UNIT 10: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE: KRISHNA KUMAR

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Understand the Relation between Power and Knowledge
- Know Krishna Kumar's ideas on knowledge construction

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of knowledge is a vast area. But knowledge in the education system has a specific boundary to it. Nature and distribution of power in the society decide the definition of knowledge in the education system. Karl Manheim viewed that it is not only the class but various social positions that determine the forms of knowledge. The dominant groups decide what counts as knowledge in the education system and such knowledge is considered appropriate and worth to teach. So, if the classroom knowledge is decided by the dominant groups, it will favor them who are in power and powerless will get discriminated automatically. Neither the experience of students nor the teachers are considered in the knowledge creation process. The dominant groups impose meaning to certain information and impose them as legitimate. It is only through their power that they do so and consider such information as knowledge in education. Here, the concept of Management of Knowledge comes.Through schooling,

different dimensions of knowledge management could be seen- in the school classroom interaction, by professionalizing the teaching process, through bureaucratization of school organization, and at the cultural level specially. This management of knowledge links sociology of knowledge and power.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. How is knowledge in the education system decided?

Q2. Where can different dimensions of knowledge management be seen?

Q3. What are the variables that influence education?

10.3 KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE BRITISH RULE

Kumar discusses the knowledge construction in the context of India under the banner of colonialism, where the legacy still continues. Education in India is still influenced by the colonial agendas. The British Policy makers in India rejected the indigenous knowledge and developed colonial education which shaped the educated Indians. It created a gap between the educated and the uneducated Indians.

Knowledge is meant here as appropriate or valid knowledge associated with education and learning. Certain ideas acquire more legitimacy than others. What is taught in educational institutions has acquired the status of valid school knowledge; it is the result of cultural and economic stress of colonial rule, decided by the British officials and missionaries. In colonial India the job of deciding, selecting and shaping school knowledge was performed by the enlightened outsider where the native knowledge was rejected mostly. The colonizers took the role of adult and the native was the child. This adult-child relationship entailed an educational task. Their agenda was to train the native to become a citizen. Gradually, this role of enlightened outsider was acquired by the educated Indians. Basic structure of knowledge which was determined appropriate by the colonial

rulers was taken forward and it shapes the education till date.

This created a gap between the knowledge imparted in educational institution and the native Indian knowledge and skills. So, distance between school curricula and real life arose gradually. Teacher, one of the basic pillars of teaching-learning is also set apart from the selection of knowledge i.e. provided through the curricula. Along with it, English became the ideal medium of instruction, where little scope remained to link the school knowledge of the children with their outside world. The craft and knowledge of illiterate masses were not recognized as worth of being learnt. These forms of culture became symbols of ignorance and decadence and thus became irrelevant to education. The perception of the colonial administrators was to incorporate in the curricula what the Indian society lacked. Accordingly Teachers taught all the subjects in school, but the content of curricula did not link to the life and social context of the child. It is the part of the legacy of colonial and precolonial educational system. The rejection of indigenous knowledge was accepted by the Indian society in the form of negative or cynical attitude. Subtle resistance to this new form of knowledge especially at higher educational institution was formed. The main motive behind this was that their children would be capable for government job with such education. The colonial curriculum was quite different from the prevailing Indian education. This modern education dependant on facts and reason survives till today. Textbook culture developed, rather than textbook becoming an aid, it became in fact the actual curriculum. Teachers explain the text which is prescribed by government and children copy and memorize it so that they can answer the questions in examination. This written examination was a method to evolve the bureaucratic centralized system of education. The content of the textbook was considered something to be mastered in, both by the students and teachers, so to memorize it and to be reproduced at the examination. Bodily storage of knowledge i.e. synonymous with textbook, became part of student's culture to avoid failure in examination. Teachers too emphasized on the clarification of the textbook only to prepare children for final examination rather then on life afterwards. Textbook was

considered as curriculum and thus all the other forms of knowledge were invalidated by the textbook culture. Mastery over other forms of knowledge was not considered as education.

A gap between this school curriculum and cultural ethos became the feature of colonial system of education. School based knowledge become isolated from everyday reality and cultural context of the child, the legacy continues till date. He emphasized, if we want to create a defensible curriculum, we need to reflect on the conditions prevalent in society and culture.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4. Fill in the blanks

a. Kumar discusses the knowledge construction in the context of ..... under the banner of .....

b. The British Policy makers in India rejected the ..... knowledge and developed .....education.

c. Bodily storage of knowledge i.e. synonymous with ....., became part of student's culture to avoid failure in .....

10.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Krishna Kumar, the Indian educationist and writer was born in Allahabad. His mother was headmistress of a school at Tikamgadh, Madhya Pradesh and his father was a lawyer. He was the director of NCERT from 2004-2010.

Being a teacher, Kumar's mother influenced him hugely. Since his childhood, he got the opportunity to experience the world of education and developed his interest in education.

According to Krishna Kumar in the age of global world, if we get educated then only we can get connected. Education is learning, but we need to keep learning and thus keep getting educated. Krishna Kumar viewed education not as an isolated process. He viewed education being

influenced by the other social, economic and cultural aspects. The division in terms of education in India started in the late 70's and in the 80's. According to him, one division of India is the part of history i.e. division of 1947. But he termed another division in India, which has its root in the late 70's. This division was not only in terms of education, but was in every aspect, lifestyle, drinking habit, road, home etc. This was led by the middle class, their efforts to stay different in India but different from India. They tried to stay away from the universal system. It was division of everything in the country. The reality of India was created by them for their comfort.

To study the social character of school knowledge and skills krishna kumar used structural and historical characteristics of the Indian system. According to him the problem of curriculum is that, it involves imperfect choices and decisions. But nobody asks why certain body of information is equated with education. A large number of people in our country are used to accept the validity of particular structuring of knowledge. Here, dissociation between curriculum and child's immediate socio-cultural or physical environment is easily accepted. The problem of curriculum is mostly related to three questions; though these questions are independent they are related to each other at a deeper level: i) .What is worth teaching? ii). How should it be taught? iii). How are the opportunities for education distributed?

Now, the question is how to determine worth? What kind of value can we put upon different types of knowledge to differentiate worthy or unworthy with regard to their becoming the essence of education for children? For this two ways have been explained by Kumar. What we want to teach in view of the learners' needs and abilities- it can decide the worth. It is the viewpoint of the receivers. To analyze this he used the metaphor of 'gift' and applied it in the context of education. When we give a gift, we choose it according to the personality of the receiver. But to apply this analogy, difficulty arises since millions of children are involved in this process; education is not just for one child and to consider such million needs is hard enough. So, mostly we have a generalized understanding of children's personality. To some extent adults can think on behalf of children, but not totally like

them. So, though we judge worth on the basis of child's perspective, it may be difficult for the adults to take child's perspective completely for following reasons.

- All or any kind of knowledge can attract children, it depends on how it is presented to them. So what is worth knowledge or not it is not particularly relevant from children's perspective.
- Knowledge is abstract. So children cannot be expected to articulate view on such abstract issue, rather they could have likings or preferences.
- It leads to third problem. Children's likings are not permanent. So dependent on their changing preferences one cannot decide a reliable base of what should be taught to them.

So, rather than following children's perspective, it's better to follow the thoughts of adults on behalf of children. It leads to identify the worth. Something is worth teaching only if it can be learnt. In the early phase of learning, it is difficult to differentiate between knowledge and skills. Research indicates that the success of reading of children depends; first, on the encouragement to use their prior knowledge on language; and then the world to decode the printed things meaningfully. But, the lack of such a system in Indian context leads to repeated failure. Because, children cannot decode the meaning of what they read, and it also contributes towards their dropout. Apart from those, some memorize but unable to connect it with real life experiences. But if such texts could be effectively taught, the wastage in our primary education could have been stopped to a large extent.

The second route to decide what is worth can be decided by the intrinsic value of what we want to teach. It does not refer to the views of the child. It identifies something intrinsically valuable in the knowledge what we want to teach, It should be learnable then it can be imparted in knowledge.

It's been already discussed that knowledge is a very vast concept. But education deals with knowledge in a rather limited context. Knowledge in education is defined by social reality of a particular period of history and locale. Karl Manheim rightly explained that aims of education could be

grasped historically, because they are shaped by history and therefore change from one period and society to the next. Knowledge which counts in education is a reconstruction based on the selection made under given social circumstances. Only a part of knowledge can be treated as worthy of being transmitted to the next generation. Education does not deal much with true knowledge as with what is perceived as knowledge in a given social context. Many teachers want to distinguish between the true and false knowledge, but they can do it in the context of what has been perceived and installed in the curricula as worthwhile knowledge. Same kind of knowledge is imparted to all. But at a point of time we have to look at it carefully by considering the composition of society and the corresponding composition of structure of educational opportunity.

The knowledge that is imparted by school is shaped by the overall classification of knowledge and power in society. With the appropriate reconstruction of knowledge, school provides the necessary skills and information and supplies persons for the everyday jobs, generated by the economy and supported by politics and culture.

The alliance between certain forms of knowledge and certain social group is necessary because it depicts the very image of educated person prevalent in a society at a particular time. And as a result certain areas of knowledge get equated with education. In every age, educated person is defined differently with his/her association with particular forms knowledge. Kumar has discussed an example in this context- his house help uses the Indian calendar, and as an educated man he expects that she might know only the Indian system, i.e. Aghan, Sawan and as an uneducated person she expects Kumar that he won't know the system she is used to. Their ignorance to each other's calendar contributes to their identities as educated and uneducated. The house help's lower caste also contributes here in her poor knowledge. A priest also uses the Indian calendar, but his knowledge is not considered to be associated like the house help's knowledge.

The problem of curriculum also needs to be reflected. It is an act of deliberation. Every genuine deliberation is based on the assumption that no

voice should be silenced. By accepting or not reacting to the given curriculum, we are letting ourselves to be governed. But if we recognize the fact that curriculum is an act of deliberation, rather than given, it will be a good step towards weakening the system by which dominance is perpetuated. Kumar also explained that the failure of our education to reach the oppressed is directly related to this system. The bureaucracy involved in the curriculum designing has never reflected it.

The structure of knowledge embedded in the curricula has never been enquired. Curriculum deliberation is a social dialogue, the more it engages with interaction the more it will be able to grasp the social condition in which education is to function. Kumar also advised to include teachers in the curriculum deliberation, and this is where the problem of curriculum encounters its greatest challenge in the culture of education in India. In this culture teachers are subordinate functionaries. They are not expected to have a voice, only to teach the skills. So without the voice of teachers, the curriculum deliberation that takes place in the higher circle of educational machinery remains very poor. Number matters in deliberation, but more important like the fact that the deliberation should be sensitive to the dialogue that is going around the society. School curricula never maps out the issues common people are dealing with. Knowledge imparted in the classroom ignores the real life experience of child as well as adult members of the powerless sections of society. In the name of 'national' concerns, which are basically linked to dominant groups, it is attempted to avoid the daily life of common masses. According to Kumar, this kind of transcendental curriculum is not just wasteful, for it does not use the opportunity that the school provides for imparting contextual knowledge; it is destructive too, for it promotes a kind of schizophrenia and domesticated consciousness. Even after independence, no remedy could be seen in this pedagogical field regarding the dissociation of school knowledge from real life experiences. The distribution of opportunities for learning that is available in the society is also an imperative factor as it influences how worth of a

certain kind of knowledge is perceived and how knowledge that is worthy of being taught will be represented in educational materials.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5. Why does the culture of masses became irrelevant to education?

Q6. What is the main feature of colonial system of education in India?

Q7. Why is the alliance between certain forms of knowledge and certain social group necessary?



10.5 LET US SUM UP

- Krishna Kumar is a famous Indian educationist who through his writings and deliberations expanded and explained the notion of social construction of knowledge.
- He equates education with the idea of getting connected, which is unavoidable in the age of global world.
- Since education does not exist in vacuum it is to great extent influenced by various social, economic and cultural aspects.
- Krishna Kumar through his writing discusses the central theme of knowledge, its selection and representation in the context of issues pertaining to teaching of reading, textbook, gender and secularism.
- He questions the whole idea of knowledge and critically explains why certain information is imagined as education and more dangerously knowledge.
- The curriculum which is very crucial must be able to answer these three questions- 1.What is worth teaching? 2. How should it be taught? 3. How are the opportunities for education distributed?
- Children's existing knowledge must be appreciated within the space of education. The experiential and existential realities of the child must be appreciated and acknowledged.

- The colonial influence and structures engrained in the knowledge system of India must be demystified and replaced.



10.6 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q1. Knowledge in the education system is decided by the nature and distribution of power in the society.

Answer to Q2. Different dimensions of knowledge management could be seenthrough schooling - in the school classroom interaction, by professionalizing the teaching process, through bureaucratization of school organization, and at the cultural level specially.

Answer to Q3. Krishna Kumar's mother was a headmistress.

Answer to Q4. Kumar taught English at college.

Answer to Q5. These variables are different social, economic and cultural aspects.

Answer to Q6 a. Kumar discusses the knowledge construction in the context of India under the banner of colonialism.

Answer to Q6 b. The British Policy makers in India rejected the indigenous knowledge and developed colonial education.

Answer to Q 6 c. Bodily storage of knowledge i.e. synonymous with textbook, became part of student's culture to avoid failure in examination.

Answer to Q7. The forms of culture of masses became irrelevant to education because it is symbolized as ignorance and decadence.

Answer to Q8. A gap between the school curriculum and cultural ethos is the main feature of colonial system of education.

Answer to Q9. The alliance between certain forms of knowledge and certain social group is necessary because it depicts the very image of

educated person prevalent in a society at a particular time. And as a result certain areas of knowledge get equated with education.



10.7 FURTHER READING

1. Kumar, Krishna. (2005). Political Agenda of Education: A study of colonialist and nationalist ideas. Sage.
2. Kumar, Krishna. (2009). What Is Worth Teaching?.Orient BlackSwan.



10.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Answer in one or two words

Q1. In which place did Krishna Kumar receive his early education?

Q2. What do we need to reflect upon a defensible curriculum according to Krishna Kumar?

B. Write short notes (Answer within 150 words)

Q1. Explain the two ways discussed by Krishna Kumar to determine worth knowledge.

Q2. Curriculum as an act of deliberation.

C. Long type Question? (Answer within 500 words)

Q1. How knowledge was constructed under the colonial rule? Discuss the views of Krishna Kumar.

Q2. Education does not exist in isolation. Do you agree to this? Why?

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