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Teaching Culture, Transforming Selves: An Insight into Life-skill Lessons Offered at Government Schools

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Abstract: *There is naivety in considering that the awareness imparted on a desired lifestyle, health, hygiene and emphasis of its higher cultural value always goes down as planned, without any dissent. There are always contradictions between the idealized training and the socio-cultural context of the students expected to learn and practice the same in their everyday lives. Thus, values circumscribing suitable lifestyle seek validation by undermining an opposite set of values, guided by several socio-cultural and politico-economic considerations. This paper at large will make attempts to surface this majoritarian and universal control over value education that exists even today, standing at the crossroads of neo-liberal economies and liberal democratic political formations. It will also try to flag occasions ripe with possibilities for resistance to a given moral order from the subjective/subaltern experiences.*

Keywords: neo-liberal order, ideology, values, cultural capital, school curricula, extra-curricular activities, conscientization, school-community relation.

Introduction

Schools have always been both repository and preserver of culture. It is an institution that reserves sacred value for culture and thus reproduces it to accommodate other structural demands of the society. Culture builds like an edifice upon categories like class, gender, ethnicity and race, but often transforms into a practice that need not always reflect these categories in its complete distinctiveness. Education system in a multicultural and globalized world is quite illustrative of such overlaps and intersections, inviting negotiations and therefore training that ensures continuity while keeping the promise of change alive. Life-skill and personal grooming have always been on the cards for adding utility quotient to education, whether by

coercion to adopt given ideals of health, hygiene and cleanliness or making distinctions of esteemed lifestyles. At such crossroads, the pupils from the lower class of an urban space are seen lacking the required “cultural capital” to survive a life of dignity in the cities. With such ideological misgivings and political ploy often the state and its educator battalion run the mission of transforming them so that they drop their indigenous cultural moorings and slip into a “cultured” lifestyle that befits the larger imagination of the former’s growth. Thus, the paper attempts to interrogate such an educational regime by reading through all the extra-curricular programs of the Government schools in Kolkata, raising questions on purpose of learning, conscious raising and “conscientization” (Freire 1971) among the adolescent students.

Culture of Education and the Moral Responsibility

Education with the spread of modern school system, establishes close ties with the community. Since located in a socio-cultural milieu, catering to a particular geographical limit, the school functions as anything but an autonomous unit. The school as a formal institution too shares a continuous and reciprocal relation with the community, at times almost behaving like a serving body to a large clientele. Such a market orientation that education adopts in modernity to meet socio-economic interest, accommodating political overtones, surfaces in the form of moral injunctions. These admonitions are not always profoundly instructive, rather are very subtly placed to satisfy the larger promise of maintaining social order. However, the school-community relations that existed in the village life, where the immediate neighborhood and family stood as the guiding force for *patshalas*, have traveled a long distance to become a more organized body, operating with greater discreteness and bureaucratic formality. Public relations have made way into school administration at various levels to meet the needs of a culturally more heterogeneous community in cities. Thus, transcending the particularistic community interest of a clustered geographical identity, schools now seem to grapple with universalizing agendas and fast changing demands of every day. In the process a varied nexus of ties emerges, accommodating and negotiating on several cultural, social and political fronts. Value education and role of moral benefactor undergoes a silent metamorphosis. All key participants in the process of schooling appear to be apprehensive about the identity one carries into and comes out with from this rigorous institutionalizing system. As Jayaram observes: “Both teachers and students generally vary in their background characteristics,

and communities differ in terms of the material/monetary support that they can extend to the school and in their value systems. These diversities in the community's input into school impact it both directly and indirectly, determining the functioning of the school and the outcome of its educational efforts." (Jayaram 2019: 50).

The school-community relation in a city is enmeshed with a plethora of sub- counter-relations, which become evident in different categories of schools. Starting from Government public schools, government-aided schools, private schools, international schools, community schools, and missionary schools to municipality schools, all speak of the socio-economic diversity that education accommodates and replenishes in a plural social milieu of urban scape. The location of the school, management authority, primordial affiliations and gender composition become very vital in determining the influence of the community on schools and vice-versa. The association among the teacher-student-parent is quite segmented and formal, mostly indifferent beyond the fulfilment of immediate academic interests. However, in such situations, as Jayaram says, "the community's interests in school is mediated more by governmental channels rather than by community members per se" (Jayram 2019: 52). I would like to add an observation here, the community that makes inroads into schools holding hands of the government and its policies are no way a complete or organic representation of the former. The community therefore finds a majoritarian, hegemonic and often alienating presence in the school, serving disparate interests and encouraging instilling of values equally discordant at times. The private and public schools behave in contrast on the operational level, though synthetically they may appear in unison as far as imparting community values and bearing the moral responsibility of grooming the adolescent students is concerned. The public schools either seem to tout ideas of community participation and moral grooming under the larger banner of "uniquely Indian values"¹ to echo the need for traditional revivalism, or limit itself to fulfilling the demands and crises faced by the geographically immediate population it serves. Thus, the community here often represents a more preconceived, given and therefore dictating and often a controlling entity, far from being organic and culturally regenerative of the ones being educated. Contrastingly, the private schools accommodate and represent the community in a relatively more relevant fashion, keeping in mind the cultural and social backdrop of the students they pledge to train. Though, the motivation for the private schools remain profit maximization in most cases through display of sensitivity towards community and providing ways for cultural catharsis in the name of value restoration and moral protection.

But whatever may the structure and administrative scope of the schools be, an overwhelming majoritarian influence persists. As Jayaram says: "... both in government schools and private grant-in-aid schools there is a discernible majoritarian orientation. While this is understandably a function of the demographic composition of the school population, it puts the secular ethos under strain and creates an uneasy feeling among the students and teachers belonging to the minority communities" (Jayaram 2019: 54).

From my research into the schools of the city, I have come to discern that the community-school interlacing invites a relook into the idea of community itself (along with the training it plans keeping pace with the cultural heterogeneity). Communities, as we all know, have moved beyond being a "spatio-temporal" entity to representing and obliging identities based on commonalities of religion, language, caste, race etc.; and often these identities come to exist through imagined commonalities (Anderson 1938) transpiring beyond physical continuity. Thus, the values/morals that emerge out of and sustain such communities are bound to have overlaps, contestations and discontinuities, all of which necessarily make way into the schools and twig their training manuals of all kinds. In fact India has been witness to an evolving culture of education that has strongly drawn upon its communities' social and political appeals as well as predicaments across history.² Such a rich culture of education that has been assimilating into the structures, needs and aspirations of a society from pre- to post-colonial times; necessarily rendered functions to fulfil moral and ideological obligations through varied channels. Thus, moral or value education found fresh orientation and content at several epoch in time keeping in tune with the fast-changing social fabric and corresponding shift in ideals. Several kinds of lessons, from spiritual awakening in ancient religious education, nationalist aspirations in times of nation building, sharpening of etiquettes for western colonizers to lifestyle coaching for industrial and then globalized society have found relevance under the rubric of moral and value education. It should not be missed, thereby, that there were always underlying purposes for such lessons. But these purposes never made overt display of supremacy of one utilitarian goal over the other, rather mechanisms were explored to convert few to satisfy the ideals of another dominant few.

As Pathak says, after Durkheim, "Schools instill a sense of morality into children. But what is morality? Durkheim made two points. First, the function of morality is 'to determine conduct, to fix it, to eliminate the individual arbitrariness' (Durkheim 1961: 27). This means regularity. 'Morality', wrote Durkheim, 'presupposes a certain capacity for behaving similarly under like circumstances, and consequently it implies a certain ability to develop

habits, a certain need for regularity' (Durkheim 1961: 27). Second, morality implies 'the idea of authority'. Moral authority is qualitatively different. One must obey moral command out of respect for it and for this reason only. In a way, according to Durkheim 'morality is a system of commandments' (Durkheim 1961: 31)." Thus, with reference to case studies from my field of research, I pledge to explore the several layers in training programs offered to the adolescent students in the city of Kolkata under the plethora of life skill lessons via extra-mural (beyond classroom) activities at schools. Here I would be highlighting the organized activities in which students of government schools participate, those of who mostly represent a specific socio-economic class. It will help explore the ideas and ideals that come to exist and circumscribe the larger universalizing notions of morality and, thereby, also locate the fissures within that notion, the breakaway points, the negotiations for subjective moral existences and the hegemony of a collective conscience.

Into the Everyday Terrains of Schooling

The state government schools of Kolkata were observing a week long program on the theme "Nirmal vidalayasapthyaudyapan". The schools under ward 17 of Kolkata municipality had organized several activities beyond their curriculum to generate awareness about environmental protection and cleanliness. The themes included: renouncing the use of plastic, saving water, Dengue and water-borne disease awareness, open defecation, cleanliness in cooking, use of dustbins, planting of trees and doing of one's household and everyday chores. All these themes in a city-based public school, if you observe very closely, is indicative of the social and cultural practices that circumscribe the lives of the people mostly belonging to the lower socio-economic class. However, we can't really say that the environmental protection or cleanliness and saving of water are issues that only impinge upon the lives of the economically backward but the habits of open defecation, cleanliness of the surrounding and control of water-borne diseases necessarily affect the lives of the poor much more. As they dwell in houses and localities that lack proper sanitation and hygiene facilities and are also seen to be lacking adequate knowledge about the resultant health hazards in an urban space.

Event I - Road Rally

One of the events was a road rally where seven government schools participated. They had all assembled at Northern Park near Jagu Babu Bazar and were to walk down a distance of 3 kilometers up to Paddapukur Road canvassing with posters that they had made on the above-mentioned issues. All necessary arrangements for the march were made by the local councilor. The posters had slogans such as: “slow the flow, save H₂O”, “bajarkoritholihaatey, plastic barjanhobetate” (use bags for shopping, denounce plastic), “tubewell or pump tap, water must be clean for us”, “vidyalayamoderbari, takey mora porishkarkori” (school is our home, thus we keep it clean), “Beware of all types of pollution”. Besides these posters, students also decorated a scooter of a teacher like a tabloid into a forest, narrating the importance of rain forests and trees specifically to arrest environmental damages. Two very interesting poster slogans read: first, “barjonoitobarjoniyo, Jodi rakhisusthaney. Jothasthaneymoilafeli, prithokkorisabdhane” (waste is not wasteful, if kept in right place. If only we dispose of waste rightly, segregating them carefully). Second, “mid-meal erkhawardawarrakhtehobeporishkar” (mid-day meal food needs to be cooked in a clean and hygienic way). These both slogans if read deeply hint at finer understanding of waste and its scientific processing and goes beyond the mere logic of adopting habitual changes in personal grooming for health and cleanliness. The slogans also highlight the government provision for free meals at school and how it should nurture not only quality eating habits, i.e., the diet issues, but also its preparation by cooks who must not compromise on hygiene. Contrasting to the above preceding slogans emphasizing on the scientific and technical conditions for understanding health and hygiene, there were slogans like, “tottonoi, golponoi, chai roger pratikar. Dhangshohok sob jibanu, stabdohokhahakar” (no theories or stories of hope! We need cure of diseases through proper control of viruses and bacteria so that the suffering lot can be saved); “joljomberashirashi, thaktehobejolkashishi” (water logging needs to be addressed with proper drainage system) and “khabar eragey, soucher por, haathdutiporishkarkor” (before eating and after defecation wash your hands). Thus weaving all these slogans together a pattern can be seen in the narrative built: firstly, they are all in active voice, as if the adolescent girls and boys are taking a pledge while carrying these banners and posters, echoing their responsibilities for caring about their own health as much as of becoming responsible residents in an urban space. Secondly, there is also a kind of appeal in the slogans, demanding for privileges to ensure a more healthy and protected life for them. However, on talking to the students

who were carrying those posters, I discovered that most of the slogans were written by the teachers or copied from pamphlets and notices handed down by the *sikhabondhu* (the government appointed conduit between the office of secondary education and the government schools). One of the students, Bijay Dalui, residing in the Peyara Bagan slums of Kolkata, on being asked about his interest and motivation for participation in such rallies and programs, replied that he participates as the teacher asks them to and all his classmates and friends are part of it. He mentioned that it comes like a break from the regular monotonous classes, where mostly he fails to follow everything. The boy studies in class X and his father is an employee at the petrol pump, while mother works as a domestic help. He has two other siblings and resides in a single room house with the kitchen in the common space shared with other residents. They share a common toilet with four other families and every morning he needs to fetch the household water from the nearby public water supply tap to be stored for the day's use. When I mentioned that these programs and rallies asks all to avoid storage of water for long and management of diseases spreading because of unclean and unhygienic conditions in the households and neighborhood. He said, "My mother sweeps the house every day, but if we do not store water then we cannot cook and take bath. As the latrine is common no one bothers to clean it and for bathing we mostly use the common space closer to the public tap, whereas my mother and sister takes bath next to our kitchen using the stored water." Another student, Rohan Mallick, residing next to Landsdowne market area in south Kolkata, offered a similar response for participating in these events. He said that teachers generally tapped him to make the posters and copy the slogans written on the boards. He along with few of his friends carried out the task with much enthusiasm. He is elated to meet other students from different schools during these rallies and feels proud when people on the streets stop to watch them march holding these banners and posters high. On asking him what message he draws from these programs or how he finds them relevant. He says, "I know we should keep our surrounding clean and drink clean water. Therefore, we always carry our drinking water from the tube wells nearby. Since we stay near the vegetable market, at the days end all the rubbish is kept next to our houses and throughout the day people use the space for urinating, at times even the passerby. Last year I was detected with malaria and could not sit for my exams in the month of July. My father who works with the KMC as a sweeper is responsible for collecting waste in the adjacent areas, thus we have to stay in this location." There were other boys too who shared their feeling of enjoyment gained from participating in

such events and road shows. It's like a day out, almost going out for picnic, and are offered food packets too after the end of the event.

A girl from the United Missionary School spoke slightly differently. Chandrima Basak of class XII, resident of Kudghat in south Kolkata, said that her teachers guide them throughout for preparing these posters and writing these slogans. She also reiterated that she has learnt about these health issues from her physical science course at school. She says, "I know that water borne and air borne diseases can harm us. But at our house we have proper water supply and do not store water. We have proper toilets and keep them clean." On being asked what does she learn from these rallies and how she feels participating in them, she added, "I enjoy working together with my friends and walking down the streets while others flock to see us. It makes me feel as if I am doing something important and teaching others about essential ways of good living. I also feel that I should tell people who are unaware of these problems and impart them with these basic understanding of living a healthy life. Cleanliness is something that many people who live in shoddy houses never maintain. Few of my classmates are also very unclean and wear shabby as well as dirty clothes. They carry food that looks bad and we do not like to share our things or food with them." Another girl, Debosmita Das, residing at Sambhunath Pandit Street of Kolkata, says: "I have seen many such posters and slogans on the walls of the hospital next door. Those posters mention the harmful effects of smoking and how one can catch life threatening diseases if unaware. But the the house where we live in is full of mosquitos. We use mosquito nets but keeping the surroundings clean always is not possible. My father is a taxi driver and often sleeps in the taxi itself, though we sleep under the net. I go home and tell people that we should adopt healthy practices to avoid falling sick. I stay in a small single room with my three sisters and mother, and use the public toilet whenever there isn't water in the servant's toilet in the outhouse. However, I wash my hands after defecation and before eating and tell others to do the same."

In fact, when I entered the schools after the rally ended, I found government issued hoardings on hazards of smoking and Dengue awareness. Interestingly, the region and the streets that they marched through were flanked by high-rise buildings and posh residential apartments, mostly housing people of the upper middle class and middle-class families. On asking one of the onlookers at the rally about his opinion on such a road show, he replied, "it's nice to see children taking such initiatives and participating in programs that will help them make the city a cleaner place. It will also help them learn how to live a healthy life and become more alert how to reduce

contamination.” One shopkeeper responded, “all this is just a game for these boys and girls, whatever dirt and mess that is there around will remain and diseases will increase because the ones who fall sick are those who are half fed, remaining in margins always. They will never change and continue to spread diseases.”

Event II - Inter-School Quiz Competition

A follow up inter-school quiz competition was organized after the rally at one of the schools to serve two purposes: firstly, advertise the ‘Sukanya’ project for girl child of the West Bengal Government. Secondly, raise consciousness about man’s relation with nature and therefore the importance of conducting oneself in relation to environment in a city scape. The quiz was held at the United Missionaries Girls High School. All teachers and students from other schools had gathered, with participants representing classes IX and X. The Principal of the school Leena George said that such programs are often conducted in her school as they have better infrastructure and space compared to other government schools. She said, “though the Diocese of Kolkata, the founding body of the school aren’t very keen on these programs, they feel obliged to extend support to the government for carrying out such awareness generating and training projects for other students from different schools.”

The quiz was to be held in the hall where all the other girls had gathered and placed themselves on the floor. Teachers had chosen the girls who would compete and were brushing up their biology and geography lessons. The quiz master arrived soon along with the local municipality workers and the councilor. The quiz master began the show with a vote of thanks to the school and all the local municipality workers one by one. Most of the questions were about the programs and policies that the present political party in power had formulated. The questions asked included: In West Bengal how many zillas are there? Which age group of girls are eligible for Kanyashree scholarship? What is RupashreePrakalpa? When was KanyashreePrakalpa launched? Which international prize did Kanyashree project receive? During marriage of girls, which program of West Bengal Government offers a gift of 25000 rupees? Who is the chief minister of West Bengal Government? Who is the Governor of West Bengal? What is the cultural capital of India? What is child marriage? All these questions pronouncedly tried to make the adolescent girls aware of the supportive measures that the government had brought into force to apparently improve their life chances. However, the fact that their position in the society and

limited opportunities for emancipation were being reinstated through several such questions, remained silent. Other questions asked were: when is World Health Day celebrated? Which mosquito causes Malaria? Dengue is caused by which Mosquito? Name two Vector borne diseases? When is International Environment Day celebrated? What is the full form of WHO? To these questions hardly any of the girls could reply. In fact, they asked the meaning of vector borne diseases and World Health Organization and United Nations. The girls had a profound sense of loss and anxiety on their faces when these questions were asked. To add to their sense of alienation came few more questions, like, who wrote Kaka Babu's *firisti*? Whose creation is Professor Shanku? Who wrote *Nonte Fonte*? All these dealt with popular Bengali fiction mostly written for the adolescent girls and boys. Finally, when the councilor saw that the girls participating from all the three schools had hardly scored any points, he intervened and said that he would ask three questions to each team and each question would carry 50 points. He sang verses from three patriotic songs and asked them to identify the chorus. He sang songs like, 'Godimeikheltihajiskihazaronnaddiyaan....' and 'agunerParashmonichowaopraney....' The quiz master was being guided and often interrupted by the councilor every now and then, doctoring the questions being asked and correcting his ways for conducting the entire event.

Event III - Sit and Draw Competition

In the week long program on social awareness, the secondary board of education had also organized a sit-and-draw competition on environmental problems and cleanliness issues. On a visit to one of the schools to observe the same I found that boys from class VII to class X were given a topic to express their ideas through visual representation. The topic was: "let's pledge to make our schools plastic free". The teacher who took me across the school, briefed me on how the students had no regular and formal training in art and whatever they were sketching were either shown to them by their respective teachers or it was mostly spontaneous. He also mentioned that there are no dedicated art class or any trained teacher to groom them. However, to comply with the government orders, the teachers briefed them and would send only a few of the drawings to the secondary school office, as this compliance is linked with funding. Upon my survey through all the art produced by the adolescent boys, I found somewhat a close replication in all. Most of the boys had drawn out their school premises with students cleaning the surrounding with brooms and planting trees.

There were a few drawings that showed the earth on fire and a few representing the weeping trees. All stood very close to the given theme and almost unquestionably adhered to the instructions handed down by the teacher.

When I asked these boys about how they feel about engaging in this representing act, most of them expressed their exuberance in a collective voice. Manoj Mandal, who lives in a home for poor children at MonohorPukur road, tells me that he and all his other friends collectively make these drawings. He added: "We look at each other's drawing and at times make fun and at times get ideas to draw. There is great fun as we do not have any restrictions and we are appreciated for whatever we make. All our drawings are put up on the walls and the best one is awarded." Asked what exactly he was trying to show through his drawing, Manoj Mandal said, that he had drawn all his friends cleaning the school premises, while he sat watching them. SamiranHaldar, another boy from the same orphan home, tells me that he has drawn the school building and himself, sweeping the school. An astounding revelation came from Sandeep Haldar's painting, student of class IX, when he explained to me that he had drawn his mother in the picture sweeping the floor. On further enquiry, I got to know that he stays in the same home for poor and his mother works in that home as a help. When I asked what his father did, other boys replied spontaneously that his father had fled away leaving him and his mother alone. However, the most remarkable drawing was by a boy who came from a family consisting of two younger sisters and his father. He had lost his mother when a child. His father is a sweeper in the community adjacent to the school. His drawing left me quite intrigued not only because it was very different than the other drawings that his contemporaries drew, but also because of the details he tried to capture. It might not be aesthetically or artistically a perfect picture, but it stands out as a signifier of the larger social and cultural fabric. He had drawn a plastic bottle of Bisleri with a young girl trapped in it. Firstly, the female body signified his fair understanding of a sexualized body, as it represented a full-grown woman body. Secondly, the female being trapped in the bottle hinted at his sense of human captivity (the meaning of captivity could be diverse here) and his sense of freedom. On being asked why he drew the picture, he replied: "I have drawn how the girl is trapped in this plastic bottle and would soon die." thus, if I became a little ambitious, possibly, and also saw a tinge of gender discrimination peeping from his eyes. Lastly, the plastic bottle as a trap came across as a great innovation from the young mind.



Source: from the art competition at South Calcutta National School for boys

Findings: Schooled into an 'imagined' right

Taking the debate on morality, patterning of human conduct under an authoritative guidance, and lifestyle coaching further, a very throbbing and palpable empirical experience from the field helps add nuanced explanation for its adoption. There is naivety in considering that the awareness imparted on a desired healthy life and emphasis of its higher cultural value shall always go down absolutely as planned, without any dissent. In all the above occasions, there were contradictions in what was being idealized and taught, and the socio-cultural context of the students expected to learn and practice them in their everyday lives. As Jayaram says: "A person can go through the whole process of schooling without really understanding a single idea in the sense of integrating it with his pre-existing experiences. This commonly happens to those whose native experiences and culture are not the same as those of the educated and the dominant classes who construct and impart their curriculum" (Jayaram 2019: 149). Thus, there is a persistence towards

handing down a manual of etiquettes for sanitizing a particular category of students who come from the fringes of the cities, where the hygiene and health standards are hugely compromised, thus feared as possible contaminators in an otherwise clean and artificially decorated city. In these cases, the dominant and popular ideas of being “cultured” are brought into the folds of grooming/lifestyle practices and the ones groomed are made to internalize the legitimacy of the desired lifestyle, even if materially and technically they are difficult to adopt. The universal and hegemonic value system is at times contested silently by the ethical underpinnings in particularistic experiences. But like any moral force, a consensus is built to justify an action in interest of some, compromising the others lower in the order of power (in terms of economy and polity). As Roy says: “Bourgeois democracies of the third world are structurally iniquitous and exploitative. Despite enjoying some degree of autonomy, the state primarily furthers bourgeois interests by encouraging production and consumption and controlling distribution. There is always a tendency to orient social institutions and organizations, ideas and ideologies in this direction. The process of subjugation is followed by a process of stigmatization. Years of dominance gives way to a set of stereotyped ideas about them, through a complex process of othering, distancing and stigmatizing. Once formed, such ideas become part of the ruling class ideology and are then reproduced time and again in their treatment of the subordinate classes, particularly the poor.” (Roy 1993: 2677). Hence the far-reaching ideologies and fragmented ideas about the “subjugated other” makes its way through different medium into the social space, and one of the medium surely happens to be the education system. It is the educational bodies that collaborates with the state and community at large to carry out the herculean task of nurturing and transforming selves to fit into “given” order of things.

The collaborators in performing humanitarianism

The task of percolating the “universal” values/morals across the mass, undermining the infrastructural handicaps, is executed by a very strong systemic structure and its several agencies. When violent, repressive ways of control appear as counterproductive, the systemic measures for indoctrination seem to be more acceptable in “gentling the masses” (Jayaram 2019: 150). In the content design to execution of slogan writing, poster making, quizzing to instructions for a sit-and-draw competition, we find a training being imparted that is necessarily top down. The problems and issues addressed are those that are perceived to be circumscribing the

lives of the adolescent students coming from a specific class location. Thus the “banking system”³ of education enables the pedagogue to see the students and the community they represent as “containers” necessary to be filled up and deposited with the “others” understanding of their situation and paradoxes. All these adolescent minds are coaxed to think of their location and responsibilities in a particular given way from an impressionable age. “The teachers think, and the students are thought about. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher...” (Freire 1971: 73). Thus, a narrative is built about the diseases that they are more susceptible to because of their improper health and hygiene practices with a pronounced prescription about how to address it. In doing so, a subtle consciousness is aroused regarding “the need of them to be ‘integrated’, ‘incorporated’ into the healthy society that they have forsaken” (Freire 1971: 74). They become gradually agents to transpire the consciousness raised in them to their fellow community members about their susceptibility to be defiling bodies. Hence the entire pursuit of these activities being geared towards a humanitarian goal misses out on the humanist functions that education promises to entrust. There seems to be strong absence of a dialogical exchange even in these activities beyond the curriculum, rather the effort remains to make these adolescent girls and boys more “human” as per the understanding of the powerful/oppressing class in an urban scape. Hence transforming them into objects that need to be guided and cared for while leaving them with a sense of permanence of their trying life conditions, lurching for an unachievable change ever after. Thus, interest lies in “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them” (Freire 1971: 74). However, the education system remains fraught with over-ambitious humanitarian agenda, under the garb of which mechanisms to configure the good society for few goes on. In a similar strain, Roy says: “The dialectical relationship between the dominant and dependent classes in the ‘urban’ is not confined to material deprivation only. It is extended to engulf the ideas and ideologies of the classes which often influence class relations at the social level.” In light of such a relationship, the wards of the dependent (mostly perceived of socio-economic dependence that extends into a cultural-moral one) in the cities are wrapped with humanitarian services, which come across as nothing more than momentary thrills of ideological somersaults.

The Populist leader and welfare goals

We have observed that the community has always been a big stake holder in influencing policies and guiding possibly all discourses on education.

Multivariate motivations when get entrenched into such an organized effort, the outcomes are more than singular and univocal. However, a mediating state never fails to exploit the situation and foster fresh ways to further the community ambition, while espousing the larger political goals. In such attempts, the *National Policy on Education* (1986) recommended empowering of communities for management of schools, whereby the state and its local machineries along with the community would act as partners to provide necessary services. Thus, paving path for community participation of a very deep and complex kind. Anjali Noronha has mentioned about two kinds of community involvement: 1. Spontaneous engagement emerging from community partners and parents in education. 2. Political involvement. She further says, political involvement is extended in the following ways: “(a) playing a watchdog role, supervising and keeping an eye on teachers; (b) controlling the use of resources and their deployment; (c) raising issues for larger educational change; or (d) influencing the curriculum and the way it is implemented” (Noronha 2003: 100). I suggest a more pronounced interchange can be seen between political players and educational advocates, as they take up community needs and try addressing them through several other programs beyond the curriculum. It happens to be quite a flexible space that can be exploited to its hilt to accommodate local, cultural and social uniqueness. The involvement of the local councilor in the activities starting from funding the rally to conducting the quiz to promote the government policies and products for a particular community through “non-voting adolescent” category of citizen speaks volumes about how popular leaders operate. In fact, the rally and sloganeering around his constituency is carried out with an ambition to demonstrate the “welfarist” gestures and in turn construct/reproduce an identity for a class of people in the society. Through manipulation of the situation and inviting action on the part of the ones infested with varied social and environmental hazards, the councilor asserts the idea of struggle. Though he makes these students aware about their responsibilities and perceived actions for their emancipation, the reflection is completely beyond their access. They are turned into a “massified”⁴ lot working to turn around their fate with ideological conditions handed down to them from above. These adolescent minds are made to believe that their conditions are fatal and it is through their effort that situations can be improved and the welfare state is the only means to help them achieve something, but never ensure any total dislocation in their positions. Thus, impinging upon their ideas of liberation and building upon their demands for dependency to survive in stifled life chances. “The leader restricts himself to paternalism and welfare activities, although there may be occasional divergences between him and group of oligarchies whose

interests have been touched, deep differences are rare. This is because welfare programs as instruments of manipulation ultimately serve the end of conquest. They act as an anesthetic, distracting the oppressed from the true causes of their problems and from the concrete solution of these problems.” (Freire 1971: 152). The educational imperatives and the spirit of the adolescent are used to propagate the ideals of living in an urban space under the garb of investment in the young to change the future of their lot. Thus, the false sense of generosity and the culture of care permeated fulfils the demonstrative goals of the powerful, while maintaining the status quo. This is a very ubiquitous practice in government schools, imparting value education oriented towards domesticating younger generations of a particular class, impairing critical thinking, enforce conformity and thus produce “intellectual emasculation” (Jayaram 2019) for easy acceptance of the logic of the system.

Cultural discrimination and possibilities of assertion

From the responses received at the schools, a stark contrast in ideas about the rally and hygiene lessons were noticed between the relatively affluent girls and the boys from slums. It unraveled how the metropolitan city thrives on a popular perception of untidy settlements in poor neighborhood, and conceives of a public space divided into contaminating and non-contaminating zones. Both the girls explicitly mention about their role in conveying the ideas about health and hygiene practices to the others who come from the slums. In the schools, “within the structures of domination they come to function largely as agencies which prepare the invaders of the future” (Freire 1971: 154). These deep-seated ideas about cleanliness and environment protection find fresh vigor with the “middle-classes community” sprawling over cities in “gate-community” apartments. Middle-class promoted and practiced notions of safety, cleanliness, hygiene and environmental protection, and conversations around them have helped them assert their rights and privileges as citizens of a demarcated geographical unit. In doing so, the civil society and often activists who mostly hail from the middle classes, create a public discourse about community interest that lack representation of voices from the poor, dirty and therefore “contaminating” category. AmitaBaviskar in this parlance has discussed how “bourgeoise environmentalism” as an ideology shapes the popular understanding and a culture of reproducing a spatial order in the interest of few. I see a similar spirit of eschewed environmentalism and contingent lifeskills being honed at these schools, possibly to fulfil the larger interest of

a community that is itself segregated in all its drive towards urbanity. Baviskar has delved into it deep and made hints to a process of value reproduction playing along the finer demands of a power nexus. Thus she says, “As a hegemonic ideal, the discourse of ‘public interest’ reaches out to and may be embraced by those it excludes. Yet the project of urban cleansing remains incomplete and its success uncertain” (Baviskar 2011: 393).

Moving beyond the health and hygiene agenda, the questions asked at the quiz about age-old popular fictions and the adolescents’ unacquaintance with most names cast a shadow on their minds, creating a sense of alienation from the cultural life of the “other” and therefore a sense of lacking in their own. The instructions for drawing given at the sit-and-draw competition hints at the assumed passivity of the adolescent boys, impaired of much creative thinking. However, while the stereotyping continues, art seems to come as a game changer on several occasions in my field of observation. Though there isn’t any denying that art helps adolescents learn the culture given out to them and construct “selves” around it, art holds out and nurtures possibilities in aberration. Art offers endless opportunities for imaginative mind, creates new ways of resistance and carves out fresh dimensions in a renewed existence for future. Art is for young people an especially valuable means of promoting the reflexive project of creating self (Giddens 1991). The painting of the girl being trapped in the plastic bottle and the other boy representing his mother sweeping the floor are revelations of a ‘narrative identity’ in making that produces and reproduces the experiences of the world along with injunctions issued throughout the biographical sketch of one’s life history. Thus, opening up closed spaces and lending insights into lived experiences, paradoxes and accommodations, make scope for some true reflection vis-à-vis the unreflective actions meted out under the guidance of prescriptive social sanction. Adolescent’s visual language can mediate their opinions, feelings and ideas. In that light, artifacts, which are the results of encounters between them and their intentions, can be taken as symbols of communication used to deliver messages from one person to another and the society at large. Apart from another person being the viewer, the artist him- herself can also be the one responding to her own work while in performance and even upon completion. A dialogue with the intended self, the desired self and deviant self is promoted through art, which could bring to light the contradictions, coalition and contestations with the celebrated therefore dominant ideas of morality.

Conclusion

The ideology of value-oriented education often raises questions about the ethical positions taken for justifying the values to be imparted. Thus, values imparted seek validation by undermining an opposite set of values, guided by several socio-cultural and politico-economic considerations. So, the question as to whose values will qualify and embody the value-education courses in and beyond curriculum remains a pressing and critical one at any point in history. As Basil Bernstein says: “how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control” (Bernstein 1971: 47). This research into the extra-mural components of education in public schools has tried to delineate the conditions and factors promoting such majoritarian ideologies and thus raising of a concomitant consciousness. But the study has its own set of limitations, and hence opportunities for further exploration. Firstly, it has strictly accounted for the government schools and the orientation they have towards training/ indoctrinating the students. A contrast with the privately-owned schools of the city is not something that has been enumerated in equal length here, as on most accounts such state-sponsored programs were absent in the latter. However, the activities at the above-mentioned schools are encumbered by values of a different kind, which I shall elaborate in my thesis and in other writings. Secondly, the execution of all the training appears quite gender-neutral throughout, but I beg to differ in this regard. It shall later coax the buried scholasticism to bring forth the fissures that exist between genders as far as value training is concerned. The paper at large has made attempts to posit the majoritarian and universal control over value education even today, standing at the crossroads of neo-liberal economies and liberal democratic political formations. It has also flagged occasions that could hold out possibilities for resistance to a given moral order at the individual level, opening up paths for a journey between the “given” moralities and the “arisen”, thus authenticated, morality from the subjective/subaltern experiences.

Notes

1. Some of the unique values that remain etched in the public memory are ones of tolerance, purity, renunciation, seeking knowledge than

power, adherence to duty, loyalty and servitude that draws upon the ancient religious (myths, rituals, texts) tradition of India.

2. Indian education as a formal institution with all its modern qualities was the product of British colonialism. The English or “modern” system of education grew on the ruins of ancient indigenous education that had left its imprints in the new system as well. However, this colonial structure of modern Indian education not only survived the struggle for political independence from the same colonizers, but also expanded in leaps and bounds to permeate in newer forms in the post-colonial times. However, national revivalists like Gandhi on one hand with his “NaiTalim” and emancipist like Tagore with his project of “Tapavan” (a school amidst nature) at Sriniketan did try to made adaptive changes in the modern Indian education so that it prioritizes the then necessary values.
3. Paulo Freire introduces the banking concept of education and says that the teacher is the depositor who sees the students as containers to be filled with “motionless”, “static”, “compartmentalized” and “predictable” narratives on topics that are completely alien to the existential experience of the students. “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing.” (Freire 1971: 72)
4. Massified are culturally or socially homogeneous categories of individuals; characteristic of a society engaged in mass production for mass consumption in a mass market.

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