

Communal Politics in Educational Science Research

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Abstract

The central concern of this paper is to examine the conceptual structures, driving interests and value frames and value choices that have made possible the pedagogic and teacher education discourses- research practices and production of knowledge in the field of educational sciences. The most important question is – Are there any common interests, values conceptual assumptions and norms governing the entire disciplinary grid in the contemporary teacher education and educational research in the institutions of higher learning in India. The author argues that on one hand the mechanical imitation of behavior - positivist beliefs and practices and on the other opportunistic -private- self-centered career interests, by and large, regulate the day-to-day research practices in the institutions of teacher education. Exposure and creative participation in the processes of production of knowledge in the field of critical teacher education studies and value based scientific research would certainly shift the researchers focus from synchronic, objectivistic, rigid world views to value based socially relevant scientific research. Further, there is a need to develop programmes, modules and other curricular practices that can offer a holistic picture of the objects of investigation and inculcate the values of social accountability, social ethics and social action.

The existing practices and conditions of teacher education and educational research in the Indian Universities are very much frustrating and absolutely disconcerting. The fact that disciplinary practices in the institutions of teacher education and research has no relevance to our contexts and societies is compelling us to rethink about the official notions, concepts, methods and most importantly, the disciplinary and institutional research practices in our universities.

Historically the dominant discourses in teacher education have systematically marginalized debates around the complex relationships that exist among poverty, caste, power, knowledge, culture, ideology, inequalities and schooling. These overriding discourses of teacher education represent education as a historical, apolitical and universal. Disciplinary practices centered on mechanistic behaviorist and positivist models of

understanding decontextualise learning and various other associated process of education.

Such institutional processes over a period of time nurture teacher educators psyche and construct their consciousness. This is clearly evident in their classroom pedagogic practices, institutional rituals, stories, research activities, workshops, seminars, curriculum, time-table, calendar, almanac and evaluation and assessment practices. By and large, majority of practices in teacher education departments focus on preparing teachers to develop technical competence and procedural rationalities and conform to the existing social and institutional structure.

Institutionalized individualistic approach to education brought teacher education departments very close to the state politics and made them important campaigners and ambassadors of the state sponsored so-called development schemes, programmes and interventions. In the process teacher educators got transformed into rule followers and disciplined bodies. This is the prevailing state of affairs across the teacher education departments of this country. There is an immediate need to shake these departments and instill the values of critical thinking, sociological imagination, and historical sensitivity among students and teacher educators. We need to demystify the so-called value neutral practices and dismantle the rigid disciplinary structures and deconstruct concepts, theories and methodological approaches of the teacher education departments. This is very much important in the present day context of economic reforms and its associated processes like privatization, liberalization and globalization. In what follows an attempt is made to reflect on the knowledge production processes in teacher education departments.

Research in our institutions of teacher education and learning is highly problematic and open to critique. This is because of the liberal assumptions of these institutions about knowledge as universal and normative. And their orthodox, conventional techniques and methods deny the possibility of connecting the knowledges produced with the material world and real life conditions and situations. The positivist-behaviorist thinking behind the objectives of our pedagogic practices and educational research practice has encompassed and imprisoned our actions in disciplinary frames and institutional structures. Further this thinking

has treated Indian experience and its social reality as being deviant in the sense of being a historical and static. This dominant framework of thinking is designed to create a class of researchers to reproduce complacently the programmed way of thinking.

Another area of criticism is the composition of institutional clientele, i.e., the academics and students who undertake and engage in research activities either to improve their curriculum vitae or to enhance the qualifications by submitting a dissertation or thesis as part of their doctoral research work. The research is therefore likely to be undertaken by a person in order to improve his/her career and also it is constrained by time and cost. The institutionalization of these characteristics and values has influenced the style of research and the mode of knowledge production, distribution and application.

Majority of the research activities focus only upon the 'how-to-do-it' tasks of data collection and analysis. And this community of scholars consider research as a context-free enterprise comprising a series of techniques in statistics and testing. In other words the focus is solely on techniques, procedures and time, including cost and distance involved in the conduct of inquiry. Due to these factors the knowledge generated in teacher education research is largely counterproductive and irrelevant to the needs of the practicing teachers, schools and society. Therefore, what we conceive, define, identify, think as research in educational research is open to question.

The above factors have hardly received attention and sustained examination in our academia. But what is the most interesting fact is that, of late, there is a wide disagreement within the scholarly communities about the nature and character of educational sciences and educational inquiry. The emerging debates have brought into question some of the basic assumptions related to social and cultural contexts of inquiry and the human hopes, interests, values by which people have engaged in research. We err, if we do not consider these substantive intellectual reorientations. This paper could be seen as a sincere effort to initiate a dialogue for a critical rethinking on the character and nature of educational sciences and educational research and also the tasks and responsibilities of the teachers and students who are engaged in learning and research. Further, an attempt is made here to explore the possibility of thinking for reconfiguration of practices and re-articulation of research agenda.

The central concern of this paper as enunciated above is to examine the conceptual structures, driving interests and value frames and value choices that have made possible the research discourses-practices and the production of

knowledge in the field of educational sciences and teacher education. The most important question in this context is – Are there any common interests, values conceptual assumptions and norms governing the entire disciplinary grid in the contemporary research in the institutions of higher learning in India. My basic contention is that opportunistic, career-oriented private and selfish interests are, by and large, regulating the day-to-day research practices in the teacher education departments of the universities and academy.

Research in universities is essentially a communal enterprise. The so called scientific research practices emerge from a communal context in which certain ways of looking at and interpretation are canonized and standardized. Researchers come together to share common interests, beliefs, values and patterns of social conduct. And the competition to grab certain benefits makes them to get affiliated with different groups of researchers with whom they feel secure and their interests are protected. Socialization into such groups or communities involves social, cultural, emotional, political and cognitive elements. The dominant models, official structures and established methodologies are considered for formulating the framework of the study. In every scientific community or institution of learning we find, sometimes, a small group of highly productive and influential scholars or a group of individuals located in some powerful positions in the departments who communicate ideas, norms, rules, regulations, ethical codes and also set priorities for research, recruitment and training. They define and dictate what is a scientific discipline and what is not a discipline; what is scientific knowledge and what is not scientific knowledge, and what is the right way of doing research. It is in the fitness of things to recall the contributions of Thomas S.Kuhn, to further explicate this argument.

According to Kuhn, a scientific discipline is defined sociologically: it is a particular scientific community, united by education (e.g., texts, methods of accreditation), professional interaction and communication (e.g., journals, conventions), as well as similar interests in problems of a certain sort and acceptance of a particular range of possible solutions to such problems. The scientific community, like other communities, defines what is required for membership in the group. (Lyle Zynda, 2004) These powerful individuals of a scientific community establish personal contacts with each other by mutually respecting each others intellectual standpoints and private interests. The common assumptions, beliefs, values and behaviors are sustained in a variety of forums and conversations.

The members of these groups also organize seminars and symposiums to mutually certify each other's knowledge

and actions. Doctoral theses of their students are mutually exchanged for certification and appreciation. Such communities interact in large forums and conferences and mutually appreciate each other's work and also to encourage their interests and benefits. They mutually exchange invitations, receive each other in airports and railway stations; meet in hotels, restaurants and committee meetings and share their experiences and opinions, mostly about their rivals and competitors in the field. Young scholars are inducted into such communities and are trained to participate in such discussions, meetings research activities. Over a period of time they become professionals by learning how-to-do-it tasks, and also mechanically imitate their seniors' presentation styles, concepts, methods and ideologies. In what follows, I try to map out a few existing practices of research guidance in our institutions of teacher education.

A cursory look at the way the doctoral theses are supervised, guided and produced make us realize the politics of professional ethics and conduct. According to Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) *A scientific community* cannot practice its trade without some set of *received beliefs*.

1. **These beliefs form the foundation of the "educational initiation that prepares and licenses the student for professional practice".**
2. **The nature of the "rigorous and rigid" preparation helps ensure that the received beliefs exert a "deep hold" on the student's mind.**

One can see the implications of these ideas in the following discussion. Supervisors of doctoral students generally instruct them to confine to certain structure of presentation of the entire thesis. Within this structure they prescribe how to present things before the field work itself. For example, what to include in chapter one of the thesis is by and large fixed and decided in advance, that is, before the field work. Instead of training scholars in critical ways of looking at the objects of investigation, reflecting on the field under study and re-looking at the problematic of the issues under consideration, the recognized official supervisors encourage student – researchers to copy from textual material i.e., from printed books, even sometimes without quoting and making references. Since it is very easy to copy rather than presenting the problematic of the topic selected for the study, the student and supervisor collectively commit such an offence and silently share the thesis in their communities of researchers for official and institutional certification and authentication.

The other important aspect in such communal activities is the way the methodological procedures are worked out

and rationalized in the doctoral thesis. In order to demonstrate the scientificity of the work the researchers adopt certain techniques of sampling, methods of standardization of tools and statistical data analysis techniques. For example, in order to test whether there is any relationship between the variables, the scholars apply, under the guidance of the supervisor the statistical tests indiscriminately without looking at what kind of data they are addressing. In order to show the hypotheses testing statistics they blindly adopt certain tests and share the same with their co-examiners for adjudication and authentication. By using statistics and an impersonal style of writing techniques they try to establish the objectivity of their research work. In other words, by following the rules, (*that reduce data to statistics and sampling techniques*) they believe that objectivity can be achieved in the course of investigation. The other modes of conceptualization and action that is intuitive, descriptive and anecdotal are not considered as scientific and objective procedures.

The intellectual discourses in educational sciences and educational research are constructed around such decisions and practices of the researcher. In our institutions, normalizing judgments are embedded within the judgments of the powerful faculty over statements of truth made by doctoral research students. Such judgments of the supervisors reject certain discourses of research which do not comply with the rules for the formation of knowledge, but accept those discourses which do comply as normal and true. Disciplinary discourses in the field of educational sciences and educational research are self-legitimizing through certain practices like seminar discussions, tutorials, conferences, comment on students' work, assessment of portfolios, assignments, course papers, viva-voice and theory examinations, reviewing of research proposals, journals and books. According to the norms of the accepted disciplinary discourses judgments are made to arrive at truths of the propositions and statements. Through the techniques of observations, normalization and examination the institutions of learning act as centres of power for the formation, sustenance and maintenance of the disciplined ways of constructing social and educational realities. These discourses in turn govern the institutional practices and formulate their agenda of/for action. What is important to understand in this context is, what is the basis on which such discourses of research operate to generate and disseminate so called scientific knowledge in the field of educational sciences?

What I want to argue here is that the researchers in order to acquire official recognition imitate vulgar positivist and Western models of scientific research and use dominant positivist frameworks of thought for building rationalities. The obligation and application of such structuralist forms of scientific reasoning reduces the methodological procedures and issues to techniques and tests. Because of this

researchers derive the implications of the study and arrive at generalizations not on the basis of substantive theory and social realities but primarily drawing from statistical tests and sampling techniques. They act at two different layers of abstraction. *At the super structural level they represent the principles of positivism and its language of science and at deep structural level their actions are guided by opportunistic values and career-oriented cultural forms of thought.* This rhetorical exercise clearly indicates the opportunistic strategies and actions of the researchers. They neither do honest positivist educational sciences nor honest anti-positivist educational research, but create a false impression by imitating and mechanically adopting the dominant concepts, methods, categories, and official tests and techniques.

The institutional rituals, and ceremonies conducted by researchers and faculty members actually obscure the true nature of the object of investigation. Application of rigorous techniques overshadows the real situations and removes the theoretical dimensions and simplifies the situations and context of the study. The logic of such an exercise is nothing but rhetorical logic i.e., logic of argumentation. This logic is employed to convince other scholars or someone else that *what they are saying is true.* Therefore, the thesis of a student is the function of his / her ability to persuade others through a series of chapters comprising established headings, tables, figures, structures, norms and rules. Truth lies in the ability of persuasion and resides solely in the degree to which an argument convinces. What is interesting to note in this context is that in stating hypotheses, selection of samples, standardization of tools and application of statistical techniques the researcher employs a number of tests of argument which are essentially rhetorical but pretend to be formal and scientific. For example, the claim that,

“there is a positive relationship / correlation between children’s

creative performance in arts and their interests in literature

This statement is presented in a formal logic style. But the truth of this statement depends crucially upon the ability of the researcher to convince that there are acceptable measurements of the relationship and what is measured is relevant to the relationship.

The other important aspect of this discussion is that one cannot reduce the process of persuasion to just a matter of the quality of the argument itself, but the other rhetorical dimensions added to it by the researcher. For example, the researcher does not communicate with everyone in general

but only with selected parts of the potential audience and *what those selected are those receptive to what is to be said.* Thus the educational researcher do not present and communicate their ideas to the public at large but confines to a narrow group of researchers for acquiring official recognition. It further hinders the search for understanding.

More and more use of the techniques gradually disempowered the researcher and made him / her to learn less and less about the social realities. Building such rhetorical space around their thesis clearly indicates the opportunistic conduct of the researchers for protecting their *private interests.* All this happens within the medium of the official language that is the accepted language of the disciplines of thought. Any deviation from such predefined institutional arrangements, linguistic conventions and established structures and priorities is considered as unscientific and also sometimes as anti-scientific.

Truths are produced through techniques, tests and rhetorical constructions of the discourse of scientific research. Truths constructed in the faculty research may be understood as a system of ordered procedures that involve in the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements of knowledge. And through different images, codes, symbols, words and other linguistic entities data representation mechanisms and interpretative modes are abstracted and analyzed. Hence, what is important in this context is to radically deconstruct these irrelevant scientific research practices by exploring alternative models and paradigms of scientific research. Such an alternative may be worked out by radically transforming the *value choices* of the researcher. Exposure to value based research would certainly shift the researchers focus from opportunistic interests to value based socially relevant scientific research. Further, there is a need to develop programmes, modules and other curricular practices that can offer a holistic picture of the objects of investigation and inculcate the values of social accountability, social ethics and social action.

What has been said above cannot be sustained and strengthened unless a much larger individual and institutional encouragement and involvement comes forth. In this regard an active collaborative thinking from a wide variety of disciplines is seen indispensable. In view of this, it is felt desirable the need to continue debate on certain specific issues enumerated below on a much larger scale.

1. critiquing the existing institutional practices and discursive formations
2. initiating changes in curricular structures at the tertiary level.

3. inviting and encouraging thought in the direction of pedagogy of each discipline (that is, questions about what / why / how disciplinary / curricular formations emerge and their implications).
4. opening up researches across disciplines (i.e. social / human sciences).
5. cultivating thinking with regard to the history and nature (or specificity) of disciplines in Social and Human Sciences.
6. encouraging rethinking the question of methodology beyond the narrow confines of empirical / field data procedures
7. opening alternative modes of thinking and doing research.
8. working out a programme for explaining necessary and productive dialogue among the discourses of Social Human Sciences and 'hard-core' and technological sciences.
9. inculcating the values of social and public accountabilities among educational researcher

It is necessary to meditate on these issues with collaboration and suggestions from many institutions and individual sources. By creating learning spaces around some basic socio-economic and cultural issues and negotiating with the day to day life activities and lifestyles we may raise the critical consciousness of teacher educators and student teachers. If our teacher educators cannot evaluate and critically reflect on existing social realities and issues, they can do very little but watch the day to day happenings from

the sidelines and step into the fray partially blindfolded. And they cannot creatively engage students and develop critical literacy skills. Hence, we need to empower the departments of teacher education and provide an intellectual direction to them so that they can participate in production of knowledge in the field of critical teacher education studies.

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On Jezia tax by Muslim Rulers on Hindus

The term Jezia is derived from the word Jaza which means satisfaction. Important documents bear testimony to the fact that it was not a religious, but a military tax. It "was levied as a compensation for security of life and property enjoyed by the non-Muslims in a Muslim state" (Mohammadon Theories of Finance and Taxation, P.398, by Nicholas Aghnides) which ensured them exemption from compulsory military service. The women, children, old men, scholars and monks (Brahmins), deformed persons and mentally disabled were all exempted from the tax. It varied according to the whim of the ruler and was, at no time, a major source of revenue.

A poll-tax is not unfamiliar in Indian history. Under the Charwar feudal rulers of Kanauj, a tax called Turushika danda (a defense tax) was levied on the people (Agrarian System in Ancient India, P.67-68). In some Rajputana feudal state, a poll tax of a rupee per head was levied (Annals of Rajasthan, Vo.II.P.116, by Tod). A poll tax called Purushantaram, was realized from the Moplahs of Malabar before 1800 (Foreign Miscellaneous S.No.56, Part II, PP824,836,337, 845, 868... National Archives of India).

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