



Indian Educational Space: A Panopticon of Disciplinary Surveillance

AKHILA ANIL
MA ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

The contemporary educational space in India owes much to the minutes of Macaulay. The Indian academia still bears the mark of the colonial past. Education according to the British educators was an alternative strategy to the physical subjugation of the vast and diverse country. Essentially, its introduction to Indian natives was inextricably linked to the goals of colonialism. Unfortunately, education policy was clearly enunciated in colonial terms as well.

Colonialism is tied to the Foucauldian notions of power and knowledge and it frames the historical as well as contemporary conditions for Indian people. The perpetrators of colonial discourse have justified colonialism on mainly three grounds – the security of the home station, Social Darwinism and what is now commonly called Whiteman's burden. The last deserves special mention because it aims to colonize the subjects culturally. They wanted to mould the minds of the subjects in such a way that they must be the intermediaries between the colonizer and the colonized.

A Foucauldian analysis of the educational space of India can highlight the political agenda behind it. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault have elaborated on three techniques of enacting power in modern disciplinary societies. They are hierarchical observation, normalization and examination. These three are, however not water-tight compartments. They overlap one another:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline,

it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. The superimposition of the power relations and knowledge relations assumes in the examination all its visible brilliance. (Foucault 182)

Panopticism, another theory developed by Michel Foucault, also elaborates upon the function of disciplinary mechanisms and plays a central role in surveillance studies. This concept of the Panopticon has been subject to extensive discussion and found its echoes in various fields like law, politics and education. Discipline requires the organisation of individuals and therefore requires a specific enclosed space like the Panopticon. Jeremy Bentham proposed the Panopticon as a circular building with an observation tower in the centre of an open space surrounded by an outer wall. Foucault viewed the Panopticon as a symbol of the disciplinary society of surveillance.

Through the concept of the Panopticon, Foucault introduces the notion that discipline requires the internalisation of procedures. The constant knowledge that you are being watched leads to a state of self-policing and the 'automatic functioning of power:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumed responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the very principle of his own subjection. (Foucault, 202-203).

The most direct way to mobilise the concept of normalisation for understanding the development project is to transpose 'nation-state' for 'individual' in Foucault's formulation. This expanded application of Foucault's mechanism of normalisation responds to the emergence of the productive modality of power in a very different historical juncture from that which saw its initial emergence in Europe.

Normalisation does not operate by excluding subjects or entities but by assiduously integrating them into the regime of power, by measuring gaps and by the 'art of distributions' (Foucault,141). Rather than identifying a limited number of more or less desirable positioning within the whole, normalisation aims to set up a continuous space of differentiation. It measures gaps and determines levels with the aim of distributing nation-states and human subjects in order to rank them in relation to the developed norm. Although normalization is a complete mechanism in itself, it rarely operates in isolation from the technology of hierarchical observation and the technique of the examination. Hierarchical observation enables normalisation by linking visibility and surveillance with the induction of the effects of power.

The same strategy was used in the history of colonization by the European colonizers. Colonization in fact was a multidimensional force that subjugated the colonized in different ways. Most of the discourses on colonization were concerned about its political dimension. They miss the cultural violence orchestrated on indigenous societies by European discourses. The main strategy of the colonizers was to culturally conquer the minds of the natives in set European values as the norm.

In India, the educational space created by the British during the colonial period aims to culturally dominate a country which was much bigger than their home country. Indian society, with its bewildering heterogeneity and diversity, was an enigma to the European colonizers. The easiest way to culturally dominate the country was to reconfigure the entire nation on the basis of a homogenous discourse. This was done cleverly by what can be called epistemic violence with which homogeneity is forced upon the heterogeneous nation. Reconfiguring the educational space was their strategy to perpetrate this kind of Spivakian epistemic violence.

The educational system still followed in India has traces of colonial influence. Thomas Babington Macaulay in his famous memorandum of Indian education argued that Western learning is superior and that there is a need for the English language in higher education. In Macaulay's Minute, he set out to explain his proposal for promoting English Education in India at the expense of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, which were being taught in colonial schools. And the term 'Macaulayism' is generally thought of as the deliberate policy of imperial power to redirect a subject of peoples education in an attempt to influence their thought and self-understanding. In his speech where he proposed the Minutes dated 2nd February 1835, he said:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

Thus the Indian colonizer's attempt was, in Foucauldian terms, to normalize the native Indians to what they considered normal according to the standards of the Anglicized elite. The educational policy itself is an act of Normalization; a kind of power exercise done by the academics. The upper- and middle-class Indians soon acknowledged that by Britain's standards, their country was indeed backwards economically and socially. Many of its leaders conformed to western models of economic modernity. The application of Foucauldian analysis to education can be used to unmask the politics that underlie some of the apparent neutrality of educational reform.

Thus discipline and surveillance in educational space are used as a tool by the state to carve out students as politically useful citizens.

Indian colonizers' attempts to normalize through educational policy had two primary reasons behind them. One was to make them feel inferior by degrading the Indian system of knowledge. And second to produce anglicised Indians who will work for them. They justified colonization by saying that it was their responsibility to 'civilize' the non-whites. Thus terming us as "White man's burden". Intellectually, the British found the native mind inferior. The British considered it crucial to raise the intellectual level of the Indians. Hence, the push for education taught using English as a medium of instruction became a significant aspect of reform. The use of English was the greatest symbol of British colonial power. English was not only a linguistic instrument; it was also an instrument of political power. It was adopted as the official language of the legal system, the education system, and commerce as well. English was the only language convenient for teaching science due to the lack of appropriate terms equivalent in the indigenous languages. In addition, it became associated with elitism and prestige. English was a language that characterized the upper class. It also became a representation of British efforts to modernize India and to propel her advancement to material progress. In other words, English became a prominent measure used in the civilizing mission. Thus, making a group of the same type of anglicised people through normalization was achieved. The situation has not been changed even after attaining independence. As Aparna Basu has pointed out in her article, "Indian Higher Education: Colonialism and Beyond":

Though India became politically independent in 1947, many features of colonial education still persist. Many of the new scientific and technological institutes that have been established or new research programs that have been undertaken are inspired by Western models. While such dependency is probably inevitable, given the economic and technical superiority enjoyed by the industrialized nations, it dampens creativity and innovativeness in our higher education system. (Altbach, 168)

Indian Education system still has traces of colonial influence in it. And Indian students' lack of confidence can be due to this trust with colonialism. The fact that they were once considered as 'white man's burden' makes the native Indians feel inferior and results in a lack of confidence in the educational field. Thus the Indian Educational Space is still under the normalization principle employed by the colonizers. As J S Patil, the former Vice Chancellor of Karnataka State Law University has said in a speech:

Even six decades after India freed herself from the colonial rule, the education system continues to be suffering from the influence of the colonial system introduced to serve the British rule in India. Detached from the socio-cultural traditions of our land, it teaches us simply to copycat everything from the West. Only radical reforms in the entire education system, right from the primary level to higher education, so as to restructure and reorient it to reflect the local dynamics and address the issues of the land, could put the nation on the fast track of development. (*The Hindu*, April 26, 2016).

As a result of the powerful procedures of normalization strategies, the Indian at present is devoid of self-respect and self-confidence. We always look to the west for confirmation of any information.

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