

Shivali Tukdeo, *India Goes to School: Education Policy and Cultural Politics*. Springer India, 2019. xii+138 pages, €89.99 (HB). ISBN: 9788132239550.

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Educational policies are a key area of interest for educational researchers because they have profound implications in shaping the direction and destiny of the involved communities. The book, *India Goes to School*, provides a concise and chronological account of key turning points in terms of education policy from the colonial era up to the formation of the Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) 2019. The book comprises seven chapters that explore the trajectory of development of the educational landscape of India, starting with colonial experiences and moving on to post-independence events such as the rise of a national system of education, massification of education, privatisation, mobility, globalisation, migration, the Indian diaspora and the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Most policy studies usually focus on categories such as access, enrolment, retention, dropouts, identifiable and measurable indicators and challenges of implementation. In contrast, this book which is centred on the cultural politics of education in India is an important addition to the growing scholarship aimed at analysing policy formulation, their circulation across different contexts and their translation into workable programmes and schemes. It distinguishes itself from other similar volumes by going beyond conventional accounts that provide an exhaustive chronological description of India's educational journey. Instead, it engages the readers to question the relationship of educational policy with cultural politics. This connecting thread is used to weave a distinct narrative that explores the connections among power, authority, role, response and impact of policy knowledge on different stakeholders. Arguing for the need to go beyond rational choice and impact/outcome models to explain educational policymaking, the author relies on 'policy processes' approaches that focus on the complex links between policy knowledge, documents and implementation. She argues that policymaking is a complex and layered process involving structural and institutional arrangements with profound and diverse effects on social life. Mediated by complex political economy, policies as official knowledge productions exert uneven material effects on their recipients.

This book articulates how policies are shaped and transformed by changing cultural, political and economic contours in interplay with the responses and reactions by stakeholders with diverse social identities and interests. The implications of these dynamics for equations of power, authority, domination and discrimination are brought out in an interesting manner. The author draws the reader's attention to the uneven development of education in India in relation to the entangled threads of caste, class, gender, and the alterations in cultural politics along these lines of division across the time period of interest; for example, the changing contours of patriarchy in Indian society and its impact on education are considered, from the early days of child marriage (and hence exclusion of the girl child), to gender dynamics in the post-independence era of a national system of education for all.

The book outlines some of the significant policy moments that shaped the vision of public schooling in India, from the colonial period to the post-independence period. In her analysis, Tukdeo is able to bring out the diverse and scattered responses to formal education during the colonial period. The educational contributions of Jotirao Phule, Anandibai Joshi and Ramabai Saraswati during this era, as articulations that contested 'policy from above' through the lens of caste, class and gender divides, make for a layered analysis. Later, Gopal Krishna Gokhale's consistent advocacy for universal education, through his association with the Indian National Congress, provided a new fillip and momentum to the movement of mass education in India. The establishment of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and the instrumental role of Syed Ahmad Khan's advocacy for modern education as a response from below to uplift the Muslim community could also have found some mention in this context. Tukdeo's brief critique of the post-independence Kothari Commission Report that envisaged education as a means to bring about social transformation in India has assumed new relevance in light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which highlights the need to overhaul the education system to bring about equity, inclusion and address issues of exclusion.

Differential access and inequity of educational attainment is a recurrent theme in the book. The author traces the development of a multi-tiered schooling system in India that caters to the educational needs of different socio-economic groups. She argues that the operationalisation of mass education in the post-independence period was impeded due to factors such as lack of funding, corruption and political interference, resulting in poor quality of mass education. Issues

related to the privatisation of education and the importance of the middle class in shaping the nature of public institutions, are also discussed. Tukdeo argues that the exit of the middle class from public institutions partly coincided with the dismantling of public education. However, one wishes that this argument was elaborated in greater detail as is presently the case.

The book also comments on the continuously increasing intermediary space of non-state actors with their heightened interest and involvement in activities related to education. Confining the discourse on education to a dichotomous division centred on ‘public’ and ‘private’ is limiting; rather, there is an urgent need to examine the entangled roles of governmental, non-governmental and civic political actors in order to develop a holistic understanding of the dynamics currently at play in policymaking. The book also provides insights about the role of global organisations such as the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF along with their overarching intervention in dictating and deciding the educational policies, especially of developing countries. For example, the UNESCO-led Education for All (EFA), a global directive centred on the goals of mass inclusion and enrolment in education, has become one of the important contemporary educational discourses, shaping policies on mass education across the globe.

In addition to these actors, the Indian diaspora also plays a significant role in shaping educational policies. Elite schools in India continuously adapt to international norms facilitating greater cross-border exchange. Adhering to the practices of selective admissions, these schools remain distanced from local government schools. The dynamics of education-driven migration and its impact on Indian educational policies is significantly discussed with important insights. The Indian diaspora consists of over 20 million people living in over 75 countries, making it a large, wealthy and influential population. The book, for example, describes Sonal Shah—former head of Google’s global development wing—and her work with Ekal Vidyalaya. It highlights the significant ways in which non-resident Indians contribute towards education and development of people in their country of origin. They also help shape the discourse and politics of creating a ‘skilled’ workforce, a favoured educational outcome, for example, in recent NEP 2020. The successful experiments of internationalisation of higher education (e.g., in USA) are being emulated by developing countries, including India. The book argues that the potential and limitations of contemporary educational

discourses and policies need to be critically understood and analysed in the light of complex contributions made by multiple actors.

In this spirit, the book also looks closely at the role played by NGOs in educational policymaking. NGOs are continuously carving out space in developmental activities, such that the 'NGO-isation' of education has resulted in the reframing of educational issues in many countries. The newly emerging role of international organisations as global advocacy networks also includes developing partnerships with educational institutions. The transnationality in educational organisations is explained at length with reference to three well-known NGOs, namely Pratham, Ekal Vidyalaya and Asha for Education. The book helps readers understand that the developmental agendas dictated by international donors are getting reflected in the programmes and priorities of these organisations.

The nuanced arguments and insights offered by Tukdeo are important for understanding the present educational profile of developing countries including India; for example, a majority of developing countries with similar colonial histories are struggling to compensate for the losses incurred during the colonial era. Historically, different communities have responded differently to educational opportunities offered across time, based on their positioning in terms of social hierarchy and interests. From dissent and contestation, to conformity and collaborations, these reactions have evolved and encouraged new transitions in cultural politics. This legacy of widening inequity and inequality in education is yet to be overcome by such countries even after their independence. The book points to the need for further scholarship that explores the construction, contestation and reconstruction of educational discourses in complex cultural spaces.

The book is a must-read for students and scholars to comprehend the subtle nuances of educational policy frameworks in the Indian context and to enrich their understanding about the changing discourses about caste, gender, class, power, patriarchy, bureaucracy and educational outcomes. The arguments put forth by the author to explain uneven advances in education across caste, gender, religion and region carry weight and substance. The descriptive elements of the prose and the style adopted are interesting as well as intellectually engaging. The questions flagged at many instances merit consideration and add to readers' motivation to re-read sections and rethink their initial responses. The commonly held assumptions that blame marginalised communities for their inability to benefit from educational opportunities, and for

indifference to such opportunities, are critically questioned and re-examined. The book draws on the works of Edward Said, Stephen Ball, Michael Apple and Krishna Kumar to illuminate new perspectives on Indian educational thought and policymaking. However, Tukdeo has omitted relevant empirical works and surveys pertaining to the enrolment and educational attainments of diverse social groups and communities mentioned in the book. References to such studies would have further enriched the arguments and assertions put forth by the author.

In the context of the NEP 2020, this book offers timely and relevant insights to understand the rationale and relevance of policymaking from varied dimensions. The key concerns of access, equity, inclusion and exclusion that reverberate through out the NEP 2020 have been analysed and discussed in detail in this book. The communities that have struggled to harvest the benefits of education have been clubbed together under the term, ‘socio-economically disadvantaged groups’ (SEDGs) in NEP 2020 and are now back in the limelight of policy discourse on education. Increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education from the present 26.3 per cent to 50 per cent within the next couple of decades, and the vision to make India a ‘global superpower in knowledge’, reveal and reflect the relevance of the themes covered in this book. How exactly the NEP 2020 will change the dynamics of cultural and educational politics in India is yet to be seen. In the meantime, the insights and arguments presented in the book point to the need for scholarly probing in understanding and responding to the complex system of Indian education that is perennially plagued with issues of exclusion.

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