Chapter IV
FRIERE'S CONTRIBUTION TO ADULT EDUCATION

Education has a well defined process. It is a suitable means to change both the individual as well as the society. Paulo Freire takes education as a tool to change the dehumanizing condition of man and society, created by the colonial rule, especially in the countries of the third world. He finds a well calculated and intentioned plan of the sectarian group of politicians- both the capitalists and the socialists to impose their ideas and values on the people of the third world and thereby to create an atmosphere of exploitative system in which the mass of the people, by internalizing their ideologies, became self alienated and live a life of confusion. In such a situation, they lose their critical powers to perceive the reality of oppression and are compelled to live in the “culture of silence”. Education is an attempt to arouse people from this “culture of silence” and conscientize them to transform the dehumanizing structure of society and ultimately realize their freedom.

CULTURE OF SILENCE

Paulo Freire, in his “Cultural Freedom in Latin America”, has discussed his concept of ‘culture of silence, in detail. In his, ‘Cultural Action for Freedom’ also he has discussed this idea to a great length. In the introduction of this book, he writes: “at a time on Brazil when the ‘culture of silence’ was being exposed for what it is, I began, as a man of the third world, to elaborate not a mechanical method for adult literacy learning, but an educational theory generated in the womb of the culture of silence itself- a theory which could become in practice,
not the voice of the culture, but one of the instruments of that still faltering voice”.

According to Paulo Freire, in society, there are two classes- the culturally alienated and the culturally dominating. The culturally alienated society is wholly “dependent on the society which oppresses it and whose economic and cultural interests it serves”. Simultaneously, “within the alienated society itself, a regime of oppression is imposed upon the masses by the power elites”. In both the cases the culture of the alienated societies is maintained by the colonial rule as a culture of silence”. In this case of culture of silence, Firstly, the alienated society and it becomes the mere object of it. Secondly, the director society prescribes its words to silence by the power elites. When the people of the alienated society, organize themselves to break this silence, they are violently suppressed by the power elites to maintain this silence. In the failure of the elites, the director society itself takes the action.

Freire holds that “the repression used to return the masses to their silence is preceded and accompanied by a myth-making effort to identify as diabolical all thought-language which uses such words as ‘alienation’, ‘domination’, ‘oppression’, ‘liberation’, ‘humanization’, and autonomy. The main task of a revolutionary leader or an educator is to break this silence. Paulo Freire, very eagerly expresses: “I have only one desire: that my thinking may coincide historically with the unrest of all those who, whether they- live in those cultures which are wholly silenced or in the silent sectors of cultures which prescribes their voice, are struggling to have a voice of their own”.

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According to Freire, learning, reading and writing is not enough. The important thing is to know the meaning of the words critically which implies reflection and action. This is not the privilege of the few elites but a primordial right of all human beings. As such, learning does not allow an individual and community to keep mum and remain silent. Freire holds, “speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in societies historical process”.

In the ‘culture of silence’, the masses are prohibited from their right of self-assertion and self-development. They are not allowed to take part in the transformation of their society. It is true, that they are allowed to read and write in the name of humanitarian work, nevertheless, they are alienated from the power responsible for their silence, they are not allowed true knowledge. They simply know that they are concrete men and they do things, Freire says: “what they do not know in the culture of silence- in which they are ambiguous, dual beings- is that men’s action as such are transforming, creative and recreative, overcome by the myths of this culture, including the myths of their own ‘natural inferiority; they do not know that their action upon the world is also transforming. Prevented from having a structural perception of the facts involving them, they do not know that they can not exercise the right to participate consciously in the socio-historical transformation of their society, because their work does not belong to them.

Paulo Freire, in the literacy process developed a novel method of teaching which has become very much successful in breaking the culture of silence. He has quoted the example of some peasants of Chile undergoing agrarian reform,
who clearly confessed that before agrarian reforms they could not think independently, because they lived under orders and they had to carry out those orders. They had nothing to think and share responsibilities, except to obey the orders of their bosses. So, in the culture of silence, “to exist is only to live. The body carries from above. Thinking is difficult, speaking the word forbidden”. The illiterates are mistrusted, they are afraid of the world around them like ‘big city’, of ‘buying’ the wrong thing; of ‘being cheated’ etc. They enjoyed reading and writing. One of the peasants, who underwent literacy process, remarked, “Before we were blind, now the veil has fallen from our eyes. I came only to learn how to sign my name. I never believed I would be able to read too at my age, before letters seemed like little puppets. Today they say something to me and I make them talk”.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE OF SILENCE

‘Culture of Silence’ is a function of certain structures of society. It emerges due to a particular relation between metropolitan and dependent society. Therefore, a proper understanding of this culture requires the understanding to the social structure itself. In perception, every figure is surrounded by its found. Similarly, a culture of silence co-exists with its social background. A society has both its infrastructure and super structures. We can not underestimate either of the two in understanding a social structure. Freire rightly says: “Social structure is not an abstraction, it exists in the dialectic between Super and infrastructure. Failing to understand this dialectic, and we will not understand the dialectic of change and permanence as the expression of social structures”. Culture of silence is ‘a super-structural expression which conditions a special form of consciousness”, it over determines the infrastructure in which it originates”. All
this exposes to the fact, entire expose to the fact that ‘culture of silence’ can not be understood in its part but in its wholeness. In a letter to Paulo Freire, Jose Luis Fioro writes: “understanding the culture of silence is possible only if it is taken as a totality, which is itself a part of a great whole is. In this greater whole, we must also recognize the cultures which determine the voice of the ‘culture of silence’. We do not mean the ‘culture of silence is an entity created by the metropolis in specialized laboratories and transported to the third world. Neither is true, however, that it, emerges by spontaneous generation. The fact is that the “culture of silence is born in the relationship between the third world and the metropolis. It is not the dominator who constructs a culture and imposes it on the dominated. This culture is the dominated and the dominators”. Freire also feels that the understanding of ‘culture of silence’ “presupposes an analysis of dependence as a relational phenomenon which gives rise to different forms of being, of thinking, of expression those of the culture of silence and those of the culture which has a voice”.

Explaining the relationship between a metropolitan society and a dependent or object society, he says: “both the metropolitan society and the dependent society totalities in themselves are part of a greater whole, the economic, historical, cultural and political context in which their mutual relationship evolve. Though the context, in which these societies relate to each other, is the same, the quality of the relationship is obviously different in each case, being determined by the role which each plays in the total context of their interrelation. The action of the metropolitan society upon the dependent society has a directive character, whereas the object society’s action, whether it is response or initiative, has a dependent character”. In such a relationship, the dominated society introjects the cultural myths of the dominator. The dependent
society "introjects the values and life style of the metropolitan society since the structure of the latter shapes that of the former". This brings duality, ambiguity, ambivalence and confusion in the culture of dependent society. Paulo Freire holds: "the relationship between the dominator and the dominated reflect the greater social context, even when formally personal. Such relationships imply the introjection by the dominated of the cultural myths of the dominator. Similarly, the dependent society introjects the values and life style of the metropolitan society, since the structure of the latter shapes that of the former. This results in the duality of the dependent society its ambiguity, its being and not being itself and the ambivalence characteristic of its long experience of its dependency, both attracted by and rejecting the metropolitan society". The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its infrastructure is shaped by the director society's will. Therefore, "its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis- in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens". The metropolitant Society is so powerful that it can" absorb its ideological crises through the mechanism of economic power and a highly developed technology". But the dependent society is "too weak to support the slightest popular manifestation" and hence, it always remains rigid and silent.

Freire holds that silence of a society is not due to director society only, but also due to its own- power elites. The power elites who are silent in face of the metropolis, "silence their own people in turn". Therefore, in order to break the cultural of silence, the people in mass should take the lead. He says: "only when the people of a dependent society break out of the cultural of silence and win their right to speak only, that is, when radical structural changes transform the dependent society- can such a society as a whole cease to be silent toward the director society". On the contrary, "if a group seizes power through a coup and
begins to take nationalist economic and cultural defense measures, its policy creates a new contradiction. These possibilities may arise in this case:

i. This regime may break with the culture both internally and externally.

ii. Fearing the ascendancy of the people, it may retrogress and re-impose silence on the people.

iii. It may sponsor a new type of populism.

In all the cases the submerged masses would have only the illusion that they are participating in the transformation of their society. Their manipulation will be going on and suppression continued. The masses will be formed to emerge from their silence with increasing demanding attitudes. Thus, the populist government will “find itself obliged either to break open the culture of silence or to restore it”. Paulo Freire has supported his propositions with the examples of popular government in Brazil, Peru and other Latin American societies. According to him, “Latin American societies are closed society characterized by a rigid hierarchical social structure, by the lack of internal markets, since their economy is controlled from the outside; by the exportation of raw material and importation of manufactured goods, without a voice in either process; by a precarious and selective educational system whose schools are an instrument of maintaining the status quo; by high percentages of illiteracy and diseases which are really diseases of underdevelopment and dependence; by alarming rates of infant mortality; by malnutrition, often with irreparable effects on mental faculties; by a low file expectancy and by a high rate of crime.
A special type of consciousness develops in a dependent society which is immersed in the cultural of silence. This consciousness is historically conditioned by the social structures. Freire holds: "the principal characteristic of this consciousness is its 'quasi adherence' to objective reality or 'quasi immersion' in reality". He also calls this mode of consciousness as semi-intransitive. In such type of consciousness, people fail to know the reality critically and therefore, they can not understand its challenges. They perceive the reality critically and therefore, they can not understand its challenges. They perceive the reality in distorted way". Its 'semi-in transitiveness' is a kind of obliteration imposed by objective conditions. "Because of this obliteration, the only data which lie within the orbit of its lived experience. The mode of consciousness cannot objectify the facts and the problematical situations of daily life. Men whose consciousness exists at this level of quasi immersion lack what we call "structural perception", which shapes and reshapes itself from concrete reality in the apprehension of facts and problematical situations. Lacking structural perception, men attribute the sources of such facts and situations in their lives either to some super reality or to something outside objective reality". Men become fatalistic. They find themselves incompetent to change the situation due to their 'natural incapacity and look toward supernatural power. Consequently their action is not oriented toward transforming the reality.

When the infrastructural changes take place, and a crack is produced in the existing structure, people enter into the "historical and cultural transition". Freire holds: "once the crack in the 'structure begin to appear, and once societies enter the period of transition, immediately the first movements of emergence of the hitherto submerged and silent masses begin to manifest themselves. This does not mean, however, that movements towards emergence automatically break
open the culture of silence. In their relationship to metropolis, transitional societies continue to be silent totalities. Within them, however, the phenomenon of emerging masses, forces the power elites to experiment with new forms of maintaining the masses in silence, since structural changes which provoke the emergence of the masses, also quantitatively after their quasi-immersed and semi transitive consciousness”.

The next phase of the development of consciousness towards breaking the culture of silence is what Freire calls “native transitivity”. At this stage “silence is no longer seen as an unalterable given, but as the result of a reality which can and must be transformed”. Before this, the popular consciousness was semi-intransitive, “limited to melting the challenges relative to biological needs”. Now, the popular consciousness expands and people begin to visualize and distinguish what before was not clearly outlined. Both the consciousness arise due to the crack in the structure of the closed society, nevertheless, it is difficult to make a rigid demarcation between “the historical moments which produce the qualitative changes in men’s awareness”.

In this new popular native intransitive consciousness, people are not able to overcome culture of silence, yet the presence of the masses in the historical process exert pressure on power elites and it creates a new moment in the development of awareness in both the domination and the dominated the structure of domination, the silence of the popular masses would not exist but for the power elite without the masses”. There emerges consciousness of surprise in masses, for they are, now, able to see what was masked before. Similarly, the power elites also feel surprise for the fact that they have been unmasked by the masses. It creates anxieties in both the masses and power elites”. The masses
become anxious for freedom, anxious to overcome the silence in which they have always existed. The elites are anxious to maintain the status quo by allowing only superficial transformation designed to prevent and any real change in their power of prescription”.

The transitional process brings dynamism in the static character of the closed society. It revolutionizes all dimensions of social life. The inherent contradictions of social structure come to the surface. This provokes conflicts and the popular consciousness becomes “more and more demanding” causing greater and greater anxiety on the part of the elites. A new event takes place. The groups of intellectuals and students, who themselves belong to a privileged class, “seek to become engaged in social reality tending to reject imported schemes and prefabricated solutions”. This changes the old styles and themes of poetry, and politics. Freire holds: “the arts gradually cease to be the mere expression of the easy life of the affluent bourgeoisie, and begin to find their inspiration on the hard life of the people. Poets begin to write about more than their lost loves, and even the theme of lost love becomes less maudlin, more objective and lyrical. They seek now of the field hand and worker not as abstract and metaphysical concepts, but as concrete men with concrete lives”.

“In the closed society, the relations between the elite and the quasi-immersed people are mediated by political bosses representing by various elitist factions”. The emergence of masses from silence does not allow this political style to continue. However, they are not able to speak on their own behalf. They are manipulated by the populist leadership, as they can not manipulate to elites. The populist leadership, not only maintains “the naïveté of the emerging masses but also the peoples habit of being directed”. But at the same time it uses “mass
protest and demands, which accelerates the process by which the people unveil reality”. Thus, the new populist leadership is paradoxical and ambiguous in character. It is manipulative, and yet “a factor in democratic mobilization”. As a matter of fact, “the populist style of political action ends up creating conditions for youth groups and intellectuals to exercise political participation together with the people”. Although it is an instance of manipulative paternalism, populism offers the possibility of a critical analysis of the manipulation itself”. This provides the masses an opportunity to become conscious of their dependent states.

As the masses pass from a semi-intransitive to a native transitive state of consciousness, the consciousness on the part of the elites is also awakened. In history, it is a decisive moment, for the critical consciousness of progressive group. At first, small groups of intellectual who are alienated from the masses, become aware of this consciousness. But “as the contradictions typical of a society in transition emerges more clearly, these groups multiply and are able to distinguish more and more precisely what makes up their society”. They join the popular masses in variety of ways, like through literature, plastic arts, the theatre, music, education, sports and folk art and achieve the communion with the people. This poses another challenge to the consciousness of the power elites. Some economic and military power elites find answer to these crises of popular emergence, in “coupd’itat”. According to the degree of its violence and that of the subsequent repression of the people, the ‘coupd’itat’ reactivates old patterns of behavior in people”. Consequently people again come back to their old culture of silence and become passive due to the violence and arbitrary rule. Now the popular forces will have to act in silence, and find ways to counter the effects of the reactivation of the culture of silence.