Dichotomy between Modernity and Nepalese Education System: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to critically assess the impact of modernism upon Nepalese local and indigenous knowledge systems. The paper highlights that modernism is a challenge, as well as an opportunity for the indigenous community and their knowledge systems. This is a challenge because of its potent threats to collapsing the originality and knowledge tradition the local communities have. And, this is an opportunity because of extending and widening its scope and recognition in the global market with a societal or national space. The paper was based on the qualitative research methodology in which numbers of Focus Group Discussion were carried out to generate the data. The paper explores that there is no need for indigenous communities and local knowledge holders to turn back to their tradition by entirely giving up their interests to become a modern one. Nor has there been a compulsion to abandon their oral traditions and wisdom to become an updated modern one. One of the impacts of modernity on Nepali education is privatization which has devalued the local or indigenous knowledge system. The paper, therefore, advises us on an education system that adapts some theoretical concepts that work as a bridge between local/indigenous knowledge system and modern knowledge system enriching local/indigenous knowledge and grasping good ethos of modernity.

Keywords: Colonial education, enlightenment, globalization, local wisdom, renaissance

Introduction

Education projects based on modernism in most of the post-colonial countries are claimed to be a continuity of a new form of the colonial education system. It is because; their development was based on the remnant of colonial infrastructure (Breidlid, 2013). For example, the decision about making the English language an official language in many countries like India, Kenya, Gambia, Uganda, Ghana, etc. is a deliberate continuity of establishing the influence of colonial hangover has become instrumental, as a tool for expanding neoliberal ideology for its maximum benefits in such developing countries (Matunhu, 2011and Griffith, 2002).

Modernism is the zenith of enlightenment which is an outcome of the European renaissance, is a movement of the revitalization of European cultures, languages, arts, music, literature, and religious improvement during fourteen to seventeen centuries (Matunhu, 2011; Breidlid, 2013). The renaissance

provided fertile land for promoting everything in Europe that contributed to an intense advancement of science and technology, which worked as a catalyst for colonizing the world with power and competition among the European regimes. The contribution of Cartesian-Newtonian philosophy yielded a strong foundation to the development of political stability and economic sustainability of European nations. More importantly, the colonial policies and practices that worked with this philosophy paved a way for severe exploitation of colonial resources and materials resulted in what we perceive as today's developed Europe, (Breidlid, 2013).

To say specifically, among the several characteristics of modernist education, it gives due emphasis on the value of science, believes in the objective world, argues to uncover objective truth by employing empiricist methodology, tries to see everything from the lens of realism, scientism, and shows its connection with foundationalism, essentialism, and dualism (Boboc, 2012,). Equally, ignoring the small narratives and paying excluded attention to a grand narrative, as well as logocentrism, a central seeking tendency, are important to view education under the modernist project.

This form of the education system, even after the independence of the countries, is said to undermine and suffer the indigenous knowledge system severely (Breidlid, 2013; Matunhu, 2011). As a result, modern education is critiqued as a danger to the indigenous knowledge system and has been working to exclude it by dissociative normative policy provision of governments. The Nepali education system is not an exception to it, since it started modernizing state education with the introduction to the implementation of the National Education Commission, 1956. The commission did not provide any space to preserve and promote the local or indigenous knowledge system, rather worked as a tool of assimilating policy, a colonial melting pot policy to education, such as centralized education system, national curriculum, and monolingual mode of instruction. This type of hired colonial education policy in Nepal sidelined all other knowledge systems and cultivated a melting pot policy in education under the mask of modernized education projects. In this connection, the paper aims to assess the existing Nepalese education system in terms of its dichotomy between modernity and local or indigenous knowledge systems.

Methods and Materials

This paper employs a qualitative research method that involves a focus group discussion with Mphil colleagues during the study. The four discussions were carried out regularly in the group comprised of 6 to 8 participants (Flick, 2006) and data was generated accordingly. It was a very nice opportunity to generate data because the colleagues would come every day before starting the class, and discussion could be carried out on the issues flexibly prepared unstructured guidelines. Oral consent was taken explaining the purpose of conducting FGDs, as the participants agreed upon the oral consent. However, the data were collected through a series of negotiations between the researcher and the participants in the condition that their remarks were kept confidential and anonymous was maintained.

This involves the qualitative data analysis procedure – a grouping of the data and transcription, organization, and development of categories including its index (Cohen et al, 2006; Creswell, 2012). Then, the main themes were assessed and searched to develop the ideas for analysis and interpretation. The interconnection of the data was explored and linked them each other for making them meaningful. The analysis was made through the connection between empirical evidence and theoretical backup. So, the review of certain scholarly texts and books to the conceptualization of the issue 'modernism' is another methodological part of the study.

Conceptualizing Modernism: A Theoretical Review

The term "modern" "modernity" or "modernism" are interchangeably used in different contexts. To Dobell (1980), "Anything in its own time can be called modern. However, what we usually mean by modern is something considered up-to-date, abreast of the times, and going beyond the past in more than a temporally or chronologically literal sense. The term seems to be originated from art and literature. As Witcombe (1995) views:

> Modern was used to refer generically to the contemporaneous; all art is modern at the time it is made. It is also referred to a period dating roughly the 1860s through the 1970s and describes the style and ideology of art produced during that era in the history of art. The term modernism is also used to refer to the art of the modern period; more specifically it can be thought of as referring to the philosophy of modern art (P.1).

Modernity is the culmination of enlightenment, which has a foundation of European renaissance, As Greenberg (1960) argues that the self-criticism of modernism grows out of, but is not the same thing as, the criticism of the enlightenment. Renaissance is a movement of the revitalization of European cultures, languages, arts, music, literature, and religious improvement during the thirteen to sixteen and seventeen centuries.

The renaissance is, of course, a cause for reorienting the Western societies from the beginning of the 14th century and throughout the 17th century to their arts, cultures, and languages, as well as religions in advance contributed to the development of modern society, the present Western societies. Breidlid states, "The European societies as they have emerged since the 15th and 16th century were very much linked to the concept of modernity, starting with voyages of "discovery" (2013, p. 15). By this process, the stolen of colonial resources and properties by colonizers laid a foundation for today's modern societies in the West. Based on this foundation, they considered themselves as developed, civilized, rich, and having high-class genetic endowments, and cleverly gave different names to others, as Othering, orient, uncivilized, poor, dependent, average people, and so on. The present cleavage, like the so-called East and West, oxidant and orient, first world and third world, self and Othering, civilized and uncivilized, independent and dependent, and superior and inferior are based on modernistic thoughts.

Modernism is blamed to have destroyed the inner peace of human beings and society and created a disillusioned mind among the people who embraced the philosophy of nihilism, which ignores every principle belonging to religious and moral endowments. More importantly, it emphasized individualism, consumerism, and materialism abreast of underlying the atheistic belief (Breidlid, 2013, Boboc, 2012). The existence of God is illusionary and needless to think, since the nature of society is always changing and reinventing itself and human being is, more often than not, seeking to put steps forward with materialistic thought and technocratic mind.

The nature of man is of course neither good nor bad, all their behaviors and activities are supposed to be shaped by some kind of external forces, let's say, environmental stimuli, or determined by the environment. The human being is also a physical object because modernism has a strong tie to positive science, neither they have a spirit to feel and experience, nor do they develop by themselves, all are fixed by their environment. In this sense, modernism presents a mechanistic and deterministic view of human nature (Witcombe, 1995; Breidlid, 2013; Boboc, 2012).

Society and culture are desirably or undesirably changing in their own pace and trend. An abreast of

these, technocratic and materialistic minds add fuel to the rapid changing of societies and cultures in an unbelievable way, what we have experienced these days. Technologies based on scientific orientation developed in advance created another kind of discrimination in societies, like developed and undeveloped, civilized and uncivilized, rich and poor, dependent and interdependent, etc. are perceived rampantly in the globalized modern world. Modernism yielded, as well accepted, a machinery social age to people in which cottages and industries were established in blossom is supposed to be a foundation for generating a severe gap between 'haves and have not resulted in an economic discrepancy in the society. Because of these trends, people, like us, perceive the loss of humanity in the society, mostly they have a view of pessimism thinking that the nature of upcoming societies is likely to be more cruel and discourteous for the human race (Clinescu, 1987). Arguing by this way, societies in the days to come therefore still seem to be going out of ethical compass and will likely to strongly embrace the principle of nihilism, which tends to isolate society from the state, family from society, individual from his/her family members.

The role of the World Bank based on the Washington Consensus to manipulate the policy and practice of the education system of developing countries has constricted the role and responsibility of the state for the public service (Razzaque, Raihan, 2008; Matunhu, 2011). This has well geared up the wheel of modernism that has not only limited the role and responsibility of government for its public services but also swept away the originality and indigeneity of the state.

Findings and Discussion

This section deals with the empirical data in connection with the literature review on the issue. The empirical data and theoretical discussion demonstrate that modernism has a direct impact on our education system in spite of its some illusionary benefits seen in societies. it has bizarrely encroached the national and local wisdom that we have. A participant remarks:

> *We have an educational system hired from Western society as we can see its impact on educational policies because our education programs, policies, and their implementation have been highly advocated and supported by the donor agencies.*

This remark shows that at the national level, it has imposed the Western ethics, knowledge, ideologies, values, policies, and practices by manipulating the government's policies and practices in all sectors like health, education, economy (Breidlid, 2013, Matunhu, 2011; Clinescu,1987). It develops a dependency of the country on donors and I/NGOs, and without any support, the country is less able to manage and organize the educational programs. Two Participants view:

> *To get things done, explicitly they exhibit a more humanitarian, philanthropic, and democratic nature to influence the field they are interested in. However, implicitly, they have a vested interest by which they use their ideology and policy to exploit what they want to gain. For example, a clear example we have is the so-called autonomy policy of higher education of Tribhuvan University, TU supported by World Bank under the University Grants Commission.*

In doing so, the donors and international organizations materialize and impose their policies and programs in the way that the national government acts and functions as a core implementor. The general public does not understand their interest, and the government becomes unfunctional and irresponsible for its duties to the public.

At the local level, this is seen to have threatened the local wisdom, and natural resources because of homogenizing effect of modernism. Christianity has a philosophical proposition to exploit the natural resource's maximum to the degree unless human beings are satisfied (Breidlid, 2013). Discussing the local heritage and wisdom, a participant argues:

> *Globalization is working as a bedfellow of modernization threatening heterogeneity and diversity in the society in different forms. Nonetheless, it seems that it is also working with sensitization to ethnic and indigenous communities that result in the revitalization of their culture and wisdom and helping to raise their voices for inclusion in the socio-political sector.*

This exhibits the advantages and disadvantages of modernism or globalization in society. It is a huge threat to diversity as it forcibly homogenizes the distinct culture and knowledge and commodifies such culture and knowledge maximum for its benefit. The influence of the western hegemonic education system rooted in the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview has been perceived as a modernity project in the education system. The work of IMF and WB, for example, seems to deregulate government policy on education that implicitly excludes the rights of ethnic minorities to education, and promotes the marketization of education as an extreme form of the commodity to foster neoliberal ideology (Razzaque, Raihan, 2008; Matunhu, 2011; Breidlid, 2013). Concerning privatization, a participant asserts:

> *Privatization of the education system may have a vested interest to attract the parents to send their children to a private institution and made them pay the amount in a great deal. The temptation of parents for their children and students to learn the English language, for example, is successful evidence of the neoliberal policy of education in Nepal. The West has succeeded to generate this temptation in Nepal to meet their market needs having the human resource with minimum English language knowledge.*

The attraction of parents to English schools in Nepal, for example, may have different implications. One of them is that if the students are able to meet their minimum English language requirement, they have the opportunity to go abroad for further study. The students do work in the countries where they go in cheap labor. Given that one of the ideologies of WB is planning to meet the demand of low-level human resources of capitalist societies from high quality of human resources of underdeveloped countries (Matunhu, 2011). It shows that the more emphasis they give to the English language, the greater the degree of fulfilling the market demand of developed countries by the quality human resources available in the developing countries.

The objective reality of modernity embraces the practice of one size fits all has created another kind of imbalance between rich and poor, self and Othering, and material production and consumption as well as its possession. This, in Breidlid's view, has resulted in cognitive injustices in Nepal and many others in the global south (2013). To be honest, a centralized curriculum and uniform pedagogy adopted by the Nepali education system has upheld the culture of hegemony to ignore the other knowledge and wisdom, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) says "reproduction of cultural capital" in school. In this regard, a participant emphasizes:

> *There is no way except accepting and adapting modernity to human society because we do not have alternatives. Rather than giving up all the opportunities generated by modernity and globalization, we need to think of them from their benefits and negative consequences to our*

> *local knowledge or indigeneity. We cannot say that local and indigenous communities should ignore the consequences of modernity, and also they should give up their traditional values and practices. Rather we need to prepare them through education that they are able enough to link knowledge systems generated by modernity and what they have as indigenous or local knowledge systems.*

This demonstrates an idea that looks for connecting local and global knowledge for better outcomes. So, the education system could work in a balanced way to protect local and indigenous knowledge or local knowledge by grasping the fruits of knowledge generated by globalization and modernization. If education can work on addressing both issues, it could help local communities foster their life-sustaining and life-giving skills, knowledge, and practices (Bhattarai, 2014). Education as a bridge that could facilitate interconnection between local knowledge and global knowledge. In this regard, a participant views:

> *The best option is to look for a connection that facilitates, promotes, and balances two different ideas, local knowledge or indigeneity and modernity as reciprocal benefits. Education can welcome and adopt some theoretical approach that guidelines and support to strengthen such connection.*

To deem the connection between local wisdom and modernity, the education system could utilize the theoretical approach, 'Cultural-historical activity theory, CHAT'. This is a purposeful interaction of the subject with the world, a process in which mutual transformations between the poles of 'subject-object' are accomplished (Leot'ev, 1978). It works on facilitating to understand and analyze the contradictions within and between the two activity systems – the local wisdom and the modern knowledge for the maximum benefits. Concerning this, Botha articulates CHAT as a conceptual framework within which mixed methods can be employed to negotiate more appropriate knowledge-making relations and practices between the epistemologically divergent ways of knowing of indigenous and western knowledge communities (Breidlid, 2013). The third generation of the CHAT needs to develop conceptual tools to understand dialogue, multiple perspectives and voices, and networks of an interacting activity system.

Like CHAT, Freire's (2014) idea of dialogue is another conceptual tool that education could adapt to make the local people, and indigenous community aware of their knowledge system, wisdom, skills, values that are the ways of their life, sustainability, and livelihood. Through conscientization, dialogue plays a role in developing criticism, contestation, and voices over the encroaching knowledge system and assessing the benefits of global knowledge. So, a dialogue is (Burbules & Bruce, 2010) not an engagement of two (or more) abstract persons, but of people with characteristics, styles, values, and assumptions that shape the particular ways in which they engage in discourse.

Conclusion and Reflection

The discussion exhibits three important issues. First, local communities or indigenous communities are in the predicament about their knowledge and modernity. Second, privatization and modernization have devalued the worthiness and richness of our local or indigenous knowledge. Last, a felt need is to explore any theoretical framework that could bridge for enriching local and indigenous knowledge and skills through grasping the fruits of modernity.

Our local or indigenous communities are in a confused state – neither we go back to revive all those which were once our original assets irrespective of ethnic and indigenous capital. Nor are we able to give up all these assets in the name of being modernized. Modernization is a challenge as well as an opportunity for local and indigenous communities. It is a challenge as it has a direct impact on eroding local wisdom and knowledge and collapsing the local culture. It is equally an opportunity as it wakens local people and indigenous communities to become aware of safeguarding the knowledge and wisdom. It is because indigenous communities could recognize their knowledge, skills, and values as life-giving and life-sustaining practices, if not livelihood promotion, as an opportunity of modernity and globalization. Nonetheless, a felt need is how education can facilitate the life-giving and life-sustaining practices and skills of the local or indigenous communities is a cross-cutting issue.

Our current education system appears to be upholding a kind of business enterprise. This means the privatization strongly perpetuates the commercialization of education which is entirely instrumental – the more you enroll and attract parents and students, the more money you will earn. This gradually fades off the color of public or community schools and draws the attention of the parents and students to private schools further justifying that public schools are worthless and ineffective. The domination of private institutions over public schools entirely ignores and devalues the local wisdom and indigeneity because it commodifies our values and knowledge by using education from the market perspective. These are the Western thought and ideas perceived as the global architecture (Breidlid, 2013) of education, which has been dominating the Nepali education system for a long time. As a result, this could be a peril to our traditionally oriented education by implicitly poisoning our thoughts and ideas against our original or novel practices from the formal schooling process.

Education can always work as a means of balancing local and global knowledge; it should connect indigenous or local knowledge with global knowledge without breaking the originality of indigenous or local knowledge. One of the ways we need to pursue the theoretical concept, CHAT, could be a bridging theory between local wisdom and modernity. It is because; CHAT is a tool to mobilize differences between knowledge systems for the ultimate purpose of bringing the divergent ways of knowing together consciously and critically (Breidlid, 2013; Leot'ev, 1978). Similarly, another concept is a dialogue (Freire, 2014), the meeting point of both local epistemology and modern epistemology that could be sought for enriching local wisdom in schools by analyzing and interpreting the conflicts, biases, and supporting and opposing knowledge systems of both traditions.

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