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Uddalaka: Critical Consciousness Teacher in Ancient India

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Abstract:

The society which is dominated over information and knowledge is called postmodern society. Information and technology carried the world to global village system. Very soon every individual reaches into this information network. According to this teaching and examination method has been changing. Examinations are changing simply as memory tests. The capacity of critical knowledge to the approach is decreasing. That means science and technology education is changing to create the brain which is working according to the needs of the technology. It is clear that the importance of critical consciousness and it can move towards the knowledge production and carry the students to it. Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy is one that encourages and creating new knowledge in this way. This model could be seen in some situations in ancient India. This paper tries to examine the Uddalaka-Svetaketu discourse in Chandogya Upanishad as a prior method of critical educational thought.

Keywords: discourse, critical consciousness, critical pedagogy, deconstruction, hegemony.

Introduction

“O Gargi, do not ask too much (improper questions) lest thy head should fall off. Thou askest the Deity about which we are not to ask too much. Do not ask too much O Gargi”(krishnananda 1)

This is the reply given to Gargi Vachaknavi who was known as the first woman philosopher in India, by Yagnavalkya. New meaning making is formed from the answerless of the continuous questions. Learning method has prominent pace in ancient India which is combined by the discourse coming from the questions and meaning making evolving from the discourse. Gargi became a philosopher with the discourse of Yagnavalkya. In Indian Upanishads there are number of examples such as knowledge creation is developed through creative discourse and that has been discovered. In the present scenario where the world became the global village and information ruled over the world and to recognize more models of education through creative discourse. In the 6th chapter of Chandogya Upanishad there is a discourse between Uddalaka and his son Svetaketu and it is to be considered as the prototype of critical pedagogy. This paper discusses about the peculiarities of this discourse.

Knowledge creation develops through questions

Svetaketu is not asking any critical questions to Uddalaka like Gargi asked to Yagnavalkya in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. But all the asked questions evolved by deep thinking. More than that Uddalaka's responses to these questions have included the criticism of traditional knowledge enquiring methods. Because the Svetaketu acquiring traditional method of knowledge. So Uddalaka's replies to Svetaketu have been new knowledge narration. Svetaketu was not in a mental state to understand these without criticism so Svetaketu has been asking questions again. These questions had made the capability to produce new ideas by Uddalaka. Uddalaka's replies get an authenticity but he will not be a master. Because Uddalaka has been always ready to answer Svetaketu's questions creatively. Not only Uddalaka working as a facilitator to grown up Svetaketu with his own knowledge as production.

The question asked to Uddalaka by Svetaketu is such as:

“Thus, my dear, the mind consist of food the prana consists of water and speech consist of fire”

“Please Venerable sir instruct me further”

“So be it my dear”(Nikhilananda 57)

At that time, this question was very novel. Svetaketu asking this type of question which is emerged when the metaphysical argument exist such as everything is coming from Brahma but the question is against the argument. Grandchild Svetaketu has getting argument like mind consist of food, prana consist of water, speech consist of fire etc from his grandfather Aruna. Svetaketu is expecting the explanation of these from his father Uddalaka. Uddalaka is not only explaining simply but he is trying to explain and bringing the experience from the natural life.

Uddalaka's response is as follows:

“Do not eat any food for fifteen days but drink as much as you like. Since the prana consists of water it will not be cut off if you drink water”

Svetaketu did not eat any for fifteen days. Then he came to his father and said:“What sir shall I recite?”

His father (Uddalaka) said: “The Rik, Yagus and Saman Verses.”

He replied: “They do not occur to me sir”(Nikhilananda 57)

This is Uddalaka's teaching method. Natural life situations are created in front of the students and through this they are getting the capability to produce their own knowledge. This is also the basic characteristic of the critical pedagogy which is developed only in the modern era. Joe L. Kinchole said that “As a teacher relinquishes the authority of truth providers they assume the mature authority of facilitators of student's inquiry and problem solving. In relation to such teacher authority students gain their freedom –they gain ability to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge.”(17)

Uddalaka's pedagogy is the prototype model which has to be made the capacity to the students from their own natural situation and to present the theories from examples.

From examples to theories

Appropriate examples are not attained when it imposed by the non-critical theories. It will be more technical and artificial when the examples are creating according to the theories. The more creative method is to create theories from the proper examples which are received from the original living circumstances. Uddalaka is following this method.

There is an example in the 8th part of 6th chapter which is as follows:

“Bring me a fruit of that nyagrodha (banyan) tree”

“Here it is venerable sir”

“Break it”

“It is broken venerable sir”

“What do you see there?”

“These seeds exceedingly small”

“Break one of these my son”

“It is broken venerable sir”

“What do you see there?”

“Nothing at all venerable sir”(Nikhilananda 60)

We cannot perceive subtle essence but exist itself in all the substance. This method gives the capability to a student to move from natural living examples to exact theories. Uddalaka is not imposing theories but he is opening the ways to critical consciousness. Here Svetaketu has the capacity to produce his own theories from his natural life.

Uddalaka accepting the organic style which explains the deep relationship between the soul and body and in that condition also it is moving from example to critical consciousness and again moving to new theories.

“Just as a bird tied by a string to the hand of the bird – catcher first flies in every direction and then finding no rest anywhere settles down at the place where it is bound so also the mind.” (Nikhilananda 58) Through the example Uddalaka gives the meaning that wherever the soul go and takes rest it will come back to the body.

This method is following the example like honey collected by the bees. “As bees my dear make honey by collecting the juices of trees located at different places and reduce them to one foam,...

And as these juices have no discrimination so as to be able to say: I am the juice of this tree or I am the juice of that tree”(Nikhilananda 58)

This is an example leads from example to theories. More than that Uddalaka teaches the basic test of discrimination to his son which means the same essence existing in every substance. This is the proof that the critical consciousness preparing from many organic situations and it was a part of the learning process of ancient India.

Paulo Friere has been criticising the banking method which stuff in the information into student's brain because these type of information cannot helps to develop student's imaginative capacity. If the student will not acquire imaginative capacity he/she cannot attain the height of critical thinking.

In 1999, the UK National Advisory Committee Report defines creativity is such as "first, they (the characteristics of creativity) always involve thinking or behaving imaginatively. Second, overall this imaginative activity is purposeful: that is it is directed to achieving an objective. Third these processes must generate something original. Fourth, the outcome must be of value in relation to the objective. (Morris wayne 5) New knowledge can be created through creative thinking only when the imaginative capacity should cause to grown up in students. Critical knowledge means imagination is bring up and thinking capacity made by this and then the knowledge is gained through this. With the help of visual aids education system trying to up lift student's thinking capacity. This is working differently from the information gained from the text books.

There has been no modern technology at the period of Uddalaka. It is to understand that Uddalaka was not completely joined the teaching method such as memorisation. Uddalaka is not seeing students brain as bank where information is depositing. So Uddalaka received the way which travel to critical thinking with the help of imagery and then that leads to the critical narration. Uddalaka's achievement is to change the knowledge as a narration. For that Uddalaka accepts a technique that is to see metaphor continuously. The illustration of 'the seed of banyan tree' is important. The subtle essence which is the origin of the world and it is filled in every object and he ordered Svetaketu broken the seed of the banyan tree to show this strength. Here Uddalaka is trying to uplift different abilities of the student Svetaketu.

1. The imaginative ability created through making the seed of banyan tree as a world metaphor.
2. Examples are finding from his surroundings to produce information by himself.
3. Svetaketu gets the ability to develop critical consciousness to use creative method which gives the same results by visual aids.

In honey example also this process is performing. Uddalaka using metaphor like honey bees, honey and trees which produce honey is to clarify the basic essence of universe is same.

The salt illustration proves how knowledge narration performing through critical education process.

"Place this salt in water and then come to me in morning.

The son did as he was told.

The father said to him: “my son, bring me the salt which you placed in the water last night.

Looking for it, the son did not find it, for it was completely dissolved.

The father said: my son, take a sip of water from the surface. How is it?

It is salt.

Take a sip from the middle. How is it?

It is salt.

Take a sip from the bottom. How is it?

It is salt.

Throw it away and come to me. (Nikhilananda 60)

This is Uddalaka’s illustration process of teaching learning process. Through this illustration Uddalaka is come to a theory naturally.

“Now, that which is the subtle essence – in it all that exists has itself. That is the true”(Nikhilananda 60)

This is the best illustration of knowledge narration formed naturally from the natural life and quarrels with the banking system method which will check the memory.

Education for deconstruction

Group of dominating system which ruled over the society invisibly and it is called as Hegemony. The base of this Hegemony is the ideological state apparatus (Althusser 231) which is working through education, religion, art, literature etc. It is the dominative system it would construct the teaching - learning process which support us, the awareness of education can control deeply and unconsciously for the society. The memorisation information has this type of knowledge and to study the information which is constructed by someone. That means this type of learning- domination given symbols of existing system. New information should be formed by education only when to overcome the dominative system. For that first of all we should have to deconstruct the existing knowledge power relation. Then liberative knowledge is coming instead of traditional knowledge. In every period this type of information is formed. This kind of information leads the history in a meaningful way. To construct this type of information one has to exactly learn the existing construction of information. Secondly, it is to demolish this construction method and to make it in different way. Let it call as deconstruction process. This deconstruction process is necessary for the emancipation through education. The conflict between traditional theories and new theories has been seen in Uddalaka – Svetaketu discourse. Because Svetaketu gained traditional education at that times. Uddalaka brings forward the teaching method by questioning this. Uddalaka criticise the goddess image existing at that time. Uddalaka presents a God image which has no relation with the Indra image seen in Veda or ‘Thrimoorthy’ image later on.

Uddalaka's Goddess' are food, fire and water. The son who gained traditional education is not able to accept this. So Uddalaka is trying to present matters scientifically and to correct his son. The reason for Uddalaka asked Svetaketu to chant Rigveda mantras after did not taking food for 15 days. Through this he understands the importance of food, water and soil. More over that it is making to clear that the basic essence in these things are also present in soul. These types of observations are criticised against the absolute idealism which does not give the importance of labour and physical world. Uddalaka has been able to present the scientific relation between mind, body and food. "Food when eaten becomes three-fold. What is coarsest in it becomes faeces, what is medium becomes flesh and what is subtlest becomes mind.(Nikhilananda 56) Absolute idealism considered only soul as the truth when trying to make mind as a metaphysical thing. Then Uddalaka is trying to present mind is to be a part of food. Here it is deconstructing the existing knowledge. Uddalaka was trying to make knowledge and mind as a part of ordinary natural life and removing it from the extra sensory perception. This makes conflict with the existing knowledge concept at that time.

Ruben and Debiprasad Chandobadya said that Uddalaka's thought is conflicting with the great Yanjavalkya saint in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (277-280). Upanishads questioned various ideas which emerged from Vedas and strengthen the Aryan invasion. Uddalaka's ideology is against the theories like soul is immortal and body is mortal/perishable. Uddalaka – Svetaketu discourse put up the argument like universe and the components in it (human being, mind, body, soil, food etc.) is soul but which is against the discourse that is universe is fake and soul is true. It can be considered as the best illustration of Indian liberal education method.

Uddalaka's learning method is noteworthy in the present situation also. Nowadays discourses are reducing in classrooms and all the examinations are changing into one word and OMR system. Examinations are become memory tests only. In other side, there has been destruction for cultural capital, diversities, local languages, ecology etc. One who writes examinations in one word and could they face this problems and which is the real question. They are travelling with the system that constructing this type of problem. This type of education method can travel against the system. And the very prior model of this type of education method is seen in Uddalaka – Svetaketu discourse.

1. The knowledge which is constructing through the discourse can deconstruct the existing knowledge which help student to get critical consciousness. The effective strength of deconstruction is this critical consciousness.
2. The existing teaching method which examines only the memory and it cannot make a critique. To use the possibilities of critical pedagogy to make a critique.
3. Some possibilities of critical pedagogy are seen in Uddalaka – Svetaketu discourse in Chandogya Upanishad. Uddalaka is receiving the teaching method which helps to carry Svetaketu to critical consciousness through discourse and it leads to own knowledge production.

4. Modern science and technology is trying to develop students thought with visual aids. Instead of this Uddalaka is using organic metaphor. This metaphor is receives from the natural life.
5. The method is not creative which is constructing illustration after constituting theory according to it. So Uddalaka is taking examples from the natural life. Then it narrates in front of the student. Through this student is producing own knowledge. This knowledge production method is considered as the prior model of critical pedagogy.

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