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# Education in Tajikistan: A window to understanding change through continuity.

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# **Education in Tajikistan: a window to understanding change through continuity**

**SARFAROZ NIYOZOV**

## **The Background to the Study: Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province (MBAP) of Tajikistan**

Tajikistan is one of the countries formed as a result of the socialist revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917 and united as republics within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). As an independent republic, Tajikistan emerged from the 'ruins' of the Soviet Union in 1991. Most (80%) of Tajikistan's population lives in rural areas, and mountains cover 93% of its territory.

While within the USSR, Tajikistan experienced a comparative industrial, educational and cultural modernisation (Curtis, 1996; Niyozov, 1996). After the collapse of the USSR and six years of civil war (Gretsky, 1995), Tajikistan, already one of the poorest states of the USSR, re-emerged with social indicators similar to those of very poor developing countries. Its per capita annual income in 1990, for example, averaged about US\$180 – poorer than most sub-Saharan Africa or the poorest countries of Asia (Pomfret, 2003, p. 9) – and more than 80% of the population were living below the poverty line. The protracted civil war killed an estimated 50,000 people and displaced around 600,000. The economy was ruined and Tajikistan several times verged on national and economic collapse (for more on Tajikistan's general situation in the last decade, see Curtis, 1996; Niyozov, 1996; Djalili et al, 1998; Keshavjee, 1998; World Bank, 1998).

The majority of Tajikistan's people found the collapse of the USSR untimely, sudden and shocking (Niyozov, 1996). For the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province (MBAP) [1], the USSR's breakdown resulted in a cut in basic supplies, an influx of civil war refugees, a reduction in paid jobs, a dramatic fall in salaries, poorer living conditions, isolation, and a shortage of land. These declines made this

exotically attractive region almost unbearable to live in (Niyozov, 1996; Keshavjee, 1998).

The Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province of Tajikistan lies in the high Pamir mountain range. Deep green valleys riddle its west; the east is a cold, high plateau desert. As with many other mountainous areas, the province's fundamental quality is its incredibly complex geographic, biological, social, cultural, linguistic and economic diversity (Muhabbatov, 1999).

People in Badakhshan live at elevations between 1000 and 4000 meters. In the province's lower parts, the weather is almost subtropical, and there are even citrus tropical fruits. However, in the higher areas, there is extreme scarcity of vegetation.

Culturally, MBAP is the homeland of six small eastern Iranian linguistic groups, also known as Pamirians: Shugnani, Roshani, Wakhi, Ishkashimi, Yazgulami, and Bartangi. These groups speak their own distinct languages and live in different valleys.[2] MBAP is also a land where two larger nations (Iranian Tajiks and Turkic Kyrgyz) and two branches of Islam (Sunni and Ismaili Shi'ite [3]) have lived together for centuries (Bashiri, 1998; Keshavjee, 1998; Niyozov, 2003). In this regard, MBAP has the important distinction of being the only place in the world where Ismaili adherents constitute a majority of not only the population, but also the government and non-governmental decision-making structures. At the same time, the post-Soviet transitional period has seen not only the revival of the Badakhshani cultural and linguistic identities, but also the encounter of various forces of an increasingly globalised world: socialism (including Communism), Islam (including Ismailism), and nationalism (including ethnic nationalism and regionalism).

Economic diversity has flourished since the collapse of the USSR, when the centralised, state-run and tightly controlled economy was dismantled in favour of a pluralist, market-driven economy. Accompanied by chaos, an overwhelming pace of change, lack of experience of a market economy and a crisis of ethics, this 'freedom', among a few positive things, also gave birth to illegal, socially and ecologically harmful socio-economic activities, such as unemployment, drug trafficking, gun running, armed violence, and the poaching of endangered species. Consequently, contrary to its initiators' promises, the socio-economic transition has provided access to unimaginable wealth for a few, meanwhile causing tremendous impoverishment, misery and hardship for the majority (International Crisis Group, 2001).[4]

To an extent, the current situation of post-Soviet Badakhshan, Tajikistan and central Asia could be described as a Hegelian, dialectical negation of their situation at the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, at the surface things appear to have progressively changed, but in essence (Keshavjee, 1998) these countries have reverted to where they

were before Russia's annexation of central Asia at the end of the nineteenth century and the Soviet Revolution in 1917 (Allworth, 1989).

The present situation has deep historical roots and far-reaching implications for Tajikistan's future. Within the new meaning of the old geopolitics, Tajikistan and perhaps other central Asian states, like many developing countries, appear to have been reassigned subordinate roles in the new world order, as dependent followers, receivers of external wisdom and solutions, providers of raw materials and cheap labour, fields of experimentation, and buffer states in the strategic zones of interests of the larger forces (Said, 1989; Iskandarov, 1994; Sagdeev & Eisenhower, 1995; Keshavjee, 1998; Glen, 1999).

To successfully navigate between these realities and take advantage of them to serve the interests of the emerging but culturally rich Tajikistan will, among other things, depend on the quality of its education and human resources. Ultimately, it will be the Tajik people who will bear responsibility for Tajikistan's future role and status within the central Asian region and the whole world at large. The degree of success in this regard will depend on their intellectual abilities to critically understand, adapt and reshape the post-Soviet realities to their personal and common benefits.

Tajikistan's education system, like its economy, unfortunately lies in a state of misery. The current social, economic, and educational crisis testifies to an unsustainable and largely ungrounded approach to development in Soviet and post-Soviet educational and social policies and the contradictions between rhetoric and reality in their implementation. Soviet Marxist-Leninism, for example, supposedly talked about empowerment, independence, human agency, equity, freedom and democracy for people of all nations, languages and convictions (Nazarshoev & Nazarshoev, 1984). In reality, however, the expensive infrastructure, the universal and free schooling, the demanding curriculum [5], the high level of literacy, the promotion of gender equality, national cultures and languages, and the high status of teachers all had fundamental flaws. These apparently noble ideals were compromised and, ultimately, discredited by the system's and its leaders' dismissal of the questions of relevance and sustainability, identity and freedom, and culture and context. By employing a monistic, ideological, and reductionist interpretation of reality (Karlsson, 1993; Ekloff & Dneprov, 1993), the state and party leadership promoted dependency, colonial bias, indoctrination, dogmatism, compliance and reproduction of the status quo (Medlin et al, 1971; Fireman, 1991; Belkanov, 1997; Roy, 2000).

The teachers too, regardless of their high social status and broader political and professional roles, were trained to be obedient servants of state and party (Ekloff & Dneprov, 1993). In sum, the history of the Soviet Union and Soviet education reveals an eternal struggle between the

egalitarian, emancipatory theories and slogans, and the practices of corruption, personal greed, repression, cynicism, hypocrisy, inequity, colonial bias and disempowerment that were promoted under these slogans and theories. As a result of such dogmatic approaches, post-Soviet Tajikistan has inherited a socio-political and economic infrastructure, including the educational system, that is unsustainable, ineffective, and riddled with continuing tensions. The World Bank (1999) has found several major structural and cultural problems in current Tajik education: deterioration of the quality of education; a need for a change of 'mentality' among teachers, students and educational administrators; inequitable access to schools; inadequate management capacity; insufficient funding; unsatisfactory school facilities; and a serious shortage of textbooks. Administratively, the post-Soviet Tajik education system has changed very little from its Soviet predecessor.

Almost all schools in Tajikistan continue to be public. The dominant approaches to educational reform, including teacher development, have remained mainly top-down, bureaucratic and largely rhetorical. One of the major phrases used in education circles is 'changing the mentality of the teachers so that they can teach according to new realities' (World Bank, 1999). Changing the mentality of education personnel may be a necessity for building a democratic post-Soviet Tajik society.[6] But emphasising a narrow notion of training and a focus on teachers' mentality as the prime 'object of change' tends to demean teachers, considers their knowledge as a 'problem and obstacle to improvement', creates ground for manipulating and controlling them and essentially repeats the old and failed approach to educational reform (Hargreaves, 1992; Thiessen, 1993a; Farrell, 1994).

Although in MBAP, the education system has been assisted by international organisations, especially the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), and has continued to operate (Kuder, 1996), the challenges remain enormous and the general educational situation continues to deteriorate.[7] The current educational establishment has been increasingly unable to sustain the expensive infrastructure, let alone improve it.

In 1999, there were 315 schools enrolling 55,000 students in MBAP. Out of these 315 schools, 89 are primary (grades 1-4), 66 middle school (grades 1-9), and 160 complete secondary schools (grades 1-11). Since 1991, almost all schools in MBAP have been streamed into natural and mathematical science, social science and general streams. The general stream accepts the students who cannot meet the criteria for joining either of the other two. There are around 6,500 teachers in the province, the majority of whom obtained their schooling and higher education during the Soviet period, before 1992 (Kuder, 1996). Since 1993, however, the number of teachers leaving teaching has steadily increased. Unofficial figures from the MBAP Department of Education

suggest that in 1999 about 120 and in 2000 about 70 qualified teachers left the profession in the province. To compensate for this loss, the schools hire their own graduates, who have no further qualifications than school graduation. The teachers and students continue using the old Soviet textbooks. There are no laboratory facilities for teaching science in most of the schools.

Part of the reform efforts attempt to reinvigorate the system structurally and intellectually. Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) have been revived to take charge of several school activities, such as renovation, budgeting, and attendance. Fee-paying classes are being opened in each school. In addition, schools and PTAs have initiated complementary fundraising activities, such as selling the school gardens' agricultural produce, opening school revolving funds, seeking sponsors, and selling teaching materials.

On the intellectual side, the transition from one level to another (i.e. from primary to secondary and from secondary to higher secondary) is no longer taken for granted, but depends on a rigorous examination. Students are streamed into natural and mathematical science, social science and general groups right after the primary level examination (in grade 4). Schools and teachers now undergo an accreditation process to ensure that certain standards are met.

The majority of the reform efforts in Tajikistan and MBAP lack grounding in research and empirical data. They are largely based on policy-makers' and bureaucrats' views about what is good for education, the students, and the country. Many of the efforts are attempts to revive the so-called 'successful' Soviet approaches. Others are a simple imitation or modification of similar efforts of other former Soviet countries, particularly those of the Russian Federation and western countries (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). The designers of the reform efforts have largely ignored the voices of the teachers, the ultimate providers and reform implementers of education, and the voices of people at the grassroots level, the ultimate beneficiaries.

It is against this problematic contextual background that this study was carried out. This inquiry has brought the voices of highly committed and deeply knowledgeable teachers and other major stakeholders to the foreground of the current debate in educational and societal reform.

### **A Conceptual Framework on the Rationale for Exploring Continuities**

The exploration of continuity as a fundamental quality of human experience (Dewey, 1938; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) is important for several reasons. Educational reformers have agreed that for change (internally or externally initiated) to succeed, it must deal with the

continuing pre-established practices, values, attitudes, norms and structures (Hargreaves, 1994, 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Continuities are valuable for knowing why teachers tend to absorb changes in terms of their existing values, beliefs and practices (Sergiovanni, 1998). They shed light on teachers' usual conservatism and reluctance to change (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). By comparing across time, teachers try to figure out the real differences and similarities between their existing practices and new changes. Then they decide whether to accept changes, modify them or reject them.

Understanding the continuities also helps one realise how certain changes have become essential norms of a society and education system and then have promoted or prevented new changes (Louden, 1991; Tabulawa, 1997, 1998). Knowledge of continuity provides us with important evidence of what teachers enduringly value, and their concerns as they move from their usual practice to adopting or adapting innovations (Anderson, 1997). Thus, the history of continuities provides insights into how change could happen in reality and why, despite so many apparent changes, pre-established classroom practices have remained almost the same (Sarason, 1982; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tabulawa, 1997).

Through a historical inquiry into the educational and societal structures of Botswana, Tabulawa (1997, 1998) found the deeper social, cultural, institutional, historical and global roots of why, despite so much investment and attempted innovation in Botswanan education, transmission or 'banking' methods of instruction have persisted (Guthrie, 1990). Earlier, Avalos (1985) mentioned the persistence of this situation in many developing countries:

Teachers occupy a central role in the conduct of teaching. Most classroom activities are directed to the whole class, with the teacher appearing as a 'benevolent dictator'. The teacher solicits, requests, or orders responses from pupils who in turn must render such services. The children's personal experience is seldom used as a learning input. The provision of feedback to pupils' responses is often arbitrarily decided by teachers who might 'ignore' a child's response or treat a child's error as a personal insult ... Teaching of norms and rules overshadows other teaching activities. (p. 212)

Even though a great number of questions are asked, most of them are either recall or simple direct questions mostly initiated by teachers. (p. 211)

Interestingly, the persistence of transmission is not confined to poor countries. Tyack & Cuban (1995) conducted a historical analysis of American education over 100 years. They revealed that despite the

waves of reform, the patterns of classroom instruction and teacher-student relations in American schools have largely remained the same over a century. Transmission, teacher-centredness and coercive [8] teacher-student relationships have not only persisted, but continue to dominate classrooms even in developed countries. Sirotnik (1983), too, found that a typical American secondary school in the 1980s reflected:

A lot of teacher talk and a lot of students' listening ... almost invariably closed and factual questions ... and predominantly total classroom instructional configurations around traditional activities – all in a virtually affectless environment. It is but a short inferential leap to suggest that we are implicitly teaching dependence on authority, linear thinking, social apathy, passive involvement, and hands-off learning. (Sirotnik, 1983, quoted in Cummins, 1996, p. 16)

According to Tyack & Cuban (1995), the major reason for this persistence was the researchers' and reformers' focus. Research activities and reform efforts have had two major flaws: first, they have aimed at first-order changes, without touching on second-order changes.[9] Reforms have ignored what Cuban called the structures and norms of education and society. These persisting structures, designed to serve one system, work to sustain the status quo and strongly affect (mainly impede) the processes of initiating, implementing and institutionalizing changes and innovations, because these are seen as threats to stability and certainty (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). This chapter will not only provide examples that confirm these global insights, but also challenge them. It will also illustrate that not everything is gloomy and that there is a hope alongside despair.

Through analyzing the reasons for the persistence of domination and transmission, Cummins (1996) suggests that the core mistake of the reformers has been their failure to conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning and its connection to the larger society. Cummins dismisses the continuing confinement of teaching to subject matter and methodologies; for him, at the heart of teaching and education lies the teacher-student relationship. If the current teacher-student coercive relationships are not challenged and humanised, the constant injection of new and effective techniques will be of limited value and unsustainable endurance. The second major flaw is the way reform efforts have focused on how to change teachers' behaviour and mentality, rather than on finding out how teachers teach and why they teach the way they do, without exploring the various reasons behind their existing practices.

To rectify these flaws, a new approach to research is required. Such an approach requires an exploration of actual, naturally occurring teachers' practices, finding the teachers' reasons for their practices, and

connecting these reasons to the teachers' personal, systemic, geographical, cultural, educational, historical and political contexts. This approach has to acknowledge teachers as people with knowledge, values and beliefs, with which the reformers need to engage rather than ignore or see as problems (Freire, 1983). This approach also views teaching as more than subject matter and methodology (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). As such, a close look at change through continuities helps to disclose the politics of rhetoric and reality in education and society. Hargreaves (1994), pointing out the dialectics of structure and culture in change, suggested that more enduring changes occur, not only as a result of the importation and implementation of external ideas, but mainly as a result of teachers' and reformers' honest and critical engagement with their historically and culturally formed practices, traditions, and structures into which they find themselves socialised. Current problems and successes cannot be separated from their historical roots (Hargreaves, 1994; Tabulawa, 1998). It is against this theoretical backdrop that my socio-historical study of the continuities in Tajikistan's education system was designed and carried out.

**Method of Data Collection and Analysis:  
a combination of qualitative case study and life history**

The identification of the continuities and changes was possible due to the research methods used for data collection and analysis. In this section, the research paradigm, method and techniques that were used to collect, describe, analyze and interpret the data are discussed.

I chose the qualitative paradigm because I assume that reality, including education, is a complex and dynamic human socio-historical construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). We cannot detach and objectify ourselves from the reality that provides meaning to our actions and thoughts. But we can reflect on it by acknowledging that we (a) both produce and are products of our socially and historically-constructed reality; (b) are bounded by personal, educational, temporal, geographical, ideological and political needs, purposes and interests; and therefore (c) have only subjective and limited understanding (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992; Eisner, 1993). These premises mean that we cannot neutrally explore social reality with the aims of finding laws, rules and regulations to provide the solutions and fixed 'rules for actions' to educational and social problems (Shavelson, 1988, quoted in Kennedy, 1997, p. 10).

Socio-historical qualitative research stresses that any phenomenon, including teaching, has meaning only within a context, which illuminates its history, development, main relationships, underlying assumptions, current location and future trends (Merriam, 1988; Hathaway, 1995). I used case studies in my research because they are 'the most appropriate format' for school-based research and 'the most

memorable and meaningful' endeavour to teachers (Yin, 1994). Case-study research focuses on the exploration of a phenomenon (i.e. cases), without experimenting upon it, and with few worries about the techniques used for data collection. It tries to retain the meaningful, holistic characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 1994, p. 14) and their relations over a defined period of time (Merriam, 1988). Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) state that case studies are most appropriate when the investigator poses 'how' and 'why' questions, has little control over events, and focuses on a contemporary phenomenon with a real-life context. They argue that:

case study offers most to the teachers because its principal rationale is to reproduce social action in a natural setting, i.e. classrooms and workplaces, and that it can be used either to test existing theory and practice in an everyday environment, or it can be used to develop new theory or practice or improve and evaluate existing professional practice. (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 323)

My research is bounded in space (a rural mountainous area), time (the post-Soviet period), population (teachers), focus (interaction of practices, beliefs and context), and scale (general secondary school).[10] It is also interpretive, as I intensively and continuously involved myself with the participants and their culture, and partook in their daily life and work for a prolonged time (Merriam, 1988). In addition, my research focuses on socio-cultural context, time and space, thus becoming 'more than an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social unit or phenomenon. It is a socio-cultural analysis of the unit of study. Concerns with the cultural context are what set this type of study apart' (Merriam, 1988). Furthermore, this study aimed at producing valuable stories focused on the cases' complex relations, issues and arguments, which I then analyzed using an inductive-deductive approach.

Life history, as a method of exploring human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Smith, 1994), is influenced by personal, institutional and social histories (Cole, 1994). As such, it provided several advantages for my study. First, it helped to explain the meanings that underlie the participants' actions and behaviours (Woods, 1987; Sparkes, 1994). Secondly, life history places and examines a lived experience within a greater socio-economic, cultural, historical and political sphere. On this point, Goodson & Cole (1994) noted that the whole idea of looking at teachers as agents of change, transformative intellectuals and empowerers of themselves and others, will not yield results if we ignore the micro-political and contextual realities of school life. 'In other words, teacher development in its broadest sense depends on teachers having access to professional knowledge beyond just the personal, practical and

pedagogical' (Goodson & Cole, 1994; also see Sparkes, 1994; Blase, 1997; Day, 1999).

Thirdly, life history, aiming at socio-historical, cultural and contextual exploration of human experience (Wexler, 1987), gives prominence to teachers' voices and concerns, which in turn provide insights not only about teachers' classroom practices but also about their roles, positions and status regarding power-knowledge relations in educational and societal hierarchies (Sparkes, 1994; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). In addition, the life-history approach enables one to conceptualise teachers' practices in a much broader sense than just as behaviours and actions exhibited in the classroom. Practice, says Goodson (1996, quoted in Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996), 'is a good deal more than the technical things we do in the classroom – it relates to who we are, to our whole approach to life' (p. 29).

Finally, life history, due to its concern with whole persons and their relationships with their social contexts and histories, counters the ethical and intellectual limitations of one-shot, quick-visit research in which the researchers take what they need from their subjects, give nothing in response, and make sweeping generalisations on the basis of thin, superficial data (Goodson, 1997). However, in life-history research, prioritising and respecting teachers' voices does not mean a blind acceptance of what they say (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996); it involves a respectful dialogue:

Voices are not only heard, but also engaged, reconciled and argued with. It is important to not only attend to the aesthetics of articulating teachers' voices but also to the ethics of what those voices articulate. (Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 165-166)

The study's core participants included five teachers at three sites of the Badakhshan province of Tajikistan. The criteria for selecting the core participants were as follows:

1. Participants must have teaching experience that captured both Soviet and post-Soviet times.
2. They must be reform-minded, trying to improve their practices irrespective of the difficulties.
3. They must represent linguistic, religious, subject and gender diversity.
4. They must be vocal, respected members of the schools and community.

In addition to the core participants, in each of the three sites I met with focus group of teachers (12 teachers at each site), parents, community and government representatives. I also consulted officials at the Boards and Ministry of Education and consultants in foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs). No particular criteria were employed in collecting

data from these participants. The data collection tools included observation, interviews, field notes, and document analysis. A multi-level qualitative data description, analysis and interpretation were employed to extract meaning, themes, patterns and categories, interpret and draw tentative conclusions.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

In this section I discuss a number of the continuities and changes that emerged from the analysis (Niyozov, 2001).

#### *Continuity of Dedication to Caring and Service*

One of the major continuities that emerged was the teachers' enduring desire to see the children and enjoy feeling useful to them. Regardless of the changed times and conditions, the teachers continued to see teaching as a duty and moral responsibility. This principle showed itself in the teachers' care for their students, the school, the community and the country.

When I look at children my heart breaks. They had nothing to do with the collapse of the USSR. Like the teachers, they too were innocent victims of the events. Their childhood was even more disturbed. Unlike our times, many of these children have not seen sweets and toys. What sort of a heart should one have to not attend the school? (Interview, case 1, p. 67)

Another teacher added:

These students are our children. Their requests make us believe that they need us, they trust in us. How can we leave them without a guide, when we have to do that? He is going to be lost, if we do not care for him. The child will find a bad guide. He can easily get into drugs and guns. Leaving them on their own is not humane. (Interview, case 3, p. 43)

A woman colleague reinforced these feelings:

I have always been friendly and open with my students. History has changed. Materials have disappeared. The structure of the society has changed. *But my love for and eagerness to see the children remained the same.* (Interview, case 1, p. 93, emphasis added)

In the small rural communities studied, teaching was a lived experience, an inevitable part of the teachers' daily life in and out of school, not something done to students in a detached way and in a detached place.

The teacher above described how teaching immediately affected her life and work:

*I feel bad when my students get low grades. I feel I have not helped enough.* Moreover, I am already upset with the annual grades. Not all the students did as well as I expected. I may, over nothing, fight with my own daughter or son or even husband. *Due to the frustrations related to assessments, I have been unable to sleep well for the last week.* Unlike Soviet times, we have no time and conditions to work with the weaker students. (Interview, case 1, p. 69, emphasis added)

Another teacher reinforced the point that teaching in rural communities went far beyond classroom doors and school walls:

We are connected by blood, faith, and language. We see our students and their parents two or three times a day. *We actually see their parents more than them.* Therefore, when you see students and parents hide and avoid you, something is going wrong. In the village, if relations are wrong, they go bad for a long time and include families for generations. I ask the parents immediately and sort out the misunderstanding. Parents think that we teachers can do everything and their kids' future is only in our hands. We have to tell them that is not true. We visit their homes and they come to school and enter their children's classes. In the pedagogical council [11] we agreed *that we have been teaching not only students but also the whole village, even in the Soviet times.* But, at that time we did it for the state. Now we do it for ourselves, the school, parents and their children. (Interview, case 4, p. 75, emphasis added)

A Russian teacher reinforced this: 'Teaching, in my view is giving food to society and helping it get up and stand on its feet. Moving it ahead. Lessons are tactical steps in this strategy' (Interview, case 2, pp. 84, 148). This broader notion of teaching was vividly illustrated by another teacher's reflective comments:

Even now (after the Soviet times) people ask us to explain the laws, the changes. Why did Socialism fail? Why have people become so greedy? Why are some corrupt people again in the high positions? The government asks us to help with political matters. Now we are involved in the referendum and the census. Hozir Imom [12] has asked us to help with teaching 'Ethics and Knowledge.' Even during his arrival we were asked to organise the reception. In a way teachers are still important. The difference is that the status is low. Today we are lower

than many other professions. I do not know why. Maybe we teachers are guilty too. (Interview, case 2, p. 74)

Teaching thus emerged as more than a job to earn money. It was a vocation and calling; it was a service, and the teachers readily served and sacrificed for the good of their students, community, nation statehood and spiritual guide. A head of a school in Shugnan expressed how the notion of care and service was boosted by the Aga Khan:

Prior to the Imam's arrival, we had not received our salaries for three years. *After his visit we decided to work for the sake of Mawlo and his steps in Badakhshan.* What was the use of the nonsense salary that we got? Mawlo sent us everything, food, clothes, and fuel, his love and care. He said we were always in his thoughts and heart. How could we not reply with something adequate, I asked the teachers. The only thing Mawlo wanted of us is to work hard, seek knowledge and teach the children. (Field notes, p. 12, emphasis added)

This broader notion of teaching has survived the years of transformation. It reflects the teachers' egalitarian and humanistic values, embedded in the enduring reciprocal traditions (serve and be served) of the community. These have been the values necessary for the community's survival in the face of continuing geographical challenges: high altitudes, isolation, natural disasters, and the historic political and cultural threat from various neighbours (Bobrinskoy, 1902; Iskandarov, 1994; Glen, 1999). The adverse realities of harsh geography (lack of oxygen and vegetation, avalanches and floods) have always existed; poor inter-ethnic and sectarian relations (which existed before the Russian annexation of Central Asia but were mediated by Soviet internationalist policies) returned after the Soviet collapse. An obvious example is the treatment Ismaili and Pamir communities received at the peak of the civil war (1991-1992), when they became victims of *perestroika's* rhetoric of freedom, democracy, autonomy and independence (Curtis, 1996; Roy, 2000).

In these conditions, teachers realised that they should continue promoting humanistic values, which they believed were norms of the local culture:

I should be pushing a humanistic ideology. You noticed how many nationalities and ethnicities we have got here in Murghab. Murghab is not Darvaz or Shugnan where one ethnic, religious or linguistic group lives. We should make it a tradition to celebrate the days of each group here. One day for Wakhan, the other for Roshan and so on. Another day we should have a Kyrgyz cultural event. I should promote education that teaches respect, justice and internationalism.

By internationalism I mean the equality of people despite their geographical locations, languages, races, and religions. I like when there is pluralism of thinking, instead of having an ideology of a party or a clan. (Interview, case 2, p. 68)

The teachers' egalitarian, internationalist, and cooperation-oriented values appear to have been reinforced by Soviet rhetoric, which emphasised collectivism over individuality, cooperation over competition, public over private, and equality over disparity. These values have served as reasons for teachers to resist competition, wealth accumulation, selfishness and individualism.[13]

The teachers rejected drugs and guns, though they saw many people around them become rich by using and selling them. They continued to be accountable and principled in a time of chaos. They preferred being poor and 'unpolluted', despite noticing that their poverty had made them 'dervishes of the 20th century', and had adversely affected their prestige among their community and their students. They continued serving and helping everyone, with little appreciation or acknowledgement. The following quotation reveals how uneasy one teacher had become when these values were challenged by the fledgling market economy: 'If you want to succeed in trade you should be able to say no to people. I realised this is what new times require. I have not been educated to say no' (Interview, case 2, p. 69). He further added:

I am afraid that the students may ask me one day which world I have prepared them for. I do not know about market economy a lot. What can I see is that there is no regulation. To become rich everyone does what he wants. There is no accountability. But I cannot tell these students to cheat, steal, kill or sell drugs. The values that I talk about never die and never get old. I hope we are going to have a country where there is law and which is also blessed by Mawlo. The key to this is preparing people with ethics and knowledge. That is what the Imam tells us now and that is what the Communists told us before. The issue is to put all this into practice. Not just talk about them. It will take time when the number of these people becomes larger than those corrupted. I believe that good is going to win. The current victory of the bad is temporary. Victory may not come in one form only. We may not win materially and physically, but we can do so morally. We can cause a deep psychological blow to the bad, make it feel ashamed and put down. (Interview, case 2, p. 62)

The teachers' care and service for their students, education system, community, country and spiritual authority (the Aga Khan) clearly reflected these larger societal concerns. They also echoed their commitment to the children's social and academic development and

their promotion of altruism, cooperation, respect and sharing. Apparently, these values have become important features of the teachers' identity. They refused to adapt them to the post-Soviet realities of the advancement of capitalism and the market economy. To survive within these new realities, according to the teachers and community members, required individualism, competitiveness, and a selfish refusal to share or grant the requests of the needy. The timelessness of the ideals of service, sharing, caring, cooperation, justice and helping the needy has been endorsed by the teachers' spiritual guide, the Aga Khan:

It would be traumatic if those pillars of the Islamic way of life, social justice, equality, humility and generosity, enjoined upon us all, were to lose their force or wide application in our young society. It must never be said generations hence that in our greed for the material good of the rich West we have forsaken our responsibilities to the poor, to the orphans, to the traveller, to the single woman. (Aga Khan IV, 1967)

A female teacher revealed the endurance of these traditional values of reciprocity in her community:

Sher [her husband] brought two sacks of wheat flour, but I could not cook bread openly. The neighbours all see what we eat and wear and who visits us. I shared the first sack with them. I felt more relaxed this way than cooking bread in secret. (Interview, case 1, p. 67)

Her colleague illustrated how the ethics of service are deeply rooted in the classical literature:

Our poets have mentioned:

*Har ruz zi khud bipurs agar ki mardi*  
*K-imruz chi khizmate ba mardum kardi*

(Each day ask yourself if you are a man  
What service have you provided to the people?).  
(Interview, case 2, p. 73)

The irony, however, is that in practice, teachers have found themselves almost alone in promoting these values. They have continued to worry about the community and society at a time when many people have focused on their personal interests. The teachers have continued their sacrifice at a time when it is fashionable to 'grab and run'. They have continued to promote internationalism during an upsurge of ethnic nationalism and localism (Ignatieff, 1993; Khudonazar, 1995). They have continued to see positive insights in the ideas of Lenin, Marx, socialism and the Soviet state when many people appear to have misused them for

their own personal and colonial interests, abandoning them as soon as they went out of fashion (Keshavjee, 1998). They have continued serving the state and community when there was little reciprocity. They have continued to believe in genuine education, when even their students seem to have lost trust in it. They have dreamt of and worked for a stable, developed, peaceful, educated, democratic, pluralist Tajikistan, at a time when they have seen the country's riches pillaged and its people increasingly divided across ethnic, religious, gender and class lines (International Crisis Group, 2001). They have endorsed justice and hard work at a time when corruption has taken over society. All these have had a deeply demoralising effect on teachers. A biology teacher revealed how he has been working against incredible odds:

Even though I am very busy with handling my survival needs, I could still find time and energy to put into teaching. I could daily put 3-4 hours into preparation for teaching. But why? Who needs my teaching? When positions are often bribed and diplomas are bought? When the school authorities say to the students and teachers: 'If you do not want to come to school, to the devil with you.' When there is misuse of the school's property. When the sons of the village leaders stop their peers from coming to the school. When some people at the *rayono* [14] say they don't care whether our children get education. (Interview, case 5, p. 98)

The teachers in this study continue to believe in their own centrality, when the community considers them time-wasters at best, and when they have become 'dervishes of the 20th century' in their appearance. They continue to believe that they have to be moral guardians and intellectuals of the rural community when people are less and less prone to listen to them, when they are avoided as 'preachers' and not invited to parties and gatherings as they once were. They continue to believe in truth and consensus, while many around them use 'truth' as a shield to cover cynicism, clientelism and hypocrisy. A teacher put this belief as follows:

Teachers are the most honest, most educated and most important people in the society. They cannot bribe, cannot cheat and cannot make extra money at the expense of the students. *If there is a force that could really promote knowledge and ethics in the society, this force is the teacher.* (Interview, case 1, p. 68, emphasis added)

Believing in the eternity of their values, it was painful for the teachers to witness the decline of their status in society:

I get angry when someone who has become rich nowadays forgets that there has been a teacher who helped him to

become so. Even Rumi [15] had realised that teaching is the mother of the other professions:

*Hej kas az peshi khud chize nashud,  
Hej ohan khanjari teze hashud.  
Hej Mawlono nashud mulloi Rum,  
To muridi Shamsi tabrezi nashud.*

(No one has become someone just by himself,  
No iron has become a sharp sword by itself.  
No Mawlono has become the Mullah of Rum  
Unless he has not become a student of Shams of Tabriz.)  
[16-19] (Interview, case 1, p. 66)

### **Continuity of Ethical Authority**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Ismailis and Pamiri Tajiks, excited by the promises of perestroika and glasnost, became involved in broader political, cultural, and religious movements. Their cooperation with the Democratic and Islamic forces of Tajikistan resulted in the loss of the latter forces in the political struggle for power. This led to tragic losses of human life, material resources, status and future opportunities. A considerable number of the Ismailis fell prey during the civil war. Both during the war and afterwards, many lowland Ismailis took refuge in Badakhshan and other parts of the former Soviet Union. From 1992 to 1993, Badakhshan was cut off from the rest of Tajikistan and the former USSR and left to its own devices. Many people immersed themselves in reflection about the recent and remote past, recovering their roots and history of sufferings as well as wondering about their future within the new Tajik state (see Niyozov, 2003)

In this context, the concept of an ethical authority as a major source of moral reference and a pillar of justice has remained intact in MBAP, although its source has switched from the secular and atheist (Marxism-Leninism) to the spiritual and religious (Islam, primarily the Ismaili interpretation of Islam) in the case of these teachers. In fact, neither of these two authorities disappeared in either the Soviet or post-Soviet periods. The concept of the Imam has existed in the minds of teachers and the community since the Ismaili interpretation of Islam was established in Badakhshan in the 10th century (Daftary, 1991; Hansburger, 2000). During Soviet times, Marx and Lenin were promoted officially. A teacher who used to be a member of the Communist party and a propagandist for the state ideology put it as follows:

*In the class and my lectures in the village, I promoted the strength of the Soviet ideology and theory, not its practice.[20]*

*I continue to believe that there was nothing wrong with the theory of socialism. I knew it was people who destroyed the theory because they misused it for their own benefit.*  
(Interview, case 1, p. 49, emphasis added)

In post-Soviet times, Allah, the Prophet Mohammad and the Imam (the Aga Khan in this case) resurfaced from the private and underground domain to become central sources of reference. Lenin and Marx, however, seem to have not disappeared. Unlike politicians and perhaps philosophers, teachers have managed to reconcile these seemingly opposed authorities in their practices so as to promote their own worldviews in the various contexts of their life and work. A primary teacher (core participant) stated this as follows:

Maybe I am wrong, but when I listen to what our Imami Zamon says and what Lenin had written, I find many similarities. Both speak about serving the needy, helping the poor, friendship between people, equality. I sometimes wonder whether Lenin might have also been a holy person. He did not have kids but made so much for the children. We have all got so many facilities in the Soviet times. The difference I see is that Lenin died before his ideas were implemented by others, while whatever the Imam says, he makes sure that it happens. (Interview, case 4, p. 45)

The ethical authority expressed above in Lenin and the Imam, as well as great figures in Tajik classical literature and the current constitution of Tajikistan and increasingly its political leadership, were among the teachers' few sources of moral support for staying in teaching and continuing their care and service. To the teachers in the study, the sayings of the Aga Khan about teachers, education, and human relations resembled those that Marx and Lenin on the same subjects. Some of them noticed that the codes of ideal behaviour for a good Muslim resembled those of a good Communist. A history teacher mentioned this:

During Perestroika and early Independence years (1990s) I was a bit disturbed by the excess of talk about Islam, but then I realised that the major principles of the 'code of the constructor of Communism' [21] are similar to those of 'javnombardi' [22] [chivalry] in Islam. The problem is how to apply them in practice. I don't see that happening with either of them. (Interview, case 1, p. 103)

The teachers saw the balance of ethics and knowledge promoted by the Imam today as similar to the balance of social and academic aspects promoted by educational policy in Soviet and even post-Soviet times. The continuity of ethical authority provided a crucial foundation for teachers promoting the value of education, their status and the rightness

of their cause. This continuity enabled the teachers to survive the years of post-Soviet hardship and justify their extended roles in the community: to fight drugs, guns, corruption and other harmful activities, and to promote justice, cooperation, humanity, tolerance and care.

Some people thought we would all die soon or become slaves to others as a result of our defeat in the civil war. With the arrival of the Imam we all felt that, though we are a small and very poor people, we have got a strong protector and guide. From 1993 to 1997 there was no major problem with basic foods. The Aga Khan Foundation also provided us with clothes, shoes and some textbooks. For us as teachers, some of the most touching words were Hozir Imom's appeal for education and his saying that for him teaching is the noblest profession. He asked us to carry on our work and seek knowledge. As the head of the school I gained the moral right to ask teachers to come and work so that the help of the Imam becomes *halal*. [23] (Interview, case 2, p. 59)

The participants' discussions about authority provided several important messages. First, through connecting spiritual with secular authority, tradition with change, the essential with the contextual, intellect with faith, and West with East, the teachers' adherence to a religious interpretation (in this case Ismailism) has come to play a powerful, constructive, encouraging and transformative role in their lives. The teachers have found positive dimensions of faith, which provide hope and meaning to their life and work, and fuel their enthusiasm and motivation to improve their lives, help others, and improve society. Power and authority in this case appear to have become positive forces (Giroux, 1998).

However, the teachers know that theories are hard to apply, because human factors and other realities come between the ideas decreed by authority and the practice of their implementation. For the teachers, who have experienced the rise and fall of promising ideas such as Communism, democracy, *glasnost*, *perestroika*, certain forms of Islam and nationalism in the brief post-Soviet period, it is the practice that matters. The question they ask is not whether people and institutions will or will not serve a religious or secular authority such as Lenin, Mohammad or the Aga Khan. The question, as Giroux (1998) has put it, is to what end and by whom authority and ideals are employed, and whose interests are served in reality and in practice. A history teacher, talking on this point, put the authority-representation relations in a historical perspective:

Not all the Communists were bad. The old Communists were really devoted to the idea. My father was a secretary of the Communist party of the *kolkhoz* [collective farm] in the 1960s.

I remember Shakarsho, Shonazar [24] and others. When they arrived in our village, they sowed grass and fodder with the students, sat with the farmers and worked with them, to thresh the wheat. My mother and I would cook for them, waiting till late night. They would come dusty and tired, but still have time to joke. They would always bring us some gifts. In the 1980s people used communism for convenience, position and power seeking. The new leaders would come, give orders and a sheep would be killed for them. They were like in the old saying: '*Omadand, shishtand, guftand, khurdand, khestand wa raftand*' (They arrived, sat, talked, ate, got up and left). They never visited the farmers, never asked about their problems. They came to the schools to order the teachers to go and work with the farmers. These democrats also have no principles. I think they should not be called democrats. (Interview, case 1, p. 45)

A Russian teacher reinforced this point about post-Soviet times:

There are times when I tend to agree with the *khalifa* [25] and people in the community that only the Imam can resolve the corruption problem, that only he can remove these people and bring justice. What the people in the café [26] said about the bureaucrats and Masali [27] makes me worried that these people may do harm to the Imam's image here ... I hope the Imam is aware of this and will change these people before they discredit his ideas as they had misused those in the socialist ideas. (Interview, case 2, p. 74)

Thus, the teachers warned that not everyone has an ethical approach to the ethical authority (Marx and Lenin in Soviet times, the Aga Khan in post-Soviet times and literary figures in both periods). The teachers and, by extension, the population at large, suggest that there might be people in positions of power and privilege who promote their personal and political agenda by manipulating the people's faith, love and devotion to the secular or religious authority and to the ideals in the country's constitution and educational laws; that some people may, consciously or unconsciously, betray the ideals of justice, service, caring, equity, and compassion espoused by the ethical authorities.

Together with the teachers, one worries whether this will dissipate hope for justice and a meaningful and fulfilling life, not only among teachers but among the community in general. Teachers and the population at large have the highest hopes of the ethical authorities and their institutions. The betrayal of such hope and aspirations by those who mediate between the authorities and the population at the grassroots level will make double standards, hypocrisy and cynicism the norm in newly emerging and hopeful post-Soviet societies. Although the

teachers' fears may not be fully grounded in fact, as long as people perceive reality subjectively and experientially, what they believe in will often remain true for them.

### **Continuity of Lack of Relevant Education**

The participants suggested that, as in Soviet times, the schools' curricula have continued to be of little relevance to the realities of mountainous Badakhshan and people living on its high hillsides. According to one history teacher, although history in the curriculum has moved from Soviet and Russian to Tajik and Persian, the history of Badakhshan, its culture and language, mountains and people continued largely to be left out of the picture.

During Soviet times History of Tajikistan was a small section within History of the USSR. In fact, we studied the History of Russia from the primitive time until the present. Soviet we said, but Russia's history we taught. Even at VUZs [28] there was not enough attention paid to teaching History of Tajikistan. I learnt many Tajik history topics in a hurry, 25 years ago, but never taught this topic in school. In schools the History of Tajikistan was something like two to four hours within the History of the USSR. In selecting the topics from Tajik history more attention was paid to the history of Tajikistan in the Soviet period. Topics that dealt with ancient and medieval Tajik history were rushed or left out from the course ... It was perhaps acceptable, because we were united within the Soviet Union. But it was not right to ignore our own history, the history of a whole nation, even at that time. I think our Tajik scholars did not pay enough attention to it. The Soviet system was based upon commands and a 'you must do it' approach. Everything was decided centrally at the USSR level. The history curriculum was always published in the journal *Teaching History in Schools* and we merely copied and translated it. Tajik scholars have always relied upon the Russians. (Interview, case 1, p. 14)

History continued to concentrate on past and previous relations with other states (sometimes ambiguous relations); it excluded the current problems of the country – drugs, disease, poverty, ethnic and clan rivalry and diversity, unemployment and religious conflicts – from discussion, as before. History has continued to be about learning names, facts and events, rather than about critically discussing life issues, current problems and future aspirations. There is also little evidence that history has moved from indoctrination of a single viewpoint to a free and critical inquiry of multiple historical and contemporary interpretations. The

history teacher suggested that she would like to discuss how the mountains affect the people's lives and how and why people have come to inhabit such harsh living conditions:

During the Soviet times we learnt about USA, Russia and the Roman Empire, which were too far and too old. But we knew nearly nothing about our neighbour Afghanistan. Ultimately, we have come to teach our Tajik history. But, because our scholars cared so little, we have so many problems with teaching it now. *Maybe they were not allowed to do this.* The current programs are being developed in Dushanbe and sent down to us. There should be someone in charge of looking at the school programs here at the *oblano*. [29] Many important themes are not in the program: we have got so many problems, the origins of which go deep down in history. Students won't read and pay attention to these things on their own, even if there were books available. I would include the view of mountains, the traditions of the people of Badakhshan, the needs of Badakhshan and the problems we face today. We have several small linguistic groups here in Badakhshan, which have little respect for and understanding of each other. *We need to know about ourselves before knowing others.* Why are there so many languages here? There are debates about the meaning of the words Badakhshan and Pamirs and we do not know enough about them. I would talk about our economic and political life. *Why are we, despite our high level of education, so poor? Why did we follow blindly our populist leaders?* This helps us to have a better life here. I have nothing against the Soghdians and the Bactrians [30] but I want to know about ourselves first and how we are connected to them. The peoples of this place are registered in the Red Book. [31] *So many countries wanted to occupy our land, so many people want to come here and we know very little about it.* Many people do not even know about how our people are divided between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Sometimes I want to raise these questions at the provincial professional development courses. I blame our provincial Education Board. Why do the responsible people there not inform the Ministry of Education about this? *Is it not their job to care about our joint history?* (Interview, case 1, pp. 102-103, emphasis added)

This teacher said she would like to explore and discuss local and national cultural diversity; she would discuss what is wrong with Badakhshan and Tajikistan and why they continue being at the mercy of external aid; she would discuss how peace and consensus could be

achieved; she would talk more about what politicians do and about corruption. She also said she would like to use Shugnani [32] and let students speak it when necessary, to inspire students to learn and speak more in her class.

The language curriculum has shared a similar fate. The content of Russian textbooks has retained old concepts that are often alien, not only to Badakhshan, but even to the larger Tajikistan. A Russian teacher acknowledged the following:

I never thought that my subject and these ideas could promote certain ways of thinking as you noticed. I had a feeling that I am doing something good for the Russians, but never to the point that the textbooks promoted love for Russia more than for Tajikistan. *I do not use these books for promoting politics. I use these topics because they talk about honesty, respect, hard work and love for the motherland, good society and collectivist attitude.* I think these are good values. Lenin is on each page of these old textbooks, his portrait is in the offices and his statue is in the centre of the city. People still talk about Lenin as much as they do about the Imam. The point that you made about why the Russian textbooks do not present Tajik poets is something that people at the Ministry of Education have to think about. Also we have no other textbooks. I cannot wait until new textbooks come. I have no other options except to use these torn-apart and worn-out textbooks. In my view it is better to have something than nothing. (Interview, case 2, p. 66, emphasis added)

Language training has not yet become a tool by which the local culture can express itself to become part of the larger Tajik or global culture. The Russian teacher above said he would like Russian and English to serve as a bridge to allow local, national and global cultures to interact on an equal basis.

A biology teacher suggested that biology should be the prime subject in the rural context and should deal with that context, because it enables people to find food and keep healthy; its uses are immediate and basic to all other activities, academic or not. The lack of attention to biology was also a legacy from Soviet times:

At that time everything was available and we prepared the students for exams and for leaving this place. But now, we cannot leave easily, even if we wish to do so. The current life conditions ask for more knowledge of biology. (Interview, case 5, p. 2)

Due to biology, I have become one of the best peasants in the district. I can take care of the health of my family members. I

know what kind of food is best for them and try to find that food. Many people, even the agronomists, ask my advice for farming. If children learn biology well, they do not need to pay doctors and agronomists for each [bit of] advice. They can also teach their parents about farming. I am very disappointed that people do not realise that biology is essentially the most important subject in rural areas. (Interview, case 5, p. 3)

At the same time, the participants' practices revealed that curricular relevance often depends on the teachers' intellectual and pedagogical abilities and commitment to care for students' learning and future. The participants illustrated many ways by which they tried to make the curriculum relevant: they brought into the classrooms their students' experiences, linked the textbooks with local realities, discussed issues, and occasionally used the local languages (Niyozov, 2001, Chapters 5 & 6). The Russian teacher, for example, had encountered students who were in grade 6 yet unable to read Russian. He realised the uselessness of pursuing the official curriculum and began from where the students were, rather than where the program required him to be:

*I left the program. I said to hell with the 'Parts of Speech'. [33] I will do everything to enable these students to read and write first, if not to speak. As they start reading and writing we can move to grammar. I knew that I was violating the directives. In the journal I would write that I am covering grammar but in reality I was doing the reading intensively. (Interview, case 2, p. 32, emphasis added)*

The history teacher added:

We should have a special topic on famous Pamirian people and their contribution to Tajik history. Everyone talks about Shotemur as one of the founders of current Tajikistan. In the program of Grade 9 and 11 Shotemur is briefly mentioned as one of those who founded the revolutionary government in Tajikistan. We in the school conduct extra-curricular activities to teach more about him, take the children to the spring of Nosir Khusraw, bring in a veteran of the war and work, or a local scholar. We arrange a visit to Shotemur Museum and to the Ethnographic Museum in Khorog. On our own efforts, time, energy, and expenses. No-one pays us for that. No-one thanks us. But we have been doing this since Soviet times and we believe it is important for the children learning. (Interview, case 2, p. 102)

However, the participants saw this process of making curriculum relevant as taking personal and political risks, or as a professional burden. As in Soviet times, they view their main job to be covering the

textbooks, telling the students the truths of the subject matter, and teaching for the tests. The teachers suggested that they would make the curriculum relevant if they were allocated time to do it and better conditions in which to live, learn and create, as well as support from the inspectors and authorities. They said they would make the curriculum relevant if they knew that letting the students speak in their mother tongues and talk about Badakhshan would not cause them to fail exams and further studies. Currently, evidential success in Badakhshan does not involve relevance in the sense of teaching about the mountains, but in how to leave the mountains. It emphasises memorising, mastering other languages, behaving differently and choosing a fashionable stream rather than engaging students' personal experiences, self-actualisation, moral reasoning, and problem-solving (Bacchus, 1983; Fuller & Clarke, 1994).

The roots of this irrelevance, as the cases show, go back to the Soviet system of education, which talked about empowerment but manufactured an unsustainable, mythical reality. The Soviet system, as the above examples have shown, ignored questions of local relevance in the name of moving people out of Badakhshan and creating pan-Soviet citizens (Muckle, 1988; Weber, 2000). In Badakhshan, the Soviets created structures that dismissed the enduring severity of natural conditions. In Soviet times, the mountains mattered little, perhaps only during earthquakes and avalanches. People truly believed that the mountain environment could be subdued through the power of science and technology. Relevance was imposed from above and far away, and people were made to believe that others knew better what they needed to know and how to live.

Partly due to the enduring challenges of survival in the mountainous environment, and partly due to Soviet education's inattention to the local nature and culture, teachers and the population at large developed a negative attitude to the mountains. They saw the region as inhibiting, diminishing and restricting, socially backward and less advanced than the rural and urban areas (Sher, 1991; Stern, 1992; Becker, 1996). They associated mountains with earthquakes, avalanches, hell, cold, narrowness, obstacles, isolation, dead ends, lack of civilisation, hopelessness, and lack of confidence. As a result, the local people rarely saw growth and development as achievable in the mountains. An English teacher made the following comment:

No serious learning can take place without high demands and expectations. I cannot demand this if the children are hungry and unclothed. I would rather say thanks to these children and even arrange food for them for merely coming to school. In my school years, for 20 kopeks we had *pirog*, tea and *palow*. We have this saying, 'From hunger you kill a tiger.' You can patch your clothes, but you cannot patch your stomach. Here we do

not have even grass so that we could eat it and fill our stomachs. I often fight with my dad: why did you come to this hell? So I give the children 4 and 5 merely for coming to school. I am telling you this because I lived in the two periods. I always remember Brezhnev's words: 'If there is bread there will be song'. [34-38] (Field notes, 2, p. 22)

The above teacher's voice echoes those who warn that reforms, when carried out on populist grounds without care and responsibility, and in the pursuit of personal greed and power, not only fail to improve the situation, but make matters worse (Ginsburg, 1991; Tayler, 2001). To that extent, the teachers' post-Soviet images of and feelings about the mountains resemble the painful feelings and complaints about Badakhshan of Nasir Khusraw, a prominent 11th-century Tajik-Persian thinker and Ismaili philosopher (Hansburger, 2000). Mirroring this belief, the teachers saw the mountain environment as a hurdle to growth and a reason for the decline in the teachers' professional quality and working life.

Similarly, the school system phased out local culture and languages. Linguistic and cultural differences became problems to be avoided, rather than a source of richness from which to learn. Hitherto, proposed solutions to the problems in Badakhshan mainly involved bringing in outside models.

The teachers, however, suggested that new, indigenous models of improving life in Badakhshan needed to include a dialogue between the various local and external wisdoms. The teachers envisioned that a prosperous future for Badakhshan and Tajikistan would be achieved when the ideas of socialism were reformed and improved by local (diverse Pamirian), national (common Tajik-Persian and Tajik-Russian), Islamic and Western democratic ideas. Within this blend, socialism and internationalism remained the preferred ideals for the teachers. The preference for socialist continuity was not only due to the compatibility of the values and the Soviet indoctrination; it was also due to the practical difference between life and work conditions in the two periods, as the remarks of the English teacher quoted above show.

The teachers suggested that connecting the classroom to the community is a powerful concept that will work naturally for the villages in MBAP. This connection plays a fundamental role in understanding oneself and one's community and the community's contribution to the larger society. It also contributes to the appreciation and development of the local nature and culture, including the resolution of social issues and problems, which continue to be excluded. This link is crucial for making curriculum and instruction relevant and meaningful to the students. To make this connection requires a basic reconceptualisation of the nature of knowledge and the purposes of education. In addition to teacher development, this requires a serious commitment of education policy in

Tajikistan to the preservation, maintenance and development of the local culture and ecology.

### **Continuity of Child-Centred Rhetoric and Teacher-Centred Practices**

Much policy rhetoric in MBAP and Tajikistan has stressed the supposed move to child-centred pedagogy, active learning, creativity and critical thinking (Kuder, 1996). The historical analysis of the teachers' cases reveals that this policy is not new; it has been there since the early years of the Soviet period (Suddaby, 1989; Popovych & Stankevich, 1992).

In practice however, teacher-centred instruction has continued to be teachers' main pedagogical approach throughout most of the Soviet and post-Soviet times. Biographical, pedagogical, cultural, linguistic, environmental and systemic continuities have contributed to the persistence of teacher-centred pedagogy. The teachers' occasional deviance from transmission (as we shall see later) arose partly from the recent weakening of state control, moral support from the ethical authorities and policy texts, glimpses from their culture, their own belief in the necessity of variety for improving the teaching and learning process, and their abilities to reshape the existing structures to serve their transformative worldviews (Niyozov, 2001, Chapter 7). A teacher gave several reasons for continuing with transmission:

This is a habit of mine, my personal quality. I want the students to be ready to answer quickly and tell me fast, fast so that I can tell them something more. I am always worried that the bell is going to ring soon and I have not yet said what I needed to say. See, due to cold we have about two to three months of vacation in winter. Then periods are also shortened and this talk gets left and that talk gets left. Certainly, that is from the most important talks, not the secondary thoughts. Secondly, the student may get far from my question. In this case I do not waste time. I tell him: now you listen to what the question is about. This is a mistake of mine to jump to an answer on his behalf. He is a child and his language is not like mine and he needs time to speak it. We all speak in a second language. The student may feel that I did not like his answer. I need to eliminate this mistake, but am unable. I have got used to it. It is like the saying '*Odati bad baloi jon*' (Bad habit is a threat to the soul). (Interview, case 1, p. 63)

The study revealed that teacher-centeredness and transmission are sustained ideologically. The teachers, as the state's employees, are to implement its policies. These require that they, despite the rhetoric of de-ideologisation of education and society (Ekloff, & Dneprov, 1993),

should promote the ideology of the state (Marxism-Leninism then, and nationalism now). The history teacher believed that her criticism in history lessons (Niyozov, 2001, Chapter 6) was essentially forbidden. The Russian teacher acknowledged that the alternative approaches to teaching Russian were not encouraged. The biology teacher stated that 'we again see that we are being channelled into one way as before' (Niyozov, 2001, Chapter 7). As in Soviet times, any criticism must focus on the outside and the past, not inwardly and on the present. Teachers should emphasise patriotism (often uncritical, but surely responsive to the general rise of nationalism in the former Communist countries; Ignatieff, 1993; Shukurov et al, 1997), encourage and give examples of sacrifice for the country, and not discuss current issues or the current system. They still have to preach ideological correctness and the correctness of a single interpretation. The Russian language teacher explained that many of these practices stem from Soviet times. He recalled that during his university studies he used to face teachers who:

used threats, pointed to our mistakes, put us down, and made fun of our accent in Tajik. They demanded obedience. I found many of them also weak in the subjects they taught. Any disagreement with our instructors would end up with bitterness and ill-feeling. (Interview, case 2, p. 29)

Transmission, teacher domination and coercive relations have been sustained organisationally. Curricula, textbooks and examinations are all centralised. Hierarchy persists; inspectors are watchful. Classrooms continue to be front-oriented and row-based; a mixed lesson framework [39] predominates, and standardised lesson planning persists. A myth that the Soviet educational system was excellent and therefore need not be altered persists as the teachers compare the new struggling and decaying educational systems with the comparatively prosperous Soviet one. The pressures of covering the curriculum and examinations, the lack of learning materials, and even the cold weather also contribute to the transmission approach. One of the study's participants pointed out how the local climate contributes to the preservation of transmission pedagogy:

In the second term of the last academic year, which was very short [from the end of March until June 15] [40], we studied in a very fast way. In March here it gets down to 20 degrees below zero, and we have no fuel to heat the classes. This created a lot of pressure upon the students. We moved fast to complete the program and avoid possible scandals. Out of 68 hours, I have to cover 64 hours at minimum. During the Soviet period, if you were unable to do that, you would be punished. Even now we have that fear. (Interview, case 2, p. 21)

Transmission is sustained culturally. Tajik culture largely promotes the attitude that adults and those in authority cannot be wrong, and should be listened to. Students are seen as immature; their outlook is regarded as narrow; they can and should take knowledge from the teachers, who are there to expand the students' horizons. Respect is often associated with unquestioning acceptance and compliance. The high status teachers enjoyed in pre-Soviet and Soviet times has been sustained rhetorically. True and useful knowledge is seen as being in books, and scientific explanation is viewed as superior to any other form of knowledge. The culture is sacred and one should not question it. Many authors and scholars in the culture suggest the need for total submission to a teacher. This is illustrated in the above sayings of Rumi, as well as other cultural proverbs. A prominent Tajik scholar, Aini (1958), in his autobiographical works gives many examples of the unquestioned nature of teachers' status. In this study, some community members repeated sayings such as '*Qamcnhini okhun gul ast, waqti zadan bulbul ast*' (A teacher's whip is like a flower, in hitting it sounds like a nightingale) and '*Pusti kudakam as tu wa ustukhonash as man*' (My child's skin is yours and his bones are mine).[41] (Observation, case 1, pp. 54, 65; see Niyozov, 2001, pp. 264-266).

Transmission is also sustained linguistically. Students are not allowed to speak in their mother tongues [42]; they should speak only Tajik, Russian or English, and speak them correctly. The correctness should be total: not only grammatically, but also ideologically. If they cannot speak them correctly, they should keep quiet and let the teachers show them how one should speak these languages properly and expressively. The history teacher put this as follows:

Sometimes I ask a student and do not give her a chance to speak fully because she moves around, but never says exactly what is required. This is because she does not know the appropriate words. See, when I talk to them on an individual basis I use Shugnani now. That makes it less formal and students also tell me what their real problems are. I usually use Shugnani to encourage them. So the girl realises why I interrupted her. She does not get upset. I do not put her personality down ... I agree if she expresses her opinion. I wish my students to be fast thinkers and speak good Tajik. (Interview, case 1, p. 37)

These above-mentioned factors, interconnected with classroom (Blase, 1997; Niyozov, 2001, Chapters 5 & 6), institutional (Hargreaves, 1978; Cuban, 1988; Niyozov, 2001, Chapters 7 & 8) and geographical challenges (Niyozov, 2001, Chapter 7), make the continuity of once-established practices stronger than forces for change. Some of these factors have become norms and traditions of society, which makes their change an

extremely sensitive endeavour, because these continuities are not neutral; they serve the vested interests of certain groups. In sum, the teachers reinforce Kerr's (1990) conclusion that post-Soviet classrooms are not so different from those in Soviet times:

Instruction from the first grade on was characterised by a fairly rigid pattern of rote mastery of text, oral recitation by students, and teacher dominance of classroom activity ... the typical Soviet school was often a dreary place: a decrepit building with few textbooks, out-dated equipment, alienated students, bored teachers and authoritarian administration. Students graduated with little understanding of the concepts or principles they had studied, or with narrow, outdated occupational training that was often useless in practice. (p. 27)

All this has a deep implication for reform. The denunciation of teacher-centred pedagogy is thus not a simple technical issue of imparting methodologies and techniques into the heads of teachers, often through detached workshops; it raises political, ideological and cultural questions of power, norms, habits, structures and interests. Unless these aspects are critically dealt with, any talk about the shift to child-centred pedagogy will always remain rhetorical, and will continue to cover up practices that promote obedience, docility, cynicism, and submission.

### **Continuity of Top-Down and Outside-In Approaches**

The case studies inform us that most post-Soviet attempts at educational change in Tajikistan have remained like those of the Soviet period. As before, these reforms officially promote freedom, justice, equity and empowerment, and prosperity for all. As in Soviet times, reform is expected to require a necessary 'change of mentality' (World Bank, 1998). As before, the approaches to educational reform have mainly continued to follow the Soviet centralised model, under which all decisions and reforms are decided on at the centre and merely implemented at the local level, with teachers acting as technicians and servants of the bureaucratically downloaded policies, rather than as partners in policy-making and curriculum development (Thiessen, 1993a). The top-down and outside-in approach is clear in one teacher's observation of a training session in 1999, where many head teachers continued to speak in the old manner:

Some of our school directors (heads) continue speaking like Brezhnev, as if they are in a session of the Congress of the Communist party. *Everyone supports the idea because it is fashionable.* Some heads said streaming is the demand of the time and market economy. I honestly do not know how streaming is connected to the demands of the time, democracy

and a market economy. (Interview, case 1, p. 132, emphasis added)

The same teacher, however, found the issues raised during the training session to be good signs of continued care about education and society:

From the meeting and from the issues raised by the Government inspector, and the guests from the Aga Khan foundation I got a good feeling. I felt that there people who talk seriously and are concerned about the educational improvement. My only hope now is that all this has to be put into practice. (Interview, case 1, p. 133)

Despite these moments of hope, the teachers revealed that, as before, teaching is seen as something that consists only of two components: subject matters and methodology. The larger and holistic notion, which also includes human relations, morality, ethics, passion, commitment, vision, and goals, is still not equally acknowledged and included. A primary teacher stated:

Everyone talks about methods. I think each teacher has his own method and teachers are different. I have my own methods and I change them all the time. But for me they are secondary to relationships with the students. I believe my teaching success depends on my students' and their parents' attitude to and relationships with me. If a teacher is rude and students hate him, they will not learn much, whatever his method are. We have a saying: '*Olim shudan oson wa odam shudan mushki*' (It is easier to become a scholar than a human being). If students like me and respect me then they will learn from me, do their homework and progress. (Interview, case 4, p. 19)

Further, the reform initiatives, as before, fail to take into account the local contextual realities of Badakhshan and the local people's voices and visions about how to live and teach in their area. As a result, the local population continues to have an inferiority complex about themselves, their culture, languages and location. They continue to accept external solutions as the key to local development. The teachers and the community see their differences from other Tajik compatriots and from the rest of the world as hurdles to their success (Escobar, 1995). The history teacher revealed this reality when she talked about how children learn:

Also I have mentioned to you the language. If I use Shugnani, sometimes, they learn better. You know some of our students never master Tajik. But Shugnani is also not useful. It does not work beyond the airport.[43] I used to feel that one does not

need to be so educated to live on these mountains. Quality education was required only if we needed to leave Pamir for other parts of the USSR. (Interview, case 1, p. 110)

The teachers associated the collapse of the USSR either with their own weaknesses and disloyalty or with the external enemy's conspiracy. The post-Soviet pessimism continues:

In the Soviet Union we had food, clothes. We did not spend days looking for food. The queues were for posh clothes and goods, not the basics. Here in the village, there were no queues. I feel sorry about the Soviet collapse. Because we were not grateful, we even lost the basics. I think this democracy has so far been no match to that. *Neither are we free to express what we want.* (Interview, case 1, p. 40, emphasis added)

Schooling seems to still be about getting a certificate and trying to move out of MBAP; teachers continue to view themselves as receivers and transmitters of externally developed knowledge and their students as mere receivers of that knowledge. Apathy exists; very few seem to really care, and things seem to have deteriorated further. It is worth repeating the previously quoted words of one teacher, expressing his deep disappointment:

Even though I am very busy with handling my survival needs, I could still find time and energy to put into teaching. I could daily put 3-4 hours into preparation for teaching. But why? Who needs my teaching? When positions are bribed and diplomas are bought? When the school authorities say to the students and teachers: 'If you do not want to come to school, to the devil with you.' When there is misuse of the school's property. When the sons of the leaders of the village stop their peers from coming to the school. When some people at the *rayono* [44] say they don't care whether our children get education. (Interview, case 5, p. 98)

In Tajikistan, as in many post-Soviet countries, the Soviet bureaucratic and command system of administration appears to have remained intact. Teachers still fear inspectors and other official visitors, who they think continue to judge them according to their lesson plans and how well they follow a prescribed schema. The textbooks have to pass the scrutiny of the higher authorities in order to be accepted. Instead of listening to the voices of teachers and improving their working and living conditions, many authorities in the system still threaten teachers with repercussions. The system still sees them as civil servants who are there to do all the jobs that the state asks them to do. A Russian teacher put this as follows:

Griboedov said that Russia is impossible to understand with reason.[45] I feel the same about Tajikistan. Many people around find it hard to understand why we did this extravagant celebration of the Samanids [46] when we are so poor. Here in our cold place we have spent three warm days on having a break on the occasion. You know we here count warm days, particularly from September onward. We cannot criticise the administration. We are still far from democracy and rule of law in this society as it was before. (Interview, case 2, p. 33)

Most personnel in the education system were trained under the Soviet system. They continue to carry unexamined Communist baggage. Although many of the goals, curricula and procedures of Tajikistan's education system have been revised, in fact it is often difficult for personnel to adapt fully to the new conditions. As a result, many former practices, values and systems remain, making the implementation of reforms and new methods of work and social relations difficult. Very little seems to have been learnt from Soviet educational and social failures. For example, the history teacher in the study felt no-one listened to her concerns about whether the students learned anything and whether the program made an impact:

Yesterday I taught two topics in one hour. That is useless, taking into consideration the age of the students. *The program has remained the same while the hours are decreased considerably.* More time is given to other subjects such as English and subjects newly introduced into the school program.[47] The higher authorities, when they send the program, don't care that we close the school due to cold weather. Even more, *the Ministry has developed a program for grades 10 and 11 that we teachers are not ready to teach.* For example, I know so little about the Sumerian state that I am worried to teach that to the students. The program, however, demands that, by grade 9, students should finish the topics including Perestroika, because compulsory schooling ends. Children can learn all this only *kur kurona* [blindly blind, i.e. by rote memorisation]. These people have not given us textbooks and have not considered the psychological state of the children. They came here and told us to do *musht-jam* [to pull the five fingers together, to make a feast] – to put several topics together and also teach them well. If that person was in a classroom, he would have understood what it means to teach too much in such a short time. By not supplying the textbooks, they have also left the job of developing programs to the teachers. When I do not have any material for the topic and I come to class unprepared, I feel guilty and lose sleep at night.

You can't do that all the time. The representatives from the Institute of Upgrading Teacher Qualifications and Education Board say they do agree with us that it is impossible to fulfil the program. But they do not convey this message to the higher authorities. I have thought many times to write to the Ministry about this, yet I do not have the time. I also do not write because I am not sure if they will listen to me. (Interview, case 1, pp. 34-35)

The professional development courses, as in Soviet times, continue to emphasise training in often decontextualised skills and methodologies. They consist of one-shot retraining courses, arranged in the centres and run by external educators who often have little understanding of the context, history and complexity of teaching and learning. The courses are driven by propositional knowledge, which often originates outside the region. In Soviet times, ideas derived from non-Badakhshan Soviet conditions were applied in the special conditions of MBAP, sometimes inappropriately. Ideas derived from the experiences of other places continue to be applied to MBAP. Now, ideas from the West are added to ideas from Russian experience. The history teacher, after having attended a training course in the provincial capital, stated that:

This year (1999) I attended courses at the Institute for Upgrading Teacher Qualifications.[48] They were as useless as in the Soviet times: theoretical and lectures ... I wanted them to be practical. I also need to know any proposed method scientifically and practically. Let them show us how it is done in practice, not just talk about it. I need to know whether it is good and workable. Talk about this to my husband and children, what they think about it. I need to know its theory, know more about it, see how others have used it. (Interview, case 1, p. 114)

Instead of giving examples, many trainers lecture to teachers about child-centred pedagogies and expect them to use these pedagogies in classrooms that are row-based, with no learning materials, where the students and teachers cannot use their cultural background; where the curriculum largely involves memorising words, dates, names, facts and rules; where the relevance of knowledge is dubious; where it is often colder inside the classroom than outside. As in Soviet times, the system sees teachers' mentality as something that has to be replaced; in those days, the teachers were not socialist or atheist enough; nowadays, they are not market-oriented or nationalist enough.

Dialogue, mutual exchange and critical examination of both indigenous and external ideas are still avoided. The teachers in the case studies show that they possess certain knowledge of their subject matters and methods. They suggest that most of what the new reforms call new is

nothing more than already tried and abandoned ideas. A veteran teacher of Tajik literature put it as follows:

Some of the foreigners with their translators assume that their ideas are absolutely new and make conclusions about the existing system. Last year in a workshop, we were told that the Soviet system was scholastic, abstract and did not develop the students' thinking. I wonder which book they have taken this from and who has told them this. I also feel as if some of the translators either do not understand what we say, or do not convey our ideas well. I have been doing so-called problem-posing teaching for the last 30 years. Years ago I told an inspector: let me teach it this way and you ask the students at the end of the lesson. I wrote the following poem by Rudaki [49] on the board:

If you are the ruler of your own desires, you are a man.  
 If you don't look down at the blind and deaf, you are a man.  
 Being a man is not kicking the fallen and disadvantaged.  
 But if you take the hand of the fallen, you are a man!

*Then, instead of explaining to students everything, I asked the students to tell the meaning of each word, the meaning of the poem and what they learnt from the poem.* The inspector was puzzled with how well the students expressed their thoughts and understood the topic and its purpose. He talked about this everywhere. (Interview, case 1, p. 67, emphasis added)

Apparently, the teachers' major problems are systemic; they lack support, freedom, appreciation, material, infrastructure, salary and encouragement to create. In other words, teachers lack the minimum conditions for living, learning and working. Attempts at achieving greater effectiveness, efficiency and quality, by such means as streaming, opening fee-paying schools and experimenting with private schools and programmes, appear to rest more on imitation and political fashion than on critical examination of these ideas against the existing material and technical realities, or issues of educational relevance and harmonious community and individual development.

Lastly, planners have overlooked the teachers' and the community's calls to examine how the new market-based initiatives relate to the continuity of traditional values of egalitarianism, reciprocity, spirituality, and justice in the community (Keshavjee, 1998).

### Continuity of Alternative Approaches

However, in parallel to the dominance of the outside-in, bureaucratic, transmissive, coercive and top-down approaches runs the continuity of alternative approaches. These are expressed in professionalism, bottom-up innovation, child-centred instruction, dialogical and collaborative relations between teachers, policy-makers and inspectors, and between teachers and students. I have showed few examples of this alternative above. A teacher put it as follows:

I would like to say that I had a kind of dialogic method even in the Soviet times. This method is not something totally new. But at that time I wanted to be very different from the kids, either in knowledge or something else. I thought that the kids should be a bit afraid of me. Now I see them as equal even in knowledge they have. (Interview, case 1, p. 45)

A veteran teacher suggested that the people are capable of creating and maintaining collaborative, humane relations between administration, teachers and students:

In our school, students and teachers have no fear to tell each other anything they want. There is this feeling of being and working together ... We achieved this through hard work and search. *With the head we felt that the time has come when we can treat each other and our students as equal human beings. I really like this mutual understanding between the teachers themselves and with the students.* My grade 11 students, for example, are adults, who will soon have independent lives. They openly talk to me about their feelings, consult with me about their life issues. They tell me more than their mothers. We are like friends. I tell them what to do and solve some of their problems. They help me with preparing conferences. This is how they will like me more and how we respect each other. This is how students stay at school and won't leave. (Interview, case 1, pp. 15-16, emphasis added)

There have been moments of resistance to the external impositions, indoctrination, control and silencing. The case studies revealed that in two out of three schools studied, the teachers went on strikes and won them. A teacher's explanation of one strike reveals a deep morality and dedication to serve the children, the community and society:

The higher authorities got scared of our unity and wanted to transfer us to various schools so as to break us. They threatened all kinds of punishments. Our head was taken to court because he openly took our side. *We all could leave teaching. That would have been much easier for us. It would*

*have also been a big blow to those who wanted to punish us. But we worked for the sake of the children and the community, not for the sake of the government officials.* We could not leave the students to become ignorant and involved in activities harmful for them and the community. We won the strike, but as the winners we have decided to prove to the higher authorities that we are human beings; that we care and that they need to think of us and should not ignore us as ‘non-existent’; that they cannot rule us any more the way they had done it before. (Interview, case 4, p. 65, emphasis added)

There have been cases when teachers tailored the curriculum to the needs of their students and the community. The history teacher suggested:

This is Pamir [a province of Tajikistan], and a blind imitation of Amonashvili and Shatalov [50] won't work. When I try to copy them, my lessons become boring. I am not who I am really in those cases. We need to look what we have here. As teachers, we do not need to be told what to do and how to teach certain things. Teachers have got a special conscience. We are responsible for the children we teach. I cannot sleep when my students get low grades ... I feel guilty when my good students fail to get to university. So we ask those who tell us what to do: what have you done for us? You improve our living and working conditions and we will work and create new ideas by ourselves. (Interview, case 1, p. 28)

The above discussions reveal that alternative empowering approaches exist apart from or besides the dominant coercive ones. There were cases of teachers' resistance to covering the imposed and irrelevant curriculum, as we saw above in the Russian teacher's words. He further mentioned: 'In the journals I would write what the inspectors want. In reality, however, I went according to where the students were' (Interview, case 2, p. 23). The history teacher suggested to the higher authorities that they learn from the history of Soviet reform failures, and stated that teachers are cleverer than those in authority and power may assume. According to her, a major Soviet lesson for agents of change is that control, extension and manipulation are becoming harder, costlier, short-lived and unsustainable. For her, real reform implementation requires honesty, communication, realism and reflexivity:

In the school you work with teachers. They are as knowledgeable and clever as the reformers. For example, as you ask me these questions, I too assess you and decide how to work with you. I, for example, could have talked to my students, developed materials and visuals and you would have

witnessed wonderful classes and would have written all the lies. But I am not a boasting person and agree that we need to demonstrate our usual practices. *But we do show unreal things to the inspectors; they take our show as true.* The next day we return to our own ways. *We can show that we are with reform, that things are wonderful, but in reality we will keep thinking about and searching for our basic needs.* Many teachers will leave in the case of any employment opportunity. (Interview, case 1, p. 53, emphasis added)

The case studies also revealed that responsible and caring people within governmental and non-governmental authorities have acknowledged teachers' power, knowledge and wisdom and have tried to care about them. A ministry official acknowledged this:

I have travelled Tajikistan back and forth and have visited some of the best schools in many other countries and compared their teachers with ours. I believe our Tajik teachers are the poorest teachers in the world. Yet they are as good as those with better living and teaching facilities. They have wonderful ideas, are very dedicated, and can be very creative. (Field notes, p. 142)

A few teachers admitted that they learnt some child-centred ideas from courses offered by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Institute of Ismaili Studies.[51] More importantly, however, these courses affirmed their desire to try their own alternative approaches:

You know I have been using this group work before. Certainly not the way the Foundation offered. I, for example, instead of four or five students used to have a whole row [10 students] in a group. (Interview, case 1, p. 98)

The biology teacher said that many of these new ideas existed in Soviet times, but were rarely implemented in practice:

In the Soviet times we had various lesson forms, such as problem-posing lessons, discussion lessons, testing lessons, and the one that we used more often was mixed-lesson format. We were not encouraged to use the other forms, but they did exist. (Interview, case 5, p. 67)

The Russian teacher recalled that there are good inspectors, 'particularly those who have been teachers before they became inspectors'. The history teacher added that:

Many ideas and orders that come from above are good ones. The question is in their implementation. We are often ordered: in a 'you must do it' way. No-one asks if we agree with the

ideas or whether there are conditions for making these ideas work. No-one asks about our living and working conditions. That is why we always ask: what have you done for us that you order us to do this and that? We have a saying: '*Rang binu hol purs*' (Look at the colour of my face and ask about my situation). I believe teachers are people with high consciousness and responsibility. I say: you improve my life conditions and I will work my best, we will produce methods and improve our teaching. (Interview, case 1, p. 91)

### **Conclusion: towards sustainable reform**

This chapter may seem unusual in several ways. First, it focuses on continuities, when readers may have liked to know more about the rapid and overwhelming changes in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Secondly, it extensively engages and represents the voices of the dedicated Tajik teachers. Thirdly, through these voices the chapter provides complex and contradictory realities, thus avoiding a one-sided – either rosy or gloomy – portrayal of the educational and social situation in post-Soviet Tajikistan's Badakhshan.

I believe this chapter's unusual focus is unique and significant. Through its analysis of the theoretical literature and data from ordinary teachers, it reveals the equal significance of continuities for not only understanding education and society, but also for bringing about a sustainable change. Continuities and changes exist dialectically; therefore, understanding change by ignoring continuities is a truncated and failed beginning in reforming education and society.

The teachers' voices show that there are some positive continuities, such as great dedication, a reservoir of rich and contextually grounded knowledge, ethics of service, a readiness to sacrifice for the common good, encouraging ethical authorities, and responsible people in the government and NGOs. The teachers also inform us that, as socio-historical constructions, continuities are complex, evolutionary and contradictory: each continuity has both enabling and constraining aspects. These continuities simultaneously have seeds of change and stability, and hope and despair. To find the seeds of positive change requires a critical engagement with the existing realities and practices, which include the continuities.

Continuities are social constructions. They happen in time and place and consolidate through generations in particular communities. As such, the continuities in the life and work of particular teachers are not only personal and private desires, but also reflective of the larger socio-cultural continuities and traditions. The above examples of socio-historical analysis of teachers' life and work in rural mountainous Tajikistan reveal that hope and despair, reform and stagnation, justice

and exploitation, good and bad, equity and discrimination, collaboration and coercion, and care and manipulation have existed side by side, in a dialectical tension of unity and struggle.

The major challenge of post-Soviet educational reform thus is twofold: democratising the existing structures and approaches, while at the same time finding and making the subordinate, yet humane and ethical alternatives dominant. The necessity for this search and prioritisation is a deep historical lesson. This ethical and professional alternative will enable teachers to ultimately develop the abilities, knowledge and attitudes necessary for developing democratic, prosperous, tolerant, active and confident citizens and society: ideals inscribed in Tajikistan's constitution and promulgated by ethical authorities and humanistic educational discourses across centuries.

The above discussion implies that the policy-makers, agents of change and administrators need to critically reflect upon their own practices and relations with teachers. Teachers emerge not only as dedicated and caring, but also knowledgeable (Farrell, 1994). Their voices urge that we take their perspectives and ponder how one can promote critical thinking, decision-making, and moral reasoning; how one can develop a democratic mentality and an active approach to life; and how one can realistically expect teachers to learn new ideas, improve their practices and sustain child-centred pedagogies in the current conditions. The teachers also invite us to honestly acknowledge that merely talking about and using slogans, developing policies and creating structures and infrastructures do not suffice for improvement. How we develop the practices, content, culture and relations of these structures, how seriously and professionally we commit ourselves to genuine development, and how open we are to learn from our practices, are what really matters (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Giroux, 1998).

Further, the teachers' voices inform us about two paths to change: bureaucratic/populist and ethical/professional. The bureaucratic path talks about educational reform because it enjoys popular support, and makes it possible for those in power to stay in power and enjoy the *status quo*. It is a reform by bureaucrats for bureaucrats (Ekloff & Dneprov, 1993).

The ethical path, on the other hand, pays great attention to the questions of this study's teachers: why should we imitate others? Is our material and technical basis ready? Will the change make our society any better? Which segments of society do the proposed changes benefit and which ones do they marginalise? Teachers need to know whether the changes that aim to improve their practices will also improve their lives. They wonder what will they get in exchange for their extra work and sacrifices of time, energy, health and family. Teachers need to know who the agent of change is, whether that person really knows classroom life in post-Soviet Badakhshan, and whether he or she knows the conditions

and history of the context. In other words, when a change comes from outside, teachers do not necessarily see it as something of their own, even though they may agree with its worth. If reformers assume that change can be achieved only through teachers' personal sacrifices, they are wrong, say the study's participants: 'Who are you? What have you done for us? Teachers are not stupid', the voices ask and proclaim.

Given this increasing complexity of our understanding of teachers and teaching, the reformers need to recognise, approach and support teachers adequately. This attitude (ethical/professional) towards teachers and teacher development would help to develop more realistic and more sustainable approaches to changing teachers and the system (Goodson, 1992; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). Improving teachers' practices requires enhancing their working and living conditions (Woods, 1987). Further, the ethical approach sees teachers holistically, as complex professionals, and supports them to critically analyze their complex and rich experiences and the contexts of their experiences. This critical engagement provides possibilities for transformation from within, where increasing consciousness helps the teachers and policy-makers to see the implications of their actions both in and outside the classroom.

This study thus brings the current post-Soviet policy of 'changing the mentality of teachers' into question, particularly courses where teachers are exposed to external methods and techniques (World Bank, 1999). It supports many authors' contentions that viewing teachers' mentality as a problem, considering them as mindless agents, injecting ideas into their heads, controlling them, threatening, manipulating and forcing them to follow one path is unworkable, unprofessional, unsustainable and unethical (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Thiessen, 1993b; Farrell, 1994; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Cole & Knowles, 2000). This chapter denounces the bureaucratic path to understanding teaching and educational change, because from this viewpoint:

teachers are ineffective public servants who are unable to fulfil their obligation as purveyors of policy. They neither satisfactorily enculturate their students in the norms of society, nor provide them with sufficient knowledge and skills for effective participation in life's endeavours. *There is very little evidence that verifies this limited portrayal of teachers or substantiates their lack of competency and impact.* (Thiessen, 1993b, p. 284, emphasis added)

According to Thiessen, the alternative path to understanding teachers, the professional path:

starts with the assumptions that some excellence already exists, that many teachers already have the capacity to create excellent classrooms and schools, *and that the further solutions will come from working closely with more*

*empowered teachers*. (Thiessen, 1993a, p. 285, emphasis added)

This study suggests that reformers need to begin with how teachers teach, why they teach the way they do, and what in their biographies, socialisation, educational background, context and culture makes and inspires them teach that way. Reformers also need to assess their ideas before proposing them; in fact, what reformers may offer as a new idea, teachers might have already tried and rejected. Further, reformers need to know that real teaching is broader than subject matter and methodologies: it also includes care, morality, relationships and emotions (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996).

The ethical or professional path to change suggested by the teachers asks whether the proposed changes differ from ideas that teachers already have. Ethical change also asks whether students will like the new ideas and whether the ideas will increase the teachers' status and the value of education in the society. Ethical reform should consider issues such as examinations which require rote memorisation. There should also be freedom for teachers to try their own new ideas and methods without fear.

### **Epilogue**

This chapter has not only described a drama of human vulnerabilities and pessimistic possibilities; it has also demonstrated how a meaningful and sustained educational reform interconnects with changes in the fabric of society. More importantly, it has revealed hope: a powerful hope that rests on the mutual bond between a dedicated and committed human agency (teachers), a spiritual and ethical guide and responsible professional leadership. With all its problems, Tajikistan today is more peaceful, united and prosperous than ever before in the decade since independence. People, driven either by interests, by pride or by ethics, want it to improve. Given this hope, none of us who care can resign. The efforts and sacrifices of dedicated teachers, supported by caring, responsible people in the government and NGOs and blessed by the spiritual authority (the Aga Khan), surely presage a better future for the children of the mountains of Tajikistan.

### **Notes**

- [1] Throughout this chapter, I also refer to Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Province as Badakhshan and Pamir. Other titles for the province appear in the literature, among them the Russian term *Gorny-Badakhshan*, and the Tajik phrase *Wiloyati khudmukhtori kuhistoni Badakhshon*.

- [2] Not all the population of MBAP speak the Pamirian languages. In Darvaz, Wanj and parts of Ishkashim, Tajik is spoken.
- [3] Ismailism is a major branch of Shi'ite Islam. For discussions on Ismailism, see Daftary, 1990; Keshavjee, 1998.
- [4] Keshavjee (1998), Niyozov (2001) and Tayler (2001) have observed that the majority of these beneficiaries constitute the former Communist elite. According to these authors, democracy has benefited the ex-Communists more than Communism did.
- [5] Demanding pro-Soviet loyalty and belief, in addition to any intellectual achievements.
- [6] In fact the World Bank document (1999) mentions the importance of a change of mentality to bring about a market economy and democracy, and suggests the necessity of this change for all education stakeholders, not only teachers.
- [7] Both references are internal reports for the Aga Khan Foundation (available from the Foundation, Dushanbe, Tajikistan).
- [8] The words 'coercive' and 'coercion' are used in this text as opposed to 'collaborative', 'democratic' and 'participatory'. This definition is elaborated in Cummins (1996).
- [9] By first-order changes, Cuban (1988, pp. 92-93) meant changes such as recruiting better teachers and administrators, raising salaries, allocating resources equitably, selecting better textbooks, adding (or deleting) courses to the curriculum, scheduling people and activities more efficiently, and introducing more effective forms of evaluation and training. By second-order changes he meant introducing new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into novel solutions to persistent problems.
- [10] General secondary schools in Tajikistan, as in other parts of the former Soviet Union, aim to provide a complete, general secondary education. In these schools, the levels of schooling [primary (grades 1-4), lower secondary (grades 5-9) and higher secondary (grades 10-11)] exists under the same organisational structure (for more on the types of schools, see Popovych & Stankevich, 1992; Webber, 2000).
- [11] Each school has a pedagogical soviet council that addresses pertinent questions of schooling.
- [12] Hozir Imom (also Hazir Imam), literally the Present Imam, a theological concept in Ismaili interpretation of Islam, refers to the Aga Khan IV. Other synonyms are Imam (locally Imom), the Aga Khan, and Mawla (locally Mawlo).
- [13] Given the Soviet and even pre-Soviet practices of subjugation and repression of the individual by the community, party and ideology, I contend that a share of individualism is welcome. I, however, share the teachers' legitimate concerns about selfish, relativist and consumerist individualism achieved at the expense of public manipulation and disregard of societal and environmental concerns.

- [14] A Russian word, meaning District Education Board.
- [15] The famous mystic Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the most influential Sufi in the Islamic world of the 13th century.
- [16] *Mawlono* (from Arabic *Mawlana*) is a title in the religious hierarchy. In this case, it refers to Jalal-ud-din Rumi.
- [17] A mullah is a person believed to be knowledgeable in Islam. The mullahs served as sources of reference in worldly and religious matters.
- [18] Rum refers to the Byzantine Empire, that is, the eastern part of the Roman Empire, later occupied by the Seljuk Turks.
- [19] Shams of Tabriz, a mythical personality, is said to have been the teacher of Jalal-ud-din Rumi, and to have had a transformative impact upon him.
- [20] Like the majority of teachers, this teacher was a 'lecturer propagandist', whose job was to educate the community through Marxist explanations of events.
- [21] The 'code of ethics of the constructor of Communism' was a document regulating the principles upon which the ethics and behaviours of the Soviet citizen communist were to be grounded (see Long & Long, 1999).
- [22] The teacher was referring to the book *Pandiyati Jawonmardi* (Messages of Chivalry) (Ivanow, 1953).
- [23] *Halal*, in Arabic, has the meaning of making something deserved and allowed.
- [24] Pseudonyms for the leaders of the district Communist Party Committee in the 1970s.
- [25] The *khalifa* is a religious authority in the Ismaili traditions of Badakhshan. A few days before this interview, the *khalifa* expressed his disappointment to and in me, whom he saw as one of the representatives of the Aga Khan Development Network.
- [26] The teacher referred to a cafe called Friendship, where we would have our usual chats over *mantu* (a local fatty food) and would often overhear those who could afford vodka gossiping about the state of things in the village, province and country.
- [27] The pseudonym for a local senior officer at an NGO, who had been mentioned as having earlier worked as a Komsomol (Communist Youth League) officer.
- [28] VUZ is a Russian acronym that stands for higher educational institution.
- [29] *Oblano* is a Russian contraction of Provincial Department of Education.
- [30] The Soghdians and Bactrians were peoples of the area in the days of the classical Persian Empire. Soghdians and Bactrians are seen as predecessors of the current Tajiks.
- [31] The Red Book, in the former Soviet Union, was a book that contained the names of endangered languages and culture species.
- [32] A local language, spoken by the population of Shugnan and also understood by large numbers of Badakhshan's population.

- [33] The teacher was referring to 'Parts of Speech', a unit of instructions on grammar.
- [34] The kopek was the smallest Soviet monetary unit. 100 kopeks made one ruble. 20 kopeks in the 1970s would have been equal to US\$ 30 cents. The average salary of teachers in Murghab was 75% more than the salary of the teachers who lived at altitudes below 2000 metres: the factor of high altitude was remunerated with a handsome addition to the teachers' salaries, and earlier retirement age.
- [35] *Pirog* is a Russian term meaning a pie or dumpling, containing meat or potato with onion.
- [36] *Palow* is a Tajik term for a type of food that is a combination of rice, carrot and meat. It resembles *biryani* in Indian cuisine.
- [37] In Soviet education a five-point scale was used for assessment, in which 5 was equal to A, 4 to B, 3 to C, and 2 and 1 to F.
- [38] 'If there is bread there will be song' is the opening sentence of Brezhnev's book *Virgin Land*. It was compulsory reading for schoolteachers and university students.
- [39] According to the teachers in the study, a 'mixed lesson framework' included the following: (a) organising the classroom (checking attendance, cleanliness, availability of chalk, desks and chairs); (b) reviewing homework (to create a foundation for today's lesson and motivate the students); (c) presenting new topics (usually by exposition, e.g., short presentation, demonstration with explanation and visual aids); (d) reinforcing new topics (e.g., asking questions to check for understanding, assigning problems from the textbook to solve, independent work in the classroom); (e) assessing students (daily marking of the students' work at the end of the lesson, sometimes involving the students themselves); and (f) assigning new homework (including a text to read, an exercise to do and problems to solve).
- [40] Unlike the other parts of MBAP, where the academic year ends in the end of May, in Murghab it ends in the middle of June.
- [41] A local proverb implying that teachers have total power in moulding children under their custody.
- [42] The students' mother tongues in two of the three sites of the study was not Tajik. MBAP is a land populated by several distinctive linguistic groups that call themselves Pamirian. These are Shugnani, Roshani, Bartangi, Wakhi and Yazgulami. Although members of all these groups inhabit the lowlands of Tajikistan, some of them also inhabit Afghanistan, Northern Pakistan and Western China. While they call themselves Tajik, their Tajik identity has played an ambiguous role in making them equal to the rest of the world's Tajiks, who speak Persian and belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. Almost all Pamirians belong to the Ismaili branch of Islam (see Keshavjee, 1998; Glen, 1999).
- [43] 'Not useful beyond the airport' is a local proverb, meaning not useful except within the immediate region.
- [44] A Russian word, meaning District Education Board.

- [45] A famous saying of the Russian thinker Griboedov, the author of the book *Pains from Reasoning*.
- [46] The Samanid state, which existed in the tenth and eleventh centuries, is alleged to have been the first Tajik state in history. Its main centres, Samarqand and Bokhara, both related to disputed territorial claims, are now in Uzbekistan. The celebration referred to triggered tensions between the two countries.
- [47] In an education seminar I conducted in Dushanbe, teachers considered the idea of introducing too many subjects as confusing for the students and creating overload for the teachers. One senior education officer expressed this as follows: 'The head of a child is like a balloon. If you blow too much it will burst.'
- [48] This institute was renamed the Teacher Professional Development Institute in 1998 and Institute of Professional Development (IPD) later in 2002.
- [49] A Persian-Tajik poet who lived and worked in the court of the Samanids in the 10th century. He was blinded and expelled as result of a *coup d'état*. One of the major allegations against him was his affiliation with Ismailism (see Daftari, 1990).
- [50] Amonashvili and Shatalov were among the innovative Soviet educators who led the trend of 'Pedagogy of Cooperation' during *perestroika*. For more on Pedagogy of Cooperation, see Long & Long (1999) and Suddaby (1989).
- [51] The Institute of Ismaili Studies is a research centre that focuses on studying the history and contemporary realities of the Muslim world, and how these realities relate to the development of the Ismaili community and its neighbouring communities (for more details, see <http://www.iis.ac.uk>).

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