

## Paulo Freire: The Greatest Pedagogical Thinker of this Era

**Dr. Prahllad Gain**

Assistant Professor & HOD, Department of Education  
Mahitosh Nandy Mahavidyalaya, Jangipara, Hooghly, West Bengal  
E-mail: prahlladgain@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Paulo Freire was a humanist educator and philosopher. Being a child of a middle-class family in Brazil, Freire took his lessons from life and the harsh and real. It was this experience that determined his course of action later in life. His philosophy on society and education has become inviolable in the present age of capitalist crisis. Based on the relationship between society, state and education, Freire's ideology cannot be reconciled with education in the conventional sense in many cases. Freire believed that education is a field through which people are able to create a new world without discrimination through their own awareness. But because knowledge is always confined to a special class, the application of knowledge, the access of people to knowledge and the expansion of the realm of knowledge are deprived of the real enjoyment of these by the relatively oppressed people. He emphasized on building a new society through fearless freedom of people, creation of educational process through dialogue and interaction of leaders with people and building awareness and cultural consciousness. Freire's ideology has been discussed in various ways in this article.

**Keywords:** Education, Society, Critical Pedagogy, Banking concept, Conscientization Oppressed,

### **Introduction:**

The child/learner is an important element in the education system. There is no end to the research on how to teach a child in a way that will make it easier for him. One of the educationists who has focused on all these research works is Paulo Reglus Neves Freire. In short, Paulo Freire. Freire's educational thought is not at all the same as the type of education we are usually familiar with, but he saw various elements of the education system from a completely new perspective. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire played an important role not only in the field of education, but also in the development of national consciousness in third world countries. His new teaching method created a huge stir in countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. He realized the financial hardship and the hunger that came with it, so he tried to prevent other children from facing them later and wanted to find a new way. The roots of his educational thought were rooted in his growing up days. Therefore, to understand his educational philosophy, it is necessary to know the background of his life.

**Life sketch:**

He was born on September 19, 1921 to a middle-class family in Recife, northeastern Brazil. The family suffered from the economic pressure that Brazil was under in the 1930s, and saw the brutal form of poverty and hunger day after day. The death of his father at a young age put an end to Freire's education. He felt that the upper class of society cared very little about the lower class. The incident of his father's death and this struggle with poverty guided his future educational thinking. He admitted that poverty and hunger taught him a lot. In the East, Swami Vivekananda had already said that education does not happen on an empty stomach. There is no reason to think that a child who is unable to learn does not mean that he does not want to learn or is stupid. The teacher must go deeper into the student's life journey to find the reason for this. Freire understood this with his own life. His life experience was particularly helpful in understanding the relationship between social class and knowledge. In 1943, he joined the law school of the University of Recife. Philosophy, mainly phenomenology and linguistic psychology were his special areas of practice. Despite being a lawyer, he did not pursue that profession, but rather his special interest was teaching. He worked for several days as a Portuguese language teacher in a secondary school. In 1944, he married Elza Maia Costa de Oliveira, a primary school teacher. Elza's influence on Freire's life was observed to be widespread.

In 1946, he became director of education and cultural sciences in his birthplace of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil. He took on the responsibility of teaching the basics of Christian theology (Liberation theology) to the poor and uneducated people there. The teaching of Christian theology was very timely for the socially, politically and economically oppressed, deprived and neglected people of Brazil. From this time on, he became involved in popular cultural movements and spoke in favor of democracy in various places. In 1959, he received a Ph.D. from the University of Recife. The topic of his Ph.D. was 'Present day Education in Brazil'. Later, he joined the teaching of history and philosophy of education at that university. In 1961, he became director of the Department of Cultural Extension at the University of Recife. In 1962, when he taught 300 sugarcane workers to read and write in just 45 days, he had the first opportunity to put his theories into practice. His efforts led to the Brazilian government granting him permission to establish many cultural centers throughout the country. In 1964, his efforts were interrupted by imprisonment. In the wake of the military coup in Brazil, he was imprisoned and spent 70 days in prison. Within a few days, he was forced to leave the country. After spending some time in Bolivia, he spent five years in Chile. In 1967, his first book, 'Education as the Practice of Freedom' was published. The following year, his world-famous book, 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' was published in Portuguese. This book was also published in English and Spanish in 1970. In 1969, he joined Harvard University as a Visiting Professor. Freire traveled to Cam-

bridge, Massachusetts, U. S. A. Geneva, Switzerland, etc. as an educational consultant for the World Council of Churches. In 1979, he returned to his country and also worked as a professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil. He joined the Workers Party and directed the Adult Literacy Project of São Paulo from 1980 to 1986. In 1988, he became Secretary of Education of the city of São Paulo. In 1991, the Paulo Friere Institute was established in São Paulo. This organization is still active in various types of educational work in 18 countries around the world. Friere died on May 2, 1997 at the age of 75.

### **Literary works by Friere:**

Friere wrote and co-wrote more than 20 books on education, pedagogy and related themes. He has also written many articles. Notable books written by him are—

- ♦ Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- ♦ Cultural Action for Freedom
- ♦ Education from Critical Consciousness
- ♦ Conscientization
- ♦ Education as the Practice of Freedom
- ♦ Pedagogy in Process
- ♦ The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation
- ♦ Literacy: Reading the Word and the World
- ♦ Pedagogy of the city
- ♦ Pedagogy of Hope: Revealing Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- ♦ Pedagogy of the Heart
- ♦ Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage
- ♦ Politics and Education
- ♦ Teachers as Cultural Workers
- ♦ A Pedagogy for Liberation
- ♦ Pedagogy of Home
- ♦ Critical Literacy
- ♦ The Importance of the Reading Act
- ♦ Theory and Practice of Liberation
- ♦ The Letters to Guinea-Bissau
- ♦ Letters to Cristina
- ♦ Pedagogy of Indignation

In 1970, Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed became so popular that about 500,000 copies were sold worldwide within three decades. This book was a milestone of his educational and philosophical thought (Kirkendall, 2004). Several of Freire's books have been translated into about 18 languages and are still equally popular in different countries of the world.

### **Concept of Education according to Freire:**

In his first book, Education as the Practice of Freedom, Freire gave a new direction to the word 'education'. The main point of the new research

that is currently going on in the field of education on constructivism is found in Freire's statement. In his much-discussed book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he introduced the political nature of education and determined the relationship between knowledge and language from a sociological perspective. He observed two different positions in this unequal social system: the oppressor and the oppressed. In this regard, he may have been indirectly influenced by people such as Hegel, Engels, Marx, Lenin, Simon-well, etc. He believed deeply that teachers could lift people out of their oppressed condition and elevate them to a sense of humanity. He also recognized that to be free from this oppressed condition, each individual must have their own role— The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. According to Freire, "A humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world." That is, human-oriented education is a way by which women and men become aware of their existence in the world. As per Freire's contend the goals of education are- Power awareness, Critical literacy, Desocialization, Self-education etc.

#### **Freire's Method of Teaching:**

Paulo Freire talked about the method of teaching in his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Freire talks about modern thinking in his proposed teaching method. In the traditional teaching method, the teacher was seen as the sole ruler of the kingdom of knowledge. There, the student's position is *Tabula Rasa* (Roy Chowdhury, S., 2012). The student learned by reading or listening to something and memorizing it. Radical philosopher Freire avoided this method and emphasized the Problem Posing method. This is the teaching method that emphasizes critical thinking for the liberation of society or shows the way to create critical consciousness. In the application as a method, the teacher selects a group of students in the classroom and considers them as fellow dialoguers. It is through this dialogue or conversation that they will be able to understand the true nature of the environment in which they are live in, and investigate its causes, determine a way out of it. Because five special aspects are observed in this conversation method, Such as hope, love, humility, faith and critical thinking. This is the opposite idea of the traditional Banking model of education. According to him, teaching through Question-Answering and Conversation methods makes the learning content simple and understandable to the students. His teaching method helped farmers and workers in getting education.

#### **Role of Teacher according to Friere:**

Friere says – 'There is no teaching without learning. To teach is not to transfer knowledge, but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge' (Freire, P., 1996). Current psychological thinkers are repeatedly says that the child should not be seen only as an object of knowledge transfer, but rather should reveal the ability to know and under-

stand in his own way. Every child has his own tastes, interests, and needs. Therefore, he must be shown the path to organizing ideas on a subject. According to Freire, a good teacher is one who, through his words, keeps the students informed about his thought process on a subject. Even if the student is tired, he never falls asleep, because in order to understand something from the pauses, doubts, and uncertainties that sound in the teacher's speech, he has to keep his mind alert. The teacher provides the student with written material (study material), but not for the purpose of memorizing it, but for the purpose of judging or revising the previous knowledge he has acquired, through which he will be able to express his statement clearly. According to Freire, the teacher will provoke questions in the mind of the student. He will present the problem in such a way that the student will ask questions. In the traditional method, the teacher would help the student to transfer knowledge. As a result, the teacher would be active but the student would remain passive. But according to Freire, the teacher will be relatively less active, he will present the problems to the students in such a way that they will think about the solution. At the same time, the teacher will ensure that the problems must be mundane and related to the students' lives.

### **Freire's views on Learning:**

Freire did not accept the traditional dichotomy of teacher-student. The teacher will never work as a separate entity in the field of education, on the one hand, he will provide food for the construction and reconstruction of the child's mental world, and at the same time, he will also carry out the work of constructing or reconstructing his knowledge realm. That is, he will be involved in both teaching and learning. The concept that Freire has resorted to explain this issue is 'Praxis' (Freire, P., 1973). That is, it is not enough for the teacher and student to exchange words together to gain knowledge about social reality, but only if they work together from the perspective of a critic focusing on the social environment, then social change is possible.

From this, his two phrases 'Conscientization' and 'Culture of silence' become clear. By 'Culture of silence', Freire means that in social relations, the powerful party (oppressors) gradually leads the powerless party (oppressed) into a negative silence. Freire did not mean total mute or lack of speech in the literal sense of the word by saying culture of silence. This 'imposed silence' does not mean not responding, but rather, in the eyes of the critic, not being able to say anything (Lack of critical quality). This is the culture where it is said to do what you are told; do not try to explain it, do not make any accusations, do not ask any questions, do not even value yourself. If this situation continues for a long time, the exploited people gradually believe that they do not have a voice of their own, that they do not have any control over what happens to them or around them, that they are not able to change anything with their own power. This also applies to education. Therefore, Freire's opinion is that in order to understand that this

imposed silence is created by those in power; the student must develop a critical consciousness. The first step in developing this critical perspective is Action. In order to move in the social environment, we acquire several social myths, which have a great influence on society. According to Freire, learning is a critical process that removes all these myths and brings out real problems and needs. So 'Conscientization' is the process through which the student moves towards critical consciousness and through which the power to change the world is transmitted within him.

### **Banking concept of Education:**

Freire introduced a new term in the field of education called Banking concept in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Just as customers or consumers deposit money in a bank, according to Freire, education is the act of depositing. The teacher is the depositor and the students are the depositories, the teacher is not just a coordinator. He is constantly involved in the act of depositing or depositing something in the student. This is the Banking Concept, according to Freire, "In banking concept the scope of education allowed to the students extended only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits" (Freire, P. 1996).

In Freire's banking education system - the teacher teaches, he knows and thinks everything. The student only listens to the teacher and receives education. The teacher's choice is the student's choice. The student works according to the teacher's plan. That is, in this learning process, the teacher is the subject while the student is only the object.

In the context of the discussion of pedagogy, he did not want to accept the 'Banking concept of education' at all. Banking model of education is the idea where the student is considered as a zero account in the bank and the teacher stores his knowledge there. The student is only the recipient here, liberalizing all the knowledge of the teacher means controlling the student's thinking and hindering his originality and creative talent. Freire's idea is not very novel, because long before this, Rousseau had completely denied the role of the teacher in the student's learning and gave more importance to the student's own knowledge or understanding. He did not want to accept the imposed experience from outside at all. John Dewey also emphasized the student's acquisition of knowledge by working with his pen, which is the principle of his so-called project method. Dewey certainly saw education as a way to change society. The social awareness that is developed through education, and the way in which individuals adapt themselves to themselves and to society at every moment, helps in the reconstruction of society at some point. Freire believed that the banking concept of education was oppressive and that it should be replaced with critical pedagogy. In critical pedagogy, students are treated as ends in themselves, and teachers work to create a shared educational experience that helps students uncover oppression and possibilities for freedom.

### **Critical Pedagogy:**

Freire believed that education is a political act that can never be separated from pedagogy. This is what he defined as critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire has made a strong statement about critical pedagogy. According to him, teaching techniques should be such that students learn to question the structure of power and the pattern of inequality around them and, if necessary, try to build resistance. According to Freire, the important features of complex child education are — political process, student-centeredness, seeing the classroom as a field of democratic thinking, etc. Freire talks about two meanings of this, namely- it explains the democratic authority of power and it talks about social equality. So even though it seems complicated, children/students need to be informed about this issue gradually. Both teachers and students need to be aware of the politics that revolve around art. A political perspective or political activity is reflected in what students will learn and how they will learn. The teacher will express his own political thoughts or opinions in the classroom. Students will continue to form or reconstruct their own ideas from within it. He said- 'Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and re-make themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as being capable of knowing — of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't' (Freire, P. 2004).

### **Limitations of Freire's Educational Philosophy:**

Freire's work remains influential because despite his writings being informed by Brazilian educational contexts and economic circumstances in the early 20th century, his ideologies have proven to be globally transferable. However, there are several limitations to Paulo Freire's educational thought. For example,

- i) Many have called Paulo Freire's educational thought theoretical, not practical at all.
- ii) Freire advocated providing primary education through non-formal education. This statement was not supported by many educators.
- iii) He did not talk about any effective formal education system to implement his educational thought.

### **Comments:**

Freire's contribution to modern education is undeniable. He rebelled against traditional teaching methods and education systems. But his statements are not as theoretical as they are practical in many cases. He did not talk about any effective traditional education system that can be easily applied in any country and in any situation. However, he talked about the new teaching method (Pedagogy) for adult education that gave him world fame. Even today, research is being done on the teaching method introduced by Paulo Freire in different countries of the world. The educational institutions he established are still working equally today. He believed that no one

teaches anyone, instead everyone teaches everyone or each other. This statement has also been accepted by modern educators. He talked about teaching through conversation and question and answer, which is still relevant today. He arranges for working people to learn in a short time, which is really innovative.

In conclusion, Paulo Freire is one of the most important figures in modern educational thought who has brought the subject of education before us from a completely different perspective. Not all his statements are above criticism, but from an ideological point of view, they are very close to modern learning theory, Cognitivism and Constructivism, especially social Constructivism. However, although his thoughts on the role of the teacher are somewhat applicable to the higher classes, there is a question mark about how much applicability they have at the primary level. However, Marx spoke of social revolution politically; the value of Freire's attempt to bring about social revolution in educational terms cannot be denied in any way.

### References

- Bhattacharya, A. *Panlo Freire*, Rousseau of the Twentieth century, international issues in adult education, Sense Publishers, vol. 5, 2011
- Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Harvard Educational Review, U.S.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of Indignation*. Boulder CO: Paradigm
- Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. NewYork: Seabury.
- Kirkendall, A. J. (2004). *Entering History: Paulo Freire and the Politics of the Brazilian Northeast, 1958-1964*. Luso-Brazilian Review, 41 (1): 168-189.
- Mollick, S. (2021). Relevance of Educational Thoughts of Paulo Freire, *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, Vol (2) Issue (7), 2021, Page 318-322, ISSN 2582-7421.
- Pal, A. K. (2012). *Mahan Shikshabidgoner Katha*, Classique Books, Kolkata.
- Roy Chowdhury, S. (2012). *Shikshabid Paulo Freire*, Eshona, 42<sup>nd</sup> edition, Gandhi centenary B.T. college, 2012
- Schugurensky, D. (1998). *The Legacy of Paulo Freire: A Critical Review of His Contributions*.
- Convegence, 31(1/2):1-12
- Shah, R.K. (2016). "Relevance of Educational Philosophy of Paulo Freire in the 21st Century", *Journal of Educational Technology and Research*, January-December, 2016, <https://www.academia.edu/67672983> Relevance\_of\_Educational\_Philosophy\_of\_Paulo\_Freire\_in\_the\_21\_st\_Century
- Singh, J. P. (2008). *Paulo Freire: Possibilities for Dialogic Communication in a Market-Driven*
- *Information Age*. Information, Communication & Society, 11 (5): 699-726.

- Taylor, P. (1993). *The texts of Paulo Freire*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
  - Vallikkat, S. (2012). *World's greatest Educational Thinkers, Philosophers and Educationists*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi.
  - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/problem-posing-education>
-