CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The present research work was postulated to explore the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy, its theoretical evolution and practices in the western academia as well as in the Indian context. Basically the study was an interrogation of how such a concept of culturally relevant pedagogy can be grounded in the practices and philosophy of pedagogy as it has evolved in the Indian context. The study was focussed on the role that folklore can play in the postulation and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy in a plural socio-cultural pedagogic environment. Schools in the greater Tezpur area in Assam, which is a culturally diverse location, were chosen as the field to interface and explore the theoretical paradigm evolved during the course of the study and its efficacy and relevance in practice.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has its antecedents in Anthropology which tries to define knowledge and belief as it existed in a given social environment as something that was acquired by members of a particular social group. It is believed that culture evolves through the transmission of traditional knowledge and customs. The notion of cultural transmission is central to what can be termed as the earliest postulation of a pedagogic process. Inevitably, understanding of culture is often understood in terms of learning and acquiring of certain livelihood and life style traits. For a discipline like Anthropology, culture is thus a repository of pedagogic values transmitted across generations.

Culture as a context is of crucial importance in formulating strategies for an effective teaching-learning process; for pedagogy is determined by
the social order as reflected in cultural beliefs and assumptions and the
lived world which sees the enactment of such beliefs and assumptions
(See Ch.I.Pg.3-4). Against such a backdrop it is important that pedagogy
is understood in a more holistic way that goes beyond the understanding
of it being mere teaching styles and effecting control over classroom and
learning environment. Instead, pedagogy is a continuously evolving
process where there is a vibrant interface of cultural inputs brought in by
teachers and students within a given learning environment, often a space
where new cultural forms emerge out of an interactive cultural milieu.
Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy should evolve means and strategies
of meeting the academic and social needs of a culturally diverse learning
environment. Folklore is deeply embedded in the cultural repertoire of a
community and can be of crucial importance in the formulation of a
culturally relevant pedagogy. Such postulations should go beyond the
oral-written or institutional and non-institutional binaries. The merit of
the familiar and informal, that is integral to folklore, can enrich and
infuse the pedagogic process. This will help in negotiating the non
institutional cultural repertoire that a learner or a teacher brings into a
formal learning environment where institutionalised discipline and
control operates.

The relationship between folklore and pedagogy has evolved in diverse
locations across the globe and is an example of people-pedagogy
partnership. The folk high school movement in Denmark was an attempt
to bridge the gap between the elites with access to formal structures of
education and the folk, mainly the peasants, who acquire information
and knowledge through non institutional modes like folklore and other
community activities. The structure of folkloric transmission can afford
us with important clues as to effective methods and procedures in the
teaching learning interaction. Like folk forms, the formal classroom
environment is essentially an oral environment (See Ch. I. Pg. 09). The connecting of the ‘literary paradigm’ of the formal classroom with the oral ambience of folkloric transmission would loosen the bindings of a strict ‘scripted’ mode. From the vantage of discipline like Cultural Studies, it is interesting to interrogate evolving paradigms of culturally relevant pedagogy. The Foucauldian concept of ‘docile citizens’ being a product of institutional pedagogy provides an interesting insight where power is inflicted through a continuous process of pedagogic conditioning through the subordination and production of conforming and consenting citizens. This leads to Antonio Gramsci’s ideas that consent on the part of the dominated is produced by elaborate and complex process of social and cultural engineering that involves negotiation and imposition (See Ch. I. Pg. 11-12). The pedagogic process is deeply implicated in the production of docile citizens through a voluntary acceptance of the hegemonic structures imposed from above.

In post-colonial societies like India, such cultural negotiation facilitated by educational structures and processes continues well into the present times. The notion of the nation rides roughshod over cultural differences and traits in engineering a seamless and non variegated learning environment. The contemporary quest for decentralising authoritarian and hegemonic social and cultural structures can perhaps be attempted by accommodating the ‘individualistic anti-authoritarianism of folklore’ and folk process can counter hegemonic educational theories and practices (See Ch. I. Pg. 12-13). This would conform to Richard Hoggart’s ‘bottom-up’ conception of culture, where culture is seen as emerging from the symbolic and everyday practices of the ‘lived’ process of life. According to Raymond Williams culture has to understood in terms of the cause and effect relationship within a given social environment (See Ch. I. Pg. 13-14).
Incorporating of folklore into the overall pedagogic strategy would require a mindset that transcends the traditional-contemporary and informal-formal binaries. Such a divide does not have historical and methodological validation and scholars like A.K. Ramanujan find modes of folkloric transmission rooted in 'formal structures'. William Westerman’s opinion that innovation in pedagogy is not achieved only through content but also through methods and it is here that folklore can provide forms of ‘engaged’ communication, where there is an open and free interactive pedagogic milieu (See Ch. II Pg. 30-31). The success of folk schools in Denmark in the 1920s point out to a successful combination of life experiences of the common people and the academic mooring of formal schooling structures. Such examples were sought to be replicated in different locations, especially in the United States, where it evolved to include experiential education whereby agricultural field work, cooperative economics and organising of labour were incorporated into the curriculum. This was further reinforced with the incorporation of cultural activities like handicrafts and skills in other material culture.

The basic emphasis was to make the learner’s life an integral part of the pedagogic process. The family in itself is an important site and mother-child transaction was implicit in the process of folk pedagogy (See Ch. II Pg.34-35). Each cultural context generates its own folklore and the inclusion of folklore in the pedagogic environment is not a falling back on overarching alternative paradigms, but humanising and liberating the formal structures of learning with a more humane interface. The secret is to give cognizance to cultural and personal diversities where education is not an insulated and autonomous structure but part of the larger interactive domain that has immediacy and comprehensibility. The role of teacher is crucial as a teacher is continuously innovating and
discovering the cultural repertoire that a learner brings into the pedagogic environment. Jerome Bruner's models of folk pedagogy are embedded in a given cultural setting which not only sees children as learners but also as thinkers and knowledgeable subjectivities (See Ch. II Pg. 37-38). The learner's mind is not a 'tabula rasa', a vault where knowledge can be deposited by the teacher for later retrieval and use, but a space where the joy of learning through the practice of freedom is encouraged and inculcated. Learning is effective through a collaborative effort between the teacher and the learner which is basically an act of negotiation between the knowledge and information that the teacher brings into the learning environment and the student's incoming knowledge repertoire. It is not a process of unlearning what the community and family teaches, but a reinforcement of such incoming knowledge. Thus, dialogue is a prime process and requisite in such a notion of pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy believes that reliable knowledge is best preserved in extant forms of culture.

Folklore would perhaps be instrumental in encouraging dialogues in the pedagogic process, where by the negative fallout of narrow ethnocentric moorings of the pedagogic process is mediated and a plural mindset facilitated amongst the learners. The imperative is to break down the narrow prison of one's own cultural lenses. Education is also the ability to acknowledge differences, the fact that varying modes of life practices is perhaps not only legitimate but also desirable. Thus, pedagogy is also unlearning prejudices imbibed through a history of ethnocentric biases. Folklore serves as the bridge between home and school and it is seen that the most effective teachers in a culturally diverse contexts are the ones that move beyond traditional approaches of pedagogy and capitalise on the students' home and community knowledge as a mode to learn and adopt new skills and contents (See Ch. II Pg. 46-47). Key to
the basic notion of culturally relevant pedagogy is the mutual respect given to different cultures which can be fostered in the plural ambience of a culturally diverse learning site, very often the school. Successful examples of such an approach are cited where African proverbs are used effectively in validating a sense of being amongst African American students. Such proverbs are age old coinages with world view and values generated by a relevant cultural context to which the learners could immediately relate. The enduring values of such proverbs is the changed socio-cultural context of the United States instill in the learners a sense that certain values are beyond time and space.

Folk speech is another important component of folklore, which when successfully integrated into the learning process, can give valuable lessons in idiomatic propriety and relevance; in short, teach the learners to speak a culturally relevant language. Informal speech registers at the community and family environment is steeped in the colloquial which strives on the association of the local and the immediate with language. The introduction of such colloquial but idiomatic speech into the learning environment would democratise the formal register of institutional learning and inflect it with a colloquial understanding that would help a student to relate what he reads to his immediate environment. One has to give cognizance to the fact that speech styles are culture specific and instruction in an alien language or language register only end up in preventing meaningful access to education. Thus in the North East of India, which is marked by the existence of numerous languages and dialogues, incorporation of the local and colloquial variation of language in the formal academic environment of schools can go a long way in facilitating effective access to the knowledge (See Ch. II Pg. 49-51).
Folklore also can be integrated well with the notion of pedagogy as performance. Teaching can draw upon the improvisation and innovation which is so integral to oral speech, where the act of teaching is both a performance event and a performative event, where a learner should be free to improvise and innovate upon the teacher’s performance. Thus, incorporating features of performance in renditions of narratives like stories, historical events and verse forms will add value to the pedagogic experience. The folklorist’s mode is always interested with the creative, expressive and that which is transmitted informally through oral traditional modes. Folk forms like myths and legends can be used to enhance the learner’s ‘sense of history’ because folk genres nurture clues to history and myths and legends that draw on and evolve around historical events. They can help a teacher to posit not only an alternative perspective on history but also how history matters in the everyday life of the people. Folk narratives are also useful in arousing curiosity of learners regarding natural phenomena and create interest in young minds to go beyond a docile acceptance of ‘scientific facts’ transmitted in the formal classroom to a more interactive inquisitive exploration. Then the final analysis would help a learner to differentiate between cultural narrative and scientific facts. Genres like folktale also help in instilling on the young minds faith on the consequences of one’s actions and justness of life.

This notion of justice and fair play is intrinsic to the Panchatantra which is believed to have been narratives used for educating children in ancient India. The symbolic functions within these tales are age old cultural and social values and ‘basic truths of life and existence’. Dialogue was an important mode of pedagogy and the merit of multiple conversations was inherent to the use of Panchatantra as pedagogic tool. In the Indian context, folklore is seen as a repository of pedagogic values and is often
a vehicle ‘to spread the knowledge of righteousness and an honest life’ (See Ch. III Pg. 66). Ancient Indian tradition of pedagogy had the religious and moral as an inevitable ancillary. More spiritual than material, the quest here was for supreme knowledge and dharma and the righteous path was the way of acquiring it. The Vedanta philosophy of ancient India laid great emphasis on the self, which, is the source of all human phenomena including truth and knowledge. Ancient pedagogy was basically oral, where listening, reflecting and meditation were three steps that led one to the enlightened state. Remarkably devoid of a structured edifice, the institution around which such pursuit of knowledge revolved was the Gurukul, where the teacher, through his own practices was an example to be emulated by the learners. Along with spiritual quest, basic life skills were also imparted to the learners. Dialogue was an important feature of higher order learning in the Parishad.

Far reaching changes were observed in 600 and 500 B C when Buddhist tradition of pedagogy established monastic schools which was beyond a caste hierarchy and liberated educational institution from sectarian and the exclusively theological framework. With the advent of Islamic rulers’ formal structures like Maktabs, Madarsahs came up (See Ch. III. Pg. 67-69). However, it was the advent of the British Colonial rule towards the end of eighteenth century that brought in epochal changes, the ramifications of which continue well into the present times. English emerged as the language of the educated elite.

After independence, the colonial model went through a series of modifications to conform to the national interest of a newly independent India. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the concept of a national system of education for all Indians beyond the barriers of caste, creed and sex, crystallised into the nascent idea of National Curriculum
of Framework (NCF). It was in the NCF that the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy found importance and the role of mother tongue/first language instruction was thought to be the bridge between the cultural hinterland of the learner and the pedagogic structure through which such aims could be fulfilled. Great importance was given to learning in an ambience of familiar cultural, social and familial environment. Thus, the disruption that colonial pedagogy had ushered in was sought to be mitigated by such a policy of culturally relevant pedagogy (See Ch. III. Pg. 70-73).

Rejection of the colonial model has its antecedents in the ideas and philosophies of Gandhi and Tagore. They had found the overt emphasis on a literary model to be unsuitable for the country where knowledge had been transmitted through much more informal modes for ages. Tagore fell back on the folklore of Bengal as an important method of knowledge communication in his pedagogic experimentations, notably projects on rural construction at Sriniketan, where he wanted to make the villagers independent and self-reliant by exploiting traditional resource bases and traditional methods. He was perhaps the earliest Indian who championed the cause of indigenous knowledge system, where by the formal classroom was sought to be integrated with the field in various areas like sanitation and health, agricultural practices and profitable use of material culture (See Ch. III Pg. 74-75). From the purely subjective basis, whereby individual skills and excellence were privileged, Tagore’s model laid emphasis on the community and the collective. He privileged folklore and traditional culture as a repository of stored knowledge in the mass mind which needs to be profitably ploughed back for the upliftment of the society.

This was the traditional aspect that Tagore tried to harmonise with western structures of knowledge and education. For him the best that the
west had to provide could only be profitably acquired in one’s own language because it is the easiest gateway to an unfamiliar world and facilitate the negotiation between new experiences of knowledge with the traditional modes of knowledge and learning (See Ch. III. Pg.74-76). Viswa-Bharti was Tagore’s attempt at synthesising the best that his own cultural hinterland had to offer and the relevant knowledge that the West could give. His model rejected the merely mimetic but aimed at a synthesis that acknowledge strengths and lacunae, merits and drawbacks of both the traditions (See Ch. III. Pg. 77-78).

The incorporation of folk forms into the overall pedagogic paradigm is also important from the contemporary perspective because of its close relationship with what can be termed as the ecological imagination of the expressive forms of the tribal people in India. Nature is an integral part of folk beliefs and there are narratives in the traditions of a person that not only celebrate flora and fauna but also have pedagogic values for its preservation. Even Tagore’s idea of Tapovan, that was a guiding principle behind his initiative at Santiniketan, had the aim of going back to nature. Field work was central to Tagore’s conception of pedagogy where not only knowledge about plants, animals and environment were imparted but livelihood avenues around such resources were also promoted (See Ch. III Pg. 79-81).

Tagore’s idea found close echo in Gandhi’s notion of Basic Education, where he tried to supplement literary education with an active physical culture that would teach the learners not only the dignity of labour but also the value of self-sustenance. In the true Gurukul tradition, Gandhi conceives the teacher as the real text-book and basic education should promote expertise of the hand, the value of mother tongue, inter cultural exchange through the learning of languages and most importantly education that is not confined to the formal realms of learning but finds
its way to the domestic sphere of the learners also. It is very interesting to note that for Gandhi true education is self supporting in the sense that it will generate the resource to sustain the process. Influences of Gandhi’s ideas continue well into the present times and it is considered as validation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Folklore finds a prominent mention in the works of both Gandhi and Tagore; for Tagore, it was an important mode of connecting a child to its large cultural reservoir and at a time when folklore and folk beliefs were viewed as superstitions, Tagore championed the cause of folklore as deliverance from the tentacles of emerging colonial modernity in India and sought for a moderation between emergent forms with its scientific bias and traditional knowledge with its socio cultural relevance. Folklore, the ‘verbal creation of a society’ was essential in the understanding of basic conception of the world and life in a given community and folk forms were the community’s response to the process of social and cultural evolution and civilisation. Folklore provided the key out of all bounded experience of learning and inculcated into the learning process the joy of creation and imagination (See Ch. III. Pg. 83-87). This links up Tagore with Gandhi. Gandhi also considered freedom as the key to worthwhile learning; where learning is a liberating agency that infuses courage in the student’s minds, for beyond fear is the triumph of real learning (See Ch. III. Pg. 88-90).

The value of folklore continues well into the present times and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 stresses the importance of oral lore and tradition of material culture as important national assets that are preserved by large number of communities in India. According to NCF, no formal structure of knowledge acquisition can ignore such traditions and repositories of knowledge. Even Nehru, the architect of the vision of a modern industrial India, found in folkways the essential
‘virility and zest’ and democratic ethos that can stand up as a model to an emerging India. What is now considered plural and multicultural was in fact an integral part of the ideas of important Indian thinkers like Tagore, Gandhi and Krishnamurti and the relevance of their pronouncement continue to influence the pedagogic process till the present times (See Ch. III Pg.91-97).

Various programmes in both the government and non government sectors have been in the forefront to provide culturally relevant education with active cooperation and collaboration of the community. In two relatively successful community based programmes in Orissa, learning was made interactive and relevant through an interface of paradigms in culturally relevant pedagogy and grass root action research. In a programme on Multilingual Education (MLE), the community was involved in the complete process, from its initiation to execution. It was interesting to observe that there was a wide spread apprehension as to the survival of the people’s culture under the onslaught of the influence of the modern living. Their expectation out of education was clearly a regeneration and revival of their age old cultural practices. The whole curriculum was designed with the help of the stakeholders through a series of workshops where folk based forms like fairs, festivals, tales and legends were incorporated. Similarly, in a programme introduced in 2007 in Orissa, named the Srujun programme, great importance was laid on the indigenous knowledge of the community. It involved primary modes of transmitting instruction and knowledge and consisted stories, games, art and craft and ecological knowledge that were entrenched in the traditions of the community itself. The Srujun programme functions from a belief that the community is a very important creator of knowledge. In Assam, an oraganisation named ‘Heritage Assam’ with the help of UNICEF is
inculcating language skills among disadvantaged children of the tea plantation by reviving the art of traditional story telling (See Ch. IV Pg. 102-105). Such approaches are in the vanguard of redeeming the curriculum from the trap of ‘mainstreaming’ that tries to obliterate cultural differences, perceived as a threat to national well being. Champions of a culturally plural curriculum would like to involve communities and teachers belonging to such communities in shaping and designing an effective pedagogic structure for children mostly from the tribal and underprivileged sections in adding value and relevance to the whole process. Though it is felt there are many lacunae in the formulation of NCF, it also has to be acknowledged as an evolving paradigm that would take time to respond to the multiplicity of people, culture and problems in a country like India.

The merit and the limitations of such an evolving paradigm of pedagogy in India was experienced when philosophies, ideas and formulations on culturally relevant pedagogy was sought to be understood and analysed in a field situation in Assam. Six schools were selected for conducting fieldwork that would reveal the efficacy and the fallacy of the present pedagogic structure in place. It is important to note that all the schools selected for the study were affiliated to the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) and followed a uniform curriculum at the theoretical and conceptual level. Thus, the plurality flowed from the widely variant local referential points. The socio cultural locations of the schools were sufficiently varied and diverse and the schools themselves were marked for cultural diversity amongst both the students and the teachers. There was a medley of culture and language and the finding of the field emerged from an interface of attitude on parts of both teachers and students to important cultural markers like food, dress, social and community practices and the larger cultural context. Food lore emerged
as a very important area of cultural contact and exchange amongst the students. As food is intricately related to different occasions and events, narrative around cultural specific events emerged through the conversation amidst the students. However, it is also interesting to note that cultural prejudices were very strongly manifested in the attitudes towards the food habits of different cultural groups and emerged as a very strong device of cultural othering. It was interesting to note during the field work that many students overcame initial prejudices and engaged in a vibrant exchange of each other’s cultural specific food habits.

It was also found that quite a few teachers effectively used folk narratives to reinforce the textual narratives, where the students could relate to the text in the book from the vantage of their cultural texts. Lessons on hygiene and good social practices were more effectively conveyed through such narratives. One of the most difficult conditions to negotiate in the classroom is the cultural incongruence between teachers and students. The ideological conditionings of the teachers play a great role in their attitude towards the learners. Teachers who have been properly trained and exposed to cultural variation were found to be less prejudiced and more effective. Gender plays a very important in determining the dynamics of pedagogy. Teachers’ motivation is often determined by preconceived gender roles constructed culturally. Social prejudices and ideas of pedagogic hierarchy act as a major hindrance for some male teachers in performing their roles effectively. It is often felt that women can handle the problems of young learners more appropriately (See Ch. IV Pg. 122-125).

The study used theoretical insights to identify the pedagogic practices which are ideologically motivated and how these practices are practiced in the classroom. Social relationship in the classroom, be it between the
teacher and taught, or amongst students or between a particular school and the community at large, are critical factors in culturally relevant pedagogy. The effective social relations create healthy conditions for effective and lively learning. The study also took into account difference in the pedagogic discourse and practices adopted by different teachers. The findings have shown that the teachers who allow the students to share their knowledge in the classroom not only help other students to gain from the whole process but also achieve a self validation in terms of both professional status and competence. The teachers, on the other hand, who consider the students' mind as a tabula rasa, expect the students to adjust their understanding on their terms and not from the vantage of the learner's competence and input capabilities. The teacher should be a guide that takes the students from the realm of the known to the unknown and not someone who throws the learners into the deep end of the unknown. When there is mutual sharing of cultural knowledge, then there is a co-creation of knowledge where the learners do not leave their subjectivity outside the school gate. Heterogeneity of cultures is healthy for both students and teachers. Existence of both local and the others, a cultural mix of people, is definitely better than a mono-cultural learning environment. Thus, it is clear that culture serves as a very important tool for effective and interesting learning; more so when students and teachers of diverse cultures learn together and develop a mutual respect for cultures while being consistent to the value of their own culture. When formal structures of learning is related to the students' day to day life, the whole process, which otherwise seemed to be tough, becomes much easier.

The ideologies and the various aspects of pedagogical issues have been dealt in detail in National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005. The teachers of Kendriya Vidyalayas had to pass the written tests to
understand the written guidelines and principles written in the document. It was seen while interacting with the teachers of Kendriya Vidyalayas that they were generally aware of the ‘theoretical aspects’. However, variations have been seen amongst them and it has been seen that the teachers who had ‘studied’ well for the test do apply to theory to practice. It was also found that the teachers do try to implement the guidelines and the principles of the NCF 2005, and teachers who had understood the theoretical concepts found it easier to apply it in practice (See Ch. IV Pg. 129-132).

Folklore, in its variegated dimensions, can thus clearly add value to the pedagogic process and at the same time mediate traditions and modernity in an effective manner. Culturally relevant pedagogy, with a focus on folklore, can go a long way in reconciling post colonial societies like India to its lot of hybridity by accommodating apparently contra indicatory dynamics of tradition and modernity, and bring alive vividly to the learners that life and learning is an unending process of negotiation.