

educational material.

Within this broad outline, however, it is important to delve into the specific social character of the child we find so often at the centre of Canadian stories. First of all, it is more often a male child. Second, the socio-economic background he comes from has no specific indicators, certainly no status indicators. The impression created is that of a middle class ethos in which everybody seems to be doing well, and where no one seems to pay attention to the hierarchy of power and privilege that does in fact prevail in society, in class relations as well as in gender relations. This is the well known picture of a society enjoying the benefits of advanced capitalism, without being bothered about the actual distribution of wealth or power. The symbolic materials used in schools in this ethos perform a conservative role inasmuch as they withhold from readers the awareness of the impact that social classes and patterns of gender relations have on people's life. The Canadian sociologist Porter (1965) had pointed out the existence of a 'vertical mosaic', consisting of an elite-dominated hierarchy which encircles the multi-ethnic composition of the population. The school stories we have analysed offer little more than token evidence of the existence of either the hierarchy or the multi-ethnicity. In the world depicted in these stories, no one is particularly rich, poor, or culturally different. The impression created is that of an amorphous, happy, homogenous community. It is a white middle class community of people whose work-related life seldom seems to enter the child's consciousness.

A dominant factor distinguishing the child's life under these circumstances is the presence of peers. They form the little world within which the agent performs many of his acts. This is yet another aspect in which we find these school stories corresponding to the norms of advanced industrialisation. Industrial development privatises family life, reduces adult-child interaction (by making stringent demands relating to the adult's hours of work), and enhances peer group relations among children. The general impact can be described as the emergence of distinct roles for children and adults. The same applies to space which gets more sharply classified into home and outside. This affects the general tenor of life, giving sharpness to one's acts and also one's sense of purpose. Agents act with a greater degree of conscious decision-making about where they want to be, whose help they must seek and whose approval they must get. These indicators of the clarity of the agent's vision may well be idealised projections of the challenge that the industrial culture poses—the challenge of finding personal meaning. A number of North American humanist educators have spotted this as a major source of problems associated with growing up through the adolescent years. School stories like those we have analysed apparently conceal the problematic aspect of growing up. The function of these stories in the pre-adolescence years is that of romanticised preparation.

3. LEARNING TO BE BACKWARD

HOW does the learner's social background affect his response to an educational text? We will look at this question in the context of a tribal boy's experience in a senior secondary level class. The first half of this chapter presents the data of this experience and analyses the data. The second half places the analysis against a theoretical background of the problems relating to the representation of knowledge in the curriculum.

The teacher-pupil interaction reported and discussed below occurred during a history lesson in grade eleven of a Central School. The class consisted of 27 students; 18 girls and nine boys, of whom two belonged to the reserved categories—one to the Scheduled Castes, and one to the Scheduled Tribes. The medium of instruction was English, and the method of teaching consisted of lecturing interspersed with brief sequences of questioning by the teacher, sometimes to ascertain whether students had learnt the content of the day's lesson and at other times to bring the next sub-topic into focus. The lesson

Ancient India, a history textbook for grade eleven, first published in 1977 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The topic was socio-economic and cultural change during and following the Gupta period (as discussed in Chapter 25, 'Transformation of the Ancient Phase in the prescribed text).

TEXT AND TEACHER-PUPIL INTERACTION

The first question asked by the teacher was answered by a girl sitting in the front ranks. As the girl was answering, the teacher noticed some disturbance in a corner of the rear ranks where the two boys belonging to the reserved categories and two other boys were seated. The teacher asked the SC boy to stand up, and then asked him a question. He could not answer, and he kept standing after the teacher had turned her attention to the front ranks where several girls were creating rather more disturbance—snapping their fingers, crying ‘M’am, M’am’—in their eagerness to provide the answer. A minute or so later, a boy sitting in front of the SC boy whispered something to him. The SC boy hesitatingly sat down. As soon as he did, the teacher noticed and told him that he had not been asked to sit down. The boy remained standing until five minutes later when the teacher had finished another part of her lecture and was starting a fresh sequence of questions.

Having told the SC boy to sit down, the teacher asked the class: ‘What is tantricism?’ Several hands went up in the two front ranks and the interaction between the teacher and the students who were allowed to answer questions went like this:

S1: Tantricism means belief in magic and superstition.

T: What else do you understand from tantricism?

S2: M’am, it’s a mysterious ritual and it’s a sign of backwardness.

T: Which areas were most affected by it—towns or villages?

S3: Villages.

T: What type of villages were most affected?

A few hands were raised in response to the last question. The teacher looked around, then asked one of the students who had raised hands to reply. The answer that came was, ‘Tribal villages were most affected by tantricism.’ The teacher nodded in agreement and proceeded to explain how the contact between Brahmins and tribal people led to the former’s adoption of tantric practices and beliefs. After dealing with this issue, she rephrased her earlier question, this time to ascertain that the topic had been learnt. The question was ‘who did the Brahmins learn tantricism from?’ Many students raised their hands, mumbling ‘M’am, M’am’ in their keenness to offer the correct answer. The teacher looked towards the rear ranks where nobody had raised a hand. She asked the ST boy to stand up and reply. The boy stood up but could not provide the answer. The teacher translated the question into Hindi, but still the boy could not say a thing. Finally, the teacher asked one of the girls in the front ranks to reply, and got the answer she expected. The bell rang and the teacher hastened to complete the lesson by giving two questions to be answered in writing at home.

The following discussion of these interactional data will focus on the ST boy, I will interpret his response to the lesson at three levels, namely the levels of (i) language; (ii) meaning; and (iii) norms. The boy’s response to the lesson at the level of language is relatively easy to guess because the teacher thought it appropriate to translate her question into Hindi for his convenience. Apparently, she knew that the boy had difficulty comprehending English. The boy’s difficulty in English should affect his response not simply to individual lessons, but to the entire routine and culture of the school. Although located in the Hindi region, the school gives place of honour to English as do all its counterpart Central Schools. In the junior classes, some teachers use Hindi, often mixing it with English. In the senior classes, nearly all teaching, except that of Hindi and Sanskrit, is conducted in English. From the posters, captions under pictures, newspaper clippings, and notices hanging on walls, anyone can discern that the ethos of this school is steeped in English. The ST boy has to accept this condition for his education in this school.

At the level of meaning, one can ask: ‘Whose meaning and viewpoint are reflected in the curriculum?’ The term ‘curriculum’ of course refers to the amalgam of the content of a topic, the manner in which the content has been codified in a textbook, and the manner in which the teacher’s interaction with students ultimately shapes the transmission of the content. In the technical pedagogic parlance current in Indian circles of educational research and training, content is treated as the core of curriculum, and nearly all critical as well as constructive action is confined to the textbook; the roles played by the teacher and the students, and the conventions of pedagogy they follow—out of habit or

spontaneously—are totally ignored- The conventions I am referring to, under the wider rubric of curriculum, are learnt by the teacher during professional training, and are further internalised on the job through contact with colleagues and students who have already internalised their roles.

Let us first consider the content and its codified textbook version. Under the reforms that took place over the last decade in history curricula and textbooks, socio-cultural data were given more attention than they had previously received when history teaching was confined mainly to the chronology of rulers and their policies. However, even the improved texts continue to present history as knowledge independent of a point of view, as a body of facts, not as what Carr (1964) calls 'a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts.' It is true that the facts selected for presentation in these texts indicate a deeper interest in the socio-economic-conditions prevailing during different eras than older school texts had shown. But the basic style remains that of brief and un-analytical description of many different spheres of life,

In a pedagogical interaction, what meanings will be learnt by the pupil as appropriate depends on the way in which power is used by the teacher to indicate approval for assigning significance. In the interaction reported earlier, the teacher uses her power to place the ST boy in a situation where he acknowledges ignorance. His silence represents no denial of the validity of the knowledge he is being offered, whereas the teacher's articulateness represents the assertion of her knowledge (based on the textbook) as valid learning and of her power to make students accept it. There is no conflict between her authority and the ST boy's expression of ignorance, Her authority is used to prove to the boy and to the rest of the class that he is ignorant.

LEARNING AND IDENTITY

In the context of school learning, the question 'What is learnt by pupils is no more significant than the question 'who learns and who fails to learn'. The distribution, just as much as the content of school knowledge, offers a clue to the functioning of the school as a social institution. As a functionary of the school, the teacher treats the ST boy under the school's norms of undifferentiated delivery of knowledge. One of the norms that the teacher follows is to ask questions in order to check whether the students have learnt what they have been taught. As a part of their training, students of teaching learn that it is *their* role to ask questions, and that the purpose of questions asked by the teacher is to enhance students' involvement. The history teacher was following this well-established norm in checking whether the ST boy had learnt the link between 'tantricism' and 'tribalism'. It just so happens that the question was being posed to a tribal boy.

The view of history as 'facts' is a part of the wider view of all school knowledge as facts. This view not only informs the prevailing curriculum policy but also shapes the perception of the teacher's role that is prevalent in teacher training. Neither curriculum policy, nor teacher training acknowledges the impact that the composition of a class, in terms of students' social backgrounds, has on teacher-pupil interaction and on the meanings generated in the interaction. The 'history as facts' approach implies that the teacher will treat all learners as an undefined group. The social backgrounds to which they belong and the points of view these backgrounds shape become irrelevant when history is presented as a body of facts. For the teacher dealing with history in this way, 'tantricism becomes a sub-topic of the cultural history of ancient India; it ceases to be a problematic issue which touches upon group identities, and which, depending on its treatment, can influence present-day group and individual identities.

The textbook on which the lesson was based has this to say on the relationship between 'tantricism¹ and 'tribes':

The most remarkable development in the religious field in India from about the sixth century A. D. was the spread of tantricism. In the fifth-seventh centuries many brahmanas received land in Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Central India and the Deccan, and it is about this time that tantric texts, shrines and practices also appeared. Tantricism admitted both women and sudras into its ranks, and laid great stress on the use of magic rituals. Some of the rituals may have been in use in earlier times, but they were systematized and recorded in the tantric texts from about the sixth century A.D. They were intended to satisfy the material desires of the devotees for physical possessions and to cure the day-to-day diseases and injuries. Obviously tantricism arose as a result of the large-scale admission of the aboriginal peoples in

brahmanical society. The brahmanas adopted many of the tribal rituals and charms, which were now officially compiled, sponsored and fostered by them (p. 172)

Apart from the confidence with which the origins of tantricism have been stated in this passage, it is interesting to observe the features that allow the passage to be interpreted in the manner which the teacher's use of it, as a basis for her class-preparation, reflects. One is the narrative style which carries the omniscient narrator's point of view. Such a style is common in history-writing. Indeed, the difference between the storyteller and the historian has never been too easy to maintain. Only the intentions are somewhat different. The historian wants us to accept what he is narrating as a body of facts. The story-teller does not always worry about this. The historian writing a school text is tempted to project a 'facts only' image of his narration even in cases where 'facts' are sparse and where the connections between known facts are a matter of conjecture. He may present such connections as 'facts' simply because conventions of school text writing favour certainty. In this context, it is interesting to compare our text with the discussion of this particular episode of Indian history by other historians.

'The esoteric nature of Tantrism obscures its roots and rituals', says Wolpert (1977), 'though it clearly seems to antedate Brahmanic Aryan religious concepts, harking back to ancient mother-goddess worship and Shaivite forms of worship.' According to Zimmer (1969), 'Tantra may have its roots in the non-Aryan, pre-Aryan, Dravidian soil.' Thapar (1966) takes a similar view, adding that 'the emphasis on *shakti* and the mother-goddess would suggest that Tantricism was rooted in pre-Aryan culture, which is not unlikely considering that it originated in essentially non-Aryan areas.' In all three of these examples one can notice a tentative tone. In the school text, we are faced with total certainty, of how a cult 'arose' and 'spread'. The use of verbs like 'arose' and 'adopt' suggest a theory of contact between the 'brahmanical society' and the 'tribal' or 'aboriginal' peoples.

Another problematic feature of the text is its use of labels such as 'aboriginal' and 'tribal'. These terms are now commonly used in India to refer to a large category of the Indian population which is the object of the state's policy of protective discrimination. 'Tribal' is used this way all the time, to refer to the Scheduled Tribes. Many different types of communities are lumped together in this usage of 'tribal'. This is no doubt an imprecise usage, 'but it is in the ethos of such usage that the historian and the history teacher have to work.

When they use a term like 'tribal', it readily becomes associated with the common contemporary usage. The imprecise label becomes a very precise indicator of identity in a contemporary Indian classroom which has one or two students of the Scheduled Tribes category.

Meaning is generated in the course of interaction, and whoever has the power to name or assign labels is able to determine the meaning of an interaction.' Pedagogical interactions, between teacher and pupils, are mediated by texts representing the authorised version of the knowledge which the school is in charge of disseminating. The text is involved in assigning significance, but it is the teacher who ultimately shapes the meaning of a text and of the knowledge it contains. The text assigns significance by selecting some out of all the information available on a topic; the teacher uses the text to control the social distribution of knowledge. The teacher does this by exercising her power to 'approve' or 'disapprove' students' responses to the text. In order to shape classroom interaction, the teacher has to interpret the text in a certain way. With an interpretation in hand, and on the basis of pedagogical norms such as question-answering, she determines who has and who has not 'learnt' the appropriate interpretation of the knowledge which the school has to offer. This is how the distribution of approval becomes an aspect of 'what is there to be learnt'.

The teacher's power to distribute approval is hardly her own; it comes from the school's claim to be in charge of distributing legitimate knowledge. In the Indian system the teacher has far less power than in many Western systems of education in the matter of structuring knowledge, even in structuring the daily routine. The Indian teacher has no power to choose the text for pupils to read in the class or afterwards. But this does not mitigate her power to assign labels of 'approval' and 'disapproval', 'success' and 'failure', and thereby to determine the meaning of a pedagogical interaction. In the interaction reported earlier, the teacher uses her power to place the ST boy in a situation where he acknowledges ignorance. By remaining silent he indicates no denial of the validity of knowledge he is being offered. The teacher's articulations represent the assertion of her knowledge, which is based on the prescribed textbook, as valid

learning. It is also an assertion of her power to make students accept the knowledge she is offering along with her interpretation of it. By staying silent, the ST boy expresses his ignorance, and thereby avoids coming into conflict with the teacher's authority. The teacher's authority thus vindicated merely proves to the ST boy and to the rest of the class that he has failed to learn the appropriate knowledge.

Teacher-questioning and pupil-answering are routine pedagogical norms. The opposite, namely pupil-questioning and teacher-answering, also takes place but not so frequently. When students do ask a question, it is mainly in order to seek clarification. A student-question which points towards new dimensions of the topic at hand is an extremely rare event. A question challenging the authorised version of knowledge is unheard of. Who has the right to ask questions and whose role it is to answer them, and what kinds of questions are supposed to be asked by whom, are related to the total cultural context of a society and to the conceptualisation of curriculum prevailing in its education system. Family norms in India do not encourage children to ask questions. Studies of adult-child interaction in Indian family settings indicate that questioning, criticism, and independent decision-making are not among approved and encouraged behaviours among children and youth (Narain 1964). Questioning someone older than oneself, such as a teacher, is certainly not an approved behaviour; it is perceived as an expression of one's disrespect for the adult's nurturant authority. On the other hand, answering a question asked by the adult in authority is the proper behaviour expected of a younger person, especially answering it in a manner expected by the adult. In the school context, these norms are further enhanced by the 'fixed' nature of the syllabus and by the popular notion that the textbook is the de facto syllabus. Textbooks are not just recommended in the Indian system; they are 'prescribed'. The prescribed textbook is the only resource available in most classrooms since children are required to purchase it themselves. Moreover, assessment of students by means of a test or the annual examination is based on their mastery over the content of the textbook.

The history teacher whose questions we have looked at was following the well-established norm of checking whether the students in her class had learnt the link between 'tantricism' and 'tribalism'. The norm places no significance on the students' social background. This indifference towards students' backgrounds is characteristic of the overall conceptualisation of the curriculum as a body of 'received' knowledge, a logical packaging of facts. How knowledge relates to a student's identity has no place in this conceptualisation. In the case of our history lesson, it is pure coincidence that the question focusing on the link between tribal influence and tantric cults was posed to a tribal boy. Whether the question is valid, in terms of accuracy of historical information reflected in it, is an irrelevant issue here. What is of interest is to note that the ST student's options in the face of the question he has been asked are not real options in terms of his existence as a member of a recognised tribal group. If he answers the question by repeating what the teacher has told the class, he will acknowledge in an articulate manner that tribal groups are the source of those characteristics of Indian society which have already been identified (by S2 for instance) in the class as symbols of backwardness, such as belief in magic and superstition. Taking the other option, if he says nothing, he would show that he has not learnt well enough to reproduce what has been taught only a few minutes ago, and that he is indeed a backward student of this class. In other words, his 'success' as a student of a history lesson would prove his backwardness as a member of a group, and his 'failure' as a student would testify to his backwardness as a student. There is no escaping the label of backwardness. As a social institution, the school has set up a situation in which the tribal will acquire responses that match his description in society as a member of a 'backward' community.

WHAT IS WORTH KNOWING

The tribal boy's experience has its 'roots' in the problem of curriculum construction. More specifically his learning experience is shaped by the manner in which knowledge; in this case historical knowledge is selected and represented in the prescribed text and the curriculum. The rest of this chapter looks at this issue with special reference to students belonging to oppressed social groups, such as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The problem we are going to discuss is not even recognised by educators who are accustomed to regarding curricular knowledge as 'a received body of' understanding that is "given" (Eggleston 1977). Our analysis of the tribal boy's experience indicates that the curriculum is not just a logical packaging of facts, but rather, a reorganisation of available knowledge from a certain perspective. The history lesson could have meant something rather different to the tribal student if the text, on

which the lesson was based, had been written from the perspective of tribal people.

We can distinguish between two aspects of the process of reorganisation of knowledge in the curriculum; selection and representative Selection involves choice of data, and representation primarily involves the choice of perspective. The body of available 'knowledge under any subject is vast. What is offered at school, and therefore gets associated with education is reconstruction which is based on selection made under given social circumstances. What kinds of knowledge become available at schools for distribution has to do with the overall classification of knowledge and power in society. Schools equip individuals with knowledge and skills that are appropriate for the tasks generated by the economy and supported by politics and culture. Schools are able to supply such individuals with the help of appropriate reconstruction of knowledge.

Gandhi's proposal for 'basic education' presents a significant example of the influence of the sociology of knowledge v/ on the school curriculum. An important aspect of his proposal was the introduction of productive crafts and skills. In functional terms, the idea was to relate the school to the processes of production in the local milieu, with the aim of making the school itself a productive institution. In symbolic term, by proposing the introduction of productive skills and the knowledge associated with them in the curriculum, Gandhi was advocating the allocation of a substantive place in education to systems of knowledge developed by, and associated with, the oppressed groups of Indian society, including what are now called the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. For centuries, education had been denied to these groups, and the knowledge systems associated with them had been denied the label of 'knowledge'. Basic education was proposing a subtle plan to carve room within the edifice of school knowledge for the knowledge and skills monopolised by the lower castes. Effective implementation of basic education could have rocked the prevailing hierarchy of the different monopolies of knowledge in our caste society.

Apart from the selection of appropriate forms of knowledge, school systems also face the problem of representing knowledge through appropriate symbols. Finding a language (e.g., vocabulary and images) to represent the data is of course a major challenge involved in the translation of knowledge into curriculum, but the more immediate and crucial question, is: 'From whose perspective will the data be presented?' A perspective represents not one person, but a structure of interests which include behavioural traits, styles of thought and the overall worldview. All of these ingredients form a structure of interests of social groups seeking dissemination and perpetuation of their culture through education. The extent to which the curriculum will reflect the structure of interests of different social groups will depend on the nature of relationships among the groups. Those enjoying power over others are likely to get a larger share of curricular representation; groups that lack power may either get only token representation or none at all.

If an examination of the curriculum and textual materials were to be made from the viewpoint of the Scheduled Tribes, it could provide answers to the following questions:

Are the ST represented:

Does the number (of lessons relating to tribal life correspond to the proportion of ST in the population?)

Which symbols are chosen to represent the ST?

The study reported in the first chapter revealed that only two out of a total of 41 story lessons included in the *Bal Bharati* series used in Madhya Pradesh had central character whose background could be identified as tribal, and no story had a central character identifiable as a Scheduled Caste. Taken together the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes comprise one-third of the population of Madhya Pradesh. Clearly, the representation of the two groups in the texts used in the teaching of Hindi was not proportionate to their physical presence in the ethos of Madhya Pradesh. More recently, I tried to ascertain the presence of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the entire school curriculum from grade one to eight as represented in the textbooks prescribed in Madhya Pradesh. This attempt showed that in all there are seven lessons and a handful of pictures that register the presence of these two groups. This count excluded the representation of tribal groups in the grade three textbook of district geography which is different for each district. But the total number apart, the presence of the Scheduled Tribes in geography texts is strictly a token which invariably consists of a brief listing of the special customs and habits of the local tribes, and a picture of their ritual dance. The geographical knowledge imparted through these texts is unmistakably based on, and oriented towards forming, a stereotype.

Let us examine the symbolic structure of the two story lessons in the Hindi textbooks which have a tribal character in the central role. One of these is the famous Puranic myth of Eklavya, the Bhil youth who has to sacrifice his thumb to satisfy a Brahmin whom he regards as his teacher. The teacher requires this sacrifice to allay the jealousy that his princely disciples feel towards Eklavya for his self-acquired skill in archer¹. The myth resolves the symbolic clash of caste backgrounds by upholding a pedagogical ideal: the pupil's obedience. In the other story, a tribal boy of Bastar saves a forest officer and a brigadier from being killed by a wild buffalo. The boy's courage and bravery are shown in a context in which an army officer acts as the audience and 'certifier'. In the structure of symbolically portrayed relationships in both stories, tribal boys depend on members of the dominant groups of non-tribal society for legitimating of their achievements.

The implication that can be drawn from the study is that the Scheduled Tribes are unlikely candidates for central characters in stories that are included in textbooks. If we consider materials prescribed for use in the curriculum as microcosms of society, then the SC and ST must be described as people who are invisible in the microcosms. On the few occasions when they do find a place in a prescribed text, they are likely to be depicted in compromising positions or as objects of patronage. In a lesson given in an elementary level Rajasthan textbook of civics, the teacher tells the class about a harijan boy named Chandu, 'Look, how neat and clean Chandu appears today. We should not hate him.'

The paucity of SC and ST symbols in the prescribed curriculum materials indicates the status of such symbols in the culture of schools which itself is a reorganised version of the cultural forms prevalent in society. The reorganisation involves selection and elimination of forms—including forms of knowledge and human behaviour. As Apple (1980) says, 'the curriculum in schools responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere. Not all groups' visions are represented and not all groups' meanings are responded to.' The groups whose visions and meanings 'are represented in the curriculum and text materials prescribed in India are the dominant groups in society. The visions and meanings held by the oppressed groups are cited as examples of backwardness and obstacles to progress. This tendency finds its sharpest expression in the materials prepared for imparting literacy to adults/ One finds its more subtle expression in school literature, as in the story 'Price of Eyes' which we looked at earlier.

Curricular representation of symbols relating to different social groups is a significant index of the value attached to these groups in the cultural configuration that education helps to form and to transmit. A curriculum can be regarded as a cultural form 'like house architecture, etiquette the design of roadways, or modes of civic participation (Andersen 1976). A curriculum which does not represent cultural data of all social groups in a proportionate manner can act as a means of aggression on groups whose data are excluded or which are poorly represented. The children of such groups are forced to identify with the symbols of dominant groups, and thereby have to perceive themselves as backward. The educational experience which is supposed to ameliorate the life of the SC and ST becomes a means of training the younger members of these groups to internalise their subservient position in society. It is true, of course, that whatever its content, education does assist individuals among the SC and ST to qualify for jobs traditionally inaccessible to them. It is also true that the success of such individuals can act as a source of inspiration for other individuals in these groups. Yet, for the majority of SC and ST children, the education available today is a discouraging and demeaning experience. This majority does not survive in the system long enough to qualify for status jobs reserved for them,

We can distinguish between two main strategies that can change in curricular policy. These two strategies are not mutually exclusive even though they reflect two different ideological viewpoints towards the representation of socially oppressed groups in the curriculum. The first strategy is to develop a separate curriculum and textbooks for students from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe backgrounds; the second is to reorganise the common curriculum so that it becomes more truthfully representative of a society which includes the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Support for the first strategy can be found in the point raised by several researchers that the curriculum content and the textbooks are unsuitable for tribal children (Srivastava et al. 1971; Ratnaiah 1977). For the second strategy one does not find much support in the literature. This is rather surprising in view of the fact that researchers do acknowledge the difficulties a separate curriculum would create for the tribal students who want to proceed to higher education. The actual policy in some cases has settled on the middle path—the usual curriculum and texts served in the tribal language.

The problem lies in how we perceive 'relevance', the belief that the inclusion of a few lessons pertaining to tribal cultures will make the common textbooks and curricula more 'relevant' to tribal children is based on a rather narrow view of 'relevance'. The worst weakness of the prevailing texts and curricula is not that they have no relevance for tribal children, but rather that they provide a distorted view of society to all children. A curriculum which has no respect or room for the tribal world-view cannot be described as 'relevant' for anyone in a society which includes a sizeable population of tribes. Such a curriculum makes a false representation of social reality. It cannot suddenly gain relevance for tribal children by having a few lessons about tribal life thrown in. The problems of tribal children cannot be solved by changing their vision, even if it were possible to do so with the aid of a handful of references, and allowing the vision of the rest of the children to remain what it is today.

What is needed is a change in the concept of worthwhile knowledge entrenched in the education system. If curricular reform permits 'worthwhile knowledge' to remain linked with the visions and lifestyle of powerful groups, and merely puts in a few stories about tribal life in order to satisfy tribal children, such a step cannot go very far. Far from changing education towards making it more relevant to social reality, it cannot be expected even to make classroom life more dynamic. It will leave untouched the behaviours we encountered in the history lesson about ancient India. For the non-tribal students, the lesson was simply another bit of 'received' knowledge; for the tribal student, it was another step towards the loss of self-respect. The lesson could not possibly be made dynamic unless the text on which it was based was written in view of the wider social reality, as it impinges upon India's present-day children.

Finally, curricular reform cannot be a self-enclosed and isolated strategy. Change in the curriculum would remain incomplete, and largely ineffective, unless patterns of teacher-, student interaction move towards greater understanding of, backgrounds such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The knowledge of social reality, particularly knowledge related to the social structures of domination that teachers bring to the classroom and their perception of the role of education with reference to these structures, are the main determinants of teachers' behaviour. Far too many teachers believe in cultural and behavioural explanations of poverty and backwardness. They use these explanations to make sense of the classroom behaviour of students from oppressed social groups. What is worse, they relate to these students in ways that accentuate precisely the behaviours which teachers regard as 'typical' of students from 'backward' backgrounds. This vicious cycle of the teacher's role is by no means confined to India. The fact remains, however, that Indian teacher training, does little to counter this entrenched role. Knowledge of social reality, and of the role of education under prevailing social conditions form an insignificant part of training curricula. Like much else in the theory part of the training course, this knowledge is conveyed in ways that are appropriate only to facilitate reproduction at the examination, and certainly not to encourage the trainee to think critically about social structures and education. Teachers cannot be oriented towards new types of classroom interaction and sensitivity towards students from oppressed social backgrounds without being exposed to specific issues of social reality and the functioning of the school system in relation to the social reality.

To conclude, my argument in this chapter has been that the experience of education, under prevailing curricular and instructional norms, can serve to assist the students who come from so-called 'backward' backgrounds to internalise symbols of 'backward' behaviour. The analysis presented in the first half of this chapter shows the role that educational texts can play in this process. This analysis should suffice to show why a claim commonly made in the literature on the education of oppressed social groups in India is a spurious one (see, for example, Chitnis 1981; Isaacs 1965; Patwardhan 1973). The claim is that education introduces bourgeois values among the oppressed, and thereby curbs their potential for radical expression. This view is based on the impact of education on an extremely small minority of students from oppressed backgrounds. Only a handful of students from backgrounds such as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes manage to survive through the primary school years, and then move through the secondary school and college to qualify for 'bourgeois' jobs. In a society where bourgeois values have high prestige, the acceptance of such values by a minuscule number of 'successful' individuals from oppressed social backgrounds can hardly be used as a ground for berating the role of education in curbing radical social change. What we ought to be worried about is not the fate of the tiny minority of 'backward' students who become 'middle class', but that of the vast numbers of students who are eliminated by the school system with the help of external or covert instruments' long before the carrot of a middle class

job can appear before them, and whose brief and demeaning educational experience merely proves to them that they are what they were alleged to be.

4. Image of the Illiterate Learner

THE study presented in this chapter concerns adult education texts, such as the primers used in literacy classes. A typical literacy primer tells the learners how a poor peasant gradually became prosperous by making certain rational decisions, such as the decision to plan his family and to start a new method of cultivation. The gist of such narratives is that a man can change his economic condition by dropping a set of backward and disabling characteristics, and adopting an alternative set of characteristics that are modern and healthy. The areas covered by typical literacy curriculum follow a certain mythology. A planned nuclear family, mother-craft, sanitation, balanced diet, a positive attitude towards bureaucratic services and increased production in agriculture are some of the recurring themes of this mythology. The emphasis everywhere is on a rational and balanced view overriding all worries, fears, compulsions and needs. The cool-headed, rational and pragmatic learner projected in literacy primers is supposed to plan all aspects of his life. He sees all his problems as the outcome of a disorganised, unthinking, ignorant personality whose salvation lies in new knowledge and skills (including literacy), planning and self-control.

The origins of this mythology, and of the learner's image that it entails, lie in the programme of community development launched in the first decade of Independence. But the literacy materials we find today are not the same as those used in the fifties. Text designing for adult education went through a subtle maturation process during the seventies. The study presented below concerns this period. It was a time of significant growth of interest in adult education all over the Third World. The factors responsible for this growth are to be found in the economic and political developments that took place in several Third World countries during this time. But one reason why adult education suddenly gained in academic respect must be seen in the publication of Paulo Freire's writings. Never before had adult literacy been perceived with so much rigour of social and philosophical analysis. Nor had it ever been discussed with such precision and richness of implication for political action.

Freire's books made it dear that text preparation for literacy work was an exercise of both social science and ideology. He devised a method of discovering 'generative' themes on the basis of an interdisciplinary study of an area, and of then 'coding' these themes into words and drawings. Like earlier theorists of literacy education, Freire recommended the selection of words on the basis of their thematic value. But he emphasised that the words, narratives and pictures must interpret the world surrounding the literacy learners from *their* perspective. The crucial difference between him and earlier theorists of adult education lay in his argument that literacy programmes can succeed only when they represent partisanship against oppression because mass illiteracy was a product of oppression. It was in this argument that Freire's attraction for hundreds of social action groups throughout the world lay. The same argument, however, might be held responsible for triggering the urgency to co-opt Freire. How one big international agency involved in adult education responded to this urgency is the specific theme of this chapter. But let us first examine the decade of the seventies, particularly the economic developments that impinged on non-formal adult education, in some detail. Also, before looking into the curricula and texts that projected the co-opted Freirean theory and method, we will briefly discuss this theory.

DECADE OF THE PEASANT

Until the sixties, non-formal education operated on the margins of developmental activity, with little financial support and with weak links with economic projects. It usually catered to a small section of Third World societies, such as the relatively well-off farmers who attended agricultural extension programmes. As Mbilinyi (1977) has shown there was no material basis for extending education to the majority of citizens:

There was no basic economic or political need for expansion of the primary education base, since 'super-exploitation' was possible without investment in or fundamental attention to either raising the level of productive forces within