
UNIT 13 IDEOLOGY AND CURRICULUM

Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives
- 13.3 Making Sense of Ideology
 - 13.3.1 Ideology as a Perspective
 - 13.3.2 Ideology as 'False Consciousness'
 - 13.3.3 Ideology and Hegemony
 - 13.3.4 Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of Ideology
- 13.4 Ideology Shaping Curriculum
 - 13.4.1 Debunking 'Neutrality' of Schooling
- 13.5 Ideology and Curriculum in Post Independent India
 - 13.5.1 Education for Secular Modernity
 - 13.5.2 Cultural Nationalism and Changing Curriculum
 - 13.5.3 Globalization and Marketization of Education
 - 13.5.4 Protest Ideologies and Emancipatory Curriculum
- 13.6 Let's Sum Up
- 13.7 References and Suggested Readings

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Education, you would agree, is not something static and ahistorical. In fact, a careful look at history suggests that what we call education changes from time to time, and alters its priorities. These days you may feel that education ought to be secular, scientific and professional; it is like acquiring a technical skill, be it in engineering, medicine, law and management, and earning a livelihood. But then, as some of our ancient texts depict, when religious institutions were overwhelmingly powerful, education, far from being secular and technical, was essentially spiritual and theological. In other words, each society has its own notion of education. To make sense of education—what we learn, what is being regarded as 'legitimate' knowledge, or the way we learn—is to contextualize or situate it in specific time and space.

This ability to contextualize things is being regarded as a sociological perspective. As a matter of fact, when you begin to look at education sociologically, you realize that it cannot be seen in isolation; it is organically related to the social needs of a particular age. What prevails as education cannot be separated from its polity, economy and culture. Let us take two examples. These days in almost all institutions of higher learning *environmental sciences* are taught. A major reason is that in complex/industrial societies environment has become a matter of great concern, and it is important to strive for the kind of knowledge that makes sense of the growing environmental crisis, and arouses ecological sensitivity to resolve it. Likewise, as women's movements are gaining more and more legitimacy, universities are restructuring their curriculum, and accepting *gender studies* as a fundamental branch of knowledge.

It is, therefore, not difficult for you to appreciate that education is integrally related to our collective concerns. These collective concerns manifest themselves as politico-economic ideas. It is interesting to explore the relationship between education and politico-economic ideas. At this juncture, you can also notice that every dynamic society lives within many such ideas and aspirations. If you look at your own society, you would find that there are, for instance, Gandhians, Marxists and Dalit activists, and each group has its own constituency. And depending on the kind of society they seek to create they have their own agenda of education. These different socio-economic projects,

be it Gandhism, Marxism and Ambedkarism, are often regarded as ideologies. With your sociological imagination it is not difficult for you to understand that education or curriculum is inseparable from these ideologies. That is why, every dynamic society has been perpetually debating an education. It is, in fact, a site of contestation.

13.2 OBJECTIVES

After working through this Unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of ideology, and why social scientists give importance to it;
- Relate ideology to the study of curriculum;
- Make sense of the social reality of post-Independent India, particularly its diverse and conflicting ideologies;
- Situate the entire debate on ideology and curriculum in the context of these ideologies; and
- Appreciate the importance of your own role as a constructive critic to evolve an integral curriculum.

13.3 MAKING SENSE OF IDEOLOGY

As we intend to explore the relationship between ideology and curriculum, it is important to conceptualize ideology. It is true that in your everyday conversation you often use this word. You tend to equate ideology with a set of beliefs, attitudes and aspirations that a person or a social group cherishes. You also use the word to describe political beliefs—say, Gandhism, Marxism, liberalism etc. In social sciences—or in serious scholarly pursuits—you, however, need to be careful while using this word. In fact, sociologists have been debating on the meaning of ideology for quite some time. From this fairly long history of this debate we would choose three major trends.

13.3.1 Ideology as a Perspective

Karl Mannheim who developed and enriched 'sociology of knowledge' as a sub-discipline made a remarkable contribution to the understanding of ideology. For Mannheim, 'there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured'. In other words, sociology of knowledge concentrates on the 'social and existential determination of thought'. We do not think in isolation. We think as a social group. What we think—or the way we perceive the world—depends on our group experiences: the life we lead, the struggles we engage in, the interests we seek to retain, and the hopes we cherish. Each social group (and this group, Mannheim emphasized, need not necessarily be based on economic class, it may rest on caste, racial, gender, ethnic or religious identities) has its own mode of thinking; each social group is looking at the world from a particular vantage point. To put it otherwise, each social group has a 'perspective' or a 'worldview' which, according to Mannheim, can be regarded as a '*total ideology*' of the group. As a total ideology, it is rooted in concrete socio-historical experiences; it need not be confused with the 'psychological motive' of a particular individual. For example, when we say that capitalists have an ideology we are not talking about what capitalists as individuals are thinking. Instead, we are interested in knowing how capitalists as a class, because of their engagement in a concrete socio-historical setting, are looking at the world.

According to Mannheim, a distinction can be made between ideology and utopia. For example, the ruling group has a vested interest in preserving the existing order. Its ideology retains the status-quo; it is conformist in nature. But the emergent group seeks to overthrow the system; its thinking is revolutionary. Mannheim regarded it as utopia.

What is, however, interesting to note is that, be it ideology or utopia, Mannheim did not regard it as necessarily false or erroneous. Instead, he regarded it as a kind of '*relational knowledge*'. Yes, it does represent the reality. But this representation is partial and incomplete because it is related to the specific experiences of a specific social group at a specific juncture of history.

Even Marxism, Mannheim argued, is no exception. It may be noted that Marxism seeks to distinguish itself as an 'objective science' which, as it is claimed, is different from, say, 'bourgeois ideology'. As it is argued, ideology is false, whereas Marxism is true. But, for Mannheim, Marxism too is an ideology, a perspective; it is also a kind of relational knowledge. There is no reason to give special cognitive privilege to Marxism.

These conflicting ideologics/perspectives—particularly when no ideology has special legitimacy—lead to the 'elemental perplexity of our time'. Yet, Mannheim retained hope, strove for the 'free-floating intelligentsia' who, he imagined, would be able to free themselves from their class interests, engage in perpetual 'assimilation and transcendence of the limitations of particular points of view', and arrive at the 'broadest possible extension of our horizon of vision'.

13.3.2 Ideology as 'False Consciousness'

Perhaps the Marxian understanding of ideology is most well-known. This requires an understanding of what Marx and Engels regarded as the 'materialist conception of history' (Marx and Engels, 1976). The fundamental premise of the materialist conception of history is that men must be in a position to make history, and for that they need to fulfill the basic needs of eating, drinking, clothing and shelter. In fact, 'the first historical act is the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself'. This led Marx and Engels to argue that 'the production of ideas is directly interwoven with the material activity of men'. What we are depends on what we produce and how we produce. In other words, morality, religion, metaphysics and all the rest of ideology no longer retain semblance of independence; they depend on the *mode of production*: the forces and relations of production. No wonder, 'the handmill gives us a society with the feudal landlord, and the steam engine with an industrial capitalist'. For Marx and Engels, 'it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness'.

Another interesting fact about the Marxism conception of ideology needs to be understood. Ideology, in the Marxian sense, need not be equated with all ideas. Essentially, what gives its distinctive identity is that it serves the interests of the ruling class. Although it projects itself as objective and value-neutral, the fact is that, as the Marxists would argue, it *falsifies* and *hides* the reality for preserving the interests of the ruling class. Whereas the ruling class sees its ideology as a desirable proposition for the entire society, the Marxists debunk it as 'false consciousness', and contrast it with the science emanating from their dialectical/historical materialism. In other words, as it is argued, for real emancipation the working class does not need bourgeois ideology, but *true consciousness* of the actual contradictions of the capitalist society as illuminated by the Marxian science.

Let us take an example. The idea of 'individual equality' is cherished in a capitalist society. Yes, on the surface, the worker is free to enter into any agreement with an employer which is suited to his or her own interest. But the real fact is that this ideology of freedom falsifies the reality and hides its contradictions. The reason is that workers, far from being free, are forced to sell their labour power if they want to survive precisely because they have been deprived of their means of production. In other words, the ideology of individual equality in a capitalist society, as the Marxists argue, is merely an illusion.

According to the Marxian argument, this *illusory character* of ideology cannot be overcome only by science. True, science, contributes to the 'theoretical collapse of ideology' but cannot by itself bring about its collapse in practice. Liberation is, after all, a historical and not a mental act. Real objective conditions are, therefore, necessary. Ideology can be overcome by practically changing the contradictory relations that give rise to it.

13.3.3 Ideology and Hegemony

Another important thinker who enriched our understanding of ideology was *Antonio Gramsci*—an Italian Marxist who was creatively engaged with the theory of revolution in advanced capitalist societies (Gramsci 1971). What is important to note is that Gramsci was not contented with the 'negative' conception of ideology, because, for him, ideology is precisely 'the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc'. Moreover, ideology is also the terrain on which the ruling class achieves hegemony. As a matter of fact, according to Gramsci, in advanced capitalist societies the ruling class rules not simply through coercion, force or violence. Instead, it succeeds in gaining legitimacy by acquiring *consent* even from the oppressed/marginalized classes. In other words, the ruling class *hegemony* is established by creating a shared ideology. No wonder, the hegemonic ideology manifests itself in the form of 'solidity of popular beliefs' which seems to have the 'same energy as a material force'. In other words, far from seeing ideology as just 'negative' or 'illusory', Gramsci gave great importance to it. He regarded this non-reductionist relationship between ideologies and material forces as *historical block*. In the process of consolidating the ideological hegemony of the ruling class, argued Gramsci, *civil society*—mass media, educational/cultural institutions—plays a key role. Another important fact *about* the Gramscian understanding of hegemony needs to be understood. It is true that the ruling class cannot jeopardize its economic interests. Yet, it cannot become a hegemonic class, and gain the consent of others unless it is engaged in some amount of 'economic and corporate sacrifice'. Hegemony presupposes that one takes into account the interests of the groups over which hegemony will be exercised. A striking illustration is, of course, the ideological practice of popular democracy through which the capitalist class seeks to establish its hegemony. Popular democracy certainly means that the capitalist class—at least, to a certain extent—incorporates the interests of the masses, because everyone has a voting power, and even the marginalized classes' can constitute a pressure group and make their presence felt in the decision-making process. For Gramsci, in advanced capitalist countries where civil society is fairly strong and ideological hegemony is sustainable, revolution requires a new strategy. In fact, it requires a struggle in the domain of ideology; it demands an alternative hegemony to be established by the working class. It is, therefore, vital for the working class not to isolate itself within a ghetto of proletarian purism. On the contrary, it must try to create a genuinely 'national popular will' by representing the interests of the increasingly numerous social groups. Gramsci regarded this revolutionary strategy as 'war of position'. In fact, this alternative hegemony requires an active role of the 'organic intellectuals' of the working class. In other words, ideology remains an important terrain on which these intellectuals have to play an extraordinarily creative role.

13.3.4 Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of Ideology

Yes, you can now see that social sciences have been enriched by this intense debate on ideology—its nature and formation, its circulation and hegemony. Although there is a difference of opinion among social scientists, it is not altogether impossible to have a comprehensive understanding of ideology on which we can have a reasonable amount of consensus.

- Ideology is a perspective or a worldview reflecting the nature of society a specific social group seeks to create: its polity, economy, culture, and network of relationships.

- Ideology is essentially *sociological*, not psychological. In other words, ideology is not about one's personal likes and dislikes. Instead, it is a well-articulated worldview of a specific social group at a certain juncture of history. It is in this sense that one can say that Brahminism or Gandhism or Marxism is an ideology.
- Ideology is not necessarily false or erroneous. As a perspective, it may be partial, incomplete or fragmented. It is, therefore, not proper to distinguish 'objective' science from 'subjective' ideology. In fact, science itself can be seen as an ideology of some kind. It is better to see ideology as a representation of the world, may be an incomplete and inadequate representation.
- A dynamic society is one having multiple ideologies. Far from being static and homogeneous, a dynamic society is an arena of conflict. This conflict manifests itself in the form of ideological struggles. If we look at our own society we see divergent and conflicting ideologies: Gandhism, Ambedkarism, Marxism and liberal individualism.
- Not all ideologies have, however, the equal power to establish their supremacy or hegemony. It is more likely that the dominant/privileged classes are more successful—particularly because of their control over mass media and educational institutions—in giving a 'universal' character to their ideology. Yet, it should not be forgotten that history is in continual flux, and even marginalized ideologies assert themselves, and resist the dominant ideology. Society evolves because of this conflict.

Check Your Progress

1) Why do social sciences give importance to ideology?

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2) What is hegemony? Identify the relationship between education and hegemony.

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13.4 IDEOLOGY SHAPING CURRICULUM

You can now understand why education plays a key role in the process of transmission and communication of ideologies. It would not be wrong to say that in modern times we are living in a *schooled society*. Because it is at school that the child learns many important lessons of life; it is a leading source of socialization. No wonder, learning material, school texts, modes of teaching and evaluation—in fact, the entire curriculum—acquire tremendous relevance. One's worldview depends, at least to a certain extent, on what one learns at school, and how one learns. It is believed that the school curriculum is a major carrier of ideological messages.

You can take some striking illustrations to see the relationship between ideology and curriculum. To begin with, let us take the most important or visible aspect of the curriculum—the contents of knowledge as defined through multiple disciplines like mathematics, geography, physics, history and literature. Mathematics, for instance, is often being seen as an abstract/value- neutral science of numbers. But then, a careful

analysis would suggest that in a patriarchal/capitalist society school mathematics is not entirely free from ideological biases. It often legitimizes *gender stereotypes*: men as *active doers* (traders, businessmen etc) in the public space vs. women as *passive consumers* (buying vegetable, milk etc). Again, while introducing concepts like 'percentage', it depicts essentially a *mercantile world* of profit and loss. Seldom is mathematics used for other meaningful social purposes (for instance, the *philosophy of sharing* can be introduced while the child learns concepts like 'division' and 'fraction'). Likewise, school history, as critics point out, is not particularly known to be sensitive to the history of marginalized communities, tribal and women.

Apart from this manifest curriculum, there is also the *hidden curriculum* filled with ideological messages. Let us, for instance, look at the hidden curriculum manifesting itself through some of the 'taken-for-granted' school rituals and practices like teacher centric pedagogy, examinations etc. Even today the teacher-taught relationship, as Paulo Freire would have argued, remains hierarchical (Freire, 1972). The child is seen as a passive receiver of knowledge; he/she is not an active participant arguing, questioning, contesting and evolving with the teacher. Likewise, examinations objectify children and hierarchize them; other 'disciplinary' activities (school uniform, 'right posture' in the classroom, regular assembly, strict division of time according to the 'time table') tend to create a *docile body and mind*. The result is that, as critics argue, through schooling the child grows up as a 'conformist', a 'loyal' citizen who accepts the status quo, and is deprived of spontaneity and the language of dissent. In other words, this *hidden agenda* needs to be known. Schools, far from being neutral, serve the interests of the Establishment!

13.4.1 Debunking 'Neutrality' of Schooling

In fact, it is through this criticality that in recent times sociologists of education have raised crucial questions relating to ideology and curriculum. They challenge the *conventional/functionalist* argument (which asserts that schools restore moral order, and contribute to the growth of a cohesive society), and point out that schools, far from being neutral, are serving an ideological function. A look at the contributions of *Michael Apple* and *Pierre Bourdieu* would make this point clear.

Apple who has worked on American schooling argues that school knowledge/curriculum is primarily ideological in nature; it needs to be problematized. For Apple, the corporate capitalist economy does have a visible impact on school curriculum. For example, certain branches of knowledge like mathematics and science are regarded as '*high status*' knowledge. They are perceived as superior to arts, literature and humanities. Apple argues that 'high status', knowledge is discrete, technical and instrumental; the processing and hierarchization of people becomes easier through these knowledge systems. Moreover, 'high status knowledge is 'macro economically beneficial in terms of long run benefits to the most powerful classes in society'.

Apple also points out that school texts hide conflict, and portray a consensual orientation to society. For example, schools teach a 'consensus theory of science' as bodies of knowledge organized around certain fundamental regularities; seldom are the learners taught the history of science, how it evolves and grows through conflict, its relationship with politics and culture. Likewise, in social sciences, Apple finds, the function of conflict is denied; conflict is seen as an aberration, a 'law and order' problem. Society is being projected as a harmonious whole. In other words, for Apple, schools seek to develop a 'technical' perspective that takes things for granted. Schools are not interested in creating critical/reflexive awareness.

Pierre Bourdieu—yet another leading sociologist of education—speaks of *reproduction*: the way educational institutions reproduce the existing inequality. Bourdieu draws insight from the French education system. His central argument is that in a class-divided society

schools privilege the 'cultural capital' of the dominant classes. In fact, the children of the dominant classes—through family socialization—acquire this cultural capital. It can be equated with the 'linguistic and social competencies and such qualities as style, manners, know-how as well as aspirations and perceptions of the objective chances of success. Its manifestation can be seen in acquired interests such as listening to classical music, visiting art galleries, reading non-professional books etc. As educational institutions privilege this cultural capital, there is a tendency that the children of the dominant classes excel, and the children of the working class fail. For example, in France, as Bourdieu reminds us, there are two forms of language: bourgeois parlance and common parlance. A major characteristic of bourgeois parlance is that it verbalizes feelings and judgments. But common parlance is devoid of 'fine words'. Now university French is closer to bourgeois parlance. The literate tradition in education assumes that all experiences can be turned into a literary exercise where styles and forms of expression are important. Not surprisingly, in the domain of higher education in France the upper classes dominate.

As educational institutions propagate the cultural symbols/values of the dominant classes, some kind of 'symbolic violence' is being perpetuated on the children of the oppressed classes. For example, it can be argued that schools in India propagate the superiority of mental cognition to manual labour; schools give importance to textual knowledge rather than local/folk traditions. The result is that it becomes exceedingly difficult, particularly for the Dalit/peasant/tribal children, to correlate school knowledge with out of school knowledge; School knowledge seems to be an imposition from above. No wonder, they tend to drop out and fail.

This critical exploration of the relationship between ideology and curriculum seems to have inspired many sociologists of education in India. They have come forward with revealing studies that question the dominant pattern of schooling and curriculum. And, patriarchy at a time when Indian society has been witnessing severe ideological conflicts, these studies have acquired added relevance. Because of these studies we are now raising many interesting questions: whether the history that our children learn does talk about the history of the subaltern communities like the Dalits and tribals, whether the science curriculum is problem-posing, or merely an instrument to get an entry into the lucrative techno-corporate empire, or whether an alternative form of schooling can be evolved to resist a caste ridden/hierarchical/exploitative society.

Check Your Progress

1) Why is Michael Apple important for an understanding of ideology and curriculum?

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2) Why do you think that the study of ideology and curriculum has acquired special relevance in Indian society?

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13.5 IDEOLOGY AND CURRICULUM IN POST INDEPENDENT INDIA

It is important to situate this entire conceptual/theoretical reflection in the context of our own society. In order to give a concrete direction/focus to our discussion, we would concentrate on four major ideological currents in *post Independent India*, and discuss briefly how these ideologies have been shaping the on-going debate an ideology and curriculum.

13.5.1 Education for Secular Modernity

You would agree that a leading ideology of post Independent India can be characterized as the *Nehruvian agenda of nation making*. As a devoted freedom fighter and the first Prime Minister of our country, Jawaharlal Nehru cherished a great vision: a vision of *modern, industrially-developed, secular, egalitarian nation*. As you know, he repeatedly emphasized the need for '*scientific temper*': an analytical/rational way of looking at the world which, he felt, would fight age-old superstitions and prejudices. He wanted science and technology for sustained industrial development of India. He was also influenced by the world-wide socialist movements and experiments. No wonder, he sought to reconcile liberal/parliamentary democracy with a socialist state. Moreover, the trauma of partition or social conflict on the basis of religious identities was a constant reminder. Nehru, therefore, wanted to create new India free from communal holocaust and religious violence. He gave great importance to India's syncretic traditions, and talked about the *secular state*. As a charismatic leader, Nehru represented the aspirations of a new generation of Indians—nationalist bourgeoisie, educated middle class, newly emergent professionals, lower castes and religious minorities, secularists and even leftists. It would not be wrong to say that the legacy of the freedom struggle, Nehru's charisma, the organization of the Indian National Congress—all these factors made this ideology almost hegemonic, at least till late 60s.

The impact of this hegemonic ideology is clearly visible in the domain of education. Nehru was instrumental in creating new center of learning: science laboratories, institutes of technology, modern universities and cultural institutions, all leading to the making of a modern/secular nation. It was because of this agenda of nation-making that school education was also endowed with anew meaning. The *Kothari Commission* (Government of India, 1966), for example, began its recommendations with an inspiring note: 'the destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms'. School education was equated with the agenda of a secular/egalitarian nation, and its techno economic development. In a truly Nehruvian spirit the Commission wrote extensively on school curriculum: the 'problem-posing nature of science so that it can inculcate 'scientific temper' in the child's mind, the history of the freedom struggle, the social meaning of our Constitution, India's syncretic cultural traditions so that the child overcomes 'local, regional and linguistic' identity, and grows up as a true Indian contributing to national development and progress.

Possibly the influence of this ideology could also be seen in the creation of the *NCERT project* which sought to give a pan Indian/nationalist character to school education. No wonder, in its early phase it did succeed in inviting the leading secular/left intelligentsia of the country, and the school texts with which it came forward began to convey the message of *secular modernity*. History, for instance, gave great importance to India's syncretic cultural traditions, the progressive character of the freedom struggle led by the secular Indian National Congress!

13.5.2 Cultural Nationalism and Changing Curriculum

If you look at history you could see the gradual erosion of the Nehruvian consensus since early 70s. There were many complex politico-economic reasons for this. Possibly

the euphoria of the freedom struggle was over; the promises with which the new state initiated its historic journey were not always fulfilled, and the assertion of marginalized castes and regional forces led to an extremely fragmented social reality. It was this void that, as many political sociologists would like to believe, led to the consolidation of a counter ideology of nation making. It can be characterized as an *ideology of cultural nationalism*. It does speak of the need for an integrated/strong nation. But, unlike what the Nehruvians say, it emphasized the role of the *Hindu religious tradition* for the making of the nation. It seeks to construct the golden past filled with religious ideals and values. This pride in the religious tradition has to be sustained, and all corrupting influences emanating from 'alien' religions and cultures need to be fought, and a strong resurgent *Hindu nation* must rest on this cultural tradition. Its 'unitary' mission makes it skeptical to diverse and plural traditions. Religion, for it, is not merely a spiritual quest for salvation. Instead, religion becomes an 'identity', and this identity needs to be asserted by finding its 'enemies'. True, the roots of this ideology as developed by thinkers like Savarkar and Golwalkar could be seen in colonial India. But in recent times it has become almost a *master ideology*. It is sustained by the trading community, 'insecure' forward castes, and the 'disillusioned' middle class. It argues that the Nehruvian ideology is 'western', its 'secular' character negates the role of religion, and hence it is 'anti-traditional'.

An ideology of this kind is bound to have an impact on education and curriculum. For example, it speaks of the need for 'value education'; it wants a curriculum that arouses the learner's faith in his/her cultural/religious tradition. It seeks to revive 'indigenous' knowledge systems like *Vedic mathematics* and *astrology* which, as it is alleged, secular modernists have always tried to undermine. No wonder, it feels the need for rewriting school texts and altering the 'errors' made by secular scholars. This perhaps explains the paradigm shift in the NCERT; old 'Nehruvian' texts are being replaced by a new set of 'culture-sensitive' texts (NCERT, 2000). This intervention in the restructuring of curriculum is often known as '*saffronization of education*' which, it is argued, is increasingly gaining legitimacy because of its close affinity with the political power. There are, however, many critics who argue that this sort of intervention on the curriculum is bound to threaten the ideal of syncretism and pluralism. Furthermore, its inclination to an assertive religious identity, it is feared, is inherently conservative and patriarchal in nature; it is not particularly conducive to the cultivation of a free/enquiring spirit.

It is equally important to note that this plea for religious education is put forward not solely by the majority community; even the *minority religious communities* have their own schools and curriculum which, critics point out, are not really desirable if we wish to create a modern/democratic/egalitarian nation.

13.5.3 Globalization and Marketization of Education

The doctrine of globalization is yet another ideology which is becoming increasingly influential, particularly since 1990s. This ideology implies the principle of *economic liberalization* which means privatization of economic resources, and free entry of transnational corporations. It indicates the steady retreat of the state from the economic domain. In a way, it is like entering into the global market. It propagates itself through new symbols and messages that celebrate the principle of a 'good life' filled with material abundance, technological pleasure and global life style. It sanctifies the market—its ability to unite the world, and construct a *global village*. As sociologists argue, an ideology of this kind is gaining legitimacy because of the new situations that have emerged after the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union, and the disillusionment with the socialist system. In India the post-Nehruvian era has also witnessed skepticism towards 'socialistic' principles. Furthermore, the emergences of the new metropolitan middle class, the growing importance of Indian diaspora, and worldwide travel and migration have created a social base for an ideology of this kind to flourish.

The impact of this ideology on knowledge and curriculum is often felt. For example, if you look at the domain of higher learning, you can notice significant changes. These days universities are being increasingly pressurized to manage their own resources, alter their curriculum, and establish linkages with the techno economic empire. It means the entry of the market into the domain of learning. It creates hierarchies: 'market friendly' knowledge systems like *information technology, commerce and management* are becoming more 'legitimate' and 'relevant', and theoretical sciences, liberal arts and humanities are becoming marginalized. Moreover, the role of the teacher as a friend/philosopher/guide is declining; he/she is becoming more like a *technical professional* whose only task, it seems, is to sell *market-friendly* skills to the learner. Even in the domain of school education you can see the influence of this ideology. These days you see the proliferation of *private schools* with 'five star' facilities. Knowledge is becoming more like a commodity one can buy. As critics argue, the impact of global capitalism on education is devastating. It is elitist; it looks at the curriculum merely from an instrumental perspective, and it discourages the idealism of knowledge: search for fundamental ideas, and unconditional commitment to truth, irrespective of its 'salability'.

13.5.4 Protest Ideologies and Emancipatory Curriculum

Apart from these three major ideological trends, there are also alternative perspectives which, far from being dead, have their adherents, and histories of protest. Imagine, for instance, the *subaltern* perspective. As a *protest ideology* it asserts that the nation as it is constructed has not given due importance to those who are in the periphery: Dalits, tribals and women. It is, therefore, important to rediscover their agency, and look at the world through their eyes. In fact, in post Independent India we have noticed significant changes as far as the assertion of these subaltern communities are concerned. Possibly because of democratization and political mobilization the hitherto silent communities are regaining the language of dissent, and slowly but steadily occupying an important space in the socio-political domain. No wonder, this awareness creates subaltern ideologies ranging from Ambedkarism to peasant consciousness.

These ideologies raise new questions relating to knowledge and curriculum. It is argued that the dominant/mainstream pattern of education is elitist; it is Brahminical and patriarchal; it negates the contributions of the subaltern communities (Kumar, 1989). It is, therefore, important to restructure the curriculum and the mode of teaching so that the subaltern communities find their space, and succeed in relating school knowledge to their everyday experiences. As a striking example, we can reflect on the experiments made by *Eklavya*—an educational group situated in Madhya Pradesh. *Eklavya* intervenes in the domain of school education, orients the teaching community, produces school texts that through narratives and real life experiences sensitize the subaltern child, and enable him/her to situate school knowledge in the specific social context in which he/she is growing up (Pathak, 2002).

Apart from these subaltern ideologies, there are alternative perspectives which emerged out of the thinking of visionaries like *Gandhi and Tagore*. Gandhi, you already know, believed in an alternative notion of *swaraj* which, he thought would depend on simplicity and austerity, harmony with nature, decentralization of power, and self-reliant village communities. Gandhi pleaded for '*basic education*' which, as he wanted, would unite theoretical knowledge with *practical/productive experiences*, give dignity to manual labour, and emphasize local/indigenous skills (Gandhi, 1951). Basic education, he felt, would reduce elitism, and bring curriculum nearer to people's life experiences. Likewise, Tagore a poet and a visionary disliked regimented/structured pattern of schooling. He wanted the child to learn by relating to the rhythm of nature, and by cultivating not just cognitive skills, but also sensitivity to *art, music, aesthetics and productive work*. In fact, both Gandhi and Tagore sought to restructure the curriculum, and reduce the bookish element in education. They gave primacy to the integral development of the learner. They wanted a harmonic/egalitarian society having an organic linkage with nature.

Although their ideas were often denied as 'utopian', there are educational activists who continue to experiment, and try to evolve an *integral curriculum*, child-centeredness, non competitive/life supporting milieu, and a spiritual bond between the teacher and the taught.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Do you see a relationship between school curriculum and nation-making project in India?

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2) Do you see the relevance of Gandhi in the debate on curriculum?

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13.6 LET'S SUM UP

All these ideological influences, you may be wondering, have made it impossible to arrive at an *objective/scientific/apolitical/non controversial* curriculum. Yes, it is true that a living/dynamic society is one that cannot come to a final conclusion on its educational agenda, because diverse and conflicting interests govern such a society.

But then, you need not forget your own *constructive role* as a student of education. If you feel that a good society is one that is *democratic, egalitarian, gender-sensitive and eco-friendly*, you ought to work for the appropriate curriculum. You should then realize the need for an *integral curriculum* that cultivates all the faculties of learning, and arouses one's enquiring spirit. Such a curriculum, you would appreciate, aims at integrating scientific reasoning with aesthetic imagination, and technical mastery with ecological awareness. It also strives for an *open/transparent/dialogic classroom* that celebrates mutual trust and respect between the teacher and the taught. It thinks of a process of evaluation that, far from declaring one's 'failure' and eliminating people, helps the young learner to discover his/her hidden potential.

Yes, thinking about education becomes truly meaningful when you get inspired to intervene, and work for a life-affirming curriculum.

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