

Education, Politics and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT: *Education formulates the psychological dimensions of politics, where political culture becomes the subjective realms and politics represents the objective realms. There is the effect of knowledge acquired through education. In this process social and political views are formed. There is a triangular relationship between the variables of cognition, evaluation, affection, personality, and societal status and relations on the one side, and politics, and education on the other side in democratic political system.*

KEY WORDS: *Scocialization. Culture.Education.Politics.Empowerment. Participation.*

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Education is a major instrument of socialization. In simple societies it may be almost exclusively what we may call primary socialization, the training of children in the appropriate forms of behaviour and skills required by all members of that society. Secondary socialization is the preparation of children for particular roles in society. In modern societies, education is the most important agent of socialization after the family. Schools are the first impersonal and collective environment that child encounter. Whereas schools official function is the transmission of knowledge, they also promote certain values - honesty, competition, respect and individualism and norms such as not cheating on tests or being punctual or not arguing unnecessarily with teachers. Children also learn to deal with authority figures other than their parents and with peers. Also for the first time schools introduce students to impersonal assessment of their abilities through grades and official records that will follow the students throughout their educational career. The objectives of our schools are (1) Socialization: How to be a productive member of society, (2) Transmission of culture, (3) Social control and personal development, and (4) The selection training and placement of individuals, where you fit into society.

Family, peer groups, school, mass media, public opinion, work and voluntary groups play important role in the socialization process and ultimately in the education process. It is logical that actions we take and the impact of these actions is based on a series of logical, rational decisions selected by choice, not chance. Education is a major instrument of socialization. In modern societies, education is the most important agent of socialization after the family. Schools are the first impersonal and collective environment that child encounter. Whereas schools official function is the transmission of knowledge, they also promote certain values — honesty, competition, respect and individualism and norms such as not cheating on tests or being punctual or not arguing unnecessarily with teachers. The objectives of education are like socialization to produce members of society, transmission of culture, social control and personal development, and the selection training and placement of individuals where you fit into society. Here, the role of political education by the political parties is important in maintaining social and political stability.

Basically, politics constitutes four essential elements like scarcity of resources, multiple interests, conflict of interests, and resolution of conflicts. For the resolution of conflicts the State intervenes. Politics means the intervention of the State through Parliament or legislative institutions and the Secretary of State or the executive organs. It also means something quite different aspects like a complex set of checks and balances, political, administrative, professional, which provide a mechanism through which collective policies or decisions are made. There is a closer relationship between politics and education. If the education system is to be regarded as a sub-system of the whole social system, then it can be argued that the proper relationship between education and politics can be deduced from the needs of the society as a whole, and the part which education plays in supporting and changing it. Society needs education and education needs society. An organic solidarity can be noticed here. An individual person who wants to promote a certain kind of society should ensure that education policies are made and tailored to that end of social solidarity and development. Education ensures the promotion of 'social capital'. If the policies which emerge from the policy levels are not always sound, this is because of human frailty and malice, not because there is necessarily anything wrong with the implied relationships between education and politics. There is no harm in closer relationship between education and politics. The human subjects make the spheres dirty and non-responsive to societal needs. 'At every level,

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the public and the private, the political and the professional should interact to reflect a relationship which does justice to the splendidly confused, complex but organic connexion between education and society.’ (Maclure 1976,p. 25). A proper balance and accommodation needs to be ensured between public and private spheres and political and professional spheres in society to ensure organic solidarity and viable relationships between education and politics. Graphically, it may be presented in Fig. 1. ‘Politics is, for a very fact, the golden mean of continuous mediation of realms private by desire but become public through necessity... The first principle of our type of politics is that citizenship must include all inhabitants. Race must not exclude, nor creed, nor class, nor sex, nor property. All comers must be accommodated so that no goers will be justly disgruntled. William James once suggested that democracy is a system in which we wait to see who hollers and then remedy the hurt — and wait once more to see who hollers from the application of the remedy, and so on endlessly. We have, then, our first principle: equality of access as insurance against disgruntlement and as guarantee against eventual revolution. The second principle of plain-politics is not unlike the first but is in reverse. Its propaedeutic to progress is that nobody shall get all that he wants from the political process. Since good men do not fully agree on goodness, for anybody to get even all that he thinks good would be for somebody to get none of what he thinks good. These two principles may now be fused thus: nobody is to get nothing; nobody is to get everything; everybody is to get something. When this process of accommodation achieves stability, so that it is self-renewing and self-perpetuating, politics has become not merely a game but a way of life; the way of life, indeed, which is properly denominated democratic.’ (Smith 1958,p. 479).

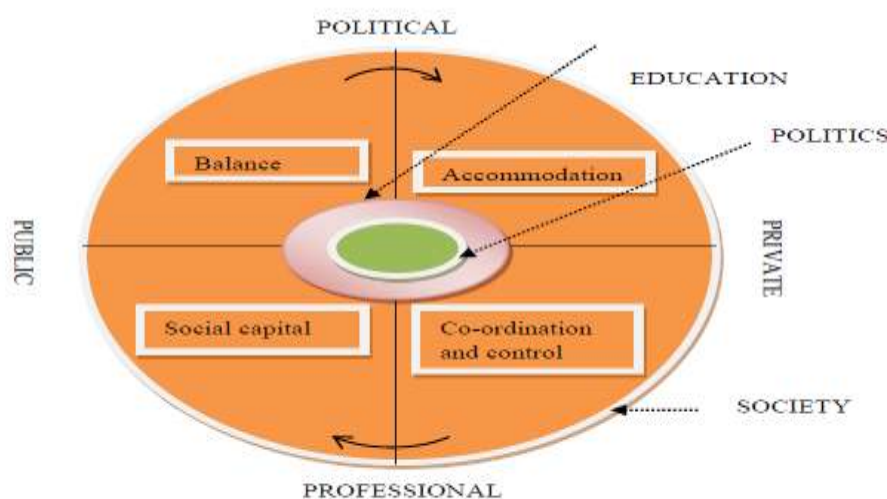


Fig. 1

Education formulates the psychological dimensions of politics, where political culture becomes the subjective realms and politics represents the objective realms. Political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among the members of the political system. It consists of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values. The patterns of psychological orientations may be understood at three levels — cognitive, evaluative and affective (Almond and Verba 1963). Researchers also report ‘cognitive’ effects of education in the political domain, namely effects on political knowledge and what has more recently been labelled ‘political expertise’ (Krosnick 1990). According to Fiske et. al. (1990), although not all educated people are politically expert and not all political experts are educated, but there is a substantial correlation. In their study of assimilation of print media information about politics, education predicted subjects’ reading time, deliberation time, cognitive responses to material they had read, and recall of material. Education was also a significant predictor of political knowledge, as well as of political activity, print media use, and political self-schema, by which was meant importance attached to an ideological identity (Fiske et al. 1990,p. 39). According to Niet. al. (1996), ‘Formal education influences political engagement by allocating scarce social and political ranks that place citizens either closer to or further from the centre of critical social and political networks that, in turn, affect levels of political engagement. The rank to which individuals are assigned is the result of education via a long train of life circumstances, including occupational prominence, voluntary associational memberships, and family wealth.’ (Nie et. al. 1996,p. 6). Figure 2 explains the cross fertilization between politics and education in modern democratic society. There is the effect of knowledge acquired through education. In this process political views are formed. There is a triangular relationship between the variables of cognition,

evaluation, affection, personality, and societal status and relations on the one side, and politics, and education on the other side in democratic political system. In liberal political system social and political goods like tolerance, stable political identities, and political expediency and efficacy are produced in this process. Political participation in the decision-making process of democratic political system as political engagement turns our attention to political institutions, to the distribution of power, and to the structure of possible avenues of participation.

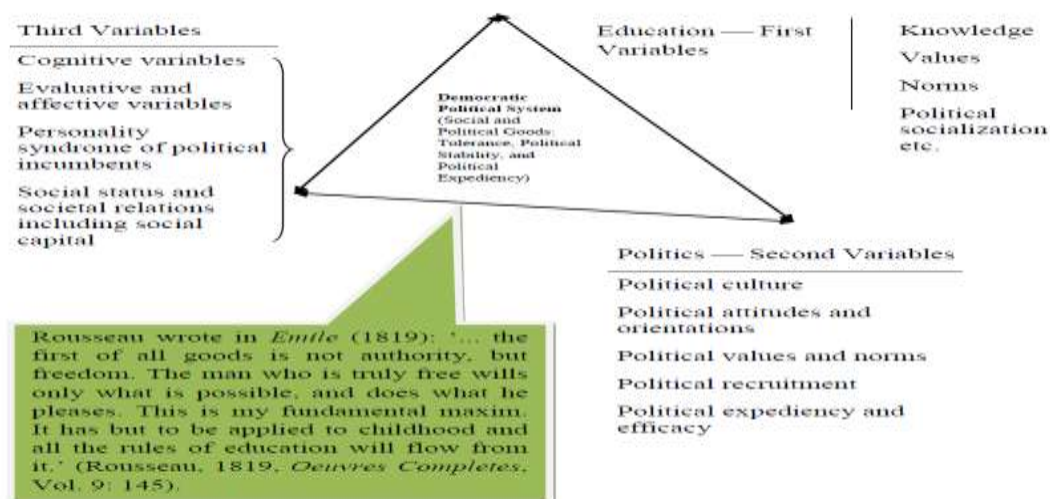


Fig. 2

This type of socio-political goods can be attained through democracy and democracy can be sustained through education and even political education. An editorial in *The Indian Express* of October 5, 1964, entitled 'New Deal for Education' concerning the newly appointed Kothari Commission said that — 'There can be no better means to strengthen democracy than the wide dissemination of education. In this country especially education would be meaningless if it did not further the cause of secularism and national integration. The tendency to make education a handmaiden of regional chauvinism must be firmly resisted. . . The issue of the medium of instruction (must) be solved from the national point of view. . . The Commission will have to ensure that while education is not divorced from the needs of society, it also leaves full scope for the un-hindered flowering of the individual. Education must no doubt produce the intellectual elite, but it must also equip the overwhelming majority of students for the struggle of existence. . . The ever-growing number of young men and women who are flocking to the schools and colleges . . . must be not only provided with the necessary facilities but also imbued with the proper aims and ideals if they are not to be turned into foci of discontent and unrest.' (Op. cit., Rouner 1965, pp. 110-111).

The conditions of the Third World countries women cannot be isolated from the colonial legacy as the exploitation of both women and colonies has become fundamental to the global system of capital accumulation, and sexism and patriarchy (Etienne and Leacock 1980; Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof 1988; Saffioti 1978). Development projects promoted by Western countries to modernize the Third World have, in the long run, better served their own interests than those of their intended beneficiaries. The chronic conditions like famine and malnutrition, displacement and homelessness, unemployment and underemployment, disease and mortality, the destruction of environment, and political repression and violence determine levels of internal conflict and government stability in the most areas of the globe, and thus, the relationships these nations maintain with the developed countries. In fact, "development would not exist without underdevelopment, wealth would not exist without poverty, and the domination of men would not exist without the subjection and submissiveness of women" (Mies 1988, p. 3). On the whole, women have less power and money and responsibility (Seager and Olson 1986, p. 7). In some areas of Latin America, it is the women who have been driven out of agricultural pursuits and forced to migrate, while in some African countries, men left the agricultural work to the women and moved to towns and cities in search of jobs (Boserup 1970).

'Men, in effect, have colonized women by the "housewifization" of their work (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1988a, 1988b; Werlhof 1988a, 1988b); in other words, by isolating women in the domestic sphere and devaluing the work they perform there; by ideologically justifying it as a genetic predisposition based on their capacity for

motherhood; by regarding any type of income they generate as supplementary or secondary, thus ascribing a lower status to their occupations; and ultimately, by controlling their sexuality. The contention that the present-day world economic crisis is not just another cyclical crisis, but rather a new phase of capitalist development relying on “feminized” forms of labor (i.e., doing any kind of work at any time, unpaid or poorly paid), is supported by the efforts of the industrialized powers to force Third World nations to “restructure” or adapt their national economies to the needs of the world system for such labor (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and Werlhof 1988).’ (Acosta-Belen and E. Bose 1999, p. 14). The need of the hour is the decolonization of women as women are colonized by men in colonial fashions. The preference for sons manifests itself through the neglect of female children, selective abortion, and female infanticide and has prompted researchers to attempt to estimate the number of “missing girls.” Amartya K. Sen estimates that 4 million girls are missing in India alone, while globally the estimate is more than 100 million women (Sen 1989). Further, recent estimates show that male preference is not, as one would expect, tapering with economic development. Instead, in the 1980s, 1 million more girls were lost in India due to neglect and infanticide (Weiss 1996).

Development policies and programmes can enable girls and women to challenge current norms and change conditions – a process that can be termed “empowerment”. In the context of women and development, the definition of empowerment should include the expansion of choices for women and an increase in women’s ability to exercise choice (UNDP 1995). Interventions expand women’s choices, for example, women’s access to employment that should increase women’s ability to exercise choices. Actions attempt to strengthen women’s capacity to choose that can amplify their choices. The concept ‘empowerment’ refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength and capacity of the women to ensure equal rights to women following the Rawlsian principles of justice: equal basic liberties principle, equal opportunity principle and difference principle (greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society like women). Lack of gender inequalities, bargaining power, economic self-sufficiency, political participation, and participation in the decision-making process are important factors of women empowerment and development. God has empowered us. Besides, no one can do the act of empowerment other than that of God. Empowerment means removal of unjust controls and restrictions on one’s life activities, and the building up of economic, social, political and cultural capabilities of those who had been hitherto repressed. The women should participate equally with men in deliberative democracies and there should be an ‘ideal speech situation’ of Habermas and an ‘overlapping consensus’ of Rawls.² To Habermas (1971), ‘... knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility... the emancipatory interest in knowledge has a derivative status. It guarantees the connection between theoretical knowledge and an “object domain” of practical life which comes into existence as a result of systematically distorted communication and thinly legitimized repression.’ (Habermas 1971, pp. 197-98, 212). In every speech action there are statements and interaction, which imply truth claims and validity claims, where experience supports truth claims further supported by argumentation and rational motivation supports the validity claims. Rational consensus is the criterion of truth and emancipation. A consensus is reached in an ideal speech situation. Mutual understanding among the participants is the grounding of an ideal speech situation. An ideal speech situation is a reciprocal relation between participants. The process of emancipation is inseparable from the struggle for self-emancipation – they are closely associated with one another. Formation of collective will, reaching at the door of collective will and the satisfaction of collective needs through democratization, popular participation and decentralization are essential for emancipation and for the satisfaction of collective needs, which cannot be fulfilled and satisfied through market mechanism and administrative mechanism (Habermas 1976). Each participant in this game has equal opportunity to select and employ speech acts, to participate in the dialogue process as legitimate, equal and autonomous partners. In *Political Liberalism* (1993) Rawls has introduced some few important concepts like ‘reasonable persons’, ‘public reason’, ‘the rational and the reasonable’ and the ‘burdens of judgement’. One idea that has become more central to Rawls’s revised theory is the idea of overlapping consensus. He claims that the political conception of justice is the object of an overlapping consensus. To him, a political conception is ‘a module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it’ (Rawls 1993, p. 12). An ideal speech situation and an overlapping consensus will emancipate and empower the women from discrimination, subordination and deprivation.

Further, the success of development efforts depends on the fruits of development reaching men and women, boys and girls. One of the most fundamental reasons for promoting the empowerment of women is that failing to empower women as well as men to reach their full potential is a violation of their basic human rights. Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. It includes both the control over resources and over ideology. It includes, in addition to extrinsic control, a growing intrinsic capability: greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one’s consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers (Sen and Batliwala 2000). While empowerment literally means ‘to

² Recall Rawls and Habermas.

invest with power', in the context of women's empowerment the term has come to denote women's increased control over their own lives, bodies, and environment. In discussions of women's empowerment, emphasis is often placed on women's decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination (Germaine and Kyte 1995; United Nations 1995) in addition to the elimination of barriers to their access of resources such as education and information. There are various indicators of women empowerment. These are: Evidence of empowerment indicators: EE1: Indicator of women's participation in decision-making, EE2: Indicator of women's freedom of movement, EE3: Attitudes that reflect acceptance of unequal gender roles between spouses, EE4: Attitudes that reflect acceptance of unequal gender roles for boys and girls, EE5: Son preference; Sources of empowerment indicators: ESo1: Access to education, ESo2: Access to the media, ESo3: Access to employment; Setting for empowerment indicators: ESe1: Marriage which is not too early, ESe2: Residence in nuclear family, ESe3: Not a very large spousal age difference, ESe4: Husband and wife with education and educational equality, ESe5: Freedom from domestic violence etc.(Kishor and Gupta 2004).

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