

Capital, Habitus and Symbolic Violence: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Mode of Reproductions in Indian Schools

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ABSTRACT: This paper uses the Bourdieusian notion of capital, habitus and symbolic violence to understand how schools in India operate as critical sites for social and cultural reproduction. The paper reveals the hierarchical nature of Indian education, characterised by a history of inequities of caste, class, gender, region and language. It benefits students who have the cultural capital that corresponds to the middle-class habitus and marginalises others. The paper also recognising the limitations of Bourdieu's approach and its further prospects. Schools also transforms inter and intra generational privileges through pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum into educational success. This paper demonstrates that Indian schools become a counter-reproductive spaces through student agency, teacher innovations, and also through policy interventions. The paper advocates for developing what has been called a universal pedagogy that is not biased in favour of middle-class habitus. It makes schools accessible to everyone.

KEYWORDS: Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, Educational Inequality, Habitus, Symbolic Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

While education is seen as the source of social mobility in India, its institutional frameworks are rampant with social hierarchy. There are massive differences in classroom facilities, teaching practice and student achievements at all levels. At one side there are elite private schools in metropolitan to poorly resourced government schools in rural and disadvantaged regions (Kumar, 1991). Such inequalities correspond to an unequal distribution of material and cultural resources. This in turn reproduced inequality in the very process of schooling. The dominant narrative positions education as a meritocratic means of opportunity. However, through gaps in enrolment, achievement and transition rates, schools reproduce and reinforces social hierarchy and social inequality, rather than overcoming social hierarchies (Nambissan, 2009).

In this context, the theory of social and cultural reproduction by Pierre Bourdieu provides a suitable framework for analysing the school as an institution that reproduces and legitimates existing social inequalities. According to Bourdieu (1977), education is a source of mode of reproduction by which societies reproduce their social order across generations. He focusses on three interrelated concepts of capital, habitus, and symbolic violence that constitutes the context and agenda that is important for ensuring how this reproduction takes place. These concepts help in understanding how privilege is not just economic but it is an exclusionary epistemological approach. We also come to know how apparently neutral pedagogies endorse the habits and capital of dominant classes.

The Bourdieu's notion of capital is a broader term. It encompasses economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital can be found in three different forms: embodied like, dispositions, linguistic style, and tastes; objectified like books and technologies; and institutionalised like educational credentials. Children from the literate, urban, middle class have cultural capital that match with school expectations; they are conversant in English or Hindi, know books, and are comfortable with the social interaction in classrooms (Sarangapani, 2003). The children from the working-class, from a Dalit or Adivasi background or from a first-generation family lack this capital. Hence, they are misrecognised as a lacking intellectual capacity. However, these children have other forms of capital (Nambissan, 2009) not explored and recognised by the schools. This situation leads to their lower engagement, performance and advancement in school.

Habitus relates to the dispositions internalised as a result of one's social upbringing. Habitus subconsciously influence perception and action of individuals (Bourdieu, 1977). The school promotes a high-status scholarly habitus, which includes skills and dispositions like comfort with abstract reasoning, and the assertive participatory behaviours of middle-class (Thapan, 2006). Children coming from poor homes also come to school with a habitus that has been shaped by differently, resulting in labelling them as less interested and disruptive (Sarangapani, 2003). Teachers recognise this as their personal failure rather than schools failure thereby re-producing low expectation (Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004). Continued incidents of marginalisation may gradually lead to disengagement, which then confirms their apparent unsuitability for higher education.

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Their concept of symbolic violence describes the ways in which dominant cultures impose their cultural norms as universal and normal, rendering others to internalise their position of subordination (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In Indian schools, the symbolic violence is evident in the everyday nature of pedagogic practices, evaluation standards, and the narratives of textbooks that contribute towards normalising upper-caste and middle-class worldviews (Nambissan, 2009). As an instance, the English-medium education is filled with a symbolic legitimacy and accorded the status of an intelligence badge in contrast to devaluation of mother-tongue (Jeffrey et al, 2008). So, English becomes a dominant language and mother-tongue a devalued language. The students who speak non-dominant dialects are subjected to all kinds of linguistic shaming through symbolic violence. The curriculum is mostly developed by side-lining the experience of the students from the Dalit, Adivasi and working-class communities (Kumar, 1991). This practice leads to lower educational achievement among students coming from these communities.

The ineffectiveness of meritocracy in education becomes apparent while considering India. It appears that the education system promotes success as the result of individual merit. However, those who succeed are largely because of access to desirable forms of capital and alignment with hegemonic habitus. Elites consolidate advantage by enshrining high-status cultural capital into curricula and extra-curricular activities in elite private schools (Sriprakash, 2012). The government schools are starved of resources and are unable to provide even minimal infrastructure development. Accordingly, they manifest as variations in learning outcomes and transition rates. Children from marginalised groups being much more at risk of dropping out of school.

This paper responds to the question that schools in India reproduce social hierarchies through capital accumulation, habitus formation and symbolic violence. This work adds to the sociology of education by contextualising Bourdieu in the Indian schooling system. Such an understanding can help create just policies and pedagogies that challenge rather than reproduce historical social hierarchies.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CAPITAL, HABITUS, AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

The theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu is essential in analysis of how educational systems reproduce existing social hierarchies from one generation to another. Bourdieu challenged the ideal notion of schooling as a neutral institution that rewards meritocracy by exposing how school privilege those who already possess the cultural capital and dispositions of the ruling class. Four concepts are central to his theoretical framework: capital, habitus, symbolic violence and mode of reproduction. These elements help in understanding how structural forms of inequity are taken up and replicated in the everyday practices around schools.

2.1. Different types of Capital and their Inter-conversion

Bourdieu (1986) made a larger contribution to the definition of capital as accumulated labour of various forms, which can be used to obtain benefits in different fields. Economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital can position a person in social space. Also, one type of capital can be transformed into another type.

Economic capital means material resources that can directly or indirectly be transformed into money and are institutionalized in form of property rights. Families with high amounts of economic capital are able to buy access to elite schools, extra tutoring, enriched learning environment, and co-curricular activities to determine children's educational success (Sriprakash, 2012). Cultural capital includes assets supporting a higher status. It includes things such as non-financial social assets like education, intellect, style of speech and dress. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital has three forms. First is embodied cultural capital like accent, aesthetic taste, and cognitive style. Second is objectified cultural capital like books, art pieces, devices, and technologies. Third is institutionalised cultural capital like educational achievement of parents.

Sarangapani (2003) shows how children from families with higher education this kind of cultural capital that align with school expectations like comfort with abstract reasoning, knowledge of cultural forms, and fluency in language. These are simple the advantages not the raw talent. But irony is that they are able to reap more from the education system because these advantages are confused with their talent.

Bourdieu (1986) provides a logical framework for thinking about social capital as a resource. Social capital refers to entitlement to or access to information through networks of relationships. This relationship may be parental links to teachers; alumni networks; political links or networks of peers with educational resources. Such networks are well-established for middle-class families and enable them to make their school systems work for them and provide high-status opportunities (Jeffrey et al, 2008).

Symbolic capital is basically any type of capital - economic, cultural, or social - that is perceived and recognized as legitimate. However, it is mistakenly identified as natural prestige and honour to dominant caste, class, gender and religion. For instance, schooling in the English medium serves as symbolic capital in India. It connotes intelligence and modernity, even if it is essentially a reflection of their privilege (Nambissan, 2009). This capital also explains the intergenerational reproduction of privileges and prestige.

2.2. Habitus: Connection between Structure and Practice

Bourdieu (1977) described habitus as a system of durable and transposable dispositions that are obtained through socialisation in certain social conditions. It serves as an intermediary between objective structures, like class positions and the practices of individuals.

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Family during their childhood, and schooling, are considered the two major institutions of habitus formation. This includes your taste, how you behave with your body, how you speak, how you think, and how you feel. However, habitus works below the level of consciousness. Hence, it produces behaviours that seem natural but are actually socially constructed. Students coming from the upper caste and class have confidence in speaking and writing, feel at ease, they are naturally comfortable submitting at school (Thapan, 2006). In contrast, the school may view students coming from working-class or lower status caste backgrounds as hostile and deviant (Sarangapani, 2003).

That is why habitus enables Bourdieu to overcome the structure-agency divide. Behaviour is not instinctively determined by social structure, nor is it chosen by individuals in autonomous ways. People may behave strategically but not consciously, based on their embodied history of structural conditions. For Bourdieu (1977), the habitus produces practices that are in line with the objective structures of which it is a product.

Habitus is durable, but not fixed or unchanging aspect of one's life. For instance, the first-generation students in a new social field when enter elite schools, their habitus may not sufficiently provide them for the expected behaviour. Students may partially change their dispositions in such situations. However, this is not possible without the institutional support in the field (Jeffrey et al., 2008). This dynamic account describes the perpetuation of inequality in general and also limited mobility.

2.3. Symbolic Violence: The Misrecognition of Domination

Symbolic violence is a central theoretical construct used to explain how educational systems reproduce social inequality through mechanisms that are merely invisible rather than being open and coercive. The symbolic violence emerges when the particular cultural norms are misrecognised by the dominant group (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). These dominant norms are imposed on the marginalised community, which act as symbolic violence.

Middle-class cultural styles, standard language, linear reasoning, and assertive participation are treated by schools as if they naturally reflect intelligence and effort. Those without these styles are seen as lethargic, rebellious, and senseless. This justifies their worse results. This process hides the structural privileges and the thus advantage the middle-class students (Kumar, 1991).

It must be understood that the reality of symbolic violence is done through routine pedagogic practices. Symbolic violence is inbuilt in the way in which students and teachers interact, in the way disciplinary measures are taken in a classroom, in the criteria used for evaluating students, and in the representation of knowledge in textbooks. For instance, curricular material is filled with upper-caste, urban-centric narratives, while the histories and knowledges of Dalit, Adivasi, and working-class communities are relegated to the margins (Nambissan, 2009). Furthermore, there is hierarchy in language which carries symbolic violence. English is treated as a superior language while the vernacular languages are devaluated so that the non-English speaking students start to feel inferior (Kumar, 1991). These hierarchies are taken for granted as common sense by both the dominant and subordinate groups. These aspects are internalised by them as natural. This way, social stratification is reflected in the meritocratic differentials. This also helps to clarify why schools can reproduce inequality in the absence of visible discrimination.

2.4. Reproductive Mode

In the lines of Marx, Bourdieu recognizes the relevance of economic structures but adds that societies have a mode of reproduction. These modes of reproduction are the mechanisms through which constellations of social structures, hierarchies, and relations of domination are reproduced in society (Bourdieu, 1974). The mode of reproduction emphasises the transmission between generations of cultural and symbolic capital. Schools certify some forms of knowledge and disposition as legitimate, thus reproducing a system of class stratification under the disguise of meritocracy (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Education systems are so central to maintaining inequalities that they are the place in which privilege is affirmed and transmitted across generations.

2.5. Critiques of Bourdieu's Framework

Bourdieu's framework has also been subjected to considerable criticism on three main accounts: determinism, circularity, and a lack of agency. Bourdieu exaggerates the degree to which habitus reproduces existing arrangements. It results in a kind of over-socialised individual who cannot go against structural forces. Consequently, this ignores the agency of students and teachers who resist hegemonic norms or attain upward mobility against the odds (Jeffrey et al., 2008).

Scholars point out that Bourdieu occasionally attributes educational achievement to habitus then gives a definition of habitus based on educational success, thus establishing a circular logic. This renders the framework difficult to falsify.

As habitus functions below the level of consciousness, it affords little opportunity for reflexive action. The students in these schools were thought to be disadvantaged, and research illustrates a range of creative and resilient practices and resistances by students. This indicates that that deterministic readings are not always appropriate (Thapan, 2006; Sarangapani, 2003).

Despite this criticism, the concepts of Bourdieu related to capital, habitus, symbolic violence and mode of reproduction provide a solid theoretical framework to analyse the reproduction of social stratification through educational systems. Capital accounts for the unequal resources that families mobilise; habitus accounts for how these resources are internalised as durable dispositions; symbolic violence accounts for the way schools legitimate these hierarchies as natural; and the mode of reproduction situates this

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process within the wider continuity of social structures. These concepts remain a powerful way to theorize why educational systems reinforce inequality rather than equality.

3. INDIAN SCHOOLS: A SITE FOR REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITIES

People usually view education as the great equaliser, a way to overcome social inheritances of disadvantages passed down from one generation to other. It is also seen as a way to move up the social ladder. Yet, the institutional structure of the Indian school system carries a deep-rooted systemic inequity. This, in turn, mirror and perpetuate broader social hierarchies. Bourdieusian perspective provides a better analysis of the system that has kept Indian society and schools, divided into castes. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and symbolic violence give a powerful explanation of how the schools in India work as systems for social and cultural reproduction. School justifies the advantages of the dominant groups and also silence the others. It covers how the structure and culture of Indian schooling reproduce hierarchies of class, caste, gender and language.

3.1. Stratification of Indian School System

Schools in India are also stratified. At the top are elite private schools - typically English medium, urban, and well-resourced. Such schools serve mainly upper-class and upper-caste households. Such schools claim to provide better facilities, small-sized classes, and a wide range of co-curricular activities. On the other end of the spectrum are poor infrastructure and facilities in the government schools in rural areas and underprivileged urban areas. In these schools most children of Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim and working-class backgrounds go to school (Nambissan, 2009).

Such stratification mirrors linguistic hierarchies as well. The English-medium education has turned out to be the most desirable and elite kind of education. Such schools symbolize modernity, high status, and employment (Kumar, 1991). Government schools, by contrast, tend to follow vernacular or regional languages and are seen as of a lower quality. According to Kumar (1991), the colonial education legacy established English as the language of power and relegated native languages to lower status. Such hierarchies of speech reflect and reproduce patterns of economic inequality.

Those divisions are exacerbated by geographical inequalities. While some resources, like facilities, are more abundant in urban than rural schools. Urban private schools can draw on experienced teachers and better supply educational markets. The rural schools commonly face teacher shortages, the infrastructural deficit is reported to be enormous, and dropout rates are high (Sriprakash, 2012). These gaps in resources are indicative not only of social disparities but also the biasness in the state policies. Both state policies and market forces interact to produce a complexly stratified hierarchical schooling system in India. The schools range from elite international schools through low-fee private schools to impoverished and poorly resourced, non-fee-paying government schools (Jeffrey et al, 2008).

3.2. Alignment of School culture and cultural capital

The school system reproduces inequalities, rewarding some cultural capital relative to the capital that is inherited by lower- and working-class people. Bourdieu (1986) observes, cultural capital is embodied, objectified and institutionalised. The ownership of this capital essentially gives advantage within the schooling context. In the Indian context, this corresponds to the connection between the cultural resources of privileged families and the expectations of the school.

Children entering school from educated households have pre-school literacy, numeracy, linguistic fluency, exposure to books, tech devices, and organised learning patterns already in place (Sarangapani, 2003). They are also encouraged to ask questions, raise their voice and engage confidently with teachers. These are the attitudes that align with the 'scholarly habitus' rewarded by schools (Thapan, 2006). These include material resources (books, tutors, study room), symbolic markers (dress and accent) that identify them as members of the cultural that match the school.

In contrast, first-generation learners and children from marginalised castes do not have access to this kind of cultural capital. Schools do not appreciate the temperaments of students coming from marginalised caste. Rather, their behaviour is seen as deviant and counterproductive. However, their home cultures may value oral traditions, community sense and practical knowledge (Nambissan, 2009). They may speak dialects or languages that are not standard, find the textbook education difficult, and school rituals alienating (Sarangapani, 2003). Often the teachers explain such differences in terms of cognitive or parental deficits. They fail to recognise this difference as the misalignment of cultural codes (Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004). This misrecognition is one of the many examples that Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue leads to symbolic violence. The school system operates by presenting dominant cultural forms as neutral and universal, while stigmatizing other practices and behaviours as inferior. The alignment of school culture with the typical habitus of the middle-class creates a 'multiplier effect'. These dynamics transform social advantages into academic success.

3.3. The Hidden Curriculum: Pedagogy, Discipline, and Evaluation

Beyond the explicit curriculum, schools transmit an implicit 'hidden curriculum,' encompassing the norms, values, and expectations of behaviour that are entrenched in the school's pedagogy, discipline, and evaluation system. The hidden curriculum gives undue privilege to the dispositions of middle and upper-class students and penalizes those whose habitus differ.

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The pedagogic style often encourages independent thought. It also presupposes an acquaintance with abstract behaviour and a formal language. In the academic field of schools, it is easier for students from privileged backgrounds to draw upon their home-grown modes of habitus and interaction (Thapan, 2006). Working class students who do not speak as confident and who are not aware of how to reason and use abstract words and relations will often be deemed by teachers to be passive, or less intelligent (Sarangapani, 2003).

Class hierarchies are reproduced in the academic field as well. Elite schools, on the other hand, often stress self-regulation, time management, and personal accountability. These are the skills that middle-class family reinforce. Government schools tend to implement an authoritarian disciplinary approach that prioritises compliance and silence. Evaluation systems also reward individual competition for writing in standard language than vernacular one. This type of evaluation practices works against students who may be more skilled at oral or collaborative forms of knowing (Kumar, 1991). In these ways, the hidden curriculum renders middle-class thinking and behaviour normal.

3.4. Symbolic Violence in Classrooms and Curricula

Symbolic violence is inherent in the textbooks, the medium of instruction, and the micro-interactions of the classroom. For Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) this produces a misrecognition of the group-specific marginalisation. The universal culture of the dominant group stands in opposition to the lower-class subculture, which is seen as deviant. Caste and gender stereotypes are omnipresent in Indian society. However, the textbooks do not contain contest to sensitise students and teachers about the marginalised communities. So, the default and normative cultural standard in schools are given importance over the culture of the marginalised communities to impose symbolic violence.

In another example of symbolic violence is inbuilt in linguistic hierarchies. English is rewarded over regional languages as backward (Kumar, 1991). Such practices destroy the self-confidence of students belonging to marginalised communities. Students who speak non-dominant languages are habitually made to correct their accents and mistreated and penalized (Nambissan, 2009). The outcome of structural inequality is mistakenly taken with lack of competence (Thapan, 2006). Hence, it is a form of symbolic violence.

Framing the first-generation students in such a way is symbolic violence and it is historical and structural. The pedagogical practices in schools does not align with these historical wrongs and structural constraints. These teachers assume that these children do not have interested parents and lack motivation. Such practices in schools disregard the structural barriers confronting them like poverty, discrimination, and linguistic exclusion (Sarangapani, 2003). This is nothing but 'blaming the victim'. According to Bourdieu (1974), schools which take these pre-existing inequalities for granted as natural differences in cognitive talent and ability actually legitimise the dominant and discriminatory social order instead of challenging it.

3.5. Making Sense from Experience: Resistance and Limited Mobility

Schools continue to largely reproduce social hierarchies. However, pockets of resistance and mobility in empirical studies reveal a complicated story of reproduction. In an ethnographic study of an urban Delhi school, Thapan (2006) found that working-class students negotiated norms of the school, using middle-class dispositions to achieve acceptance in academic field without relinquishing aspects of their cultural and social capital. Sarangapani (2003) also provided an example of how children construct their own space of learning practices blending oral traditions with school expectations. Students may create the hybrid domains between home and school. This is created using considerable resistance or negotiation and at the same time avoid a total assimilation into the dominant habitus. But these are rare occasions. Most marginalised students face systemic barriers that prevent them converting educational attainment into social mobility. Jeffrey et al (2008) showed how young men were left high and dry in Uttar Pradesh with degrees to their names but no job opportunities and social margins, exposing the limitations of schooling for upward movement.

One such example of Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction is Indian schools. Both their stratified structure, hidden curricula and pedagogic techniques and assessment systems reinforce the cultural capital of dominant classes. These hierarchies are natural and meritocratic through the use of symbolic violence. Seeing Indian schools as sites of reproduction allows us to reveal how they transform inherited privilege into educational success and structural disadvantage into visible failure.

4. RESISTANCE, AGENCY AND POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

Bourdieu gave an excellent account of understanding reproduction of hierarchy and inequality in schools. His approach is also useful for understanding social reproduction of inequality in Indian schools. However, one of the major criticisms of Bourdieu's work is that it downplays agency and overstates structural reproduction. His approach indicates that students as over-socialised and incapable of resisting dominant codes (Brown, 1987). Research conducted in India shows that reproduction is widespread but not universal. The dominant norms are sometimes challenged by students, teachers, and policy interventions to create spaces that avoid reproduction of dominance. However, these examples are scarce. This shows that habitus is strong, but not unchallengeable. It can be challenged through reflexivity, critical pedagogy, and cultural hybridity.

4.1. Policies for Members of Disadvantaged Groups

Despite the strong structural barriers there are successful cases of educational mobility for students from marginalised castes, classes, and rural areas. These instances demonstrate that structural reproduction resist but does not eliminate the opportunity for upward displacement. The work done by institutions like Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) in providing quality residential schooling facilities to children from rural and marginalized backgrounds is admirable. They combine excellence in learning with the systemic elements of holistic support. They provide good infrastructure, permanent trained teachers, regular interventions, out-of-school experiences with exposures to new cultural resources. Sarangapani (2003) notes that when rural children are provided access to the cultural resource-rich spaces, they often start developing strategies of learning that integrate school literacies and community knowledge. It also shows that when access to capital is able to provide value, children can overcome their initial structural disadvantages.

Similarly, affirmative action initiatives like reservation in higher education and public employment have allowed marginalised students to make a transition from school to dignified employment. Although they do not eliminate symbolic violence and social hierarchies, these policies broaden the terrain of possible pathways, thus, making space for marginal community students tangible and feasible. Thapan (2006) observes that among urban schools some working students are taking on middle-class codes like linguistic style, dress, assertiveness to assert their place in academic field of schools. This displays the agency of students from marginalised communities as well. However, these instances are rare.

NGOs have also developed bridging school and alternative education models that are sites of resistance. According to Kumar (1991), these experiments break the traditional relationship between cultural background and educational achievement. It aims at recognising different types of knowledge, such as local histories and oral traditions. In the same way if schools as an institution adopt marginalised centric pedagogical and evaluation system then such initiatives consciously acknowledge and validate subaltern cultural capital and break cycles of reproduction to produce truly universalistic and just school environment.

4.2. Students and Teachers as Agents of Change

Students do not merely reflect dominant culture but rather interact with it. They are actively negotiating school norms. In an elite Delhi school, working-class kids adopted 'selective conformity' of middle-class culture, and some elements of family identity (Thapan 2006). This hybrid identity allowed them to thrive academically without fully assimilating. In a same way, Sarangapani (2003) described appropriation of school knowledge by children in a rural village school, seamlessly integrating it with oral traditions and local practices.

Disruption can be done by teachers because they have the power. Nambissan (2009) cites instances of teachers who meaningfully organized classroom activities that were designed using local cultural practices, like folk songs, art and crafts, local community history, with an interest in engaging Dalit and Adivasi students. These practices challenge the hegemonic idea of what knowledge counts in some schools, thus expanding the cultural space of the classroom. These examples demonstrate that even in structurally unequal settings, agency can be exercised from below and within.

4.3. The Contribution of Policy Interventions and Reforms

Educational reproduction has also been disrupted through policy frameworks. Establishment of NVS, KGBV and RTE, 2009, which promotes universal enrolment and bans discrimination on caste, gender and class grounds, has destroyed the myth of social reproduction of dominance in school education. But such initiatives are not universal. There has been patchy implementation of RTE.

The NEP 2020 strongly favours the neighbourhood language or mother-tongue instruction during the formative years, an essential step in accordance with Bourdieu's understanding of children's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Correspondingly, inclusive pedagogy is becoming a prominent feature of teacher education and training programmes, as educators are encouraged to acknowledge the various forms of cultural capital available to students and adjust their pedagogical practices to suit them (Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004). This is not enough to overcome deep inequalities, but these policies create more structural space for effective counter-reproductive practices. They make space for teachers and students to contest symbolic violence by validating different cultural resources.

4.4. Theoretical Implications: habitus as changeable

The theoretical consequences of these empirical and policy-driven shifts are significant. They propose that habitus is durable but not unchangeable. The restructuring of habitus, notably through reflexivity-critical self-awareness of one's social position-and cultural hybridity, the strategic mixing of different cultural codes, can be seen in educational mobility among disadvantaged students. This is where critical pedagogy can help. By promoting awareness among students about dominant norms and understandings of structural inequalities, teachers can empower students to overcome attempts of symbolic violence. These reflexive practices challenge the hidden curriculum that promotes the universalisation of middle-class culture (Kumar, 1991).

Bourdieu emphasises the reproductive functions of schooling. However, in India, agency, resistance and the interventions of institutions promote equality in place of hierarchy. For example, students from minority communities may selectively adopt

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mainstream cultural codes or combine them with subaltern identities. Teachers may strive to develop hybrid pedagogies, and some policy processes such as RTE and NEP which contribute to expanding structural opportunities for all.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper indicates how the interrelated systems of capital, habitus and symbolic violence together reproduce inequalities in education. Children from privileged groups have access to elite schools as well as access to embodied, objectified and institutionalised cultural capital. They have a habitus that is aligned with the educational codes of schooling. So, they can easily turn their advantages into academic achievement and institutional credentials. In contrast, however, marginalised students typically have little access to cultural capital and their habitus is shaped by non-dominant cultural senses. Schools commits symbolic violence by neutralising and legitimatising the cultural styles of dominant groups. Students from marginalised backgrounds are made to feel that their struggles are merely their individual shortcomings. Therefore, the schools in the guise of meritocracy reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities. Bourdieu has been criticised as being too deterministic and does not account for agency.

The Indian context also brings out the fact that education is both reproductive and transformative in nature. However, schools mostly maintain hierarchies, but are not strictly deterministic. Research also highlights the strategic appropriation of these middle-class codes by many working-class students, enabling their explicit success. In India, schools such as NVS and KGBV have provided high-resource, culturally supportive schooling that has helped some first-generation learners to move up the social hierarchy. Initiatives like RET, 2009 and NEP, 2020 also intervene to produce enabling environment for the poor and the marginalised students.

In this respect, the appeal by Roy Nash for a universal pedagogy which does not take middle-class habitus as a given is especially relevant. This is significant for the sociology of education because it indicates that, while Bourdieu can be a useful for exposing the cultural undercurrents of inequality, in relation to the Indian context it is also superficial in its socio-political scope.

This paper argues that Indian schools are strong spaces of social reproduction but also contain transformational potential. The article synthesises Bourdieu's theoretical concepts with empirical case studies and material from India, and argues that educational inequality is created not through individual deficits but through the uneven allocation and the recognition of capital and habitus, through the process of symbolic violence. Simultaneously, it upholds that schools can intervene by providing marginalised students with valued cultural capital, supportive pedagogies, and affirming cultures of a school. Schools should be seen as a fertile ground to further the achievement of social justice in education and in one's life.

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