## Sociology of Education and Gender

Karuna Chanana's book, Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons makes a bid to interrogate the Indian societal structures of which education, in this case specifically the education of women, is a part. As is obvious from the title, such is its aim. However, although its expansive vision does incorporate such a conceptualization it does not always succeed in attaining it. This is bound to happen in a volume that is comprised of essays written over a span as long, diverse and multifaceted as the 1960s to present/day. But perhaps to begin with it is important to tell the reader what the book is about.

In this book Chanana has brought together nine of her essays, pieces of valuable research on the sociology of women's education. These are papers presented and published by her in the last twenty five years. She situates her educational findings and data within the parameters of terms/ideas like 'Bounded Visions' and 'Expanding Horizons' visa-vis women's education. The chapter break-up suggests thrust areas of investigation, namely, (a) the social context of women's education in India, 1921-47, (b) schooling of girls in prepartition Punjab, (c) partition and family strategies with reference to gendereducation linkages in the lives of Punjabi women in Delhi, (d) a section on schooling, primary and secondary, as well as on Higher Education with a focus on women and human rights, (e) women and work which deals in detail with educated working women and women in the professions in the Indian sociohistorical context.

It locates then quite emphatically, within a meaningful socio-cultural context, the situation of women's education in India. This book reiterates all the while that the problems/issues in this field are a direct result of the larger socialization processes that affect both men and women in India. Although this edited volume is a useful documentation and record of her thinking in this area over three decades, and shifts and developments in her thought are meaningfully articulated, it is indeed a pity that none of the essays are based upon the truly contemporary scenario. The reader can only make certain assumptions regarding the author's views on the present situation in education on the basis of what she writes in her Introduction. There is little co-ordination between the introduction and the essays, the former really focussing upon current challenges rather than the problems/issues dealt with in the essays. Besides, she states in the introduction that it is important for her to retain the thrust of her early writings although she may now have moved on to think differently. Thus she has refrained from making any alterations in the essays written one or even two decades ago. In that case perhaps if the introduction had deliberately retouched/rethought some key issues which are the stuff of these essays, making contemporary comments upon them, the book would have manifested more vision and integration, besides reflecting meaningful ideological growth in the writer.

However, the book is an extremely useful mapping of issues in the field of sociology of education (and gender). They range from historical and social contexts of pre-and post-partition India, access to Primary, Secondary and Higher education for women, to the dilemmas confronting educated professional women, the 'Trishankus' in India. Besides highlighting the ideologies that permeate socialization patterns/processes in the family and society the essays draw attention to factors that hinder or promote women's education in different parts of the country. The important connections between socio-cultural practices and the ways in which they intersect with economic and political considerations in order to produce government policies for

Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons by Karuna Chanana Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001, pp. 382, Rs. 625.

providing differential education for women are pointed out succinctly.

The introduction draws attention to the following issues and in different ways the essays do too: education as a sociological site, the goals and objectives of women's education, problems of role conflict and dual burdens for women, sexsegregation, female seclusion and the impact of purdah, overlaps between cultural and religious identities, coeducation, inequities in education, employment vis-a-vis stereotypes in feminine/masculine roles, wagedifferentials for similar jobs as well as differentiated curricula, the impact of social and reformist movements as also impetus provided by women's movements, 'woman' in relation to 'gender' as a conceptual category of analysis, the many shades and new challenges in feminisms and the role that patriarchy and power relations play within those problematics, the results of privatization, liberalization, globalisation, and the role of the state as provider of higher education.

Although a range of perspectives is presented through detailed and multiple references (the book is rich in quotations from scholarly articles/books), sometimes one wishes that the author would go deeper and more insightfully into crucial questions that are often merely referred to superficially. Chanana's own views on feminist sociological perspectives in educational theory, research, teaching and pedagogy and the contribution of these to feminist discourse and women's educational experience would be extremely valuable given her long years of experience/expertise in the field. But more often than not, she leaves the reader high and dry, with statements that skim the surface rather than provide deeper analytic insights. The introduction and the essays that follow sit in a loose and uneasy conjugation and this is understandable because the former is, as

## BOOKREVIEW

the author confesses, an exploration of her current research interests while the latter were written over a long span of time and at varying periods of the writer's research in the general area of education. However, the references and endnotes fill many gaps and often update the materials, thereby situating them in a contemporary context.

Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons by Karuna Chanana is not a radical book; nor was it meant to be. The writer claims to use the functionalist paradigm in viewing education as an 'instrument of equality and change without arguing for a radical structural transformation.' Although she does not suggest shifts in existing paradigms she believes in restructuring of social roles if education is to have real meaning and be a catalyst for change. However, this volume of essays is important because in its historical spanning as well as the relevance/ contemporaneity of the issues interrogated it clearly shows that many of the problems faced by girls in the arena of education today are as alive and troubling as they were some decades ago. Often the reasons too have hardly changed and have deep roots in cultural, religious, social (patriarchal) condition-ings/ biases, and thus defy any effective measures.

It would be an unfair expectation to seek in this book suggestions for pathbreaking strategies or new theoretical parameters, for understanding, analysis or problem solving approaches. How-ever, it is perceptive and investigative, provides a great deal of information and data across a huge and important historical span, data that can be meaning-fully interpreted and evaluated and would help in understanding much better the constraints, status, state policy, etc. on women's education in India both in the past and in the present.

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## A Remarkable First

The release of the first novel of a woman writer usually generates familiar reactions: "O, one more of that feminist stuff!" No? "Then surely, femalecentered?" No, again! Manjushree Thapa's debut novel The Tutor of History is anything but a battle place of genders; instead, it enters the vast arena of politics, dives into the murky waters of Parliamentary elections, reveals the stupefying incongruities that impede democracy in Nepal and agonizes over the loss of history. There are women, and quite a few of them but they are simple, self-effacing and too preoccupied with life's daily burden to stand up against their men folk in the name of liberation. Love, petty jealousies, small joys of life, social evils like alcoholism, the questions of women's emancipation, and betterment of their lot are woven dexterously within the fabric of the novel.

These simple human beings acquire heroic proportions as they struggle against the odds and try to improve their fate. The fact that arts and culture are being overshadowed by what is conveniently termed 'politics', pains the author. Political culture and competitive consumerism masquerading as progress or the ethos of the age catches her attention. She knows this is the current scenario in the countries of the subcontinent also. She captures the small nuances of life and builds the thematic pattern of the work. In short, the novel deals with several themes and it is for the reader to see how Thapa handles her 442page *Magnus opus*, which also claims to be the first major novel in English from Nepal.

Daughter of Nepal's Ambassador in India, Manjushree Thapa is a free-lancer and a creative writer with a penchant for social service. The experiences she gathered while working with an NGO and the shock and disillusionment she encountered when helping her father in his election campaign are at the basis of The Tutor of History. She saw the complexity of the Nepali life and chose to write in English because, as she says in an interview, she felt "it was my responsibility to bring on English readership into the Nepali society." For a person who has spent a large chunk of her life abroad, Thapa shows remarkable The Tutor Of History by Manjushree Thapa Penguin India, New Delhi 2001, 442 pp., Rs.295

•understanding of the life-pattern and culture of Nepal and particularly of the villages. It is probably due to her travels in the villages of Mustang district on her return to Nepal.

After her graduation in 1989 in Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design she returned to Nepal to take up freelancing and social work. During this period she travelled extensively which resulted in the publication of her personal travel narrative. Her first-hand knowledge of the terrain of Nepal, its villages and the changing patterns of life is reflected here. The novel is compelling in its range and, as a critic observes, has a "sweep of vision." 'History' is the focal point of the plot and it gets re-defined vis-a-vis the Nepalese socio-cultural milieu. The author gives voice to the aspirations of the society and shows its confusion through the various characters moving about in Khaireni Tar. As the story advances Khaireni Tar etches out more significantly than the protagonist, Rishi Parajuli, the tutor of history. The title of the novel appears out of focus, as it is Khaireni Tar that stays with you for long,