

**TENSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES IN APPLYING FREIREAN CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY TOWARDS FOSTERING CRITICAL LITERACY IN INDIA'S
EDUCATION SYSTEM**

By

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Education

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

November, 2007

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the possibilities in reinventing Freirean critical pedagogy in the context of Indian formal education, and to examine the tensions and limitations that emerge and that would need to be addressed in such an attempt. It argues that Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's model of critical pedagogy can offer useful ideas and possibilities for change in the formal education system in India that is currently suppressing critical education and thereby perpetuating inequality and oppression. However, inasmuch as current educational practice in India is embedded in a cultural worldview that is different from the cultural worldview which shaped Freire's thinking, his theory will have to be contextualized, in keeping with the ideals of humanization, epistemology, liberation, ontology and pedagogy that are valued in Indian society, in order to be reinvented successfully in the Indian context. To this end, the thesis will present a comparative study of Freirean critical pedagogy and the Indian culture of pedagogy in order to explore the following questions: What are some of the possibilities that a Freirean perspective can offer for a critique of the Indian culture of pedagogy? What are some of the possibilities that an Indian perspective can offer for a critique of the cultural specificities of Freire's worldview? What are some of the tensions between the two worldviews that would need to be addressed in order to successfully reinvent critical pedagogy in the context of Indian education, and what are some tentative ways to address these tensions?

These questions will be answered by exploring the points of commonality and difference between the worldviews framing the Indian culture of pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Based on the specific historical, social, cultural and political context in which

each of these pedagogies arose, the thesis will explore how the points of commonality between these two frameworks can allow them to speak to each other, and how the differences between them can be potentially reconciled. Postcolonial theory, Clarke's (2001) construct of the “culture of pedagogy,” and critical pedagogy itself will together provide the conceptual lens through which these questions will be examined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been such a collaborative effort that I can hardly fit all the gratitude that is owed to all the people that have made this thesis a reality onto a single sheet of paper.

But if I must begin somewhere, I will begin by thanking my supervisor Dr. Sheryl Bond, without whose dedicated support this thesis would not have been completed. Her academic acumen, clearheaded advice, personal commitment to my development and success, and willingness to always go above and beyond the call of duty have made it an immense pleasure and privilege to grow under her guidance.

I also wish to thank my committee member Dr. Magda Lewis for her keen critical eye, for not allowing me to settle for mediocrity, and for taking the effort to push me to refine my thinking and my writing even further than I sometimes expected to.

I thank also my family and friends who supported and encouraged me along this lengthy journey. I thank especially my mother, whose emotional encouragement and gentle prodding – although not always received as graciously as it should have been – were nevertheless necessary in pushing me to complete this journey. And also my step-father, whose inexhaustible repertoire of knowledge, literature and advice aided me in completing this journey well.

Finally, I wish to thank my grandparents, Avô and Chopi, to whom this thesis is dedicated. Avô, the generosity with which you give, the courage with which you dream, and the youthful flair with which you live out your dreams, have all been an integral part of helping to fuel and materialize my own dreams. Chopi, despite never having met you, your joyful, compassionate and elegant spirit has inspired much of what I am and do today and thus, I hope, continues to live on.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Experiments cannot be transplanted; they must be reinvented. (Freire, 1978, p.9)

Conscientization...is a very strong Western concept. The Western tendency is to act upon reality, to confront reality and try to change it. The Indian tendency is to understand history as something in which you lose yourself...We have to take into account the cultural differences between East and West. (Freire in Bangalore, India; Cited in Zachariah, 1986, p.68)

Establishing Context: The need for Change in Indian Society

As a child I would sometimes daydream about reforming underdeveloped villages. A strange daydream for a child, but understandable given the fact that I spent much of my childhood in India, where beggars on the street and large neighbourhoods of slums were a normal part of everyday life. Growing up, I would see people exactly like myself living in deplorable conditions, while I had everything I could possibly ask for. It was absolutely beyond my childlike faculties to grasp why there should be such a difference, and why someone couldn't do something about it. So I used to imagine myself as President, systematically taking on one village at a time, and in my head I would devise schemes for the transformation of the lives of its inhabitants, from their sewage systems to their means of livelihood to the education of their children. I especially felt some instinctive naïve faith in the link between education and the improvement of people's lives, although at that point I was unable to flesh out exactly where that link lay. But for a long time daydreams were all it remained – mere fleeting reveries, while I gradually grew accustomed to the dissonance and glaring inequality everywhere around me. In a way one has to somehow acclimatize oneself to the stark disparity out of sheer necessity, if only to survive without being driven to despair in a place like India.

Unfortunately the social reality of India continues to be one of widespread deprivation and inequality – one that is difficult for a child or someone who has not

acclimatized themselves to it to wrap their minds around. To highlight but a few points that speak to the stark realities facing the majority of Indian citizens: in absolute terms, India (by far) contains the greatest number of people who live on less than \$1 a day. 372 million people, or just over 1/3 of India's total population, constitute this country's enormous poverty base; this total is greater than the combined populations of the United States, Canada, and Australia. The Indian subcontinent has nearly half the world's people living in hunger, and nearly 40% of India's adult population is illiterate (World Bank, 2007). The Backward Castes, which comprise the rural majority of the population that remain poor and marginalized, are usually hit the hardest, trapped in a vicious circle of displacement, poverty and disease, and still denied access to basic necessities and human rights. Outbreaks of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS are soaring among the poor; yet public health investment is among the lowest in the world, with annual per capita public health expenditure at less than US\$4. According to the 2001 Economic Survey, 91% of rural India does not have sanitation facilities (Samuel, 2002). Access to quality education remains severely limited, and women and girls continue to bear a lower status in society, as reflected in higher female infant mortality rate, low sex ratio, poorer nutritional care, and lower school enrolment rates. This outright violation of human rights within a dynamic and emerging economic giant makes one wonder why there has not been a revolutionary drive for social transformation to challenge and overturn these inequalities, and what allows these inhuman conditions to persist.

Education in India: 'What is' versus 'what can be'.

In a recent presentation at Queen's University on her work as coordinator of Astha, an NGO working with women and development in India, Dr. Virginia Shrivastava stated that the single largest problem faced by poor women in India in a development

context is, in their own words: “I don’t understand many things.” These simple and poignant words reinforce the sentiment that drove much of my vocational interest and that led me to pursue graduate studies in education – the belief that within the pedagogical endeavour lies the potential for social transformation. I became convinced that the access a person has to different ways of seeing and understanding the world is intricately connected to the opportunity s/he possesses to act on that world. Conversely, those who are denied the means to think about and understand the world in which they live are robbed not only of words but also of power to act or enact change. Herein lies the potential that education can offer – to equip people with access to ways of thinking about the world in order to be able to transform it. But what is needed to enable social transformation is *critical* education: education that equips people to understand the gap between the way the world is and the way the world should be, the reasons for this gap, and the means to act to overcome this gap. Indian scholar Lele (2000, p.50) provides a useful conceptualization of this idea in speaking of education that fosters “reflexive competence,” described as:

... a competence to recognize and reflect on the discrepancies between the two worlds and to learn and innovate ways to go beyond those discrepancies and thus act out of an unabridged, unfragmented reflection on *what is*, in terms of *what can be and therefore ought to be*.... I see modernity as a moment of reflection that challenges orthodox interpretations because they have lost their relationship to reality and are therefore seeking to retain legitimacy through an apparatus of ideological legitimation.

Yet when I juxtaposed these ideals with the literature describing the present state of Indian education, with my observation of Indian classrooms and conversations with Indian teachers, and indeed with memories of my own primary and secondary schooling in an urban center in India, an overwhelming disjunction emerged between the ideals and the reality. My impressions of the education I experienced in India a decade ago are for

the most part corroborated by recent literature on education in various parts of India (Ramachandran, 2005; Sarangapani, 2003; Dyer and Choksi, 2002; Clarke, 2003). In general, this literature and my memory paint the picture of a system that is largely characterized by teacher-centered classrooms, where students are generally discouraged from asking too many questions or from participating in discussion, and encouraged to memorize information word-to-word from textbooks and to focus all their energies on preparing for examinations where they will have to regurgitate this information. Instead of education that empowers students to reflect on ideas and texts and on their experiences and social conditions, a significant part of the population is subjected to an enslaving schooling experience that embroils them in a ruthless race to achieve the few available coveted positions on the educational and social ladder (Ramachandran, 2005). Only s/he (more often “he”) who can play the game by the rules and memorize the most facts and reproduce the most amount of information exactly as presented in the textbook will be able to get ahead educationally and economically¹.

And even the opportunity to attempt to achieve one of the few spots on the education ladder is presented to only a few. Rather than education working towards empowerment of disenfranchised groups and social transformation, recent educational statistics reflect an exclusory education system that only reinforces the widespread injustice and social inequality prevalent in Indian society. Statistics reveal that 110 million children remain outside of the schooling system, with approximately 60% of

¹ I am wary of not painting too reductionist a picture of Indian education that assumes that these features characterize all educational initiatives in all of India. I acknowledge room for variation in different educational contexts ranging from formal to informal, private to public, urban to rural settings. However, this is the picture painted almost unanimously by most of the literature that I found on formal public education in India today.

those enrolled dropping out by grade 8 (Subrahmanian, 2002). Educational inequalities largely reflect wider societal patterns of oppression, occurring particularly along lines of caste, class and gender. Even when they do enroll in schools, the poor and marginalized fail to receive an education that is equitable in terms of its quality (although the literature is not always explicit on what *quality* entails). A crucial problem is that education quality decreases down the social and economic pyramid, and those on the lower end, forced to rely on poor quality government schools, are unable to compete with their peers from privileged classes (Nambissam, 2005; Ramachandran, 2005). For example, a recent World Bank survey found that 25% of government primary school teachers in India simply do not show up to school, and only 50% of those who do actually engage in teaching (Kremer et al, 2005). In the last 60 years since its independence, India's education system has largely ensured that marginalized and oppressed groups maintain the poor levels of literacy, cognitive and critical abilities which serve to perpetuate their oppression.

It was in the midst of my frustration at these disjunctions outlined above that I encountered the ideas of Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy.

What can be and therefore ought to be.

As one of the few who were able to benefit from the system I just described and now seeking to transform it, I entered into graduate studies in education, and it was here that I first came across the writings of Paulo Freire. It was in these writings of an educator working among oppressed villagers in Brazil that I found the words to articulate a vision of what I wanted Indian education to look like, and to conceptualize how a change in pedagogy could effect the transformation of a society. Reading Freire, I encountered an educational theory and practice explicitly committed to the liberation of oppressed

populations and to the ideal and practice of social justice both within schooling and in society at large. I saw many similarities between what I had seen in the classrooms of India, and what Freire critiques as *banking* education – a system where knowledge is seen as static and possessed exclusively by the teacher, who must then deposit it in the minds of the passive students until they are able to memorize and regurgitate it. In contrast, critical pedagogy views students not as passive receptacles to be filled with abstract information that is completely decontextualized from their reality, but as potentially active and empowered subjects that can engage in and construct knowledge about their social world, through dialogue, reflection and action (*praxis*). At the heart of critical pedagogy is a commitment to the transformation of those structures and conditions within society that serve to thwart the democratic participation of all people (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). To this end, critical pedagogy seeks to foster in students a deepening critical awareness of the social and political conditions existing in their societies and shaping their lives, and to help them discover their own capacities to re-create alternative conditions (a process known as *conscientization*).

I began to envision the potential that these ideas could have for the transformation of oppressive features of India’s education system, and consequently of oppressive conditions in Indian society. It was out of this vision that this thesis was born.

Purpose

This thesis focuses on the possibilities and tensions in reinventing Freirean critical pedagogy in the context of Indian formal education². It argues that Freire’s model can

² Since this thesis is concerned with the education of India’s oppressed majority, its analysis will focus on the public school system in India, rather than the private system that has largely been reserved for the elite. However I will employ the term ‘formal’ education in order to open up the possibility that the reinvention

offer useful ideas and possibilities for change in the formal education system in India that is currently suppressing critical education and thereby perpetuating inequality and oppression. However, inasmuch as current educational practice in India is embedded in a cultural worldview³ that is different from the cultural worldview which shaped Freire's thinking, his theory will have to be contextualized in order to be reinvented effectively in the Indian context. This is not to say that Indian culture itself cannot be challenged and should be maintained "as is", but that the deeply embedded cultural constructs that frame Indian education will prevent critical pedagogy from being merely transplanted to the Indian context in a manner that is successful and non-colonizing. In fact critical pedagogy itself can provide a language of critique of specific Indian cultural constructs that are serving to oppress the Indian majority population. But at the same time, critical pedagogy must be reinvented based on which of Freire's ideas are applicable to the context of Indian education, and which of his assumptions on the other hand are culturally specific and will need to be redefined in Indian terms, in keeping with the ideals of humanization, epistemology, liberation, ontology and pedagogy that are valued in Indian society.

The purpose of this thesis therefore is to explore the value in applying critical pedagogy in Indian formal education, and to examine the tensions and limitations that emerge and that would need to be addressed in any attempt to successfully reinvent critical pedagogy in India. To this end, the thesis will present a juxtaposition of the Indian culture of pedagogy with Freirean critical pedagogy in order to explore the following questions: What are some of the possibilities that a Freirean perspective can offer for a

of critical pedagogy in Indian schools may also occur outside the public system, perhaps within the growing number of non-government schools in India – a theme which will be further discussed in the final chapter.

³ The term *worldview*, as developed from its German root *Weltanschauung*, denotes a comprehensive set of assumptions, seen as an organic unity, held consciously or unconsciously by a group of people regarding the basic makeup of the world and how the world works. A more detailed presentation of my understanding of 'worldview' and 'culture' is included later on in the section entitled "Methodological Considerations."

critique of the Indian culture of pedagogy? What are some of the possibilities that an Indian perspective can offer for a critique of the cultural specificities of Freire's worldview? What are some of the tensions between the two worldviews that would need to be addressed in order to successfully reinvent critical pedagogy in the context of Indian education, and what are some tentative ways to address these tensions?

These questions will be answered by exploring the points of commonality and difference between the worldviews framing the Indian culture of pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Based on the specific historical, social, cultural and political context in which each of these pedagogies arose, the thesis will explore how the points of commonality between these two frameworks can allow them to speak to each other, and how the differences between them can be potentially reconciled. Postcolonial theory, Clarke's (2001) construct of the "culture of pedagogy," and critical pedagogy itself will together provide the conceptual lens through which I will draw out the cultural specificities underlying critical pedagogy that emerge when placed in the context of the Indian culture of pedagogy. My aim is not to make value judgments about which cultural worldview is superior or which must be altered or rejected. Rather, this is merely a theoretical starting point in exploring where potential conflicts and possibilities may arise, before we can begin to explore more practically some possible avenues for reconceptualizing critical pedagogy in Indian education.

Rationale & Conceptual Framework

Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy have almost acquired the status of buzzwords in recent educational discourse, particularly ones that relate to critical education or education for social change. Elias claimed a decade ago, "Freire is probably the best known educator in the world today. No educator in recent history has had his books read

by as many persons in as many places of the world. No educator has spoken to as many teachers, activists, and scholars” (Elias, 1994, p.1). While Freirean-inspired ideas and pedagogical methods have had their primary influence in the context of South and North American education, they are increasingly posited as universal ideals that hold the key for social transformation across the world. Key Freirean ideas such as dialogue, participation, critical awareness, *conscientization*, praxis, and so on have been adopted in a number of alternative education and development programs in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia (Richards, Thomas & Nain, 2001). These have been based on the presumed accessibility and transferability of Freire’s work to a range of contexts, with scholars like Gadotti claiming that there are universal dimensions in Freire’s thinking that “have provided a basis for a universal extension of Freire’s thought like no other in the history of pedagogical ideas” (Richards, Thomas & Nain, 2001, p.6).

Freire’s iconic status has sometimes led to an universalizing approach to his ideas as transferable to a vast range of contexts, leading Glass (2001) to observe that “an adoring gaze treats Freire more as icon and myth than as a radical philosopher subject to the limits of history and a necessarily situated perspective” (p.16). For example, despite his acknowledgement that Freire’s ideas do need to be adapted to suit a country’s specific needs, Mayo (1995) claims that “the basic philosophy as to what constitutes critical literacy applies in all cases,” and is as applicable in the *favelas* of Brazil as in the US ghettos or among the homeless in Europe. It is precisely this tendency to regard at least major portions of Freire’s work as applicable in diverse cultural settings and its prevalence in educational discourse that make it necessary to critically deconstruct what are the cultural assumptions and potentially colonizing aspects embedded in his ideas. The rationale for this task can be found within a postcolonial discourse, within the

construct of ‘culture of pedagogy’, and within critical pedagogy itself – all three of which will inform the conceptual framework of this thesis.

Postcolonial warnings against universalizing in comparative education.

Postcolonial theory has developed in response to the complexities faced by former colonial societies as they attempt to disentangle the lingering legacies of colonization. This research paradigm offers the space to reclaim formerly colonized identities and knowledge systems that have been marginalized by Eurocentric discourses in the face of global power imbalances. Various postcolonial tools will prove useful in the course of this thesis, such as the concept of cultural hybridity, which attempts to blur the line between local and colonial, and points out that indigenous knowledge is not a static closed system but is itself heterogeneous, embroiled in modernist discourses, and infused by relations of power and inequality (Kapoor, 2003). When applied to the field of international education, postcolonial theory reminds us of the importance of evaluating culturally imperialistic assumptions embedded in educational models. Cultural imperialism refers to the lingering hegemonic influence of former Western colonial powers, through the imposition of Western assumptions and cultural worldviews on the rest of the world so as to universalize them in ways that silence indigenous knowledge systems and perpetuate Western hegemony. By universalizing educational models like critical pedagogy originating in the West, we may be susceptible to the indictment brought up by postcolonial theory that “the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self’s shadow” – or in the attempt to constitute non-Western countries in the image of the West (Spivak, 2001, p.2193). Esteva and Prakash (1998) warn us against seeking global solutions that we assume are universally applicable and that thus end up reproducing a monoculture, by perpetuating assumptions that deepen

in people the very evils against which they are struggling and legitimate the policies and orientations that cause their oppression. The most benevolent efforts to give silenced others a voice may repeat the very silencing it aims to combat, if not pursued in a manner self-reflective of its own complicities.

Nevertheless, this lack of self-reflexivity is still an unfortunate feature of many international development education initiatives (Kanu, 2005). Recent trends of globalization and internationalization of education have for the most part been seared by deep inequalities, characterized by a unidirectional flow of Eurocentric knowledge from the West to “undeveloped” countries, in order to help them overcome the traditional ways of living which are seen to impede their development and progress. Western-originating approaches such as learner-centered pedagogy are still treated as one-size-fits-all approaches while indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized. There remains a need to develop indigenous pedagogies and to explore ways in which western and indigenous knowledge systems interact with and complement each other (Tabuwala, 2003, Kanu, 2005; O’Donoghue, 1994). O’Donoghue (1994) argues that without a serious cultural analysis being undertaken in the countries at the receiving end of cross-cultural knowledge transfer, educational models that may be suitable in their countries of origin may prove downright failures in the new context.

‘Culture of pedagogy’ and critical practices in current Indian education.

Despite a few grassroots initiatives in non-formal educational settings in India that have drawn from Freirean ideas, critical practices have remained limited within the context of Indian formal education. I have found very few references to public educational policies or initiatives that specifically draw from critical pedagogy in my examination of the literature available to researchers working in a North American

context (which is avowedly limited, pointing to a larger political issue of the imbalance in knowledge transfer). There have been a few examples of educational programs that engage with some Freirean methods in a limited way, in that they attempt to alter features of Indian classrooms that Freire would consider banking education, although they do not explicitly draw from Freire's philosophy. The largest such program is the Government of India District Primary Education Programme, which promotes more active student-centered pedagogies and creative teaching methods in contrast to traditional rote learning and textbook-oriented pedagogic styles. (Clarke, 2003) Through in-service teacher training programs, primary teachers are urged to adopt more democratic approaches to learning, to see knowledge as reflexive rather than received, and to see themselves as joint enquirers with their students. However, the project's success has been ambivalent; one study (Clarke, 2003) showed that while there have been some ostensible changes in the introduction of limited instructional aids in the classroom, the essential characteristics of traditional practice, namely rote and repetition, have not changed. Clarke concludes that the project did not adequately address the teachers' cultural ideologies and values which deeply influenced their approaches to teaching and thus prevented them from fundamentally engaging with and incorporating the attempted reforms.

Dyer and Choksi (2002) record another example of a project that attempted to promote a more critical research-based collaborative approach to teacher educator development. This project drew explicitly on Freirean principles of dialogue, problematization of social reality, critical reflexivity, a view of knowledge as dynamic rather than static, and a commitment to change through reflective action. The authors found considerable difficulties in fostering among the Indian educators the critical and questioning stance and personal autonomy required by this approach. The Indian

educators either resisted or were unable to be comfortable with the critical questioning that was essential to the qualitative research process. These qualities seemed to go against much of what teachers had been socialized to practice and value, both in their schooling and family environments. Despite the difficulties they encountered with the project, the authors conclude that “while these notions, borrowed from very different professional contexts, are difficult to embed into teacher education in India at present, we believe that such engagement is a pre-requisite for real change” (Dyer and Choksi, 2002, p.350).

Kanu (2005) also writes about an innovative teacher education reform project in South Asia that drew on critical pedagogy. The project aimed at encouraging South Asian teachers to take a critical and questioning stance to their existing social conditions, and to become agents in creating alternative conditions where necessary – skills which they would presumably pass on to their students. The assumption driving the project was that this innovative critical approach to pedagogy would promote emancipation and a radical participatory democracy among the people of the participating developing countries.

However, this project was also met with resistance:

The teachers resisted our “critical”, “challenging”, “questioning” and, no doubt, “emancipatory” approach to their learning and saw it as a combative approach that was not grounded in their lives and experiences because it violated some of their deepest beliefs about maintaining harmonious relations with others. (p.506)

Kanu analyses the reform and subsequent response through a Foucauldian lens, and sees the reform as driven by the dominant western educational discourse that prioritizes critical education and posits South Asian education as passive and thus disempowering or deficient and in need of “rescue”. The teachers’ resistance to the discourse that attempts to assign them a certain position of helpless victim and marginalize their own knowledge systems reinforces Foucault’s (1980) and Homi Bhabha’s (1984) analysis of

discursive/colonial power and the resistance that invariably springs up in response (in Kanu, 2005).

The resistance faced by these attempts at introducing more critical practices within formal educational settings reflect the dangers of transplanting foreign educational practices, especially ones developed in the West, without taking cognizance of local socio-cultural contexts and the extent to which these shape indigenous educational practice. A useful construct in helping us understand this phenomenon is the concept of “culture of pedagogy,” as used by Clarke (2001). This theoretical framework, which will be explained in further detail in chapter 2, provides a central theoretical lens underlying this thesis. Drawing from teacher thinking research, social anthropology and cultural psychology, Clarke suggests that there are many aspects of the contemporary Indian educational system that are rooted in a native pedagogical philosophy and in shared cultural models that are often taken for granted and that get internalized to determine action, constructing what Clarke terms a *culture of pedagogy*.

Drawing from this research on the cultural constructedness of teaching and learning styles, an assumption that frames this work regards the embeddedness of educational practice in the implicit and ingrained dimensions of the culture of pedagogy, and its ensuing resistance to change. I would argue that the resistance faced by the critical approaches outlined above arose because these programs failed to thoroughly examine the extent to which the critical model would have to be reconceptualized in the context of India. For example, although Clarke (2003) does explore certain aspects of Indian culture that impeded pedagogical change, she fails to engage in a critical analysis of what aspects of critical pedagogy might not be appropriate in an Indian setting, or what are the Eurocentric assumptions underlying this approach. Rather, she still assumes that these

“barriers” in Indian culture would need to be overcome or “chiseled away at” in order to implement a predefined model of critical pedagogy, and undertakes no move towards exploring how the model itself might need to be reinvented in the context of India. Much dissonance between theory and practice has resulted in Indian teacher training due to attempts to apply theories that do not adequately address the overarching worldview that shapes teaching and learning in India. When teachers are not adequately prepared with a culturally relevant educational philosophy on which to ground their practice, what often results is that their practice continues to be dependent on the worldview stemming from their collective cultural environment, and they either end up resisting or disregarding altogether the new educational theory they studied, or may develop low confidence in their own cultural beliefs and practices (Gupta, 2006). Thus the failure to take into account the recipient culture in pedagogical reforms not only generates unforeseen obstacles and resistance, but also constitutes the colonizing imposition of a foreign model onto the Indian context, resulting in the marginalization of Indian patterns of social relations and ways of seeing the world, and in the unwitting perpetuation of colonial epistemic violence.

Reflecting critically about ‘critical reflection.’

It is ironic indeed that a pedagogy committed to the struggle against oppression might find itself inadvertently becoming a colonizing pedagogy. Even well-intentioned efforts to promote critical pedagogy can turn into the imposition of a good idea used to control people. Yet this betrays the very ideals that Freire himself espouses. As the above inscriptions suggest, one of the key tenets of his philosophy is a commitment to genuinely respect the voice of the Other; “the refusal to listen to others who are different, or hold views antagonistic to one’s own, constitutes an act of oppression” (Freire and Faundez,

1989, p.37; cited in Roberts, 2000, p.64). The impetus for this thesis arises in part from Freire's own warnings against seeking "borrowed solutions" that are transplanted from other cultures (Freire, 1973, p.13), and against *cultural invasion*:

One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. (Freire, 1970, p.95)

Thus, critical pedagogy itself will serve as a theoretical lens that is turned in on itself in order to critically examine its own assumptions. Critical pedagogy provides the tools with which we can begin to question potentially oppressive assumptions underlying any educational model (including its own), in the quest for pedagogies that are truly liberating in praxis. If critical pedagogues are to be true to their own ideals, they must be willing to sincerely listen to alternative ways of seeing the world and to critically appraise their own views, rather than assuming that these apply universally and attempting to impose them on other groups. Any attempt to explore the potential application of Freire's ideas to an Indian school context must heed the warnings of Freire himself regarding the need to contextualize his ideas, those of postcolonial critics regarding the dangers of universalizing Western educational models that silence Indian educational worldviews, and of cultural studies literature that suggests that there is indeed a difference between the two (Western and Indian educational worldviews). This involves questioning whether certain aspects of critical pedagogy are grounded in culturally specific assumptions and whether their imposition in a radically different cultural context might constitute an act of epistemic colonial violence. This thesis is a first step in exploring the relevance of a

Western-originating educational theory developed for rural peasants in Brazil, to contributing to the struggle against oppression in Indian education and society.

Methodological Considerations

Rather than employing empirical data collection, this thesis will be based on a theoretical analysis of different bodies of literature, focusing specifically on literature on critical pedagogy and on Indian culture of pedagogy. While critical pedagogy does not begin and end with Paulo Freire, his influence on the field has been immense in inspiring the key ideas that laid out its foundation, and in delineating the path that it followed. Thus for the purpose of this thesis, given its limited scope, I choose to focus primarily on the writings of Freire, particularly his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as his most seminal and widely-distributed work⁴, as well as his ideas on education both as outlined in some of his other texts and as explicated in secondary sources. I will engage with secondary texts on Freire insofar as they aid in our understanding of Freire's work and have contributed to its elucidation.

Defining 'Indian', 'Western', and 'worldviews.'

I find the concept of *worldview* particularly useful in this analysis. I use this term to refer to the *Weltanschauung* of a people group, which originates from the unique world experience of this group, experienced over the span of millennia. This set of fundamental beliefs about reality serves as a framework that influences much of the perceptions, thinking, knowledge, beliefs and actions of group members (Wikipedia, 2006). This term

⁴ My decision to focus primarily on Freire's early writings and especially on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* lays me open to the charge that I have ignored revisions Freire made in his thinking as displayed in his later texts. However given the limited scope of this thesis and the prolificacy of Freire's extensive writings, it was simply not feasible to engage in depth with all his works. I therefore chose to focus on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in my analysis of Freire's worldview, as this is his most widely-read work that has sold over a million copies worldwide, and the one that has most been translated and applied in other cultural settings. However I acknowledge that some of the issues I raise may have been addressed to some extent in his later writing.

is related to the concept of culture, which in this thesis is being defined as a body of “basic ideas and beliefs, underlying values, perceptions, convictions, and truths shared by a large segment of a society”, that shapes members’ ways of being, knowing, understanding, behaving and making sense of the world (Kanu, 2005). The worldview of a particular group is shaped by its culture, and in this thesis I will often use the two terms interchangeably. At the same time, I seek to move beyond essentialist notions of culture that see culture as solidified and intractable and that deny human agency and the possibility of change. I keep in mind Anne Phillips’ more nuanced understanding of culture as “something that influences, shapes, and constrains behaviour, but does not determine it” (2007, p.10).

I have employed a comparative approach for this thesis, because the act of juxtaposing two very different cultural worldviews allows us to see more clearly what is culturally specific to each. But along with a comparative methodology arises the danger of setting up reductionist binaries between ‘East’ and ‘West’, between ‘critical’ and ‘passive’ cultures, and so on. Such binaries can be criticized for falsely assuming a homogeneity of Western or Eastern thinking that disregards great discrepancies and disagreements separating Western thinkers from each other and vice versa. Roberts (2000) argues that there is no single dominant pattern of Western thinking, and that people in both Western and non-Western societies make sense of the world in a myriad of different ways. However, one of the assumptions underlying this work is that there is indeed a difference between ways of seeing, thinking and conceptualizing reality between different geographical regions, stemming from differing ecologies, philosophies, social structures, and educational systems that go back thousands of years – an assumption that is supported by anthropological and cultural studies literature (Nisbett, 2003; Peng and

Nisbett, 1999; Fox, 1994). This belief stems largely from my experiences growing up in three very different global regions (Brazil, India, and North America), and my cultural ‘situatedness’ as both insider and outsider in all three cultural spaces. I want to be careful however that I do not set up Western and Indian in binary opposition to each other, but rather see them on a different continuum, acknowledging that ‘Western’ and ‘Indian’ do not stand in distinct opposition to each other and that each has deeply influenced the other.

Moreover, cultural practices in indigenous groups as much as in the West are shaped by ideological and material forces, and are often tied to issues of power and domination. A potential pitfall that I see particularly among critics of Western colonizing discourses is a dangerous propensity towards cultural relativism, and a tendency to romanticize indigenous cultural traditions while rejecting ideas that originate in the West as invariably destructive within other cultural contexts. But as pointed out in postcolonial scholarship, indigenous knowledge itself is not a static or closed system, and our task is not to seek out some authentic, original and uncontaminated voice that must be preserved (Kapoor, 2003). There is no comfortable, well-defined line between *Indian* and *foreign* pedagogies; rather, indigenous Indian culture itself is hybridized and intertwined with modernist and colonial discourses. Both Western and indigenous cultural practices can be questioned and critically examined, in order to see what is useful and what is oppressive, in the continuing aim of learning from each other through mutual dialogue.

My intention is not to label critical pedagogy a “Western” theory, but for the purpose of this thesis I employ “Western” specifically as Freire himself used the term in the inscription at the beginning of this chapter, and also to situate this thesis in response to authors that have critiqued Freire’s theory for its “Western” foundations. The concept

of “Western” is obviously limited since it does not allow us to adequately represent South American countries that are located in the geographic West but that have experienced a very different historical perspective from Europe/North America due to their position in the global South. I refer to the “Western” assumptions of critical pedagogy in reference to the cultural context in which critical pedagogy developed – within North and South America, and influenced primarily by Euro-American thinkers and worldviews. This is not to say that all Western countries think the same, or that Freire is completely subject to European or North American ways of thinking. I will employ the term “Western” in the context that others like Freire and his critics have used it – thus warranting the quotation marks within which I have placed this term, in the attempt to remain self-conscious about this *strategic essentialism* (see definition on page 21 of this thesis).

I struggle also with the possibility of speaking of *Indian worldviews* in ways that acknowledge the vast diversity and complexity of this enormous country. But while one cannot assume a single uniform mindset that characterizes Indian thinking, it cannot be ignored that there are significant similarities in ways of regarding the self in relation to the world that are shared by members of a group with a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage such as India. Despite its diversity, there are common features shared by diverse people groups in India that differentiate it from other countries, and that have held India together as the world’s largest democracy for the last 60 years – a topic that received significant media, literary and academic speculation as India recently celebrated its 60th year of independence.

While it is important to be wary of essentialist stereotypes, the fear of essentializing can sometimes lead to a postmodern paralysis, where accusations of “essentialism” can be used to silence concerns from marginalized groups. A useful notion

to keep in mind is postcolonial and feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak's concept of *strategic essentialism*, which can be seen as an appropriation of the notion of essentialism by oppressed groups. Spivak argues that in some cases it is advantageous for minority groups to temporarily 'essentialize' themselves and bring forward their group identity in a simplified way, in order to identify common overarching structures of oppression and to strategically achieve certain goals (Spivak, 2001). This can be done provisionally for the purposes of external struggle, while still allowing for strong differences and continuing debates to exist internally between members of the group. Strategic essentialism differs from regular essentialism in two key ways: first, the 'essential attributes' are defined by the group itself, not by outsiders trying to oppress the group. Second, the group acknowledges the provisionality of these claims, and that the 'essential attributes' are simply constructs and at best crude political generalizations, merely invoked when it is politically useful to do so (Arnold, 1992). For example, strategic essentialism allows people to argue that there is indeed an 'African American' culture and hence, a need for African American Studies. There are of course limitations in using this strategy: it can be misused or end up overlooking underrepresented minority views within the ethnic group itself. However I still see this as the most useful strategy to allow us to identify worldview differences that may render critical pedagogy colonizing in the Indian context.

My position as researcher.

Finally, there are practical methodological considerations to be taken into account. Since I am considerably distanced from the context of current education in India on the ground, this thesis will by no means provide an exhaustive review of all educational contexts in all parts of India in the present day. I will be relying both on my own previous memories and experiences, as well as (primarily) on recent accounts and studies by

educators and scholars speaking from India. However, a problem I encounter even as I carry out this research is in obtaining access to literature originating in India, which will influence the credibility of my conclusions. The silence that engulfs the voices of our Indian intellectual counterparts only mirrors the failure of North American academia to genuinely listen to the rest of the world, and the unequal power relations that mark the unidirectional flow of knowledge characterizing the globalization of information.

My research is further impacted by the fact that I have grown up and undergone schooling in both India and the geographical West (including Canada as well as Brazil, Freire's original context), and am comfortable and familiar with all three cultures. My particular researcher positionality, inhabiting both Western and non-Western cultural spaces and neither at the same time, carries with it its own situatedness, multiplicity, acumen and perspective quite different from those researchers situated entirely either in the West or in India. I will be careful not to take sides, or position myself either against Western or against Indian cultural practices. My aim is not to see Western assumptions as completely inapplicable and needing to be rejected by virtue of their origin, nor is it to uncritically condone Indian cultural practices as needing preservation.

Thesis plan

An attempt to introduce change in teaching styles in Indian education must first place these features in the religious, cultural, ideological, historical, and political context that has interacted to shape teaching practices in India, and to impede or facilitate change. Chapter 2 explains the concept of 'culture of pedagogy' and describes the culture of pedagogy prevalent in Indian classrooms, and the extent to which they have been shaped by Hindu culture. It then examines the corresponding historical and political forces that have contributed to holding this culture in place, and attempts to problematize this culture

of pedagogy through the lens of two Indian scholars that have written critically about Indian education. The chapter argues that the current culture of pedagogy in India is not by chance, but is embedded in a centuries-old pattern of thought which has been held in place by two dominant forces – the British empire and the Brahmin elite, who attempted to consolidate their position of power in Indian society by withholding access to education, and in particular access to critical literacy within education. This denial of access to education and especially of critical literacy to the Indian masses has resulted in a crisis of Indian education whereby it is perpetuating inequality and oppression in Indian society, which lays out the need for change within this system.

Having established the context of the culture of pedagogy prevalent in India and the need for educational reform, Chapter 3 turns to what Freire can offer in terms of the conceptual tools to understand the effect that current teaching styles are having on oppressed groups, and in terms of a model of education that equips the majority population to read critically and become agents in changing their circumstances. The chapter lays out an overview of the philosophical foundations of Freire's model, and of why I think these can contribute to the discussion on reforming Indian education. I then present why his model cannot be simply overlaid in the Indian system, based on the specific context in which critical pedagogy developed, and some critiques of the 'Western' assumptions in Freire's work – all of which point to the need to reinvent his model in the Indian context.

Chapter 4 examines the specific sites of slippage between critical pedagogy and Indian culture of pedagogy, showing how these tensions can be traced back to fundamental differences in the cultural worldview underlying both approaches to education. It highlights five key areas that would (or have in the past) create conflict in

attempts to apply Freirean ideas in the Indian setting. The act of juxtaposing the two worldviews brings out some of the cultural specificities of Freire's model, and points out where Freire's theory might need to be expanded or contextualized in order to successfully fit the Indian context.

Finally, Chapter 5 will conclude by reviewing my findings, in terms of what a Freirean perspective can offer to a critique of the Indian culture of pedagogy, and what an Indian perspective can offer to a critique of Freirean critical pedagogy. I return to the question of whether the differences between critical pedagogy and the Indian culture of pedagogy render the former inapplicable in India. I point to the need to move past reductionist notions of culture as incompatible, towards a more nuanced postcolonial understanding of 'hybridization'. After exploring some possible avenues for the hybridization of critical pedagogy in the Indian context in order to address the potential tensions highlighted in the previous chapter, I speculate on the possible entry points for the practical entry of Freirean ideas in Indian formal education, as well as recommendations on future steps needed towards continuing this process.

CHAPTER 2. INDIAN CULTURE OF PEDAGOGY IN ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Chapter 1 has highlighted some of the challenges of the current system of education in India, in terms of the ‘banking’ style of pedagogy and the lack of critical literacy that characterize it. This next chapter delves deeper into the context by which this situation came to be. Any attempt to introduce change in Indian pedagogy⁵ must first place this pedagogy in its context, and must seek to understand the religious, cultural, ideological, historical, and political forces that have combined to shape the purpose of education and its associated teaching practices in India, and that interact to impede or facilitate change. This chapter constitutes a limited attempt at this task of tracing the religious cultural roots and the corresponding historical and political forces that have contributed to shaping India’s existing culture of pedagogy.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the concept of “culture of pedagogy” that will serve as a conceptual lens guiding this analysis. A brief overview of the key beliefs and concepts underlying the Hindu worldview is followed by a discussion of how these have significantly contributed to shaping India’s culture of pedagogy. I then proceed to problematize this culture of pedagogy by examining the historical and political context in which it arose. I argue that cultural constructs and pedagogy styles in India are not neutral but have developed as political tools that have historically benefited two dominant forces in Indian society – British colonial rule and Brahmin elitism. I employ the help of two Indian critical scholars (Mahatma Phule and Jayant Lele) to argue that these two groups have utilized education in order to consolidate their position of power in

⁵ The term ‘pedagogy’ is used here to include both philosophical questions of the purposes of education, and methodological questions of teaching styles – both of which are being addressed in this thesis.

Indian society, by withholding both access to education, and in particular access to critical literacy within education.

Framework: “Culture of Pedagogy”

One assumption underlying this work is that a large amount of what happens within classrooms is determined by the patterns of socialization teachers and students experience outside the classroom. This is the same assumption that marks the strand of research known as *teacher thinking research* (Clarke, 2003), and that is supported by various ethnographic studies of teaching and learning in Indian classrooms (Gupta, 2006; Sarangapani, 2003; Clarke, 2001; Alexander, 2001). For example, in her ethnographic research on teacher thinking among Indian teachers, Gupta finds that teachers’ teaching practices was developed above all not through their formal professional training, but through the internalization of socio-cultural influences obtained through interactions with family, friends, work peers, and from the learning experiences they had in their own childhood. Similarly, Clarke’s (2001) book illustrates how culture powerfully and persuasively constructs Indian teachers’ implicit and explicit models of teaching and learning – constructing what Clarke terms a *culture of pedagogy*. Not only teaching styles, but also learning and cognitive styles and the overall cognitive development of children are shaped by the cultural habits, values and predispositions acquired during the socialization process (Kanu, 2005). Thus, culturally determined worldviews and patterns of interaction influence both how teachers incorporate a particular educational theory into their practice, as well as how students will learn through it.

This accounts for the vast differences in education systems across the world. Alexander (2001) provides a comprehensive example of this, in his comparative study of schools and classrooms across five countries (India, Russia, France, UK, and USA),

where he finds that that in addition to a variety of factors related to the economic, political and demographic context that fuel this difference, teacher thinking and action are strongly shaped by the culture that surrounds teachers. In particular, he found that Indian educational philosophy differs vastly from Euro-American educational philosophies, based on very different notions of what values, skills and attitudes are seen as developmentally and socially appropriate for children growing up in either context. An outcome of the cultural constructedness of teaching and learning styles is the embeddedness of practice in the implicit and ingrained dimensions of the culture of pedagogy, and its ensuing resistance to change. Thus before applying any educational theory that seeks to change current educational practice in India, it is essential to identify the key shared cultural values and practices that influence or mediate teaching and learning in India – in other words the particular *culture of pedagogy* operating in Indian classrooms.

The Culture of Pedagogy in India as Shaped by Hindu Culture

There are several shared features of education in many parts of India that allows us to speak of an ‘Indian’ culture of pedagogy, albeit provisionally, while remaining cognizant of this ‘strategic essentialism’. One of these factors is the largely centralized system of public education in India, where schooling centers around high stakes final examinations that are determined by state and central institutions. Consequently, more than 95% of schools in India are characterized by a centralized culture and set of norms (Clarke, 2001). This was confirmed by the fact that many of the features of teaching and learning outlined in this chapter were described with surprising consensus across various ethnographic studies of schools in different parts of India, from New Delhi in the north

(Gupta, 2006) to Bangalore in the South (Clarke, 2003), from large urban schools (Gupta, 2006) to small rural schools (Sarangapani, 2003).

Another more significant factor is the unifying influence played by Hinduism on patterns of interaction and socialization across various parts of India. Despite the vast diversity of ethnic groups and religions throughout India, “nearly every part of the Indian culture bears the historical imprint of Hindu thought and practices” (Sen, 2005, p.53). This is based on the statistical fact that Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority (about four-fifths) of the Indian population, as well as the historical and cultural fact that the Hindu tradition goes back more than three thousand years in Indian history. Over the centuries, elements of Hindu narratives, mythology, and ancient scriptures have been internalized by both Hindus as well as non-Hindus, and have been integrated into the daily lives of people all over India, transcending religious beliefs (Gupta, 2006; Kakar, 1978). These elements have become so deeply rooted in the Indian world-image that they have permeated across generations and have survived with remarkable continuity through the ages – even among those who may not have read the religious texts themselves. My task is rendered slightly more feasible by the distinctive coherence of the Hindu worldview, characterized by certain common features that pervade Hindu consciousness, as has been pointed out by many Indian scholars (Gupta, 2006; Aleaz, 1994; Vyas, 1992; Kakar, 1978).

The continuity of the influence of ancient Hindu philosophy can also be seen in the way it still shapes education today, as Gupta found in her ethnographic study of Indian classrooms:

In spite of the changing models of mainstream education under the influences of various historical and cultural factors, the basic values and beliefs that children in India have been taught formally and informally remained somewhat constant,

drawing from an ancient Hindu philosophy that prescribes a way of life and continues to be a part of the country's philosophical and spiritual discourse... Despite great diversity among the people in India, there is a certain Indian identity, or Indian-ness, which results from the fact that key aspects of the Veda teaching a way of life have worked their way into the ethos of the larger culture and society in India. (Gupta, 2006, p.52)

This Hindu worldview has influenced education in a relatively uniform manner not only chronologically through the centuries, but also geographically across India, to produce many elements of teaching and learning that are shared across various parts of India.

Key concepts of Hindu thought.

The core concepts of Hindu philosophy that shape its underlying worldview draw chiefly from the primary Hindu religious texts, namely the *Veda*, *Upanishad*, *Vedanta*, *Brahmana*, and *Bhagavad-Gita*, as well as the two Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These texts provide a detailed set of beliefs and constructs about the nature of humanity, the goal of life, and how it is to be lived, and have formed the basis of Hindu thought (Vyas, 1992).

In all of the major Indian-originating religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism), the primary goal of existence and the ideal of humanization is to attain the state of *moksha* or liberation. According to Vedic philosophy, human beings are essentially spiritual beings that form part of a larger ultimate source or reality. *Moksha* involves deliverance from material reality, which is marked by suffering and unfulfilled needs and desires, in order to achieve a true knowledge of the absolute or ultimate reality. *Moksha* entails a dissolution of the sense of self as a distinct 'ego', transcendence from any sense of consciousness of time, space, and causation, from any distinctions between subject and object, until the self recognizes its identity with the Ground of all being – the Source of all existence known as *Brahman* (Kakar, 1978). Thus, according to ancient Hindu

philosophy, one of the primary purposes of existence and subsequently of education relates to achieving spiritual enlightenment and self-knowledge, aimed at an evolutionary ascent into higher levels of spiritual awareness until the oneness and innate harmony of cosmic reality is perceived (Gupta, 2006).

The path to self-realization involves various means such as meditation, knowledge, and devotion, but the most important means to achieve liberation is through adherence to one's *dharma*. *Dharma* signifies faith in a universal law and organizing principle in the universe, which sustains a cosmic harmony that holds society together in a state of interdependence, whereby individuals' societal roles are complementary to each other (Vyas, 1992). Each individual negotiates multiple roles and must carry out the responsibilities and duties ascribed to those roles. *Dharma* involves a sense of duty, social obligation, morality, and responsibility, which provides order to the universe. The achievement of *moksha* in turn leads to liberation from the cycle of *karma* – another central defining concept in Hindu thought. *Karma* refers to a framework whereby human actions operate within a cause-effect paradigm, where the positive or negative nature of one's actions determines the consequences of those actions. *Karma* determines the path of the cycle of birth and rebirth that each individual is held to undergo. Suffering in one's life may be the result of *karma* accumulated from negative actions in a previous incarnation. It is through living by one's *dharma*, while being mindful of the *karma* associated with one's actions, that one breaks the cycle of rebirth and achieves *moksha*. The concepts of *moksha*, *karma* and *dharma* are quintessential in shaping Hindu life and culture and their influence extends to various facets of Indian life, including education.

Influence of the Hindu worldview on the culture of pedagogy.

Based on a variety of studies of the culture of pedagogy in Indian classrooms grounded in ethnographic and sociological analyses of Indian schooling (Gupta, 2006; Clarke, 2003; Clarke; 2001; Kakar, 1978), several key features of the Hindu worldview can be highlighted as ones that strongly influence education. The first is a collectivist notion of the self, whereby the self is viewed largely against a social fabric, as embedded within a social context. The process of psychosocial development in Indian society is aimed not so much at individuation and independence, but on developing interdependence and a sense of duty and responsibility toward the group. This in turn leads to a duty-based code of living that defines clear roles and responsibilities governing the network of social relationships in which individuals are embedded. According to the framework of *dharma* and *karma*, each individual occupies a dignified, rightful caste-based position and function within society, and contributes to the cosmic order as long as they fulfill their appropriate roles and obligations.

Another cultural construct that shapes the culture of pedagogy in India is the organization of society based on hierarchical relationships and structures. Indian society is based on an elaborately hierarchical social order where each individual is part of a complex, stable network of relationships throughout the course of their life, with individual preferences and ambitions subordinated to the welfare of the extended family and *jati* (caste) communities. The idea of individuals as linked together in an interdependent system also leads to a fourth important construct: holism as a shared worldview that encourages openness to regulation. As a result of the internalized acceptance of this system of interdependence as well as of a hierarchical duty-based code of living, “members of organic cultures take an active interest in one another’s affairs and

feel at ease at regulating and being regulated' (Shweder, 1991, p.154; cited in Clarke, 2001).

The above four cultural constructs strongly influence the culture of pedagogy that pervades Indian education. The hierarchical and duty-bound nature of the Hindu worldview contributes to a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, marked by an authoritative stance of the teacher who elicits a submissive and reverential posture from the student in response (Gupta, 2006; Sarangapani, 2003; Clarke, 2001). This construct is a deeply embedded view of the teacher-student relationship that can be traced back to Vedic religious schools in ancient India, where the ideal student was one who revered the guru, based on their position, age and knowledge, with utmost obedience being the most prized value. Religious texts were central to this educational process, and they were considered a sacred source of illumination rather than something to be interrogated. They were transmitted orally, through constant recitation and repetition back and forth from teacher to pupils, in order to facilitate committing to memory long lists and doctrinal formulae (Alexander, 2001). The above model also results in the conspicuous absence of critical challenging of the authority of both teacher and texts on the part of the students. Students' upbringing and socialization often do not encourage questioning, and genuine inquiry is restricted by an underlying assumption that all necessary inquiry has already been made, based on a view of knowledge as received rather than constructed (Kumar, 1991). Students are encouraged to accept rather than question the teacher's statements, which would be construed as a challenge to the authority structure of the classroom (Sarangapani, 2003). This model of interaction can be seen as embedded within the hierarchical social framework and the collective decision-making features of Hindu culture, where the fact that only the teacher asks questions

reflects the importance of the teacher's authority and possession of knowledge. It can also be traced to the collectivist orientation of Hindu culture that leads to a tendency to avoid conflict and maintain a harmonious environment rather than one of critique and challenge.

The worldview of teachers and students is also framed by the culture's openness to and acceptance of regulation. As mentioned earlier, patterns of interaction are highly structured and governed by unwritten expectations and codes, especially toward those with a higher position in the hierarchy of authority. Children are brought up to be dependent on direct guidance and structured support from authority figures, rather than independently undertaking tasks on their own initiative. Thus students were actually found to learn better under greater teacher directiveness, when they are given more explicit instructions or examples they can observe and imitate rather than being expected to independently "figure things out" (Kanu, 2005). This openness by students to direct regulation by teachers is also displayed by teachers themselves in their own teacher training programs, and extends to their acceptance of regulation in their practice both by the prescribed syllabus and by school authorities. The holistic, collectivist, duty-based worldview shared by teachers renders them more comfortable with being assigned prescribed tasks and duties by the state or school authorities. Rather than resenting that their autonomous individual rights are being infringed upon, "regulation by the centre and the state does not produce any conflict or a sense of being imposed upon in teachers' minds. Teachers also feel it is their duty to accept the directions given by people in authority and to follow their instructions" (Clarke, 2003, p.35).

Education is not only shaped by the cultural worldview prevalent in India, but is also active in shaping and perpetuating this worldview, since students are continually

being socialized into the culture of learning in India and the worldview in which this culture is embedded. This leads us to realize, along with Sarangapani (2003, p.253), that

...the practices which seem ritualistic at first glance, because of their monotony and repetitiveness, are not so. The school and its activities have been integrated 'meaningfully' by teachers, children and the community. We see that, for most of the participants, the activities and practices they are engaged in are supported by 'theories' which they share, derived from a popular, folkloric, indigenous cultural heritage.

To the extent that these features of Indian classroom are not ritualistic or idiosyncratic, reforming specific features or introducing an alternative model like critical pedagogy requires that we holistically address this larger cultural framework and embedded patterns of thinking that shape education in India.

Historical and Political Forces that have Shaped the Indian Culture of Pedagogy

The analysis so far has focused on the cultural and religious forces that have influenced the culture of pedagogy predominant in India. These have at least in part contributed to a model of education characterized by a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student; the lack of critical questioning on the part of the students; knowledge seen as received, passed down from the teacher and deposited in students; and a model where classroom learning and content are controlled by the teacher who is in turn regulated by the syllabus and school authorities.

However, India's culture of pedagogy and indeed Hindu culture itself must not be regarded in an ahistorical vacuum. Indian pedagogical styles are not a given, and the above elements of educational practice must not be embraced uncritically and required to be kept static simply because they are 'culturally based.' Many of the above researchers of India's pedagogic styles (eg. Sarangapani, 2003; Clarke, 2003) simply described these features without necessarily examining the power relations surrounding them or the

reason they have developed in this particular way. However cultural constructs need to be problematized and politicized, in order to determine the *way* in which these attributes have developed, and who they serve to benefit, whereby they have been allowed to become dominant in Indian society. These cultural constructs are not abstract decontextualized features, but are embedded in a historical and political context whereby they may have been employed as a tool of social control by those in power. It is thus necessary to examine whether they serve to oppress certain groups or to obstruct positive social change, in order to determine what needs to be embraced and what needs to be challenged.

The following section will present a move in this direction, by examining the historical and political forces that have contributed to the current system of education in India, and in particular the problem I highlighted in Chapter 1 as the lack of critical literacy within Indian public education. I employ the help of two Indian critical scholars – one from over a century ago, and one speaking from the present day – in order to trace two major dominant forces that have controlled education in Indian society – from without (the British empire) and from within (the Brahmin elite).

The legacy of British colonialism.

While scholars like Clarke (2001) argue that the British had only limited influence in altering the pre-colonial indigenous culture of pedagogy, others like Kumar (1991) argue that many of the features of current pedagogic practice are products of specific historical instances of political structures that were put in place by the British to strengthen their colonization of India. Gupta (2006) on the other hand sees an interplay of both – she attributes elements such as the hierarchical teacher-pupil model to ancient pedagogic traditions, while attributing others such as memorization and repetition

primarily to the British introduction of a government-administered national examination system driven by prescribed textbooks and syllabi. This led to a highly-structured, content-based curriculum, bureaucratic control of the education system, rigorous exam-oriented academic teaching emphasizing reproductive knowledge over independent thinking, and a strong focus on reproducing textbook information. In his book on the colonial legacy on Indian education, Kumar (1991) argues that many other elements of current education, including the rigidity of the prescribed curriculum, limited discussion in the classroom, over-crowded classrooms, and inadequately trained teachers, are in many ways related to the legacy of colonial rule. He also attributes the strong focus on 'order' and discipline and the view of static knowledge that underlies present teaching styles to a particular construction of knowledge that arose as a tool of social control under British colonization.

Through this rigid education system the British were able to create a class of Indian petty clerks and low-level bureaucrats to fill administrative positions in order to support colonial rule. This was made explicit in Macaulay's famous Minute on Education in 1859, where he declared the British intention to use the education system not to educate the masses but to "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, morals and intellect" (cited in Alexander, 2001, p.91). Along with the introduction of a curriculum that had no local relevance to Indian students, the above features were intended to produce an elite class of colonial subjects loyal to British authority. This system also restricted opportunities for creative or critical thought for both teachers and children. Crook (1996) in particular argues that the creation of a core and compulsory national curriculum by the British robbed Indian students of the physical

space and time for alternative curricula and thereby ensured less scope for developing critical competence. A great deal of the basic bureaucratic structures and teaching styles that were seen as appropriate by the British to consolidate their power in Indian society continue to shape schooling today.

“Indian culture”, “Hindu identity” and Brahmanic hegemony.

In the above overview of India’s culture of pedagogy, I drew from several authors who have attempted to identify a coherent ‘Indian worldview’ or ‘Indian culture’, several of whom have conflated ‘Indian culture’ with Hindu beliefs and practices (for example Vyas, 1992; Kakar, 1978; and Lannoy, 1971). However these texts themselves can perhaps be seen as belonging, perhaps unwittingly, to a larger political project that seeks to create and consolidate Hindu nationalistic identity. Lele (1996) points out that the very notion of a single unified, coherent “Indian culture” needs to be deconstructed and reformulated. He supports this argument with Bourdieu’s critique of the notion prevalent in theories of cultural transmission that there exists a unified dominant cultural tradition that is harmoniously and linearly transmitted across generations by families and schools working in tandem. While the notion of a unified Indian identity may in fact be an image widespread in India and often embraced by Indians themselves, this must also be analyzed as part of a political project propagated by the religious elite in order to deny certain minorities the power to define their identity.

This political project becomes more apparent when one traces the historical development of Hindu identity and its fundamentalist expressions of Brahminism and more recently Hindutva. Lele (1996) has provided a useful analysis in this regard. He describes how the tradition now labeled Hinduism actually started with three distinct systems of belief and social practice – *brahminism*, *sraminism*, and *saktism*. The former

arose in the Vedic period, while the latter two arose as challenges to the predominantly patriarchal ethos of Brahminism. By the end of the first millennium AD, Brahmins had gained hegemonic status by means of the monopoly of Sanskrit knowledge and its dominance in interpreting the Dharmic law, and due to their role as the legitimizers of political authority, and their subsequent control over rural resources through land grants. However it was only towards the second half of the 19th century that this hegemonic form of Brahminism explicitly expressed itself in a Hindu nationalist agenda that sought to use religion and a distinct 'Hindu' identity in order to unite the nation against the foreign colonial enemy (Clarke, 2000). 'Hindutva' (or 'Hindu-ness') involves a nationalistic reconstruction of the diverse strands of Indian tradition, into a unitary, linear, religiously homogenized "Indian" identity, whose core is defined in Hindu (specifically Brahmanic) terms. This political and educational project sought to consolidate a political constituency that responds to an appeal made to a Hindu identity as hindutva, supporting a hierarchical organization of Hindu society that legitimizes Brahmin hegemony and the oppression of lower castes. In the face of the current deepening crisis of India's political economy and subsequent increased activism by deprived groups, the present iteration of Hindutva attempts to depict this crisis as a threat to the nation from enemies both within (oppressed minorities) and without (neighbouring states), seeking to suppress the critical political activity of the deprived sections of the population as anti-national (Lele, 1996). Nevertheless, throughout this hegemonic project, critical resistance has arisen among the masses to challenge official interpretations of tradition and to attempt to reclaim local interpretations of Indian tradition. One of the most significant of these challenges in the 19th century was presented by Mahatma Phule.

Education as a tool of hegemonic control.

Mahatma Jotiba Phule (1827-1890) was a pioneer in Indian society in launching a historical-materialist critique of caste and Brahminism, and in launching a subsequent movement for the liberation of India's masses from caste oppression. One of India's prominent 19th century social reformers, Phule saw Brahminism as an "ideological and institutional system of monopolizing knowledge and power by a particular class which uses these to exclude, divide and dominate other groups in society" (Mani, 2005, p.252). In particular, Phule saw a close relationship between knowledge and power, and saw education as a key tool used by Brahmins to perpetuate their hegemony. In his first play 'Tritiya Ratna' (the Third Eye), he argues that "by denying knowledge to the shudras, the Brahmins might be held responsible for the condition of masses and for the backwardness of Hindu society itself" (Mani, 2005, p.272). Phule stressed the need to democratize education, based on the belief that the illiteracy and educational disabilities of the lower castes due to their social and material conditions were being reinforced by the power structure of the Brahmins as well as the Imperial government. Phule saw exclusion from knowledge as the main cause behind women's subordination as well, and education as the main resource to liberate them. Along with his wife, Phule established the first girls' school in India in 1848, in his native city of Pune.

Dominant groups in India have used education as a tool of oppression not only by withholding access to education in general, but also access to critical literacy in particular within education. Lele (1996) throws further light on this phenomenon with his description of the intentional suppression of critical moments in Indian tradition by powerful groups, which he describes as a form of pedagogical violence against subaltern classes. Rather than stating that the Indian masses are completely devoid of critical

ability, Lele argues that this competence has been intentionally suppressed, through two different mechanisms operating in different historical situations. Under conditions of social crisis, this surfaces as a forceful reaction to actual or nascent popular critical activity. In conditions of stability, this suppression becomes institutionalized, either through the denial of access to avenues of its expression (eg. from academia, media, literature), or through the rewriting of tradition to enable the hegemonic re-appropriation of critical insights of the subalterns, so as to deflect dissent. This educational project thrives on denying agency to the people,

by controlling competence or the capability of people to critically interpret messages, based on experienced contradictions between ideological claims and the practiced reality, and of thus transforming information into knowledge by making it come true through social action aimed at liberation from want and oppression... The state as an educator has thus functioned not as a controller of information, as such, but as the manipulator of meanings, signaled by texts that evoke popular aspirations and memories. (Lele, 1996, p.333)

Although speaking from different contexts and centuries, both Lele and Phule agree in their diagnosis that the denial of critical ability to the Indian masses has played an important role in their subjugation by the elite. Phule saw the chief evil in Brahmanical domination as the promotion among the masses of blind faith in religious texts and authorities as divinely imposed. He strongly critiqued blind belief, superstitions and rituals, and sought to lay these open to empirical and logical rational inquiry. Phule argued that the first step to the liberation of the lower castes was to bring them out of the ideologies of Brahminism, for which access to knowledge was an essential prerequisite. He termed his understanding of knowledge as *tritiya ratna*, the 'third eye', which he saw as knowledge that went beyond merely alphabetical competence to the power to see through hegemonic ideology, to understand the system of oppression in order to be able to dismantle it (Mani, 2005). Phule "wanted to use knowledge as a weapon to bring about

an attitudinal change leading to ‘a kind of cultural revolution as well as a technological one’” (Mani, 2005, p.271). He saw this type of mass education, which eliminated blind faith, as the key to emancipate the subjugated lower castes and women and to transform the unequal socioeconomic power structures in Indian society.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has highlighted the importance of identifying the *ethos* of the educational culture of India, which shapes teachers’ and students’ understanding of the nature of the teacher-student relationship, the model of interaction appropriate within classrooms, the nature of knowledge and the means by which it is gained. These various features of Indian classrooms are not just idiosyncratic but are embedded in a centuries-old pattern of thought, and have been held in place by complex constructs and institutions and by those who benefit from this system. Different authors present differing opinions on the precise roots of some of these features of Indian classrooms, and whether specific features have been influenced to a greater extent by indigenous pedagogic models or by the legacy of British colonization. Still others (Alexander, 2001) point out the role of economic constraints as having as much of an impact as cultural factors: rote learning, regimentation and ritualization are to some extent inevitable with large classes that average 60 to 70 children. Whatever their precise sources, we can see that these various cultural, historical and political factors interact in complex ways to sustain a specific culture of pedagogy, and any efforts to introduce change will have to engage with these deeply embedded cultural features.

However, hope for change remains when culture is viewed as “something that influences, shapes, and constrains behaviour, but does not determine it” (Phillips, 2007, p.10). Just because the Indian culture of pedagogy is currently a certain way does not

mean this is the way it should and will remain. As seen above, many elements of Hindu culture and Indian education have been used as tools of oppression and should in fact be challenged. Culture and identity are in an ongoing process of complex negotiation, and cannot be treated as finalized and beyond the possibility of change or human agency. This is especially the case in light of the remarkably syncretic and accommodating nature of the Hindu tradition, that is able to allow seemingly contradictory concepts to coexist (Hatcher, 1999) – a theme that will be returned to in Chapter 5. Moreover, the above chapter has demonstrated that challenges to the dominant tradition have in fact arisen from within India itself in figures such as Phule and Lele, besides numerous grassroots movements. These challenges show us that the concept of critical literacy is not a ‘western’ concept that is alien to Indian tradition, and moments of critical resistance have surged up despite hegemonic attempts to suppress them.

However, as this chapter has argued, education as it is currently practiced in India is serving to perpetuate the suppression of this critical literacy and the maintenance of oppressive structures in Indian society. Responding to this challenge will require, as Lele (2000, p.50) prompts us, a critical analysis of ‘what is’ in view of ‘what could be’, reflections on how to bring about such a transformation, and reflections on where this change might occur or who among the social actors could be the agents in bringing about this transformation. It requires the conceptual tools to understand the effect that the current system of education is having on the majority of India’s population, and how we can begin to develop a form of education that equips the majority population to read critically and to become agents in changing their circumstances. In the context of this need for change, I now turn to what Freire can offer by way of a critique of India’s culture of pedagogy, and a potential model for change.

CHAPTER 3. HOW CRITICAL PEDAGOGY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE INDIAN CULTURE OF PEDAGOGY

Having laid out the need for change in Indian education, this chapter now turns to what Freire can contribute to this context. It first lays out an overview of the philosophical foundations of Freire's model, and of the relevance of these concepts to Indian educational reform. I then present why his model cannot be simply overlaid in the Indian system, based on the specific context in which critical pedagogy developed, and some critiques of the 'Western' assumptions in Freire's work – all of which point to the need to reinvent his model in the Indian context.

The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the philosophical foundations of Freirean critical pedagogy, by highlighting his ideals about the nature of human beings, of knowledge, of liberation, of social change, and of pedagogical methods. I choose to focus on five key concepts that I believe summarize the above facets of Freire's thought and that are central to his theory, while acknowledging that the range of his writings are not limited to these alone. These five central themes are: Freire's focus on humanization as the central task of education; his concept of *conscientization*; his commitment to a pedagogy for the liberation of oppressed groups; his focus on empowering agency and praxis towards social transformation; and his promotion of a dialogical relationship between teachers and students. In explaining each of the above themes, I lay out why I believe these are relevant to the crisis in Indian education, and what they can offer by way of critique of India's culture of pedagogy.

Key Themes and Contributions of Freirean Critical Pedagogy

Humanization as the central task of education.

An important philosophical foundation of Freire's work that is relevant to the Indian context is his insistence that education must serve the goal of humanization. Freire points out that all educational practice implies a certain theoretical stance and reflects value options that betray a philosophy of being on the part of the educator – promoting in turn a particular orientation to the world on the part of the students (Freire, 1998d). Through their actions, educators consciously or unwittingly contribute either to humanization or dehumanization (Freire, 1998a). A pedagogy that dehumanizes is one that immobilizes students, failing to acknowledge them as historical beings with a capacity to think and act – what Freire terms as banking education. This pedagogy only serves to perpetuate the condition of the oppressed, whereby they have been reduced to things rather than human beings. On the other hand, a humanizing pedagogy is one which “affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* — as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire, 1970, p.84). Freire reminds Indian educators of the need to ask themselves what assumptions about their students' humanity and capacity to think and act is being implied and perpetuated by the teaching methods they employ.

Freire goes on to argue that in a situation of dehumanizing oppression, the process of humanization must begin through a humanizing pedagogy that empowers the oppressed to lead their own struggle against oppression. Freire denounces members of privileged classes who wish to help the oppressed by treating them as unfortunate objects of humanitarian aid, in need of their rescue and charity – an approach often seen underlying many humanitarian efforts towards India's oppressed groups. These well-

intentioned individuals believe that they must be the executors of the transformation, and maintain a lack of confidence in the people's own capacity to think, to want, to know and to act (Freire, 1970). But this paternalistic generosity itself maintains and embodies oppression, since it requires that the unjust order be maintained in order to justify the generous acts of charity. Liberation cannot be imposed or gifted by another, since this assumes that the oppressed are incapable of knowing and thinking and acting themselves, that they are less than human. "Liberation, a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semihumans. Any attempt to treat people as semihumans only dehumanizes them. When people are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer; the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization" (Freire, 1970, p.66-7). Freire (1970, p.60-61) warns us that:

To affirm this commitment but to consider oneself the proprietor of revolutionary wisdom — which must then be given to (or imposed on) the people — is to retain the old ways. The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived.

Freire sees trust and faith in the people's capacity to make and remake, to create and re-create, as fundamental to a humanizing pedagogy that involves true dialogue and communion with the oppressed. And in the process of entering into the struggle against their oppression and affirming their own humanity, the oppressed take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, thereby also restoring the humanity of the oppressors that had been lost in the act of oppression. Movements for change in Indian society can greatly benefit from Freire's commitment to a pedagogy that works toward the democratic participation of all people, based on a genuine respect for people and faith in their capabilities, true solidarity with the oppressed, and a commitment to disempowering oneself so that others can be empowered.

Learning through critical consciousness.

One of the most important of Freire's legacies is his critique of knowledge that is static, deposited by teachers and memorized by students, and his association of learning with critical reflection. Freire points out that not only the content of education but the very method in which it is enacted contains certain assumptions and serves to either humanize or dehumanize students. "Each project constitutes an interacting totality of objectives, methods, procedures, and techniques. The revolutionary project is distinguished from the rightist project not only by its objectives, but by its total reality. A project's method cannot be dichotomized from its content and objectives, as if methods were neutral and equally appropriate for liberation or domination" (Freire, 1998a, p.512). Freire argues that banking methods of education cannot be utilized in the pursuit of liberation, since they would only negate that very pursuit (1970). Indian educators could greatly benefit from asking themselves who they are working with and for and what effect their practices are having on their students.

The banking model of education which Freire critiques bears several similarities to the features characteristic of Indian classrooms outlined in the previous chapter. Freire describes this model as one that "leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are" (Freire, 1970, p.71). The curriculum is seen as the predetermined property of the teacher, and education becomes an act of mere depositing. Students are expected to passively receive, memorize, and repeat these deposits, without necessitating any act of cognition on their part. This model regards humans as adaptable, manageable beings,

treating them as objects rather than subjects in the learning process (Freire, 1998d). By preventing students from engaging in inquiry and alienating them from their own decision-making, it constitutes an act of pedagogic violence. It leads to the creation of citizens who passively accept and adapt to the world as it is: “Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (Freire, 1970, p.77). Since this model involves only lectures and dictated formulas, students are not taught to debate, exchange or invent ideas; and consequently neither are they taught to discuss or challenge their reality.

In contrast, Freire promotes a pedagogical process of *conscientization*, which seeks to foster in students a critical understanding of the word and the world, helping them develop their own critical and creative capacities to problematize reality and re-create alternative conditions where needed. Knowledge is no longer abstract and decontextualized, but is grounded in students’ own lived reality and leads to an unveiling of the social, political, and economic contradictions emerging in their experience of the world. Collective dialogue is seen as a necessary foundation for this process of dialogical construction of knowledge. “And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another; nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be “consumed” by the discussants (Freire, 1970, p.89). By presenting us with a pedagogic model whose very methods are geared towards the liberation of student’s creative and critical capabilities, critical pedagogy can provide the discourse needed to move learning in Indian classrooms from a focus on exclusively recalling the ‘right’ answer, to focusing

also on critical analysis and to the creative synthesis and construction of new knowledge on the part of the students.

A pedagogy for the liberation of oppressed groups.

Critical pedagogy is marked by an explicit commitment to the liberation of oppressed populations, linking pedagogy to politics and the struggle against oppressive social conditions. It provides us with the conceptual framework to make the link between the pedagogical styles that characterize Indian classrooms, and the way in which these contribute to the sociopolitical oppression that pervades Indian society. One of the most important contributions Freire can make to educational change in India is in raising awareness of the undeniably political nature of education. Freire's basic stance that pedagogical methods reflect political ideologies and contribute either to the domestication or the liberation of students' thinking provides us the impetus from which to begin to examine specific features of the Indian culture of pedagogy in their political context, in order to determine what work these features of pedagogy have historically produced in Indian society, and whose interests they have served.

For example, Crook (1996) describes how teacher-centered pedagogic styles were a feature of ancient Brahmanic education which was traditionally used to consolidate Brahmin hegemony over Hindu society. The prominent role of memorization stems from the fact that Vedic teachers did not allow students to study from written books, but insisted that the Vedas must be studied aloud, with the teachers reciting the text while the students heard and committed to memory. This teacher-centered oral tradition, as well as the fact that high learning was restricted to Sanskrit, helped the Brahmins to mystify religious education and to keep religious knowledge a secret for a long time, as well as to debar the lower castes from participating in learning. Similarly, the supreme loyalty and

devotion with which pupils were expected to obey their teachers was then translated into expected modes of behaviour in the social context. In this context, “it implies unquestioningly performing predetermined caste duties for attaining salvation from ignorance and illusion. There is a sanction of the caste system in the ideology of knowledge itself. And the caste system legitimized the hegemony of Brahmins in Hindu society” (Crook, 1996, p.105). Some of Freire’s descriptions of the means by which the oppressor class subjugates the oppressed by ensuring their ignorance can be aptly applied to the ownership of knowledge claimed by the Brahmin caste in India:

...one of the myths of the oppressor ideology: the *absolutizing of ignorance*. This myth implies the existence of someone who decrees the ignorance of someone else. The one who is doing the decreeing defines himself and the class to which he belongs as those who know or were born to know; he thereby defines others as alien entities. The words of his own class come to be the “true words, which he imposes or attempts to impose on the others... They can no longer live without having someone to give orders to. Under these circumstances, dialogue is impossible. (Freire, 1970, p.134)

Freirean analysis provides a starting point from which to challenge oppressive features of Indian pedagogy, and to develop an alternative pedagogy geared towards liberation.

Empowering agency and praxis towards social transformation.

Another useful element offered by Freire is his commitment to *praxis* as the constant interplay between reflection and action such that one fuels the other in order to transform oppressive reality, through a newfound sense of agency and empowerment. Freirean thought can provide a critique of the passivity that characterizes traditional Indian culture, and its tendency toward accepting rather than challenging social inequality. Based on the two kinds of reality that are embedded in the Hindu psyche, glaring economic and social inequalities are viewed as merely part of the fleeting worldly reality, and thus can never feel as real as the ‘ultimate’ spiritual reality (Kakar, 1978).

This cultural belief thus inhibits a real commitment to overcoming social inequality, since material suffering is to be accepted and used for inner development rather than striving to alter illusory worldly realities. According to Freire, none of these features such as passivity, fatalism or attributing of problems to higher powers – which Freire saw in Brazilian society as characteristic of a magical or semi-intransitive consciousness, exist in an ahistorical void. Rather, all these emerged within relations in which power was structured unequally, where peasants were encouraged to believe these ideas by religious elites who were benefiting from them, thus perpetuating their own material domination (Roberts, 2000). In particular, Freire provides a breakdown of how the banking model of education serves to stimulate the credulity of students, and to indoctrinate the oppressed classes to passively accept and adapt to oppressive social conditions. Thus the oppressor's interests are served by ensuring that the majority population remains in a state of submersion and passivity rather than engaging in critical intervention (Freire, 1970).

The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating knowledge, the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking. (Freire, 1970, p.76)

Freire saw education as a force that could begin to democratize oppressive elements such as the passivity that he saw in traditional Brazilian culture: “Since our cultural history had not provided us even with habits of political and social solidarity appropriate to our democratic form of government, we had to appeal to education as a cultural action by means of which the Brazilian people could learn, in place of the old passivity, new attitudes and habits of participation and intervention” (Freire, 1973, p.38). Both the theory and application of education as a practice of freedom “take the people’s

historicity as their starting point” (Freire, 1994a, p. 65; cited in Glass, 2001, p.17). This means that any historical situation or social reality is constantly open to negotiation and recreation, and subject to human intervention and freedom. The education that Freire envisions is a pedagogy of hope, that allows people to imagine a different world than one of oppression, and enables them to develop their own language that “sketches out the conjectures, the designs, the anticipations of their new world” (Freire, 1995, p. 39). Critical pedagogy can provide the perspective by which Indians can begin to understand structural oppression in terms of unjust social systems and abuse of power by certain groups, and to perceive the role that these have in shaping the specific historical and economic conditions in which people live. It can begin to empower oppressed groups to challenge the status quo, rather than accepting it as the way it is meant to be, and can replace their resignation and passivity with a sense of empowerment and agency, with a belief in their own capacity to create a different world.

Challenging authoritarian relationships between teacher and students.

A final contribution that Freire offers is his critique of authoritarian teacher-student relationships, in favor of democratic classrooms characterized by shared power and dialogue among teachers and students. Authoritarian teachers, according to Freire (1970), believe they know everything and students know nothing; do all the talking while students meekly listen, think and act on behalf of students; enforce their discipline and choices on the compliant students; set up their authority in opposition to the freedom of the students. Freire acknowledges the need for directivity in educational practice, but it is when this directivity interferes with the creative, investigative capacity of students, that it becomes manipulative and authoritarian (Freire, 1995). He argues that this authoritarian stance converts students into mere objects, eliciting either rebellious defiance by students,

or “apathy, excessive obedience, uncritical conformity, lack of resistance against authoritarian discourse, self-abnegation, and fear of freedom” (Freire, 1998b, p.40).

Freire’s pedagogy of liberation is premised instead on a dialogical relationship between teacher and students, founded on shared power and mutual dialogue. Rather than seeing the teacher as imparting all knowledge to students, this model validates the popular experiential knowledge that students also bring into the classroom. It promotes the idea that teachers can also learn from their students:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1970, p.80)

For Freire, this dialogical process must be founded upon love, humility, and faith, fostering a climate of mutual trust and respect. Rather than assuming their right to speak, the teacher learns to first listen to the students themselves, thus earning the right to be heard by their students. Freire argues moreover that truly democratic classrooms must be open to students’ curiosity, to their right to ask, disagree or criticize (Freire, 1998c).

Against Universalizing Critical Pedagogy.

As argued in the above section, although developed in a very different setting from India, Freire has many relevant contributions to make to the Indian culture of pedagogy. Notwithstanding, critical pedagogy must not be seen as a decontextualized universal model that can produce the same results everywhere as it did in the rural Brazilian villages where Freire first developed it. Just as India’s culture of pedagogy is intricately embedded in the sociohistorical context in which it developed, so is critical pedagogy. The next section argues that critical pedagogy cannot be simply overlaid in the

Indian system, but must be reinvented, based on an overview of the specific context in which critical pedagogy developed, and some critiques of the ‘Western’ assumptions in Freire’s work.

Context in which critical pedagogy developed.

It is important to situate critical pedagogy as a theory that developed out of a specific historical and cultural context. Freire’s ideas on education as a means of empowerment for oppressed groups arose out of his reflections on various adult literacy projects that he undertook among rural and peasant communities in northeast Brazil in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His presence at Harvard in the early 1970s coupled with the translation of his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* from Portuguese into English marked a turning point that brought his ideas to the limelight among radical educators across North America, among whom it gained increasing prominence (Darder et al, 2003). It must be noted that the rapid popularity of critical pedagogy in North America speaks to specific conditions and power relations that caused it to come to the forefront in Western educational discourse. Roberts (2000) points out that the attractiveness of critical pedagogy among Western educators was related to the fact that its key concepts like problem-posing and dialogue was seen as complementary to or compatible with emerging “child-centered”, “interactive”, “problem-solving” and other ostensibly progressive approaches to education during the 1970s. A Foucauldian analysis of power would be useful in this regard since it links the emergence of new research or theoretical frameworks to the way these support, or at least do not challenge, the regime of truth that exists within the social or academic community of educational research. A deeper analysis of the historical, political and ideological factors that contributed to the rapid

spread of critical pedagogy in North America would be worth investigating further, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

According to Elias (1976), it is not too difficult to trace the theoretical sources that influenced Freire's thought since his writings are replete with footnotes and quotations. Freire's philosophy has historical roots in 18th, 19th and 20th century thinkers (Elias & Merriam, 1995), most of them European. The main intellectual traditions that Freire drew from in his thinking include liberalism, Marxism, humanist Christianity, existentialism, phenomenology, and theology of liberation (Elias, 1976; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Roberts, 2000). Elias (1976; Elias & Merriam, 1995) traces the beginning of Freire's philosophical journey in Christian humanism. Raised as a Catholic in Recife, Brazil, Freire was strongly influenced by traditional religious philosophy, as well as by more contemporary religious existentialists like Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel. He draws heavily on European Christian scholars such as Emmanuel Mounier, Teilhard de Chardin, and Jacques Maritain in order to apply Christian principles of personal freedom, social activism and change to modern problems. This Christian influence can be seen for example in Freire's heavy use of religious terminology and concepts in his educational theory, such as ontological vocation, love, dialogue, hope, humility, faith. Similarly, Freire's attack of banking education is based on the principle of fraternity or solidarity, which he draws from Christian democratic thought. Freire himself describes his position towards social change as a radical Christian position: "I just feel passionately, corporately, physically, with all my being, that my stance is a Christian one because it is one hundred percent revolutionary and human and liberating, and hence committed and utopian" (cited in Elias, 1976, p.68).

A turning point in Freire's thought can be identified in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, at which point he attempts to meld together Marxist ideas with phenomenology (an examination of consciousness and its various states). The heavy influence of Marxist theory is reflected in the dialectical and analytical style of his writing, and in his focus on "the unconceivable antagonism which exists between the two classes" of oppressor and oppressed (Freire, 1970, p.143). It is also evident in his shift from the advocacy of social democracy to his call for a socialist revolution of the oppressed:

No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why? While only a revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms, the revolutionary leaders need not take full power before they can employ the method. In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary — that is to say dialogical — from the outset (Freire, 1970, p.86).

His later writings attempt to assimilate Marxist theory with radical Christian theology, and he draws considerably from theology of liberation as developed in Latin America, which seeks to apply Christian theology to the liberation of individuals and intuitions from oppressive social forces. Thus although critical pedagogy developed in the context of Brazil which is not usually included under the rubric of 'the West', many of these sources Freire drew from in his intellectual development are indeed based in the broader region of Euro-American thinking, which would mean that critical pedagogy does indeed have primarily 'Western' origins.

Critiques of the "Western" assumptions in Freire's writing.

Another argument that highlights the need for reinventing Freire in India refers to a body of literature to which I can only gesture at this moment, since it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with it in-depth. This literature refers to several authors that

have specifically addressed the fissures and tensions in critical pedagogy that emerge when applied in cultural contexts different from North and South America. The most notable among these has been Bowers (2005; 1983; Bowers and Apffel-Marglin, 2004), who over the last two decades has undertaken a systematic critique of the views propagated by “Freire and his followers”, and has gone so far as to accuse them of espousing a “mission of promoting Western imperialism...masked as a liberatory pedagogy” (Bowers, 2005, p.121). Of particular relevance to this thesis is an article included in Bowers’ anthology by Indian scholar and activist Siddhartha (2004; in Bowers and Apffel-Marglin, 2004). Siddhartha’s experience with Freirean-based adult education initiatives among tribals in Tamil Nadu, India, led him to critique Freire’s ideas as far too influenced by the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on progress and linear development, which are not necessarily supported by Indian worldviews.

Bowers argues that critical pedagogy can result in furthering the hegemonic influence of Western culture, by attempting to impose a Western worldview on the rest of the world. Bowers seems particularly adamant in his charge that critical pedagogy “has become a kind of epistemological prison, an ideological imposition, and a product of formulaic Marxist thinking that deflects people’s attention away from the cultural and historical specificity of place and bioregion and toward class struggle and socialist revolution” (Gruenewald, 2005, p.210). He argues that “Freire and his followers” share a number of the same deep Western cultural assumptions that formed the basis for the Industrial revolution and, now, for the unjust and destructive globalizing political economy (Bowers, 2005). In light of these inevitably modernizing or westernizing assumptions, Bowers argues, critical pedagogy may have some useful elements in an already Westernized cultural context, but would likely be inapplicable in other contexts.

His conclusion is that the use of critical pedagogy in non-Western settings constitutes an act of cultural imperialism.

Bowers' critique has been met with some resistance on the part of critical pedagogues. Some of these latter scholars, committed to the struggle against oppressive neoliberal capitalist ideologies, have (sometimes aggressively) dismissed as preposterous the suggestion that they could be part of that colonizing mindset (see Houston & McLaren, 2005; Gruenewald, 2005). Yet as Martusewicz (2005) points out, by dismissing Bowers' critique entirely, these critical pedagogues fail to do justice to Bowers' basic argument that critical literacy "has to include our careful reading of the particular symbolic maps creating our own consciousness, the deep root metaphors laid down by our own historical cultural processes" (Martusewicz, 2005, p.221). Bowers states clearly the challenge of assessing Freire and his ideas:

Should he be viewed as an essentialist thinker whose philosophical anthropology is based on Western assumptions that were also the basis of the industrial Revolution, or should he be understood primarily as an advocate of dialogue and a cultural sensitivity that precludes imposing on other cultures a Western understanding of the emancipated individual? (Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2004, p.307).

Whether or not all of Bowers' criticisms are valid and based on an adequate understanding and representation of Freire's original words, his critique nevertheless stipulates the important challenge of critically examining the hidden assumptions and implications underlying Freire's ideas⁶.

Freire's model of education does find its intellectual origins primarily in Euro-American thinkers. While this does not necessarily make critical pedagogy an exclusively

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage these critics at depth, but it is hoped that the ensuing analysis will make a small contribution to the debate on whether or not critical pedagogy is inapplicable in non-Western contexts (I will return to this question in the concluding chapter).

“Western” theory, this does mean that one cannot dismiss the arguments of critics like Bowers and Siddhartha who highlight the need to examine the cultural specificities of Freire’s worldview before applying it in other contexts. However, I believe that Bowers is mistaken when he uses the Western-originating sources and ideas of critical pedagogy to label it a “Western” theory that will “undoubtedly have a modernizing effect” and lead to the reproduction of the Western mindset (Bowers, 1983, p.951). As Roberts (2000) has pointed out, “To affirm that Freire draws on a number of Western intellectual traditions, and adopts and endorses principles favored by many other Western scholars, is not to say (as Bowers seems to suggest) that Freire is an unreflexive, “blinded,” carrier of *all* Western views, or of some reified, homogenous, generalized Western mind-set” (p.133-4). This accusation ignores the subtleties of Freire’s work, and posits the existence of one single Western mindset that is shared by all scholars working in a Western context and that is unambiguously reproduced at every application of a Western-originating theory.

I would argue that it is possible to analyze the cultural specificities of Freire’s worldview without automatically labeling it a “Western” theory that is therefore inapplicable in other contexts. While Freire’s ideas may have been shaped by the context in which it arose, the critique of Bowers and others should not lead us to an outright rejection of these useful and complex ideas, and to regard any attempt to promote Freire’s ideas in other cultures as inherently imperialistic, which is what Bowers’ position tends towards. The historical and cultural origins of critical pedagogy does not render its ideas inherently invalid and by definition irrelevant to anyone not living in north-east rural Brazil in the 1960s. Theories cannot be automatically rejected simply because of the unfamiliarity of their source of origin – this is an anti-intellectual stance that precludes the possibility of dialogue across differences and collaboration across cultures. Simply

because an idea may contain assumptions that are more prevalent in “Western” thinking or draws from Western intellectual traditions does not make any attempt to share this model in another culture invariably a destructive act of colonial domination – as long as these assumptions are critically questioned and reinvented in the context of the new culture.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the important contribution Freire offers to a critique of India’s culture of pedagogy. Freire offers us a framework for understanding the sociopolitical context of education in India, whereby specific educational methods reflect particular ideologies and serve either to humanize or dehumanize, to oppress or liberate, to create students who are passive adaptive objects or critical and creative empowered Subjects. He provides the language with which we can begin to challenge specific elements of the Indian culture of pedagogy that are perpetuating the dehumanization, critical suppression, material oppression, passivity and authoritarian control of the majority of India’s students.

Moreover, Freire provides us with an example of a pedagogical method that could potentially teach people to read critically. Critical pedagogy provides a model of education that is committed to serving the interests of the students first and foremost rather than perpetuating their oppression; that seeks to awaken students’ consciousness rather than enslaving their minds. However, since this model was developed in a specific historical context and draws primarily from Western sources of thinking, as pointed out by several critics, this model cannot simply be implanted within Indian schools in a manner that is successful and non-colonizing. We are left with the challenge of taking a

model that was developed for the illiterate adult peasants in rural Brazil, and applying it to the vastly different socio-cultural context of Indian classrooms.

A useful reminder in responding to this challenge is Freire's own commitment to context-specific education, and his warnings that his theory be approached critically and reinvented in each new setting in ways that are non-oppressive. Freire is consistently adamant that any educational program must begin by first attempting to understand the context of the participants, and that educators must respect and dialogue with the worldviews of these participants:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of "banking" or of preaching in the desert. (Freire, 1970, p.96)

It is with this injunction in mind that in the next chapter we embark on a dialogue between Freire's particular view of the world, and the worldview embraced by Hinduism, to hear how the two worldviews speak to each other, where the differences between the two may lead to potential sources of conflict that will need to be addressed, and what each can contribute to the other.

CHAPTER 4. TENSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDIAN CULTURE OF PEDAGOGY

This chapter examines specific sites of slippage between critical pedagogy and the Indian culture of pedagogy, showing how these tensions can be traced back to fundamental differences in the cultural worldview underlying both approaches to education. In juxtaposing the two worldviews, I acknowledge the impossibility of drawing distinct lines between cultures that demarcates where one ends and another begins – but for now I choose to ‘strategically essentialize’ in order to be able to begin some conversation regarding applying Freire’s ideas in an Indian context. Moreover, the following analysis does not imply that the features of the Hindu worldview being described should remain unchallenged – as pointed out before in chapter 2 and 3, many of these cultural constructs have been used as political tools for the benefit of dominant minorities. Freire reminds us that while educators must honor the cultural identity of the oppressed, educators must also critically examine elements of traditional culture to determine the way in which these have developed and the work that they do in that society, in order to be able to decide whether and how they should be challenged.

The challenge is to never paternalistically enter into the world of the oppressed so as to save it from itself. The challenge is also to never want to romanticize the world of the oppressed so that, as a process of staying there, one keeps the oppressed chained to the conditions that have been romanticized so that the educator keeps his or her position of being needed by the oppressed, 'serving the oppressed,' or viewing him or herself as a romantic hero. (Freire, 1997, p. 307)

However, what this chapter argues is that despite (or perhaps because of) their function in Indian society, these constructs strongly shape the culture of pedagogy in India and influence the way teachers and students think, and are likely to result in resistance to and the possible failure of critical pedagogy efforts in India. A critical pedagogy movement in India will have to identify and address these potential sites of conflict. Since the

metaphors and images Freire uses are based on a worldview different from that shaping educational practice in India, a transformative movement will require framing Freire's principles in terms that are recognizable and applicable in Indian education.

To this end, this chapter will return to each of the five key components of Freire's philosophy outlined in the previous chapter – his view of humanization, critical knowledge construction, liberation, transformation, and teacher-student relationship. Each of these features will now be further unpacked and juxtaposed against Hindu views on these themes, in order to explore to what extent there exist differences in underlying assumptions about these five issues between the two worldviews. In each case, these worldview differences will point to potential tensions that would likely arise and need to be addressed in a practical application of critical pedagogy in an Indian context. The differences also highlight some possibilities that an Indian perspective can offer for a critique of the limitations of critical pedagogy in the Indian context, and areas where this theory may need to be expanded.

Nature of Humanization

While Chapter 3 highlighted the positive contribution that Freire's focus on humanization can make to Indian education, unpacking what humanization entails according to the Hindu worldview reveals the culturally specific elements of Freire's view which would need to be reinvented to take into account Indian notions of humanization. The Hindu ideal of humanization seeks to undo the distinction between the Self and the world, Subject and Object, I and not-I. The ideal state of *moksha* involves a dissolution of the sense of self as an egotistic personality, resulting in a transcendence of any sense of time, space, causality, or individuality, to a point where the self is absorbed in its surroundings: "ego, not in opposition to the id but merged with it; individual, not

separate but existing in all his [or her] myriad connections” (Kakar, 1978, p.32). The goal sought for the Self is empathy to the point of complete identification with the ‘not-I’,

until a person also has a similar feeling of ‘I’ in the selves of others...Until and unless this awareness of ‘I’ in the composite self and in the generalized ‘other’ is established and maintained, man, Hindus would say, is living in *avidya*: ignorance or false consciousness – his perceptions of reality and the world remain false, fragmentary – not the true, ultimate reality known only to the liberated man. (Kakar, 1978, p.19-20)

This sense of unity between the I and not-I can be the basis for a deep identification and empathy with the outside world, both human and natural, and could provide a useful root metaphor to motivate collective action against oppression in solidarity with others in Indian society.

This world-image presents a marked contrast with the metaphors employed by Freire, whose ideal of humanization seems to move in the opposite direction by seeking to separate the Self from the rest of the world. A useful framework in understanding this distinction between the two worldviews is Kakar’s (1978) analysis of the differences between Hindu and Western world images. According to Kakar, Western thought is based on the maintenance of ego boundaries, between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, between ‘I’ and ‘others’. In Western societies, psychological development is viewed as a “process in which the individual’s sense of space, time, causality and individuality are formed, and ego boundaries are constituted” (Kakar, 1978, p.21). A similar distinction is reflected in the object of critical pedagogy as repeatedly articulated by Freire (1970) – to differentiate between the Subject and the Object, the Self and the World, so that the self can step back, reflect and consciously act upon the world. For Freire, the essence of humans lies in a separation between the self and the world:

To be human...is to experience that world as an objective reality, independent of oneself, capable of being known. Animals, submerged within reality, cannot relate

to it; they are creatures of mere *contacts*. But man's separateness from and openness to the world distinguishes him as a being of *relationships*. (1973, p.3)

Humans are able to escape an animalistic state of being and step into the role of true Subjects only when they are able to step back and objectify social reality, to understand the world as object in contrast to self as Subject. "Men can fulfill the necessary condition of being with the world because they are able to gain objective distance from it. Without this objectification, whereby man also objectifies himself, man would be limited to being in the world, lacking both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world" (Freire, 1998a, p.499). Thus for Freire, in contrast to the Hindu worldview, a fragmented vision of reality can be made unified and coherent only when the "I" is able to step back and "ad-mire" reality by objectifying the "not-I": "To "ad-mire" implies that man stands over against his "not-I" in order to understand it" (Freire, 1998d, p.488).

This difference in worldviews in turn gets translated into differing views of the relationship between the human and natural worlds. The Hindu view of human beings is characterized by a sense of deep continuity between the human and natural world, seeing both as inhabited by the spiritual, where one intermingles with the other. Hindus believe that there is some life and spirit that infuses everything in the universe, both animate and what is considered inanimate. "For Indian culture, the whole world is one family....The *Arthava Veda* declares, 'The entire earth is my mother. I am the son of Mother Earth'" (Vyas, 1992, p.105). Not only is the natural universe seen as an extension of the human race, but it is also regarded as a manifestation of the divine, warranting an attitude of reverence. This is in contrast to Freire's view of humans which is premised on a fundamental hierarchical dichotomy between humans and animals. Freire repeatedly defines humans in contrast to animals: in their awareness of time, in their ability to step

back and reflect on the historicity of their existence, to master nature by developing culture and to transform it through their work (Freire, 1970; 1998c). The human ability to differentiate between self and world is defined in contrast to animals: “for the animal, the world does not constitute a ‘not-I’ which could set him apart as an ‘I.’ ” (Freire, 1970, p.98). According to Elias (1976), who examines Freire’s citations to trace the intellectual origins of his thought, Freire’s hierarchical placing of humans and animals at opposite poles reveals the influence of his Christian humanism and of the scholastic philosophy and theology of thinkers like Thomas Aquinas. This hierarchy in turn leads Freire to conceive of the human role in terms of conquest and domination over the material world: “The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind” (Freire, 1970, p.89). For Freire, humans master nature through their capacity to invent tools and to call nature by name, leading to the creation of culture. Freire’s view of humanization fails to take into account differing worldviews that see a biological, psychological or spiritual continuity between animals and humans.

Limits of critical pedagogy: Need for a broader notion of humanization

The cultural specificities that have been brought out in Freire’s view of humanization, in light of the fundamentally different orientation of the Hindu view, serve to highlight the subsequent tensions that would emerge when critical pedagogy is applied to an Indian setting. Freire’s view of the nature of humanization is a contextually specific and arguably limited view of what it means to be human. An attempt to impose Freire’s interpretation of what constitutes the ideal state of humanity within an Indian context, without affirming Indian views on this fundamental ontological question, would indeed prove to be a culturally imperialistic gesture that would deny the humanity of Indians

themselves. However what this conflict suggests is not that critical pedagogy is inapplicable in the Indian context, but rather that a critical pedagogy movement in India must perhaps find different metaphors and world images that resonate with the deep spiritual unity pervasive in Indian life, framing its ideals in terms of Indian notions of what it means to be human.

Moreover, the contrast between Freire's view of humans as distinct from their environment and Hindu views of humans as merging with the natural world can also offer a critique of the anthropocentric nature of Freire's thought. Freire's understanding of the goal of humanization is based on an anthropocentric view of humans as discrete from and superior to the natural world, which fails to acknowledge the intricate interdependence of social and ecological systems. If unchallenged, this view could be used to justify the destructive conquest of nature in ways that are instrumental to human development. This critique has been brought up by Bowers (2005; 1983), who argues that the sharp distinction Freire draws between the individual as separate from and superior to the world rather than belonging to a single interdependent life-system, has led to the perpetuation of ecologically destructive patterns of thought in critical pedagogy. According to Bowers, this failure to take into account the interactive nature of life-forming and sustaining processes is the same feature that underlies current destructive industrial economic and political systems that lead to ecological devastation. Siddhartha (2004, p.92, 94) brings up a similar critique in his attempt to apply Freire within an Indian context, arguing that Freire, along with Marx, fails to question some basic assumptions of the capitalist model of development:

Even Marxist theory, in its definition of surplus value, emphasized the role of the working class in its production and overlooked the significance of the resources that the earth provided. Surplus value is not only stolen from the workers, it is also

stolen from the earth...One could only wish that the more meaningful aspects of Freire's ideas could be incorporated into a holistic perspective that integrates the interdependent nature of reality with a critique of the limitations of the present understandings of social progress.

Freire did in fact begin to address in his later writings the critique that his philosophy overlooked crucial ecological concerns in its initial formulation. What the comparison with Hindu notions of humanization can add to this critique is the suggestion that perhaps the ecological tensions in Freire's writing stems from the fundamental metaphor that Freire uses to conceptualize the nature of human beings. By emphasizing that the nature of humans is defined specifically in contrast to animals, and that the task of humanization involves separating one's self from the world and objectifying the "not-I", critical pedagogy is susceptible to a worldview that justifies human domination over the natural world and human development at the expense of the environment. I am not saying that critical pedagogy inevitably contributes to the environmental crisis, as Bowers (2005) seems to suggest. Rather, I am arguing that critical pedagogues need to be more careful in challenging the ways in which their ontological assumptions could contribute to the environmental crisis, and consequently need to be more intentional in emphasizing the interdependence between human and ecological systems. The Biblical worldview on which Freire bases his notion of humans as distinct from and above the natural world does not have to inevitably lead to an environmentally destructive worldview, but can be used to revitalize the metaphor of humans as stewards of the created world who are morally accountable for their treatment of the Earth. In light of the current environmental crisis, it is crucial that critical pedagogues renew the metaphors and assumptions that underlie their ontology, in ways that place a greater emphasis on the continuity and interdependence between human and natural worlds. A dialogue between Indian and

Freirean views of humanization can open up possibilities for reinvention of a broader notion of what it means to be human that places a greater emphasis on the deep interconnectedness between humans and their environment, as will be explored in Chapter 5.

Nature of Truth, Knowledge and Higher Consciousness

Another potential source of conflict lies in the different epistemologies informing critical pedagogical and Hindu notions of the nature of truth, how knowledge is obtained, and what form of knowing and learning lead to higher consciousness. Hindu epistemology is defined by the spirituality that is central to shaping Indian views on the essence of humanity and the nature of reality (Gupta, 2006; Vyas, 1992). According to Hindu thought, the phenomenal universe of perceived duality, the purely physical and mental reality perceived by our everyday consciousness, consists merely of *maya*, a fragmentary and illusory reality. *Maya* is a veiling of the true, ultimate reality—the unitary Self or Cosmic Spirit known as the *Brahman*. This transcendent truth can only be grasped through the development of the individual’s inward world and spiritual journey; “reality and true consciousness emanate from deeper, unconscious intuition, which is thought to be in touch with the fundamental rhythms and harmonies of the universe” (Kakar, 1978, p.24). Knowledge gained through logical reasoning and grounded only in the material world is merely partial or false – it is *avidya* or not-knowledge.

Critical pedagogy, in contrast, draws from a constructivist epistemology that sees knowledge as grounded in the material and rational world. In Freire’s theory of knowledge, truth is something that is actively created by learners through dialogue and reflective action in the material world. In order to acquire “true knowledge, the knowing subjects must approach reality scientifically in order to seek the dialectical connections

that explain the form of reality. Thus, to know is not to remember something previously known and now forgotten. Nor can *doxa* be overcome by *logos* apart from the dialectical relationship of man with his world, apart from men's reflective action upon the world” (Freire, 1998d, p.490). Freire denounces mystical and magical patterns of thinking such as those embodied in the Hindu worldview, that substitute rational causal principles with magical explanations – features of what he considers a naive consciousness that must be replaced by a rational critical consciousness (Freire, 1973, p.18). Freire’s epistemology is grounded in a material reality that can be apprehended through critical rationality, abstraction, dialectal reflection, and decoding (moving from abstract to concrete, from the part to the whole; Freire, 1970), which Roberts (2000, p.39) argues contains some of the rationalist ideals espoused by Enlightenment and liberal thinkers:

True or authentic knowledge for Freire arises not in some realm beyond the sphere of objective reality; to the contrary, knowing is thoroughly grounded in the material world. The origins of knowledge lie not in some form of celestial divination but in the day-to-day transforming moments of human activity... The path to knowledge is not to be found in some form of abstract, inner, individual activity, but in active, communicative relationship with others. (2000, p.39)

This epistemological difference between critical pedagogy and Hindu philosophy has two significant pedagogical implications for potential tensions in critical pedagogy efforts in India. For Freire, “knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [people] pursue in the world” (Freire, 1970, p.71). Since the object of knowledge is constantly changing, it cannot be handed down from one person to another. It can only be constructed by the dialectical opposition between teacher’s canonized knowledge, and student’s individual experiential knowledge, both of which are placed on equal footing by Freire. This is very different from the epistemology operating in Indian classrooms, where the task of the student is

usually to reflect on and internalize knowledge derived from tradition and trodden paths, rather than relying on his/her own limited rational judgment to create innovative knowledge. The hierarchical nature of Indian society where age and experience are seen to bequeath a higher level of knowledge and wisdom to teachers, leads to a great power imbalance between students' knowledge and teachers' knowledge. In an environment where knowledge is traditionally regarded as something that must be passed down from those that have acquired greater knowledge to those who have not, it would be difficult for both teachers and students to equally esteem students' knowledge and to place it on par with teachers' collectively-attested knowledge.

This also leads to a second pedagogical tension that critical pedagogy would need to address in an Indian classroom: the role of memorization in learning. Since the process of learning for Freire is one in which students construct their own original knowledge, "producing and acting upon their own ideas — not consuming those of others — must constitute that process" (Freire, 1970, p.108). Freire rejects memorization entirely as antithetical to and mutually exclusive from genuine learning that involves critical reflection: "If learning to read and write is to constitute an act of knowing, the learners must assume from the beginning the role of creative subjects. It is not a matter of memorizing and repeating given syllables, words, and phrases, but rather of reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself" (Freire, 1998d, p.485). Freire assumes that memorization is incapable of allowing critical understanding, and does not see it as a valid way of knowing: "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1970, p.73). However, the important role played in Indian education by repetition and memorization

must nevertheless be addressed and acknowledged as deeply embedded in Indian pedagogical practices. This stems partly from the oral tradition that originally existed in India, which resulted in a view of knowledge as needing to be preserved and transmitted through accumulation and memorization of information, rather than the abstract analysis facilitated by written language (Clarke, 2001). Memorization as a learning tool is deeply embedded in the ethos of Indian education. In both ancient and present-day learning, memory is regarded as an important cognitive faculty and viewed as an essential step in the process of knowing, understanding and retaining conceptual or factual information (Gupta, 2006).

Implications: Need for a clearer articulation of different types of knowledge and learning

The mechanical transmission of static knowledge evidenced in current Indian education, which can be seen as at least partly influenced by Hindu epistemology, is something that needs to be critiqued for the lack of critical literacy that it produces in that society, as argued in the previous chapter. But at the same time, the conflict between Freirean and Hindu epistemologies also points to the deficiency in Freire's thought of accounting for other theories of knowledge and learning that are different to his own – for example one that sees knowledge not as limited to the material world but also as spiritually divined. His model assumes a worldview that coincides with his epistemology, and fails to allow for the possibility of alternate epistemologies that do not see all knowledge as constructed by the learner. The differences noted between Freirean and Hindu epistemologies point to two limitations of critical pedagogy in the Indian context.

First of all, the issue of power imbalance between teachers' and students' knowledge serves to draw out tensions in Freire's constructivist theory of knowledge that emerge when it is translated into practice, and that have been pointed out by some of its

practitioners. For example, Bartlett (2005) explores some of the difficulties faced by teachers in an adult literacy project in Brazil, in integrating students' knowledge into the classroom in meaningful ways:

Freire's dichotomous division between teachers' schooled, dominant knowledge and students' experiential, subordinate knowledge left him open to two contradictory interpretations, alternately employed by the literacy teachers: (a) the uncritical and culturally relativistic celebration of popular knowledge (and culture) as pure, revolutionary, and beyond challenge and (b) the conviction that students' knowledge was penetrated, alienated, resulting in (essentially) false consciousness, and that therefore teachers needed to serve as the vanguard to lead students to a predetermined conclusion that served their "real" interests. (p.360)

For Bartlett, this difficulty points to a contradiction in Freire's constructivist theory of knowledge production. Freirean teachers experienced a tension between valuing the students' knowledge in the process of dialogical knowledge construction while at the same time trying to achieve a predetermined outcome for this process – namely a Freirean understanding of reality. Bartlett found that many of the teachers "conceptualized their work as respecting and valorizing popular knowledge *in order to further their goal of socializing students into their own way of seeing the world...* This contradiction in Freire's work, which has been highlighted by other Freirean scholars, placed teachers in an untenable position" (Bartlett, 2005, p.357). Critical pedagogy could benefit from a clearer articulation of the different types of knowledge that operate within the classroom, and the power imbalances between teachers' knowledge and students' knowledge.

Similarly, critical pedagogy will fail to successfully take root in Indian classrooms if it dismisses traditional Indian learning styles and fails to adequately address the central role of memory in Indian classroom learning. Critical pedagogy must guard against seeing memorization as evil in itself and as inherently passive and antithetical to learning. The challenge to this view is supported by recent studies that have found that

memorization as a learning tool can serve to aid rather than hinder understanding, and that it is more akin to a deep approach rather than a surface approach to learning (Ninnes, Aitchison, & Kalos, 1999). According to several authors, learners from Asian countries are not necessarily passive learners who blindly memorize facts without attention to meaning and understanding. Many are active learners who struggle to attain a deep understanding of course content, using strategies like repetition and memorization as tools to internalize and deeply engage with well-understood material (Chalmers and Volet, 1997; Biggs, 1996; cited in Ninnes et al, 1999). Memory itself is often seen as an educational ideal to be valued and is included in the definition of literacy in many of these cultures. In the Indian context, memorization must be understood in terms of the role it plays in Indian education, as a construct that hails back to indigenous views of learning, and as a tool that does not necessarily preclude and may in fact assist understanding and active learning – as long as it made to extend beyond blind memorization to other forms of reflection and analysis.

Nature of Oppression and Liberation

Another point of difference between Freirean and Hindu worldviews lies in their contrasting views on the nature of oppression and their understanding of what liberation entails and how it is achieved. The Hindu worldview places a greater emphasis on liberation as an inner rather than outer event, dependent on a spiritual shift in consciousness rather than on the attainment of certain political or material conditions. In Hindu philosophy, the chief cause of suffering in this world is ignorance of the supreme Truth, and a person can only be liberated from suffering through knowledge of the Real (*Brahman*), whereby the soul realizes its oneness with a supreme cosmic harmony (Gupta, 2006; Vyas, 1992). Social, political and economic institutions and disorder are

seen as reflections of or defenses against the turbulence of the inner world (Kakar, 1978). The notion prevalent in India that social improvement stems first and foremost not by acting against outer social structures but in the cultivation of inner morality is exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi's model of social change. Gandhi saw history as primarily not about a struggle between classes or between oppressor and oppressed, but between spiritual and animal tendencies in the world. Thus the enemy is not externalized and located in an oppressive elite class – the enemy is within each of us. Societal oppression can only be addressed by first addressing internal oppression at the level of the individual. It is only by turning inward to achieve greater self-knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, that one achieves true liberation or *moksha*, regarded as freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth and from all the suffering and limitation of worldly existence.

Freire, on the other hand, understands oppression primarily in terms of societal structures and the material struggle between oppressor and oppressed classes. He denounces as lacking structural perception those who attribute the problems in their lives “either to some super-reality or to something within themselves; in either case to something outside objective reality” (Freire, 1998a, p.506). For example, he describes leading a discussion circle where he succeeded in getting peasants to locate the source of their oppression in their oppressive employers rather than in divine attribution. His aim was to make them “‘step back’ from the oppressor, and localize the oppressor ‘outside’ themselves, as Fanon would say,” as the starting point for a discussion on socioeconomic systems, social relations of production, class interests, and so on (Freire, 1995, p.48). This understanding of oppression as external in turn informs Freire's views on liberation, which consists in the resolution of contradictions between oppressor and oppressed classes, and the permanent transformation of social structures, achieved through praxis in

the material world rather than in the inner world. “For Freire, liberation is not a psychological process: it is not something that occurs (purely) as a shift in consciousness, or as some form of inner transformation. Rather, liberation takes place in the transformative action of human beings on the world, under specific historical and social circumstances. Freire is thoroughly Marxist in his stance here.” (Roberts, 2000, p.45). Freire’s understanding of freedom draws from a Marxist view of emancipation that takes place in the transformative action of human beings on the world, tied to the attainment of certain material and physical conditions:

It is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means...people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. “Liberation” is a historical and not a mental act (*The German Ideology*, 1976, p.44; cited in Roberts, 2000, p.45).

This would differ from a worldview such as the Hindu view that sees liberation as an inner rather than outer event, dependent on a psychological or spiritual shift in consciousness rather than on the attainment of political or material privileges.

Implications: Need for a broader notion of liberation

The comparison between Freirean and Indian notions of oppression and liberation brings to light some limitations of Freire’s conception of liberation. By creating the dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed, critical pedagogy ends up externalizing the source of oppression and focuses exclusively on overcoming external oppression to the neglect of internal liberation. As a result it also idealizes the oppressed and fails to provide an adequate analysis of how the oppressed themselves can be complicit in their own oppression or in other people’s. Elias (1976) brings up an astute critique of Freire’s utopian and overly optimistic vision of social change, which fails to take into account the limitations of human freedom. Freire assumes that individuals, once liberated from

oppressive social conditions through conscientization, will be able to act rationally and will use their freedom in a non-oppressive and non-exploitative manner. However, access to critical consciousness and political freedom in itself cannot guarantee that the same humans who created the oppressive institutions in the first place will suddenly act in a humane and selfless manner, simply through the acquisition and practice of critical perception.

In this regard, Indian worldviews make an important contribution to Freirean thought, in pointing out the need for a critique not only of external material oppression, but also of the internal causes of our imprisonment that lead people to exploit others for their own self-interest. Socialist revolutions or democratic political systems cannot keep people from continuing to exploit each other or continuing to be driven by their self-interest at the expense of other people's humanity. Ultimately, any political system, including a socialist revolutionary government, can be manipulated to serve the interests of a few while perpetuating the oppression of many. In fact, in his critical pedagogy work among *adivasis* (tribals) in India, Kapoor (2003) found that critical pedagogy's exclusive focus on external systemic oppression without including an internal critique of individual self-interest ran the risk of promoting a collective *adivasi* interests at the cost of other marginalized groups, or of promoting a culture of self-interest within the *adivasi* community. "The logic of self-interest and instrumental rationalism that was 'successfully utilized' to secure community control over land was now being used within the community, leading to a rise in individualism that is uncharacteristic of Kondh vernacular culture and perhaps, an 'unintended consequence' of the Freirean approach to popular education" (Kapoor, 2003, p.81). Critical pedagogy could benefit from an extension of its

focus on external systemic liberation, to include a focus on internal moral or spiritual transformation as well.

Nature of Transformation of Tradition and Critical Confrontation

Indian society is characterized by a deeply embedded respect for tradition and authority. This stems from the fact the Hindu worldview's hierarchical, duty-based code of living that privileges collective decision-making rather than relying on the moral authority of the individual. Social interaction is governed by a defined set of rules and norms and are therefore predictable, making it unnecessary "for each individual to access the exigencies of a particular encounter or circumstance on [their] own, and encourage[s] them] to respond according to a tried-and-true traditional pattern" (Kakar, 1978, p.108). In Hindu culture, the importance of staying true to one's life-path (*dharma*) makes it more prudent for individuals not to rely on their own limited individual judgment, and instead to follow the path of their ancestors and community, to ensure that they are following the 'right' path. All these factors generate a deep respect for the authority of traditional beliefs and culture.

When seen in light of Hindu worldviews, Freire's linear view of historical development can be seen to display a bias towards transformation, and a tendency to create truths in opposition to tradition and authority. According to Freire, human agency is central in constructing history, and the role of humans is to intervene in order to transform rather than adapt to traditional society. For Freire, being human implies constantly transforming one's world: "to speak a true word is to transform the world.... To exist humanly is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*" (Freire, 1970, p.87-88). Freire even prioritizes transformation above the act of reflection: "First of all I

have to act. First of all I have to transform. Secondly I can theorize my actions – but not before” (Freire, 1971a, p.2; cited in Roberts, 2000, p.37). Freire’s prioritizing of change leads to a bias against tradition, and a tendency to regard traditional culture and thought as either oppressive or naive, and inherently needing to be rejected or transformed.

Freire’s assumption about the individual’s right to reject tradition and to invest the world with their own sense of meaning reflects his constructivist epistemology which sees knowledge and history as continuously being constructed and reinvented. Drawing from a Marxist perspective, Freire believes in cultural revolution that completely transforms traditional culture and rejects the old order – “through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation” (Freire, 1970, p.55). As Bowers (1983) argues and Margonis (2003) agrees, Freire’s tendency to reject tradition goes against the orientation of many indigenous groups that are devoted to the maintenance of traditional culture:

Freire – like John Locke, like John Dewey – deemphasizes the value of tradition; this is one of the basics of enlightenment thought. Whether it be called reason, dialogue, or the method of intelligence, enlightenment philosophers have continually placed their faith in a process of producing truth that stands in opposition to dogma and tradition. This is a very different mindset than that of Vizenor, for whom cultural survival is the highest aim. Bowers and Vizenor are hardly alone in emphasizing Indigenous groups’ commitment to the maintenance of culture....Marxists may believe in wiping the slate clean of old beliefs which sanction oppression, but many Indigenous peoples are devoted to the maintenance of cultures that show little commitment to democracy or socialism. (Margonis, 2003, p.151)

Roberts (2000) too, while he adheres to Freire’s philosophy and rejecting Bowers’ critique, concedes that the restless critical orientation to the world promoted by Freire is likely to be different from many traditional approaches to reality – “even if it’s not “the Western” mindset, it does privilege critical modes of consciousness over what Freire sees as more ‘passive and naïve’ forms of thought” (p. 132).

In practical terms, Freire's bias towards transformation and towards defining truth in contrast to tradition leads to a challenging and confrontational stance that resists authoritative statements, and tends to favor revolution against tradition. The questioning, confrontational approach implied by Freire's methodology may prove to be potential site of conflict with the more consensual, harmonious patterns of interaction favored in Indian society. Freire's critical consciousness is characterized by "highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life" (Freire, 1973, p.18). This is also tied to Freire's model of dialogical construction of truth which is based on the Marxist dialectic pattern, where one idea must clash with another in order to produce a superior idea. In an Indian context this would be seen as a combative approach, encouraging confrontation which Indians are generally not socialized to value, and which in fact did generate resistance in former attempts to introduce Freirean-inspired approaches in India. This is reflected in Kanu's (2005) record of an attempt to encourage Indian teachers to take a more critical and questioning stance to texts and to social reality. During the teacher training program, teachers saw the approached being promoted as a combative stance that clashed with their deeply-held beliefs about maintaining harmonious relations with others:

What I find difficult to do is when I am required to analyze and challenge what someone else has said or written and to find fault with it... in the class activity we were being forced to criticize the objectives approach and it was hard because we are not the authority on this approach. Tyler is the authority and we should not show disrespect for his views... (Kanu, 2005, p.504)

Another teacher gave the following explanation for the difficulty she was experiencing in writing a literature review:

...Because I am expected to fight with each writer over what they have written about the constructivist approach to teaching mathematics (her thesis theme). I feel that if people have studied this approach and written about its benefits it is not

for me to challenge and criticize their idea beforehand. My duty is to try this approach in Pakistan before criticizing it, not find fault with it beforehand. (Kanu, 2005, p.504)

Kanu (2005) explains that the disputive stance towards authoritative statements implied by the critical approach was a type of intellectual discursive practice that reflected the appropriate child-adult interaction models predominant in western middle-class families, where children are rewarded for expressing their opinions and challenging adult ideas. Adult-child interactions are more formalized in Indian society, and children are taught to pay deference to and learn from authority figures rather than disputing against them.

This conflict was also experienced by Siddhartha (2004) in his attempt to promote critical pedagogy in an Indian tribe in order to organize the villagers against a government attempt to dislocate the tribe. Siddhartha (2004) found that the confrontational Freirean approach the educators were trying to promote went against the consensual and cooperative conflict-solving approach traditionally favored by the community. The young people who were trained into an activist force also began to disrespect the tribal chiefs and attack their authority in the tribe. But it was the traditional authority of the tribal chiefs that had hitherto held the small community together, and Siddhartha found that their Freirean program resulted in the weakening of the sense of community and in the disintegration of the tribal way of life. In light of this cultural conflict, an emphasis on controversy, debating, and taking opposing views as instructional strategies might clash with Hindu cultural values and might be resisted in Indian classrooms. In an Indian context, critical pedagogy would have to be reinvented in ways that are not seen as combative and disrespectful toward authority and tradition.

Implications: Limits of Freire's bias towards transformation against tradition

The conflict between Freirean and Indian worldviews highlights the need for critical pedagogy to more deeply engage with and affirm traditional knowledge and intergenerational learning, rather than creating a sharp dichotomy between traditional and critical consciousness and seeing the two as mutually exclusive. By placing too great an emphasis on transformation of traditional forms of consciousness, critical pedagogy tends to undermine traditional modes of thought, and in the process goes against the deep interconnection, reciprocity and respect for traditional and intergenerational knowledge that characterizes many indigenous cultures, including in India. Freirean epistemology could benefit from analyzing the ways in which so called traditional cultures already engage in critical reflection. By confining himself to a narrow definition of conscientization defined strictly by Marxist-based dialectical modes of thinking and ideology critique that derives primarily from a European intellectual tradition, Freire elevates this particular form of reason above other forms of knowing. This leads him to create a sharp dichotomy between what he sees as a critically conscious culture versus a submerged 'culture of silence' that has yet to be enlightened with critical modes of thought. In the process, Freire overlooks the rich repositories of wisdom and critical acumen already contained by traditional cultures: "Freire does not appreciate that the very same people are naive about some things and clear about others. Apart from being street smart, they are also storehouses of traditional wisdom related to health, agriculture, and technology. They are reservoirs of psychological and spiritual energy, which could sustain alternate paradigms" (Siddhartha, 2004, p.97). One way of conceiving critical reflection in broader terms is to see it not necessarily as a specific form of Marxist dialectic social analysis, but to see it operating in any "moment of reflection that

challenges orthodox interpretations because they have lost their relationship to reality and are therefore seeking to retain legitimacy through an apparatus of ideological legitimization” (Lele, 2000, p.50). This broader view acknowledges critical reflection as a widespread human faculty that need not be confined to institutionalized, scientized discourses or bottled into evolutionary categories of ‘critical’ and ‘uncritical’ cultures.

Nature of Relationship Between Teacher and Students

Another feature of Freire’s model that may generate conflict in an Indian setting is Freire’s ideal of a dialogical relationship between teacher and students where power differences between the two are erased. Freire’s pedagogy attempts to foster a horizontal relationship between teacher and students: “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire, 1970, p.72). Freire seeks “to resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students” (p.75). He rejects a model where the teacher knows more and has the prescribed role of teaching the student whose role it is to learn.

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on “authority” are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other” (Freire, 1970, p.80)

This pedagogical model is based on a democratic worldview that is completely against any form of hierarchy. Freire’s notion of dialogue, which is central to his philosophy, necessitates “a horizontal relationship between persons” (Freire, 1973, p.45). He encourages students to be open, democratic, free to ask questions, to disagree with or

criticize the teacher, to put the teacher to the test (Freire, 1998c, p.60). He rejects authoritarian teachers who “are always the initiators of talk, while the students are continually subjected to their discourse. They speak to, for, and about the learners. They talk from top to bottom, certain of their correctness and of the truth of what they say” (Freire, 1998b, p.64). For Freire, a truly democratic classroom is one where the students speak first, and where all have an equal voice and the disposition to question, criticize, and debate.

This horizontal teacher-student relationship may not be appropriate in Indian classrooms, which are characterized by a deep respect for the authority of the teacher, which is seen as legitimate and justified. The hierarchical structure of Indian society, a centuries-old tradition of a guru that is worthy of the student’s complete respect, coupled with the resulting popular, folkloric constructions of the teacher’s and student’s roles, as well as the local cultural models of appropriate adult-child and parent-child authority patterns, have been internalized in both teachers’ and students’ thinking, resulting in a naturalization of the teacher’s authority at a subconscious level of the psyche.

All the representations of the teacher-taught relationship oblige the child to accept the moral and epistemic superiority of the teacher and therefore to concede his authority. The power relationship in which the teacher and students are bound together is an essential aspect of their roles and orientation to each other. The position of authority is a part of the identity of the teacher and the acceptance of authority is a part of the identity of the student. (Sarangapani, 2003, p.121)

A model that seeks to eliminate all power differences in the classroom and encourages students and teacher to have an equal voice may not be easily adopted or even appropriate within this context. Sarangapani’s study of Indian classrooms shows that students themselves actively participate in creating the reality of the classroom. The power relationship in which teacher and students are positioned, and their appropriate roles in

relation to each other on acceptance of the teacher's authority, are actively embraced as part of the identity assigned to each role. In this context, the teacher's authority is not regarded as negative, and a horizontal teacher-student relationship may not be seen as desirable. Respectful listening rather than critical dispute is considered a sign of respect and deference to the teacher's age, knowledge, and position.

Freire's ideal of shared power between teachers and students also translates into a non-directive stance on the part of teachers, where students are able to direct their own learning. For Freire, the truly liberating teacher does not attempt to retain control over the students' learning, but attempts to hand over control to the students themselves; "The teacher's role, thus, is to step in – to initiate, redirect, or give a focus to, dialogue and study – with the express purpose of creating the possibility for *others* to give direction to the educative process" (Roberts, 2000, p. 62). Freire (1970) describes an instance where his students asked him to speak first, since as the teacher he knew more; and Freire argues against this, rejecting the notion that the teacher knows more than the student, and urging the students to speak instead of what they already knew. This non-directive stance proved to be a source of conflict experienced in past efforts at introducing a critical approach in an Indian context, which found difficulty in replacing teacher-directivity with more student-driven, independent learning. For example, Clarke's (2003) study found that even after receiving training in more critical participatory approaches, the teacher continued to be the primary player in the classroom, continued to be in control and to define the parameters for student participation. Similarly, Dyer and Choksi (2002) also found great difficulty in producing the high levels of personal autonomy and critical reflexivity among teachers and students required by their approach, and in changing the role of the teacher from one of controlling or directing the classroom activities to that of a

more unobtrusive facilitator. Freire's model of student-directed learning may be difficult to implement in an Indian context, where "children are brought up to be dependent on direct guidance and structured support from authority figures, rather than independently undertaking tasks on their own initiative" (Kanu, 2005, p.506). Kanu's research demonstrates that Indian students were actually able to learn better under greater teacher directiveness, and were found more likely to accomplish an assigned task when they were given explicit instructions or examples that they could observe and imitate, rather than being expected to figure things out on their own. The value of directive, expository and mimetic teaching styles can be better understood when placed against the hierarchical and duty-based features of the Hindu worldview, encouraging openness to regulation and direct guidance and a preference for deep, slow learning through imitation and repetition.

Limits of critical pedagogy: Need for a deeper understanding of power

The conflict between Freirean and Indian notions of the ideal power relationship between teachers and students suggests that critical pedagogy could benefit from a deeper engagement with the concepts of power and authority, as well as from a deeper analysis of the ways in which students or oppressed groups are also already exercising power. Blackburn (2000) brings up the critique that Freire tends to disvalue traditional and vernacular forms of power, and creates an overly simplistic categorization of the oppressor as those who control power and the oppressed as those who have none. Freire's understanding of power derives largely from European Marxist traditions, whereby power is seen primarily in terms of control over material resources and means of production. This leads to a view of empowerment primarily in terms of the gaining of greater political and social space by the poor and oppressed. "The inappropriate imposition of a certain vision of power on the people who may not perceive themselves as powerless and,

moreover, may not want to be empowered in the way that is being prescribed, is a problem area that has not been sufficiently addressed by Freireans” (Blackburn, 2000, p.11).

Moreover, Freire tends to depict all power differences and hierarchy as negative, and draws from a liberal democratic worldview in positing the ideal of freedom and autonomy as one characterized by horizontal relations of power, whether between student and teacher or between different groups in society. However, the nature of the hierarchical Indian society demonstrates that not all forms of authority are viewed as negative and coercively imposed on others. What matters is how power is used. Instead of aiming to erase power differences completely, what needs to be ensured is that power is being used in the interests of the other. Here the need for internal transformation mentioned becomes all the more important – even the distribution of political and economic resources will not preclude the possibility of continued exploitation in new forms, unless there is a radical shift in consciousness whereby people are no longer seeking their own self-interest alone, but seeking the interests of others. When this shift happens, even power inequalities can be still used for the good of the other.

Conclusion

This comparison of the assumptions of critical pedagogy to those of a Hindu worldview speaks to us of the need to resist the attempt to universalize Freire’s theory as a recipe for all times and places. We saw how many of the assumptions of critical pedagogy are indeed culturally specific. The Hindu worldview contains several differing assumptions from Freire about the nature of humanization, the nature of truth and knowledge acquisition, the nature of oppression of liberation, the relationship towards tradition, and the ideal teacher-student relationship. These differences have pointed to

potential tensions that might arise and need to be addressed in a practical application of critical pedagogy in an Indian context. They have also highlighted some possibilities that an Indian perspective can offer for a critique of the limitations of critical pedagogy in the Indian context, and areas where this theory may need to be extended.

This juxtaposition serves as a reminder of the fact that we must deeply and critically examine the assumptions underlying Freire's model in every attempt to translate this theory into practice, especially in a different culture such as India – and not simply assume that Freire's philosophy is universal. Freire himself denounces the act of cultural invasion that would constitute an attempt that ignored the different worldview held by Indians and that applied his model uncritically in the Indian context:

Cultural invasion, which serves the ends of conquest and the preservation of oppression, always involves a parochial view of reality, a static perception of the world, and the imposition of one world view upon another. It implies the "superiority" of the invader and the "inferiority" of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former, who possess the latter and are afraid of losing them. (Freire, 1970, p.160)

However, the differences between the Hindu worldview and that of critical pedagogy do not mean that this theory is inapplicable or inherently imperialistic in the Indian context.

The next concluding chapter will return to the question of the applicability of Freire's ideas in the Indian context, and will explore potential avenues for its reinvention in Indian education, as well as suggestions for where and how this reinvention might occur.

CHAPTER 5. POSSIBILITIES: TOWARDS REINVENTING FREIRE IN THE INDIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context. (Freire, 1997, p. 308)

Review: Applicability of Critical Pedagogy in Indian Education

This thesis has explored the possibilities and tensions in reinventing Freirean critical pedagogy in the context of Indian formal education. Chapter 2 demonstrated that education in India is serving to oppress the majority of its population, and that one of the main tools of this oppression is through denying education and in particular critical literacy to the masses, so that men and women uncritically accept a cultural ideology and social structure that serves to enslave them. It also argued that the current system of pedagogy in India is a result of a complex framework of cultural, religious, historical and political forces that interact to impede change, and that would need to be addressed before a model for reform can be successfully implemented. Chapter 3 explored critical pedagogy as an educational theory that can speak to the need for change in Indian education and that can offer a model for this transformation. Freire provides the language with which we can begin to challenge specific elements of the Indian culture of pedagogy that are perpetuating the dehumanization, critical suppression, material oppression, passivity and authoritarian control of the majority of India's students. However, as Chapter 4 has argued, the specific shape that this theory takes in practice will need to be redetermined in the Indian context, due to underlying worldview differences between Freirean and Hindu worldviews, which would create potential tensions or resistance that may result in project failure. Critical pedagogy must be reinvented based on which of Freire's ideas are applicable to the context of Indian education, and which of his

assumptions on the other hand are culturally specific and will need to be redefined in Indian terms, in keeping with the ideals of humanization, epistemology, liberation, ontology and pedagogy that are valued in Indian society.

Chapter 5 will now explore some potential ways of addressing the tensions highlighted above. It will begin by returning to the question of whether the worldview differences render critical pedagogy inapplicable in Indian society. It argues for a more complex postcolonial concept of ‘culture’ that moves past binary depictions to the acknowledgement of the hybridity that exists in India as a postcolonial society, thus offering room for hope. It then offers specific suggestions for the hybridization of critical pedagogy in the Indian context, in ways that address the five areas of tension outlined in the previous chapter. It goes on to speculate about where this scope for change might lie in Indian society, based on an analysis of the nature of hegemony which generates critical resistance among those to whom it denies benefits, and which also must allow room for this critique to co-exist in order to maintain its hegemonic position. Finally, I suggest increased opportunities for educational change to occur in India in light of globalization, and offer suggestions for future steps needed to make this change a reality.

Is Critical Pedagogy Imperialistic and Inapplicable in India?

The question that remains is whether the ‘Western’ origins of Freirean critical pedagogy render it inherently imperialistic and inapplicable in other contexts, and whether promoting its ideals in a different culture such as India would constitute an act of cultural invasion, as certain critics seem to argue. The irony in Bowers’ stance of constituting a major rebuttal to Freire’s philosophy, is that Freire himself would likely agree with and welcome much of his critique, and work towards questioning and overcoming oppressive elements in his own practices. What must be kept in mind is

Freire's own commitment to context-specific education and to challenging oppressive ideologies, even those underlying his own ideas – which is what allows me to undertake the critique involved in this thesis while still highly esteeming Freire's philosophy.

Freire offers the oppressed and (development practitioners) keys to many doors, and he urges us to open them and enlarge our vision. But he also leaves us to decide what to do and where to go once those 'doors of perception' have been opened. In short, rather than provide us with a set path, Freire seeks to improve our perception of each stage of the journey that is life. (Blackburn, 2000, p.13)

The beauty of a philosophy that values mutual dialogue, critical self-reflection and love and that seeks to transform power inequalities is that it is itself constantly open to questioning its own assumptions and working towards self-transformation. A philosophy that seeks to destabilize power centres and seeks power not for itself but for those it aims to help cannot be labelled imperialistic. Margonis notes that there have been successful educational programs that meld Freirean principles with Indigenous cultures to create "hybrid pedagogies that serve Indigenous students well; such pedagogies were only possible because liberatory educators devoted themselves to a sympathetic understanding of Indigenous perspectives – even when those perspectives violated sacred aspects of critical pedagogy" (Margonis, 2003, p.153).

Gore's (1993) application of the Foucauldian concept of 'regimes of truth' to critical pedagogy discourse is useful in highlighting the idea that pedagogy is a site of struggle and its effects can never be wholly predicted and pronounced *a priori* as either liberating or oppressive:

There are no inherently liberating or repressive [pedagogical] practices, for any practice is cooptable and any capable of becoming a source of resistance. After all, if relations of power are dispersed and fragmented throughout the social field, so must resistance to power be. Thus evaluating the political status of [pedagogical] practices should be a matter of historical and social investigation, not a priori pronouncement (Sawicki, 1988b, p.186; cited in Gore, 1993, p.57).

Critical pedagogy cannot be labelled as inherently imperialistic – it can only be colonizing in specific contexts, in certain articulations or practices of it. As Freire reminds us, “An individual is not antialogical or dialogical in the abstract, but in the world. He or she is not first antialogical, then oppressor; but both, simultaneously” (Freire, 1970, p.138). Rather than rejecting it in its entirety, we need to reinvent critical pedagogy in each new context in which it is considered, challenging assumptions that prove colonizing in that context, and learning from what is potentially useful and liberating in that context. Whether specific Freirean assumptions and methods will prove to be liberating or colonizing “depends on who uses them, in favor of what or whom, and for what purpose” (Freire, 1993, p.93). It is important not to be paralysed by critiques of the cultural limitations of Freire’s theories, but to use Freire’s commitment to context-specific education as a guiding principle in the creation of hybrid pedagogies that are able to empower indigenous groups rather than colonizing them further.

Towards more complex and hybridized notions of culture

At the start of this thesis I self-consciously assumed the language of *strategic essentialism* in discussing the Indian culture of pedagogy and its interaction with the worldview of critical pedagogy. I acknowledged however that such essentialisms are only a provisional stance in order to engage in a particular conversation – and I now return to the provisionality of these generalizations. While the cultural features described in the previous chapters do exist as broad trends and forces operating in Indian society, the reality is much more complex than these descriptions have made it out to be. In reality, cultures possess multiple layers, allowing for inconsistencies and contradictions to often coexist with each other in people’s belief systems or frames of action – whether blindly or consensually. And it is in the niches and crevices carved out by this complexity that we

find room for possibility for critical pedagogy to be reinvented in Indian education. In this regard I return to Anne Phillips' (2007) critique of multiculturalism invoked in the introductory chapter. Phillips critiques the tendency in multiculturalism discourse to represent non-Western individuals as irrevocably determined by their culture, compelled by cultural dictates to behave in particular ways. We cannot deny the human agency of people in India to counteract dominant cultural forces, which despite having influenced their thought and action, do not inevitably determine their behaviour.

Phillips (2007) seeks to dispense with reified notions of culture that stress the unity and solidity of cultures and the intractability of value conflict between cultures. Despite important areas of cultural disagreement, Phillips argues that most cultures do subscribe to a similar set of basic ethical principles and shared norms. Despite cultural differences between critical pedagogy and the Indian culture of pedagogy, Indian society still values many of the same ideals of humanization, of liberation, of positive social change and democracy that critical pedagogy also aspires to. These shared ideals are what make critical pedagogy still applicable to the context of Indian education, even if the specific nuances of how these ideals play out might look different or need to be rearticulated in the Indian context. Critical pedagogy need not be posited as a binary against the Hindu worldview; the challenge rather is to look within the Hindu tradition itself to find similar values and metaphors that reverberate with the ideals of critical pedagogy, and to rearticulate critical pedagogy in these terms.

I return also to the postcolonial framework invoked in the first chapter, to remind us that as a postcolonial society, India does not possess a static, uncontaminated indigenous culture that must be preserved against all foreign influence. Postcolonial scholars such as Bhabha (1994) have employed the concept of *hybridity* to emphasize that

racial and cultural purity do not exist and that all cultures are to some degree hybrid, intermingling the cultures of the colonizer and colonized. Bhabha describes how cultural differences and identities are negotiated in what he calls the “Third Space of Enunciation”:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or “purity” of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. (Bhabha, 1994, p.37)

This hybrid Third Space involves a variety of adaptation strategies by which different cultural practices are assimilated and reinterpreted through people’s own existing structures of understanding, thus producing something familiar but new, in ways that can prove enriching and dynamic, as well as oppressive. Ashcroft states how “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth” (1995, p.183).

The transcendence of binaries is also encouraged by the non-dualistic nature of the Hindu worldview, which sees no fundamental distinction between mind and matter, and views dichotomies as unreal or mere illusory phenomena. This leads to an attitude of tolerance in Hindu thought towards contradiction and ambiguity, with little apparent need or compulsion for compartmentalization and resolution of binaries such as good/evil, sacred/profane, inner/outer (Kakar, 1978). It also leads to a remarkable eclecticism that characterizes the Indian cultural tradition as well as modern Hindu discourse, as emphasized by Hatcher (1999) in his analysis of the process of cultural and religious change in modern Indian society. Hinduism is a syncretic and inclusive tradition, and is

able to contain within itself many concepts which would be contradictory in Western thought. Hatcher traces the ancient Indian antecedents of this eclecticism, seen particularly in the sacrificial cosmology of the Vedas, and evident in various Hindu thinkers ranging from Rammohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi, who have routinely supported their interpretations of the Hindu worldview with what seems an almost promiscuous use of the world's many philosophies and religions. Hatcher also cites as an example the medical eclecticism prevalent in India: “[i]n the village, no statement, and no narrative, was ever felt to be entirely right or wrong, and so none was discarded. Contradictory, incompatible explanations were allowed to coexist...” (Carstairs, 1957, cited in Hatcher, 1999, p.73). Tribal and Western medicine have historically run side by side “like the river and the railway tracks – parallel yet distinct, unconnected, and yet clearly related.” It is this permeability of the Hindu worldview to seemingly paradoxical and eclectic traditions that has historically allowed it to accommodate to and even incorporate contradictory viewpoints, and that now opens up the possibility for it to embrace a reinvented critical pedagogy despite its conflicting elements.

As this postcolonial analysis suggests, it is possible to move beyond binary representations of Freire’s worldview against Hindu worldviews, to the creation of hybrid pedagogies that combine non-oppressive elements of both in order to empower Indians to create positive change in Indian society. At the same time, the specific form that this reinvention will take can only be determined in context:

If it is an approach or an orientation toward human beings and the world with which we are dealing, then specific “how to” questions can only be addressed in context. That is to say, the best methods in one situation may not be the best methods in another. Teachers not only must take into account the social and political context within which learning occurs but also the experiences and existing forms of knowledge among participants....It is possible to develop pedagogical *principles* from a holistic reading of Freire’s books (cf. Freire, 1996,

p.127) but these principles suggest, at most, parameters within which methodological decisions can be made. (Roberts, 2000, p.68, 70)

If it is not the methods, skills and techniques that define liberating education, but an underlying ethical and political stance towards the world and human beings, then critical pedagogy can take a different form in the Indian context than it would in a Brazilian or North American context, and still be aimed at liberation and social transformation. But this also means that specific methodological decisions must be decided in praxis by those that are grounded in that context. It is not my prerogative to prescribe a detailed program that successfully integrates Freirean and Indian perspectives, but simply to highlight the theoretical issues that would need to be addressed in a practical reworking of Freire in an Indian context, and to tentatively suggest a few possible routes that this journey might take. This next section will now turn to the latter task.

Towards Reinvention: Possible Avenues for Hybridization in the Indian Context

Redefining “humanization” in Indian terms

Efforts at reinventing critical pedagogy in an Indian context will have to attempt to reconcile the differences between Freirean and Indian notions of humanization. A dialogue between the two cultural views of humanization can open up possibilities for combining Freire’s emphasis on humanization as the central task of education, with an Indian conception of what humanization entails. This allows for the reinvention of critical pedagogy based on a broader notion of what it means to be human that places a greater emphasis on the deep interdependence between humans and their environment, and that takes us closer rather than further to the interconnectedness we experience with other living beings. The challenge is to find ways to frame the ideals of critical pedagogy in terms of Indian notions of what it means to be human; in ways that acknowledge the

importance of material and political development while also emphasizing community-oriented, ecological, and spiritual values (Siddhartha, 2004).

Freirean views of humanization as engaging in praxis which transforms the world, and Indian notions of humanization as cultivating the inner spiritual world through devotion, social duty and sacrifice, could potentially be reconciled in ways that acknowledge both views. The Hindu ideal of humanity is not a restless incomplete being who is geared towards entering an endless material struggle in order to fight, but is a being who turns inward to achieve greater self-knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, until s/he is able to perceive the innate harmony of cosmic reality. Thus, conscientization might be framed in terms of reflection that flows from a deeply spiritually awakened consciousness, and social transformation could be framed not as the task of a restless individual engaged in the material struggle to construct reality, but in terms of Hindu notions of *dharma* (social duty), *yajna* (sacrifice), and the Gandhian concept of *sarvodaya* (actions performed for the good of all). Working for social change could be framed in terms of individuals participating in the harmony of the universe by living out their life task (*dharma*). Models like that of Mahatma Gandhi provide examples of how the two ideals of withdrawal into the spiritual world and action in the material world can be successfully combined within an Indian context in ways that strengthen both spiritual commitment and social action.

Similarly, critical pedagogy could be merged with Indian views of humans as identifying and merging with the natural world, as deeply interconnected with their natural environment. One possibility that could be drawn on is by integrating the Indian notion of *interbeing*, based on the deep connectivity between self and the world, as suggested by Siddhartha (2004):

This deep subject is *interbeing*, not a separate reality. ...It derives its sustenance and identity from its interconnectedness with all other humans and the natural world. This deep subject needs to be acknowledged, nurtured, and enlisted into the spiral of praxis for its potential to enable us to progressively deepen our connections with each other, the earth, and the cosmos....It can be argued that when the human is seen as “separate”, it inevitably leads to suffering, oppression, and ecological disaster. (p.98)

Greater articulation of different types of knowledge and learning styles

Freirean thought can make a useful contribution to the epistemology underlying the Indian culture of pedagogy, in his emphasis that the teacher does not possess *all* the knowledge in the classroom. Even if the teacher’s official school knowledge is culturally valued more highly, Indian teachers must learn to acknowledge and validate the popular experiential knowledge that students bring into the classroom. This promotes the idea that teachers can also learn from their students, rather than simply depositing their knowledge into student’s heads. At the same time, a critical pedagogy effort in India must acknowledge that although students do bring in a certain form of lived experiential knowledge, the teachers do have a greater degree of ‘acquired’ knowledge, whether by virtue of their education or lived experience. It would need to find ways to validate students’ outside knowledge while still acknowledging the greater respect universally accorded to the teacher’s knowledge, rather than attempting to conceal the power differences between the two or attempting to place both on equal footing within the classroom.

Similarly, an Indian reinvention of critical pedagogy must acknowledge traditional Indian learning styles and the central role of memory in classroom learning. The problem is not that memorization precludes the possibility of critical reflection, but that learning must not be restricted to blind memorization. It must be accompanied by understanding; and must move beyond understanding and remembering to include other forms of

analysis and critical reflection. Thus in Indian classrooms, perhaps the answer is not to reject memorization entirely, as Freire seems to do, but to acknowledge the important role it plays and emphasize the potentially positive role it can play, while ensuring that students move beyond passive memorization. Perhaps a contextualized model of critical pedagogy can include a model of memory as a way of fostering deep understanding and internalization of a theory or idea, as a first step to then engage in a deeper critical analysis of its essence. This would also allow for an interaction between the two epistemologies that can potentially coexist in Indian classrooms, allowing for the passing down of received knowledge and facts that are to be understood and remembered, as well as engaging in constructing new knowledge which requires creative and critical analysis.

Redefining oppression and liberation to include awakening spiritual as well as critical consciousness

A reinvention of critical pedagogy in India can combine Freire's commitment to a pedagogy of liberation, with a broader notion of what is meant by liberation. Freire's emphasis on the liberation of oppressed groups from material oppression is necessary in critiquing the tendency in Hindu philosophy to focus exclusively on spiritual liberation, which can lead to a passivity or lack of agency in the face of social oppression. At the same time, any attempt to promote critical pedagogy would have to expand Freire's notion of liberation from external material oppression, to also engage with the Hindu ideal of *moksha* as internal spiritual liberation, which constitutes the goal of existence for many Indians.

Kapoor (2003) provides a very useful analysis of the contribution that Gandhian social thought can make to popular education efforts in tribal India, highlighting the way Gandhi's model successfully integrates a focus on internal liberation with social action

for political liberation. For Gandhi, reformation of society is inextricably linked with self-transformation or self-rule (*swaraj*): “reform yourself and you have started to reform the world, reform the world nonviolently and you will have reformed yourself.” (cited in Burns & Weber, 1995, p.8). According to Gandhi, political freedom (from British rule) would be futile unless it is tied to inner transformation of the moral agent, to the promotion of *swaraj* (self-rule or self-government) “by dedicating one’s life to the service of humanity without being motivated by self-interest, and by consciously adopting a policy of not wanting anything that millions cannot have (minimization of wants), eventually rearranging our lives in accordance with this mentality” (Kapoor, 2003, p.77). Gandhi’s concepts of *swaraj* and *sarvodaya* (working for the welfare of all) reflect a hybridized blend of ideas that draw from Hindu scriptures as well as from Western writers and Christian scriptures. He relies particularly on the Hindu notions of *yajna* (selfless service for others) and *dharma* (moral duty), in promoting inner self-rule whereby the mind maintains its freedom and exercises control over its desires and its self-interest, and instead acts sacrificially for the welfare of all. Perhaps conscientization can be broadened in an Indian context to include critical awareness of systemic oppression, as well as a spiritual and moral critique of individual self-interest. Such moral reflection and inner awareness can provide the impetus for actions aimed at the welfare of all, as exemplified by the Indian metaphor of the bow and arrow described by Siddhartha:

The arrow shoots outward and finds its mark only when it is drawn inward in the bow. This is a self-evident principle. But what of arrows that shoot out without being drawn inward? Obviously they are illusions and not real ones. Our virtual and consumer society is concerned with dispatching illusory arrows that cannot find their mark, for they are not real arrows to begin with. Our political convictions and our desire to change ourselves are lacking in substance because they have not been drawn inward in the psychospiritual bow. And as there is no inward journey, there can be no outward journey. An outer praxis without an inner praxis lacks conviction. Genuine critical awareness and transformation entails

changing social and ecological practice as well as the deep structures of our consciousness. Liberation is as much an inner as an outer event. (Siddhartha, 2004, p.99)

A consensual rather than combative notion of dialogue

Critical pedagogy makes an essential contribution to the Indian culture of pedagogy in its commitment to praxis in order to transform oppressive conditions, empowering oppressed groups to challenge the unjust order rather than accepting it as the way things are. However, critical pedagogy's exaltation of transformative action can lead to a bias against tradition, and a skeptical impulse to reject traditional patterns of thought without focusing on the valuable elements in these. It can also generate a combative approach where students are encouraged to criticize authoritative texts and statements, including those made by the teacher – which may be inappropriate in an Indian classroom setting. This reflects what Fox (1994) argues to be a fundamental difference between Western and Eastern notions of the teacher-student relationship. According to Fox, in Western societies students are typically expected to challenge and dispute rather than accept authoritative opinions and ideas of texts and teachers, to pose new questions and arrive at original arguments and findings. This is in contrast to many Asian societies, where the fundamental task of the student is not necessarily to challenge but to reflect on various interpretations of fundamental truths that have stood the test of time, and to first apply them to their own contexts rather than challenging them (Fox, 1994).

In an Indian context, critical pedagogy would have to be reinvented in ways that are not seen as combative and disrespectful toward authority and tradition. Siddhartha (2004) suggests for the Indian context the replacement of the Freirean goal of revolution with one of transformation that is based not on dialectic but on dialogue. The idea of a consensual rather than dialectic form of dialogue provides one possible alternative for the

reconceptualization of critical pedagogy in ways that are not seen as combative or threatening to authority. I find useful the distinction drawn by feminists between separate vs. connected knowing, and the model that they have advocated of a form of knowing premised on the ‘believing game’ rather than the ‘doubting game’ (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). When we enter a discussion with the intent of critiquing other points of view based on our predetermined frame of reference (the doubting game), this hinders our ability to wholly enter into and understand the intricacy of other people’s arguments, and limits what we are able to learn from them. A critical engagement with another’s views based on the believing game would seek first and foremost to sincerely listen, to enter into, understand, and develop an empathetic appreciation for another’s worldview, rather than immediately reacting to and trying to shoot down the other person’s argument. This would lead to a more nuanced and valid critique of the strengths and weakness of a particular view, based on a deeper understanding of the person’s argument, rather than a reductionist reading that focuses only on finding flaws without adequately taking into account the merits of the argument or what can be learned from it. Such a model of dialogue would also allow for a more respectful stance toward authority and tradition – by still giving precedence to the teacher’s voice. It would encourage students to first accept and ‘believe’ the teacher’s statements, as a first step in developing a deeper analysis and more nuanced critique of that view – in collaboration with, rather than in opposition to, the teacher. By students first focusing on what can be positively learned from the teacher’s knowledge, and then focusing on how it can be extended, this allows for a critical yet less combative stance. Consensual critical dialogue can be used not to openly challenge authority and tradition, but to generate a deeper understanding of different perspectives and interpretations so as to integrate or reconcile them.

Redefining the teacher-student relationship

Finally, Freire's distinction between authoritative and authoritarian modes of teaching can also be used to critique instances where the authority culturally accorded to the teacher in India is misused in ways that perpetuate the oppression and manipulation of students (thereby becoming authoritarian), and to ensure that this authority is always used in the interests of students instead (which can still be authoritative). At the same time, Freire's model of teacher-student interaction would need to be redefined in the Indian context, in order to allow for cultural notions of the authority and respect rightfully accorded to the teacher, and the more formal patterns of child-adult interaction predominant in Indian society. Perhaps critical pedagogy can be applied in India in such a way that it focuses not on replacing teacher-directed classrooms completely with student-driven classrooms, but that allows for a combination of both in ways that best support learning in that context. One possibility for the reinvention of critical pedagogy in India can draw from the apprenticeship model that was observed by Alexander (2001) in his study of traditional Indian classrooms. Alexander describes how this indigenous pedagogic tradition, witnessed in some Indian music and dance lessons and in experimental settings, was based on Indian assumptions regarding the importance of teacher authority, but at the same time nurtured the development of skills that could allow the novice to eventually disengage from or even surpass – rather than merely imitating – the expert. Thus this model is able to successfully foster learning by combining imitation with dialogue and knowledge transformation, and may be a more appropriate model to promote in Indian classrooms.

Contrary to Freire's depiction of any hierarchical power difference between teacher and students as inherently oppressive, the Indian model of teacher authority does

not necessarily have to imply the mere depositing of ideas to be consumed and blindly accepted by students. Rather, it can imply that students listen respectfully to the knowledge presented by the teacher rather than focusing on immediately disputing or challenging it, perhaps until they are able to more thoroughly test the reliability of these views. Perhaps it is possible to have a liberatory pedagogy that still respects the greater degree of specialized knowledge that the teacher brings to the classroom and that is to be passed on to the students, while at the same time nurturing the students' critical abilities to constantly keep reassessing the validity of that knowledge, combining imitation with dialogue in ways that foster the students' reflexive capacity.

Moreover, for Freirean ideas to be successfully translated into practice in Indian classrooms, it is important that educators recognize Indian cultural modes of learning, and initially at least provide a greater degree of structured support and directivity than would be required in North American classrooms, where students are more socialized to engage in self-directed learning. This could be done by providing a greater degree of 'scaffolding' or modeling of what teachers expect students to do, at least until students become more comfortable with learning more independently. For example, in teaching the process of critical reflection, teachers might need to provide a more explicit breakdown of what this process entails, provide detailed explanations and examples and explicit steps to follow, before asking students to engage in the process themselves. It is important to the success of these efforts that educators acknowledge Indian learning styles, and ensure that their teaching is balanced between supporting and challenging students in ways that encourage them to take greater responsibility for their learning.

Scope for Change: Opportunities for Critical Pedagogy in the Indian Context

One of the grounds for hope that provides the impetus for undertaking this research lies in the very nature of the hegemonic tradition serving to oppress the Indian majority as described in chapters 1 and 2 – and their ability to spawn a counteracting critique. Lele traces how tradition is “capable of generating, from within, a critique of an oppressive social practice, as a critique of its legitimating ideology. Such a critique is grounded in a rational recognition of a forcibly denied potential social order” (1996, p.319). The oppressed are confronted with a daily experience of the discrepancy between the ideological affirmation of ideals such as democracy and social welfare by the dominant elite and leaders of Indian society, and on the other hand the actual life experience of the oppressed which confirms the systemic violation of these ideals. It is this discrepancy that generates instances of critical reflection and resistance among the oppressed to official interpretations of traditions, and attempts to reclaim local interpretations of Indian tradition that affirm the rights of the oppressed. Thus tradition itself can serve as the springboard for critical social action in Indian society, as Lele points out (1996, p.319) --

In situations where an adequate material basis for an epochal transformation has emerged, the critique may point to a future where all of the existing oppression is seen as coming to an end. Where such preconditions have yet to emerge, it appeals to the anchoring principles of tradition and demands that ‘unnecessary oppression’, socio-culturally determined within the parameters of a given tradition, be abolished.

Such critical alternative grassroots discourses have indeed arisen and continue to emerge as challenges to dominant oppressive discourses in India. For example, there have been various social movements of “constructive resistance” in India (Parajuli, 1990; cited in Kapoor, 2003, p.79), where oppressed subaltern groups have sought to resist

“destructive development” and to articulate and implement alternative development practices. Included among these are numerous popular education efforts, influenced by Freirean ideals and Gandhian social thought, that have played a significant role in *Adivasi* (tribal) movements, street theatre, and other social movements in India (Kapoor, 2003). A number of Indian scholars like Vandana Shiva, Gayatri Spivak, and Amartya Sen have embarked on the academic search for alternative discourses. Shiva has played an important role in challenging the dominant paradigms of unsustainable, reductionist agricultural development practices, leading grassroots movements in struggles to protect biodiversity, cultural integrity and social justice. The Subaltern Studies Group that developed in the 1980s in India also represent efforts by critical scholars to challenge traditional elitist historical narratives, attempting to write subaltern groups into history and to present them as agents of political and social change (Spivak, 2001). All of these provide avenues for hope and speak to the likelihood that alternative homegrown discourses that aim at decolonization can and are developing within India. In fact even as I look at international headlines today, I am greeted by evidence of oppressed groups that are rising to challenge the discrepancies between expressed national ideals and their exclusion from the fulfillment of these ideals:

Indian landless march into Delhi: About 25,000 protesters have arrived in the Indian capital, Delhi, after marching 325km to demand the redistribution of land. The protesters, mostly low-caste tenant farmers and landless indigenous people, say they have been left behind by India's economic boom. The marchers set out on 2 October, the national holiday marking the birthday of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi... The protesters waved flags and chanted “give us land, give us water”, as they marched in long, orderly lines into the centre of the capital. (BBC News, Oct 2007)

In specific relation to critical pedagogy, one of the most significant critical models that have been presented in this thesis as a source of hope is that offered by Mahatma

Phule. Phule represents one of numerous activists that arose in colonial society to speak on behalf of the silenced subalterns such as women and Dalits (others include people like Ranade, Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai). Many elements of Phule's philosophy bear striking resemblance to critical pedagogy. For example, Freire's emphasis on the need for critical consciousness can be traced in Phule's argument that education must foster *tritiya ratna* (the 'third eye') that enables oppressed groups to see through hegemonic Brahmanic ideology in order to dismantle caste oppression (Mani, 2005). Like Freire, Phule theorized the bipolar structure of Indian society marked by the dichotomous relationship between the Brahmans (the oppressors) and the *shudratishudras* (the oppressed), and he wanted the community of the oppressed to lead a revolution for change. And Phule too saw mass education, complemented by radical practice, as central to the process of cultural revolution (Mani, 2005) – similar to Freire's emphasis on reflection and praxis. Phule's writings provide a useful potential starting point for a reinvention of Freire's ideas based on an indigenous articulation of a similar philosophy.

Possible entry-points of critical pedagogy in India in light of globalization

A further excursion into the nature of hegemony is useful in our exploration of where in present-day Indian society lies the scope for critical pedagogy to take root. Gramsci's ideas on hegemony and power provide a useful framework to unpack the concept of power as a necessary combination of consent and coercion. In order to maintain its hegemony and preempt outright revolt, the state must allow some room for maneuverability and encourage small forms of dissent. This creates potential space for a counter-hegemony to develop, to challenge dominant ideologies (Burke, 1999). This is particularly true in the case of nations faced with external threats to the nation's sovereignty – the mere transmission of knowledge as a hegemonic educational strategy

is an insufficient strategy to ensure the perpetuation of richness and power in a society that has once been opened to external challenge or suffered a permanent exogenous shock. For in such a society, the rich and powerful also need to transmit the knowledge of how to innovate, evaluate, adapt, and hence compete with their challengers, otherwise they will be swallowed up by those with greater information, and, more critically, superior understanding” (Crook, 1996, p.3).

In the face of globalization, educational reform will remain crucial to the education of the Indian work force and the economy's performance in the global arena. If the Indian state is to survive the external challenge presented by increasing global competition, it must also teach its workforce to engage in critical cognitive competence. In fact, even in the US the spread of critical thinking courses has been strongly bolstered and sustained by the business community's need to compete in a global economy, based on the belief that “nations that want high incomes and full employment must develop policies that emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills by everyone, not just a select few” (Marshall and Tucker, 1992, cited in Facione et al, 1995, p.14). The recent surge of educational reform in India that attempts to introduce more ‘Western’-based, learner-centered and active pedagogies may provide the needed opening for some form of critical pedagogy to take root in the Indian education system.

At the same time, this speculation raises new questions which warrant further exploration. The question arises of whether we can ever expect the State to be an agent of critical education, or whether this would invariably threaten its interests. There exists a fundamental conflict of interest between the purported ideal of teaching people to think critically, and the interest of the state to maintain the status quo and produce workers for global capitalism. At several points, Freire argues that liberating education cannot be implemented by the oppressor, since this would entail a contradiction in terms: “No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why? ...only a

revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms” (Freire, 1970, p.86). Freire argues,

Only the “innocent” could possibly think that the power elite would encourage a type of education which denounces them even more clearly than do all the contradictions of their power structures. Such naïveness also reveals a dangerous underestimation of the capacity and audacity of the elite. Truly liberating education can only be put into practice outside the ordinary system, and even then with great cautiousness, by those who overcome their naïveness and commit themselves to authentic liberation (1973a, p.4, cited in Zachariah 1986, p.73).

In pursuing the aim of having critical pedagogy embraced by public education in India, there is a great danger that the ideals of critical pedagogy will get appropriated by the dominant group in ways that diffuse its potential critique and perpetuate dominant ideology. Perhaps critical pedagogy might be more likely to surface in alternative venues, such as the rapidly rising number of private or independent schools in India, informal education or private professional development courses for teachers.

The analysis presented in this thesis has been for the most part a theoretical exploration of the possibility of reinventing critical pedagogy in the context of Indian education. The next step that is needed is to move this conceptual analysis into a practical exploration of where are the spaces for this conversation to audibly begin to take place in affecting change in the current Indian education system. Education does not exist in a vacuum, and further investigation is needed into what are the current economic and political forces operating in Indian society today that would create opportunities for this change to occur. Moreover, more research is also needed into ways of overcoming further practical and structural constraints to promoting critical literacy in Indian education. Some of these continuing obstacles include the large class sizes, the rigid examination system, the lack of resources, and parental/societal expectations of what is needed for children to succeed economically.

Conclusion

Despite having originated in a very different context from that of Indian classrooms today, Freirean critical pedagogy can offer a useful contribution to address the crisis in Indian education, which is at present serving to suppress critical literacy and thereby to perpetuate inequality and oppression. As long as the dialogue between critical pedagogy and the Indian culture of pedagogy is undertaken in a manner that is self-reflexive and respectful of the other's worldview – in a manner that reflects Freire's own dialogical approach – such dialogue can offer rich contributions to a critique and reinvention both of the Indian culture of pedagogy and of critical pedagogy itself. In light of current opportunities and scope for change in the Indian education system, I remain hopeful, based on the analysis undertaken in this thesis, that critical pedagogy can indeed be reinvented in the Indian context so as to contribute to social transformation in India. The scope of this contribution can be most aptly summarized in the words of Freire himself:

Imagination and conjecture about a different world than the one of oppression, are as necessary to the praxis of historical 'subjects' (agents) in the process of transforming reality as it necessarily belongs to human toil... Here is one of the tasks of democratic popular education, of a pedagogy of hope: that of enabling the popular classes to develop their language: not the authoritarian, sectarian gobbledygook of 'educators', but their own language—which, emerging from and returning upon their reality, sketches out the conjectures, the designs, the anticipations of their new world. Here is one of the central questions of popular education—that of language as a route to the invention of citizenship. (Freire, 1995, page 39)

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