

Rituals and Adolescent Practices in Schools of Kolkata

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Abstract: *Extracurricular activities (ECA), as formulated and administered by the school authorities, either have strong mandates of the state and its higher education agencies or are catapulted by the socio-cultural demands nurtured by the market in terms of 'high-value' education. This leads to a varied experience in terms of what is enumerated and what is practiced. An eschewed observance in terms of grandeur can be seen across different types of schools. Interestingly the constant feature that cuts across all these variations is a larger belief system supporting these celebrations, guided by some grand moral imperative and parallel cultural adaptations based on their indigenous institutional affiliations. Above all, a process of ritualization is at play in all these ceremonies, often oscillating and at times overlapping between the religious and the secular.*

Keywords: Extracurricular activities, adolescence, culture, religious education, secular practices, rituals, collective effervescence.

Introduction

Moving through a field that narrates events and experiences in the lives of adolescent girls and boys within the schools, I have taken up keen interest in the activities that encompass their learning beyond the prescribed curriculum. The field has opened up a fresh discourse on learning vis-à-vis training (socialization verses social control), and this thin line of differentiation seems to get fainter as I move deeper into the fine corners and extend my discursive field, both institutionally and in public discourse. Extracurricular activities (ECA) as formulated and administered by the school authorities, either have strong mandates of the state and its higher education agencies or are catapulted by the socio-cultural demands nurtured by the market in terms of 'high-value' education. This leads to a varied experience in terms

of what is enumerated and what is practiced. The exploration, thus begins at this disjuncture, upholding nuances and lacunae in the declared list of ECA, their adoption, and ultimate experiential disposition. All the schools that I visited had a well elucidated and fixed record of activities that they conducted throughout their academic year, which included celebration of Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti, events to commemorate the Birth Anniversary of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Foundation Day of the school, Teachers Day and Annual Sports day among others. However, all these events and the celebrations do not remain uniform across schools. An eschewed observance in terms of grandeur can be seen across different types of schools, namely, the private schools, missionary schools, missionary state-funded schools and public state-sponsored schools. Interestingly the constant feature that cuts across all these variations is a larger belief system supporting these celebrations, guided by some grand moral imperative and parallel cultural adaptations based on their indigenous institutional affiliations. Above all, a process of ritualization is at play in all these ceremonies, often oscillating and at times overlapping between the religious and the secular. Thus, an attempt has been made in this paper to understand this journey between the religious and secular in the lives of the adolescents as experienced through the celebrations at school.

Site of research

School -1

There are a few accounts which I shall use to elucidate the above stated observations made in two schools. One is at an annual function of United Missionary School, located in Bhowanipore area of South Kolkata. This school was set up in 1832 by London Missionary Society to provide education to the children of lower and middle income group residents of the city. Later on it came under the jurisdiction of Diocese of Calcutta and was funded by the Government of West Bengal. Being a Christian minority institution it wasn't a surprise to see their annual function being held at St. Paul's Cathedral of Kolkata, but the practices and programs performed were quite interesting for an annual day commemoration. The program began with a prayer song by the girls of the sixth and seventh grade. They had assembled closer to the altar facing the audience/ worshippers seated on the chairs placed on both sides of the aisle moving up to the bema where the cross is ritually located. The song necessarily had reference to god and admonitions in his name. A verse from the song had very interesting

reference to the 'lord' as a friend, making some common acquaintance to and finding a real life presence for his form. The verse reads like this:

Praise to the lord, who doth prosper
thy work and defend thee.
Surely his goodness and mercy
here daily attend thee;
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
If with his love he be friend thee.

All the girls were dressed in checked skirts and white tops with a bow tied to their neck almost like uniform, but that wasn't their regular school uniform. These were dresses specially designed for the annual day program by the school authorities and were kept away to be only handed down to the girls every year for such special occasions and celebrations. Dressed in this ritual attire within the ritualized environment of the church, the girls after the prayer song organized a ceremonial procession singing a hymn in praise of the lord, the school and the institutional custodian i.e. the Diocese church. The procession was led by three girls, one (Sudeshna Mukherjee of class 11) carrying the 7 feet long wooden cross in her hand, other (Piyali Das of class 10) carried the school flag and third (Anjali Barman of class 12) the ritual lamp set on the edge of a long pole covered by a Belgian glass case. The girls lined up in neat que, maintaining equal distance and keeping measured steps. They displayed a patient gait and a solemn as well as calm expression on their faces. All seem to be perfectly coordinated and an act of practice evoked in absolute synchrony with this 'pious' occasion. These girls were followed by the choir and then by the teachers, who were also dressed in a coordinated costume i.e., white saree with red border, having Batik motives that are intrinsically a cultural marker of local Bengali textile worn on any such auspicious occasion. At the end followed the management of the school, which included the Principal, Diocese's priests, priest of Cathedral Church and Calcutta's Bishop of Diocese (Paritosh Canning Nag). After the procession the teachers' choir had a song recital (a Rabindra sangeet), the chorus of which reads like: "jogot jurey, udaar surey anando gaan baajey" (across the world echoes the music of happiness). The musical rendition was enhanced with the playing of piano in the background. There was complete silence and a sense of dedication and emotional exaltation in every musical offering, as they were well rehearsed and deployed melodious modulations based on classical compositions. The ambience therefore within the high-raised ceilings of

the church with soft light seeping through the painted glass windows was definitely one that soothed the senses. Appropriately set to awake the spirit into collective practice of rituals, elevating oneself to a state of profound elation and making peaceful accommodation of the others in a trustworthy association.

The program moved gradually into thanks giving session and commemorating the contributions of the school and the missionaries towards girl's education in last 187 years. A prayer service was carried out where verses from the bible were read out in Bengali and later on wishes were also made, and blessings were asked for. One of the teachers named Pratima Das read these messages aloud and the rest of the audience while nodding to her each service message uttered Amen. It was almost an orchestration of any Catholic prayer service with all its discipline and dedication. One very intriguing wish that is worthy of mention here reads like this:

Amader desher neta der jonno prarthana kori, bisheshoto mahamanna rashtryopati, Shri Ramnath kobind, pradhan mantri Shri Narendra Damodar Das Modi. Paschim Banger maha manyo rajjopal, Shri Jagadeep Dhankar ebong onnanno rajyer rajjopaal gon, lok sabha o Rajya Sabhar Mantri gon o Paschim Bangyaer Manoniya Mukkho Mantri Shrimati Mamata Bandopadhyay. Amader Bishop Maha Acharjya Paritosh Canning, onnanno Bhisop, Purohit o Netri banger sujyoggo parichalonaar jonno amra prarthona kori. Prabhu tomar kripay.

(We pray for the politicians and leaders of our nation, our President Ramnath kobind, Prime minister Narendra Modi, West Bengal's governor Jagadeep Dhankar, we pray for all our lok sabha and rajya sabha ministers, West Bengal's chief minister Mamata Bandopadhyay and for all priests and bishops so that they can diligently carry out their duties.)

In chorus: "Amader Prarthona sraon koro." (Lord, hear our prayer)

Finally, the Bishop delivers a speech to draw relevance of the annual day function of the school. He reminds the audience, which includes teachers, students and their parents, about how the united missionaries have provided service to the people of Kolkata. He says, "ja India bhabte pareni, ta church onek khetre bhebeche" (what India could not think, the church did in many instance). And immediately he mentions how they have never gone ahead to



Source: United Missionary Girls High school. Annual day celebration at St. Paul's Cathedral

baptize a single child in this school. He further adds, though it is a Bengali medium school as far as curriculum deliberations are concerned, the school encourages the learning and speaking of English through such activities so that the girls can cope with the needs of the present society. He reiterates “we are after all here to glorify Bengali, so no matter how much we draw teachings from bible, the purpose remains to impart the morals necessary for a good life and one of the most significant of them all remains the attitude for sacrifice.” He insists sacrifice in personal life can instill discipline and help attain success, which in turn will benefit the immediate family and then the larger nation and society with one’s selfless deeds.

School – 2

I happen to visit another school that had organized a fest on the eve of Druga Puja. The National High School located on Sarat Bose Road was observing ‘Navaratri’ within the premises of the school. National High School was established in 1913 as an Anglo Tamil School. The school functions under the aegis of N. R. Iyer Memorial Education Society. The school entrance wall had a banner that read: “Now in its 104th year the school aims to provide a comprehensive & value based education to its pupils at an affordable cost. The focus is on creating conscientious and responsible future citizens.” As I entered the venue I was enthralled by the decoration all over. The entrance was adorned with garlands, paper collage, streamers and glow lights, setting the mood perfectly for celebrations. However, the school had a very narrow home-like entrance and the decorations matched that of the informal set-up of a traditional three-storied house with an open courtyard in the center of the building. Surprisingly the architectural details of the school were very unlike a formal school, with rooms as large as bed rooms and verandahs overlooking an open space where all the cultural programs were being conducted. As I moved further I was taken to the very first room where the ‘Golu’ was decorated. ‘Golu’ happens to be a wooden structure consisting of a flight of nine steps and each set of three steps displaying idols of Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga, respectively. This is a ritual decoration practiced across South India during Navaratri. The Principal of the school mentioned to me that this

arrangement of 'Golu' is a ritual in all Brahmin household of Tamils. The students had gathered around the 'golu' and few were making designs on the floor for Rangoli, while others setting up the lamp. There was a neat coordination among the girls performing all these activities, which might not be a learnt behavior for all of them or a common ritual back home.

The students had displayed their paintings and other crafts upholding the popular myths and parables relating to Durga and the mythological belief in the victory of the good over the evil. Here too I find adolescent girls dressed in white and red border sarees and boys in white kurta pajama echoing the symbolic meaning of the same. Among many paintings, one stood out for



Source: Painting by Yana Shai, student of Class X

both its artistic value and the agency concerned in making of it. The painting represented a woman smeared in vermilion as part of the 'baron' ritual of the goddess on the 10th day of the Navaratri (i.e., Dashami) before the idol is taken away for immersion. The painting was made by a Buddhist girl named Yana Shai of class X. In this exhibition-cum-fest organized by the school I also found several parents coming along with their wards to view the display. One such parent was Sakhia Raza Begum, the mother of a class VII boy who was being accompanied by her son to every room and all the stalls put up to view the visual narrative created by the students about the festival. She said, "I have lived

in Topisa for last 40 years and have seen Durga Puja being celebrated across the city, but these small stories that are there behind this puja is something I am seeing in this school". On being asked how she is finding it, she replied: "the kids love to participate in these events and activities and insist that we come and see too, I also feel nice as there is something new for me. Besides, seeing the excitement among the kids make me happy". After having word with her I moved into the open courtyard along with her for the cultural program arranged by the students. The program began with a sloka in Sanskrit glorifying the goddess Durga, followed by a 'Dandiya' dance a typical practice of western India. The girls dressed in traditional ghagra and choli were striking wooden sticks in a synchronous fashion, while moving in circular pattern to the rhythm of the drum being played by a boy of class XI. This boy named Ashok Soren came from a tribal

community. His father had moved to Kolkata from Purulia with a job in the post office of Kolkata almost 20 years back. The boy seemed to be quite proficient in playing the drums that he had learnt as a part of his extracurricular engagement with school band and NCC (National Credit Corps). The program was summed up with the arrival of the President of the school Mr. S Radhakrishnan, who carried out the ritual lamp lighting ceremony in front of the Golu and offered his prayers to the God.

There was another very interesting section in the school especially significant for the day, it was the last room filled with food stalls at the extreme end of the building. Students had cooked varied kind of delicacies back home and had brought it for sale. Food items ranged from fries, cakes to 'Firni'. However, there were no non-vegetarian items on offer as it was not permitted by the school authorities for the day. The girl who was selling a bowl of 'Firni' was Asifa Khatun of class XI. She had asked her mother



Source: Silver Point School Exhibition.

to prepare the same for this occasion and insisted me to have a serving for rupees 10. She told me that she enjoys participating every year in the Navaratri celebrations as it gives her an opportunity to enjoy with her friends which she would miss back home on these days. Another boy named Tejandra Singh had put up a soft drinks stall. This Sikh boy's father is employed with Uber as a driver and also owns a shop. He carried these soft drinks from the shop and made concoctions of varied kinds to sell in the fest. He narrated how he and his brother, who also passed out from this school, every year come to the school on Navaratri and feels elated being part of every event. All the above

celebrations and the inter-

twined rituals observed were not mere mimicking acts that they carried from the home to the school. Rather they seem to have learnt, explored and unlearned many through these practices within the school set up. The implications and ramifications could be varied and contestable, but whatever be it, a new pattern of organizing behavior among the adolescent can be traced, even if it be highly ritualistic. Thus we shall move forward to understanding the nuances of observing ritual practices in the next section

to locate the meaning and relevance of the same in the lives of the adolescents.

The implications of observing ‘observable’ practices

Locating rituals and finding a system of meaning reinstating or opposing an abstract belief pattern confronts us with the thought-action dichotomy continuously. The conceptual blueprints and mental constructs of beliefs, myths and symbols emerge to inspire activities, while they aren’t activities themselves. Rituals often end up being perceived as thoughtless, habitual and mimetic acts, having secondary and mere physical expression to prior logical ideas. Therefore, Edward Shils says “beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals, however, could not exist without beliefs.” (Shils 1968: 736.) Yet despite the secondary nature of rituals, it plays a kind of functional-structural mechanism to reintegrate thought-action dichotomy of rituals. Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* introduces rituals as the means through which a community generates, experiences and confirms the beliefs and ideals as real. (Bell 2009: 20). A dialectic mediation occurs between the subjective individual condition and the communal order through collective representations as generated and appropriated by actors in practice of the ritual. Thus rituals become means through which both the perception and behavior of the individual is socially appropriated. Beside, a further extension could be seen where ritual possibly becomes an expression of communal unity in opposition to the constraints and competition. Ritual offers a creative ‘antistructure’ that produces acts and forms of action in opposition to the hierarchies, traditional forms and given social order (Turner 1982: 82). This dichotomy of thought and action that could be understood better with the lens of a dialectical mediation between the two leads to ‘homologisation’ of the ritual ‘observer’ and the ritual ‘actor’, however keeping an implicit opposition between the conceptual and dispositional categories alive.

Moving along this dichotomy and dialectic invocation, I turn to the discursive field that I have been part of and begin to perceive of a culture that gets produced, reproduced and reformulated through meanings assigned by practice of rituals in a fresh context. The school premises remain a sub context within a larger context of plural exchanges and innovations, and also a supra contextual unit reiterating meanings of the varied cultural symbols while gaining new meanings through practice of culture. The students, teachers and the institutional agents come with their respective indigenous religious faith and beliefs, and thus their cognitive and dispositional

aspects for ritual performances. Here at the school they confront varied set of other religious belief and thus their corresponding rituals. Often they engage in performance of these not so 'native' rituals, generating possibly a new meaning or transposing the meaning generated through their experiences at school on their earlier ones to give way to a common chain of explanation for cultural phenomena. Thus the cultural life in performance projects a distinction between ethos (moral and aesthetics aspect of culture, and people's attitude towards their world and themselves) and worldview (cognitive aspects of culture, people's comprehensive idea of existence)(Greetz 1973: 89, 98). Clifford Greetz suggests that rituals perse as ceremonial, dramatized, material enactment of a system of symbols reflect the moods and motivations as well as the general conceptions of order of things that men formulate to meet and reinforce. Therefore, rituals "not only are models of what they believe, but also models for the believing of it" (Greetz 1973: 114). Here comes the third dimension of the detached observer or the researcher of any ritual performance, rendering a shift in the object of analysis from ritual thought to performances that merge conceptual forms with practical dispositions (one arising out of needs of a particular time and space). The participant in a ritual act experiences an integration of their own conceptual framework and dispositional imperatives, and thus observer here gets the cultural vantage point to think over and make meaning of the 'meaningfulness' in the ritual act. This I believe guides me through in contextualizing rituals in a school set up that cuts across varied belief systems to fuse into a ritual action that necessarily upholds a single thought-action/conceptual-dispositional dialectics. For instance, the observance of the prayer service in the case 1 school consists of participants who come with their respective religious belief system but while carrying out the rituals at the church they give rise to a fresh meaning of rituals by converging the continuous thought across religions about any such pious practices with actions specific to the church. Here I make the methodological journey into engaging myself with 'practice' so that I can move back and forth between the theoretical explanations of religious structures and practicing of the same in the given context.

The theories of ritual and their methodological underpinnings ultimately turn our focus to the performance of ritual action. This emphasis on practice undoubtedly is a position that helps in transcending the methodological divide between collectivism-individualism, objectivism-subjectivism and often the abstraction-empiricism. Embarking upon a study of rituals in a non-religious set up like school, performance study becomes very significant in terms of the ceremonial activities of the micro institutions and the macro social

festivals that impinge upon them. Thus rituals that are enacted in the social cosmos by specific communities seem to be replicated and at times transformed within the school premises, but the traces to the larger practices continue to affirm itself with both expressive and instrumental ends in its folds. Thus there could be no denying that the institutional formality and regularization of rituals in their closed set up open up ways for symbolic, communicative and expressive transmission of collective messages to others as to oneself, and also fulfill the instrumental goals of 'social catharsis'¹ or social resistance via rituals. Practice in these terms remains an irreducible term for human activity, individual or collective, and entails essential features. Firstly, it is situational, having influences of other situations but not mere effect of those determining situations. In fact, on a deeper analysis of the ceremonial and festive events of the schools I see the influences of the other situations coming to exist only through the activities conducted by the schools and at times an extension of them (structural influences). Secondly, practice is necessarily strategic and seeks to maximize advantages. The practical adoption of ways by the adolescent and their instructors (teachers, school authorities and parents) to observe and fulfill the symbolic and instrumental functions of rituals gives way to a logic of economy, which might not be always stated or inscribed in its initiation. Practice, therefore turn out to be a constant play of contextually most precise schemes - as Bourdieu says, "The intentionless invention of regulated improvisations." (Bourdieu 1977: 79). Taking it forward from this embeddedness of practice in context and thereby its tactful innovation with respect to time, we can encounter rituals emitting overlapping in indeterminate and equivocal conditions. The school moving into the church for celebrating its foundation day program, commemorating the glory of its institution, while organizing rituals intrinsic to the faith and spirit of the church simultaneously, leads to misconceptions about the limits and constraints of the practice. But these misconceptions are important cues for tracing the blurry line between the secular-religious, sacred-profane in its real life dynamics. Therefore, as we recognize these features of 'practice'², the force of negotiations and motivational agency brings forth the third feature, i.e. practice as a social drama reproducing or reconfiguring the vision of social order. The dynamics of the ritual practices and observation of same invites one into peering through the ideological formulations, its discharge and circumvention in a vital institution for 'man-making' like the school. Thus the science of practice as understood by Bourdieu and invoked through a dialectical method of conceptualizing and enacting offers an object of analysis (i.e. practice/

ritual), which is dialectic in nature and thereby the method is constituted in the object itself.

Controlling, ritualizing and adolescents' embodied selves

Ritualization³ as a way of acting makes some activities more privileged, therefore distinguished from others. Various culturally specific strategies emerge to assign ritual status to some actions, thus distinguishing the sacred from the profane. Such ritualization process gives way to mechanisms for social control and thus accepted modes of and models for social relations. In both the schools the rituals ordered everything into a hierarchy. Including the space, conduct and relationships. The adolescent girls and boys who come with a set of beliefs and ritualized experiences from their homes, confronted a new set of rituals and an extension of the same at times at the school. But whether new or replication, the hierarchies of control seem to remain pertinent. The primary ritual of holding the prayer service or placing the Golu in school 1 and school 2, respectively, having priests or headman (necessarily a Brahmin) of the community to conduct the acts most sacred is the reinforcement of such ritual hierarchies. The social relations are therefore structured based on the culture of rituals that emerge around the notion of sacred. However, the rituals find a situational twist to itself and adopt certain improvisation, if not radical innovations. The carrying of the cross by Sudeshna Mukherjee of class 11 and the Lamp by Anjali Burman of the same class reveals the engagement of adolescents from other faith into acts that are ritually symbolic for dissolving boundaries of a religious community. Thus rituals demand an exactness of gestures and a sense of sincerity to be enacted in a particular time and place, providing an authoritative model of control for the performers. Adolescents become very crucial agents in such participations as it transmits through and into them a moral code via structures of 'invisible control'⁴. Hence ritualization is also concerned with nurturing of the body within a structured space around fixed rituals. And this whole process happens silently under the symbolic acts of rituals.

Bodily symbolism that rituals create by demanding purification, decoration and disposition qualify the body as a social object. Thus the adolescent girls being dressed in clothes specifically designed for the ritualistic ceremonies at the church, their ordering themselves in a clear and defined pattern and maintaining a slow gait as well as wearing a solemn expression on their faces while walking down the aisle with the cross, their dressing up in ritual

costume of a 'Dandiya' dance, decorating their bodies and transforming into Krishna or Durga; all turns them into embodiments of social experiences. Thus the construction of cultural reality permeates the all pervasiveness of the body, which in turn gives way to bodily experiences that make meaning of the social. Mark Johnson (1987) claims that "the indispensable forms of imagination" that emerges from bodily experience profoundly affect human reasoning. Thus the rituals and its corresponding belief systems are embodied and predisposed through the bodies of the adolescent boys and girls, creating meaning of the ritual by engaging and internalizing them via the body. The girl carrying the cross in the church when asked about her understanding of the sacredness of the act she was carrying out within the church, she replied: "I do not touch the 'tahnkur er ashon' or perform any of the ritually pure acts without taking a bath or during my menstrual cycle, so while I'm here at the church I do keep in mind that the altar where Jesus stands is a pabitra (pure) space and the cross is an object representing God." A practice that gives way to a normative frame for behaving in a certain way also inculcates values that travel across faith and particularistic belief systems. Ideas about manifestation and organization of the body is fed by ritual experiences in the formative stages of adolescence when the body is already under major physiological changes, impacting the social transformations thereafter. Therefore, the experiences that make up 'social body' in turn prepares the body for further ritualistic activities across life, making the social come alive in varied cultural drama. Irving Goffman (1962) examined this molding of the body and production of a memory device in turn that organize society based on cultural principles. The boys who dress up and represent themselves as Lord Krishna in the 'Dandiya' dance have an embodied realization of the mythico-ritual practices around "lord Krishna" and therefore go ahead to make meaning of the associated patterns of cultural and social beliefs emerging therein. Thus Bourdieu writes, that it is through the 'Practical mastery' that the ritualized body develops a sense of rituals within a structured and structuring environment (Bourdieu 1977: 91). The creation of a ritualized space within the school premises or moving into a ritually classified space for celebration of a belief system (in this case, both, religious and secular) often produces experiences that impress upon the bodies of the participants, at times reinstating the collective order and power of the community that he or she is born into as well as the ones they move into in their lifetime. "It is in the dialectical relationship between the body and structured space, one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the

world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world”(Bourdieu 1977: 89). In fact, in both the schools the girls and boys develop an agency even within the controls of the ritual structure and make negotiations between the strict hierarchical binaries of sacred-profane, purity-pollution, inside-outside and others. The creation of a situational, thus a temporal ritualized environment that weaves within its fold all institutional demands of the host, makes room for ritualized agents as well to create and recreate rituals in a plurality of beliefs. These beliefs are reproduced, reinstated and often reinvented through the embodied ritualistic practices of the adolescents in an alternative site of socialization i.e. the school and give way to multiple cultural interpretation of their expanding social world. The adolescent with their yet unresolved definition of the bodily existences, find this interlocution between the body and the ritual practices as a fresh platform to socially assign meaning to the varied statuses and roles that lay before them.

Collective performances and ‘effervescence’ in adolescence

Exuberance in ceremonies and celebrations are integral to all situations, ritually marking possibly all events of a life cycle. But there are rituals which might not be always performed with a classified purpose to fulfil or any universal meaning to make. Such are rituals that emerge out of a group’s interactional dynamics. Within the schools and in their celebrations a heightened emotional expression with regards to their allegiance to the school, the authorities and the institution’s religious custodians could be constantly observed. The prayers or the songs were soaked in gratitude and total admonition of all. Students, teachers and parents in collective spirit participated in each and every event abiding by all the necessary schemes that the rituals invited within the ritualized space of the church. There was profound cohesion and synchrony in whatever they did. The collective experience not only showed undeterred acceptance of all symbolic representations but also inculcated strong affectual bonding. Reassertion of the larger value system and coherence in its interpretation as well as adoption helped the adolescent socialize into a culture that accommodates new meanings for many of their old ritual experiences and qualifies older meanings through fresh experiences of the same. The formal authoritarian structure of the institution is no way compromised but a kind of informal break away within the same structures are facilitated to ascertain the embedded values and at times bring in normative forces to give it a cross-cultural significance for the budding minds. Victor Turner, the British Anthropologist, rightly elucidates how rituals concomitantly allows structuring

of value in a community while accommodating cathartic functions and at times provide safety valves through periodic injunctions in form of antistructure or redemptive practices. He says, “Norms and values, on the one hand, become saturated with emotion, while the gross and basic emotions become ennobled through contact with values. The irksomeness of moral constraint is transformed into the love of virtue” (Turner 1967: 30). At times ritualization through various modes of celebrations gives birth to habits of negotiation, adjustment and therefore acceptance of the unfamiliar. The adolescent confronts contrast in meaning of the rituals in external display and within oneself upon thoughtful reflections, as during the glorification of ‘their’ God vis-à-vis ‘My’ God and their ceremonies in contrast to my ceremonies. But all seem to dilute, if not diverge, in the moments of entertaining performances through music and dance that are organized with high vigor and vitality by all. The psychosocial dimension of the ritual often impacts the adolescent in a way to impress their minds with experiences that are both pleasurable and antidotal for aggressive impulses. It can be debated that the ritual exercises control the adolescences’ affective state to repress actions and expressions or at least mold them into socially desired and uncontested ones. However, I’m making no attempt to not recognize this molding or repressive thesis, but only trying to uphold the communication of positive values through ritual performances that often integrates the adolescent with the universe of other values that make life meaningful for them.

When such ceremonial gathering and celebrations gives rise to a strong multicultural experience within a cross cultural context like a school, it becomes a source of affectual collective memory that harbors a uniform and unifying moral order. “What is true of practices is true of beliefs. The state of effervescence in which the assembled faithful find themselves is translated outwardly by exuberant motions that are not easily subordinated to ends that are defined too strictly. They escape, partly without destination, displaying themselves merely for the sake of displaying themselves, and taking pleasure in what amount to games.” (Durkheim 1912: 385) Thus the energetic and vibrant adolescents are motivated by strong bonds of friendship in a milieu of ‘collective effervescence’, entering into close relations with each other and working together in making of ‘rangoli’, decoration of the ritual space, initiating collective ferment in musical deliberations, rejoicing in dance recital, organizing group lunch or simply dressing up in their respective ethnic costumes to uphold the communal feeling while endorsing the festive spirit. Durkheim writes in *The Elementary Forms*: “when we find ourselves at the heart of an assembly animated by a common passion,

we become capable of sentiments and actions of which we are not capable when reduced to our own efforts” (Durkheim 1912: 209-211). He thus mentions of ‘creative’ and ‘re-creative’ functions of rituals and ceremonies, where to maintain the re-creative attribute often parties (economic or political) come together to refurbish their faith by representing and contrasting them in common. Thus the common bonds made and the dissimilar practices identified builds a scheme in the collective memory that more or less offers an ideological and moral grooming, cutting across ritual practices of varied religious and ethnic factions. Therefore, reverence for the almighty in ritual offering, authoritarian control and universal love for the other are few of the common motivations that find common grounds in all religious and secular rituals of the school. Thereby emerges a culture of bonhomie unique to the adolescent lives in practicing these rituals at school. The peer network gets solidified through such ritual celebrations and promotes secular accommodation and subversive use of these traditional-religious rituals of the institutions of school and society at large. Though the institutions of knowledge production and citizenship training might have their designated pedagogic prescriptions of disciplining through such rituals, the spillover effect of such emotionally engaging activities are quite evident in the behavior of adolescents. In Gore’s words, the “regimes of truth” may provide a very useful tool for analyzing pedagogical discourse defining pedagogy as the process of knowledge production embedded with disciplinary powers. “These powers function through technologies of the self, making strategies for self-disciplining via techniques and practices that adolescent students absorb unconsciously to mold themselves and others. These technologies of the self are enacted socially as much as they are at the “site of the body; eyes, hands, mouth, movement”. Therefore, we can say that “pedagogies may produce particular political regimes of the body” and such “technologies of the bodily self can also be understood as manifestations of the internal (mental) self – how people identify themselves.” (Gore 1993: 60)

When does the Secular sneaks in adolescent experience ?

There is however no denying of the reproducing ideology of schooling and its pedagogic indulgence in practices of control. Several thinkers like Durkheim (1961), Althusser (1971) Bourdieu (1978) and Bernstein (1996) who have highlighted the socializing function of schooling in making moral beings and at times to the extent of manipulating the individual consciousness and controlling them ideologically. Pierre Bourdieu has always perceived

school as the repository and nurturer of culture, an institution to provide sacredness to culture and thereby reproducing it as a marker of distinction. Basil Bernstein (1977), in his explanation of pedagogic discourse, throws light upon state and its regulatory mechanisms for framing educational codes to perpetuate control. In view of these positions one can reflect upon the contestations that have always arisen regarding religious instructions in Indian missionary schools. Christian missionaries have made a remarkable presence as far as education is concerned. But inevitably there has been the thesis of indoctrination into the faith of the religious Christian community both in research and popular ontological deliberations on education. Often these have transpired through the populace with varied explanations, mostly in the tone of religious intrusion and control. “Apart from turning communalism, defined as the ‘antagonistic mobilization of one religious community against another’ (Ludden 1996: 1), into a perennial problem, the majoritarian ‘cultural nationalism’ has resulted in contestations over every issue involving religion, including education” (Jayaram 2015: 296). The Christian educational institutions invariably impart religious instructions to their Christian students by offering special classes to read verses from bible and invite them to special prayer mass. “The non-Christian students are offered a veiled and less objectionable form of religious instructions, euphemistically called ‘moral education’” (Jayaram 2015: 301).

However, while looking at the schooling process through the lens of programs and practices that lie outside the curriculum one surely finds similar traces of training the ‘subject’, but there can also be no denying that these activities provide scope for innovation and escape from the clutches of the structuring processes. However, parallel to this thesis of control and indoctrination, there grew the resistance thesis through works of scholars like Henry A. Giroux (1994), recognizing the agency of the students in their learning processes and making of selves. Thus the reflective and critical voices of the subjects of the system of school education often lies beyond the textbook. It would be a mistake to find these voices anywhere else other than the domain of extracurricular activities where both the educators and the learners are at equal play in fulfilling the herculean task of training. Krishna Kumar says that the students’ experience of the truth through textbooks are underplayed by experiences of the same outside of texts and he quotes Ayesha Jayal on reproductive inabilities of textbooks: “The gems of wisdom contained in textbooks rarely survive the writing of the exam. But with help from state-controlled media, the lessons learned at school and college serve as the alphabet and the grammar that makes psyches literate in the idioms of national ideology” (Kumar 2001:65). Thus

the rituals observed at both the schools mentioned above, with their high dosage of religious innuendo, also lie at perils of subjective interpretation and contextual maneuvering to unravel many unintended implications and ground breaking functionalities.

The ritual practices and the misrecognition of its aims in education often open up the field for varied interpretation and debates over its utility. The festival organized for Navaratri within the school offered students non-religious ways to express themselves through display of their painting, setting up stalls to sell their ethnic foods and uphold their cultural distinctiveness by decorating oneself in their ethnic dresses as well as exchanging their cultural excesses in forms of dance and music. Interestingly there were certain cross-overs too, with cases like the Buddhist girl making a portrait of a woman smeared in vermillion. The girl being a Buddhist possibly has no religious offering in mind while sketching this image. But surely she grew some strong attachment with the festivities that she has been observing over years. Thus the ritual practices of playing with Vermillion before the emersion of the goddess has had enduring and gratifying impression on her mind about a woman and her coming of age. Secondly, the myth and its interpretation of the win of good over evil runs across time and space much like any mythology does, only having transformed in its objective representation to become more relevant, ensuring its survival. The girl too has been wrapped by the greater narratives of a cultural tradition and made way for local practices of little traditions to continue the reciprocal exchanges between the two beyond the religious confinements. Thirdly, the leisurely moments of her life offers her the creative space to reimagine the goddess and her multiple interpretations, both religious and secular. The interface between the two (religious-secular) is something that the girl learns through her creative moorings in a culturally liberating space. Thus the woman next to the goddess and the 'popular' imaginings around celebration of woman power gets reiterated into the scope of popular culture, feeding a parallel market-mediated idea about the celebration. The adolescent girl being a potent customer of the mass-mediated products doesn't escape these daunting ideals. She learns many things secular while being planted temporarily into a context of religious rituals, while being at a risk of picking up few religious misgivings under the garb of secular.

Here I would like to focus on the secular practices and its emerging meanings, moving away from the constitutional state-religion dissociative definition. Hindu Nationalism seem to have overshadowed any discussion of religion in India and problematized the communal politics and conflicting

identities in that light. Though they still remain pertinent, in view of state's ideological apparatus (Althusser 1971) operating in its full swing to manipulate the masses on divisive principles, the inter-religious or pluralistic pledges made in everyday lives of co-habitation are of equal significance. Thus the ceremonial ritual performances and the celebrations circumscribing it in both the schools brings forth instances like Arifa khatun, who puts up a firmi stall to be a part of the event and Sakia Raza Begum, who sees her presence at the feast as a good platform for making meaningful engagement with her son in his multi-cultural grooming. In fact, Anjali Barman's (the lamp bearer of the church) statement has been very intriguing; she says, "Ishwar to ek, tai ami to bari te sondhey di aar ekhane lamp ta niye jaachi. Aar amay teacher ra khub pochondo korey, ami school er sob kichu tei onkso grohon kori" (God is one, so I worship him at home as I worship him here. Besides, I am quite liked by the teachers and therefore participate in all activities of the school). Her faith and ideas of spirituality seems to cut across the ritualistic observance of two different religions. Reservations do remain about her statement being a document of media-generated faith, thus a popular rhetoric. But the fact that it has coaxed her to act in certain way hints at the larger imperatives of religious negotiations. These instances help delineate secular in two modes of operation: firstly, the non-religious or non-communal beliefs that arise out of our routine yet non-habitual actions of everyday. Secondly, a universal ethic emerging from rituals that guide one's understanding and therefore engagement with any ritual expression of other religiosities. The second being more foundational for a pluralistic cultural milieu in any society at a given point of time. Based on these two micro approaches towards secular, I have found adolescent girls and boys exhibiting 'scalar religiosities'⁵(Copeman and Quack 2019: 48-54) whereby they display relative and scaling affiliations in terms of the boundaries of their respective religious belief and practices. A significant pattern of behavior upholding such secular religiosities may also tell tale about the identity-class nexus that is at play. The students of both the schools were from lower middle class families having good exposure to popular discourses on secularism and religion generated through media and the market. Thus, 'religious pluralism is the normal condition in which religious subjectivities are formed, nudging to look into 'how religious diversity occurs at different scales of social life' (Das 2014: 82).

However, the prayers loaded with wishes to keep the leader of the country and state in good health; the Bishop's mention of their missionary goals to uplift the society, the women of Bengal and Bengali as a cultural community in the presence of the counsellor of the ward where the school is located -

makes me skeptical about completely abandoning the state-religion hegemony in appropriating our cultural adaptations. The use of Church's premises for an annual function of the school and then glorification of an anti-conversion bearing in the institutional policy diverts one's attention to 'not-so secular' ideologies in circulation. The preeminence of ritual practices with respect to ethnic and religious affiliations of the governing bodies of the schools hint at the dominance of a particular faith in an 'ideally' secular institution. Extending the argument forward a similar narrative from an ethnographic account of a Delhi-based school operating under the aegis of a reformist Hindu philosophy -The Arya Samaj - can come to my support. Meenakshi Thapan in a special article, refers to a 'havan' being organized in this school every month as a part of the institutions ritual practices. "The symbolic value of the 'havan' varies in the multiplicity of students' articulations about its practice and their relation to it. It is part of tradition but it also has a practical place in their everyday lives. Attendance at the 'havan' is valued by students for its perceived therapeutic qualities more than its religious significance in the life of an individual or the community. It is however seen as being constituted by the Hindu dharma and therefore belongs clearly to a particular tradition that is eulogized as it is experienced as providing a way to release tensions and enabling concentration and reflection on school work. Citizenship education, in practice, apart from the theoretical lessons that students learn in civics classes, is about a particular religion that is routinized into the curriculum through regular practice. While the 'havan' has certain significance in the lives of students, classroom interaction among peers in fact tends to play down the very purpose for which students want to participate in the 'havan'" (Thapan 2006: 4195-4203). The interventions of the state and the religious affiliations to create ideal citizens run parallel to the religious minorities or elites seeking support of the state to organize and sustain. However, such 'bi-instrumentalisation'⁶ often confuses one as to who uses whom, between the state and the religious organizations. However, the project of citizenship training remains pertinent in school education always, whether through practice of religious rituals or adopting secular methods, and at times taking the mid-path. And standing at such a crossroad of multi-variate forces, the edgy and exploratory adolescent minds and senses are often the target of many to build a potent population in the days to come when either of the agencies (state or market) can benefit and make them subservient to their interests. However, the promises of an exalted experience through varied learning programs and extracurricular activities often defer such straight-jacketed transformation of adolescents into standardized citizens, if not completely denounce it.

Besides, the multicultural values have no doubt found a throbbing presence in the policies of Indian education ever since independence and have kind of build an overarching nomenclature that the schools often try to adopt and follow like any other rhetoric. But the adolescent mind is ever curious and questioning the given, making them accommodate multicultural ethics in a possibly revised way along with drawing upon and rejecting the larger social vision and mission of education. Surprisingly, all of these negotiations and assimilations seem to happen silently within the extracurricular engagements of the adolescents.

Conclusion

My endeavors, in this paper, have not been to merely locate the religious ways deployed at schools to attain citizenship ideals; my interest, rather, has been to document the ritualistic engagements within the school that echo the larger socio-religious practices and help identify the distortions, manipulations and/or the reassertions in the sub context of a school. This, in turn, helped me understand the other hidden forms of learning and unlearning that takes place deploying the adolescent agency. I have tried to paint a vivid picture of the adolescent lives at the crossroads of experiencing, learning and making collective memories to trace the genealogy of their existences across a culturally plural landscape. The adolescents at the liminality of adulthood seem to accommodate the religious prescriptions handed down to them in a novel way at times. Primarily, their higher level of exuberance and energy make them participate in the ritualistic practices of religion with much enthusiasm. The collective effervescence that they exhibit along with their peers often guide them away from the dogmatic and divisive forces of religion. Thus, as they learn religious ways to discipline their bodies and minds, the celebrations and rituals make them rethink about, if not outright flout, the controlling character of religion. So while enquiring how the popular cultural reverberations occupy the intuitional framework of education under the garb of socio-religious practices, I try to nudge the readers to revisit religion and the celebrations it entails within the school premises. Further, I hope to draw an account of the same celebrations as impacted and nurtured by the compulsions of consumption among adolescent students in a neo-liberalized economy.

Notes

1. The notion of rituals as irrational and symbolic vis-à-vis the rational and instrumental activities can be contested by the performative

value it underscores. Ritual as cathartic performances are often carried out in response to fear, anxiety and disciplining into some sort of social symbiosis. In fact, Victor Turner developed the notion of social drama enacted through ritual performances to highlight the expressive yet the instrumental function that they fulfil in any institutional set up.

2. Bourdieu defines practice in terms of a dialectical relationship between a structured environment (by which he invokes 'objectivist structures', which are not necessarily the real world but an agent's practical interpretation of the world) and the structured dispositions engendered in people which lead them to reproduce the environment even in a transformed form. (Bell 2009: 78)
3. Ritualization is a way of organizing certain social action so that they can be marked off from other actions. Culturally specific ordering of these actions is done to meet some strategic purpose of distinguishing the sacred from profane and thereby assigning powers to the act itself that transcends the human actor.
4. Culture uses ritual to control by means of sets of assumptions about the way things are and should be. The rituals often remain invisible in their process of naturalizing the dominant assumptions and ideologies. While apparently having to do something insignificant, the ritual practices extorts the essential commitment to order. However, this kind of silent control through formalism of ritual can run the risk of having a dissociative and distancing effect. But interestingly rituals are performative in nature and thus transform into practices, a real time activity, whereby intrinsically weaving instrumental logic in its modes of inherent strategic manipulation, economy and expedition. Thus making the Gramscian notion of ideological domination (cultural hegemony) less pertinent, as the will to act in the structure of dominance and subordination becomes a motivational dynamics of agency.
5. Social positions in terms of accumulated economic and cultural capital often impacts one's ability to remain detached from matters of religious behavior and belonging. Such secular religiosity shows a possible way of circumventing the reductive religion vs secular binary. The contemporary religiosities when perceived from the eyes of the people who consider themselves not so traditionally religious and questions the all-pervasiveness and unilineal nature

of religion, helps account for the ambivalences. (Copeman and Quack 2015: 54)

6. Bi-instrumentalism acknowledges religion as a tool that is used by several institutions to exploit each other. There are often instabilities and incoherence in such exploitation, whereby making it very difficult to understand who is using whom as an instrument to serve an interest.

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