

Learning Modernity? The Technologies of Education in India

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Let us begin by taking an ethnographic journey in pursuit of schools in a non-metropolitan urban centre in North India, which I shall call by the apocryphal name of Janabad. The first thing that strikes us is the amazing variety of schools. The most prominent are the so-called English medium schools. Their names range from Tiny Tots to Oxford Public School, including a Harvard and a Cambridge, two St Joseph's, a St Mary's, a St John's, a St Atulanand and a St Vyas. There are Temple Bells and Glorious Academies, and innumerable Little Birds, Sun Beams, Moon Rays, Golden Boughs, Margaret, Thomas, and Don/Dawn « Public Schools », « Academies », and « Convents ». The names of these are not normally heard in public life in Janabad, my suspicion being that the names do not sit phonetically easy on the lips of local residents, and they avoid the problem by referring to all these schools generically as 'convent schools'.

Then there are the Hindi, Urdu, Urdu-Arabic, and Sanskrit medium schools, each of which also pronounce their status by their nomenclature. The Hindi schools are typically named after role models, such as Tulsi Das or Madan Mohan Malaviya. But the cultural fund to be gained from such naming gets lost as children and the public reduce the names to undifferentiated barebones: TVS, CHS, DPS, and so on. Madrasas are typically, springs, gardens, and centres of learning, in flowery Arabic. Non-madrasa Muslim schools are non-committal about religion and community, called City Girls' School and National Public School. Sanskrit schools all name the patron, and only the patron, thus: Rani Chandravati, Goinka, Marwari, Sri Nandlal Bajoria, and so on.

Naming can provide insight into history, even the history of the nation. Within a survey of the names of schools in any provincial Indian city is summed up the history of education in South Asia. And not just the narrative of the colonial state's administrative history, but the parallel narratives of the march of missionary education, the fate of vernacular education, and the hidden histories of family and community. In any provincial town of North India there is the following pattern. The oldest school will have been set up by a local *rais* or aristocrat, if a raja or maharaja was not around, and will be named after his father or grandfather. The other large schools will have been founded by: the Agrawalas, the Khatri, the

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Marwaris, the Thakurs, the Kaysthas and other upwardly mobile castes or caste clusters, by organic intellectuals from within the community, educated in indigenous ways, often called « illiterate » in government records. Some of those based on caste will be actually founded by widows, who have deliberately used their marginal status to occupy subject positions for themselves. The madrasas and non-madrassa Islamic schools will be differentiated among themselves according to sect and emphasis on modernity. In the provincial capitals and larger towns, the most popular schools are certain to be the Christian Missionary ones. If the town is too small to have any, there will be the simulated versions, *i.e.*, non-Christian, but sporting the names « St Something-or-the-other » or names that are self-indulgently cute. My favourite is « Kiddy Convent ».

Names of course have more serious implications yet. As in other cultures, past and present, names in India are regarded as isomorphic with reality or even able to create reality. Thus names, like images, are not « just » images, or symbols, but transfer unpredictable force and meaning to objects which are thus named. A name can bring an object to life. We should remember that even the Hindu College (f. 1817 in Calcutta, today's renowned Presidency College) was given that name by the founding committee because that was understood to demonstrate its « Hindu-ness » although the curriculum was the secular one of government schools and what the school became renowned for was its anti-Hindu stance. Similarly there are schools today that declare themselves to be based on Montessori principles. Others evoke the Vedas, some the Quran, yet others the New Testament. Some conjure up the names of Gandhi, Tagore, Krishnamurti, and Syed Ahmad Khan, who, together with Vivekanand and Aurobinda Ghosh, are the names listed in compilations of « Great Indian Educators ».

Our first stop, then, on our ethnographic journey:

The classroom is a kind of shed, though the campus otherwise is beautiful and idyllic, with old, airy buildings. In this classroom, walls are broken, windows have grills like a jailhouse, and there is no lighting [the bulb is constantly stolen, says the teacher]. There are typical benches and tables with no space for huge bags or books, no place for the children to climb in and out. There is a broken blackboard, broken cupboard, broken shelf, and nothing on the walls but cracks and greasy spots – yet it is pleasanter than the smart Little Flower House or Kiddy Convent...

This is the Annie Besant Theosophical School, called popularly BTS, founded 100 years ago by A. Besant, Hindu missionary and reformer, builder of the modern nation, preoccupied with the synthesis of science and religion.

The second example:

In the Principal's office, I notice with a shock that near my feet is a metal waste paper basket from which is leaking some liquid. Looking more closely, I realize that it is pan juice, and the basket is not only wet but totally rusted at the bottom with the remains of many pan spitting. Many spitting must have also missed their mark, because the durry outside and under is liberally sprinkled with pan juice, chewed ingredients and much else...

This is Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, or DAV, the most impressive of the reformist-progressivist schools in terms of plant and philosophy, the plant

resembling an English public school's, the philosophy that of synthesis, between the most valued in traditions and the best in modern western knowledge.

A third example:

The Montessori apparatus in the pre-school section is all packed away and I am allowed to view it in its abode of ground level shelves covered with cloth curtains. The nun explains that Montessori practices have been dropped « in view of the preparation for the higher classes », the apparatus packed away because « the children are of Indian background » (as she is). « Is Montessori not a suitable method then? » I ask innocently. « *Very* suitable, » she tells me, « but the place, the atmosphere, has to be suitable. » Meanwhile, it is a parents' meeting day and mothers have been dropping in. The first one has a daughter, all of four years old, who cannot learn the Hindi vowel signs and got them all wrong in dictation. She has been labouring at home continuously since, under the guidance of her father, as well as a tutor, and gets everything right now. Sister Gita squashes this claim from the mother with no compunction. « *Abhi apko bahut mehnat karni hai. Isko nahin ata, nahin ata...* » (« You have to work much harder with her. She still doesn't know the stuff... »)

This is St Mary's, a Catholic school, the actual model that every provincial school strives to follow, with its indisputably dedicated nuns, unmatched Church endowments, and invincible philosophy of rationality, uniformity, and punctuality (these qualities measured by size and action: it has the largest gates of any school in the city and they are closed the most punctually in the morning to shut out all latecomers).

I am interested in using the cases above to illustrate and discuss a series of problems today under the rubric of « technology » and « modernity ». Technology, as we know, is some artefact or set of artefacts related to a context of human action, including techniques of use. I include within my discussion of « technologies » non-material circumstances as well, in the anthropological belief that dreams are as real (and as hard) as rocks.

I distinguish my approach from three major ones in the study of schooling in South Asia. Many studies describe graphically how step after step was taken on the path of building a progressively better system of education in India without questioning the actual *building*, that is the texts comprised by the brick and mortar of school buildings. But these aside, most studies *do* pay attention to technology if they do not call it that. Some studies describe the efforts of nationalists and conservatists to set up alternative institutions. For the nineteenth century, we have evocative studies of the Deoband madrasa [Metcalf, 1982], the Aligarh university [Lelyveld, 1978], and for the 20th, the Krishnamurthy school in Rishi Valley [Thapan, 1991], respectively. Each institution comes alive in its technological setting. Each is placed in the history of Hinduism or Islam, and nationalism, but then there is no discussion of the political and discursive effects produced within its walls. That is, what kind of subjects do they produce? Other scholars of education such as Krishna Kumar, do an interesting job of interpreting the colonial and the nationalist projects, but then leave out completely the « how to » of these projects, so that we cannot visualise the overall *sites* of these projects, leave aside any details of classrooms or playing fields. That is, we know of the subjects, but what is the technology? Then finally there is the fascinating ethnography of Doon School by Sanjay Srivastava, which is called, tellingly, *Constructing Post-Colonial India* [1998]

which focuses precisely on the school as creator of a national subject. Here we have a salutary distancing from a straight forward class reproduction model of Paul Willis and the social interactionist approach of most education studies. Srivastava looks at the school as the space for the production of the citizen, of the nation, and of modernity. In doing this, he does not accord the process sufficient specificity: what makes a pedagogic institution different in so far as it is a space for children, and children are in their turn actors, albeit subaltern ones, and the commodity being produced is not only citizenship but also intelligence and stupidity, and the control of languages and narratives. That is, we have both the technology and the subjects, but there is no agency and no pain. A focus on elite institutions, moreover, that are only the illusion of a real (a real that exists nowhere), shuts out other illusions of other realities and there is no space left for non-elite institutions.

I choose to speak of technology because it permits me to weave together the material, the political, and the meaning-creation aspects of the process of education. And I speak specifically of non-elite institutions in a provincial city.

To simplify, let us say at the outset that the minimal technology of schooling consists of: buildings and spaces, furniture and textbooks, teachers and curricula, routines and rituals. I will not be able to touch on all these areas in my talk, and will focus on buildings and spaces, as in the first two ethnographic descriptions, and some rituals, as in the third. The purpose can be accomplished with just these few: to demonstrate how a particular kind of modern subject gets created, and a particular discourse of modernity, precisely at the sites of these classrooms and the interactions of these teachers with their students, that is, gets framed and created by the technologies of the school. My purpose is to question the nature of this subject, and the nature of our Anthropology in pursuing this subject.

Mapping

Although they are all fundamentally one, as I shall be arguing, the apparent diversity of schools in a small town requires some mapping. One division would be into the public or recognised and the private or unrecognised schools, each then further divisible according to management. There are at least five major Boards that recognise and affiliate schools. In a city like Janabad with a population of 10 lakhs or one million, there could be easily over 200 schools, counting only those that exist for at least a decade. Why there are so many is because of the phenomenal growth in the market demand for schooling, both in absolute terms and proportionate to the population.

Of the 200 plus schools that I am aware of, in a city like Janabad, 64 % are unaided and unrecognised. Apparently the conflict between the requirements for government recognition, and the needs of a neighbourhood, continues today, some 150 years after the system was first set up. Schools that « survive », including unrecognised ones, cater to local needs which consist of English language and a modern syllabus. Good academic results are also needed but are seen to depend on the family's initiative, not the school's. Other considerations, such as a playground, extra-academic activities, innovative teaching, or reliance on extra resources and methods, do not constitute a « need ».

The requirements for recognition, on the other hand, include facilities such as library, laboratories, and playground, which private schools do not have. What is significant is that recognised schools do not have them either. They may have them « in name », that is, there are spaces that may be pointed out to the visitor as « games room » or « library », or « laboratory » but are never used by the students for the named purpose. Real facilities actually used by the children, as required for the running of a modern, liberal school by any of the Boards, do not exist in any schools in the city.

If we were to look at the Board requirements as they are presented on paper, we might say that the rules were well meaning as premises for a liberal, modern education. Given the demand for modern schooling, the paucity of funds with public bodies to aid schools, and a popular ideology not congruent with the colonial, the rules became for the last over 100 years a non-constructive restraint and a progressively bigger bottleneck that had to be overcome by circuitous routes. Schools recognise these routes today to be: exertion of influence or power, running around and repeated humiliations from officers, sheer time, and perhaps bribery. In this, they are playing the discursive game that characterises all public life in India: a recognition of the utility and I will add, even of the *pleasure*, of a second parallel plane of functioning to the officially articulated one. This Indian is the « flexible subject » who thrives with elan in conditions of insecurity and seeming doubletalk, willing to accommodate contradictory demands.

In the case of schools, this duality is significant because of the « naturalness » of the absence in all schools of the very facilities required by government boards. The cultural assumptions that underlie recognition rules are modernist ones, concerning the nature of childhood, the nature of learning, and the duties of educators. Schools and their public *do not share* these assumptions.

Buildings and Classrooms

The most obvious instance of technology is, of course, building in India the citadels and indeed statements of empire. The choice of sites for studying in the early part of the 19th century has been laboriously listed by various surveyors of the indigenous scene and is available in the Reports of Howell, Kempson, Monteath, Reid, and Thornton. These sites were possibly: teacher's house, parent's house, other's house, temple, mosque, *chabutara* or garden. The sub text of the listing of these sites was a critique of their non-specialised nature and their primitive continuity of the outdoors with the indoors. The discussion invited, not any appreciation of its rationality, but only opprobrium. The critique of the possible plurality of sites was so complete that it did not have to be even articulated. A coded allusion was sufficient: « There are no proper school buildings. » This comment summed up the negative assessment of the total educational practice.

From the middle of the 19th century onwards, there was a discursive shift from older legitimate understandings of teaching to a newer one. This « progress », as it was considered by both the British and Indians, was marked by the earliest schools such as Hindu College in 1817, Jai Narain Ghoshal in 1816, to the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857, each approximating the definitions of

proper institutions in Europe. By 1900, there was no conflict or questioning left regarding the norm of the proper school building.

The case of Bombay is archetypal. The architect of the central Hall and Library of Bombay University was the famous Sir Gilbert Scott who had never visited India. He adopted a style which was « a free variety of the architecture of the 18th century adapted as far as I was able to judge to the exigencies of a hot climate ». The building, therefore, embodied rationality and science, paying attention to the broad points of temperature, wind and water currents; and confirmed the authority of European architectural principles, the weight of the Graeco-Roman heritage, and of course, the authority of the colonial state. He emphasized what he saw as « all practical considerations », such as making the Tower the loftiest and most conspicuous in the city.

In the case of each building, the foundation ceremony was conducted with great pomp and circumstance, with hopes expressed loudly for the future of the institution as an instrument of acculturation and profound change. Lord Mayo said in Bombay : « The building now commenced will give a fresh impetus to these objects for which the University has been founded », described otherwise as « a moral and social training... The native student... receives unconsciously each day a thousand moral and social as well as intellectual impressions. Only by personal experience of College life can it be known how great a change in the character is so produced in a few years » [Chatfield, 1876: 226; Tikakar 1984: 30].

The new architecture was the single most dominant mark of the new era. There has been no conflict or questioning left of the model for at least 100 years. When I stress this, I am saying that this ideal of a closed, box-like school building (for gradually no more turrets or verandas were possible) with heavy gates in front, both proclaiming some terrifying rules of discipline that can only be maintained if all is insulated from interference of the world outside, is the *norm*. However, when we look at the urban scene in the 1990s, we see – to use one of my favourite metaphors – that the stick of modernity with which the place was going to be beaten into shape has received a beating of sorts itself. Even while the normative school building is accepted in Janabad as the only model of a good school, the majority of schools, or 95 % of them, are acceptable and popular even without their fulfilling the criteria of this school building or its corollaries: adequate playgrounds, classroom space, ventilation, and lighting. « Saraswati dwells even in little rooms » is the convenient expression of the acted out ideology.

Most schools in Janabad are housed in residences that have been donated to the school committees by philanthropists and do not even pretend to emulate the model. But as opposed to the tolerance expressed for these, antagonism is aroused by a building that may seek to be deliberately different, to offer an alternative to the code of heavy masonry and closed doors, and suggest, perhaps, openness to the outdoors, child centred spaces, or climate-appropriate materials such as tiles and bamboo. There is a threat inherent in this, which cannot be met except by a refusal to participate in a new dialogue, to respond to a challenge of ideas beyond a stubborn conviction of « rightness ».

The historical explanations are the easy ones. One is the role of philanthropy in old urban centres in India, leading to schools like Bipan Behari Chakravarty Higher

Secondary School, housed in an old, ornate, early 20th century aristocratic home, with deep verandas and high ceiling shady rooms – all wonderful but positively not suited for use as classrooms. Such buildings are donated, and accepted, with grace and gratitude. As expansion becomes inevitable, new classrooms are created with tin or asbestos siding, on the roofs, all around in the compound and spanning all over corridors and verandas. I wish to emphasize the range this includes. There is W.H. Smith Memorial School founded by an Englishman's widow and immensely popular because of its suggested resemblance to a « convent ». There is Sir Syed Public School started by the Aligarh Old Boys' Association as a « reply » to Christian and Hindu schools. In both cases, all semblance of the original plan has been lost as classes meet in the verandas, in the courtyard, in front of offices, and literally in nooks and crannies – in the case of residential buildings, in bathrooms and garages. Historically, any acquired space may be used for any stated purpose, and failure or success in achieving the purpose is not attributable to the space. While I use the term « historically » loosely here, I mean it as both a discernible characteristic of « The History of India » and also of the awareness of tradition with which people choose. In all these cases, the crowding is of no interest to the educators, including all those who enthusiastically discuss the « problems of Indian education » where « space », « classroom », or « building » finds no mention *No* educator or alumni of a school ever commented voluntarily on the physical properties of their school, either with relation to its excellence or mere satisfactoryness and, never at all, inferiority.

Such a persisting pattern in history might provoke us to attribute the indifference to space to a notion of non-materiality. Are Indians, both Hindus and Muslims as we see, to say nothing of Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Christians, characterized by an unarticulated cultural grammar of the possibility of any and all achievement merely through internal resources, and not external ones? One may also pose another question of great contemporary relevance to the anthropology of the nation state. One's common sense understanding is that the ideology of the nation state is transmitted and reproduced in actual sites: the office, the railway, the newspaper, the school. But its propagation may well be achieved through images, not even the images on a screen or in a book, but in the mind and in the rhetoric of words. The grandiose architecture of a neo-Gothic style college set up in the 19th century may be reduced to unrecognisable local tropes through posters on the walls, peeling paint, overgrown flora, garbage, and cows depositing their dung freely around the campus. Yet the ideal of that college remains the only positively reinforced one in the population.

This particular fate of the modernizing project in small towns in India is significant. These small towns *are* India, with their seeming resistances, compromises, and maladjustments. « India » is not the postmodern re-discoveries of variety in traditions and the arts, such as regularly encountered in the metropolitan centres. Yes, the different composition of symbolic capital in the metropolises and provinces of India may give us an insight into the problem. Veena Das' argument for continuing the focus on local experiences and practices as constitutive of contemporary human existence in postcolonial societies is indeed a powerful one, one which she then works out in her own study of the suffering of the victims of

Bhopal [Das, 1996]. What I seek to do is to extend the meaning of « critical events' » to go beyond tragedies and disasters easily recognisable, such as the Babari masjid demolition and the response to the Mandal Report, to the everyday disaster and tragedy of life of small-town India, such as in its classrooms. If the nation is the simulation of the real and acts itself out in theatres such as elite public schools, the threat to it comes not only from specific actions of the communal, the ignorant, and the chaotic, but continuously from the populations of small towns (who are of course, according to this communal terminology, ignorant and chaotic).

People in Janabad, even while paying lip service to the ideology of the nation state, do not « modify » modern school buildings beyond recognition, because they are *ignorant*. In modifying them or finding alternatives, they are distancing themselves from the play-acting of Delhi, and theatres like the Doon School. They are sceptical of the liberal nation-state, openly dismissive of its civilizational claims, and finally, not overly threatened by its coerciveness. There is certainly a clash of two contrary discourses: a modern one of properly conducted specialized space, and an anti-modern one indifferent to the specific qualities of organized space. There is also a double loop: the mimic-man of Macaulay is the one produced in Doon School or La Martiniere, and an other of that is the one produced in the provincial school. We can interpret this as mimesis if we also question the implicit claim that there exists a purer model of which this is an unstable copy. I prefer to regard mimesis itself as the ultimate in creativity, when a representation satisfying certain criteria, functional and aesthetic, is made by the actor, not particularly because he is a certain *kind* of actor – colonised, South Asian – but because mimesis is the condition of life. How « real » does a copy have to be? These schools fail our realist tests; they show no *fidelity*, in the sense of both *accuracy* and *loyalty*. But the magic of mimesis lies in that while the copying may be quite imperfect, it is nevertheless effective in acquiring the power of the original [Taussig, 1993], *as well as* accomplishing some further purpose of the actors.

Let us look briefly at an Agarwal school in the heart of the city. The founder is an idealistic woman who has no other interests in life but personally supervising every detail of its running, one of the widows mentioned earlier by me as turning around the discourse of widowhood to her advantage. Her single-mindedness is confirmed to me by her turning to me to exploit me as a resource, as would any good educator to her environment. « What is an intsy wintsy spider? What is a tuffet? » she demanded of me. The meanings of some of the nursery rhymes « taught in the convent schools », as she put it, were not clear. And she insisted on minute explanations rather than the evasion that many were supposed to be nonsense anyway. Here an English nursery rhyme is taken by her as symptomatic of the « modern »: opaque and incomprehensible, but unchallengeable and with some material reference to meaning and power that was simply undisclosed yet, but could be captured through mimesis.

This particular school was impressive in its obvious effort to emulate innovative techniques such as the use of visual and aural devices, an emphasis on art and music, an increased participation by children by seating them in semi-circles, and so on. The problem, for the anthropologist, was its inadequate space and related inconveniences. In an old residential house in the densest part of the city, every

space is used as a classroom, some shared by two, some on a rotating basis as classes « go » elsewhere for dance, music, and physical training. Dance classes are held in the courtyard of the owner's house. Music is taught in the owner's bedroom, bare of anything but a string cot used by the teacher and her instrument. PT (Physical Training) is conducted in the front courtyard, in turn, as the space it needs can accommodate no more than ten boys. The children take all this totally in their stride. The teachers are matter-of-fact, the owner non-committal. The anthropologist's feelings of unease are shared by no one.

The anthropologist has the dilemma of whether to take the point of view of the school administrator, dedicated to the proposition of a good school through sheer commitment of her own house, funds, time, and energy. She does not seem to notice that children in her classrooms cannot bend over, stretch out, or move their legs. She will not see that the teacher cannot move around among her students or display her illustrations to all of them or that there is insufficient light in the classroom, once the natural light has been restricted by iron grills on the windows and the artificial light economised. In her practice, she is not « modern ».

Or, should the anthropologist take the side of the school children, who need a spokesman since they do not themselves know or can say what is best for them, but could find a voice in the anthropologist's report? But that would of course make the anthropologist a modernizing colonial-type authority on educational matters, a role that restricts her options in many ways. Or should the anthropologist be the old fashioned detached observer, taking the most prominent voice as the authentic informant's? The crises of legitimation and representation which beset our discipline are well displayed here. Who is the subject? Who is being spoken for, and to whom?

As we take leave of Mrs Agrawal and move on, I will re-emphasize one point. Clearly the description of the domestic facilities of the owner doubling as school facilities evokes the image of the old indigenous school where the teacher taught in his own home and space naturally overlapped between different functions. The conflict I wish to highlight is that the owner in this case is not striving to re-create the indigenous. She would consider the indigenous a poor alternative to the modern, implying specifically *poor* physical surroundings even though she may refer positively to some ethical values transmitted 200 years ago. In her articulation of the matter, she is a deliberate modernizer seeking the colonial Western mode, even when not comprehensible, as in the case of nursery rhymes or buildings. The grandiose liberal, humanistic discourse of education, with its large, built-up, specialised spaces and its ideas of engaging the children in sport, must be taken seriously by the anthropologist (as it is in name by the educator). Equally seriously must be taken the lived-in culture of the city where it is believed that a child can be taught anywhere, with no material help, as long as there is moral dedication.

Playgrounds, and Garbage

Let us enrich our observations on the non-materiality of Indian small town modernity further, remembering the conventional truth that human beings inhabit discursive worlds of culturally constructed significance, including their

construction of a differentiated terrain. Almost all schools make the effort to provide some sort of open space for their children: in a sample of 50, 20 do so with what may be called « playgrounds », 23 do it with courtyards. The remaining either cannot or do not need to. The schools which *cannot* are located in the chawk and market places of inner cities and *possess* no semblance of free space. Those which do not *need to* are the madrasas which have no open-air or physical activity as part of their curriculum. They have successfully institutionalised an attitude that is in front in the minds of many Indian educators and parents, but that suffers from being buffeted by a contrary ideology. The attitude is that mental drilling is sufficient and physical drilling unnecessary. The ideology that buffets it is that PT and games are part of the modern curricula and therefore necessary to fashion the modern (English medium) individual. This duality has roots in both history and culture. The Hellenistic legacy of competitive sports has not been integrated with local culture, although funding has ensured a national legitimacy for it. The history of the ideology of wrestling and body building in provincial India has seen the following pattern: first, the exclusion of females and its installation as a male prerogative some 300 to 200 years ago. Then its typification as a lower class practice from being that for all males some 200 to 100 years ago. Finally, the loss of patronage and cultural capital for even the lower classes over the last 100 years. Now, neither do modern sports, nor Indian body building, find a niche in the practice of city schools.

Of the 20 schools with playgrounds, 13 do not use or maintain theirs at all. Some look like overgrown wildernesses, others like dusty fields. The cultural attitude enshrined here is not simply one of indifference, but a discursively complex one. « Jungles », as they are called, have a privileged status in local life. The opposite of brick and mortar structures is not the cultivated flower garden, but the « jungle », meaning not necessarily a verdant forest, but any natural place, unspoilt by human hands [Dove, 1994]. The British ideal of the culture of nature has never made any impact on Indians outside the metropolitan centres. Indeed, uneducated or vernacular-educated Indians, such as in our small town, regardless of region, religion, or caste, continue to have their own ideal of cultured nature which is a contrast to the modern one. There is a commonsense comfort with mud and water in context, such as of the akhara or the well or river. The student of the modern school learns to despise this in concept through exposure to a discourse of sports-with-all-your-clothes-on, but in practice gets neither of the two worlds to embrace and experience.

The schools that do use their playgrounds are either populous boys' schools where the boys in their enthusiasm find it a fine site for as many as one dozen cricket matches going on simultaneously; or the Christian missionary schools which, through their system of « houses », have as their annual event not a cultural programme as do all other urban schools, but a Sports Day. The few other schools with well maintained front grounds use them exclusively for morning Assemblies.

Because these Assemblies are rituals that are confined to fixed spaces, they deserve to be mentioned briefly here. The Assembly, with its emphasis on straight lines, silence, and correct uniforms, is an exercise in making the child respond to instructions unclear in principle, such as « stand at ease! » « attention! » « keep

arm's distance! » Indeed the distortions of these dreamt up by children in various degrees of playfulness and even seriousness are marvellous. What children experience at Assembly time is that certain rules have to be obeyed in that one context and that one space, but not transported over to others. The discipline of the assembly becomes restricted to, and associated with, the space in which it is held. The school assembly, if taken as a formal disciplining site for future adults, makes it possible to explain the chaos of public life in urban India. Schoolgoers as children, and then as educated adults, can never maintain even a fraction of the discipline they are/were subjected to at assembly time when they find themselves in other spaces, such as when boarding trains or buses, buying tickets, or entering a narrow gateway. Here, we have extra-materiality: too close an association of a discipline with its physical location.

I come then to a discussion of garbage. The average citizen of a small town insists on his freedom to disregard the rule of law that is supposedly institutionalised in the city (this includes lawmakers, such as policemen). Most also display ignorance about basic science, and seem uneducated about sanitation and the germ theory. Small towns in India are quintessentially dirty places, originally with recyclable waste, presently further degrading the environment through liberal disposal of plastic bags and non-recyclable waste. The indifference to cleanliness and sanitation in the city spaces is perfectly replicated in the spaces of the school. Modern education should pose a threat to this freedom and this ignorance but it does not.

The question then, reflected in the invasion of garbage everywhere, is why, for all the lip service paid to modernity in the form of buildings and banks, offices and schools, roads and traffic signals, citizens prefer to remain at a pre-civic level of involvement with the city, demonstrating a passivity to soluble problems, and even actively celebrating their perpetuation of garbage.

Again, the history and culture: Indians may have always had a strong notion of « own » versus « other », related to well developed ideas of hierarchy, pollution, and context-based appropriateness. The experience of the colonial state over more than a century as both invasive and foreign may have created an indifference to public spaces which were clearly under colonial control; and a need for « private » spaces which were not. A postcolonial state then failed to dispel, and perhaps nurtured further, the infancy-syndrome in its citizens bred from decades of dependence on the colonial state. Thus the average small town Indian has no interest in public spaces, no belief of contiguity regarding them, and no concept of his own rights or power to do anything regarding them.

Again, there is a dilemma for the anthropologist. We could empathise with local practices and refuse to accept or comment on the problematic nature of garbage because our informants thus refuse. Or we could be colonisers who believed in difference, and maintaining their own preserved enclaves elsewhere, in leaving the natives alone to wallow in their own cultural preferences. Or we could react, again as with classroom space, by striving to engage those in control in a dialogue regarding what arouses us but not them.

This possible critique then takes us into deeper waters. We cannot but glimpse a similarity between us and other intellectuals in the past, both nationalist and

colonialist. These intellectuals are routinely deconstructed for their seemingly un-reflexive reliance on « tradition », « history », « science » and « progress ».

But, if we were to take the problem of garbage seriously, what can we propose we would do in the place of these intellectuals and social leaders in the past? When one searches for ways to transmit the principles of cleanliness to children and uneducated adults, one thinks of teaching about the germ theory and about environmental pollution. One ponders on various rituals that breed pride in one's own, but where « one's own » can be defined in a wider way to include public spaces. One's mind turns to various resources, to traditions, for instance, of nature worship, corpuses of stories about trees and animals, to the images of *ashramas* and philosophies of oneness with the environment.

That is, one moves towards the logic behind the occasional effort to strive for the scientific subject in India; to design rituals that expand the « our » into the national; to use the resources of literature, mythology, and philosophy to construct a « tradition ».

We then go beyond the deconstructivist historian who would critique modernizers in the past for their promotion of science, or question the whole allegiance to « progress » displayed by the educated elite. Judging from our survey of schools and the invasion of garbage today, should we not wonder instead: why was science not loved and promoted *more*?

Similarly, as anthropologist we need to steer clear of essentialism when judging the behaviour of the ordinary Indian at face value. I am on record as having marked my break with ethnosociology when I realized that I did not share many of the values of my informants [Kumar, 1988; 1992]. That, after I was through interpreting the aesthetics and freedom, I was finally critical of the violence, often fatal, as in the ignoring of garbage. A critic of my work narrates the following incident. He interfered in a young man's dumping of garbage on the road and was bemused at the youth's challenge to him « Is this England? ». The academic was rendered silent, trailing off in his narrative, implying that demanding a cleaner surroundings in India is tantamount to an elitist, objectifying conflation of India with England, based on an ignorance of Indian « indigenous » culture [Chakravarty, 1992]. I want to conclude this section on garbage by suggesting rather, another set of considerations with which this Indian youth's comfort with garbage dumping could be treated:

Maybe we could consider that there are more complicated equations than the intuitively perceived ones of garbage dumping as equalling « freedom », and cleanliness as equalling external control. The young man's notion of what is English and what is not in our anecdote is clearly uninformed and has resonance of protest against upper class control. But can we afford to forget that this essentialist notion of the English and the Indian was itself bred by colonialism? By being generous to purer, native values, are we not confusing the indigenous with the essentialism of colonialism?

The framework we are obliged to adopt is clearly one of modernity. I suggest that there is no other path for the Indian state or its citizens to follow than one leading towards science (but an environmentally sensitive science); technology (but a culturally appropriate technology); and progress (but a progress aimed at

redressing gender and other inequalities). And that if this placing is not recognised by the anthropologist, she is still placing herself, but on the side of science, technology and progress *without* the caveats mentioned above.

The Discourse of Childhood

The technologies of education allow us to glimpse the discourse of the child in India.

(i) Sanskrit schools and madrasas eschew all symbolism, because they are themselves icons and signs of the religions they substantialize. Catholic schools are abundant with crosses and bleeding hearts and pink, blonde children cuddling kittens. But in non-religious schools the only representation is of Hinduism and a closely allied nationalism. The favourite personage depicted is Saraswati, the goddess of learning, with close favourites being Vivekanand and Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru, and Krishna in pursuits arguably adult. The philosophy of childhood evident here is an unreflective one based on the educators' predilections towards a combination of a bhakti style and a reformist Vedantic Hinduism, and a pre BJP Hindu cum Congress nationalism. The philosophy is comfortable therefore with symbolism that has no local referents, thus there are lotuses, swans, and Mughal or Victorian gardens. The child, it is maintained confidently, can be unilaterally worked upon. He or she is a blank slate with no context in everyday life and can be written on.

(ii) The child is understood to be chaotic, destructive, and unstructured. When there are framed pictures or flower pots or other destructible items in school spaces, they are at a height or in places beyond the reach of children. The supposedly innate capacity of children to violence is regarded with tolerance and pragmatism. There are no *theories* of how the child can be brought within discipline, short of growing older. Rationality, orderliness, and respect for the law, do not characterise the child, and it is not that he must therefore be made over from the inside, but that he must be controlled and opposed in all his impulses from the outside. There is thus a non-negotiable belief in authoritarianism. The most important aim in the classroom is obedience. When some allegedly new fangled ideas are introduced such as seating children not in straight rows but a circle, or having them brainstorm or discuss, the purpose of these ideas is not understood. Educators claim disciplinary difficulties with practising them, and the vote always goes in favour of « discipline ». This is just the opposite of the discipline of Foucault which is a transcendent self-discipline and works through « the mystique of the everyday ». Self-discipline in space and in time is the characteristic of the « modern » citizen, and endless supervision from the top through coercion and threat is the characteristic of its Other. The ground is therefore not made ready for the creation of the modern subject of postcolonial nationalism in the schools we have been looking at – that can happen elsewhere, as it does, in boarding schools in the mountains, in Delhi or Bombay, but not in provincial towns. The explanation given by both metropolitans and provincials is that in the provinces there is simply too much disorderliness, religion, irrationality, and backwardness allied with sheer cussedness.

(iii) Prior and more significant than even the above discussion is the observation that in doing an ethnography that may seek to focus on the child, one would be pursuing the unrecognised, trying to locate the undefined. The « child » or « childhood » have no resonance in small town India yet. It is not clear how to ask about them in local languages: *bachcha*, *shishu*, *larka-larki*, *vidyarthi*, *chhatra-chhatri*? It is clear from all evidence, linguistic and otherwise, that the overall discourse in society is emphatically not of discrete, self-sufficient individuals and of the child as one such individual in the making. She has typically no choices and no status outside that of her family, community and local history. Without belabouring the point, I would claim, as I have done elsewhere, that the modernist invention or discovery of the child and of childhood has not occurred in India yet outside metropolitan centres, and that the non-relevance of some categories of enquiry tells us of the subject itself.

Pain

What is it that the nation state is afraid of, that is seen by the national elite as a threat to the democratic, secular order? That is further characterised as primordial, communal, ignorant, and factionalist? That is privately also known as vernacular, with the greatest divide recognised as between English and Provincial languages? The threat is typically discussed with reference to events and happenings: demolition of Babri Masjid, Roop Kanwar's self-immolation, rural tragedies in Bihar. But the threat lies, for this national elite, in very familiar, mundane, quotidian sites, where subjects are produced and reproduced who have no access to and no vision of the secularism, liberalism, and nationalism of this elite. They are accessing a range of other options, none of which are certainly primordial or ignorant. They are *also* modern, but also specific as both threatening to the modernity enshrined in nationalist discourse, and creative of a *via media* between larger cultural processes on the ground and larger global processes. We have to discard dichotomies, specially of the real and the mimicing modernity, of the centre and the periphery, of colonialism and the indigenous. It is not that there has been a struggle or resistance against a model modernity that resulted in peculiar local versions of the modern. There has appeared rather *a formation of modernity* that is as legitimate as the more globally familiar variety, and is more than simply protest. It is constructed and hybrid as much as any modernity is constructed and any construction is hybrid.

The power structures at the national level work out in terms of both repression and subversion. As repression, they keep the larger part of the population out of the accounting for ruling the nation (though for different reasons than Norman Weiner gives in his class analysis [1991]). As subversive potential, however, they may well prepare a script leading to a larger upheaval in the national-global model of democracy if not capitalism, sometimes summed up as « Lallu Raj » and « Mulayam Raj » named after new and powerful provincial leaders.

I want to end, however, by suggesting a legacy of colonialism and an interrogation of modernity that is less familiar to us than the tropes of mimesis, alterity, and subalternity, that is experienced by the subjects of the nation as *pain*.

There are two obvious experiences of pain for the child at the micro level, each constituting an unbroken tradition for 150 years. One is the paraphernalia of « convent schools », *i.e.*, the some 200 schools in our city, of blazer, tie, belt, badge, socks and shoes, ostensibly the marks of a disciplined identity. The power of these artefacts in producing meaning is displayed by the opposition to them of the few schools with a rigid ideology behind them, such as Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangha Hinduism or Wahabi Islam. They are decisive in their condemnation of western Christian gadgets, but they do not realize the power these « gadgets » potentially exercise, a power which has eluded the critics. The critics discover, as they think, appropriate symbols in the past, and are simultaneously convulsed by the realization that the symbols themselves, say, white pyjama-kurta with topi in one case, salwar-kamiz and dupatta in another, or a local language in a third, spell marginalization. Meanwhile, the ethnographer notes that the synthetic, tight fitting, pants, shirts, socks and shoes do *not* in fact suit the climate, and notes that adults accept heat and discomfort for their children as celebration of the victory of modernity – and further notes that elite metropolitan Indians celebrate *their* modernity with the comfort of loose cotton garments and sandals.

The second micro level tradition of pain is comprised by rote learning. Schools had become synonymous with rote learning already 150 years ago, both because of the previous legitimacy of memorisation in the Sanskrit and Arabic curricula, and because it was not possible to perform well in the new schools until the new language had been somewhat mastered. But while there was legitimacy for rote learning in the Sanskrit and Arabic learning systems, in English studies it was rued from the beginning. To tackle English was launched a technology that has become elaborated further and further over the past 150 years: of private tuition, notes, translations, commentaries, and other guides for everyday work and final examinations. The spiral of insecurity that is built at the outset for a student is typically never broken, as demonstrated in my third ethnographic example of St Mary's. There are no possible rewards for effort or improvement, only total success or failure, the constant expectation of being judged, of competing ceaselessly, and for most, of not being good enough.

This is at the micro level. I have been ethnographically stressing the local. Such pain might seem to be the fate of every student everywhere. The particular colonial gloss on it is that *the greater pain* lies in the denial to children of the rewards of the national-global. At the national-global level, or the level of power, there are clearly winners and losers, both economic and symbolic. Provincial schools do *not* succeed as little theatres of the nation to play out, or little workshops to create, the spokesmen, the elite and the intelligentsia. They reproduce the pan chewing, pan spitting headmaster of DAV College, who stars in my second ethnographic example – a free and satisfied human being certainly, but not the progressive, successful citizen of the nation.

The problem is not merely, as postcolonialist critics put it, that this is the cultural strategy of the postcolonised nation state. The problem is that the schools create pain, at the level of both the local and the global. This modernity deserves to be ceaselessly interrogated.

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