

Professional vs. Ideologue Teachers: A Review Analysis of Meenakshi Thapan's Work

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Abstract - This paper analyses the social interactions between professional teachers and ideologues, two different categories of educators. Mostly derived from a review analysis of Meenakshi Thapan's groundbreaking work, it pays special attention to the interactions between the two different roles that teachers play in educational institutions. These interactions are still relevant in today's classrooms. In addition to curriculum and policies, teachers also have a significant influence on the educational culture in India, like the unique Rishi Valley School in the paper, which was established on the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti. Whereas the two such distinct teachers group bring their experiences and beliefs to the classroom. Through an analysis of these divergent groups, the paper clarifies more general issues regarding the responsibilities of teachers and the challenges of creating a vibrant school culture in establishments that are governed by firm ideological convictions and professional teaching ethics.

Key Words: Schooling, Krishnamurti, Ideologues Teachers, Professional Teachers, Modern Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper tries to provide review analysis of Thapan's (1991) work *Life at School: An Ethnographic Study* and its relevance, particularly focusing on professional teachers and ideologue teachers. The analysis will highlight the potential relevance of her work and bridge the divided roles of the teacher. However, the challenges of bridging are fraught with challenges and possibilities, which are relevant in contemporary society today. The diverse experiences provide rich insights for ethnographic study, where the interplay of hierarchy and power becomes evident as well. Hierarchical structures within the study field at Rishi Valley School do not stem from the teachers immediately but rather from an interesting institutional order based on organisational dynamics. The school has two distinct teacher groups: ideologues who are committed to the school's ideology and pedagogues who focus on their instructional roles.

2. INSTITUTION PHILOSOPHY

Meenakshi Thapan's (1991) *Life at School* provides an insightful examination of the teacher culture at Rishi Valley School, a private institution in Andhra Pradesh influenced by the educational philosophies of Jiddu Krishnamurti.

Krishnamurti's ideas, often perceived as religious or spiritual, advocate for holistic education that integrates academic learning with inward personal growth. This philosophy underpins the school's approach, emphasising individual transformation as a pathway to social change. Thapan's (1991, pp. 1-3) study examines how this philosophy manifests in the daily practices and interactions within the school. Acts of resistance, whether through protest or subtle challenges, are integral to the schooling process. These acts highlight the roles of social actors within the educational system, showcasing how students and teachers contest and negotiate the terms of their engagement with school authority. This resistance is not only a form of opposition but also a means of asserting identity and agency within the institutional framework. The schooling process at Rishi Valley School is characterised by a dualism of conformity and resistance (pp. vii-xix). This dualism reflects the broader ideological underpinnings of the school, influenced by Krishnamurti's vision of global responsibility and holistic education. Thapan explores how this dualism plays out in everyday school life, shaping the identities and experiences of both teachers and students.

Thapan delves into the intricate dynamics between professional teachers and ideologue teachers, highlighting the roles, commitments, and interactions that shape the educational environment. In the educational framework, the voices of teachers and pupils are often concealed yet play a crucial role in shaping the institution's culture (p.54). Their views, identities, and interactions form the unique cultural fabric of the school, which is influenced by various embedded subcultures. Referring to this type of ideology submission, Weber (1978, p. 111) discusses that it originates in those circumstances of 'distress' or 'enthusiasm' resulting in the 'surrender of the faithful to the extraordinary'. While the school's philosophy and authority structure guide teachers' roles, these roles cannot be fully dictated by the school's expectations alone. Teachers' responses to the schooling situation and their interactions within the school environment are essential to understanding the broader teacher culture. Teachers' roles at Rishi Valley School are shaped by multiple factors, including teaching duties, organisational responsibilities, school board decisions, and parental concerns. These roles embody a multiplex character that influences their professional lives. Teachers are recruited through both formal processes, such as advertisements and guidelines set by the school board and informal discussions at organisational events or public talks by Krishnamurti (pp.28-30). In this context, Hall (1972) views that this context of 'abstractions' of ideas becomes 'more concrete' and 'legitimacy'.

2. PROFESSIONAL VS. IDEOLOGUE TEACHERS

Thapan identifies two primary recruitment models: formal and informal. Informal recruits, often overqualified with doctorates or specialised training, are attracted to the school due to their commitment to Krishnamurti's philosophy (P. 79). These ideologue teachers, or "twice-born," have renounced more lucrative careers to pursue teaching influenced by Krishnamurti's ideas (p.81). In contrast, professional teachers, recruited formally, join the school to build their careers, seek personal convenience, or find a more leisurely work environment. In her book "Life at School," Meenakshi Thapan (1999) offers a captivating analysis of the teacher culture at Rishi Valley School, an institution in India heavily influenced by the educational philosophies of Jiddu Krishnamurti. Thapan delves into the intricate dynamics between two distinct groups: professional teachers and ideologues. By examining their roles, commitments, and interactions, she paints a vivid picture of how these groups shape the school's unique educational environment (p.82).

Thapan emphasises that the voices of teachers and students, though often overlooked, are crucial in shaping a school's culture. Their views, identities, and interactions weave a unique social world, further enriched by embedded subcultures within the school. While the school's philosophy and leadership structure set the stage for teachers' roles, these roles are not solely dictated by external expectations. Teachers' responses to the school environment and their interactions with colleagues are essential to understanding the broader culture. The multifaceted roles of teachers at Rishi Valley School are influenced by various factors (p.83). These include teaching duties, administrative responsibilities, school board decisions, and even parental concerns. Teachers are recruited through both formal processes, adhering to specific guidelines, and informal avenues, such as Krishnamurti talks or organisational events. These recruitment methods pave the way for the emergence of the two distinct teacher groups.

Thapan identifies the crucial distinction between professional and ideological teachers. Professional teachers, or pedagogues, prioritise career development and approach teaching without a deep commitment to Krishnamurti's philosophy. While some may gradually embrace aspects of the ideology, their dedication rarely reaches the level of ideologues. The latter group, deeply invested in Krishnamurti's principles, views their work as a mission to embody and promote his educational ideals.

3. BEYOND CAREERS AND COMMITMENTS

Thapan builds upon Woods' (1984) model of teacher commitment, which identifies three categories: vocational calling, professional commitment, and instrumental commitment. These forms of commitment can vary in intensity and may shift over time. At Rishi Valley School, Thapan introduces a unique concept: "commitment to worldview" (p.83.) This refers to the teachers' dedication to the school's broader philosophy, which emphasises positive societal change through education. Professional teachers'

actions are primarily guided by local educational practices, while ideologue teachers strive to align their work with the "transcendental order" of Krishnamurti's principles (Krishnamurti, 1981). Interactions between these two groups can sometimes lead to conflicts, particularly regarding the interpretation of Krishnamurti's ideology and school operations. Goffman (1961) sees these as an 'embrace' of the 'role' completely disregarding all the elements of their 'virtual self' life and submitting to its role fully. Professional teachers often take a pragmatic approach, prioritising career advancement and job security. Ideologue teachers, on the other hand, prioritise adherence to the school's philosophical ideals and may challenge administrative decisions perceived as contradictory (PP.85-90). These conflicts highlight the differing worldviews and commitments that coexist within the teacher community.

Thapan utilises case studies to illustrate the contrasting motivations and experiences of these two teacher groups. A professional teacher might be drawn to the school seeking a more relaxed environment, while an ideologue teacher might be deeply inspired by Krishnamurti's writings and view their role as a mission to implement his educational philosophy. For professional teachers, job security is often linked to their ability to adapt to the school environment and maintain a professional demeanour (p. 84). Ideologue teachers, however, are more concerned with conforming to the system and impressing key figures within the school's foundation. Failure to align with Krishnamurti's philosophy can have significant personal and professional repercussions for ideologues (p. 86) In Rishi Valley School, this existence of 'informal interaction' and the least presence of 'authority structure' is opposite compared to various 'public schools' in India and where De Souza (1984) finds that 'Indian public schools' are considered to be 'authoritarian structure'. The strong emotional attachment of ideologue teachers to the Krishnamurti philosophy can sometimes lead to misinterpretations. Campbell (1980) has criticized Krishnamurti's ideas which are identical to Rousseau's such emphasis on the self 'ability' for social transformation. Thapan highlights an example where a teacher views their role as helping students adjust to society, while the true focus of Krishnamurti's philosophy is on societal transformation. This points to a potential pitfall within the teacher culture: the danger of ideological rigidity and a one-size-fits-all approach to education. While Thapan identifies professional and ideological teachers as the two main categories, it's important to acknowledge the existence of a spectrum of teacher commitment within the school (PP. 105-107). Some professional teachers might gradually develop a stronger connection to the Krishnamurti philosophy over time. Conversely, some ideologue teachers may face challenges in fully embodying the philosophy in their daily practice. To which, in understanding this social spectrum allows for a more nuanced view of the teacher culture at Rishi Valley School.

4. CONCLUSION

Critics like Shukla (1991) argue that Thapan overlooks the roles of conflict and resistance in the functioning of school actors. However, Thapan does acknowledge these elements,

emphasising how teachers and students mediate conflicts that arise from submitting to school authority. Meenakshi Thapan's analysis of teacher culture at Rishi Valley School provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between professional and ideological teachers. Their distinct motivations, commitments, and interactions contribute to the school's unique educational environment. By examining these differences, Thapan highlights the broader implications for teacher roles and the functioning of educational institutions influenced by ideological principles. The interplay between professional duties and ideological commitments shapes the school's culture and influences the educational experiences of both teachers and students.

Schools are shaped not just by curriculum and policies but also by the teachers who bring their experiences and beliefs to the classroom. This article explores the fascinating teacher culture at Rishi Valley School, a unique institution founded on the philosophy of Krishnamurti. Professional teachers are primarily driven by career goals and their passion for teaching. They may not be deeply invested in the Krishnamurti philosophy. In contrast, ideologues are deeply committed to his ideas and view their work as a way to contribute to those ideals. These teachers are often highly qualified individuals who have chosen the school over potentially more lucrative opportunities, driven by their belief in its mission.

The recruitment process itself plays a role in shaping this teacher culture. Formal recruitment attracts professional teachers seeking career advancement, while informal discussions and Krishnamurti talks draw in ideologues seeking to connect with his philosophy. This creates a dynamic where professional teachers hold more authority due to their numbers, but the curriculum and educational discourse remain heavily influenced by the Krishnamurti philosophy embraced by the ideologue teachers. Thapan delves deeper into teacher commitment, expanding on a model developed by Woods (1984). She proposes an additional category specific to Rishi Valley School: "commitment to worldview" (Thapan, 1991, p. 92). This refers to the teachers' dedication to the school's broader philosophy of fostering positive societal change through education. Senior professional teachers, despite occasional disagreements with school decisions, avoid openly criticising the Krishnamurti ideology. This could stem from loyalty to the school's founder or a fear of jeopardising their job security. While professional teachers may adopt elements of the Krishnamurti philosophy over time, their commitment rarely matches the intensity of the ideologues. Ideologue teachers, on the other hand, exhibit a strong emotional attachment to the school's success. They see themselves as central to its growth and dedicated to upholding the Krishnamurti philosophy. However, the article also highlights a potential pitfall: misinterpretations of the ideology. One example describes a professional teacher who views their role as helping students adjust to society, while the true focus of the Krishnamurti philosophy is on societal

transformation. Interestingly, this paper shows the complex relationship between loyalty and potential dissent in an educational institution.

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