



Critical Awareness within the Teachings of the Bhagvat Gita and the Aditya Jyoti Path

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Abstract

Total ignorance of what we have had in the eastern body of knowledge and civilization for a long period of time may lead ones to imperfect course of learning since there have already been in the east what we claim today to be new and innovative. The concepts such as critical thinking and critical teaching – though they were not explicitly expressed in words – existed clearly in the literatures and practices of the ancient eastern life. In this brief review article an attempt is made to explore some kind of bridging up between the ancient eastern values and today's (post) modern expressions related with criticalities in education, particularly in teachings. The concepts of critical discourse and critical pedagogy are elaborated, and a few of the contents of the two renowned books on eastern values are analyzed and interpreted putting the intensive curiosity on how these ancient eastern understandings throw insights on today's critical framework of thinking. This article expects for the readers to have general background knowledge on the discourse related with the Mahabharata War in the times of Krishna and on the enriched guidelines given by Guru Aditya for ideal human life of the present time.

Keywords: engagement, empowerment, identities, ideologies, oppression, liberty, social injustice

Manuscript Received
22 May, 2023

Final Revision
14 June, 2023

Accepted
18 June, 2023

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1. Background and Overview of Literature

Criticalities in teaching have shaded useful insights for practitioners primarily focusing on the issues such as learner empowerment, engagement, negotiation and autonomy (Kumaravadivelu, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2010; Down, 2010). The concepts such as post-method pedagogy, critical discourse analysis and critical pedagogy explicitly advance their advocacy putting in centre the uselessness of prescriptive teacher-centered activities in education and worthiness of learner activation, involvement, empowerment, identity, ideology, interaction and engagement in learning and teaching.

These burning issues of today's scene of teaching and learning were also equally acknowledged in the teachings of the ancient times when the Bhagvat Gita was scripted. In the life teaching books such as the Bhagvat Gita and the Aditya Jyoti Path, we find enough amount of critical awareness shown by the characters of all times, including Lord Krishna, His devotee Arjuna and Guru Aditya. Critical awareness is regarded in this writing as the essence that today's critical thinkers intend to state within their frameworks such as Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Pedagogy.

Critical discourse analysis: The CDA is an approach which offers the socio-political interpretation of a discourse, and shows clearly the relationships between language and power (or, politics). Cutting (2008) argues that "CDA is an ideological approach that examines the purpose of language in the social context and reveals how discourse reflects and determines power structures" (p.3). The CDA approach successfully links the linguistic and social variables within the wider range of social contexts. It is largely influential to the global social issues such as power, culture, gender, education, economics, etc. so that the implication of the properties of a language can be easily seen in the social contexts of the world issues and ideologies. For Holmes (2012), CDA is explicitly concerned with investigating how language is used to construct and maintain power relationships in society; the aim is to show up connections between language and power, and between language and ideology (p. 389).

Critical pedagogy: Critical pedagogy is an innovative teaching orientation that was developed by a popular Brazilian educator, Paulo Friere through his work 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', (1970). This approach is also termed as 'critical literacy'. It helps students to be free from the oppressive condition of societies and classrooms. In the critical pedagogy, open discussion on social, political and ideological issues are encouraged. Furthermore, learners develop critical abilities to

analyse the contemporary society and power structures of these societies. Gender issues, social issues, political issues, ethnicity, security, and dominance are the major aspects for classroom discussion and understanding.

Reconceptualizing education: Critical awareness in practitioners has encouraged themselves to reconceptualize the entire education system. According to critical pedagogy, second language education needs to be understood in a different way from how the mainstream education (particularly, ELT) is dealing with it now. It needs to be reconceptualized by putting learners' urgencies and identities in centre. Learning is a practice that constructs, and is constructed by the identities of learners, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future (Norton & Toohey, 2010, p. 1). Learners are not only learners of content, but they are the change agents of their societies and of the contemporary knowledge systems. The second language should be understood as a means of social changes, reforms and issues.

Learner engagement: Missing in the mainstream education of the present time is the notion of students and teachers as active participants capable of producing knowledge, generating meaning and taking social action (Freire, cited in Down, 2012). Today's critical awareness and voice is that students should also get the collaborating opportunities for planning, assessing and other activities for their own learning.

Learner identity: The socio-political term 'identity' has become crucial in the field of education along with its advocacy of criticalities in this field. One relevant discussion about the relationship between challenging identities and education has been led by Suresh Canagarajah. In his writing in Norton and Toohey (ibid.), Canagarajah (2010) explores through his case studies in the USA and Sri Lanka that literacy activities were misleading in the ESL classrooms because of "unfavourable identities imposed on the learners" (p. 5). In his research the *safe houses* served as the sites of identity construction. He found that these 'safe houses' allowed negotiating among the students of diverse communities with different identities.

2. Methods/Approach

The approach that I have adopted in this study is a form of discourse analysis in which intertextual correlations among the texts produced across a considerable period of time ranging from ancient Mahabharata Age to the (post) modern era are explored. The representative pieces of the Bhagvat Gita and the Aditya Jyotipath, the two different spiritual discourses reflecting the ancient eastern consciousness are sampled purposively and they are interpreted from the critical perspectives of

modern thinking/consciousness. Chapter One and Chapter Two are sampled from the Bhagvat Gita, and Part One and Part Two are sampled from the Aditya Jyoti Path. The discourse pieces are basically analysed in terms of the critical parameters including empowerment, engagement, liberty and social transformation.

3. Results and discussion

Critical awareness has become an important standard in the modern education system as one of the resultant features of the contemporary knowledge, philosophy and thinking pattern. In the successive subtopics, this feature of modern discourse is discussed by exploring it within the teachings of the ancient eastern thinkings and legacies.

Critical awareness within the Bhagvat Gita. The Bhagvat Gita (TBG) throws critical shades right after its beginning when the narrator/reporter of the war in Kurukshetra states the event as it is before the power iconic King Dhritarastra. Unlike in the news reporters of the (post) modern time, no influence of state power was seen in the reporting of TBG. Neither exaggeration of the power nor underestimation of the oppressed was seen in the contemporary discourse of TBG time. Similarly, as the discourse moves on in the source (i.e. in Chapter 2), Krishna who was the Guru as well as friend of Arjuna encouraged the warrior for the purpose of latter's sociopolitical empowerment. Despite the absence of the four walls of the classroom, empowerment by a teacher as an instance for critical awareness can be explicitly seen in this episode of the discourse. Krishna encourages Arjuna to fight with his own kinships just because the power was misused and rights were grabbed by the sons of the brother of his father unethically. Krishna's focus is that even fighting can be sinless if it is meant for social justice and for the end of inequality, injustice and oppression in the societies. The issues of liberty and empowerment are also expressed in TBG 2.11, 2.15 and 2.18. In these verses of the Chapter Two, Krishna emphasizes the urgencies of conscious people for playing the accurate roles in accurate time as the influential change agents of their societies.

The discourse between Krishna and Arjuna throughout TBG can be resembled as the cool interaction between a teacher and his student(s) inside a classroom of (post) modern university. The discourse is fully characterized by many dimensions of consciousness, including critical approach. Krishna persuades Arjuna for the war, arguing that the war will be an education or lesson for the newer generations of people for a long period of the future (TBG 2.48); it is for social transformation. This criticality reaches into height when Krishna in TBG 3.30 advocates that Arjuna must focus on fight for liberation. The intensity of one's engagement in learning

and performing leads whether to success or failure. This awareness regarding engagement is central in today's critical pedagogy too.

Another important point is that just like in the today's critical approaches, TBG also presents the contexts for learners and their teacher for peaceful and fruitful interactions. Collaboration in the given task adds critical values in the discourse of TBG. Furthermore, Krishna's focus on the critical issues such as identity and ideology in the verses 2.31, 2.33, 2.34 and 2.35 of TBG illustrates that identity and ideology are not always oriented to getting rights and benefits, but more importantly engaged for fulfilling one's responsibilities and duties. The war for Arjuna was just like *safe house* (Canagarajah, 2010 in Norton & Toohey, eds.) for uplifting identity and social justice.

Critical guidance in the Aditya Jyoti Path. The human essentials such as liberty, inclusion, representation, equity, identity and ideology are identified as basics of critical awareness of our time. These critical issues have been duly addressed by various attempts of teachings and interactions of the enlightened Personality popularly known as Bal Gyani Guru Aditya. In His book Aditya Jyoti Path (AJP), Guru Aditya outlines within a poetic discourse the critical characteristics of the relationship between a Guru (i.e. a teacher) and a disciple (i.e. a learner). "This is a relation where the bodies are different, but the life one," the Guru expresses. For Him, a teacher and a learner are essentially blended for the specific of learning a life; only a higher level of collaboration, cooperation and negotiation between teachers and learners may lead ones towards a true sense of learning. This is the typical understanding of the critical approaches about the relationship between teachers and their students.

In the same book the AJP, the empowerment of the oppressed and marginalized learners through spiritual teachings and encouragement can be explored almost everywhere. For instance, in the eighth section of the Part One, Guru Aditya expresses, "Seeing others' accomplishments, never think that God has discriminated against you by keeping you away from all sorts of happiness. He has bequeathed a divine and glorious light inside you, which shall exhibit your perseverant form in front of the world." The explicit as well as the underlying meaning of the expression is apparently associated with empowering the learners by showing their strengths and potentials for learning. People who are socially discriminated and oppressed are to be psychologically boosted up and opportunities for learning should be ensured. This resembles the basics of criticalities in modern education.

A similar piece of discourse at the end of the Part Two can be found in the AJP. The enlightened teacher puts his words, “Fight only for legal rights. Do not forsake others of their guaranteed rights, even if that makes elixir for your soul.” This version clearly indicates the voice for those who are voiceless. It encourages people to fight for right things and not to take interest in taking what others have as their right. The piece of discourse is intended to ensure social justice too. This is indeed one of the basic implications of critical approaches to education.

Another important voice raised by critical movement in education is sociocultural issues with identities, ideologies and social transformations. In the AJP, urgency for high level of social consciousness has been expressed in several places. An example is: *Education without culture, civilization and morale is of no worth. Such education always makes us impaired to discern the real value of our life.* In this quotation we can explore the urgency for incorporating sociocultural values for actual learning and social transformation. Value of our life can be enhanced only through the incorporation of culture and civilization within the framework of our education.

4. Conclusion

The attempts of this brief piece of writing have been just to assemble few examples from the spiritual discourses of the East to portrait that modern theories of the today’s time also exist inherently in our ancient consciousness and knowledge systems of the East. At the same time critical awareness explored within the ancient spiritual discourses makes the critical movements and campaigns even more meaningful and relevant. From the exploration and discussion so far the new body of knowledge has been evidenced from both ancient and modern thinking patterns in a way that educating children and others is not merely passing them an amount of knowledge or information but enabling them to bring expected changes and transformations in their societies with maximum dedication to sociocultural identities, social justice and humanity.

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