

Map as Critical Pedagogy

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Eklavya's extraordinary nature-society series construes geography as an important signpost of inquiry. The complexity of the environment and well-being of human and other life forms can substantially be churned out, along with understanding it beyond territorial gratification in the form of unravelling the layers of processes and its offshoots like the place, people, questions and alternative. Using geography for people per se necessitates rearranging the engagement with the map as critical pedagogy. This refutes its reductionist use for homogenisation, territorialisation, and empiricisation of beings. Yemuna Sunny, the author of *Maharashtra*, under the nature-society series, metamorphoses the map substantially into critical pedagogy.

Critical Consciousness and Alternative

Construing and presenting a map as critical pedagogy requires a substantive methodological shift—to relook, read and realise about critical consciousness (“what it is” followed by “why is it”) and critical alternative (what ought to be done). Critical pedagogy combines critical consciousness with the critical alternative. In the first aspect (critical consciousness), critical pedagogy is “enacted through the use of generative themes to read the word and the world and the process of problem posing generative themes involves the educational use of issues that are central to students’ lives as a grounding for the curriculum” (Kincheloe 2008: 10). Critical pedagogy requires more than critical thinking in terms of direct engagement cum acquaintance with people. “Distinct from critical thinking (a term that has been hijacked by many anti-critical teachers and textbook publishing companies), critical pedagogy calls for an active engagement with oppressed and exploited groups” (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008 cited in Kirylo et al 2010: 332).

Maharashtra (Nature Society Series) by Yemuna Sunny, Bhopal: Eklavya, 2020; ₹80.

Therefore, it is not “... formulaic, it isn’t stagnant, and it isn’t an is” (Steinberg 2007: ix). Herein, critical ontology (new self) is going to play an indomitable role. “Critical pedagogy’s notion of a new self (a critical ontology) and new modes of exploring the world are grounded on the human ability to use new social contexts and experiences to reformulate both subjectivity and knowledge” (Kincheloe 2008: 147).

In the second aspect (critical alternative), critical pedagogy proposes “... a social and educational vision of justice and equality ... [by way of] ... alleviating human suffering” (Kincheloe 2008: 10). It becomes “a critical agent” (Giroux 2007: 1) to challenge socio-economic structures in which schools do operate (Kirylo et al 2010: 332) for social transformation (McLaren 2007: 310). It promotes social justice and democracy by way of using education as “counter-socialisation” (Stanley 2007: 371). The foremost task of critical pedagogy “... is to clarify the legitimacy of the ethical-political dream of overcoming unjust reality” (Freire 2016: 19). Critical pedagogy becomes assiduously crucial for combining critical consciousness with critical alternative.

In this book series, the map meant for children brings forth substantial critical consciousness. The map is neither a cryptic code of administrative parlance nor a homogenising tool. The state of Maharashtra is more than its capital and second capital. Twenty-one languages (Marathi, Malwani, Konkani, Hindi, Gujarati, English, Jhadiboli, Vahadi, Ahirani, Gondi, Mavchi, Nimari, Dhanki, Rathi, Warli, Kolami, Maria, Naiki, Korku, Kurmi and Koli), presence of multiple religions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism, Adivasi religion and not specified religions), multi-culinary food habits

(fish, rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, and ragi) and availability of a heterogeneous range of vegetables (lentils, poultry, meat, coconut and groundnut oil) make reality as multilayered exploration and acquaintance. Geographical heterogeneity is explained with three crucial components—providing a critical alternative to any homogenised world view—nature-society relations, people of Maharashtra, and the environment.

Synthetic Convergence

The section on nature-society relations explains the crop and region. It not only succinctly highlights the intricate relationship between geography and history but also the symmetry/asymmetry between cultivations and regions. Sea-front, sustenance, trade, wars, and forts are intertwined. To generate curiosity, the question being asked is apt: “Can you find out from other sources why forts were built, and what were their uses?”

The question of water availability comes uniquely. In Maharashtra, 64% of people do cultivation and related activities. The pattern of crop and regions is as follows: cotton and orange: Konkan; banana: Khandesh; rice and coconut: Marathwada; grapes: Vidarbha; ragi: Submountain; jowar and bajra: Sahyadri. The description of sugar cane is telling and forces us to rethink our priorities. Maharashtra has only 18% cultivable land and sugar cane production consumes 71% of the irrigated water. Solapur district of Maharashtra contributes significantly to sugar production. These descriptions are crucial for the reader to further explore the twin enigmatic developments in Solapur, which is the leading producer of sugar on the one hand and worst sufferer of drought on the other. This is sufficient to draw attention to the consumption of water for a particular crop and democratisation of water in a district which is drought-prone. It also highlights the trajectory of BT cotton. Though BT cotton remains immune from several insects, it is not completely free from all insects. This requires the use of additional pesticides along with the higher cost of BT cotton seeds. This information becomes significant in the context of farmer suicides.

People are beyond enumeration. They are not a fact but life.

Not Merely Enumeration

The book underlines that the diversity of religions, languages, and food habits are crucial aspects of Maharashtra. Life suffers from inequality in access to resources. The presence of 47 tribal communities and non-tribal societies do provide heterogeneity. Non-tribal society by way of caste does deprive people of development and landownership. This gives rise to traditions that seek socio-economic justice. This gives rise to traditions that seek socio-economic justice. This aspect is crucial for imagining the presence of a critical alternative.

Warkari tradition and Dalit movement are examples mentioned. The pre-14th century Warkari tradition by Dnyaneshwar, Eknath, Tukaram, and others emphasises “equality, compassion, love, non-violence, humility, and peaceful living.” These developments were crucial for anti-caste and anti-gender discrimination movements. Pandharpur is not merely a point on the map but encompasses a history of struggle. Maharashtra is also known for the Dalit movement and pioneering contribution of Jotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, and B R Ambedkar towards an egalitarian world. The map of Maharashtra encompasses such a rich tradition of transformation. The author asks aptly in this backdrop: “In your life experiences, do you see caste, poverty, and gender-based inequalities decreasing? Do you think we still have much to do for making a just society?”

Raising curiosity in the minds of young readers without pre-empting a response, forces them to not only know but also constantly interrogate our socio-economic engagement and overt and discreet discriminations—ever-present, justified, and normalised. Therefore, the complacency towards discrimination is broken through goading inquiry and inquisitiveness.

Moreover, the author draws attention towards patterns of development in farming and industrial productions relating to problems for the unemployment and livelihood requirement of the people. It is important to understand the correlation

among expensive seeds production by multinational companies along with fertilisers and pesticides production by companies, expensive farming, and loans for agricultural purposes. Due to the interplay of these myriad factors, the cotton farmers faced the highest number of suicides.

Moreover, the disappearance of textiles due to the shifting of land use for other commercial activities and resistance of textile owners towards higher wages caused unemployment among people, and affected their children's school education.

Diversity and Democratisation

This book also informs us about the environment as both a repository of the diversity of all life forms and as a site for the democratisation of resources (in this case water availability). It highlights the diversity of medicinal plants, trees, plants, animals, birds and other living beings in the forest. The Sahyadri region of Maharashtra has UNESCO-recognised world heritage sites (Koyna, Radhanagari, Bhimashankar wildlife sanctuary, Kass plateau, and Chandoli National Park). These sites are pointed on maps as a symbolic representation of the protection of the diversity of all forms of life.¹

The author invites the attention of students towards excessive car availability, pollution, waterlogging, flooding of houses and interruption of railways during monsoon in Mumbai. Water consumption patterns offer an insight into the process of democratisation of resources. Industrial consumption of water is voluminous. Thermal plants are placed on the map while suggesting that they consume a large amount of water. Moreover, industrial waste is released into rivers which contaminates the water. Excessive use of water in sugar cane cultivation drops the groundwater level. Together, these insights are represented on the map, enabling the readers to conclude for themselves, the factors that attribute to acute water scarcity in an area.

The author uses Warli painting brilliantly to highlight and provide meaning from the intricate relation between tribes and art. Peculiar shapes, inhabitants, nature, festivities, animals, farming and

trees are the best representatives of the richer profundity of environment and ecology.

A Quintessential Read

The pithy book is a required methodological innovation. It lays out the backdrop for further exploration. It does not do away with the explanation part but asks students to develop it further on their own. The map is exploratory in nature while facilitating an understanding of nature, biodiversity, humans, and allied activities. The book understands the consequences for human beings vis-à-vis the presence of diversity of all forms of life. The map becomes a signpost of critical pedagogy concerning critical consciousness and a critical alternative. This book bridges the gap between essentialist and people-centric understanding of geography/map.

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NOTE

- 1 Some of the concerns around “Sahyadri-Radhanagari” can be seen in Government of India report on *Status of Tigers, Copredators and Prey in India* (Jhala et al 2020: 82).

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