

Wandering in the Realm of History

Experimenting with Pedagogy

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Abstract

Teaching history to the D.El.Ed trainees is both, a challenge and an opportunity. The huge burden of 'accumulated facts' (that is, what we transform history into) could be reduced considerably by introducing innovative ideas and initiating a culture of collaborative learning. The relationship between the past, present and future can be effectively transacted through vivid activities related to the social milieu and personal experience of the learners.

This article explores the journey of the author (a Teacher Educator in history and civics) and her teacher-trainees into the pedagogy of the subject, and the possibilities of creative and collaborative learning as introduced by DIET, Goa.

INTRODUCTION

The vast, mysterious ocean of the past beckons, allures, invites us. On the shores of this vast ocean, we gather facts, weave a lot of fiction around it and get actively engaged in understanding our pasts. It is in the light of our past that we can understand our present and carve the path for the future.

It was the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), New Delhi which provided a plethora of rich and vivid experience, connecting history with culture. The wonderful lectures, slides of our heritage sites, regional songs, visits to historical sites in Delhi, live performance of theatre artists and classical dancers, and many other such activities

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transformed my perception of the subject.

The huge educational kit gifted by them to each participant was truly a treasure trove of the past. This kit consisted of attractive pictures and slides with useful information about the architectural marvels of India, classical dance forms, musical instruments, miniature paintings, folk theatres of India, national symbols and a lot more.

It made me realise that history is not merely an accumulated heap of facts, facts and more facts; but a lively, colorful, engaging 'affair' with the past and the present. History is not merely about kings and queens, but also ordinary people, such as artisans, weavers, farmers, scribes, poets, scientists... all those who have built this world in which we live today.

This understanding freed us from the shackles of treating the subject area as a mere 'political arena' and helped develop a comprehensive viewpoint about the nature of the subject and the role of a Teacher Educator.

INCLUSION OF CREATIVE PEDAGOGY IN TEACHING HISTORY AND CIVICS: GLIMPSES OF EXPERIENCES

The subject content of the textbooks of social sciences published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) (June 2006) has many significant pedagogical strategies woven into the content, which provides scope

for the trainees to discuss, debate, interact and share their viewpoints. Many interesting narratives and case studies have been used by the authors. But, the problem is that it is not connected to the local history. An insight into the subject content and an attitude to go 'beyond the text' is needed in order to make the subject relevant and interesting.

In this context, a brief overview of the activities conducted in the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Goa, is thus provided.

'Amchem Mankulem Goem' (Our tiny Goa): Revisiting the Past

One of the key activities taken up in order to infuse local history and engage teacher-trainees actively was an exhibition titled 'Amchem Mankulem Goem', showcasing the heritage and culture of Goa. Every home is a site which cherishes and preserves things of the past. Each trainee brought articles, generally from their ancestral homes and wrote a few lines about its type, material used, and utility. The trainees and the teaching faculty were excited and pleasantly surprised to see that we have history in our homes which we need to discover and appreciate and be aware of. The antiquities exhibited surpassed our expectations. The long forgotten instruments of measure (locally called *annathi*, *ginnathi*, *kudav*, *payl*, *padd*, etc.) were displayed. The 21st century teacher-trainees seemed unaware of its presence in their homes or its utility.

Large sized copper and brass vessels, liquor storage glass wares, musical instruments; several articles used by the tribes of Goa adorned the exhibition hall. This activity brought to the fore memories of the bygone era and the need to preserve it. In a way, it was a celebration of the rich cultural diversity of the land and its people.

Perhaps, we could use the term “constructivist pedagogy” for this kind of a learning endeavour, wherein the learners become the makers of meaning. This is possible only when the learning is ‘connected’ to the world of learners. According to ‘Constructivist Pedagogy’ proposed in the National Curriculum Framework 2005, the learner is the creator of content, the maker of meaning, and not merely a passive receiver of the ‘given’ knowledge.

Taare Zameen Par: Celebrating 100 Years of Cinema

It was in the year 2013, that the Indian Film Industry had hit a century on the screen of time. The History Club of our institute used this opportunity to display an array of exhibits related to the theme Indian Cinema. From screening the first feature film of the Silent era, *Raja Harishchandra*, by Dadasaheb Phalke, to listing the major blockbusters till 2013, the exhibition hall was filled with the history of cinema.

Cinema too documents the past in many ways. This realisation was needed because we take films for

granted. Many films and film clips on social themes of untouchability (*Achhut Kanya*, *Sujata*), gender oppression, poverty, and class struggle could be used by teachers of social science as an effective device for creating social awareness.

Indeed, films could be used as a catalyst to change the rigid mindset of people. However, the choice of films to be screened and discussed should be done carefully because many films perpetuate the age-old stereotypes and biases. Documentary films on themes such as India’s freedom struggle, Shyam Benegal’s series based on Discovery of India have the potential to change one’s approach to teaching about our glorious past.

Developing a legitimate pride in the achievements of our country is possible through judicious selection of the theme, articles, pictures, relevant materials for the exhibition. Correlation of history with other subjects such as art, literature, geography, political science can also be done effectively.

Cinema based on the theme of freedom fighters, partition of India, or personalities like Ramanujan (a mathematician), Milkha Singh (an athlete), Mary Com (a wrestler), Hansa Wadkar (film *Bhoomika*, a biopic of the actor), several films on Gandhiji (*The Making of Mahatma*, *Gandhi My Father*, *Gandhi*, *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, etc.), Bhagat Singh, Subhashchandra Bose could be used as a significant source of learning

history. Partition based films such as *Garam Hava, Tamas, Pinjar, Khamosh Pani* are relevant in the present times too, for they reveal the anatomy of communal violence and its tragic consequences.

Digital Storytelling (DST)

An assignment on preparing photo slides, a short video with narration using voice-over, background music, on a theme selected by the trainees, helped create stories about the local history of temples, feast, folk theatre, *jatra* (a village fair) and many other exciting topics. The ethnic diversity of Goa was well captured by the 'selfie-obsessed' new millennial generation. The wide spectrum of themes included the feast of 'Sao Jao' (St. John), 'Chikalkalo' (mud festival celebrated in Goa during monsoons), 'Bonderanche fest' (the feast celebrated on the island of Divar, wherein people march with colourful flags). The history of forts, temples, chapels, martyrs' memorial were digitally documented and presented. Though amateurish, it was the first attempt at using this mode of DST for learning about local history, which mainly focused on cultural history. This experience of learning about the local history became relevant and interesting for our teacher-trainees, as it involved total engagement with the topics they had chosen, which were rooted in their cultural history.

Similarly, short videos could be prepared to capture oral history,

wherein senior citizens, freedom fighters, the elders in our family could be interviewed. Their valuable experiences and views about the Portuguese regime and the post-liberation period could be understood and appreciated.

The District Institute of Education and Training, Alto Porvorim is the only DIET for the entire state of Goa. The trainees travel from the extreme ends of north and south Goa to reach Porvorim, which is more or less located in the central Goa. Therefore, our trainees could represent a wide spectrum of themes related to local histories.

Visit to Museums

Visit to the Goa State Museum, a storehouse of artefacts, well-displayed in its galleries, is one of the prime activities taken up by the History Club of DIET. The sculptures of gods and goddesses carved during the reign of the early rulers of Goa, the photographs of rock art of the prehistoric times, the Portuguese influence on Goan history and heritage, the life-sized statues of the saints who propagated Christianity in Goa, the furniture of the colonial period, the sketches depicting the horror of the inquisition period, the pictures depicting the transformation of the city of Panaji into the capital of Goa during the Portuguese rule, coins, manuscripts, inscriptions, miniature paintings and many other antiquities helped in understanding and appreciating our unique identity

as 'Goans'. The first printing press in India was started in Goa. The first printing machine is displayed in the printing press gallery.

Indian Customs and Central Excise Museum, situated in the heart of the capital city of Panaji is one of its kind in the entire country. Right from the punch-marked coins of the Kushana period, to the depiction of The Silk Route during the reign of Kanishka, the Salt Satyagraha of Gandhiji, the photographs of finance ministers of India since Independence, adorn the galleries of this museum. Several priceless historical antiquities have been smuggled out of India. Therefore, the role of the custom and excise officers in intercepting the smugglers of not only antiquities, but also of narcotics, gold, arms, tusks of elephants, etc., was appreciated by all.

The visit to museums made our trainees reflect on whether there is a need to create a little museum corner in their classrooms. It was suggested that this be taken up as a group activity and the displays could be changed every month. Collection of stamps, coins, stones, utensils, pictures, drawings, illustrations, models, clay-models could be displayed artistically. Such learning activities could be a part of group assignments.

History and Heritage Trail

Goa has been portrayed as the land of sun, sand and sea. In the author's experience, it has been found that

many important historical facts and heritage aspects are not known to the teacher-trainees. An annual activity of 'history and heritage trail' taken up under the guidance of noted historians and environmentalists of Goa provided a very enriching and memorable experience to our future teachers.

For more than a decade, various historical sites have been visited. Bhimbetka Caves of Madhya Pradesh have been discussed in the NCERT textbook of Class VI. It is a World Heritage site, known for its evidence of prehistoric human beings and the cave paintings created by them around 10,000 years ago. In one of the heritage trails conducted in Goa, the trainees could see the prehistoric rock art at Pansaimol, Sanguem taluka. These carvings made on the laterite stones have interesting figures of birds and animals. The trainees realised the importance of preserving these sites.

To cite another significant example, it becomes a direct learning experience when we walk the trade routes which connected Goa with its neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. History becomes real, palpable and interesting. The Jain temple at Kudne, or the Harvalem caves in Bicholim taluka which show the presence of Buddhism in Goa, the worship of Sapta Matrukas (seven mothers) reveal the presence of Shakti cult, and the 'linga, indicating the presence of Shaivism in Goa.

Rivers are the lifeline of a civilisation. In Goa, out of the eleven rivers, river Mahadevi and river Kushavati have not only created a rich biodiversity but also vivid cultural diversity. The Western Ghats in Goa are home to many species. Therefore, the organisers of heritage trails should consciously select resourceful persons, who are well versed with the history, geography and culture of Goa. Such personalities make a profound impact on the student teachers.

As a follow-up, the Teacher Educator and trainees can decide a variety of activities such as slide presentation, preparing sketches, writing poems, articles, essays, reports, etc., according to the aptitude and interest of the trainees.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

The contribution of women should be adequately included in the subject content of all the disciplines across the board. What we learn and how we learn about our past will determine our perception of the present. Therefore, every teacher should analyse the textual content from the gender point of view, for gender equality and gender justice are pre-requisites for creating a democratic society.

Gender stereotypes are deep-rooted in our society, perpetuated by socialisation practices. For instance, one comes across a question stated in the lesson plans by the trainees on the topics related to family or village panchayat: 'who is the head of your family?' or 'who cooks food in your

family?' the expected response from the school children is 'father' and 'mother' respectively, very often our expressions, whether visual or verbal, strengthen our stereotypes. This is also true with respect to the textbooks.

Prior to the introduction of the NCERT textbooks in 2006, history and civics textbooks used in Goa had merely a couple of names of women personalities included as 'tokenism'. In the chapters related to the freedom struggle of India, only three women freedom fighters, namely, Rani Laxmibai, Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant were mentioned briefly. Comparatively the representation of women in the textbooks titled '*Socio-Political Life I, II and III*', respectively is much more gender sensitive as the currently used NCERT textbooks showcase real issues faced by girls and women of our country.

A purposeful, deliberate and a consistent effort is needed to include women in every sphere of history; be it social, political or cultural. An analytical or critical perspective is necessary to understand the textual content by Teacher Educators and trainees. This will enable them to play a proactive role in changing the age-old gender perceptions. In D.El.Ed institutes, more than 90 per cent of trainees are girls. To empower them, we need to create opportunities for inclusion of women personalities in the content, and use activities, such as wallpapers, videos, pamphlets, talks, poetry, songs, dramatisation, newspaper articles, discussions, etc.

CONCLUSION

If we adopt an activity-based approach to learning the subject, allow ourselves to wonder about the nature of the subject of history, go beyond the textual content, contextualise the learning experiences, develop a gender sensitive approach, nurture the creative potential of our teacher trainees and use local history to create a bond with the past, such endeavours will definitely go a long way in changing the perspective of our future teachers. A wide range

of ideas, viz., constructivism, critical pedagogy, child-centric education, activity-based learning are complementary and correlated.

The future of our country is being shaped in our classrooms and the teachers who will educate and empower this 'future' are being educated and trained in the teachers' training colleges. A paradigm shift is needed from being 'trained' to being 'educated' and this requires a paradigm shift in the pedagogies used in the DIETs and other teachers' training colleges.

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