

## History as Radical Pedagogy

History is one subject that has increasingly become vulnerable to different misinterpretations and arbitrary historical assertions. These assertions have been processed through pedagogical means that are available even for distorting history for achieving a reactionary mobilisation of certain sections of society. The question that one needs to raise here is: Can we rescue pedagogy from the abuse and misuse of history? Let us try and offer an affirmative answer.

Radical pedagogy is all about creating a new modern subject through the process of persuasion. Put differently, history does not hand down the modern subject to society and polity; it needs to be aided by pedagogy. Pedagogical practices, happening across time and space, can help the subject arrive at new and alterative perspectives. This arrival, again, is not automatic; in fact, it is propelled by radical pedagogy that serves as a means to create a new subject through democratic persuasion rather than authoritarian imposition of any reactionary ideology.

However, such an arrival gets delayed and becomes difficult in the case of a large section of people with a right-wing orientation. Such a variety of people refuse to arrive at a crossroad where they are confronted with more than one perspective that would redeem them from their perception of historical ruin. Listening to history through pedagogy is to acknowledge the emergence of different perspectives for social transformation. A variety of critical pedagogical devices would mean positively participating in the process of persuasion. In fact, those who are driven by an authoritarian ambition to disregard social diversity try and bend history according to their ideological agenda.

Arguably, history is the pedagogical site on which multiple identities are formed and also transformed. Pedagogy is a version of emancipation from the historically given identity such as “untouchable” or *abala*, that is, a woman whose transformative power has been emptied out by patriarchal forces and then rendered helpless. Pedagogy plays an important role in creating a historical subject or an agency that is embedded with historical consciousness that finds its political articulation in the duality of division and vision. Such consciousness, mediated through a pedagogical force, seeks to question the given hierarchical social order, and such an incisive question leads to divisions. The history of social assertion against exploitative and oppressive systems in India bears this out. However, this agency does not stop at creating a division of perspective and politics but also provides a vision that is necessary to guide a subject’s political action for emancipation.

The second task that pedagogy achieves is that it projects a vision for the future. Such a vision, insofar as it seeks to transform the social arrangements of caste and patriarchy, attempts to articulate itself through leaps in the past as well as future. “Dalit” as a historical subject embodies this spirit that attains its actuality only by creating a dualism between division and vision. It provides for an understanding that history unfolded itself only through divisions between, say, touchables and untouchables, or the *puruskrit* and the *bahishkrut*, or the elite and the Dalit. Are these divisions permanent? They are not to be seen as reified historical formations but something that could be transcended by the normative force of a transformative vision. In the Dalit case, such a normative force is provided by Buddhism. History as pedagogy, which is practised by social thinkers and public intellectuals, involves narratives of ruins so as to reflect upon the possibility of redemption.

Radical, and hence a forward-looking pedagogy, teaches a modern subject the art of listening to Indian history that entails in it critical ideas starting from the Buddha and reaching people via M K Gandhi and B R Ambedkar. Arguably, the liberals and the left have used history as pedagogy with the purpose of enabling people to develop both their abilities and skills of listening to the other. It helps radicalise the subject to enact resistance and social struggle for the aim of emancipation from caste and patriarchal domination.

History as pedagogy is essentially an exercise in creating among the people the cognitive capacity that teaches them how to sort out historical facts from myths, separate objectively rooted and evidentially verified claims from those assertions that are arbitrarily pushed forward by the leaders representing the far right. This point has been well covered in the editorial comment by Kumkum Roy in the current *EPW* issue.

Pedagogy is aimed at creating new knowledge and meaning of history. For example, it is focused upon transformative traditions that represent plural but critical impulses or ideas that are available in thought and action throughout the social history of India. The language of pedagogy is thus necessarily affirmative in nature. It takes a leap in the past in order to explore critical ideas that can help construct the outlines of a thought, which could then be used to mobilise the masses towards transformation or emancipation. Thus, pedagogy helps taking a leap in the future as well.

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