



**“Primary School Children And Moral Education : A Sociological
Perspective”**

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The subject of moral education has been of interest to sociologists, psychologists, philosophers and educationists. The nature of this interest and the manner of probing the subject has been varied. However, a definition of the term for the purpose of this study may be given as follows: moral education is understood to be the transmission of "normative interpretations" of the social world, as opposed to "cognitive interpretations", or merely knowledge of the social world. In Berger and Luckmann's formulation these two concepts are subsumed in what they call "legitimation" of the institutional world, that is, ways by which it can be explained and justified. These are- particularly useful concepts in attempting to understand the socialization of children, wherein the concern of this study lies. Legitimizing is a process that is necessarily required in the socialization of a new generation, for the institutions are not self evident to them. That is to say, the individual is not born a member of society, but becomes one and is inducted into participation in it. Therefore what are required are the processes of explaining and justifying the institutions, both of which are encompassed by the concept of legitimating. These are processes of ascribing cognitive and normative validity to the institutional order.

While cognitive interpretations are not the central focus of study here, yet these are inseparable from, and as pointed out by Berger and Luckmann, precede normative interpretations. Therefore, knowledge of the social order is presupposed in the acquisition of values or normative interpretations. An example may best serve to illustrate this: children's interaction in a village may be guided by their caste and kinship affiliations and the values that justify their interaction within these, but this is preceded by their first having acquired knowledge of caste and kinship relations. This study attempts at studying those aspects of social interaction that may be seen as transmitting normative interpretations to children.

The social encounters of the children's daily life in Marakpur took place in their homes, neighborhoods and school. Embedded in these encounters are the normative interpretations

that are internalized by them as rules of conduct as etiquette and as maxims for various situations.

The institutional world is humanly produced and becomes an objective and external reality, which in turn acquires the status of undeniable facts and wields a coercive power over men, its producers. There are processes involved here in making the social world an external and objective reality and these are the processes of externalization and objectivation respectively. The relationship of man the producer (in a collective sense) and the social or institutional world, which in turn exerts a force over men, is understood to be a dialectical one in which there is an interaction of three moments: externalization, objectivation and internalization. The third consists of processes of making the social world subjectively meaningful and this is said to occur in the course of socialization.

what is the substantive content of moral education that children internalized? -where and how do they acquire these? and what are the relationships of the Interactional contexts in which these are learnt? In seeking an answer to the first question I have used Piaget's questioning methods as documented in his work on children's acquisition of moral judgment (Piaget, 1932/1965). This is a method of indirect questioning on hypothetical situation presented to children. These are similar to the use of schedules in sociological research and shall be described in the course of this study. The method in Piaget's work is tied up with a theoretical framework, of which not everything is of relevance for a sociological understanding of moral education, as pursued in this study. Therefore, I shall emphasize only those aspects that fall within its domain of investigating the moral education of children in their social world of home, school and village. It is a means of examining the subjective reality of moral education or the contents of the normative interpretations acquired by children. This is, in a sense, the beginning point in this study whereby I seek to find out what is internalized by children by way of moral education.

Thereafter, I have sought to examine the contexts of moral education. The interactional context of home and village was one of these, while the formalized sphere of the school was another in the lives of the primary school children. I have, therefore, sought to explore these covered the entire range of the content and patterns of social interaction that took place within the classrooms and school. Within these I have sought to discover normative interpretations, their transmission and internalization by children.

Moral education in India.

The subject of moral education in India has received attention from time to time in various communications including those of the Government of India. It seems to be closely intertwined with the subject of religious instruction. Their conclusions have varied as to whether religious instruction should be included in syllabi of formal education or not. Towards the close of the British era the question of religious education was discussed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (between 1944 and 1946). Moral and spiritual instruction in the “building of character” was recognized as important by the final resolution of the Board. But the responsibility for this, it was said, should lie that of the pupils’ community and not the school (Government of India, 1947: 76). The next official statement relating to moral and religious education was in the Constitution of India, adopted in 1950. The provision directly relating to the subject, and to which all subsequent statements allude, is contained in Article 28. This states that no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.

In response to the Article of the Constitution of India, the report of the Radhakrishnan Commission said that religious training cannot be left to the home and community as “communal bigotry, intolerance and selfishness may increase” (Government of India, 1950, Vol. 1: 290). It interpreted the constitutional provision mentioned above by saying that the reasons that have impelled this are to do with the multi-religious character of India and the impossibility of providing religious instruction in all the faiths. The intention is said to be that of banning dogmatic and sectarian instruction, but not religious instruction. Also commenting on Article 28 of the Constitution of India, the Mudaliar Commission said that, being a secular state does not imply that there is no place for religion. In describing the position of religion in educational institutions it mentioned the imparting of religious education in some schools run by denominational agencies. In defining the course for the future it is said that being a secular state does not imply that there is no place for religion. But, in its view, religious instruction in schools cannot be given except outside regular school hours and on a voluntary basis (Government of India, 1965: 103).

In 1959 the Central Board of Education published the Sri Prakasa Committee Report which dealt exclusively with religious and moral instruction in formal education. It reviewed the constitutional provisions about religious education and also the resolution of the meetings held by the Central Advisory Board of Education 1944 to 1946. It made some

recommendations about making moral education an integral part of formal syllabi. In order to avoid “constitutional difficulties”, it spoke of “moral and spiritual values” in education and not religious values.

It also mentions that it was responding to the need to develop some inner discipline and strength of character among our youth so that liberty is not debased into license, that mutual harmonious relations are established among men and women of all creeds, and that our educational institutions produce young men and women of good and sound character - disciplined, responsible and trustworthy - fit citizens of a free country (Government of India, 1959: 7-8).

Specific suggestions were made for the stages of higher, middle and elementary or primary education. - For the primary stage suggestions included group singing at a morning assembly; inclusion of stories about the lives and teaching of prophets, saints and religious leaders in the syllabi of language teaching; showing of audio-visual material on art and architecture connected with religions of the world to teach Geography; setting aside of periods for moral instruction by relating interesting stories of religious origin; and developing the attitudes of service and true sportsmanship.

The object of basic education is the physical, intellectual and moral development of the children through the medium of a handicraft (Gandhi, 1951:104).

The value of non-violence was also said to be embodied within the scheme of basic education, for it was said to be a system of self-supporting primary education. Further, it was seen in opposition to, and as a rejection of, British Imperialism and industrialization. Gandhi described educational system in the industrialized nations as based on violence: in U.S.S.R., the whole national system based on force and in the U.S.A. and England, based on wealth obtained through exploitation (Gandhi, 1951: 30).

In 1937 the principles of basic education were formulated in the Wardha conference on basic education. A committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Zakir Hussain to prepare a detailed syllabus on the lines of the resolution adopted in the conference, which do not contain any reference to moral and religious education.

This was explained by Gandhi as follows:

We have left out the teaching of religion from the Wardha scheme of education because we are afraid that religions as they are taught and practiced today lead to conflict rather than unity (Hindustani Talimi Sangh: 147).

These are some of the statements made by social and religious thinkers on the subject of moral education. Many of these have been significant influences in northern India, the culture area surrounding the empirical context of Marakpur.

Moral education in sociology and psychology.

Moral education has been a subject of academic interest largely in the disciplines of sociology and psychology, besides education. Approaches to its study have been developed to a greater extent in psychology, though questions have not always remained enclosed within the boundaries of the separate disciplines. I cannot hope to do an exhaustive survey of all approaches to the study of moral education, but I shall try to outline the broad contours of these and discuss at greater length those that have a direct bearing on this study. One of the earliest sociologists to write on moral education was Durkheim. He tried to glean a theory of pedagogy from his researches. In a sense, he identifies what he thought to be the elements of morality per se, rather than examining the transmission of moral education in a specific cultural setting. Preceding his description of the elements of morality, he tries to give a definition of morality which is said to be a “system of rules of action that predetermine conduct” (Durkheim, 1925: 24). He also added on to this definition, that the rules do not have to be constructed from some general principles at the moment of action but they are already made and live and operate around us (Durkheim, 1925: 26). This was further said to be an aspect of morality that is similar to social customs -which is also characterized by regularity. But there is more to morality than mere regularity. He defined morality by identifying its sources. The acquisition of moral education is the acquisition of interpretations that are dictated by authority; are socially or collectively sanctioned and autonomously or freely accepted. Durkheim clearly defined the three elements of morality:

Finally the third element of mortality is defined as autonomy. This, according -to Durkheim, is -the conscious-ness or understanding of morality whereby rules prescribing behavior must be freely and -willingly desired and accepted and this he called an “enlightened assent” (Durkheim, 1925: 120).

A sociological insight that may be discerned from Piaget's work, and one that has been used in this study, relates to the importance of social interaction in the transmission and acquisition of moral education. For instance, in contrast to Durkheim, he pointed out that it is not only relations of authority between adults and children which foster morality but also the relations between children themselves. These are what he terms the relations of constraint and cooperation respectively. He illustrates in his work the stages of transition from a morality of constraint to one of cooperation or from "heteronomy" to "autonomy". This transition is illustrated by means of data generated by the interviews he conducted with children (Piaget, 1932/1965).

It seems necessary to mention here that Piaget's work on the acquisition of moral judgments is part of his larger theoretical scheme. Within developmental psychology it has been considered to be a pioneering effort of the 'structural developmental' approach to the study of moral education, but one that he did not follow up himself (Windmiller, Lambert and Turiel, 1980: 2). Central to his study is the framework that sees a sequential development - according to age - in the acquisition of moral judgments by children. These are, in turn, part of the stages of cognitive development. Specifically on the acquisition of moral education he interviewed children on the rules of the game of marbles and identified stage of moral development in the acquisition of this socially given institution. Further, he distinguished between the moralities of constraint (heteronomy) and cooperation (autonomy). These were identified as stages, the first being a consequence partly of adult-child relations of a heteronymous kind and the second, a later phase, borne of relations between equals or peers.