



# UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF 'INTERNALIZATION' AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WOMEN VIZ THE LEGISLATIONS OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ANTI-OPPRESSIVE AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES.

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## ABSTRACT:

Internalization is an integral factor in sustaining social or external controls; the individual is not separate from society, and as much the individual is part of society, society is part of the individual; individuals collude with external controls, and learn how to participate with society; external controls are sustained and perpetuated by individuals within society. In this assignment my endeavor is to examine the concept of internalization in greater depth, and look at how this relates specifically to oppression, and discuss its implication on implementation of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices.

**Key words: Internalization, Controls, Oppression, Equal opportunities, anti-discriminatory practices**

"Only an understanding of internalization makes sense of the incredible fact that most controls work most of the time, for most people in a society. Society not only controls our movements, but shapes our identity, our thoughts and our emotions, The structures of society become the structure of our own consciousness. Society does not stop at the surface of our skins. Society penetrates us as much as if envelopes us."(Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology. 1977:140)

**Introduction: -**

The quote on which the present research is based has been taken from a chapter in *Invitation to Sociology* where Berger extrapolates the relationship between the individual and the society in which they exist. His theme is that society also exists within the individuals, that the norms and values of a society become so embedded within the individuals that they form strong self-regulating forces of behavior.

***"Our bondage to society is not so much established by conquest as by collusion. Sometimes indeed we are crushed into submission. Much more frequently we are entrapped by our own social nature. The walls of our imprisonment were there before we appeared on the scene, but they are ever rebuilt by ourselves. We are betrayed into captivity with our own co-operation." (Berger, 1977: 140)***

The main points that Berger conveys are that internalization is an integral factor in sustaining social or external controls; the individual is not separate from society, and as much the individual is part of society, society is part of the individual; individuals collude with external controls, and learn how to participate with society; external controls are sustained and perpetuated by individuals within society.

When I joined the Haryana Civil Services (Allied) in 1989 as Block Development Officer, my job involved interaction with representative bodies at the village level called '*panchayats*'. During my visit to villages, I was ushered to the village rendezvous '*chaupal*' as a matter of course where as the women representatives (lady '*panches*') refused to enter the place as it was a taboo for them to cross the threshold of a '*chaupal*'. They had '*internalized*' the restriction and even when the male members urged them to attend the meeting in presence of the 'woman' officer (I was the only woman BDPO in the state then) at '*chaupal*', they did not come out of the walls of hesitation built by the '*norm*' of the village society. I used to stick to the ground that the meeting would be held in '*chaupal*' only but often I had to motivate, persuade and convince the women representatives ('*panches*') to come there.

***"The most terrible thing that prejudice can do to a human being is to make him tend to become what the prejudiced image of him says that he is."***

This experience, of becoming like the prejudiced image, is what Berger terms *internalization*. Later, in the same book he says that identity is not something "given" but it is bestowed in acts of social recognition. This is closely related to the concept of socialization, where a young child in his formative years internalizes the behavior, norms and values of immediate social grouping and learns to be a participant, and to play the appropriate social role. **'We become that as which we are addressed'**. (Berger, 1977:117).

In this assignment my endeavor is to examine the concept of internalization in greater depth, and look at how this relates specifically to oppression, and discuss its implication on implementation of equal representation and anti-discriminatory practices.

**Prejudice, Power, and Oppression: -**

In *Invitation to Sociology*, Berger examines prejudice rather than oppression. To understand how this view point relates to anti-oppressive practice, we must first understand prejudice and how it relates to oppression.

Prejudice is "***an opinion or judgment formed without considering the relevant facts or arguments; a biased or intolerant attitude towards particular people or social groups.***" (Thompson, 1989:32)

Prejudice is perhaps the most common trait to be encountered in our everyday lives. When certain traits of personality are generalized to be symbolic of a caste or a class, it is prejudice. Often the 'opinion or judgement' so formed is negative paving way for 'intolerant attitude'. In India the attitude of upper castes like 'Brahmins' against the 'scheduled' or 'backward' castes are example of prejudice.

Sexism, ageism, racism, casteism, disablism are therefore based on what **Bullock and Stallybrass** term '**deep rooted, often unconscious system of beliefs, attitudes and institutions in which people's intrinsic worth are made**' (1977:571) there is a tendency in the social strata that enjoy certain powers to oppress the other sections of the society owing to certain prejudices internalized by them.

Oppressions is '**any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person.**' (Friere, 1993:37).

Thus, we see that oppression has implicit concept of power i.e. the capacity to 'press':

*"The root of the word 'oppression' is the element 'press'. The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten or reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduces." (Frye, 1983 in Britten and Maynard, 1984:1)*

Oppression, therefore, is a combination of power and prejudice. It means that oppression is a state of affair where one group not only holds prejudiced views against another, but also has power, so these prejudices have a negative impact on the less powerful group. Since people can be 'located' within the social structure in terms of the intersection of different social divisions (Berger, 1966), oppression can be due to class (Jones, 1983); gender (Mayes, 1986); race/ethnicity (Rex, 1986); age (Philipson and Walker, 1986) and differential ability – able bodied/disabled (Oliver, 1989).

Hence, we see the concept of oppression is a socially constructed power relationship. Oppression is discussed in terms of the nature of prejudice; the concept that oppression becomes taken on board, or internalized by the individual and that prejudice then becomes based on reality – the individuals acting out what is expected of them by society. If women keep accepting their roles as 'women for hearth' and allow men to rule their lives, the oppression further gets embedded.

*Internalization is a similar process in later life, where, upon becoming part of a new group the individual learns to play the appropriate role, to fit in and to participate.*

#### **Oppression – Personal, Cultural and Structural:-**

Neil Thompson developed PCS model which identifies the three interconnected levels of oppression as personal, cultural, and structural.

In Neil Thompson's model P refers to the personal or psychological which is the individual level of thoughts. It is at this level that prejudice stands in the way of 'fair and nonjudgmental practice'. C refers to the cultural level i.e. the level of 'shared ways of seeing, thinking and doing'. Due to commonalities 'an assumed consensus' about what is right and normal occurs; it produces conformity to social norms. S refers to the Structural level in which oppression and discrimination are institutionalized and thus 'sewn in' to the fabric of society' (Thompson, 1993:20).

The 'glue' that keeps oppression in place is '**ideology**' – the body, of ideas which, according to Thompson act as the vehicle of '**cultural transmission**' between the personal, cultural, and structural levels of oppression. (1993: 27). It is this ideology which ensures that oppression is normalized – becoming what Berger and Luckmann call the '**taken – for – granted ness of everyday life (in Thompson, 1993:23)**, and internalized – that is we all come to believe (to some extent) the myths, lies and mis information about ourselves and others which permeate the social system.

As a lone woman Block Development and Panchayat officer in 1989-90, I not only had to bear with initial social estrangement from the villagers (as they were unable to accept woman as a BDPO!) but also the hostile and humiliating remarks from a male boss such as: '*I have been lenient to you because you are a woman.*'

One of my former male bosses recorded in a report on my working: "*Present incumbent, the first woman Block Development Officer in the state, is full of dash and drive and has given discomfiture to her male colleagues.*" The reference to gender was avoidable but spontaneous.

**Hanmer and Statham, (1988)** describe the '*double jeopardy*' faced by women managers: they have to operate within a predominantly masculine environment and ethos; leadership skills can be seen as 'unfeminine.' Women managers are also expected to prove themselves to justify their place in the 'man's world' of management, and this of course, adds to the pressure of coping with the demands of the job. (Cooper and Davidson, 1982 in Thompson, 1993:47)

### **Oppression – socially constructed, sustained and perpetuated by individuals;**

Prejudices, power relationships and oppression are not only based on views and attitudes common within a society or culture, but are also sustained and perpetuated by internalization of both individuals and societies that create these.

In the leadership training camps that I organized for young people I realized that the boys were prone to snatch the jobs related to outdoors leaving the scrubbing, cleaning, cooking jobs for the girls. At P level they had internalized the concept that "a woman's place is in the home." At the C level it is reinforced by the community they belong to and the families they live in where patronizing of sister/daughter by the brother/father is a commonplace thing – an accepted norm. At the S level, this is further sustained and perpetuated by media through TV serials, films.

### **Thompson' Model and Anti – oppressive Practice:-**

It is clear that the personal level of prejudice exists largely as a result of the cultural and societal norms that perpetuate these views. However, this is the level in which we may encounter prejudice and oppression most frequently and most directly. Thompson states that an individual can cause greater change at the personal level than he can at the cultural or structural levels. **"The Degree of control a worker can have on tackling discrimination is also related to the three levels."** (Thompson, 1993:22) On looking back, I realize the stiff opposition my father must have faced in pursuing his mission to give the best of education to his seven daughters and enable them take cudgels in society as "leaders". He dreamed of the society which would judge his daughters not by their gender but by the 'content of their character'. At P level he realized that education is strength and there should be no discrimination between men and women in imparting of education. He was confronting the societal norm of marrying daughters off at an early age. At S level his views mattered as he was a person of social repute and prestige. Hence, other people ameliorated the precedent set by him. At the C level, it resulted in healthy attitudinal change as in these five decades thousands of girls have graduated, post graduated. Scores of them have proven their mettle in field of medicine, administration, teaching, business, and jurisprudence from the small town of Punjab in India.

**"If structure and institutions are created and recreated by everyday practice then they are vulnerable to major change in practice."** (Connell, 1987)

This would suggest that individuals, far from being merely the pawns of society have the ability and power to change society, and that this change can be begun in relatively small ways, by individuals amending their own actions.

I agree with Judith Butler when she says: **"My argument is that there need not be a doer behind the deed but that the doer is variable constructed in the through the deed."**(Judith Buter, 1990:142)

### **Educator needs educating;**

As a community worker and practitioner, it is of vital importance to raise our own awareness to be able to begin to challenge oppression, to question 'taken – for granted' assumptions related to gender, sex, ability, age, race, class, and caste. The views of prejudice are often so deeply rooted, and conveyed in such nuances that they may be easily perpetuated. Unless we involve, evaluate, and reflect at every stage of our practice; there is no possibility of our breaking the barriers of oppression of any kind.

**Friere** sees education as another process that maintains institutional order and perpetuates inequality. (1993:59). Similarly, **Emile Durkheim** describes education as 'simply the means by which society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence' (in Giddens, 1972:203).

Further, Giddens suggests that as individuals we cannot deviate from it without 'encountering the strong resistance which counters the erratic impetus of dissatisfaction' (Giddens, 1972:205). It is like sailing against the tide.

But the youth worker who manages to change the actions of group of racist, sexist, or homophobic young people is actually affecting the nature of the structure. Giddens sees individuals as capable of not only "rebuilding the walls of imprisonment" but also of knocking them down.

Anthony Giddens in 'Theory of Structuration' looked at the relationship between the individual and the structure (which he terms "micro" and the "macro" levels respectively). He concluded that individual acts, and

the repetition of these reproduces the structure of society: "***we actively make and remake social structure during the course of our everyday activities.***" (Giddens, 1997:577)

Sex, for instance, is often seen as purely biological, i.e. male/female, but gender, that is masculinity and femininity is a concept created by society and culture. The painful memory of maiden gender awareness is still afresh when I had been punished in class IV with deduction of a mark from my score and resultant placement on second position due to my having set a bad precedent of playing with boys which was a taboo for inmates of a single sex school where I was studying. An injury to an insult was that the "reason" for this punishment was announced in assembly so that all girls should not forget what treatment could be meted out if they only dared transgress the boundaries set by unwritten code of school conduct.

At the point of time, I was too young to understand the 'why' of this. But something inside me kept me committed to impart realization amongst young girl students when I was lecturer in a college that women and men are like two halves of a whole and their roles are complementary and not at all supplementary. Here I agree with Copper who says: '**there is a feminine as well as masculine side to truth; that they are related not as inferior and superior, not as better and worse: not as weaker and stronger, but as complements – complements in one necessary and symmetrical whole**' (in Hooks, B., 1987:167-168).

The concept of community education that "educator needs educating" holds the key. Reality does not transform itself but the realization of our own need for the critical intervention through the praxis can.

***"In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limited situation which they can transform."*** (Friere (1972:34), in Dalrymple and Burke, 1995:15).

Moreover, it is not only vital that we understand oppression as a situation that has the capacity to be changed, but that we communicated this to others. If we ourselves are not convinced that change is possible and essential then the spirit of the community education would be conspicuous by absence.

***"The materialistic doctrine that men are product of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating"*** (Marx and Engels 1968:28, in Friere, 199 3:35).

Community education is an arena in which there is no room for complacency. Challenging and confronting oppression is the key without which there can be no change. As community workers we need to have a deep sense of commitment to action and change, and tireless optimism that '*we shall overcome.*'

#### **Putting Anti – oppressive Theory into Practice:-**

It is logical to suppose that as community workers we want to work in a way that is non – discriminatory, fair and does not exclude groups. Therefore, it is pertinent to see for ourselves that our intervention should be positive i.e. right deed for the right reason. The framework for anti – oppressive practice suggested by **Dalrymple and Burke** consists of personal self-knowledge; knowledge and understanding of the majority social systems; knowledge and an understanding of the majority groups and cultures; knowledge of how to challenge and confront issues on a personal and structural level; awareness of need to be "research minded" and commitment to action and change (2000:18).

***"Anti – discriminatory practice – means recognizing power imbalances and working towards the promotion of change to redress the balance of power."*** (Dalrymple and Burke, 2000:15).

They propose that we should actively work towards the change because if we do not then we may simply perpetuate the inequalities inherent in society be it based on race, ethnicity, disability, gender, or caste.

Thompson agrees, '**there is no middle ground; intervention either adds to oppression (or at least condones it) or goes small way towards easing or breaking such oppression**' (Thompson, 2001:11)

It is with considerable discomfiture that I realize that my practice in the Leadership Training Camps and Workshops that I have been organizing in India for young people, is more an intervention that condones oppression than one which condemns it. The reality of the system is that young people will have to face the hard reality of quota reservation on basis of castes rather than merit when they will go for seeking admission in professional colleges. And whilst this is important, we as workers do not encourage young people to question

the inequalities inherent in the system. We only teach them that this is the way of the world. This I feel needs to be changed as my efforts as community worker should be in the direction of enabling them **'to develop a more critical perspective on their situation and to have some sense of alternative possibilities in their lives.'** (Smith, 1994:65).

Friere proposes the abandonment of 'banking' education, which simply sees students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge in favor of 'problem – posing' education which encourages young people to critically examine the world so that they may **'perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.'** (Friere, 1993:31).

In this way community education is about encouraging people to question the reality of their everyday live, to break down the 'taken for granted ness', the assumptions, the values, the norms and the stereotypes not only of who other people are but of who we are, in such a way that it challenges both the oppressed and the oppressor.

***"Authentic thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory towers isolation, but only in communication" (Friere, 1993:58)***

As Managing director of the sugar mills, I was shocked to see the discriminatory attitude towards the female staff. The male workers were recalled in off season but the female staff was denied an opportunity altogether on the pretext that they were non – technical staff. I started recalling the female staff proportionately as the technical staff also needed the support of unskilled workers. It takes little time for oppression to take roots but it takes longer to change the mindsets.

Almost every organization has an "Equal Opportunities Statement" but often seem to be largely ignorant of anti-oppressive practice. It is useful to understand the differentiation between these terms. Anti – oppressive practice is concerned with equality of outcome, i.e. enabling all people to reach their full potential, free from oppression. Equal opportunities only state that the same opportunities are available to everyone. It is sad that some of the organizations even fail in extending basic courtesies to the women, the disabled or other weaker sections of the community. I feel that anti – oppressive practice is more pro- active, and takes more account of the wider experience of groups and individuals than equal opportunities. Equal opportunities may do very little towards any kind of real equality unless efforts are made for mass awareness of such policies or legislations through social and print media, workshops and seminars ensuring participation of public at large.

### **The importance of the role of anti – oppressive practice in community**

As Thompson puts it that the prefix 'anti' is very significant; it denotes fighting against a powerful and established ideology. If we fail to challenge and confront then we collude by supporting and perpetuating the oppression (1993:154). Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in **"Changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"**. (Simon de Beauvoir (1963), in Friere, 1993:55)

Education can become a tool of liberation whereby students and teachers learn from each other in such a way that students – no longer docile listeners are now critical co – investigators in dialogue with the teacher. Such an education will amply adhere to the concept of community education i.e. 'to facilitate learning from each other'.

***"...all education is political as it is aimed at either preparing people to liberate themselves and others from an oppressive and exploitative status quo, or at domesticating people to adapt and to work individualistically within the given." (Allman and Wallace, 1992 in Murphy and Shaw, 1999:17).***

According to Thompson traditional social work takes little or no account of the oppression inherent in certain aspects of social organization. They therefore see the social work task as one of adjustment to the 'natural order of things' rather than a contribution to the political struggle against oppression. Thus, the focus in anti – discriminatory practice should be on empowerment rather than adjustment. Social work is traditionally seen as operating on knife edge of care and control and the community workers must relate it to another 'knife edge' situation i.e. the line between oppression and empowerment. Further, Thompson says:

***"The full development of anti – discriminatory practice must be a long – term aim if more than lip – service is to be achieved. The focus needs to be on educating and convincing, not bullying."(Thompson, 1993:154).***

The stereotypes of sexism, racism, homophobia, gender bias can have tremendous effect on potential and empowerment of women. The views of young women are often given little weight when decisions about their lives are made in their childhood by parents especially in set up of Indian society. Women are often treated as having neither the skills nor the requisite experience to be able to make decisions which affect their lives especially in the under privileged and the marginalized communities.

As Berger puts it, when people internalize the message society sends out to them, they become the stereotype. It is at this point that our role of community workers becomes so vital i.e. to educate to resist or counteract in whatever way they can this '*internalization*'. Education holds the key to awareness, strength to confront and challenge to make the difference in the world for the better. There is no gainsaying the fact that education holds the key to impart amongst women the necessity of self-awareness, awareness of self-identity and self-esteem. I think catching them young can really pave way for better prospects of their empowerment and the to come out of the bondages of '*internalization*' and realize their potential in true sense of the term given the support of legislation for equal opportunities and anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices.

***"The purpose of youth work is to facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social development and enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in communities and society." (Ethical Conduct in Youth Work: 1999).***

### **Conclusion: -**

From the examination of Berger's quote considering theories regarding oppression and anti – oppressive practice, it emerges that oppression is creation of power and prejudice combine in socially constructed roles which make individuals internalize oppression. But oppression is neither static nor fixed but mutable and changeable. Oppression negates and individual's potential and becomes a hurdle in his/her growth. As community workers we can either collude with oppression or challenge it – there is no middle path. Challenging oppression involves raising of awareness and consciousness of the oppressed as well as one's own awareness. If as community workers we are aware that the *status quo* is oppressive and exploitative, and we have a sense of commitment to social justice and principles of equality, and we agree with the philosophy of Giddens, Marx, Engels, and Friere that the change in attitudes and actions is possible then our way clear, then is the meaning plain that we must make anti – oppressive practice an integral part of our work so that everyone could live:

***"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit."***

***(Tagore, 1912)***

A key task within a program of developing awareness on legislations on equal opportunities and regarding anti – oppressive and anti – discriminatory practice should, according to Thompson, be 'promotion of dignity and the enhancement of self – esteem'. (Thompson, 1993:102).

Anti – oppressive practice needs to be foundation of our values and practice. The key to anti – oppressive practice is empowerment and not adjustment. To be effective as informal educators with commitment to make the difference for the better, we must be vigilant about our own actions through reflection as '*eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.*' (Phillips, 2001).

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