

# Unit 6

## Education, Nation-building, State and Ideology

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### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to understand the:

- process of education as a means for ideological indoctrination;
- role of education in the nation building agenda and how the latter is used as an ideology to control the masses; and
- ideological use of education in India and in other countries.

## 6.1 Introduction

Education plays an important role in legitimizing control of the dominant sections of society. In the earlier unit we looked at certain theoretical concepts in the context of ideological domination. In this unit we will see how education is used by the state or by the dominant sections of society to assert their power. Education takes care of secondary socialization, and for this reason it seems to provide a platform for the fulfilment of important tasks like character building, value education, citizenship training, patriotism and so on. These tasks help the state to perpetuate unequal social order through the ideology of nation building. This unit explores how nation-building ideology is fostered by the state to cater to the vested interests of the dominant sections. Any claim that the education system as an apolitical category is fallacious. Education is used to serve political ends. We will discuss this aspect here and place it in a wider perspective in the next unit. In this unit we will explore how the freedom struggle narrative is interpreted to construe the categories of the 'other' and the 'self'.

## 6.2 Education and Nation-building

Apple (2000) suggests that the role of history is extremely important in developing ideological control. The control over history helps the dominant sections to control the masses by using the ideology of nation building. The state attempts to use education as a tool to exercise its control over people. The dominant sections are involved in the process of defining official, legitimate knowledge. From the events in the past that constitute history, certain sections are eliminated, while others are selected to suit the vested interests of the dominant sections. This ideological control over education decides the way the younger generation is made to perceive the present. The teaching of history particularly in the present day when there is increasing awareness of the role of education in imposing control over the masses is a matter of controversies and many political debates. The curriculum and teaching of the discipline of history is often a matter of concern. How history is taught, and what are the topics included in the curriculum, are crucial issues. Modern

nation states place a heavy responsibility on the historian who is assigned the task of writing for the young. Political leaders and the elites perceive education as a means of imparting a strong sense of national identity to the young. Education plays a pertinent role not just during nation making, but also in sustaining this concept. This control decides and defines the category of the 'other' and the relationships with the 'other.'

The role of education assumes significance in the broader framework of building national identity and citizenship. Its role becomes more paramount in the post-colonial period of nation building and in carving out 'good citizens'. The national education policies, curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy construct the 'nation', inculcate the feelings of patriotism, delineate the characteristics of 'good citizen', and inculcate the spirit of character building. The official knowledge imparted in the schools is in accordance to the wider national goals. For these wider national aims, education becomes important. One of the most important tasks of the education system is to develop in the students a strong sense of national pride, and to make them feel a part of the larger national community. According to Thapan (2003), 'school is a primary institution through which values and norms are constituted as well as reproduced. The schooling processes are related to power and social control. In the national discourses, there are normative definitions of 'right' values and morals, and the forms of ideal citizenship. Education plays a critical role in making these meaningful to the students and drawing up a plan for their incorporation in their lives. These 'right' values, norms, and ideal citizenship are embedded in national cultures and they are reproduced through state and other institutions in society. The school is one such institution of the state that defines this national discourse. In schools the notions of citizenship are constituted in the normative definitions of citizenship.

#### Box 6.1: Colonialism, Imperialism, Indigenism

"In the postwar world, Western nations embarked on a program of assistance and influence in the rest of the world while independent national elites proceeded to build their nations and develop education for this goal. The mission of modernization and economic growth was reflected, in Western intellectual institutions, particularly in the area or comparative studies program as well in the comparative study of education. Thus, comparative education, international education and development education developed associations and connections with a mission of identifying educational practices that would promote development in accordance with the strategy and goals that the developed modernizing nations considered appropriate and that the leadership of the ex-colonies also appears to adopt. Even scholars from these nations were not free from this stance. In fact, the entire theory of modernization has supported this attitude of externally sponsored change. The study of the relationship of formal education to economic growth in historical and comparative of the relation of education to indexes of modernization and development are examples"(Shukla 1985: 253-254).

This takes place through the print material in the form of textbooks as well as through everyday practices within schools. In school the 'self' is constructed in relation to the nation in terms of the components of citizenship and nation building. Schools do that in highly demarcated and strictly maintained boundaries; with an 'abhorrence of mixed categories, blurred identities and intolerance of ambiguity' (Saigol, 2003, quoted in Thapan). This results in the construction of pure and unambiguous social categories. It is through such categories that the nation-building endeavour is carried out. Ali (2002) presents this perspective in the context of the Pakistani history primarily because the history of Pakistan seeks to homogenize the culture, traditions, social and religious life of the people in favour of the ruling class and the political attempts

towards centralization. This affects the non-Muslim religious minorities since they get excluded from the mainstream of history. Moreover, any attempt to assert the historical identity of a region is disparaged. Thapan explains that this takes the place through 'habitus' (to use the term Bourdieu proposed) and through the processes of social reproduction in society. Historically, the same national project could also be seen in the colonialist discourse on educating natives as well as in nationalist interventions in educational practice. The 'citizen' is one who valorizes national honor. The emphasis of the educational discourse remains on the honour, integrity, purity, and above all on the dignity of the nation.

Ali (2002) upholds that in order to rule over the present, it is important to have control over the past, as that legitimizes the domination. History serves as an important medium to authenticate, and to naturalize the ruling power. Most of the oppressive regimes have moulded history to serve their vested interests to justify their inhuman acts. The dominant powers can be states, churches, and political parties, private interests, which own media, schools or other such institutions. The dominant powers of society exercise their control through these mediums. They all use history to authenticate their regime. Rulers, in the past glorified their achievements by manipulating history. Similarly, in the modern nation states, rulers reconstruct history to assert their authority and domination. Ali (2000) quotes the following words of Eric Hobsbawn, 'History as inspiration and ideology has a built-in tendency to become a self-justifying myth. Nothing is a more dangerous blindfold than this, as the history of modern nations and nationalism demonstrates'. In the newly developed nation states like India and Pakistan, colonial history is invoked to rule the country, and to sustain the ideology of the nation state. Political leaders struggle to assume the status of freedom fighters and assert and reassert their role in helping India achieve independence. They eulogize their own role in the freedom struggle and then use it to legitimise their power and domination after independence. For this reason the concepts of 'freedom struggle' and 'war of liberation' are commonly made use of. Their sacrifices have been the dominant theme in the history writing of both the nations. In both the nations, the role of these freedom fighters is highly eulogized in order to give them the right to rule the newly formed nations.

#### Reflection and Action 6.1

Do you think education has a significant role to play in nation-building?  
Discuss with other learners at the study centre.

### 6.3 Nation-building in India

In post-colonial societies like India, the nation, national identity, and nationhood are constructed around colonial history. The period of colonialism and the colonial exploitation accompanying it become the mega narratives to define our national identity. During the colonial as well as the post-colonial time there were institutions and policies to transform the 'natives' into 'citizens'. During the freedom struggle this 'citizenship building' exercise became necessary for attaining freedom.

For Kumar (2001) nation-building assumes a dominant position among the aims of children's education. History is central to the maintenance as well as the creation of a modern nation state. Its role is pertinent in the process of nation-building. The pedagogic and learner centered perspectives take a subservient position to the nation building project. History faces more strain of teaching about nation-building than other subjects. The process and prospects of inculcation of national consciousness becomes paramount in history. In the Indian case, knowledge of the freedom struggle plays a key role in socializing the younger generation into attitudes and beliefs that are upheld

nationally. In the schools, their mindset is prepared in a pre-defined way. Kumar examined the rival ideologies of nationalism into which schools attempt to socialize the young, and in doing so he depicted the ways in which history is used for indoctrination of specific ideologies. Kumar emphasizes the processes of selection and representation to understand the nation building project of the state. For Kumar, it is important to see how things are represented to design the young mind. Our education system serves the wider national objective of nation building, and for this reason from a very early age, children are socialized into national legacies. Education from the early stages is deliberately used to pursue the nation-building agenda. Knowledge of the past is an important medium that ensures acculturation, socialization and framing the national identity of the future generation. It is for this reason that schools take on the ideological role. The knowledge of the past becomes pertinent for a construction like nation-states. The anti-colonial movement as well as the freedom struggle play a key role in socializing younger generations into loyal citizens. The socialization through the formal learning at school plays a pertinent role as the latter 'leads to the formation of socially articulated knowledge' (Kumar 2001:15). The past plays an important role in shaping people's attitudes and behaviours. It can, therefore, be said with confidence that the 'representations of the past serve as mental maps in shaping their responses to present-day situations' (Kumar 2001:15). Kumar explains the way the freedom struggle is used for consolidating the nation-states of India and Pakistan. Though the narratives of both the countries were the same, yet they have been projected differently.

The systems of education deliberately cultivates the characteristics of loyal citizens in children. The curriculum, pedagogy and the entire education system are geared towards socializing the young into an approved national past. The national past, taken as the main discourse by the education system, is approved by the state. The state is the guiding force first for nation building and then for its sustenance. The school uses the officially approved knowledge of the nation's past to inspire children to fulfill their roles as obedient citizens. History plays a major role in fashioning young minds into the roles of the citizens. Kumar (2001) explains how both the nations understand the same event of partition in different light because of their nation-building project.

Both India and Pakistan faced 1947 independence, followed by the partition, yet their perception of it varies. India looks at 1947 as a great achievement which followed arduous struggle (though, because of partition it was also accompanied by a terrible sense of loss and sadness) while Pakistan treats 1947 as the formal beginning of its nation-state. The same event of partition is understood in a different light. Indian texts treat 1919 to 1947 as 'Gandhian era' of the Indian nationalist struggle as Gandhi transformed the nature of this movement. Gandhi's personality, activities, and ideology are highlighted in this part. Indian textbooks represent his personality and ideas. Children are informed about his principles of non-violence and truth.

Kumar deduces that the way knowledge about the past is selected, reconstructed and represented in the textbooks for school children depicts how a common past acquires distinct versions under two systems of education. The process and perception of nation-building in India and Pakistan differs considerably. These issues depict the relationship between national ideology and textbooks. The pursuit of nation-building is turned into an ideology and education is seen as the primary instrument for propagating it. The ideology of nation building became the most important goal of the education system. As Kumar puts it, after independence the heuristic methods of teaching, emphasizing the child's freedom to negotiate meaning were not given any weight. All education commissions underscored nation-building as an important objective that even downplayed the ideology of manual work proposed by Gandhi. The wider aim was supposed to be of nation-building, and all the

other cultural, educational or economic facets were sidelined to fulfill it. The 'nation-building' symbolized national development. In history textbooks, the decision to mention a name or an event or to overlook it is guided by this paramount national ideology. In Kumar's words, it reflects the 'politics of memory'. The difference between the Indian and the Pakistani understanding of the freedom struggle is essentially in the choice of the events they mention. Certain details and certain events are given more space and time in one story, while the same ones can be ignored in the other. This tendency, which Kumar refers to as 'politics of mention', increases in the coverage of events that took place in the last seventeen years (1930-47) of the struggle. The ideology of nation-building in the last decades becomes more compelling in both the Indian and the Pakistani textbooks. Though the attainment of freedom is common to both the nations, yet its understanding varies. As Kumar puts it, in the Indian case the story would explain *why* India was divided, while the Pakistani story would explain *how* the division was made to happen. It is because of their nation-building ideology that the same bodies of facts are presented differently in the two nations. Both the nation states want to foster nationalism with the help of education. Education carries the heavy burden of nation-building project on its shoulders. Their task is to celebrate the struggle and the eventual triumph of secularism. Partition was a trouble for them as it signified religious separatism too. For this reason they marginalize this period of nationalist struggle. In the Indian case, the narrative of the freedom struggle as well as the history itself comes to an end in 1947. It only talks of some events associated with the Independence, which includes the making of the constitution, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, integration of the princely states and the beginning of Five-Year plans. For Pakistan, partition signifies the birth or creation of the new state. The 'freedom' implied not just freedom from the British, but also the creation of Pakistan. It symbolizes the genesis of Pakistan.

History is seen as a means for ideological indoctrination. Through the study of the past the earlier animosities are kept alive and are fostered. In India, the narrative of freedom basically revolves around the tension between 'secular' and 'communal' forces. This tension becomes relevant to define India's national identity and its secular nature. History cannot be simply understood as the memory of the past as the politics of mention always operates and guides it. 'Memory of the past is not about reality; rather it represents a reconstruction of past reality in ways that nourish the self' (Kumar 2001:241). In India, the debate on history textbooks focused on the distinction between secular and communal perspectives. This politics of history allows ideological indoctrination to become the purpose of discussing the past.

The idea of the nation state, national language, and national culture favours the dominant culture and does not represent minority cultures. They remain suppressed in this national politics. Surely, the citizenship status is also given importance by the nation state, and becomes important for the sustenance of nation-building project. The feeling of patriotism is important in citizens for the concept of nation-state to exist. This nation state exists on the idea of the homogenous citizenship. This homogenization, however, subjugates the minority culture and their rights. The minority culture and the minority rights are sacrificed for the national honor and integrity. For Mahajan (1999), the nation state enfolds the culture of the dominant sections and devalues and marginalizes minority cultures. The minority cultures exist on the fringes of national political life, which largely believe in the liberal ideal of homogenous citizenship. The minority community is culturally marginalized within the liberal nation states. The homogenizing tendencies of the state do not favour all the cultures, and are in consonance only with the powerful sections of the society. Mahajan makes the point that the minorities are disadvantaged in the context of the nation state, and the nation-building project. The educational policies, educational structure, educational curriculum and pedagogy play an active role

in this ideological control over people. The state attempts to unite the diverse groups within its territory to evolve a national culture. This national culture is manifested in various forms. The nation state adopts a national language, interprets its history, specifies certain kinds of academic curricula, identifies the medium of instruction, declares public holidays, selects national heroes, and adopts certain rituals for ceremonial occasions as symbols of its national identity. In all these processes certain kinds of selection, representation and sustenance of the national symbols happen. This national culture, which the state tries to inculcate in all its citizens, is not entirely neutral. It tends to express the culture of the dominant community. The minority culture is not expressed in the national ethos. More than that it marginalizes them in the public arena and devalues their cultural practices. Therefore, the policies and the practices of the nation- building project result in the gradual erosion and disintegration of minorities' culture, and only favours the dominant culture. The equal rights of political participation (or the citizenship status) have not dismantled the structure of dominance and subordination in society. 'Assimilation' into the national mainstream distances them from the culture of their own community. It devalues their culture. To secure a job, for instance, one has to master the national language. In our country, in certain instances, communities are marginalized, as a small but dominant minority controls national resources. It is the new minority of modern and modernizing elites which exercises hegemony over national life, which disadvantages large sections of the population, not by devaluing their culture, but by denying them equal opportunity and access to the available resources. It is not just the cultural identity which is at stake, but more than that it is the social and economic disadvantage which they face. The project of nation- building never wants minority identities to go against the prevalent idea of national identity. The 'national identity' expresses itself in the political-cultural ethos of the majority, which remains shrouded in the nation-state's macro-ideology of modernization and development.

#### Reflection and Action 6.2

Discuss how the state intervenes in the process of nation-building in India.

### 6.4 Nation-building in other Countries

When education is directed to a definite and preconceived end, it is amenable to indoctrination. Education can be too purposeful in such cases. The curriculum reflects the order of interests in any given society. In a theocratic society, for instance, first priority is accorded to religious studies; in a democratic state, the focus is on consolidating ideas about citizenship. Nazism and communism have also used education to mould the minds of the youth to cater to political interests. Nazism employed education to implant in the German youth the cult of racial superiority, of military discipline, of unquestioning obedience, and of devotion to Hitler. To achieve this objective, it controlled all the cultural and educational forces, like science, philosophy, religion, press, literature, music, art, and all other means through which youth is moulded. In the same vein, the cultural and educational development which requires independent thought and imagination was discouraged. It muffled all those forces that did not reiterate the theme of the class struggle and the proletarian revolution (Scheffler 1958: 23). That's why for him 'one will say that geography and mathematics are by nature non-political'. Such may be the case, but also the contrary. Their teaching can do good or harm. From the elevation of his chair, certain words, an interaction, an allusion, a judgement, a bit of statistics, coming from the professor suffice to produce a political effect. That is why a professor of mathematics could play a political role and could be a fascist.

Napoleon (see Kilpatrick 1963) explicitly states his educational aims, 'My principal aim in the establishment of a teaching body is to have means for directing political and moral opinions.' Out of all the political questions he considered education to be of the highest importance. Certain attitudes were built in these Napoleonic schools' unquestioning acceptance of Napoleon as emperor, honour to him and the complete willingness to serve him. Everything was authoritative in these schools and regulated by the central government. 'From childhood on' they would be told what to think. Napoleon recognized the role of education in controlling the masses. Education can be effectively used to silence the resistance and in naturalizing the control.

Education plays a pertinent role in the growth of modern nationalism, which then is instrumentally used by revolutionary totalitarian regimes. The Nazi regime in Germany used the ideology of nationalism to authenticate its oppressive and totalitarian regime. Here, we can understand the processes through which Soviet citizens acquired their political values, attitudes, perceptions and sentiments. The Soviet man who emerged after the Bolshevik revolution was a different man and the national values and the project of nation-building was given supreme importance during that time. The one major process through which the political socialization of Soviet people happened was through the educational system. Soviet educational system took deliberate steps to create a 'new man.' The 'new Soviet man' whom the Soviet Educational System was supposed to produce was not merely a 'civic man' and an 'industrial man' but also a 'totalitarian man.' This led to political cohesiveness and consolidated the political system, which then made sure that the total power is concentrated in the hands of the Communist party. The Soviet rulers' unswerving support and blind adherence lies with the 'all embracing, action oriented ideology - 'Marxism-Leninism.' This ideology legitimated the steps of the Communist party. The party attempted to establish a totalitarian political culture - an all-inclusive, monolithic, and homogenous political culture characterized by values, beliefs, attitudes, and sentiments which foster absolute devotion to the Communist party. The educational processes also encouraged undeviating adherence to the principles of the party line, and absolute obedience and devotion to the directives of the party leadership.

The common curriculum, the single pattern of school organization as well as the uniform curriculum existed in the USSR. This guaranteed that all the students were exposed to the same educational experiences. The common curriculum led to the politicization of the entire curriculum. Social science was responsible for the major indoctrination. The supreme task of the curriculum was to inculcate 'Soviet patriotism.' According to Soviet educators of this time, children progress most easily to the feeling of love for their motherland, their fatherland, and their state through a feeling of love for the leaders of the Soviet people-Lenin and Stalin. This makes them associate with the concrete images of Lenin and Stalin, the party of communists. The history textbooks and the primary school song books were designed to convince students that everywhere, in all spheres of science and art, industry and agriculture, in the works of peace and the battlefields, the Soviet people march in the forefront of other nations and have created values which are unequalled anywhere in the world. Primary school readers were replete with the tales of the careers of political leaders, brave soldiers and famous scientists. The way these "biographies" have been written, it exemplifies right conduct and inspires reverence. The Nazi regime in Germany and the communist regime in the USSR depicted the role of education in socializing the young in the political ideology of the ruling community. The ideology of nation, nation building and nationalism was used to control the masses and to legitimize the control.

### Box 6.2: Education and the New International Order

“The question also arises whether a world order of parity and equity among nations is not also crucially dependent on internal equity and equality within nations or nation-states, as it is among classes and regional and ethnic units for example, castes and tribes. The educational correlates of the strengthening of national identities in the context of domination by international elites, by national elites, and by the masses of people themselves and the struggles and conflicts of social classes, regions, and nations deserve examination in as much as these are reflected in or related to questions of educational structure, process, content and distribution” (Shukla 1985: 249).

## 6.5 Conclusion

This unit has explained that education cannot be seen as an apolitical category. It should be seen as a highly charged category. The dominant groups of society use education as a tool for indoctrinating masses, and this indoctrination makes their rule possible. Education is an important institution in the hands of the state, and state uses it to legitimize its control. The state uses the ideology of nation building or the development agenda to control the masses. This makes the civilized control of people possible as ideology blinds them. This unit depicted this by throwing light on various nation-states and their nation building projects. The ideology of nation building and nationalism acts as an active force in controlling minorities in a civilized democratic way. This nation-building agenda favours the dominant groups, and homogenizes masses.

## 6.6 Further Reading

Apple, Michael W. 2000. *Official Knowledge*. Routledge and Kegan Paul

Kumar, Krishna. 2001. *Prejudice and Pride*. Penguin

Thapan, Meenakshi. 2003. Pedagogy and the Future Citizen. *Economic and Political Weekly* April 12-18