)

Through his initiatives, Lord Macaulay was to re-craft a new intellectual order for India which threatened the dominance of the brahmins and questioned the relevance of the Varna/caste order. This was to give Dalits a large breathing space ... Should we know our past the way we like to, or we know the past as it existed? Or should there be any distinction between History Writing and Story Telling? Those who condemn Lord Macaulay for imposing a 'wrong' education on India do never tell us what kind of education system which Macaulay fought and eventually destroyed. (Chandra Bhan Prasad 2006: 99 & 115)

Pawade's critical work of memory unfolds the complex gender and caste parameters in the "language question" and lays bare the dynamics of a Dalit woman acquiring an authorised tongue. Importantly she underlines the operation of language as a marker of subordination and exclusion in our academia and thus the impossibility of viewing the "language question" as a matter of communication separable from power relationships and cultural and symbolic effects of language.

Ilaiah argues "the communists and nationalists spoke and wrote in the language of the purohit. Their culture was basically sanskritised, we were not part of that culture. For good or ill, no one talked about us. They never realised that our

language is also language, which is understood by one and all in our communities". Any easy equation between English as alien and Telugu as "our language" yielding "our categories" of analysis stands interrogated. Further, Ilaiah suggests that the question of culture mediates between the axis of equality and the academia and the "language" in which education takes place is an epistemological issue more than a matter of mere instruction.

The "difference" of Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogical perspectives lies in a double articulation that conceives education then not only in terms of cultures of learning and teaching but also dissenting against that which is learnt and taught by dominant cultural practices. This entails constituting teachers and students as modern truth seekers and agents of social transformation who seek to become "a light unto themselves". The methods are those that seek to integrate the principles of prajna (critical understanding) with karuna (empathetic love) and samata (equality). This democratisation of method of knowledge marks the difference of Phule-Ambedkarite perspectives from methods based on binaries of reason/emotion, public/private, assumption of neutral objectivity/celebration of experience that inform much of our teaching and research.

Why then have social scientists in search of alternative pedagogies rarely turned to Phule, Shahu or Dr. Ambedkar? Why did the search for alternatives usually end with Gandhi, Aurobindo and Nehru? How might this "Dalit phobia"¹⁹ or exclusion in the academia and its cognitive structures be explained?

Since the 1990s, this "secular upsurge of caste" at the national level interfaced with local Dalit movements and international contexts like the UN Conference against Racism is shaping varied trajectories of Dalit studies in different regions in India.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The student and teacher relationship in Indian education system in the present conjuncture how is the relationship between the teachers and the taught performed? How does the intersection of generational and “other” differences between them disrupt this relationship? We may as practitioners of rational pedagogies reject the brahmanic principle of teacher as “god embodied” (Guru sakshat paraha brahma) but then do engaged pedagogies such as critical install teachers as the new “saviours” of the students?

Generally speaking, teachers who believe that learning is linked to social change, struggle over identities and meanings, may practise variants and combinations of three possible models of progressive pedagogical practice. A teacher must believe that she understands the truth/ the real relations of power and imparts it to the students. The second model believes in a dialogical mode and making the silenced speak. While in the third the focus shifts on developing skills, so that students are enabled to understand and intervene in their own history. It is possible that different combinations emerge from these models, for common to all three are a set of similar assumptions.

The first model believes that the teacher can and does know the truth, the real interests of different groups brought together in the classroom and has to just impart the truth to them, the second overlooks the real material and social conditions which may disenable some from speaking and others from “listening to silences” and the third assumes that the teacher knows and can impart the “universal skills”. Sharmila Rege asserts “it is clear that education becomes “Trutiya Ratna” in Jotiba and Savitribai Phule’s school because what was demanded from students was not conformity to some image of political liberation but of gaining understanding of their own involvement in the world and its future.

The teacher still remains responsible for production of knowledge in the classroom but is required to traverse risky grounds that interrogate the binaries of knowing teacher/ignorant students, public/ private and rational/emotional. She recognises that often the students are uninterested in the classroom not because they do not want to work or because of the difficulties of jargon or theory but they do not see reason. Probably the questions being asked and answered are not “theirs”. This realisation cannot be followed up with a simple dictum that from now on students will define the questions. The challenge is to discover the questions on the terrain of everyday lives and popular cultural practices.

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