

**HEGEMONY, RESISTANCE AND SCHOOLING:
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELECT
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**

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DECLARATION

I, S. Ramya Devi, declare that this thesis entitled, "**HEGEMONY, RESISTANCE AND SCHOOLING: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELECT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**", submitted by me, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has not been previously submitted, either in part or as a whole, for any other Degree of this or any other university and it is my original work.


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CERTIFICATE

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*Dedicated to **Sir**...*

...For he is my inspiration

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Writing acknowledgement to me is not a formality to be finished, but an interesting exercise to recollect and value those people and moments who journeyed along with me in this entire research process. And the first person who comes to my mind without even a second's delay is my supervisor, Prof. Avijit Pathak. People generally say that, Ph D is entirely dependent on the kind of supervisor one gets, and now, I believe it is very true. Because, at times, the stereotypical fears and doubts of a researcher used to engulf me - "scary" deadline, "conventional" methodology, "expected" word count and "legitimate" references. To be frank, these things took me far away from the interest, passion on the topic. It generated fear, anxiety, anger and frustration. But, with Sir, I was able to overcome all these and relook at the entire process in a new way. Gradually, this research turned out to be an enriching and meaningful experience.

Not only that, my experience with Sir suggested another possibility, that a teacher can also transcend the regular, expected role and transform student's life in many fronts. No wonder, I am able to appreciate what ancient scriptures talked of the emancipatory possibilities of a Guru, as I see myself voluntarily giving in his hands. I like to bow my ego to Sir, not because my university says, but because I want to. I don't mind considering myself small and incomplete before him. In that smallness I grow, open and merge. I surrender my pettiness in front of him, for I have trust on him. He is more than a teacher; he is a friend, father, guru. In his presence, I am willing to change, because with him, I go deeper and in that depth, he makes us feel "one". Then something happens; the change becomes natural, effortless and smooth. I no more pretend to change, but I just change.

Being a South Indian and moreover a woman, I used to often encounter typical questions in my hometown like, "why go so far to do Sociology?", "why don't you take some course here itself?" Though I sympathize with their stereotypical orientation towards technical subjects, I still feel that one of "the best" decision I took in my life was to join JNU. I am lifelong indebted to this University for being the reason behind many "crazy", yet meaningful changes that happened in me. The vibrant culture, freedom of expression and critical discourse of the university altered my understanding of life.

Many days I had wondered, with lot of discontentment with the present system of education then 'what am I doing as a student again?' There was a strong urge to re-

live the student life, experiencing it, with its contradictions, hope and joy. I wanted to feel it again. I realized being a research student of a university and questioning the education system itself, the way it functions, its contradictions has the possibility of self-reflection. And that was possible mainly because of joining Sociology in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems. The critical insights and creative pedagogy helped me discover the nuances of society and its institutions. It not only prepared me to write term papers and assignments “critically”, but to look at society and myself critically in real life. Now, when I visit a school, I understand its politics, socio-historical relevance and the economic motive. Not only schools, even family, religion, occupation, entertainment and even the intimate moments disclose their complexities. Therefore, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to (CSSS) for making Social Science experiential and enriching.

Initially, the critical understanding of the present system of education made me come in terms with the trajectories of my own educational experience. I realized that, mechanical memorization, discipline, corporal punishments, examinations, homework and mark sheets had taken away the joy of learning. The authority of teachers always created fear, and therefore there was always a huge gap between teachers and students. Such insights unsettled my mind. However, visiting some of the alternative schools gave a hope that not everything is dark. Special thanks goes to Ashram School (Pondicherry) and Sholai School (Kodaikanal) for allowing me to conduct field work in their schools. Their innovative curriculum, creative pedagogy, un-hierarchical management, inspiring teachers, joyful children and caring non-academic staffs of these two schools helped me to develop positivity in education system and humanity.

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comings. The clarity of concepts and expression, therefore, seemed to have considerably improved from the first draft to the final one.

Hailing from a family background where girls never moved out of the state (Tamil Nadu) for education or job, my parents found it difficult to understand my longing to study in Delhi. Moreover, crossing the “expected” age of marriage was something that continued to trouble them. In spite of all that, I am surprised, they still liked me. Every time I used to go home(except for the “emotional” last day of leaving) all I could see was love in their eyes. Their genuine concern and care overwhelms me. Though they may not “understand” or agree to the ideas I have, I still long to be with them.

Next to my parents, is my sister and her family who are awaiting for my arrival. Their abundant love makes me speechless every time I go home. The “unusual” gifts my nieces (Sruthi&Mahitha) give, lovely time with them makes my academic and personal journey rich and beautiful.

Though my in-laws and the entire family joined lately in my journey, did not take much effort to understand my interest, dreams and crazy ideas. Their love, patience and support is essential for a person like me who generally does not fit in a “regular” daughter-in-law format. The love from the younger ones (Priya, Kushal&Kaushik) fill the “lonely” gaps which I encounter in the new family.

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(S. Ramya Devi)

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No matter I liked it or not, I went to school,
I understood them or not, I read books,
I wanted it to happen or not, I passed classes.
School entered my life and I let it rule my mind,
It gave me some and took away many.

Now, when I look back,
Friends, lunch break, sports class, drawing teacher,
and annual day function,
these are the things that come easily to my mind.
But everything else that I memorized, I forgot.

I cried and wept,
Yet I could not give up exams,
Rank card scared me.

School took away my innocence, my dreams, my freedom,
And I thought it was all normal,
But, now I realize,
What I lost in the name of 'education'.

...

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Present Crisis: Situating the Debate

I wish to start this manuscript with a positive note, however, I refrain to do so, because the kind of life one generally leads is filled with fear, anxiety, restlessness and violence. Except for a few moments of happiness and peace, we seem to constantly live in a state of sorrow and misery.

In modern societies, we have developed technologies and improved our material comforts, but still we are unable to solve social problems and address our personal issues completely. But, at the same time, we cannot undermine the benefits of modernity. Many interesting discoveries and enriching innovations would not have happened had the project of modernity not touched us. Modernity also has relieved us from the tyranny of collectivism by breaking away from the stereotyped social identities like caste, occupation, religion, gender and other social categories. It has given us the freedom to question and to reconsider our values and beliefs systems. Modernity is promising us the 'new' identity, where the memory of oppression and inequality can be rewritten and transformed.

However, there is a danger in celebrating hegemonic/one-dimensional modernity, for it devalues anything that is traditional; anything 'old' is rejected and avoided. The dichotomy of modernity versus tradition often leads to the assumption that, all traditional values are necessarily "irrational" "superstitious" and have to be overcome. Because of this "certainty" we end up negating many emancipatory possibilities implicit in traditional knowledge and wisdom. So, we tend to ignore the spirit of modernity that underlies in certain traditions. Moreover, modernity cannot also be completely accepted, as the classical sociologists have already informed us that it leads to "alienation" (Marx), "disenchantment" (Weber) and "anomie" (Durkheim). Besides, modern culture is also prompting people to become automated and isolated individuals. This over-hyped individualism is what even Durkheim feared in modern complex societies. Because, people are striving for their own good and are excessively absorbed in their limited selves. Is it not evident to us now? We hardly seem to have any connection with our surroundings, people and environment.

Moreover, neo-liberal economy, with its excessive competitiveness, has also promoted narcissistic individualism. It has come to a stage where survival itself is not possible without competition. Ugly competition has entered every aspect of our life. Besides, Social Darwinism has become the only way to survive in a neo-liberal economy, where only those who are economically and socially strongest are able to have the luxury for living. Forget meaningful living, it has become a constant struggle for the poor and disadvantaged even to survive itself.

Certainly, the development of science and technology has improved our standard of living. No doubt, development is essential, without which we would have not come this far from Stone Age. Fastest modes of transportation, latest technologies and modern home appliances have made our life more comfortable. All these have freed us from the tyranny of work and gave us leisure. Nevertheless, it is also arrogant and destructive. Because, if we identify the gains of development across various social groups, its spread is highly disproportionate. Factories, dams, and highways have entered even remote villages, displaced poor people and damaged their personal and cultural space.

Development with all its benefits has not only fractured the social world, but the physical world as well. Industrial development has caused widespread environmental degradation and the damage it has caused to our ecology is far reaching. Thousands of trees are being cut, huge forests are being turned down and animals have lost their home - all these for the sake of growth of industries and the comforts that a modern lifestyle demands. Excessive pollution, environmental degradation, and deforestation are making us rethink the project of development. Such development is not healthy, if we have to cut several hundred trees to make a road, displace poor people to an unknown land for the purpose of constructing huge industries and malls, and pollute fresh air, water and soil with increased number of vehicles, gadgets and chemicals. In addition, harmful pesticides and other chemical preservatives have caused massive injury to our food and health.

However, economic growth reflected through Gross National Product (GNP) and Per Capita Income (PCI) has become the key indicator of development of a nation, And, the efficient way to do, is to promote modern technologies and industries, where generation of profit and mindless competition become the slogan. Man's mental

and spiritual well-being has taken a back seat. Although, economic progress has provided us material comforts, but it could not make our life happy and meaningful. One may earn a job, but one has no deep connection with the work one is doing. This sense of alienation is what Marx feared in a capitalist society.

Adding to industrial growth is the drive for commercialization and marketization. Everything has become commercial. Modern industries are producing endless products and markets are validating them, and ultimately, man has become the victim of a consumer society. In such a world, we can never be content; the constant need to buy things unsettles our mind and makes us restless. Moreover, the aspiring middle class with the principle of consumption, has become addicted to the market and its products. The application of modern technology may have minimized the unnecessary wastage of time and energy. Nevertheless, as social theorists like Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm argued, we have become addicted to modern gadgets. This modern culture instead of freeing us, has caged us to the glamorous technology and its products. Ironically, we are not free, we are caught up in an endless pursuit of filling up our time. We have become slaves to technology.

Additionally, our craving for the modern western lifestyle has a deep rooted history. Colonial masters apart from their economic motive, thoroughly debunked the Indian tradition, civilization and also its cultural practices. As the narratives of colonial masters as Thomas Babington Macaulay indicate, they thought of India as an empty vessel to be filled with prestigious, modern, civilized and rational culture. Moreover, everything favored them; their supremacy and economic benefits undermined the native knowledge, wisdom and culture. This has ultimately crippled our consciousness and that is why, even after 70 years of independence, they still continue to colonize our native mind.

No matter whatever reforms are introduced, our society is extremely conditioned and enveloped with various layers. Our sense of collectivism finds expression in practices like caste hierarchy, religious superstitions and gender discrimination. Even now, despite Ambedkar and Gandhi, ascriptive caste identities with their inherent hierarchical practices continue to determine our social position and the status we receive. Even in the name of religion, we have created divisions. Not only that, we are constantly being measured and compared with others. Even the gender based

discrimination and violence has created an unsafe society. Women are being objectified and are constantly subjected to various kinds of sexual harassment in a male-centric and patriarchal society. Additionally, sexuality has been commercialized and reduced to the level of instant gratification. However, such collectivism does not unite people, rather it divides them and creates animosity. Like excessive individualism which we discussed earlier, even ruthless collectivism breeds conflict and violence.

In this modern society with its ever-increasing complexity, people are unable to handle mental stress. Confusion, loneliness, and sorrow have become the common symptoms of modern mind. People have lost trust with relationships and with life itself. Even the most intimate relationships are being spied and damaged. Psychiatrists, counsellors and other related professionals have to mediate even the most personal moments. Vulnerable people are being subjected to violence, harassment, suicide and crime. Ultimately, society and people are caught up in a tragedy. But, we may wonder, is there a way ahead? Or, are we going to constantly live in this darkness?

The way ahead

However, in the midst of this darkness, we cannot undermine the ability of education to transform society. Economic progress, scientific and technological development are necessary for the smooth functioning of society. Yet we need a healthy transformation in the cultural sphere as well. An effective social transformation is not possible without change in the domain of education, because education determines the ideas we possess, and the way we relate to ourselves and the world. Antonio Gramsci, primarily a Marxist, who felt the need to transform the domain of culture through radically altering the educational institutions along with civil society for nurturing a counter hegemonic struggle. In fact, the domain of education also captivated various radical thinkers and philosophers. John Dewey, Gandhi, Phule, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and J.Krishnamurti believed in the transformative power of education. However, the present system of education cannot escape itself from criticism.

1.2. Problematizing the Notion of Education

Not surprisingly, our long history of colonization, industrialization and marketization has its impact on education as well. Education has been made into a commodity. The process of education which is supposed to liberate people from this tyranny has further complicated the problems. However, one may argue that it is not very necessary to connect education with the larger society and its problems. Nevertheless, education cannot exist in its own sphere with limited boundaries. Competitive workforce, political decisions, macro-economic situation and social changes influence the way school functions and also its objectives. School, as physically it may appear, is not just about the classrooms, time tables, lesson plans, syllabus, teachers and students. The socio-political influences and implications permeate the consciousness of school.

In a modern society, schools have become essential for developing specialized knowledge and skills. Educational qualifications, employment opportunities, technological development, and scientific progress are not possible without schools. Moreover, schools are not passive entities, their ideologies and practices can have various implications on social, political and economic spheres. Additionally, in India, we believe that education is a process of liberation and inner transformation. But the experience of schooling in modern times is not a liberating experience, but a devastating experience for most of the children. Therefore, it is significant to understand the social function of education and schooling.

To begin with, we have to understand that the meaning of education has never remained constant, as Durkheim reminded us that, it has varied infinitely in time and place. He criticized the idea that there is an “ideal perfect education which applies to all men indiscriminately”. In the following lines, he put across the varieties of education that existed in societies,

“In the cities of Greece and Rome, education trained the individual to subordinate himself blindly to the collectivity, to become the creature of society. Today, it tries to make of the individual an autonomous personality. In Athens, they sought to form cultivated souls, informed, subtle, full of measure and harmony, capable of enjoying the beauty and the joys of pure speculation; in Rome, they wanted above all for children to become men of action, devoted to military glory, indifferent

to letters and arts. In the middle ages, education was above all Christian; in the Renaissance, it assumes a more lay and literary character; today science tends to assume the place in education formerly occupied by the arts”(Durkheim, 1956, p. 64).

Furthermore, education varies depending upon the kind of social milieu the individuals belong to. For a child belonging to a wealthy family, education is quite different compared to the education of a child belonging to a low-income family. The experience and meaning of education vary from one social group to another. Likewise, educational ideology and practices in a city are different from that of a village. Considering all these aspects, we can say education by all chance has an overwhelming influence on individuals. Every society, thereby, finds a means by which it educates the younger generation.

Confusing Education with Literacy and Schooling

The meaning of education gets more complex in developing countries, where we often use education loosely in the place of literacy, though there is a huge difference between them. Literacy is a skill, an ability to read, write, and do some arithmetic (3‘r’). But education is not just a skill; it is much more complex than that. However, our present-day schools are concerned mainly with literacy than with education. Education has been reduced to just numbers and letters. Children are being forced to develop the skill of mugging up every sentence from textbooks without understanding the concepts fully. Besides, writing also starts from kindergarten and the number of pages they write multiply every day. But if we look carefully, even the three ‘R’-s- Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic- are not just skills to be learned through endless drill and practice, but by reasoning out their purpose and through a meaningful approach. If children are put in a situation where they need numbers to solve a problem and a set of words to communicate to others, they will automatically seek 3‘R’'s without compulsion whatsoever.

Likewise, we even confuse ‘education’ with ‘schooling.’ Many people are convinced that education ends with schools or colleges or with other higher educational institutions. One does not have to bother about education when one is in the 50s, while taking care of children, or while in business. The process of learning is believed to end, the moment we step out of an educational institution. The textbooks then have no meaning whatsoever. To be very honest, we do not remember all those things that

were taught to us in our schools. Then, why are we giving importance to the packaged knowledge which has no meaning at the age of 28 or 40? Why waste time which we could have been spent in playing or enjoying in the fields with our friends? If it is all about reading & writing skills and some arithmetic calculations, then why waste all our childhood in breaking our heads in schools? By giving enormous significance to schooling, I am afraid, with the kind of education we have, whether children will lose their childhood and become merely cloned individuals.

Externalities of Education can Also be Negative

When education is supposed to be a meaningful and joyful process, as well as an interesting journey, then why have we made it into a difficult, dominating and uninteresting endeavor? It is not and never was a simple phenomenon. It is a complicated, manipulative and competitive process. Statistics have always been collected to prove that education is a “public good.” As a public good, it is always assumed to have created externalities, which are unquestionably “positive”. But, if education improves people’s lifestyle and social environment, then why are people still unhappy and fearful of life? A simple glance at newspaper tell us that our lives are not happy.

Compared to earlier times, now the learning period of students has increased. Few decades back, gaining even primary education was difficult, but now a days, majority of students get into higher education. But, it is only the quality of our living that will show how useful and meaningful our education is. Certainly, educated people to a greater extent have achieved material comforts with the help of growing science and technology. And material advances in every walk of life have been possible because of ever increasing educational levels. Whereas, our education does not guarantee subjective aspects like happiness, satisfaction, peace and harmony. Because, the present-day education system mainly aims at stuffing the young minds with information than providing a platform to bring out their capacities and abilities. If creating such a platform looks undesirable to be achieved through education, at least we should be clear with the fact that, EDUCATION alone is not the key to all the locks in the world, as we are believing now!

Schools Without Freedom

A normal everyday functioning of the school looks unproblematic. And it is believed that schooling is compulsory. Prescribed syllabus, well authored textbooks, authority of teachers over students, graded mark sheets and fanciful extracurricular are thought as necessary. But, when we tend to see classrooms exclusively in terms of everyday interactions, schedules and functions, the bigger social context gets blurred. Teaching lessons, giving punishments, writing exams are normal routine in schools like eating breakfast, lunch and dinner at home. But when we place the same set of classrooms and schools in a social context, a very different meaning emerges from them. However, with all the slogans for compulsory education raising up for making it as the fundamental right of the children to get education, we are forgetting and also overlooking what is happening in the name of education.

Educational institutes are like factories producing rotten souls in readymade uniform. The rules and norms have killed the fun and joy of learning and teaching. These rules have made the learning place very mechanical. School subjects are not taught for the joy of learning. Learning is always quantified, measured and compared. Even the well-reviewed text books do not provoke any sense of wonderment and joy. In this system of memorizing and achieving marks, we have lost the art of knowing oneself, the art of knowing the mysteries of life. As education is majorly serving the economic needs of the society, it undermines other faculties of knowing and learning the emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects of life.

Learning in schools has no meaningful connection to our real life. What is being learnt in the school is so disconnected from the life outside. Also, not all subjects are equally important, some subjects enjoy high status and some remain unimportant. This is majorly determined by the economic requirements of the society. Unlike social sciences, humanities and arts, science & technology enjoys a high status. Also, India has multicultural background in terms of dresses, language, customs, food, and beliefs. But many of these cultures do not find adequate representation in the school knowledge. Certain cultures of the society are excluded from this. Therefore, education in India does not serve the interests of all, but favours only certain groups. It promotes knowledge of the ruling class and ignores other systems of knowledge. Durkheim's ideas get into trouble here. Because, the functionalist approach to

education does not explain everything. It gives a very blurred picture of reality. Whereas, Marxism feels that the reality is falsified and it believes that there are multiple ideologies, but not all the ideologies have the same power.

As Marxists like Louis Althusser would argue, the school is preparing us for a capitalist society. It therefore means that we should not take what is taught in the school as 'pure', or take it for granted or sanctify it. From the Marxist angle, just as the workers are alienated from the production, the children in school are alienated from what they are learning. Since, everything is already fixed, they cannot choose, they can only become the passive recipients, not active participants. Secondly, as a worker one is forced to work, otherwise one will starve. Similarly, if one doesn't go to school, one cannot get the degree and therefore a job. Schooling, therefore, is not based on interest, it is based on compulsion. Thirdly, it creates fragmentation- as the individual workers produce only the small and fragmented parts, he/she doesn't know the whole. Similarly, in schools, when one learns science one does not learn philosophy or Math. So, one does not learn the whole.

Placing the Concept of "Hegemony" in Context

Before I speak of the Gramscian notion of "hegemony", it is important to refer to the classical Marxian notion of "domination". For Marx and early Marxists, the state is seen as a coercive apparatus that serves the interest of the ruling classes. In other words, the ruling classes through the state and governmental machineries, as it is argued, engage in an act of "domination". It is based on fear, repression and violence.

However, Antonio Gramsci gave a new twist to the Marxian theory, as he looked at the social reality of advanced capitalism characterized by a high degree of civil society like media, cultural institutions and educational practices, he felt the need for yet another concept to make sense of how the rulers rule. He argued that the modern state functions not merely on the coercive apparatus of domination, it is also an ideological state and it is both "political society" and "civil society". Through the elaborate network of civil society it succeeds in acquiring consensus from those over whom it rules. Here lies the meaning of "hegemony"- a process of getting active consent even from the subaltern and resultant consolidation of the ruling class ideology. To take a simple illustration, if competitiveness is the central characteristic

of a capitalist free economy, the fact is that, all of us tend to normalize it and accept it as the real.

The Gramscian analysis would help us to understand how competitiveness is normalized through prevalent school education- the way it hierarchises through examination, eliminates people, distinguishes achiever from those who have failed and lead to a belief that the “successful” ones deserve it because they are “meritorious”. In fact in this work, we would see how schools as the part of the larger civil society play an important role in this hegemonic exercise- normalizing an ideology of competitiveness, achievement orientation, meritocracy and success. And thereby, eliminating all other possibilities of learning through cooperation, sharing, psychic-spiritual elevation and joy. And we would also see, whether alternative schools can resist this hegemony and create new ethos for a new culture and civilization.

To elaborate further, the concept of ‘hegemony’ in this research, intends to explain the dominant ideology of a society and its relation to the present school system. Placing school along with civil society - private voluntary organizations, cultural and religious institutions, Gramscishows us how a dominant class uses these institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. He argued that “the hegemony of a dominant class is exercised in civil society by persuading the subordinate class to accept the values and ideas of the dominant class”(Simon, 1999)

With the powerful term “hegemony”, Gramsci’s emphasis is not on questioning how capitalism functions, but rather it is on how we ourselves make it function. Here, Gramsci differs from Marx regarding how ruling class rules the society, making a shift from coercive to non-coercive force. For instance, constantly updating mobile phones, unequal salaries, supremacy of English language, non-stop consumerism, are not enforced on us, but they have been accepted as personal choices by us. Even the content of curriculum, choice of subjects, and amount of fees, routine time table, rote memorization and crowded classrooms are not forced, but we seem to have accepted and agreed them. Because, for Gramsci, power is not exerted by mere force, but with ‘consent’. It is not that police or a law is threatening us to buy a costly branded shirt or a watch, but in a very interesting way, power has influenced our personal choice without our own knowledge. As mentioned by Roger Simon on Gramsci’s concept of

hegemony that, “it (hegemony) is a relation, not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organization of consent.” (Simon, 1999, p. 24) Also, the consent to ideology is not a passive submission, but an active consent by subordinate class.

It is rather interesting to see how the dominant class wins ‘consent’ to its power from the subordinate class by influencing their commonsense. Generally, commonsense is the way one perceives the world. However, commonsense is never suspected and remains largely unconscious. The meaning of family, caste system, occupation, even the physical world, like sunset, trees and rest of the things and events become a part of our commonsense. Commonsense has been given to us. And socialization has played a major role in building up our common sense. The important part is, we tend to internalize and own that which is given to us, gradually. A new born child, does not know the language, cultural and religious values, but it learns them through family, neighbors, peers, and school; gradually these values get internalized. However, commonsense is not as simple and personal as it appears, it is highly political, feels Gramsci.

Commonsense has been the site for effective functioning of hegemony of the dominant ideology. Family, schools, religious organizations, and other civil society institutions are used as a means to determine the content of our commonsense. The dominant ideology gets established in our consciousness through commonsense. The unequal caste system, market oriented education, competitive work environment becomes a part of our commonsense. It is family that influences children about caste, determines the way we differentially treat a barber compared to an administrative officer. The schools would tell us which course is beneficial and how competitive we should be, and the temples would teach us which God to believe and they create enmity towards another religion. Ironically, these ideologies do not benefit all. Only a certain group of people get the advantages of the system that is created on hegemony.

Like family and temple, school also has been used as an effective means to influence our commonsense, thereby establishing the hegemony of the dominant class. The school system has submitted to this domination and it does not have control over its own curriculum and pedagogy. The whole system would function in such a way to benefit the dominant class. The content of the textbooks, the power relation between

teachers and students, punishments, examinations, comparisons, social inequality, choice of subjects are the various ways hegemony operates in the school.

As we have already seen, not everything is nice about the formal mainstream schools. The entire system with its oppressive nature, acts like a dominating ideology. The ideology which is based on standardized curriculum, prominence of textbooks and freaking examinations has killed the joy of learning. The meaning of schooling, the infrastructure, curriculum, and pedagogy are defined by this ideology. In such a system, children learning to compare and compete is considered as normal. Words in the textbooks are simply memorized and repeated in the exams, and children are made to go through the endless drill of discipline and punishment. Moreover, academics are largely in line with the economic value. The content and methods of academics, therefore promote competition and inequality. Therefore, the whole process of schooling is not a pleasant story of learning and joy, but a manipulated institutional exercise for promoting political and economic agenda of inequality and economic profit. The oppressive nature of schools has damaged children's physical and mental abilities, their ability to imagine and create. Therefore, schools instead of liberating people from ignorance and oppression, rather become a ground for oppression and hegemony.

Conceptualizing Resistance: Its Relation to the Larger Social World

However, any kind of hegemony provokes resistance. A society which is subjected to hegemony comes up with some sort of resistance to the dominant ideology. For Gramsci, resistance is not a protest in the form of war or military activities, but it is much subtler. For him, civil society becomes the means through which resistance gets through the commonsense of people. Schools and other educational institutions also become the sites of contestation. When hegemony takes commonsense as the site to influence the minds of people, even resistance happens there. Resistance alters the commonsense of people and it is the only way to bring out any change or reformation. For example, Ambedkar and many other social reformers fought against the caste system which produced inequality in Indian society. His act of burning Manusmriti in public, created huge disturbance, yet it altered the commonsensical perception of caste and its oppressive nature. It altered the way people perceive caste system and liberated them from the tyranny of oppression. Likewise, other forms of oppression

like sati, child marriage have also been contested and fought. This has altered the commonsense of the people. As a result, sati became a practice of the past and the occurrence of child marriage has reduced.

However, for any reform to happen, it is important for the subordinate class or an oppressed group to create critical thinking intellectuals. Even Gramsci wanted the working class to create its own “organic intellectuals” who will acquire social and political consciousness. Because, reform is not possible if the working class remains in the same state of affairs. They need to understand that false consciousness is being made to operate in them without their own knowledge by the dominant class. This intellectual reform would help them to situate the whole socio-political game played by the dominant class and thereby, they gain the strength to create resistance against the dominant ideologies and practices. Even for Freire, the oppressor cannot free the oppressed from the tyranny of oppression, because the whole process of oppression itself is the manifestation of ‘dehumanization’. So, the oppressors themselves are dehumanized because of dehumanizing others. Therefore, like Gramsci, Freire also place the responsibility of reform on the oppressed. He feels that it is only by freeing themselves, the oppressed can free their oppressors. For example, women in patriarchal society are dominated by men, but when women resists this domination, they are not only freeing themselves, but also men from the tyranny of oppression.

However, resistance is not so easy; society has generally considered it as an anti-social and unacceptable concept. Because, if there is a possibility for conflict, there is a chance to question the given reality, which might disturb the existing social order. Therefore, conflict is always kept under control or hidden. However, conflict may trigger social transformation and change. Without conflict, our country’s independence, labour problems and many other social problems would not have got resolved. Even a son who wants to decide a career on his own, has to put forward a fight against his parents. His wishes don’t come given, he has to constantly fight for them. As Freire reminds us, “freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion”(Freire, 1970, p. 47). Therefore, we understand the need

for resistance. Because that is the only way to free and liberate human beings from the tyranny of oppression and control.

Besides, any means of control and domination makes any relationship ugly. The intention to get something out of the other takes away love, affection and freedom. In society, overtime, some groups have learnt to dominate others. At certain places, it is done by force, but majorly it is done in an implicit and subtle way. But even the ones who are dominating, apart from gaining certain benefits by controlling their subordinates, are themselves getting dehumanized in the process. One's intention and the action to dominate others will also affect one's consciousness, and destroys one's nature and also one's relationship with everyone. One begins to not trust anyone, including oneself. Communication breaks between different groups as one is constantly doubting, and there is no possibility for a dialogue to occur. Therefore, resistance becomes necessary.

To put it in context, even the destructive nature of the schools has not been left unquestioned and unopposed. Various philosophers and critical thinkers have raised their voice against this culture of oppression. They have condemned the system which have made children the passive recipients of a consumerist and competitive society, which is producing mechanical and cloned individuals. Their voices, however, has created a wave of resistance against the mainstream system of education.

1.3.Education as the Site of Contestation

The situation is not fully despondent, time and again we have had series of thinkers and philosophers who had reminded us of the transformative power of education. Apart from securing marks and acquiring jobs, for them, education has a deeper meaning and a power to transform the inner being and the outer world. Moreover, schooling of a different kind is considered as a sign of protest to endorse meaningful education for a just society. Though, we cannot place the entire responsibility of transformation on education, yet, it has to do its justice. Because, formal academic education is not only about acquiring skills, but subjects like Physics, Math, Biology, Social sciences should transcend their limits of syllabus & examinations and merge us with life and world around us.

When we look at our history, we cannot undermine Gandhi's powerful resistance against the colonial rule and also social evils like, untouchability and racial discrimination. His method of resistance against colonialism through *Satyagraha* was different, yet powerful. Unlike usual protests ridden with violence, his protest against Britishers was not to buy British goods. He promoted local handicrafts. He proposed an alternative worldview which goes against the evils of modern civilization. Nevertheless, he was not against modernity per se. In fact, he admired scientific temper and its pragmatism. But he was very uncomfortable equating modernisation and westernisation. He was not a revivalist either and he raised his voice against social evils like untouchability and child marriage. His notion of modernity does not completely negate tradition. He wanted our culture to stand on non-violence and spirituality.

Similarly, Gandhi's resistance to modern colonial education was equally prominent. He felt that colonial education did not appeal to the masses of this country, which is primarily composed of rural areas. Also, this education did not serve all social groups, as the poor could not afford to get this education. He criticized this inherent elitism which colonial education promoted. The content and the medium of instruction became foreign to the children. Therefore, he strongly opposed English as the medium of instruction in schools. By opposing the unnaturalness of English education, he gave importance to mother tongue. Education carried out in English was only for the chosen few, and soon there appeared a division between the educated and uneducated.

The colonial education for Gandhi, alienated children from their own culture, tradition and knowledge systems. Children were unable to relate what they were studying to their life. He therefore, vehemently criticized the ideology of colonial education as it was based merely on textbook learning. He insisted on education based on practical learning, which can be applied in everyday life. He felt that all the subjects should be taught practically and also expected the teachers to have creative wisdom.

For Gandhi, acquiring literacy alone did not appeal, rather he pleaded for education which will unite body, mind and spirit. He wanted education to be imparted through productive craft. He also pleaded for economically self-sustainable schools through craft, so that children can get free education. Apart from becoming economically

independent, craft activities would enable children to appreciate the dignity of labor and ensure their livelihood after leaving the school.

For Gandhi, it is not only the academic subjects that mattered but also the religious & spiritual education. For him, this constituted an important component of learning. In India, even in ancient times, keeping the practical and technical knowledge in its place, a spiritual quest for life, death, and nature was important. But, modern colonial education has sidelined the spirit to ponder upon the meaning of life and nature. However, Gandhi felt such spiritual quest applied even in the modern times. Moreover, he felt colonial education with its hegemonic power puts down any other possibilities and alternatives in education. Colonial education considered such alternatives as barbaric and superstitious (Gandhi, 1951).

The importance of Gandhi's educational ideals was widely discussed in the Wardha conference in 1937. Based on this, some key resolutions were approved: Free and compulsory education, mother tongue as the medium of instruction, manual and productive work based on traditional craft and self-supporting education which would take care of the remuneration for the teachers. But, all these simply remained as dreams. Gandhian scheme of education was considered irrelevant for the contemporary times. However, modern education does have its defects. Irrelevant school curriculum and rote learning dull the children's mind for the rest of their life. Flexibility of curriculum, free environment and practical education for the child - which Gandhi pleaded in his Basic education - sounds more relevant even in the modern times.

Like Gandhi, Tagore too had a different vision of education for the country which was wounded socially, politically and spiritually. His deep admiration for traditional Indian civilization and its philosophy, made him identify the danger of the modern and western influence. This did not mean that he was against any scientific progress or change, in fact, he encouraged development in the scientific realm. But what he suggested was the danger of an industrial and market-oriented society which would eventually take away our cultural sensibilities. He challenged the modern complex materialistic society with his ideal of simplicity.

Tagore was nevertheless a critique of colonial education. Like Gandhi, the supremacy of English as the medium of instruction, disturbed even Tagore. He felt that this alienated children from what they are learning. Also, with formal education he felt, the child would feel disconnected to the subject and that denies love for the subject. Therefore, at Shantiniketan¹, he hoped to create a space where learning is not only through brain, but through emotions, through seeing beauty in everyday life, and through arousing the aesthetic sense. His deep longing for a new education,

“The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed. From our very childhood habits are formed and knowledge is imparted in such a manner that our life is weaned away from nature and our mind and the world are set in opposition from the beginning of our days. Thus the greatest of educations for which we came prepared is neglected, and we are made to lose our world to find a bagful of information instead. We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar. His hunger is for the Epic, but he is supplied with chronicles of facts and dates...”(Tagore, Personality, 1917)

Tagore gave a lot of importance to nature, as unbounded physical space, as non-alienated, as real intimate self. He felt that nature with its mystery and wonder becomes the source of knowledge for the child. But now urban life has completely alienated people from nature. Similarly, he feared that children may get alienated from what they are studying and the nature. Therefore, he proposed an education which keeps children close to nature and harmony. He wanted the classes to be held in the open air under trees, so that children learn naturally about trees, animals and birds and also it would help them to appreciate nature.

Growing Quest for Alternatives

Not surprisingly, after the Second World War, people gradually started questioning the nature of formal mainstream education. Especially during 1970s, some of the critical thinkers and educationists raised their voices against the institution of schooling itself. They questioned the dominant curriculum, teacher’s authority, unequal assessment and various other issues. Many felt that reformation of schools

¹ Shantiniketan was once a spiritual centre and ashram owned by Rabindranath Tagore’s family, where he then started a school called Patha Bahavana.

would bring a healthy environment for learning and therefore they propagated certain measures to change the nature and functioning of schools. Contributions of people in the field of education like Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Froebel have made us reconsider the mechanical rituals in schools and gave scope for various innovative methods to enrich the learning experience of children.

Many educationists have also implemented radically different forms of education. The famous Summer Hill School founded by A.S. Neil redefined the meaning of schooling for children, and longed for their freedom and happiness. But, few felt that reformation would not do any good, rather they felt the better option would be to abolish the school system altogether. Ivan Illich is one such thinker who in his “Deschooling society” talks of the destructive nature of institutionalized education. Also, we find John Holt who vehemently opposed running of schools itself and proposed ‘home education’ for children. Now we find popular movement on ‘home schooling’ in America and elsewhere in the world picking up. Not just in the West, but even in India, the wave of resistance rose long back.

Like Gandhi and Tagore, other significant founders and pioneers of education in India such as J. Krishnamurti and Sri Aurobindo, among others, have examined education from alternative perspectives and insisted that education should bring about an inner transformation of children. Writing with same force, J. Krishnamurti pointed out the need for a different kind of education to revolutionize the individuals for a better society. For him, the real issue in education was “to see that when the child leaves the school, he is well established in goodness, both outwardly and inwardly... The child is to be open, aware and fearless”(Krishnamurti J. , 1992). He urged for a system which is not based on competition and comparison, but creating an atmosphere of freedom and authority. With a deep sense of discontentment with the existing system, he established his first school (Rishi Valley School) in India.

The most interesting and foremost confession by Sri Aurobindo was “nothing can be taught”. This implies that the children are not empty vessels, but the knowledge is hidden and latent, and the role of teacher is to simply ‘guide’ and not to ‘teach’ or ‘instruct’. Teacher is only a friend and a catalyst, and the child begins to learn by itself in the nature. He wanted schools to not only focus on mental aspects of children,

but also their physical, vital, psychic and spiritual aspects. The Mother² also worked closely with children, evolving a philosophy of 'Free Progress', where each child is made to develop and flower in an absolutely spontaneous, inwardly centered process.

Relevance to This Study

Of late, there are a growing number of alternative schools in India. These alternative schools look for new possibilities that shun the popular or conventional ways of thinking and acting. Even 'homeschooling' is becoming one of the possible choices for parents who are dissatisfied with the present education system. Surprisingly, all these ways are not identical. Each have their own characteristics that are distinct from others. In the midst of all varieties of schools, it is important to ask here, "What category do these schools belong to?" and "How to categorize these kinds of schools?" "Are they all same?" Every school of this kind has its own special features and philosophy. So, it becomes very difficult to put all of them under a single category. But still we can broadly group them under one umbrella called "alternative schools" when we compare them with the mainstream conventional schools which are characterized by rigid syllabus, examinations, authoritative teachers, and a textbook centered curriculum.

Each of these alternative schools are unique and they have something to say. Some of the alternative schools specifically cater to the poor, some work for children with special needs and many cater to adults and illiterates. It is important to mention here that, this specific research is not trying to dwell into those issues, bearing in mind their significance. This research is about schools which are philosophically oriented. Some of these schools can take us to the realm of understanding the human possibilities and its various expressions. For us rows of benches and tables, blackboard, textbooks, homework, examinations, punishments, discipline, uniform, timetable...represent 'school'. To imagine a school without walls, classrooms under trees, teachers sitting along with children, circular sitting arrangement and no examinations seem difficult. This imagination for us can be something else, but it cannot be a school. Whereas, these alternative schools have specific characteristics

² Original name Mirra Alfassa, known to her devotees as The Mother and she was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo.

that challenge our popular imagination of a school. They question the very notion of a school system.

1.4. Methodology and Confessions

The method of enquiry is as important as the subject of enquiry. The quality of research objectives, the kind of questions we raise, the choice of respondents and the method of analysis decide the course of a research. All these aspects are determined by various factors and these factors are not constant. They vary depending on background of the researcher, her ideology, intention, passions, conflicts and fears. A research on the same subject conducted by another person may give a different flavor. Therefore, researcher, her methodology, her history, motives and philosophy are as equally important as the subject of enquiry.

Role of Theoretical Knowledge and Understanding

Before I started my field work in the alternative schools, a detailed understanding of our present system of education, its problems and implications on the child in particular and on the society in general was extremely essential. Because, without a strong theoretical background, the interpretation of the social situation would be narrow and inadequate. Knowledge of various theories and interpretations by several thinkers would help us to make sense of our experience and our social world. Therefore, I started off this research with collecting several materials concerning variety of issues related to education and society. Interesting and relevant literature enabled me to understand how hegemony is operating in/through the educational system.

Initial reading gave a good understanding of the complexity of issues regarding hegemony and the present system of education and schooling. Later on, to understand the resistance, I relied majorly on literature related to educational alternatives proposed by some of the prominent philosophers, radical educationists and thinkers. Moreover, to get a holistic understanding of the problem, I did not narrow down the reading materials only to the areas of education and sociology, but rather I explored a wide variety of subjects. To be honest, many of my insights came not while I was reading academic books; but when I was engaging with the so-called “non-

academic”- a poem or a work of fiction, books on philosophy, posters, casual conversations with friends and some lectures. So sometimes I wondered, how do I include all of these in Reference and Bibliography?

Theoretically, alternative educational ideologies look very interesting and promising, but without a closer look of practices at the ground level, the research would lose the essential flavor of reality. Therefore, field work in select alternative schools became inevitable.

Point of Arrival at These Schools

Excitement began as I was searching for some of the alternative schools. I undertook an intense and hectic pilot study in which I visited eight alternative schools in South India and finally, I narrowed down to two schools for the purpose of this research. Initially, it was very difficult and confusing to choose among the list of schools, but as I visited, it became clearer. The decision to work only on two schools and not many was necessary because of the in-depth study I intended to do and of course, only one school seemed too less. Clearly, the interest here was not to list out all the varieties of alternative schools and also to not to make a comparison between these schools either.

Many reasons carried me to choose the two schools among the eight I visited. Apart from the practicality aspects like seeking permission and accommodation, I can cite a few interesting observations that helped me to decide on these two schools. Orientation towards philosophy, nature, eco-friendly environment and child-centered curriculum attracted me. A system without examination and certification surprised me and the social implications it intended to create drew my attention. Also, the fact that spiritual progress was accorded priority on top of all physical and material progress and the kind of relation it made with education fascinated me. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education (hereafter referred as “Ashram School”) in Pondicherry became my first choice.

The second place I landed in was Sholai School in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu. Situated in the lush green forests, surrounded with beautiful mountains and a river cutting across, this school drew my attention. With scattered buildings among the greenery, a curriculum drawn close to nature and a friendly student-teacher relation, it didn't resemble a typical school. Therefore, I couldn't resist to choose this school. This

became the second school to explore and understand the relation it is trying to build with nature, education and life.

It was not easy to get permission in these schools. Writing several emails and personally visiting these schools few times conveyed the seriousness and interest I have in understanding their system of education. I also understood the pressure they have and issues that arise from a large number of visitors visiting the school for various purposes. The schools therefore, feel the need to protect children, teachers and the management from this pressure created by visitors.

Ashram School



(Photo credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

I initially started my field work at Ashram school in February 2013. Since, I could not find accommodation inside the school hostel, I resided in a rented house close to the main school campus (around 200 m distance). This option gave a relatively easy access to the school. Also, different sections of the school are not contained in a single campus- Kinder Garden, Primary, Main School and College are scattered, yet not far (within half kilometer radius). School is situated close to Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the popularity therefore, has brought lot of visitors to the Ashram as well as the school (though they strictly avoid casual visitors). Four months of stay in

Pondicherry and regular visits to this school gave a good understanding of their system of education, ideology and practices.

I arrived at the second school (Sholai School) in Kodaikanal in April 2014 and stayed there for the next three months. School provided me accommodation within the campus, a separate room in one of the boys' hostel (Rose wood). As the accommodation was provided to me within this residential school, it was easy to be part of the school culture. There were totally around 52 children and 12 teachers (as on 12/5/2014) in the school and this minimal strength allowed me to move closely with most of them. And no restrictions on talking to children, teachers and other staff members made the interactions smooth, easy and comfortable. The entire school is situated within a huge single campus (100 acres) with a major part of it dedicated to farming and forest cover. The school building is scattered across the place (covering 35 acres). Surrounded by mountains, trees and plants, this place arouses sensibility towards nature automatically.

School Amidst Nature



(Photo Credit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kwalityfotos/130672500>)

Subjective Participants

The existence of the school itself is an 'objective' fact. Its structural component, managerial activities, everyday transactions, and the actors (meaning everyone on campus including children, teachers and staff) participation becomes an objective

reality. Yet we cannot deny the social interaction, behavior and intended meanings which form the 'subjective' component of the school and the actors involved. After all, these actors are not passive objects, but active participants in the everyday functioning of the school. They have feelings, beliefs and motives which invariably affect the educational process of the school.

However, in my observation of research papers related to education, the voices of students, teachers and parents generally remain silent. Their participation and voices do not find adequate representation in the research documents and elsewhere. But, without their expression, the study of any educational process becomes skewed and incomplete. This research would, therefore try to present their opinions, interests and experiences, in a way that would imply meaning to their action and participation. Because, their ideology, its implications and their intentions do affect the educational process in a subtle way. Say, for example, the teachers' orientation towards academics and interest in competition, children's aspiration towards success and their interest in technical subjects and parents' desire for status and power do affect the everyday experience in a school which is ideologically oriented towards bringing an inner transformation. Therefore, it is significant to understand the 'subjective' meaning of the participants.

At Ashram School

First few weeks in Pondicherry, I was mainly focused on adapting to the new place, understanding the school premises, and establishing rapport with the children and teachers. One of the office staff in the Ashram School, Gayathri di, helped me initially in getting appointment with some teachers, and other department heads and her brief introduction on the school system helped me to gain an initial grip of the functioning of the school. Not only she helped in research related queries, but also extended her help in finding an accommodation, and making my stay in Pondicherry comfortable. There was a caring touch in her voice that made me feel at home.

I initially was taken aback by the instruction given to me by the Ashram School management to not speak to the school children. I reasoned that the school had a lot of visitors and I understood the disturbance it may create for the students. It was not easy for me to enter the classrooms either; I had to seek permission from the management

and the teachers, though most of them did not avoid my presence in the classrooms. I was strictly asked to not interact with the students either in the classrooms or elsewhere. So, initially, I was majorly relying on observation. But as the days rolled, I found a way to interact with the students without disturbing them.

School curriculum also allows the students to participate in various activities apart from academics. Gardening, embroidery, carpentry, pottery, music & dance, drawing & painting are some of the activities for which children move to different departments which are located near to the school campus. Those extra-curricular classes gave me a scope to talk to children. In fact, I also gradually started learning embroidery, pottery, gardening and some music along with other children. As a result, slowly the 'outsider' anxiety and gap reduced between myself and the students, as well as the teachers. A relationship started to build at a personal level with some of the students.

The total number of teachers in Ashram school was approximately 200 and as the numbers were more, it was difficult to engage with every single teacher. Moreover, most of the teachers are not only involved in teaching, but also into various other activities of Ashram, so they are not always available within the school premises. Also, the intention was not simply to fill the questionnaires, but to have a detailed, intense and regular discussion with the teachers. Therefore, following up every teacher became tedious and also irrelevant. Gradually, I then started talking to some of the academic teachers in their free time. I started meeting them at regular intervals and it gave a scope to discuss various issues relating to school's ideology, its curriculum, and innovative pedagogy. Sometimes a casual talk with them gave an understanding of their orientation towards life, their philosophy, motives, and history.

There was a specific objective behind the selection of teachers for the research purpose. There appeared to me, roughly, three different types of teachers in the school. First type are senior teachers who have been associated with the school for longer periods of time. These are the teachers who were directly guided by the Mother in those days when she was alive. Since this school was started in 1943, there are a lot of senior teachers. I believed, that they would give good amount of information about the system of education in earlier times and also the trajectory of change in values and practices over the period of time. I noticed that most of the senior teachers, who were strongly connected to the ideology of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, were critical of

the present situation in the school. Apart from school magazines, there is hardly any document on the practices of the school in the initial times, therefore the experiences of these senior teachers was of paramount importance to me.

Second set of teachers are newly appointed, but they are school alumnae. These teachers, I believed would uncover the changing cultural landscape of the school and also the challenges the school is facing at present. Third category is also new teachers, but these have studied elsewhere. With these teachers, I wished to get the outsider's perspective of the school and I felt they also would throw light on the issues of children, teachers and school. Therefore, I decided to engage equally with both the senior teachers and junior teachers. Interviews and discussions with different categories of teachers gave various perspectives regarding the school, its philosophy, changing scenario of the school, its dilemmas and promises.

Total number of students in the schools are 410 (212 boys and 198 girls). Some of the children stay in the school hostel (70), but majority of the students are day scholars. Some of the parents are school alumnae and most of them are from the northern and eastern part of India (West Bengal and Orissa), and they have shifted to Pondicherry for their children's education. Some of them stay away from their working spouse, who works elsewhere, to live with their children. Some of the children use bicycle to commute to school and to other departments. But some of them are dropped and picked up by their parents and guardians. So, I used to stand in front of the school gate to get a chance to talk to parents. Since, there was no other occasion where parents are involved in the school activities, this was the only best option to engage with them. Some of them were very formal, but some were interested in discussing freely and openly.

Not only those who are associated with the school were interviewed, I managed to talk to ashram inmates, senior *sadhaks*³, other staff members, department heads, shop keepers and ordinary people. Their view was also significant in deepening my understanding of the ideology of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the practical issues that bother the school. Normally, I relied on informally structured interviews and discussions with teachers, children and parents, and the questions were generally open-ended. Informal talks with teachers and parents gave an understanding of their

³ Sadhak in spiritual term is a seeker; the one who is yet to reach the Ultimate goal of life.

philosophic orientation towards life. Whereas, conversations with the principal always had a 'formal' tone and there was hardly any information that I could gather from him. But, surprisingly he had no expectation from me regarding sharing my experience of the school, or regarding suggestions from me once my field work is done, or there was any compulsion on me to participate in any of activities of the school or Ashram.

At Sholai School

Here, comparatively, there was good amount of freedom to talk to children, teachers and other staff members. I had got permission from the principal to sit in the class for observation right at the beginning. Because of the freedom to attend the classes and to have conversations with children and teachers, I could get a good understanding of the system of education in the school. Also, the strength of this school being very less compared to Ashram school, it became easy to adjust and understand. I decided to not take any formal responsibility of the school, like taking classes or dining hall duties or supervising evening reading time. I remained an observer throughout.

Initially, the students were little curious to know my position there. I told them clearly that I am not a teacher and I have come to understand their school. At first, they were little uncomfortable about my presence in the school, because I am neither a student of the school nor a teaching staff, which made them wonder about my position in the school. But as the children are used to visitors, they moved freely with me without much inconvenience. Slowly, as I joined them in the classroom, and in other activities like gardening, wood work, hikes and walks to the village, weekend outings, and play time gave me a way for interaction. Even casual talks in the dining hall and in the hostel, where I stayed along with few children brought some of them close to me.

Because of the virtue of staying in the campus, the "outsider" barrier was easily broken. Children engaged with me freely and expressed their views comfortably. The stories about monkeys which visit the hostels often, their favorite games, their personal stories and even gossips brought us close. Slowly, the element of fun and friendship made the relationship intimate. Moreover, a casual talk in the dining hall, playing with the children, and chat during the tea time gave a way to see through the school in a much more detail form, than how it would have been if I had just visited

the school only during working hours. Those informal discussions and talks gave an immense insight into the school and its people.

Except for one teacher, most of them stayed inside the campus. Therefore, there was a good rapport among all the teachers. I think, the less number of teachers (12) also plays a part in this. Some of the teachers could express freely, but some were reluctant to talk beyond the given questions. I also encountered disinterest from some teachers when I wanted to know about their views on school and their experiences. May be, the lack of trust did not allow them to open up. Casual talks during the night, 'get-togethers for fun', participating in farm activities or other obligations with teachers, helped me to get closer to them. Unconsciously, friendship grew over time with some teachers, which made my stay more comfortable. Also, some of the children's comments on teachers' teaching styles and their attitude was easily observable in the classroom setting and in other activities. Watching the students and teachers at various places gave a broader understanding of their nature, interest, feelings and motives.

Not only the teaching staff, but also drivers, manager and other staff members working in the farm, kitchen and wood workshop, became part of the research. Though I did not participate in the academic activity of the school, I had opportunities to be a part of farming activities. As I showed interest in farming, school allotted me a small plot of land for farming, where I grew spinach and beetroot. This was one of the unintended way I became close to the place and its people.

Close and deep observation helped me understand the hidden meaning, dilemmas and conflicts in the school process. This was possible only when I was considered as a part of the school which happened very slowly. Nevertheless, there was always an element of an 'outsider' that crossed once in a while the minds of pupils and the teachers. A fact that deserves special mention here - I was not allowed to attend any of the students' or staff meetings, as they were considered "personal".

As this is a boarding school, children stayed most of the time in the school. Occasionally, parents visited during the weekends or during their children's birthdays. Those were the moments I got to interact with the parents. But this was also a drawback because, I could not get to meet many other parents. Most of them who

visited were from an affluent background. I could not get to meet parents of children who were receiving scholarships. Some of the school workers' children were also studying in the campus. So, I got to speak to them as they were available in the campus itself.

Creative Research: Moving Beyond Boundaries

Formally, Sholai and Ashram school took the major share of my field work, but to admit the truth, I could not confine myself just to this field. As I was going deep in the research, I could see boundaries merging. The questions raised by my niece, the schools I had visited earlier, my own schooling experience and conversations with random people- all found their way to seep in at various times and altered the boundaries of the research. Therefore, it is not fair to just mention these two schools as my field of study. Of course, these schools gave a chance to materialize the battle that was going on in my mind.

Weird questions bothered me, like, what does it mean to research a particular topic? Will it not undermine, exclude the rest of the things that life is offering? Can researching a particular topic transform the rest of the things in my life, as well as in myself? Can living or life itself be researched? The following lines would describes my discomfort, confusion and longing:

*My sick grandmother
Lying in her death bed
How important is this due date?
I sit among books
But, can these pages unfold the mysteries of the mind?
Every night I wonder at the stars.
The infinite stories they tell...
Which dissertation can hold this truth?
How beautifully they are moving,
One by one, searching for food, these ants
How can I ignore their lessons?
How many things can I research,
When everything around me matters?
When birds sing, children play, flowers bloom,
What can I ignore?
While singing a song, or walking in the market or
reading the newspaper,
Can I talk of theories?
What methodology to use, when my friend has a problem
Or when I see the poor on street?*

The openness and creative spirit brought various interesting elements to the research. Initially, I did not have any specific research objective, but a general objective gave a way forward to carry on research in these schools. Therefore, apart from some of the issues raised initially, many issues emerged from the field itself. This attitude gave more scope for the research to grow freely and maturely.

Element of surprise is sometimes necessary in research. We may plan everything- the people we are going to interview, questions we may want to ask, the expected outcome, but life always brings us some surprise. For example, I thought one of the office staff members in the Sri Aurobindo Society would be my key respondent in the initial phase of my research. But as I reached there, I hardly got any appointment with him, as he was busy with many other projects. I had organized several things around him, but then, I had to change the entire plan for him. Even sometimes, we may have a set of questions planned for a respondent, but as we start talking, many of the questions might look irrelevant and unnecessary, and this very person may offer a totally different insight, which we should be ready to receive. To cite one such incident, I wanted to meet one of the senior teachers in the Ashram school who has been teaching since the time of the Mother. So I prepared a set of questions to ask her, but, as I started talking to her, I did not get any relevant information, but she cracked jokes and showered her warmth with a cup of tea. I kept all my pre-decided questions aside and started enjoying jokes and tea. That was the gift I got that day and luckily, I was ready to receive.

The mere intellectual analysis of information gathered, for me, sometimes felt mechanical, whereas the same information, while sitting under a tree or watching the ocean appeared completely different and many interesting insights occurred. These insights were significant and more profound than ordinary intellectual analysis. Maybe, certain truths reveal to us profoundly when we are least expecting them. Those are the moments to be caught, registered and cherished. There, evidences may not fully hold the truth or insight but, the subjective experience has the capacity to bring out insightful thoughts. For me, mindlessly quoting others, gathering percentages of respondents' opinions and mechanical analysis do not count as genuine research, but the deepest experiences and insights which occur sometimes while

reading, or while talking to others or even while being with oneself or in the nature are extremely important.

Apart from executing the research objectives, field work also gave an interesting opportunity for me to discover myself. I understood my interests and my deep longings became clearer. Moreover, I enjoyed throughout, as I also participated in some of the sports activities, and watched games that were conducted regularly in the school. I used to take part in the class activities which were sometimes conducted in the nature. I used to attend their assemblies and sang songs with them. I rediscovered myself while participating in other activities like embroidery, carpentry, pottery and gardening. I too became an active learner.

I had a choice, either I could make the entire research process very serious and 'regular', or I can explore it creatively. I may become an expert in this particular area of research, but not a transformed human being. I may produce an attractive piece of work, but what is the point if it does not touch my inner self. Other choice was to make the entire exercise very inclusive. Along with the area of research, I took life and myself together in the journey. I deeply intended to connect myself with the world outside through this topic of research.

But modern institutions have a typical way of functioning - over specialization, lack of space and mindless occupation with work. We have forgotten to realize many other things that life offers. Work has become so important and the rest has gone to the backstage. We do not give time for many things like, watching the sky, spending time with children, talking to grandmother or to sing and dance. I took several breaks in between. When work gets too heavy and mechanical, I used to stay quiet in the ashram or in the beach, reflecting on mind and life. I used to have retreats until the longing came back.

Reflexivity: Cannot be Silenced

It is important that I understand my personal history which led to my interest in this topic. Only then I can become aware of my biases. I studied in an English medium High school in a town (Tirupur) from the state of Tamil Nadu. The school had a mixture of children belonging to different communities, but most of them were from middle class background. My school gave me good knowledge, ability to read and

write, encouraged all kinds of extra-curricular activities, from sports to drawing, dance, and karate. Yet, mechanical memorizing, discipline, corporal punishments, examinations, homework and mark sheets had taken away the joy of learning. The authority of teachers always created fear, and therefore there was always a huge gap between teachers and students. Standing on the bench, kneeling down on the rough sand under hot sun, uncountable sit-ups and of course, the popular 'stick' that changed our skin colour to black and blue, and writing the same word thousand times are the common punishments that we tolerated. From the time of examination until the announcement of the board exam results, our hearts were constantly under fear and anxiety.

When I look back at my school life barring some concepts and the skills of reading and writing, sadly, I don't remember anything I had studied. For all those years I spent in the school with merciless drill and punishments, all I remember (and I wish to remember) is the time I had fun with friends during sports classes, excursions, and the little moments of joy in classroom. I don't remember the process of photosynthesis, functions of different organs of human body, various gases in atmosphere, all the historical dates and years, and the principles of our constitution. I have forgotten them, not now, but way before, for they majorly stayed only till the exams. To my surprise, all the rituals of schooling then appeared to me as normal, as everyone was going through the same story. All this was uncomfortable and unpleasant, but it seemed legitimate. There was no question that it can be any other way.

All this personal anguish got forcefully expressed in my research. This story is not mine alone, it is the story of many of my friends, relatives and young children. The present school system is even worse, with added pressure for securing marks. However, this critical thinking did not come to me automatically either. Luckily, choosing Sociology as the subject for my higher studies gave scope for critical thinking on various social values and practices. Moreover, the subject allows us to look critically at institutions, their ideologies and practices. The university (JNU) gave me courage to question the established social norms and actions. The implications of questioning were devastating. And my own journey of schooling and education, the hurt, the disappointments, and the damage it had done, all these found their reasons, their voices in this research. I realized that my school resembled not less

than a prison. My own experience of my school days and the ideas of critics and philosophers on schooling and education brought a discontentment in me about the whole system of education, its philosophy, its functioning, its intentions, and its cruelty. Such experiences and thoughts made myself a strong critic of modern day schooling.

Without doubt, throughout my formal education, I have been mainstreamed with all its values and expectations. But not everything was dark. Certain moments of schooling and education gave us hope. One or two teachers who touched our heart, gave us hope for a new future. Their love, kindness, as well as their passion for the subject made us like the subject. Even now, the favorite subject is the one where we must have had an amazing teacher worth remembering. Those teachers gave us hope. Also, visits to some of the alternative schools where education is looked at differently without accepted ways of drills, punishments and examinations, opened up a new possibility. These schools assured me that it is not a completely hopeless situation.

As my mind is conditioned to 'normal' way of educating, these alternative schools initially appeared to me as dreamlands. As I started reading on these schools, and the philosophies they follow, I was fascinated. From the beginning of this research, I had a very positive inclination or a prejudice for the way these "alternative" schools function. And I started out with a lot of positive feelings for these alternative schools. I was aware that, seeing these schools as ideal places for education would become a barrier in identifying the problems or issues within these schools with a great degree of objectivity. Visiting them personally made my position clear- my questions, biases and limits come to the fore. But, by the virtue of staying in the schools for longer periods, I could manage to get different perspectives. To admit the truth, it all looked very rosy in initial days, but gradually a different reality unfolded.

My inclination towards philosophy, the fundamental questions it asks of life, my longing for a different lifestyle, a friendly environment, my affinity to nature, all these might have influenced my decision on these two schools. These might have also influenced how I wondered, the concepts I framed, the books I selected, the style I wrote. But that is where I stand. This exercise to understand the school system may also help understand my choices, priorities, prejudices, dreams and failures. Because, I cannot separate myself from this research. For instance, as I come from a middle -

class background, the voice in the research would have a tinge of this character. Keeping this in mind, I made conscious efforts at various places to overcome this influence. But this is not an attempt to keep my personal and subjective aspect away from the research topic. Rather, this entire research exercise is an attempt to relate subjectivity with objectivity, prose with poetry, and science with art.

Ethics of Care: Need to be Integrated

The physicality of our existence as well as our social structure is very limited. Me being born as a girl, in a particular family, in Tamil Nadu and in a Backward Caste is not my choice. These factors are very limiting, in the sense that, I cannot go through what others in their own limited structure go through. But this limitation does not stop me from getting close to a girl belonging to Scheduled Tribe from Manipur. What is it in me that lets me move beyond my limited boundaries and feel along with her when she talks about the ongoing struggle in her place? Even in my everyday experience, am I not constantly entering into the realm of ‘other’, like, while reading newspaper, hearing about earthquake in Japan? So, the boundaries of “otherness” are constantly being challenged and broken. Though it is challenging, that is the only way to move deeper, for people are not numbers to be manipulated and calculated. We are living people with feelings, interest, dreams, fears and hopes.

Our preoccupation with “value-neutrality” and “objectivity” in research have damaged the sense of feeling and care for others. For instance, in Sholai School, there was an incident of theft and a female student was caught guilty. Initially, I was interested in understanding the school’s response to such a crisis and also the dynamics of students’ interaction. This entire issue made the girl disheartened and defeated. But in the whole process of getting information for my research from her, I completely ignored her feelings. It was only later I realized my ignorance. For a whole day, I couldn’t think of anything else than this. This incident affected me and I remained silent for a few days. Nevertheless, I constantly made efforts to let go my preoccupation with research and allowed feelings and care to emerge.

Lipi di is a teacher in Ashram School who is genuinely interested in nature, plants and trees. She regularly visits the farm which is around 10 km away from the Ashram. I used to accompany her to the farm for two reasons. One, I would get an opportunity to

talk to her at length as well as to the children who come there for their farming class. Two, my interest in nature drew me closer to the farm. On a particular day, I heard that her brother expired the day before. I felt bad, but how do I react? Should I stay away from her as the purpose of my relationship with her is primarily research? Or, should I empathize with her out of the friendly relation we had built over the past few weeks? Though empathizing does not serve any direct purpose for my research, I decided to make a visit to her residence. I attended the evening prayer she had organized in her brother's memory. I sat next to her and she touched my hands. Suddenly, my 'otherness' vanished. Her world came close to me now.

For a researcher, number of questions and formal discussions are important, but they have a deep-rooted selfishness, for they ignore feelings, experiences, joy and suffering of the respondents. I was talking to an ex-student of the Ashram school and I had some questions in my mind. As we started talking, I realized that I was only bothered about getting answers to my questions from her. I didn't expect anything else from her. I didn't care much about her feelings. It was all quite mechanical. I was so bothered and conscious about my questions. I was trying to put a fake 'caring' attitude. No matter how much I tried, at that moment, I could not overcome this attitude. After she left, I realized how my training in objective research limited me from feeling truly for her. It is more convenient to see people as mere respondents without giving any importance to their feelings. Our effort to avoid biases has damaged our basic human sensibilities.

Sometimes, crossing the boundaries of a researcher helps in bonding with the respondents. One of the respondents was a student from the Ashram school who passed out of Knowledge (college) in 2012. She was preparing for an entrance examination for admission into higher studies. In one of the interviews I had with her, she expressed her fear of exams and future. For a moment, I could understand what she must be going through, as I also had gone through the same phase during my studies. I could empathize with her exam-related anxiety. After listening, I shared my story and gave a few words of encouragement to her. I could sense some relief in her face.

Academic research has become majorly a mental exercise with a lot of planning, analysis and calculation: preparing questions, fixing themes, and making hypothesis.

We have completely forgotten that there are other faculties that can also help in approaching an issue- like intuition, psychic suggestion and empathy. If such faculties are included, then one needs to have a different methodology like listening to one's own heart, giving way for feelings and empathy. The research should enable the researcher to bring the subject of research closer to his/her life. By studying the other, I am also studying myself. My existence has no meaning without the presence of the other. And, one of the ways to move from oneself to the other is through empathy.

Researcher, by the virtue of staying in the place for a long period, builds a close relationship with the participants. Gradually, they start sharing their 'secrets' and of course with a request to not share them with others. The secret world includes their private life, comments on other staff members, attitudes towards principal, towards crucial decisions and some conspiracies. I found a dilemma whether to use such 'secrets' in the research or to conceal them because of the trust that grew in the relationship. Though I moved out of the school, I was caught between the roles of a researcher and trusted friend. As I struggled with this, I was able to draw a mid-line where I could derive the meaning of complex social interactions, without disturbing the trust they have on me in revealing their secrets.

Dialogic Understanding: A Meaningful Approach

Research is generally the researcher's interpretation. Her history, ideology, intention and experience come in the way of interpreting the social world. We, as researchers may speak of our understanding through the respondents. But what we generally miss is the real voice of the respondents. The researcher therefore needs to listen, understand and comprehend the world of the respondents, and see where their personal history, their educational qualifications, their social milieu, and their orientation towards life differ. Therefore, a researcher needs to be sensitive and let the two worlds with different experiences meet.

A researcher is usually preoccupied with getting relevant information from the field. Initially, I just wanted to get as much information as possible, so I wrote down everything they said and I felt some rudeness in my approach. While talking to them, I was hardly sharing my observation or insight to their comments or my understanding of the issue, because that is "not" necessary, as long as I get the

information. But, how are the respondents going to benefit from this research? I may get information from them, but can I also participate in the dialogue?

A dialogic understanding enriches the research, researcher, as well as the respondents with the insights that emerge out of the dialogue. The long stay in each school gave an opportunity for building intimate bond with the children, teachers and other staff members. One of the benefits of living closely to people in a school is the possibility of having a dialogue. A casual conversation can sometime change into a dialogue, when both the researcher and the respondent are exploring the same issue by keeping themselves open for change. For instance, I was talking to a teacher in the Ashram school regarding 'the changing role of school in the present times'. We had our own baggage of ideas, but as we started exploring together, something new emerged. We both felt surprised and enriched by the insight. Such dialogic understanding is possible not only with the respondents, but also with oneself or when one is with the nature. Such a dialogue can bring out something tremendously significant and new.

Similar experience occurred when I was sitting on the beach and looking at the waves. As I was busy the whole day talking to teachers and some students, the issues which we discussed kept coming up in my mind. I was unable to comprehend the issues completely. I kept looking at the waves, the vast ocean and the bright sky. The nature hijacked me completely for a while. Suddenly, an insight came and then, I was able to understand the issues that bothered me.

The entire field work experience was not only helpful in collecting information, but it was also an enriching personal experience with philosophy, school activities and the people involved. Cultural events, musical nights, and movie shows are some of the events I used to not miss in the Ashram school. Also, regular meditation and quiet time at Samadhi in the Ashram gave a different meaning to my work and life. And of course, the morning sunrise and evening walk at Pondicherry beach enriched my stay. Also, nature surrounding the Sholai School kept my mind and heart fresh. The sound of the birds, the chillness of the hills, the flowing stream and the silent greenery took me close to my inner self.

Writing the Manuscript: A Creative Journey

The one thing that I felt very important is that there cannot be a single hard rule that will apply to everyone. Generally it is believed that consistency is important while writing, but it is not a hard and fast rule, because sometimes good insight comes out when we take a break and go back to the same topic after a long gap. Many times, I had drew up plans to write consistently, but I successfully failed in executing them. One of the reason for this failure could be that the system wants outcome of the research in a specific format. Any other method of expression is not allowed. Dance, music, painting, and poems are not considered as valid forms of expression. The language in this document is not very ‘academic’, but it cannot be put it into a category either. I didn’t want to avoid occasional poetry, personal stories and pictures that expressed more than the official text.

This document explains the process of my research and the insights gained, keeping honesty alive. Many insights came not while I was prepared for the interview, but while I was sitting in the beach looking at the beautiful sea or while talking to a friend or while reading a poem. Certain things worked according to the plan, but many good insights came while things were unplanned or in a completely different setting. Even some of the finest learnings in this research happened unexpectedly, and naturally. This made me wonder whether, learning can be so strictly planned for children.

The spirit of reading and writing was not always constant, it was mixed with fear and anxiety. Sometimes we work continuously because of the university ‘ritual’ to complete a course within a period of time. Also, at times, it is very difficult to confine to the structure of writing as per the university rules. It hampers the creativity. It prevents free flow of thoughts. Many times, I have noticed the pressure on my mind about the number of pages I have to cover, the list of “legitimate” books that I have to refer, the objective, value-neutral “academic” style of writing I have to follow. It really blocked my mind and document initially turned out to be very plain and mechanical. With regret and pain, I stopped writing for some time. The pages I wrote before with enormous reference and proper style, looked strange, dull and distant. It is only then I started letting the words pour from my heart that I could start writing freely and effortlessly. To my surprise, though I didn’t follow the standard pattern, what was written had some life. It was like a real story that included myself and established meaningful connection with the school, society and life.

CHAPTER-I

PROBLEMATISING THE DOMINANT PRACTICES OF EDUCATION

We are generally unaware of how hegemony of the dominant class act and alter our everyday experiences. As we have already seen, the process of hegemony is not through force, but by winning the consent from the subordinate class by influencing our commonsense. Therefore, one of the main objective of this research is to identify the ways in which dominant ideologies influence our commonsense and also, to identify the complex process of negotiation and consent in the context of school education.

Increased dependency on institutions, legitimization of selective knowledge, prevailing social inequalities, conceit of western colonialism, growing number of industries and consumerism are not disconnected events, they are linked to the system of education. Hence, how all these have been influencing our school system and thereby, our commonsense, becomes our major concern in this chapter. These are also the unscrupulous ways through which hegemony gets established in schools and society.

2.1. Politics of Legitimized Knowledge

Knowledge is something that is basic to any culture, society and individual. To understand things and events, we require knowledge, that is provided by society. As we are born, we are unaware of the knowledge about the sun, stars, trees, plants, family, occupation, god, etc. Gradually we learn about them through different means like family, neighborhood, religion, and majorly schools. And for a meaningful living, knowledge becomes necessary. Therefore, schools and other educational institutions become immensely important.

However, what is learnt in school is not simple and unproblematic. Schools teach us about things like how electricity runs through wire, chemical composition of various liquids, changing landscapes, process of evaporation and solar eclipse. But it will not teach us about relationships, the reason for our suffering and the purpose of our living. These do not enter the school curriculum, because only some knowledge becomes 'legitimate' and 'official'. For example, William Shakespeare's famous work "Macbeth", appears in school books as a legitimate knowledge, but a beautiful work of a local poet may not enter our textbooks, as not all knowledge are considered legitimate. Even the description of our human body in our biology book is according to the western concept, but the native system of medicine like Ayurveda and Siddha do not even getacknowledged. Now, we may wonder, "Why make some knowledge alone legitimate but not others?"

Knowledge as a Tool for Hegemony

Above all, we have to understand that, the process of legitimization of selective knowledge is highly a political act, because normally, there is an inherent power to anything "legitimate"; it is "unquestionable". Once the legitimacy is established, we accept its authority and thereby, allow it to influence our commonsense. In the context of school, only certain knowledge gains legitimacy and not all. And these legitimate knowledge are generally in line with the ideology of the dominant class. Therefore, legitimate knowledge becomes an effective tool for the dominant class for establishing hegemony in the society. Therefore, hegemony prevails not only in the form of police or military force or through various agencies of law enforcement, but also in the school text and the selection of its knowledge. For instance, as our society

is divided based on caste, class, religion, gender and other endless sub-divisions; school knowledge can be used as an effective tool to maintain this structure.

We may wonder, why manipulate school knowledge? Because, only if the children from the young age are manipulated, the process of hegemony becomes easier and smoother. As the children are young, they may not pose threat to the existing pattern of dominance, because young children may not understand the complexity that goes behind the making of textbooks and syllabus; it easily could convince them. As they grow, they may become a threat because of their ability to think critically. Their capacity for complex thinking develops, so they need enough justification and therefore, it becomes necessary to manipulate the syllabus based on social and cultural values. By politicising the school knowledge, children are prepared to accept the established norms and values. So, they are effectively disabled to question its legitimacy. That is the reason why, legitimising curriculum becomes necessary, says Micheal Apple, one of the eminent educationists;

“there needs to be continuous and increasingly sophisticated justification for acceptance of the distinction and the social rules they learnt earlier. This justification needs to set the ideological limits of such thinking by embodying ‘appropriate’ ways in which students can begin to reason through the logic of why the institutions and the culture they interact with every day are in fact legitimate” (Apple, 1979, p. 83).

It is through this process of legitimisation, students tend to take anything given as normal, agreeable and valid. Even inequality, discrimination, violence and competition are normalized. Gradually, students tend to accept the unequal, violent and competitive society. This is how, hegemony slowly enters their subjective world and becomes a part of their reality.

Misplaced Emphasis

However, while problematizing the school system, we are mostly concerned about the enrollment, retention, dropouts, capital punishments, learning outcomes, pass percentage, but school curriculum and the knowledge selection does not appear problematic. What looks challenging are the performance level and outcome. But the issue here is, while we focus on the learning outcome, we may forget to notice the problem with the content of curriculum itself. Schools represent ‘popular’ culture and

that culture may not be a part of every students' life. For instance, a student from rural background or the one belonging to a tribal community may be excellent in identifying plants and tree types and its characteristics, but what is given in the textbook is not how she relates to plants. Therefore, she finds it impersonal and irrelevant. The book fails to represent her culture and knowledge to which she belongs. So, how is it possible to get equal participation and uniform results when some children are unable to relate to what they are studying to their life, or some may not be inclined at all?

Moreover, there is a lot of curriculum research happening to find out 'how better or easier to deliver the subject matter to students and additionally, some research goes on to find out 'what best ways students learn and therefore create a better learning environment'. No doubt, these are areas of serious concern, but we have completely ignored to question the content of curriculum like, 'Whose knowledge is it?' Without such inquiry, curriculum presumes to be neutral and objective. It tends to undermine the social, political, and economic complexities behind it. Current policies almost neglect or ignore the question on knowledge selection. Their emphasis is mainly on learners' outcome, learning styles, career-oriented curriculum. We also take school knowledge for granted. That is the reason why, Apple contested saying, learning tends to be "apolitical and ahistorical, thus hiding the complex nexus of political and economic power and resources that lie behind a considerable amount of curriculum organization and selection"(Apple, 1979, p. 29). By hiding the complexities and conflicts, it becomes easy for establishing legitimacy on selective knowledge.

Textbooks: An Effective Tool for Legitimacy

School textbooks contain selective knowledge and does not allow all kinds of knowledge. Those knowledge which enters the textbooks become legitimate and therefore, "powerful". But, a meaningful novel or a short story, magazines and comics cannot enter the classroom. They are "not" considered legitimate. That is the reason why, being 'serious' and 'studious' always means reading textbooks and not other books. Whereas, the way textbooks are presented makes children dull, passive and uninterested. It does not make them active and vibrant. Schools have made textbooks more sacred; children use it every day to read and write, but they do not engage with it meaningfully. Words and sentences have become too rigid. They are

repeated without any meaning. Without creative engagement with the textbooks, the words have become dead, but an 'evil dead', because it scares them, dominates them and controls them. The heaviness of its legitimacy has made textbooks their enemies. For children, it is something to be avoided. I remember when I was in primary class (do not remember the exact grade) on the last day of our final examination, we tore and burnt our textbooks. Why did we do it and what does it signify?

Often in the textbooks, we come across description of various topics without any sense of wonderment, ecstasy and joy. It simply states the facts and descriptions. For instance, if we see a description of atoms, electricity, numbers and human history, there is no element of wonderment. The sentences are not poetic and do not evoke any sense of wonderment. To cite a few from school textbooks;

“The biosphere is the living part of the planet, consisting of oceans and land surfaces where moisture and temperature conditions are suitable for life. It is composed of many ecosystems.”

“Pollination- flowering plants need fertilizations before they can produce seeds. This involves the transfer of pollen from the anthers to the stigma in flowering plants...flowers that rely upon insects for pollination have adapted in ways that improve their chances of successful pollination by insects, for example by having a strong scent or brightly coloured petals or by producing nectar”(Mackean D. , 2002).

Textbooks, especially Science, simply convey the facts; not the wonders and mysteries about life. The language is plain and is not rhythmic. The process of pollination in plants has been described with facts, but it lacks to build the ability to wonder at the intelligence of plants to create beautiful and attractive flowers and their whole process of reproduction. But, why is the language so plain? Can it not be described poetically with the wonderment of life? Is it possible to engage with children creatively and make them realize that books are not dead, but they can be brought alive!

Moreover, what is given in social science textbooks could be biased. The same historical event of 'partition,' is interpreted differently in India and Pakistan. India blames Pakistan, and in return, Pakistan finds fault with India. The history books in a particular country carry selective facts and events that would justify their interpretation. Even the stereotyped gender ideology gets expressed in the school text,

that women would always be associated with taking care of their children or household activities, whereas, men are depicted as the active bread winner of the family, even though the social situations are changing.

Nevertheless, educationists have been keen on reforming textbooks. It has been an attraction for policy makers too. Many changes have been made to make textbooks more inclusive, socio-politically sensitive and also creative. Although, such reforms are encouraging, but it appears that textbooks are not the problem in itself, rather the whole system. The way it has been used and exploited creates the problem. Out of the school context, textbook appears simple, and informative, but when placed within the system, it becomes heavy and repulsive. But, instead of perceiving textbooks as sacred, legitimate and rigid, it should be easily questionable and made flexible. Because, when it dominates, it loses life, love, and care. It merely becomes a mechanical and ruthless display of power in papers that enters our consciousness gradually. It decides what we ought to think, speak, and act. Moreover, if textbooks provoke students, they can become a threat to the established values of society. It, therefore, restricts our freedom and becomes an effective tool for hegemony.

Power in Classification

Not to blame the textbooks per say, but the knowledge it represents. It is not uniform; it is classified and hierarchized. A typical school timetable will tell us the relationship between classification of various subjects and their respective status and power. Not all subjects receive same status and authority. Some subjects are given more hours compared to others. Drawing and sports classes are only once in a week, but maths, language, science and social science occupies the major share of the school timetable. For Basil Bernstein, such classification and framing of various subjects is a “social fact”(Bernstein, 1971, p. 49).It is, therefore, important to understand the ‘myth’ of classification and ‘mystery’ of correlation between subjects.

Each subject has built a boundary which distinguishes it from the rest of the subjects. Maths cannot be science; a scientific experiment cannot become a part of social science class or an art class. There is a clear distinction. Each subject is strongly insulated from the other. However, the nature of such classification is highly a political act. Because it does not care about the content, but about maintaining the

boundary between contents, says Bernstein(1971, p. 50). For instance, a teacher cannot easily use poem in a maths class or a science class; art cannot be done in a social science class; even personal problems do not enter in a formal classroom. They are all different and the boundary between them are strong and clear.

As the classification of subjects is considered common and inevitable, Bernstein reminds us of the danger in creating a strong boundary between subjects. Such classification may create strong identities, which in turn may make the teachers powerful than students, regarding decisions over ‘what’ to teach and ‘when’ and ‘how’ to teach. Also, the teacher would have less power over the curriculum as the boundaries are very strong. Any attempt to weaken the boundary may create a threat to one’s identity. A science teacher enjoys her power and status because the subject is well insulated and protected. She cannot enter into the domain of social science for it may pose a threat to her identity as a science teacher.

Though classification helps in specialization, it also creates strong identities. Such identities damage our consciousness. We tend to see the world in compartments. Life would, therefore, appear in fragments. Plants become a subject matter only in botany, but not in history or philosophy. Numbers indicates math and not art and Bernstein calls this as “alienation”.He says, “the stronger the classification and the framing, the more the educational relationship tends to be hierarchical and ritualized, the educandseen as ignorant, with little status and few rights”(Bernstein, 1971, p. 60).But, life seems to present itself not in fragments; everything is relative so as the boundaries between the subjects which are weak and permeable.

Moreover, everyday knowledge does not enter the school curriculum, not only because of the heavy insulation between subjects, but also between the overall school knowledge and commonsensical everyday knowledge. It stays “out of focus” and ignored. As Berstein attempts to distinguish school knowledge or curriculum from commonsenseknowledge and understanding which pupil or students bring to school.He says, “the frames of collection code, very early in the child’s life, socialize him into knowledge frames which discourage connections with everyday realities, or that there is ahightly selective screening of the collection”(Bernstein, 2003, p. 166).By establishing such clear distinction, between subjects and also with the everyday

commonsense, our life seem to look fragmented and disconnected, therefore it becomes easy to operate hegemony.

Economic Hegemony and School Knowledge

We cannot ignore the possible relation of school knowledge with the economic values of society. When the society is majorly oriented towards economic development, schools do shape its curriculum accordingly. The content of curriculum, the underlying ideology, and the relationship between teachers and students tend to shape itself around economic values. Hence, board exams become necessary, not for the children to learn essential concepts, but for them to get good marks, which eventually would get them jobs. When society wants to increase economic production and maximization of products through technology, then what is taught in the school should enable the students to become a part of this process. It has to be done in such a way that all the social and political conflicts underlying the curriculum are hiddenaway, so that, the agenda becomes more legitimate, natural and neutral. Apple calls this agenda as “inner logic” which will eventually “set the limits, the constitutive rules that will become our common sense” (Apple, 1979, p. 102).

Knowledge is not simple; some knowledge is powerful, prestigious, popular and acquire high status compared to others. All subjects do not hold the same value and the values are in line with the division of labor and hierarchy of occupation. Science, Mathematics and very recently Commerce, Accountancy and Computer Science are considered ‘high-status’ subjects, whereas, subjects like Arts, History, and other Social Sciences are considered ‘lower’ in the hierarchy. Similarly, professions like doctor, engineer, scientists enjoy high status in the society, whereasteacher, gardener, musician, and artist belong to the lower end. The demand for any profession in society alters the preference for the respective subjects in the school.

Moreover, young students in the higher classes are unable to question the choice of subjects available to them, selected information in textbooks and career options. As they grow, they have gradually internalized the social and economic capital of different subjects and occupations. They know the difference between pursuing an Engineering or Information Technology course and taking up a Social Science course in higher class, not regarding the content, but regarding the cultural and economic

burden. Consider the case where people are ready to pay in lakhs and crores to courses like Medical Sciences, Engineering, and Information Technology. Whereas, subjects like History, Sociology, Fine Arts and related topics costs less and therefore, the demand is also less. It is no more a surprise to read news like, “MBBS fees double in Tamil Nadu, to now be Rs. 2 crores”, “Engineering course for 50 lakhs in top colleges”(We are literally selling education!).This decides the future of children, their interest, and choices. Therefore, children choose science over arts, for they are afraid that it may not fetch them any job and also it is not a popular and prestigious choice.

When the selection of knowledge itself is corrupt, then the process of transmission of this ‘powerful’ knowledge would be no less sane. Those who possess this knowledge would also possess the power; the power that differentiates between others. It is easy to identify which knowledge is powerful; the differential amount for various subjects and also by the demand for those subjects. Science enjoys the power and it gives power to those who possesses it. Whereas, Arts and Social Sciences are devoid of this hegemonic power; the power that misleads and misinterprets our life. Such hegemony would undermine diversity and possibilities. Arts, Social Science and Humanities would lose its rigour. Moreover, mindlessly equating education to the economic structure would undermine its creative potential and narrow down its possibilities.

Social Hegemony and National Curriculum

The formal School curriculum is not only influenced by economic values, but also by social values which socializes children for an unequal and hierarchical society. As famous social scientist Preire Bourdieu mentioned about the ‘cultural capital’ which school possesses, acts as an effective filtering agent for the reproduction of a hierarchical society. According to him, the cultural capital of one group is imposed on all the children belonging to various groups(Bourdieu, 1977).Ironically, this process is considered neutral and apolitical, and therefore hierarchy and inequalities it reproduces are legitimized. As our society is already hierarchized based on the division of labor, schools with its political and economic agenda behind the selection of curriculum fill these positions and therefore, reproduces inequality. Caste tensions, religious conflicts, poverty and the school curriculum are not discrete; they are directly linked to each other.

The point of argument is, a single neutral curriculum for the entire country undermines the socio-economic differences that persist in our society. When the society is unequal, then providing national curriculum would further damage the people belonging to socially underprivileged and minority groups. Not only the curriculum, but also “national testing” would strengthen the division and reproduce the existing inequality in the society. Standardization of national curriculum may invariably dismiss and ignore other possible knowledge. In the name of ‘improving’ standards, we may miss representing the knowledge system where everyone gets included. Like, “A” is for “Apple” and can never be an “Ant”. Whereas, for a child who is from a village, would easily identify with “Ant” than “Apple”, but the standard national curriculum does not identify with her knowledge, because the curriculum is considered to be of ‘better’ standard only if it includes selective knowledge belonging to a dominant group. It is obvious who is going to benefit out of this, and the rest is automatically going to suffer exclusion.

In the name of uniform standard curriculum, we are misleading ourselves to an unequal, discriminatory and violent society. We have already forgotten agriculture, traditional arts and the spirit of ancient Indian education that are now preserved only in old movies and museums. Our ‘modern’ curriculum do not entertain these aspects. The present national curriculum puts an end to the traditional family based knowledge system and promises a highly competitive technical future. Finally, one ends up in a job which is alien, competitive and unknown and more importantly, one loses in touch with what was already familiar. A farmer’s son competes hard to get a corporate job, which he is unfamiliar with and in addition to it; he has no knowledge of the land he belongs to, its plants, and birds. It is a ‘double’ drop down.

Therefore, one can say, that national curriculum acts as a hegemony to reproduce unequal society. Because, in a complex heterogeneous society like ours, it is unfair to dispense a standard uniform curriculum for all. It is against the agenda of unity. Unity is not in following something uniformly. It is to allow differences and alternatives. It is unfair and unjust to expect all the students from various socio-economic background to follow the same curriculum content. Similarly, a common curriculum for Richard Johnson, “in a heterogeneous society, is not a recipe for “cohesion,” but for the resistance and renewal of division”(Apple, 1979, p. 231). It is not only the

content of the syllabus that is divisive, but also its language and the medium of instruction. Therefore, it is oppressive.

Hidden Curriculum

So far, we spoke about curriculum as represented in the school textbooks which are largely 'manifest' in nature. The school also has a latent/hidden curriculum. Manifest are like mathematics which appear neutral, but the inherent meaning of profit and loss, gendered ideology (always men sell and women buy) cannot be avoided. But the latent curriculum is always hidden from the surface. Like, Science in school becomes a dominant ideology in the techno-corporate world. A professor would choose to teach in college or institution which will pay him more salary. These things are commonly hidden from the surface, because it may arouse conflict.

Overtly, the curriculum may appear very plain, neutral and objective, but it hides the conflict that is boiling under the system. Also, there is conflict in every sphere of our life. Conflict is natural in a society that is based on injustice, inequality and violence, but the conflict is also what helps us grow and mature. However, we tend to give a very negative connotation to conflict; it is not about fighting and killing or hurting each other. When society is unequal, where one group dominates the other, then conflict is bound to arise. To simply avoid conflict is to accept inequality.

Without conflict, we would not have given up sati, child marriage and other social problems even now. Conflict gave us strength, courage and intelligence to oppose, resist, reform and reject social values. It changed our society. Even the scientific community would not have progressed if they were not faced with challenges and conflicts. Conflict challenges the existing order, values and knowledge. It makes us progress. However, school curriculum hides this kind of conflict from students (Apple, 1979, p. 90). The conflict that may arise in the issues like power relation (between a higher authority and teachers), selection of the content of syllabus, time limit for completing syllabus, external pressures and so on are hidden from the students. Children learn to believe that everything is normal, equal, and peaceful; when it is not. Through curriculum, children are mentally informed, but if the emotional aspect of challenge and conflict are concealed from their experience, then there is no

possibility of action and change. We may end up creating mechanical and emotionally-dead individuals.

Moreover, our curriculum does not make us politically, intellectually and morally active, because it fears the real conflict it may have to face. It makes the individuals very passive, dull and scared. For instance, the school syllabus would teach us about political struggle, environmental issues, gender inequality and religious unrest, but it creates emotional detachment from the subject of study. The attempt to make it “objective” kills any natural action that it can provoke. As Apple calls it “vulgar objectivity,” which may lead to “detachment from political commitment”(Apple, 1979, p. 89). Often in the classrooms, we read and discuss deforestation, urban development, and environmental degradation, but we rarely come out of the class and plant trees. The hidden agenda is not to make us proactive and intelligent, but inactive, submissive and repetitive. Otherwise, if education makes us brilliant and creative, then it has to bear the consequences of change; the change in social values, our thoughts and actions. While the school is meant to maintain the order, socializing the values and norms and reproduce the same kind of society which believes in inequality, discrimination and violence, then producing intelligent and creative minds is dangerous, because it may disturb, create conflict and herald change.

Whereas, hidden agendas and internal conflict are the undercurrent of various social institutions. It is conflict which exposes the internal hidden struggle. It comes to the surface. Therefore, it disturbs us; it makes us restless. At the very sight of it, we want to escape. However, that is what can liberate us from the ongoing struggle. It will display the ugliness of the power, hegemony and violence. It gives us another chance to rethink, act and change the existing order. It has the possibility to liberate us from the chain of bondage, fear and self-centeredness. It makes us listen to others, their situations, interests, ideas, and actions. It makes us humble and receptive. Whereas, hegemony prevents conflict to reach the surface and thereby, keep people perpetually in the state of darkness.

2.2. Danger in Institutionalization

Often we find, debates on ‘what’s worth learning?’ and ‘how to teach better?’. However, as we ponder on these issues, our imagination is restricted to schools or other educational institutions. That is, ‘learning’ directly implies school building, tables, textbooks, black/white board, teachers, children and youngsters. Implicitly, ‘serious’ learning does not mean a retired bank employee spending few hours a day, reading books on philosophy and astronomy, or a child running after butterflies in the garden, or a 12 year old girl sitting next to her grandmother in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in a cancer hospital, or a homemaker sitting under a tree and writing poem... Frankly, most of us would feel weird and uncomfortable to call these as learning, because learning denotes ‘schools’, ‘colleges’ and ‘universities’ and one cannot escape imagining young children without textbooks, tables, exams, assignments, teachers, timetable and so on.

We (society) have clearly demarcated and segregated learning regarding space and time. Created separate institutions and imagined that these are the only places where learning can happen and also that, it can only happen within 21 years of age (but thanks to higher education, it has extended up to 25, 30 years of age). However, there is a danger in this imagination. It has already made other institutions, places and situations devoid of any possibilities to learn or to put it simply, anything that happens outside the school walls cannot be called as learning.

Institutionalization gradually undermines other possibilities and avenues. Such hegemony does not free people, but it enslaves them within the institutions and deprives them of other options. It makes people believe that it is difficult/impossible to live or even dream life without institutions. Not only education that suffers from institutionalization, but also other aspects such as health, economy, family, religion, etc.

Myth of Learning: School is the Only Place

Learning happens everywhere, but schools have been considered as an exclusive place for learning. It does occur in schools, but to completely accept that learning happens only in schools and colleges is a problem to be deliberated upon. It has created a huge

damage to be repaired. Though it is a well-defined, concrete structure, it is necessary to ponder on what is happening inside the school. At the same time, it is also essential to see what goes on outside the school; where exactly learning is happening and what conditions make it conducive for learning and if learning is what we are concerned about?

Firstly, not everything is learnt in school. To discriminate colors while playing games, learning to fly a kite, taking care of grandparents, cooking for the family, looking after siblings, watching butterflies that visit garden, counting the type of cars that run on roads, riding bicycles, playing and moreover learning a language- all these learnings happen generally outside the school. It does not require a well trained professional to teach all these, but a typical everyday life with parents, siblings, peer group and elders would take care of it. However, schools and other educational institutions have constantly been making its students feel that learning happens only in a formal institution and anything beyond the institutional walls is not considered as learning or worth learning. It has discredited other forms of learning. So, the individual is prevented from exploring other forms of learning. Therefore, anything that happens outside is taken for granted. For instance, if someone is begging on the street, I am only bothered just to drop a rupee, but I do not see a possibility to learn from it, to look at the problem deeply and understand from it. Within the institutional framework, words do not carry life, so we become easily insensitive to our surroundings and of course towards life itself.

Secondly, learning starts in school and ends with school or college. No other institutions (family, work, religion) are responsible for our education. We cannot forget to mention Ivan Illich, who time and again reminded us about this danger. His concern is that,

“All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society: school is recognized as the institution which specializes in education...school appropriates money, men and goodwill available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks”(Illich, 1971, p. 15).

No wonder parents, relatives or managers do not feel responsible for our learning. Whatever is being learnt with them is merely accidental, because they leave it entirely in the hands of teachers and schools.

Thirdly, learning stops as one finishes education from the formal institutions. Our mind would easily accept this pattern. Maybe, that is why, once we start working or start a family life, there is no scope for learning, at least we are not expected to. All that is worth learning has already been done at schools and colleges. No one is going to penalize you, if you do not have a book at your home or does not discuss about nature and human conditions. Life will go on with its ups and downs without knowing about stars and planets. Is it true that we stop learning after school? Or, what is worth learning has already been done in schools and colleges? Somehow, neither can we accept it fully nor deny it.

However, institutionalization was intended to serve the purpose of enhancing the process of learning, but it invariably becomes the preserving ground for institutional norms and learning, therefore, becomes the least important aspect. Illich questions not only the schools, but also the other forms of institutionalizations like army, hospitals, etc. Traditional occupation, medical practices, and learning have been already given up for the sake of institutional affiliation. Whereas, with increased dependency on institutions, every individuals' mind also gets institutionalized. On the whole, institutionalization becomes a tool for hegemony, as people find it difficult to live without institutional affiliation.

Unquestionable Aspects of Schooling

Schools are well defined in time and space. It has erected concrete walls, structured classrooms, graded syllabus and time bound curriculum. What should one study? In how much time? Moreover, where? These questions are well defined and structured. Everything is planned and laid out for everyone. One stands utterly lost when time, space, contents and trainer are not well defined. We become helpless without the system as if nothing exists outside of it. The system sustains itself with such definition and makes sure that nobody falls outside its definition. Those who breaks the rules fall outside the system.

With new initiatives, there are schools which are trying to make the teaching-learning process more interesting. No matter what the difference they are making, none of these schools seem to even question the number of years children are being schooled (normally, 14 years). Moreover, learning possibilities in institutions do not exist for

all those who want to learn and also, not for those who have crossed beyond a certain age. We seem to have taken these as norms, fixed entities which can never be questioned. Imagine a 45-year-old business man interested in learning basics of physics, approaches a school for attending classes with other students. Also, it is impossible to imagine a school student who is in class 8, interested in construction; leaves the school for few months and joins building construction in her adjacent street and comes back to share her experience in her class after few months. Both doesn't fit in our imagination of schools.

The system is a mentally constructed reality. Education exists in this structured prison. Any learning outside this structure cannot be termed as education. Only the certified specialists have rights to give training. Nobody else has this indisputable right. Education as a life-long process has got no meaning. It is graded and fixed. To remove anything out of it or to add anything new would unsettle the whole structure. Take for instance, without clearing the lower levels, one cannot enter the higher levels. A sixth grade student who has mastered the subjects already, cannot easily jump to seventh or eighth grade without completing expected number of attendance in that particular grade. One's progress in education is not independent; it depends on previous attendance. This can happen only if one go through the graded curriculum and fixed number of classes.

Certificates, Necessary Evil!

What is the evidence for all the learning that has happened and the compulsory attendance? One cannot think of completing a course without quantifying the learning. As we get used to quantifying learning, we would gradually start measuring every aspect of our life, our interest, dreams, even love. A piece of certificate that an institution provides convey much importance. Moreover, the legitimacy for certificate comes because of compulsory attendance. This determines the kind of job she is going to get in the future. Illich said,

“Learning frequently is the result of instruction, but selection for a role or category in the job market increasingly depends on mere length of attendance.”(Illich, 1971, p. 19)

Take an example, one student who has completed mechanical engineering through a diploma or certificate course and has equal competency compared to another student

who has done four-year engineering course in a “prestigious” college (i.e. more attendance compared to that of the former course). The first one would be preferred less. Here, what matters is not the competency and skill, but a ‘formal’ institution and ‘more’ attendance.

If a student has got enough skill for the work she has to do, then why is it made important to know the learning history of how student acquired the skills? She could have got it without an institutional training, or she must have learnt it from her father or someone else. However, why is the amount of time/year spent and kind of institution becomes necessary and determining? The minimum qualification set by the company or workplace justifies the legitimacy of the certificates issued. She may have the skills required for the job, but may not be preferred without an institutional certificate. This compulsion reinforces institutional dependency. However, what is the need for certification? A farmer who has the knowledge of crops, time of sowing and harvesting, and about weeds can very well teach a group of students who want to learn about crops. She does not possess all the technical knowledge and scientific terms, but definitely, she knows something which she has learnt over time. Then, what should stop her from teaching and sharing with others? Can we always justify based on her learning history and certificate? Why is the right to teach given only to some?

Compulsory Education & Personal Impotence

In these present times, if we look at compulsory schooling, then it is no more than disempowering people- that to expect everyone to go through it, ignoring the danger it has; it could turn out to be disadvantageous or even discriminatory. Besides, the effect it has on our imagination and personal sphere could be dangerous. Our imagination has become too limited that anything creative or productive can come only out of institutions. If that is the only way, how do we justify great philosophers and educators that the world witnessed, who had nothing to do with formal institutional education. Michael Faraday had no formal education, yet he revolutionized our understanding of electricity. A guy insanely genius at mathematics, Srinivasa Ramanujan was self-taught. William Shakespeares work compulsorily enters our textbooks, but he himself was a middle school dropout. The list is not limited if we have to add more philosophers, scientists, poets and other personalities who had either

no formal education or was a school dropout. Nowadays, it has become impossible to think of a situation where we can take institutional dependency lightly.

The severe danger behind institutionalization is the ever increasing dependency and what Illich called it as “personal impotence”. It makes the mind dull, insecure and unimaginative. By over emphasizing and making it compulsory, we create self-doubt about the capacity and ability of the individual. We have accepted it without questioning. Whereas, Illich argues,

“Equal educational opportunity is indeed, both a desirable and a feasible goal, but to equate this with obligatory schooling is to confuse salvation with the church. Schools have become the world religion of a modernized proletariat, and makes futile promises of salvation to the poor of the technological age”(Illich, 1971, p. 18).

School claims and occupies children’s entire time and energy. Parents may feel disinterested and apprehensive to leave their children at neighbors home even for a short while, but the same parents have no problem to leave them in school to the unknown teachers and staff. It is because, schools are legitimate and therefore, compulsory for schools to claim their children’s time and energy.

A group of children left in a classroom with a set of textbooks would, normally, wait for the teacher to come and teach. Though they can read and understand, they would not dare to explore on their own. They have already submitted to the authority of institutions. It created the need to be taught because, it undermines the capacity of students to enquire independently without any authority. It distances the students from their willingness to learn. When such things are done at a young age, children, as they grow, would become dull, disinterested and dependent. These are the prerequisites for the process of institutionalization of various aspects of life. As a result, compulsory institutionalization would invariably shrink our imagination and restricts our creativity.

A schooled mind which is used to taking instructions for one’s progress, over time becomes helpless without institutional affiliation. Our creativity becomes impotent as we get used to taking instructions. Someone else has to tell us ‘what we should do’ and ‘what we should not do’. We become habituated to letting the institution decide for us. These days, children tend to become easily bored during holidays and long

vacations. Frequently, we see even adults getting utterly bored and helpless when they have long holidays or when they quit a job. Our consciousness is so trained to let the institution decide for us and plan for the day, month, year and even our entire future. We feel secure and safe with their planning, for we have forgotten to decide for ourselves and to try out new things.

Educational institutions become the sole place for generating and controlling knowledge. There is already a set pattern. Whereas, knowledge generation can happen anywhere and in anyway; while sitting under a tree, while talking to an old man, while sitting beside the river, while reading poetry or while encountering a problem and it does not have to be only from the books, prescribed for the course. It does not have to happen only during a classroom discussion, by only using academic terminologies. It does not have to be expressed only through a formal academic language. It can be poetry, art, or a real action. These days educational institutions, students and others who belong to it are running short of creative imaginations and sensitivities. This poverty of imagination and creativity makes the school or any other educational institution become a mechanically closed place for any soul to be touched, changed and cherished.

A child is generally curious about its surroundings and the exploration it sets forth; no one taught the child. It is a natural and fundamental instinct to learn. Initially, as a child, institutional norms were forced on us, but as we got used to it, we gave in willfully and became completely dependent on it for the rest of our life. However, slowly as we got imprisoned in institutions with its never ending instructions and its promise of security, we have almost forgotten to resist. Once children are made to be dependent on schools, its planned instruction, then they will invariably be conditioned to all sorts of institutions and its myths without questioning them.

As a result, hegemony enters as a simple school timetable and a structured curriculum, but its consequences are far reaching. Gradually, we would be habituated to be dependent on institutions for food, health, occupation, personal relation and even death. Institutions or firms which run 'event management', in the recent times also have started organizing death funerals and related activities. The family does not even have to think of cremation; the firm would take care. The institutional affiliation

would give us security and peace. Without it, we would be lost, ignorant of life itself. Therefore, the hegemony of institutions hampers our imagination and creative spirit.

Insecurity and Increased Dependency

Nowadays, compulsory schooling is making people excessively depend on institutions. It has become the only legitimate way of meaningful living, in fact, survival itself. Otherwise, it is undesirable to learn by oneself and outside the school. This increased dependency on institutions has disabled individuals' creativity and freedom. It has created a monopoly over social imagination. For example, giving birth at home, learning by oneself, going to the library at the age of 50, treatment with home medicines, etc. has gone out of our imagination. Even for personal problems, professional counselors have become the best possible solution; talking to elders and sharing it with friends have lost its value.

The ritual of schooling has entered our consciousness and hijacked our imagination. This happens at a young age, therefore, for the rest of the life, one is dependent on other institutions. Days without schooling is not a choice of convenience, but is undesirable. It has instilled fear in our consciousness, that without school, future would be bleak. Similarly, of other institutions like health. Earlier health care was available at home and neighboring houses, but now, to imagine a society without hospitals is scary and unimaginable. Social service also has become too institutionalized that service to poor or needy cannot be solved without the intervention of NGOs and welfare organizations. Even the political and legal systems are not any exceptions. Increased dependency on these institutions would make us incapable of conducting our lives and make us cut off from our life experiences, ability and practices.

The legitimacy of institutions does not allow us to question the very existence of schools. We are socialized to believe that schools are necessary and compulsory. It will be a crime if parents do not send their children to school. A few decades ago, schooling was not a compulsion. It was an additional benefit. It did not leave the one who was not schooled with the feeling of helplessness; were not subjected to poverty and discrimination. However, nowadays, institutionalization promises a sense of security for the future. The agenda is to create insecurity among people and thereby

create the demand for institutions. Schools, therefore, become automatically important when we create the fear of future without school education. This process, fears Illich, would make the student dependent, less creative and scared. Children would always want to be taught, but not grow independently, thinking creatively and freely. Their world would become limited and ever dependent. Even parents are not much bothered about what is being taught at schools, but more on the certificate so long as their children's future is secured.

These are the ways in which hegemony operates through institutions. Thereby, institutionalizing each and every component of our life, we are missing a direct and natural connection with life. One is made to feel helpless without an institutional affiliation. Any learning that happens outside the institution is not authentic, reliable and significant. Few decades back, not going to school, getting less mark and having no degree were considered normal, but these days they have become the sign of poverty and low social status. From birth to death, institutions have become the only legitimate way of survival. This very process sets some of them inaccessible to those institutions. 'Modernized poverty,' as rightly said by Illich that,

“the increasing reliance on institutional care adds a new dimension to their helplessness: psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves”(Illich, 1971, p. 11).

Modern institutions determine what poverty is. Failure to admit in the hospitals rather than traditional home treatment, retaining children from going to school than teaching them family occupation are the signs of poverty. Being away from all these institutions indicate poverty.

2.3. Forgotten Past, Western Arrogance, and Voluntary Colonization

History is not discrete; it is not only the event of past, in fact, it also shapes the present. To understand the present is to trace the past. In other words, the present is incomplete without the past. They are not black and white; there is a continuity between past and present. As Karl Mannheim points out that, to understand anything deeply, involves the understanding of history and its meaning (Mannheim, 1936). We might argue well that, what happened ages ago, only scriptures and literatures could speak. We cannot relive the past to experience it. However, there is much scope to

infer the meaning and implication out of these literatures and see if there is anything significant we can derive from them.

The present day education has a historical character. It cannot be understood without understanding the ancient Indian values, colonial invasion and post-independence policies and its implications. The aspect of caste, religion and other social classification that enters the modern classrooms cannot be understood completely without the grasp of ancient Indian education. The process of disconnecting what is being learnt in school from everyday life can be traced back to colonial education. The quality of schools, the way it functioned, and its dreams changed over time. How it was in the ancient time, it is no more the same now. Schools no more teach Vedas and Upanishads. Children no more stay at teachers' house during their period of education. These days, schools prepare them for career and not with the quest for realizing oneself. This change is not exclusive to schools; it reflects society's aspiration and its modifications over time.

Overall, we could sense some discomfort with the modern school education, otherwise, why would any child hesitate to go to school? What happens inside the school has been influenced by history. The discrimination based on caste, religion and gender in education, irrelevant curriculum, mechanical memorization and superiority of English language are the products of history. These things are still hegemonising our mind. Therefore, the attempt here is not to present the description of related historical events, but we would question it and see the implications of its hegemony.

Ancient Indian education- A spiritual predisposition

For a normal mind, school means a concrete building, planned classes from morning till evening, trained teachers and regular examinations. It is hard to imagine a learning setup where the children stayed at teachers' residence for a considerable period of time, doing all chores starting from cleaning the house, collecting wood, taking care of cattles, cooking, reading and meditating. These things seems right in our history books, but to re-live the past seems disturbing and 'unfit' in the present age. Even to imagine our past looks unrelated and irrelevant to the present. Does it mean that our old values and practices were wrong, or is it incorrect to relook at the

meaning and understand its aspirations and contradictions to make sense of the present?

First of all, when we talk of ancient education, we have to travel back to 1500 BC, where our way of life was dominated majorly by religion. Religion determined how we lived, what we talked, how we dressed, what we ate and learnt. Education was not a separate activity, but it coexisted along with religion. The syllabus was not set by a group of board members with formal educational background; teacher designed the syllabus independently, taking references, not from the set of books that are impersonal, objective and academic in nature. However, those days, books helped them to turn inwards and also aided in finding the meaning of life. Self-realization became the major objective around which every other things were placed. Vedas and Upanishads were the core source of knowledge for Hindus (Altekar, 1934). Knowledge of the Self was the most sought among all the subjects, for it had high relevance in those days. The entire society was centered upon this ideal and practices. However, in the contemporary schools, knowledge of the self is kept far away from school books and out of reach even for a highly educated person. There is a huge gap between what is being studied and what is happening within us.

Realization of oneself was the primary motive underlying ancient education system; to believe in the Supreme and “enlightenment” of oneself became the ultimate goal of life. However, our modern education is obsessed with objective knowledge. To know about the external world and to conquer them is its ultimate aim. Religiosity has no role in modern education; the secular view is far too ‘sacred’ to touch anything religious. To talk about the Self, Atma, Supreme or God has become condemned. We are too hesitant to touch these, fearing we may lag behind, or it may divide us or leave us underdeveloped. Also, we panic that it may keep us out of the project of modernity and therefore, it may hinder the development of scientific and technical knowledge. With this fear to relook at the past, we may forget to wonder about the essence of existence itself. The fundamental questions it raised about life, about one’s existence, about all the “why” questions which even science do not have answers yet; we may remain ignorant forever.

We now consider that knowledge is secular, logical, objective and discrete. However, when we look back to ancient times, there is a different meaning to knowledge itself.

The real knowledge was considered as the realization of the infinite, eternal, Supreme. It is not limited; it was this search for the eternal and infinite that became the ultimate aim of learning. Such knowledge was considered beyond limits and description. It was the realization of something which was absolute, and no sensory organ could describe it. It was considered beyond duality, where the knower becomes the known, and the known becomes the knower. Like the river merges into the sea. We are carried away by the differences and stay limited within the sphere of body and mind, but what is remaining is the eternal flow of light. It was believed that, only when I could see myself as eternal, as the spark of the infinite, it would help me to overcome the limitedness. This became the major objective of the ancient education system. Moreover, such learning possibilities happened in an informal set-up because non-dualistic knowledge cannot be sought through structured and fragmented approach (Altekar, 1934).

Acquiring knowledge from the Scripture alone was not believed to give wisdom. One had to be completely a part of that, feeling the reality, but not carry the burden of scriptures. Education was complete only when one completes three stages of learning: *Shravana* (hearing), *Manana* (meditation) and *nididhyasan* (realization). Even though education was majorly religious, it did not simply aim for acquiring knowledge about the Supreme as a metaphysical concept, but it was complete only with the final realization of oneness with the Supreme. It was believed to be possible not with lecturing alone, but with various other pedagogical methods: Self-meditation, self-study, question and answer, enigmatic method, puzzles, aphoristic method, etymological method, mythical method, analogical method, dialectical method, synthetic method, temporizing method and regressive method (Cited in Ramkumar, 2005:14).

Teacher in the Vedic times was deeply engaged in meditation, taking a journey towards the Self. The learner learnt because the teacher radiated like a flower spreading the smell and the sun radiating the light. Guru and learner were involved in everyday engagement. Hence, an intimate bond was established. The nature of the relationship was fundamentally different from that of the modern times. These days teacher have become very authoritative. A formal superficial interaction keeps them away from each other, failing to engage deeply and meaningfully. If a student is ill

and admitted in a hospital, the system does not expect the teacher to visit the student, show care and provide support. In those days, gurus became their parent- thus impregnated the learner with both his knowledge and love. It was not simply a narrow transaction, but it was a deep and a close relationship. In the whole process, the learner was transforming himself by overcoming his temptation and to attain self-realization. Additionally, teacher had autonomy: admission, curriculum, method of teaching and assessment were not in the hands of the State administrators and politicians. Teachers were highly respected, and their needs were taken care of by the society for they could give themselves entirely to educate the younger generation with all the necessary knowledge that's required for a happy and meaningful life(Sharma, 1993).

The teacher was not simply imparting knowledge, he became their mentor and guide, and such respectful relationship brought about high regard for each other. Teachers were 'gurus' and taught them not only the subjects but also the lessons necessary for life. He was not tied to any authority nor had to receive any money for his service, he was free and he provided his service for free. Now the relationship is mechanical, narrow and formal. Outside the school, children hold no regards for teachers; maybe except for a few teachers who have succeeded in winning childrens heart. By and large, children fear teachers, for they may punish them or probably reduce some marks. However, in those days, the authority of teachers were not destructive; it enabled them, nurtured them, and shaped them into critical reflexive individuals.

Apart from Hindu religious centers of learning, there also thrived Buddhist monasteries imparting Buddhist system of education. Because Hindu religious orthodoxy and superstitions paved way for the emergence of Buddhism in India. Over emphasis on rituals and ceremonies, inequality by caste and occupation had engendered Buddhism in India. It's practical questions on everyday worldly life, its idea of simplicity and equality were different from the approach of Hinduism, which was majorly based on metaphysical concepts. Logical inquiry and presentation became critical educational approach. In addition to Buddhism, Jainism also contributed to the development of scientific temper in India, because the necessity of scientific explanation for everything was central to Jainism. Scientific inquiry of Jains helped to bring out various books on science. Also, Maktabas as the centers of primary

education and Madras as the institution of higher learning existed for the Muslim community. Even though the main aim of Islamic education was also religious in nature; learning Quran and the teachings of Mohammed, it also exposed students to various other subjects like history, geography, mathematics, politics, economics, medicine and agriculture. Education was for life and never for securing high marks in examinations. Now it is hard to imagine a system without examinations and certificates and to call it an education system. Nevertheless, it thrived (Mookerji, 1951).

Women in pre-Vedic times were educated and also participated in all religious activities. They did not have any reservations for women, for they were given education equally. They studied Vedas and Vedangas and did not get married until they finished education. It was not a directionless and meaningless education, some of them studied till their marriage (Sadyodwahas) and some who dedicated their life for learning, stayed without marriage (Bramhavadinis). Some of them even outshined men of those times, Gargi and Maitreyi were well known for that. Their participation in public debates and discussions with philosophers and sages during Upanishad period cannot be easily forgotten (Mookerji, 1951).

Problem with Religious Education

However, the present day education is concerned about preparing children for a career, than for life. The ancient education in India with its principal objective of realization of oneself and the Truth, to the present schools concerning majorly about promoting techno-centric, mechanical and English education could not have happened without a complex historical journey. This journey would be incomplete if we do not acknowledge the problems with religious instruction and the struggles it witnessed. These internal problems and struggles, in fact, could have been the reasons for the acceptance of English education in India. They could have prepared the ground for colonizers to establish their supremacy over the natives easily.

Religious education, over time, became the rule of the dominant caste. Superstitions and orthodoxy made religion discriminatory. Moreover, society had also evolved to tolerate and encourage occupational hierarchy, social inequality and elitist culture. Certain sections of the society enjoyed all the privileges it had to offer. Education was

not an exception; it also discriminated girls and children from lower caste. Minimum education was given to Shudras during the Pre-Vedic period, but gradually even that was denied to them. They were completely devoid of education.

Besides, the status of women also went down, which affected every aspect of their life: social, family, economic, political and religious. They could not participate equally with men; home became their only domain of existence. Social and religious restrictions controlled their movement and kept them confined to home. Maybe, that was the reason why Raja Ram Mohan Roy was uncomfortable when East India Company decided to support vernacular religious education. The vernacular education he feared would aggravate inequalities based on caste, religion and gender and superstition based social practices like sati, child marriage, which he thought would never be questioned. He hoped English education would liberate people from such social misconceptions, oppression and inequality. He established schools where he insisted that education is based on “modern, western curriculum.” Even for Jotirao Phule, English education promised a society without untouchability, oppression on women and other social problems. He was against the oppressive hierarchical culture of Brahmanism (Ghosh, 1995).

All these prepared a supporting ground for the spread of English education. It was seen as a hope for solving all our socio-economic problems. Its objective scientific approach interested educated Indians, for they thought it might uplift the society. Although, colonial education has given us the ‘language of the world’, entry to the scientific-technological world, promoted industrial development and synchronized with our education system, the intention and motive were not too positive as it appears. Its hegemony and power, therefore, has ripped off our cultural heritage and damaged our consciousness.

Ideology of British education in India

Political motives

Yes! Britishers ruled India for 150 years and they had a bigger agenda than just to educate Indians. Moreover, if we believe that India has attained complete freedom from them would undermine the impact of their agenda in the present education system. It was not until 1813 when the Charter of East India Company was

renewed, Major B. D. Basu felt that, for Britishers, spreading education was not in their objective. He remembers that

“The Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757 and the Wood’s dispatch, commonly called the educational charter of India, is dated 1854. This would show that the system of education now in vogue in this country was not introduced in hot haste but after much deliberation nearly a century later. The number of those English Christians who considered that it was a mistake to have introduced western education in this country is not a small one” (Basu, 1926, pp. iii, iv).

His detailed description of the situation in the Report (*History of Education in India: Under the Rule of East India Company*) with the help of the records and documents make us understand one important note; that educating native Indians was not the primary motive of the Britishers.

To exert power over a new land is not so simple and it cannot always be applied directly. It has to be subtle. Otherwise, their security will be in danger. Educating the natives was not meant with the intention to uplift the knowledge of the natives, but for the security of colonisers. As Basu puts it,

“the more the diffusion of education took place in India, the greater would be the security of their dominations; that educated Indians instead of being any source of danger would be towers of strength to the rulers of British India” (Basu, 1926, p. 152).

Not only that, it was otherwise difficult to get employees for running their regime in India or even for a much more complex agenda which lay ahead. As Krishna Kumar also rightly argues, “the colonial state was, after all, no welfare agency. It existed to facilitate and expand exploitative trade. Funding a program of mass education was beyond its purview” (Kumar, 1991, p. 33). All these motives underlay the framing of the Educational Despatch of 1854, commonly known as Wood’s Despatch. It recommended opening at least one government school in every district, providing grant-in-aid for affiliated private schools and improving vernacular education.

Wrong conceptions and incorrect decisions

It is not very new that we hear about India as being “religious”, “illiterate,” “immoral,” “superstitious” and “under-developed.” When we think of schools in ancient time, a lot of us would get disturbing thoughts- that the condition of schools

were poor, not scientific and discriminatory. These are not doubts, but firmly believed by Indians. We owe these beliefs to the colonial masters who falsely conceptualized the character of India. However, unfortunately, we started believing them.

An important ideological misconception behind taking an interest in education was that India was in the 'age of darkness.' They wanted to 'civilize' Indians. Whereas, the notion that India did not have proper schools were contested with evidence by Dharampal (Dharampal, 1983). He refuted the popular assumptions that India's state of education was very poor. Major B. D. Basu also had vehemently pointed out the important aspects of education system before and during the British period in India. For him, in the pre-British period, "India was not an illiterate country. The land was far more advanced in education than many a Christian country of the West" (Basu, 1926).

The education system in ancient time was very vibrant which allowed regular discussions and debates between scholars in the major public gatherings called *sammelans*. Not only that, but even temples with its large space were also used to educate people. Additionally, *Brahmin sangas* were organized for conducting seminars, *vidyapithas* for providing mass education and *parishads* for higher learning were the various forms of formal and informal educational centers in those time (Ramkumar, 2005, p. 11) Even *agraharas* in South India where learned Brahmins lived, became the center for higher education. Also, there were wandering schools (*carakas*) who moved from one place to another to educate the masses. Monks, sanyasis and acetics were also involved in spreading philosophical thoughts. Debates and discussions became a stage for expressing knowledge as well as an important means of educating the masses. Adi Shankara was famous for winning such debates. Literature and learning happened even through temple festivals and functions. When books were not available drama, music, dance and art, educated people.

Moreover, another important misconception was that, education in India was largely religious. It was condemned that Indians lacked 'rational', 'logical', reasoning, also believed that they were short of practical technological instructions. In the eye of western science, Indian knowledge system looked irrational, ignorant and religious. Although religious education took a major share of the syllabus, it also promoted other secular, non-religious education: law, physiology, astrology, astronomy,

geometry, medicine and fine arts were also included. Vocational training for livelihood was also taught with great honor: art, music, dance, architecture, medicinal practices, wood work and various others were also a part of education. More specializations developed later as per the need of the society. Mithila was famous for law studies (Nyaya Shastra), logic, scientific subjects, literature and arts. Takshashila became famous for various subjects like accountancy, commerce, agriculture, magic and various other subjects(Dharampal, 1983).

These misconceptions led Indians to lose confidence in themselves. These false assumptions helped Britishers to establish physical and moral supremacy over Indians. They undermined our heritage, demoralized us and established the moral and cognitive superiority of the colonizers. Even the effort to promote an indigenous system of education in India was not based on genuine concern. The opening of Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 by Warren Hastings to preserve Indo-Persian culture, Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in 1784 by Sir William Jones and Sanskrit college in Benaras in 1792 were not necessarily started for promoting indigenous knowledge but for 'political considerations'(Ramkumar, 2005). East India Company was uncertain of its presence in India, therefore to secure the willingness of the natives was crucial.

The pertaining time in Europe was considered as an 'age of reason' and so, it should throw light on the world. Moreover, not everyone in the East India Company agreed with Oriental knowledge. They considered it as worthless. They wanted to establish European (western) education. James Mill, John Stuart Mill, William Bentinck and Thomas Macaulay- all four were condemning oriental education in India. They considered Europe was rational and civilized, so they wanted to 'educate' India. They have attempted thoroughly to debunk the Indian tradition and civilization and also various cultural practices in India. So they tried to abolish all types of oriental learning- books, civilization and languages. They thought India was an empty vessel to be filled with prestigious, modern, civilized and rational education.

However, spreading English education was not only for uplifting the knowledge of the natives, but it serves two other crucial purposes as well. One was to find native Indians to work in their office for cheaper salary, for it felt it was too expensive to pay for the British officials to come to India. So, educating Indians in English would mean

investing in cheap labor. Another important reason was that Britishers wanted to find a market in India for things they produced in Britain. With their moral supremacy in India, they started creating demand for their goods as well (Pathak, 2002, p. 78). All these were evident in Charles Grant's dominating and arrogant agenda to promote English education. He wanted Christianity, modern science and European literature and wanted to establish English schools. Though his Bill was rejected, this momentum to establish English supremacy was kept alive.

Everything favored them; their supremacy, economic benefits, undermining the native knowledge, wisdom and culture added to their agenda. By gaining unwavering faith from the Governor General Bentinck on ruling the natives, Thomas Babington Macaulay made a radical change in the educational policy in India. His famous speech in British Parliament on 10th July 1833 reflected the momentum of that time. He had no respect for our culture, religion and knowledge. Though Wood's Despatch (1854) and Hunter Commission (1882) came in opposition to Macaulay's law, it could not stop English education from spreading and luckily or sadly, it has not stopped even now.

English in education

English became the language of the ruler then in India. It was not too simple; it had power and arrogance. It was not as simple as learning any other language; it had the pride and superiority of the rulers. The English language was diffused in India not for the benefit of the natives, but for the benefit of the Europeans. The spread of English and its establishment in educational institutions was not incidental, but well thought-out and planned. In a Minute dated 24th March, 1828, Mr. F. Warden wrote,

“In any plan, therefore, for the public education of the natives, the complete knowledge of our language ought to form so prominent an object as to lay ground for its gradually becoming at least the established vehicle of legal and official business. The English tongue would in India, as in America, be the lasting monument of our dominion” (Basu, 1926, p. 72).

Even Macaulay was not any less in establishing English supremacy in India. In one of his famous notes he expresses the objective was, “to form a class who may be interpreters between and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, words and intellect” (Basu, 1926)

The spirit to spread English education was not simply with a matter of pride, but also due to fear. The fear that the growth of vernacular literature might threaten British government. Soon vernacular education became secondary; schools were insisted on taking English education seriously. As for the Bentinck's resolution goes, "that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone." (Basu, 1926, p. 115) The intention also is not for enlightening the Indians but to "produce cheap clerks and useful subordinates for the service in the different departments of the State." (Basu, 1926, p. 116) Even the science from the West was taught in English. No effort was taken to translate into vernacular languages. B.D. Basu says,

"had the vernaculars been employed as the media of instruction, their cultivation would have progressed by leaps and bounds, and very useful literature on every subject would have been produced in them. It is the demand which creates supply. There being no demand for the useful works in our vernaculars, it is small wonder that we had hardly any decent vernacular literature to boast of. In 1853 the Japanese language was not half so well advanced as Bengalee, Hindee or other leading vernacular dialects of India. If useful literature in Japanese has since been cultivated, there is no reason why the same should not have taken place in our vernaculars also had they been properly encouraged. But the cultivation of vernaculars was left to the people themselves. Thus it would be seen that neither in the dissemination of general education nor in the cultivation of our vernaculars, the people of India during 20 years, i.e., from 1833 to 1853 received that amount of patronage and aid from the Government of their country which every civilized government is bound to render to its subjects" (Basu, 1926, pp. 127-128).

The agenda to "Englishise" education did not stop with the end of British rule in India; we still witness it in the classrooms. I remember paying fine every time we speak in our mother tongue (Tamil) in a private English medium school; even the private talks with friends had to be in English. Nothing has changed much, even now schools have such rules. If we speak in English, automatically we receive respect. How sad we started equating a fluently English speaking person to a highly educated person. It is a matter of pride for parents to make their children speak in English and recite few rhymes in English in front of guests. Even 70 years after Britishers left India, English still rules us, dominates us and disempowers our native languages.

It is important to learn English, as it opens up to the world, to different cultures, their discoveries, and inventions. It makes our journey wider and enable us to make relations from one end of the world to the other end. It makes sharing of technologies, information, materials easy and convenient. One does not have to look lost when a German or an American arrives at our restaurant or when we go on a historical trip to Italy or China. We do not have to look alien to each other; a common language will bring us close. However, history tells us that it is not as simple as it appears. Supremacy of English has corrupted our consciousness. It has made us feel that our native mother tongue is inferior. According to the census of India 2001, there are 122 major and 1599 other languages spoken in India. With such rich multi-lingual background, we seem to shy off from learning our mother tongue. Slowly native languages are losing its ground and value. English is monopolizing our culture. It is not merely the fault of colonizer, but we have lost trust with our culture, history and the strength. We have regarded ourselves as inferior to the rulers. Their language, culture, tastes and aspirations have become superior to ours. Even the color of our skin we want it to be like theirs. English supremacy in present schools has therefore disconnected us from the practical cultural context. Now we know where the problem arose; we were brought up to believe that 'English means education'. We lost in touch with our land, culture, the smell, and color. We feel ashamed to relearn the past values.

Indian intellectuals- consensus and contradictions

English education was not altogether 'bad,' but it is also not free from dominating and corrupting the regional, local mind and consciousness. As it started spreading, the response was colorful; not everyone admitted it or condemned it completely. Some of the educated elite Indians secured jobs and attained 'high status.' They demeaned Indian culture and history. Through education, they could feel superior to others, both intellectually and morally. They got opportunity to work in the state under the colonial masters. This new venture altered their everyday life, language and culture. They rarely questioned the colonial masters, their agenda and the new way of life.

Not everyone accepted this change, its power, and destructiveness. For many of the scholars who benefited with traditional religious education did not want to give away the system. Arrogant Hinduism began to resist, and they believed that the solution lied

in the past. This orthodox section of the society came to the foreground and insisted that conservative tendencies be back. If we see the colonial rule as an 'external' domination of one group from outside dominating the other group (inside), there also exist internal domination in the name of caste (rule of Brahmins over lower caste). It was for this reason, another section which didn't want to go back to traditional education, for it reminded them of oppression, inequality, and injustice. It was not a pleasant past for them: the marginal, women and poor class. For them, colonial education showed them the possibility of justice and equality. Jotirao Phule fought for the marginal and poor class, and he felt that traditional education limited them. He saw possibilities of liberation from oppression and discrimination in colonial education, as it gave equal opportunity for everyone to participate. Phule started his schools for untouchable girls. Like Phule, even Ambedkar favored colonial education as he felt would uplift the lower castes(Ghosh, 1995).

Not simply for the lower caste and marginalized education became a hurdle, but overall education system itself was becoming unhealthy for it undermined the regional culture and language, disconnecting everyday life from what is being learned at school, and over emphasis on the career based education. For Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Tagore, traditional education was not favorable, and even colonial education did not offer a solution. They looked for something different, a new kind of education that would not alienate children from their culture and nature. Gandhi was against colonial education for it made children alien to their culture and language. He saw a danger in disconnectedness in school education and children's life. He emphasized on craft, mother tongue and manual work. Even Aurobindo's and Tagore's ideal of education was far different from the ideals of colonial education. Likewise, even Tagore was a critique of deep 'militant' nationalism and he felt, to keep nation as a central theme would lead to destruction.

All these reactions are equally significant as they brought to forefront various issues concerning our education system. Though colonial education has improvised India on certain aspects, yet it does not seem the right alternative. It did not propose mass education either, for it was not their agenda. It did not liberate people; rather it alienated us from our land, culture, language, knowledge and wisdom. It made us feel

inferior and exerted power. It crippled our consciousness, which is why even after 70 years of independence, they still continue to hegemonise our mind.

2.4. Perils of Industrialization and Commercialisation

As the country was healing from the effects of colonialism, modernisation and industrialisation promised a new future. India, therefore, longed for scientific development and economic progress which lead to steady increase in material progress and technological development. Although development in scientific and material sphere benefitted the country in certain aspects, it also paved way for destruction of social world as well as physical world. Moreover, the promise of modernity and the model of development has a hegemonic character. It has fractured our imagination and critical-reflexive spirit.

Modernity: Hegemonic and One-Dimensional

Human beings have the potential to question 'everything.' Even the most sacred subjects like the God, creation and the established social norms could be interrogated. Without the spirit of questioning, we would not have moved this far, from the Stone Age to the modern. Interesting discoveries and enriching innovations would not have happened if the project of modernity had not touched us. We would still have believed that the earth is flat and every other planet is revolving around the earth. The freedom to question has given us wings, to reconsider our values and beliefs. It has also given us the responsibility to trust our intelligence, that things cannot be taken for granted, it has to be reviewed, reconsidered, transformed, accepted or rejected. The spirit to inquire is not only peculiar to the scientific field, but it has entered even our established social values, specifically, not to forget the contribution of Ambedkar, Periyar, Bharathiar, Gandhi and various other social revolutionaries.

Modernity helps us to break away from the stereotyped social identities like caste, occupation, religion, gender and other social categories. It challenges the traditionally established patterns, like, a washer man's son does not necessarily have to become a washer man, but has a fair chance to become an administrative officer or a business man. Similarly, a woman has an option of challenging her traditional role and become a professor or a doctor or even a bus conductor. Modernity is promising us the 'new'

identity, where the memory of oppression and inequality can be rewritten and transformed. It gives ample choices to select according to one's interest, capabilities and not dragged down by family ties, occupation, caste, and other social forces. The choices are endless. A day in a village would be quite long, monotonous and everyday routine gets repeated without much difference except during festivals and functions. Similar routine replicates itself without much change, whereas city offers a variety of possibilities and options. A day can be spent fast, starting with a movie to cultural performance to shopping galleries and a food court. As the varieties are abundant, mind can be continuously occupied.

However, there is a danger in celebrating modernity, for it devalues anything that is traditional; anything old has to be rejected and avoided. Such a process would wash off all that is traditional. That anything that is old and traditional are seen as "irrational" and "superstitious". There is a danger in doing so. We tend to ignore the spirit of modernity in traditions. Modernity is not discrete from the tradition, maybe that is the reason Avijit Pathak felt, modernity as the continuity of tradition. Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism or Sufi tradition for him, seems modern, in terms of the spirit to question the taken for granted beliefs and social values and norms (Pathak, 2006). They are modern, not regarding external appearance like wearing 'jeans,' or having 'spiky' hairstyle, or using modern gadgets, but in a deeper sense. Keeping practical and technical knowledge in its place, the spiritual quest of life, death, and nature became important in the ancient times. However, the spirit to ponder upon the meaning of life and nature applies even in the modern times. Whereas, anything religious and spiritual is considered traditional; we have kept it far away, even rejected and stereotyped. However, we all cannot avoid the limitations of the present state of modernity, with development in technology, scientific discoveries, and applications, we are still not free from sorrows, fears and anxieties. We have found no solution to these, and modernity has not solved all these problems. We cannot easily forget modernity, as the roots of modernity were laid down cleverly by the colonial masters.

Colonization has asserted its power through modern education in India as we have seen in the precious chapter. The 'western modernity,' it proposed, had its arrogance. With modern and popular syllabus focusing majorly on technical and economic

aspects, we forget to wonder the meaning of our existence. It suppressed what India had, its ancient ideals, values, and dreams. It doubted the spiritual values it possessed and made the natives slave of the ideals of modernity. Not to sideline the negatives that Indian culture had, its discriminatory nature towards lower caste, women and another disadvantaged group. Instead of working on transforming these aspects of our culture, modernity completely abandoned the native culture itself. That anything 'Indian' is believed to be superstitious and hierarchical. Nevertheless, India once had the culture of learning, debate, self-enquiry and enabling social space.

Moreover, modernization cannot also be completely accepted, as it is leading us to alienation, hyper-individualism, loss of community feeling and identity. Because modernity is not simple; it is arrogant and authoritative, because it sidelined traditional culture and disabled its possibilities. Whereas, modernity is not a contrast-tradition versus modernity, science versus non-science. The solution is not in accepting one and rejecting the other. Both have advantages as well as disadvantages.

Modernity also has its flaws. Scientific discoveries and technological development have ruined our environment. Being modern is not only about growing many industries to provide employment for many people. It is also about polluting the environment and making people depend endlessly on the gadgets. Also, science with its hegemonic power puts down any other possibilities, and alternatives. Anything non-science is considered barbaric and superstitious. Whereas life cannot be completely examined through the lens of science, it also needs some poetry, magic, and beauty. The complexity of life and nature cannot be captured through science alone; it does need to believe in uncertainty, wonderment, and silence. Therefore, modernity which is one-dimensional is always hegemonic.

Development and its Dilemmas

Economic growth is the key indicator for the development of a nation, like, steady increase in Gross National Product (GNP) and Per Capita Income (PCI). Moreover, the efficient way is to promote modern technologies and industries. Engaging in agriculture is not productive enough and progressive, whereas, promoting industries signifies growth and advancement. Western countries' achievement in scientific discoveries, technological development, modernization and economic growth has

been taken as a model for the development of India. Development signifies following a linear line, towards western developmental pattern. Critically, it is seen as the 'secular theory of salvation'(Nandy, 1987). It is believed that the backwardness, poverty and cultural wound of the developing countries are expected to be healed only by following the Western model of development.

India longed for economic and scientific development, for it may take away the darkness and bring hope and change. That was the reason why Nehru wanted to embrace our country with modern science and technology. It was also the dream of many Indian intellectuals as well. As the country was healing from the wounds of colonialism, the development project promised a bright future. India did not shy away from it. Like any other developing country, India also wanted to replicate the western model of development. Anything 'traditional' was considered as an obstacle to development. Maybe, that could be the reason, all the traditional occupations and knowledge system and practices gradually got slashed out from the society. Also, it furthers the social problems.

Development is seen as productive, beneficial, and necessity. Nevertheless, it is also arrogant and destructive, because the country's developmental experience is not very inclusive. If we identify the gains of development across various social groups, it is highly disproportionate. The one who already has, benefits a lot, but, the poor and disadvantaged are further marginalized. From ancient to modern society, they have been alienated. As Ramachandra Guha argues,

“development has often brought in its wake profound cultural dislocation- e.g. the decline of traditional sources of meaning (including religion), and the uprooting of entire communities by large development projects. By attempting to alter livelihood patterns and belief systems radically, the process of development has engendered a deep alienation among significant sections of the population. This social and cultural cost of development must be set against its economic benefits” (Guha, 1994)

The reality sounds even more painful in the words of the Uruguayan historian and novelist Eduardo Galeano (1989). He says “the poor of this dual society sell newspapers they cannot read, sew cloths they cannot wear, polish cars they will never own and construct buildings where they will never live”(Guha, 1994). This applies even to Indian cities. Though development is majorly centered on urban cities, the

fringes of rural areas are also under the scanner. Rural development, modernized agricultural services, and green revolution has favored majorly the land-owning class, but the poor laborers and marginalized communities are pushed to the corner. The benefits are reaped majorly by the landlords.

Furthermore, the model of development influences the political economy, because development is not just about wealth creation but also about distributive justice. Who owns? Who produces? Who benefits? Because I own, I organize, I sell, and I get the profit. It is wealth creation and wealth concentration. There is no equal distribution. So the disparity between rich and poor increases. Creation of wealth without distribution will increase the per capita income, but also the disparity increases between rich and poor. Therefore, growth does not necessarily promise the wellbeing of the poor and disadvantaged, nor does it guarantee happiness and freedom. Moreover, development cannot be simply equated to economic progress, for Amartya Sen, it also means providing basic education, good health care, political and civil rights. For him, 'freedom' is central to the process of development. He says, "Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy" (Sen, 1999, p. 14).

Developed countries have reached its peak in technological development and scientific discoveries, yet there is poverty, the disparity between rich and poor, environmental degradation and growing mental illness. People in western countries do suffer from loneliness, fear, sorrow, guilt, violence, and greed. They have not overcome all these. But, we take them as an example, we follow what they did, and our ignorance makes us repeat their mistakes. We do not see the politics involved in it. However, mindless replication comes with a pride; that which is replicated is considered as great, and others are worthless. This skewed approach of development has damaged our confidence. The developed countries make the developing countries feel helpless and disempowered. In such a situation, the authority of the developed countries would hardly be questioned. Gradually, developing countries replicate the pattern of the developed countries, which, therefore benefit the economic prosperity of developed countries. Additionally, globalization and free market add more benefit to the developed countries.

However, development with all its benefit has also fractured the physical and social world. Excessive pollution, environmental degradation, and deforestation have made us wonder about the project of development. We have given up on nature, its philosophy, and poem. Anything slow is looked down upon and whatever manual is not valued. We have become slaves to the machines ranging from tiniest chip to the largest engines. Its absence indicates underdevelopment, poverty, and misery. Life cannot be otherwise meaningful without these machines and developmental programs. We do need good roads, modern hospitals, and transportation; it has made our life very comfortable. However, to equate it to a meaningful, happy life seems dangerous. Such development is not healthy if we have to cut several hundred trees to make a road, displace poor people to an unknown land for the purpose of constructing industries and malls, and pollute the fresh air, water, and soil with the increased number of vehicles, gadgets, and chemicals. When planning is done effectively for the improvement of facilities in the cities with wide roads, flyovers, apartments, supermarkets and malls, there is hardly any consideration for the poor who live on the streets. In the project of beautifying cities, beggars are considered as 'nuisance'. Growing number of slums in cities and other urban areas denotes the government's discriminatory policies and planning.

Development is majorly centered on the cities and towns. It has become rare to find well-equipped hospitals, premiere educational institutions, economic opportunities and other facilities in rural areas. Our pursuit of development radically alters our life, professional as well as personal. People are moving from the countryside to cities in search of jobs, educational institutions, and other facilities. Their family life, religious beliefs, cultural practices and community feeling also get altered. It does not mean that rural areas are not worth investing, but this is an agenda of 'internal colonialism' says Sengupta(Guha, 1994). On the one hand, all the facilities are centered around urban areas benefitting the dominant social group, on the other hand, resources and raw materials are drawn from the rural areas for the development of the urban areas, which invariably affect and alter the livelihood of the villages and its people. Factories, dams, and highways have entered even remote villages, displaced poor people and damaged their personal and cultural space. By following economic model of development, certainly, we are going to create further damage.

More per capita income and more goods have become the only indicator of development. Man's mental and spiritual well-being has taken a back seat. It makes us believe that only doctors, scientists, engineers, and technicians can tell us the truth of life. It kills the poet, mystic, philosopher, and artist from defining life. They are branded irrational and illogical. Sitting quietly, enjoying the nature, laughing with fellow beings have lost its meaning. What kind of development it is when there is no freedom, contentment, peace, equality, the dignity of labour and leisure? Even for a man with all the privileges could not overcome fear, sorrow, and loneliness. What is the purpose of earning more money and acquiring more physical comforts, when we do not have enough time to relax, write poetry, or travel or just wonder about nature and life?

Misleading Technology

Modern technology is doing wonders in our life. It is not only the educated journalists who get to share their views in public forum but now social media like facebook and twitter have given us space for ordinary people to express their opinion, anguish, and discontent as they have democratized the public space. Moreover, technology has reduced unnecessary wastage of time and energy. However, gadgets apart from occupying our time and space, builds identity. It is no more for the comforts and efficiency alone, it sets our social status, and has become the symbol of cultural capital. The kind of gadgets I have, would decide where I belong in the social world. Having a high-end car, ultra-modern refrigerator and other home appliances and new brand mobile phone I use, would determine my social status.

Additionally, there is chaos,restlessness, and anxiety around us. People are constantly moving and doing something or the other. They have no time for leisure and silence. Even the modern gadgets have occupied our leisure. Constantly touching the mobile screen keeps them engaged and occupied. The drive to enjoy pleasure has gone beyond a limit. It becomes difficult to take a break from mobiles, laptops, constant texting in WhatsApp and scrolling through our Facebook pages or at least listening to music. We have become addicted to gadgets. The modern culture, instead of freeing us, it also has caged us, to the gadgets, and many products. Sometimes it gives us a false consciousness that without which we cannot live.

Technology in a way kills our silence. The silence that we get while walking through the fields, nothing to occupy, but just we and the sun that is setting, birds chirping and clouds moving could bring us peace. Even sometimes, just to sit back in the chair and hear the musings of our thoughts and the inner world or the moment of contemplation while watching the ants marching in lines could change our perspective of life. Such moments are hijacked by mobiles and other gadgets. It is easy to scroll down and occupy ourselves endlessly in the virtual world, where we tend to forget the existence of the real natural world.

Families have lost its conversations, and the meaning of togetherness is reduced to just physical comforts. No one has time to spend with each other; everyone is busy filling up his or her days. Four members are sitting next to each other in a restaurant, but everyone is engaged in conversation with some other friend in the mobile phone over WhatsApp, or simply watching videos on a YouTube page. Though they are together, each one is in their world. Even children are quicker in getting addicted to the video games than indulge in real-life play. There is a certain benefit to have gadgets, like to get certain information or to call someone in an emergency; it does has its value, but its excessive use has damaged our self. We have become dull and passive. It has been damaging our consciousness and gradually enslaves us.

Threats of Industrialization

Industries are entering everywhere; the culture of surplus supply and increasing demand have changed the lifestyle of people around the world. I should not feel content with a basic model mobile phone, but the culture of market demands me to desire for a smartphone and the options are endless. Industries should not be looked merely as an employment exchange, but that which alsopromotes consumerism. An endless variety of things that it is producing does not only fill the pockets of owners, but it makes every one of us a prey for the market. We become the victims of the consumer society. In such a world, we can never be content; the constant need to buy things unsettles our mind and makes us restless. From the toys to a high-end car, we have increased our demand. It has altered our lifestyle and philosophy. Bagaram Tulpule rightly argues,

“spending social resources in producing ever new, unnecessary and even harmful things and artificially creating demand for them through

loud and misleading advertisements, thereby promoting mindless consumerism for making quick profits, can have no place in the objective of genuine development” (Tulpule, 1996, p. 2993).

Industrial development has caused widespread environmental degradation. The damage to our ecology is far reaching. Thousands of trees are being cut, forests have to be turned down, and animals have lost their home, all for the sake of growth of industries and the comforts that a modern lifestyle demands. Villages and forests have been killed for the supply of resources to these industries. Shortage of natural resources is already taking a toll on the country. Deforestation and cutting down of rest of the trees in villages and cities have reduced the possibility of water vapor and oxygen, therefore, shortage of rain, as well as pollution. Moreover, water scarcity has not been addressed properly. Merely pumping out all the ground water for the industrial and domestic use have damaged the ground. We may use the latest technology, but will it bring rain?

Huge industries may provide jobs, as well as goods, but they may also become responsible for the increasing number of illness, disease, and environmental pollution. The chemical fertilizers it proudly produces have already damaged the soil and water. The harmful pesticides and other chemical preservatives have caused massive injury to our health. We are still horrified by the Bhopal gas tragedy that happened in 1984 when the harmful gas was leaked, which affected lakhs of people; several of them died. Additionally, traditional medicines and practices have lost its value. That is the reason, “development is nihilistic” says Tulpule. For him, it is

“not founded on any basic human and social values; it has degenerated into blind, ruthless pursuit of wealth, power, pomp and pleasure by every individual who has the means and opportunity to engage in such pursuit” (Tulpule, 1996, p. 2992).

In the present market-oriented consumer society, Gandhi’s thoughts become paramount and relevant. He was well aware of our country’s strength as well as its agony. A country with a huge population, he felt, would suffer from increased mechanization. He rather pleaded for a labor intensive technology. Not only that, India has a rich heritage of traditional knowledge and occupation, he felt, small-scale and decentralized occupations would heal our country and revive our culture. His assertion on the limitation of our wants threw a different light on the consumer

society. Whereas his ideas remained only a dream in a country aspiring for ruthless industrialization and mechanization.

Furthermore, this developmental model also influences our educational policies and practices. The industry is dictating what national educational priorities should be. Philosophy of market has been shaping the nature of schools. Generation of profit and mindless competition becomes their slogan. Information loaded curriculum, examination and certification goes in line with the market economy. The entire curriculum and the process of schooling prepare children only for the job, to blindly make money. Privatization of schools and colleges in the name of efficiency further marginalize communities who already find themselves only on the periphery of formal education. The cost of education has also skyrocketed, that not all children receive good quality education.

Village Life: A Forgotten History

Schools have become so inevitable these days, almost next to eating food. We cannot digest when children roam around without going to schools. We find it uneasy and uncomfortable. To see them in the fields, helping their mother and just roaming around without any purpose, is hardly visible. It cannot be denied that there are millions of children who has not even stepped into the school. In one way, they are lucky. They do not have to go through the drudgery of rote learning, mechanical writing, and meaningless assessments. They do not have to sit in rows, tied down to benches for the whole day. They are free birds, who play with goats and dogs, running after butterflies, plucking cherries and playing in the vast land. They are lucky enough to touch the sand, play, and role on it without worrying about getting dirty. Climbing trees, building small houses and jumping into the well and swimming through the canals and ponds, fishing with the friends and sleeping under the sky and watching stars, life is happening for them.

Even if some of the village students get to the nearby government school, the meaning is different. They are not made to worry about the marks constantly, nor they have to fill their rest of the evening with tuition. They do not break their head studying the same thing thousand times. They do not have to worry about mindless projects even during holidays. Their day is very casual, walking through the fields and running

between trees, they reach the school with a lot of laughter and jokes. While going back from school, some of them travel a long distance in cycles, sharing their stories with their friends. Games for a while, helping mother and taking care of siblings in the late evening, they have more responsibilities and yet they do not miss the fun. They go to the fields and help their parents during holidays, and some discontinue school after few years. Life is not too easy in the village, yet it is filled with joy.

Largely, village school building is not high, maybe a small room to accommodate 40 or 50 children of different age groups, single teacher to manage the entire team, no benches to sit and a huge playground. When we compare it to a private school in the city with well-built structure, different classrooms and separate teachers for each subject and infrastructure in place, a normal government school in a village stays back. It may sound inadequate, but if we look at it from another angle, it may appear different. A school in the city with all the structure in place does not have the scope for the unpolluted fresh air to enter through the window, children miss out on a long beautiful walk through the fields, watching cows, goats, and birds to reach the school. With too many children to address and tight syllabus to cover, teachers in the city miss this personal touch. With overloaded home works, tuition centers to attend and the extracurricular and gadgets to fill the remaining gaps, children in cities miss out on a casual walk back to their home and not to miss the local games while the sun is still setting. Trees, birds, sky, stars, animals and insects, rains and clouds are not too distant to watch them only in television, they are too close and familiar. They are part of their everyday life. It does not mean that one is blindly glorifying village and ignoring its darker side. However, in the name of improving 'quality,' we have effortlessly ignored to see the beauty that a village offers. From this angle, a well-built private city school appears to be a jail.

The children from village have a great chance of knowing about nature, to grow and understand plants, and to care for animals, but by sending them to schools, we are taking away the lived experiences of these children and isolating them from 'their' knowledge. In the process of isolation, we are completely handicapping them of 'their' world. Their roots are cut down to a point where they feel alien to their place, people, work, and knowledge, as well as; they are unsure of the disguised promises the school makes about their future. Our education does not only brings the children

from rural background to a school in city but additionally, it does not take them back to their villages. The land, which was once fertile, is now barren and dry. Hardly anyone wants to touch it, give it birth.

For ages, human beings have been cultivating the land, producing food items, rearing animals, growing trees. Their connection with the soil, water, plants and animals is an age-old history. However, suddenly within few decades, we seemed to have forgotten the history, for we have lost in touch with the land, soil, plants and animals. Agriculture has been one of the primary occupations for ages, but now this generation has forgotten it in a short while. It did not take much time for us to forget something that we had for ages. Industrial development has done the damage in a short while. Many of the families who worked on the farm- tilling, sowing and harvesting are now working in the companies as labourers. They consider it as 'development.' Luckily, they were not educated, so at least they had spent their childhood in the fields. However, now, their sons and daughters are going to English medium schools. They do not want to wet their hands in the fields. They have never tasted the smell of soil and longed for rain to come. It does not matter for them, whether the coconut trees are drying or the cattle starving because she can get a job. The company would feed her as she is going to surrender her freedom, intelligence, creativity and leisure to them.

Washerman, cobbler, shopkeeper, farmers, carpenter, construction workers, gardeners are not given a chance to enter the world of books, pens, technology, but even after that they get a chance, at the end of their education, they demean their work and prefer to go for a white color job. Certainly, a new occupation would liberate them from the bondage of religion, caste, and gender. It frees them from getting chained to their social identities. Education releases them from such bondage. It gives hope and gives freedom to make their own identities. However, our education completely separates them from their roots and make their history ugly and undesirable. A village farmer's son does not want to take farming, yet don't have grip in the new occupation which the modern education is promising. With the modern hegemony, he would eventually feel uprooted from his land and alienated in the new space.

2.5. Disturbing Social Realities

As skewed model of development and economic progress have created disharmonious society, similarly social inequalities based on caste, gender, class, disability and educational qualification have divided our society and fragmented our mind. Moreover, every aspect of our life is structured to favour those who already possess 'cultural capital', defined according to the criteria of dominant hegemony. Even schools are not free from this hegemony; inequalities do enter the curriculum, classrooms and in relationships.

Invisible Walls

Our society is extremely conditioned and enveloped with various layers. Caste, class, religion, gender, occupation, and region are not strange concepts; it gives individuals and groups their identity. Say, two different individuals from different places traveling in a train, introducing each other for the first time, do not appear simple. The name denotes their caste and religion, their appearance, dress, things they carry and the style of language indicates their class, the occupation would hint their status, and of course, gender and physical disability cannot be kept out of sight. Within few minutes, our social conditioning puts each other in place. Moreover, without which our conversation may not proceed because the course of conversation depends on these parameters. These parameters are not simple; they are placed orderly and hierarchically. A Dalit cannot be put up in the ladder, nor a poor man or a woman. A rich business man or a higher official would get front seats in an auditorium or a function hall compared to a labourer. As Marx rightly points out that, all social institutions exist to serve the interest of the ruling class and maintain its power. Society is constantly reproducing this unequal, hierarchical social structure through various means, and education is not an exception.

Similarly, social hierarchy raises walls between people and these walls are generally "invisible". However, invisible walls are often visible when the school says, "you cannot get admission because you have 'failed' the exams", or when parents cannot pay the fees, or one may have a physical, mental or learning disability. Still, if they are lucky enough to get admission into a school, they encounter further walls inside the classrooms. Comparisons, partial treatment, over-crowded classrooms,

disconnected syllabus and formal relation with teachers prevent them from learning. Finally, if the children have enough strength to continue in school, they face more walls when they have to take examinations which would further marginalize them.

All these keeps our schools fragmented, divided and therefore discriminatory, because schools do not bring all of them together, rather it separates them, and it makes the wall too solid. A child who enters as a middle class mingles with the same class and pass out as middle class. There is no chance to know the 'other'. The other always remain like a mystery. Schools rather than producing social reform and equality, it reproduces social hierarchy and inequality. In this context, when we talk of inequalities, we cannot possibly ignore Bourdieu's contribution; his revolutionary ideas. He, unlike other critics, does not want to reduce everything to economics, through the term "cultural capital," he revolutionized the regular way of deducing educational ideals. For him, all forms of capital are

"subject to conversion, like real capital (money) even cultural capital (style, language, taste, disposition, social grace, cultural goods, and educational qualification) can be switched from one form to another in search of profitable investment. Therefore, society is engaged in a continual competition for this real and symbolic profit for the benefit of its group for now and forever"(Harker, 1984).

The school is not a neutral place; it favors the dominant class. It is organized accordingly to favour those who already possess 'cultural capital'.According to Bourdieu, our economic bodies are designed to favour those who already possess economic capital, so are our schools structured to favour those who already possess cultural capital, defined according to the criteria of dominant hegemony. The culture of the dominant class becomes the taken for granted or the 'common' culture of the school. Therefore, the default or taken for granted cultural capital in school seems to act as an effective filter for reproducing inequality. A school for example with the majority of Hindus tend to play only Hindu prayer songs in assembly, even though it has some Muslim or Christian students. Here Hindu culture is considered "normal." Such a school would re-establish the same hierarchies and differences.

Inequalities in the education system help to reproduce the class system from one generation to the next. What school teaches children is the ideology of capitalism. Schools use a variety of methods to control pupils through the curriculum, through the

way in which the children are organized in schools and through the hierarchical staffing system, which mirrors the hierarchy of the wider society. As Bourdieu rightly points out, that it is school's failure to develop "universal pedagogy" that keeps these differences alive. In fact, there are different ways in which social reproduction unfolds itself. Therefore, for him, schools are not instrumental in producing social reform and equality, rather, it reproduces inequality.

Girls' Education-Harsh Reality

Understanding girls' education will become incomplete without taking into consideration the politics of gender. It is shaped by the society's perception of gender, womanhood, and their identity. It is not discrete as it is linked to various other aspects. The culture of sati, purdah, female infanticide, child marriage, control of female sexuality, reduced access to public space, acid attack, dowry, rape and other sexual assault has coloured the societal perception of girls, female and womanhood and that, has a direct impact on their education. When a society tolerates these atrocities, then the meaning of girls' education cannot be simple; it is questionable. For a teacher who personally believes that women are anytime lesser than men, when gets to address a classroom filled with both gender, the difference would emerge in the form of some examples, comments, gestures and remarks.

To look at enrolment, attendance, dropout, retention of girls education will give only some understanding of the situation, but more important is the intention and conceptual framework behind the framing of educational policies. It has tried to address the issue of girls education and provide equal access to girls. However, word "Equality" written on a white paper will not make a class or a school or even the society equal. There is hardly any policy analysis from a gendered perspective, complains Karuna Chanana. She adds, "scholars argue that the construction of educational policy is political and, therefore, it fails to overcome the gender bias"(Chanana, 2006).

She has further discussed four views that emerged regarding the need and justification for girls' education during the pre- and post-independence period. First view in the pre-independence period that there was a necessity for the reform in the social position of women. Secondly, it was based on the premise that men and women are

equal at the time of attaining independence. Thirdly, the conception that women education is seen as a necessary condition for the development of all human resources (the utilitarian approach). Fourthly, it is considered to be the source of equality and empowerment. However, all these discourses she feels, are not very deep, for it is afraid that the system may collapse if they have to question many fundamental issues that shape identities around gender(Chanana, 2006).

During the colonial period,the curriculum for boys and girls was different. Whereas, textbooks, curriculum and the amount of time spent in school now are same for both boys and girls, but this stage did not come without policy change over the time. In the concern to bring girls to schools during late 19th century, the government was willing to change the structural pattern and the curriculum. As Karuna Chanana points out that Indian Education Commission (1882-83) which dealt exclusively with female education made several incentives like scholarships, relaxing the school time and the curriculum be 'drawn up with special reference to the requirements of home life'(Chanana, 2006). The Educational Policy of 1913 also recommended that 'the education of girls should be practical reference to the position which they will fill in social life. It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys'(Chanana, 2006, p. 209).

However, we should thank the effort to universalize elementary education which made a significant change in respect to women's education. National Policy on Education (1986) reflected the equal education for women and their empowerment. Still, opting some of the fragmented approaches by opening alternative schools, boarding schools may not help in long run. It could be only for a quick fix, or it may have the danger of stereotyping girls. She also points out that education policy documents continue to use a compartmentalized approach to education. A separate chapter on women, scheduled castes, and tribes, children with a disability makes the approach fragmented. It does not give a comprehensive, inclusive overview and strategies. Like, non-formal education kept them in the school, but their social roles remained the same.

The gender stereotype added to poverty, scheduled caste and tribe, disability, worsen the situation. When school admissions are open, newspapers, posters, and even televisions display these differences, and everyone knows where one belongs. Parents

of a girl child from a Dalit family living in a remote village knows where possibly she could get an education. His dreams for his daughter would not include expensive English medium private schools. For her, a village government school would be her world or maybe to a nearby town for her higher studies, if she is “lucky” enough to cross poverty, early marriage or child labour. Furthermore, boys are sent to private schools and girls go to government schools and the choice of the subjects are guided by the gender stereotype.

Furthermore, it is believed that an increase in literacy rate would lead to economic development. However, equating education with economic prospects like employment, business and other ventures have done major damage to girls’ education. Apart from providing equality, the whole discourse is majorly based on a utilitarian approach to girls’ education and female literacy. It is not for them to become free and enlightened, but for them to earn money, possess properties and make the whole business run. That could be one of the reasons why girls in general are not educated because, “they are not going to earn, then, why educate them?” Getting education is not an end in itself, it has to be of ‘some’ use or profit. Also, relating female literacy with reduced mortality rate or increased per capita income of the family, or better health conditions and what not, which further validates the utilitarian approach.

Caste, Inequality, and Education

Caste is ingrained in our soil. No matter whatever reforms introduced, our society is unable to give up its practices. Caste based occupations determine our social position and the status we receive. Caste determines the dress we wear, food we eat, rituals we follow and also the way we treat people belonging to other castes. They are not simply different, but they are unequal. Upper caste and lower caste cannot take an equal share in social activities, decisions, and occupations. Their worlds are different. Even schools do not bring them together; it maintains this separation.

The caste identity, one of the things we cannot change with money, education or power, may be that is why, even after completing higher studies, a Dalit student will encounter at least a pinch of discrimination while applying for employment. Everyone is born into the caste, and it shapes our consciousness. Moreover, the denial of education to the children belonging to a lower caste (Sudras) is not a modern

phenomenon; it was the case even during the Vedic and post-Vedic period. Education was open only to the upper castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vysyas). From the time of Manusmriti, the division and discrimination against lower caste and women had been accepted and became very common. It clearly says that Sudhras are unfit for education, and no other caste should impart education to Shudras. Those who violates the law were believed to go to hell (Manusmriti, IV, pp. 78-81). It graded the society and fragmented our consciousness.

Though over time, the link between caste, education, and occupation has been broken, the social status of the lower caste remains the same. In the ancient caste-feudal society people belonged to lower caste were entitled to menial occupations, but it is no different from low-status, low paying and low-skilled jobs in the modern occupational structures (Velaskar, 1998, p. 211). Alienation and social exclusion enter their everyday life irrespective of their level of education. Discriminatory practices in the school, teachers' partial treatment, separate food for Dalits, and irrelevant curriculum forces the children from a lower caste and Dalit community to drop out eventually.

Anti-caste revolt movement participated by upper-caste social reformers, which mushroomed as a result of the spread of western education disturbed the traditionally well-established caste-based feudal system. Various reformers like Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar embraced the system of caste hierarchy. No wonder Ambedkar burning a copy of Manusmriti became a symbolic revolution against hierarchical social structure and discriminatory practices against untouchables. Irrespective of all the social reforms, structural change and legal interference the caste hegemony still prevails.

Disability: A Genuine Category for Discrimination

There are at least schools available to these 'lucky' ones irrespective of the poor quality education and sub-standard infrastructure. For children who are mentally and physically challenged, there are hardly any schools. Normal schools do not take them, but even if they enroll, they make sure that they get demoralized and lose the remaining self-confidence, for the schools are not ready to change. If the major aim of our school is to prepare us for market and workforce, then it becomes difficult for the schools to spend their time dealing with children who cannot hear, or see, or think

through 'normal' ways. Children by nature are expected to follow the 'normal' developmental pattern, and whoever falls out of it are meant to be nowhere. They were not even recognized as citizens, until, for the first time, information about basic disabilities was included in the 2001 Census, as a result of campaigning by the Indian disability movement.

Enactment of the People with Disabilities Act in 1995 provided the much required legislative support and represented a major step forward in policy towards disabled people in India. This act made it mandatory to provide free education to children with disabilities in an appropriate environment until the age of 18 years. However, the Act covers only designated types of disability and ignores several significant categories of disability. Thus, in 1999, the government passed the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities. Irrespective of these acts children with special needs are kept not only away from school, but away from public space, festivals, functions, and life itself.

Additionally, India has not been officially recognizing all the disabilities that are often acknowledged in developed societies. However, if we add such disabilities like learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, autism, leprosy and others, the percentage of people with disabilities will not be less than 10 per cent of the total population. Also, a person has to be medically certified as having 40 percent or more of one of these disabilities to be 'counted' and also entitled to 'benefits.' It may result in a situation where the ticking of census/survey boxes is wide open to subjective interpretation, and perhaps even the issuance of disability certificates open to corruption.

However, most of us are unaware of the issues relating to disability. Everyone pities them for not being able to hear or walk. It becomes their fault or their families. Also, when the awareness about disability is very less, then how is it possible to have trained professionals to educate children with disabilities in all the schools? On the one hand, the present special education programs in the country are designed to give an in-depth study in the area of specific disability, but on the contrary, the teacher is presented with students with various disabilities in an inclusive setup. Schools are

struggling; children are suffering, and yet, we have not found a meaningful and caring system of education.

Expensive Education

Schools are not for “all,” and also not all schools are similar; it caters to specific groups. Children from the upper class would go to English medium private schools, and a government school would not even fit their scheme. But, not all private schools can be clubbed together into one category, there is a range of options. Middle-class children somehow can afford for a different set of private schools and because it is English medium, does not make them any closer to the upper-class elite schools. The private schools where children from upper class attend could be distinguished from other English medium private schools, regarding a high fee structure, A/C classrooms and other ‘ultra-modern’ facilities. There is a clear segregation. It is hard for a child from a lower class background to adjust with children from upper class. It is not an only economic difference that keeps them away, but even the language, its slang, food preferences, dress, their smell, aspirations, and dreams make them unfamiliar to each other. Their worlds are different in a normal social world.

Regularly we see in newspapers, cut-outs, hand-bills during the new academic year; schools tend to project their ‘superficial’ achievements and ‘lucrative’ extracurricular facilities to attract more customers. Schools are no more an easy entry; education has become a costly affair. No wonder, one of my relatives once suggested me to start a pre-school, for it has become an ‘easy and profitable business’ for women and his examples surprised me. As schools set high standards regarding fees and demand other cultural capital like language, parents’ educational qualifications, and others, it becomes easy to keep away poor children from entering the school. In addition to these, speaking English becomes the top most priority. English not only dominates the classroom interaction, but also forced to enter the interpersonal relations, with teachers, peers, and some cases even with parents. Therefore, the ones who do not possess this cultural capital (English) are forced to feel isolated and finally, withdrawn from the system.

Social hierarchy does not only operate when we are adults; it starts right from the beginning. The ‘early selection,’ i.e. placing of children in various types of institutions

begin when they are young. The selected ones are trained in separate institutions to gain cultural capital for their elite status in the future. It is not only about the economic development but also involves gaining of dominant cultural capital which becomes a prerequisite for becoming elite. Schools do these job so well, and the premiere in cultivating elites are these ‘public’ schools. Krishna Kumar points out that,

“these schools draw their distinctiveness from the spirit of the British public schools which they imitate and whose historical origins they share. Like their British counterparts, the Indian public schools breathe the spirit of a bygone era of history and continue to uphold an unmistakable aura if imperial days” (Kumar, 1985).

Not only these schools, but any private schools try to imitate similar aspects to produce and reproduce elite class. All these different types of exclusive schools offer routes of ‘sponsored mobility’ to elite jobs and institutes like IIT, IIM, other popular colleges, and universities.

Moreover, one of the major striking features that keep the poor from entering the school is the high fee structure. It selects in the very beginning and thereby retains the difference. Even the selection is not for the ones who can simply pay but for the ones who already have acquired certain skills, like numbers, alphabets, drawing, and reading. There are ‘pre’-schools which give training to find easy entry to these schools. Not all children are capable of possessing these skills, due to poor economic condition backed by other social problems. Those who are in a better economic situation would be able to provide these skills. Children from the poor economic background are sent to government schools. Also, not all government schools are alike, Central Schools, Sainik Schools, as Krishna Kumar says, “operate with far superior resources than are available to the schools run by the state government in the same town” (Kumar, 1985). These schools are not open to poor students. They are highly competitive.

Education and Occupational Hierarchy: Yet Another Category for Discrimination

Education instead of uniting separates, divides and compares us with each other. Not only caste, class, gender and ethnic differences stand for discrimination, but even

education itself becomes one of the reasons for inequality. There is a huge difference between the one who has completed school education from the one who has a doctorate, the difference is not simply regarding knowledge, but regarding social status, opportunities and of course, the salary. Even the one who has a sound understanding of hardware with no institutional certification, has less advantage compared to the one who holds a certified degree, even if his practical knowledge is minimum. Institutionalization, standardization, and certification have validated such discrimination. Even different streams of subjects can be arranged in order from the least important to the most famous and marketable. Most of us are aware of such ordering when we have to choose a subject for the higher studies. It is simply not about one's interest and thirst for knowledge, but it indicates a highly socio-politically stratified streams of knowledge. Arts and Humanities are considered lesser than the technical science subjects.

Occupational hierarchies and educational hierarchies go hand in hand. There is a strong and direct link between economic institutions, and the educational system feels, Gramsci, because

“class which is advancing towards hegemony in civil society must also achieve leadership in the sphere of production. It is only because the bourgeoisie acquires a decisive control over the productive process that it can also become the hegemonic class in civil society and achieve state power” (Simon, 1999: 30)

Maybe that is the reason; education is directly linked to workforce, job, business. Even jobs do hold ranks; not all jobs are equally treated and aspired. A manual labor and a civil service officer are no way equal, though both work for people, yet they hold differences regarding status, respect, salary, opportunities and living standard. The differences are well-defined and socially hierarchized.

Equality, A Popular Misleading Aspiration

Equality has become a popular concept in the recent times. In every sphere of life we are at least coming to acknowledge 'equality,' be it gender, caste, class, religion and disability. For women, equality denotes, leaving the household work behind and pursuing all kinds of job where men used to be the sole participant. For a Dalit, to give away his manual labour and aspire for the white collar jobs, becomes his prayer

and likewise for every other group. Whereas, even if equality is brought in, then what culture will it represent? That was the reason why Bourdieu reminded us that, “the social boundaries are reinforced through the narrow pursuit of equality” (Harker, 1984, p. 118).

The world does change; societies do not remain static. The problems like unemployment, poverty, discrimination do challenge the system. It may solve or not, but at least, it creates some discomfort. However, the irony is that the reaction to these discomforts is superficial and misleading. The response to the rising unemployment and economic unrest is to prepare the children for the ‘popular’ jobs and increase the level of competition, but who is going to benefit this? Definitely, not the working class or lower class whose language and the concepts are not competent enough because of the educational deprivation of their parents and limited exposure to the children. Therefore, any change introduced in the system is always for the dominant class. Even in such a situation if the child from a lower class succeeds, Willis reminds us that “Individual working class kids may succeed in education- never the whole class”(Willis, 1983, p. 129). Equal educational opportunity is highly political, says Bourdieu, because for him it cannot overcome the real inequalities. The mode of selection, the content of the syllabus and practice of examinations cannot, but help reinforce inequality.

To break all social barriers and to bring all children together in school and secure their participation in learning activities is a distant goal, though it looks interesting, but not practical. Addressing the problem is not simple. Technically, it is simple to bring about equality, but it is highly doubtful whether we desire it. There is always difference, hierarchy that comes in place, be it caste, religion, class, gender or even the educational qualifications. Imagine a situation where one overcomes caste, religious and class inequality and embraces equality, but as long as he is worshipping competition, he cannot resist himself from raising the wall against others using his educational qualification. Something blocks us and makes us feel different from each other. We may celebrate differences, but we are also placed on the social ladder, we know where we are, either above, middle or in the bottom. We are constantly being measured and compared with others. The scale may be different, maybe earlier they were placed on ‘caste’ scale, or a ‘religion’ scale, or a ‘gender’ scale, but now, we

have only replaced it with other scales. If we have to give up this order, is to give up our identity itself. In the fight against caste, religion, and gender we may forget to notice new forms of identity arising. It comes in some form or the other. It is highly dangerous, for it may deceive us of our movement and the social harmony.

However, education contains an element of challenge to the system, but the dominant class fears the consequence, because educating the working class, girls, disabled and children belonging to lower caste would open their eyes to the true nature of the society they live. So through various ways they operate to keep these children out of school. Moreover, encouraging children to think and discover things for themselves raises the possibility that they might use that knowledge to challenge the society rather than support it. That nevertheless is a threat to their hegemony. So even if they get to reach the school, the curriculum and pedagogy is manipulated to keep the children unaware of the reality. As Illich rightly understood the politics of increasing institutionalization in the modern world, for it has invented “a new class of poor” and “a new definition of poverty.” Ivan Illich calls this as “modernization of poverty”. He feels that

“the poor have always been socially powerless. The increasing reliance on institutional care adds a new dimension to their helplessness: psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves” (Illich, 1971, p. 11).

Like ignoring to include women, poor, disabled, disadvantaged, tribes, and marginalized group in this vicious circle is, in a way better, when we are aware of the kind of problems with the education system. However, globalization is threatening the government to include the whole lot in the process of making a uniform rotten spoiled mechanical human soul. NGO and other research organizations have joined to strengthen this hegemony.

CHAPTER - II

CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY AND HEGEMONY

We seem to have become uncreative, fearful and cloned individuals and lost the art of questioning, exploring and wondering about our life freely. We have no confidence and faith to face our life freshly and creatively. Why are we like this? Hegemony in education and elsewhere seems to have created this dearth in intelligence, creativity, confidence, faith and love.

Through education, children are made to conform to the already existing social structure which is based on inequality, insecurity, fear, sorrow and violence. Moreover, in the educational arena, curriculum and pedagogy become the obvious tools for furtherance of hegemony. Therefore, this chapter further goes into the details of how the consciousness of children, teachers, school authorities and parents gets influenced, becomes corrupted and ultimately leads to the establishment of hegemony. This chapter also goes into the various other forms in which this whole process of hegemony unfolds. It is astounding that, we ignore to see that, our everyday reality in school is highly politicized and manipulated for the establishment of hegemony.

3.1. Disconnecting Learning from Life

Hegemony disconnects us from what is being learnt in schools from life. Children are unaware of the complexities of the real life. Since the first day of our school life, we have been trained to distinguish book learning from the real-life learning. Textbooks do not mediate between the world outside and man's inner world, but they are rather divided. Children are disconnected from their own life experiences and what remains with them is the superficial textbook knowledge. Due to this division, children dismiss the significance of learning in real life and get habituated to it. Thus, they tend to take everyday life for granted and not look at it as an arena for learning. Because, what is written in the textbooks becomes legitimate knowledge and the rest is not 'worth' learning. As children and also when they grow into adults, they would not be able to relate this knowledge to their everyday life. As a result, life appears as two separate worlds. To see History, Philosophy, Science, Social science, and Art as their everyday experience then becomes very difficult.

However, the superficial knowledge about everything may make the child's life also superficial. Children miss connecting with life at a deeper level. Our education does not care to build on this connectivity in children either. Therefore, the real world becomes unimportant to them. Printed words, mark sheets and grades mislead them. When the world is fully, freshly happening out there, then why should we confine our education within four walls? What we study is about the outside world, but why does the classroom become extremely important? When the bird is singing outside, why should one make an artificial model and study about it in a closed lab? There is no connection between what one studies and how one lives. This isolation has fragmented our mind and life has lost its poetry. When we have become dry, dull and violent, it is therefore easy to manipulate one's mind and establish hegemony.

Lack of Wonderment about Life

The sense of wonderment and excitement is often missing in our schools. Everyday rituals, fixed syllabus, rigid time table and examinations have made learning very mechanical and dull. To understand how this incredible human machine goes on working without the direction of our knowledge is a mystery. But a chapter on 'physiology of human body' in biology class does not induce any goose bumps for the

children. What we are and how the world is at present, has taken billions and millions of years to evolve. Yet the comprehension of this course of nature manifesting into different forms through 'evolution' does not evoke poetry in our classrooms. And a geography class on 'tectonic plates and the changing landscape' would not tell us how impermanent our physical world is. Life itself is a wonder and mystery still unfolding. Classes, when meaningfully conducted, cannot miss this aspect of awe. Whereas, in schools, there are hardly any classes where the subjects are taught with this feeling of wonderment. Barely do our classrooms spend time on these. Whereas, in small children, the interest to explore is very natural. They explore keenly and seriously, yet with joy. But, as they grow, they stop exploring and enjoying. Schools play a major role in killing this natural interest as well as joy in children.

Each individual is interested in a certain area/s of knowledge and possess a unique style of learning. However, teachers do not have patience to provide students with enough stimulation, knowledge and opportunities for them to grow. When the syllabus, classes, and timetable are fixed, then how will the individual student's interest be understood? Even if their interest is known, how is it going to flower in a fixed timing? Life has its own surprises, but if we ignore them and fill life with our plans, will the learning be complete? When, most of our learning happens unexpected, unplanned, unintended, accidental, and natural, a strict programmed learning in schools may not help the children to learn, rather, it may hamper the natural learning process. Within the physical walls erected in schools, invisible walls tend to arise in our mind. With this kind of hegemony, we compartmentalize and live within the cells and never let ourselves merge with life completely.

Nurturing Away from 'Nature'

Schools are very keen in raising walls between classrooms and are trying to make schools look more like factories, where souls are separated from nature. Whereas, nature looks so orderly. Nature creates, protects and dies, and then again it creates, protects and dies, and the cycle goes on. It doesn't assert its existence. Like, the sun rises in the morning and sets in evening and it never announces its arrival, a flower doesn't trumpet during the spring to showcase its coming, nor a river. Everything happens rhythmically and beautifully, yet there is no trace of ego. But man has gone too far from nature, in fact, he has gone 'against' the nature.

Human beings have stepped out and created organizations which are formal, regulated, managed and impersonal. In such a place, where only the defined roles and specified rules and regulations becomes the only way of being together, then it loses life. Here, the mind dominates, heart gets defeated, the feeling dies and therefore the place becomes mechanical, dull and boring. Man went on creating many such organizations and markets for both the goods and services. Schools are not an exception; schools alienate children from nature, their surroundings and life itself. What we are learn in school has no meaning in our understanding of nature, life. Schools may help us to get a job, but they have damaged the connection we could possibly have with nature and life.

Learning, Work & Play – Watertight Compartments??

Learning, working and playing are considered as separate activities. When we learn, we don't associate it with work or play, and when we play, we don't associate it with learning or work and when we work, again we don't include play and learning with it. But are learning and work different from play? Are they all really opposed to each other? Certainly, there seems to be a clear distinction on why each of them is carried out, the mood each creates, the outcome each gives, .

The games children play give them pleasure and joy, but they do not get any income out of playing. Whenone completes his/her education, one has to start 'working'. It is definitely not 'play', because when you are at work, you have to be serious and move towards a desired goal. Play is something that is done when one is 'free' and it is not supposed to be 'productive'. The boundaries are very clear, and work and play seem to appear distinct, separate from each other. Each has a different meaning, value and status. It is not considered legitimate to even doubt this difference, but certainly, there seems to be a problem with this assumption.

For example, a person who is interested in playing chess resists his work. He seems to enjoy playing chess while working on a translation project in an office setting. He finds work boring and not enjoyable. In fact, work is coming in his way of enjoying life. Largely, when play is there, work is not there and when work is present then the aspect of play disappears. Work can never be a game, something to be handled with ease and joy. It is very important to understand this process of separating the extra-

curricular activities or play or art from work. Work is something to be done so mechanically and uninterestingly, but play or art is something to be enjoyed and to have fun with.

The immediacy of work has limited us in seeing the connection and meaning it has with the larger world and to the inner world of ones being. Because of the missing link we are bound to see only the personal benefit- like hike in salary, incentives, and social status of designation. For which, we might be ready to go to any extent- taking bribe, making exorbitant profit and exploiting the poor. Thereby, we have completely missed the link that our work has with the larger society and its implications. When work becomes a compulsion, then surely art, play and entertainment provides an escape from this tyranny. Then the means of art or play becomes the way to release this tension. Same is the case with academic learning. We tend to see the academic papers as something so important, then automatically, extra-curricular gains a different meaning.

Play too is very distinct from learning. When you play, you do not learn and when you learn, it is not a play. Learning is serious and cannot be taken as lightly as playing. Such clear classification and differentiation has damaged our intelligence. It has fragmented our mind and compartmentalized our life itself. Definitely there is certain practical convenience in doing so, but it has destroyed our joy, the fun in enjoying life.

Learning and Work

No matter how much we argue, work becomes extremely important. We can't deny it easily, for the consequences are disturbing and sometimes devastating. A man in thirties cannot reject or take a break from work comfortably. The absence of work haunts him, and also people around him. Even a retired employee finds it difficult to manage 'no work'. Because, it provides something more than money, it occupies his time, gives him social status, and acceptance. It becomes his identity. Work is no longer simple and meaningful.

But, what is work after all? When any "job" is just about bringing maximum comfort in others' life, then why waste one's whole energy on it? As a civil engineer, all I can do is to make a good plan and build a big house, an apartment or a multi-level

building. As a vegetable vendor, I can become a source for delicious food in somebody's home. Or, as a bank manager, I can temporarily keep the number of smiling Gandhi earned by somebody and disperse it whenever it is necessary. But, what is so great about it? Except that I will be getting paid for it to make my life comfortable.

From the tooth paste I use to the car I drive to the house I live to the food I eat to the computer I use to the movie I watch to the bed I sleep - somebody has to work from 9am to 5 pm and six days in a week. Even I have to work for others. Thanks to the national holidays! Why spend maximum time on things that are really not that important? That is, after getting all these comforts then, what???

Where did our 'wondering' ability go? When we were small, even a soap bubble could trigger our curiosity. Don't we remember asking our mom, 'where is this rain water coming from?' Why are these ants marching in line? When our grandfather died, didn't we ask our dad, 'where is my thatha/dadu?' Now that we are adults, are we thinking that we know everything? Or, are we too busy to ask them again?? When our life is all about job and family, then from where will these questions arise? If we stop wondering about life, then what is the use of all these comforts?? Definitely, to an extent, we do need the comfort. How can we wonder about stars when our stomach is hungry? But if it is all about getting job and working, then who will ask 'what life is'?

By making work compulsory and mandatory, we have lost the inner meaning of work. We have forgotten the inter-connectedness of work with everything around. It might be a very mechanical and compulsory work for a laborer in the farm to dig his hands every day in the mud, but his work helps some other people somewhere else have a meal. This is not to romanticize manual labour, but even the high paid software engineer in a multinational company helps people to get access to technology. Here it is pertinent to mention John Dewey, who insisted that, in every work there is a possibility of learning. For him, it is very difficult to separate. He feels that education has a possibility of transformation, which means that,

“these occupations in the school shall not be mere practical devices or modes of routine employment, the gaining of better technical skills as cooks, seamstresses, or carpenters, but active centers of, scientific insight into natural materials and processes, points of departure

whence children shall be let out into a realization of the historic development of man” (Dewey, 1966, p. 17).

However, such connections are missing and we tend to see them in isolation-working, learning and playing. By isolating all these components, one loses their real meaning. Therefore, it has taken the essence out of life. This makes mind uncreative and unintelligent and therefore, it has lost the ability to question and wonder. Through such a mind, hegemony unfolds easily.

Speed, Restlessness and the Myth of Learning

Often in schools we see teachers rushing through the topics and in a constant hurry to cover the syllabus. There is no time to wait and watch. In competition with other schools and also to make their school ‘advanced’, more complex topics and skills are introduced in early years. To make small children write sentences, when their hands are not even ready to hold a pencil properly, is the situation of the present-day play schools. What was taught once in higher classes are now in primary books. Not only lot of topics are included, but they are rushed through. Children are not taught to wait and wonder what they study.

Once the busy Mathematics class is over, without giving some time to even grasp and feel it, the next class begins. And definitely, without making any connection to the previous class, Physical Science begins as a different subject. By the time children realize what has been taught in Science, Language class starts. And this madness continues for ever, day after day. There is a frantic rush in schools to complete the prescribed syllabus and we can see this restlessness in the number of topics they cover in a day, increased amount of homework and mindless project works. It does not just stop here.

What has been taught has to be remembered as well. So, the next problem is to retain the information. Class tests, home test, surprise test, monthly test, mid-term exam, quarterly and half yearly exams and final exam...all these demand retention of information. Teacher and children are in a state of constant anxiety. They have forgotten to stop and wonder about the things they read and remember. They are trying to convert the child into a mobile encyclopedia. This is a kind of madness to know about anything and everything. Schools have lost the sense of moving slowly

and easily. They have lost the guts to stop and wait. But what happens when we move slowly? Maybe we are afraid that we may waste time.

Whatever information it is, it touches us deeply only when we move slowly. Only then we can feel it; it becomes almost real. It feels closer. Similar to describing our visit to a rose garden or a museum to a friend. If we rush through, it becomes mere information, but if we slow down, they can almost feel it. It becomes almost real to them. As if they are touching the rose today, as if the wind is blowing on their face and filling their heart with joy. They feel it much later, though they may simply recall their past experience.

Similarly, when I study about a tree, it can be a piece of information and it can also be an experience of feeling. Simply a mental exercise does not evoke anything in us, but when we feel what we study, then it evokes a different reaction, it opens up a different perspective. One can observe what happens when we just the word 'tree' and what happens when we feel the tree. The word 'tree' can only bring us the image of the tree. But when we feel the tree, we can almost touch the leaves, feel the shadow; it cools us.

However, the aspect of feeling is hardly evoked in schools, for the curriculum runs from topic to topic. The more we rush through, the more we would run farther and farther away from feeling. Feeling brings us closer to life. We can rush through a newspaper and update the information, but it will not touch us deeply. Whereas when we slow down and feel, then we are closer to the information. It is no longer a reality of others, but it becomes almost our reality. In schools, the information about something is fixed and sacrosanct. It has to be so. It cannot be otherwise. For example, a tree is always a tree, fixed matter, it cannot be otherwise. But some theories of quantum physics tell us that there is no matter as distinct from energy, no physical universe; and that everything exists in the form of energy. Now how do I perceive a tree? Can I allow various perspectives to enhance my understanding? But the schools do not allow such possibilities, because there is no time.

Schools are not the only places, rush and restlessness have become the basic functioning point of the present civilization itself. Everywhere there is anxiety. Anything faster is good and effective. We judge things and even people based on

speed. The faster and quicker anything is, the more desirable it becomes. In a market economy, competition is based on this theory. Anything slow is looked down and is considered outdated. Slowness has lost its value. From daily activities to work environment, everything has speeded up. Bicycle is effective, keeps us healthy and it does carry one from place to place, but it is slow. Over time bicycles have faded away from the roads. Why would one prefer bicycle over a motor bike, when a bike can cover the same distance several times faster? Even household things have changed over time, mainly to reduce the time spent; the time spent to complete the tasks. We no more use the things that our ancestors once used. From a small grocery shop to a multinational company, speed is the parameter. The faster you produce, the better it is. The moment you become slow, you almost can't exist. You will lose your job, you will lose your customer, and you will lose everything.

This is not to blame all the development that man has brought about, because it has definitely made our life easier and convenient. A faster vehicle can save an emergency patient by reaching hospital quicker; a mixer and washing machine can relieve house wives from insurmountable work. Fastness has its value, yet in this pursuit of making everything faster we have lost the art of slowing down. On the roads, in shops, in offices and even at home, there is rush. Moreover, hegemony cannot work effectively in slowness, because as long as one is rushing, there would be no time to think, feel and reflect. Therefore, it becomes easy to rule over. That is the reason, why there is always a constant feeling of anxiety and restlessness. This has destroyed our rhythm. Mad rush for everything has killed our peace, our life itself. We don't seem to know why we are rushing through. At this juncture, I wish to recall something that I wrote to a friend who was very "busy" with his work.

*The morning Sun,
With all its brightness
Peeping through the window,
It's reflection on your bed
What a bright star (t) awaits you?
What to do??
Sorry, you have no breaks,
Your day is already written!*

*Rivers are flowing
Trees are glowing
Birds are singing*

*But...
You don't notice
So...
They don't exist!*

*Children can play,
Mother can cook,
Flowers can bloom
Well...
How does it matter?
When your day is full!*

*Busy are these days!
With mundane things
And overflowing thoughts
Crowd your mind
And I am wondering,
With, what a speed!
Where are you going?*

*Walking in solitude,
Sitting by the silence,
Wandering empty,
What else didn't you taste!
Oh my friend!
Do you hear those songs anymore??*

*Waiting far away,
Wondering how to reach you
Beautiful poems to share
But...
I'm afraid,
You may not hear my chapters
Before the story ends!*

*Come on, my friend!
Lie down on my side
Let's watch the sky
Those distant mysteries,
Empty your mind
but...
Will you trust the stars?
I doubt!*

*You must be wondering,
Why am I mourning?
For I am sad,
That, your dreams may die.
Dance slowly, my friend!
For you may miss the music,
Before the song is over!*

3.2. Classification that Kills Connectedness

Hegemony disconnects us from life and that can be easily established through classification. That is the reason, in schools, subjects are classified and the contents are well insulated within their boundaries. We cannot do addition without calling it 'Math' and in the same way, we cannot study about plants without calling it 'botany' or 'science'. It is very clear where it belongs. It is not right to mention 'Akbar' in a Math book, similarly, it feels so right to study about 'rivers' only in Geography class, but not in Physics. Each and every subject exists in its own atomized world. Subjects are divided as if they have no connection with the other subjects. Similarly, anything about human body can appear only in Biology, likewise, stars exist in Astronomy and Angles in Mathematics. It cannot be otherwise.

However, life does not present itself that way. Water is water. It contains everything-Literature, Science, History, Geography, Economics, Politics, Philosophy and what not. Every subject is connected in water. However, specialization has fragmented this reality. Our education does not seem to evoke our intelligence to see this connectedness. Rigid classification and specialization have taken away life out of everything. This has created huge damage to our intelligence and creative imagination.

Mathematics, Physics, Languages, History and Geography...we find them in different books and we have different teachers for them. And for higher studies, we have even separate colleges, where subjects are even more micro classified (Micro-biology, Nano-physics, Commerce, Bio-technology, Sociology, Philosophy and so on). Classification of subjects was meant to enrich our understanding of life, but over specialization and classification fail to admit or see the interconnectedness between everything. Therefore, people are disabled to see life totally, wholly.

Such hegemony makes life fragmented and kills the spirit of connectedness. Even at a very young age, we begin to start compartmentalizing and labelling life itself. One cannot deny the importance of specialization but at the same time in the process of compartmentalization we are losing the connecting thread between different subjects and therefore we tend to see life only in fragments. The abundance and the wholeness of life cannot be perceived through division. Division distorts the continuity and

makes subject appear as self-contained in their prescribed boxes. But this is dangerous, because life itself offers in abundance, in its completeness. It is very difficult to remove Mathematics from patterns in the leaves, Physics from the blood supply in our body... they are all not isolated events, they happen at the same time and the challenge is to see all of that at the same time.

As a common man, standing at the banks of the river Ganga, what do I perceive? Do I see the river as collection of atoms and molecules, or do I see the force of the water, its depth, or do I think about the history of the river and its changing geographical scope, or do I study the ecosystem -varieties of fishes, plants and micro-organisms-of the river water, or do I probe into the degrading condition of the river, the pollution and enormous number of dams and tall buildings, or do I recollect a beautiful poem on river and nature, or do I perceive the impermanency of our life that flowing river is signifying? What is expected of me or what will be 'the correct' way of perception? In life, all these perspectives exist and happen simultaneously and in abundance. But, can I perceive all of these completely? Will my specialization allow me to see this connectedness? I doubt.

Different subjects are not discrete but they are different aspects of the same thing. Each subject is unique in its specialization, but at the core, they are all related. The very connectedness of all the happenings – which we have made into subjects - is what makes life possible. The explanation for the existence of a single human being depends on what is going on inside the tiny atoms and also what is happening in the vast universe. Largest of the largest and smallest of the smallest are not discrete, they are connected. Even our life is all connected and seems to be in continuum with everything around. So, it does matter to us to know about what is happening out there/outside, for it is all well connected and interdependent. Without the environment filled with plants, animals, micro-organisms, non-living things and astronomical bodies, we can't exist. Life is simply not possible. So, the important thing that needs to be cultivated from childhood is this sense of "connectivity". The child has to be made aware of this connectivity at a deeper level. Then learning becomes important to the child and it gives significance for her own existence.

Everything a child learns has to be connected to her own life experience. Otherwise, the superficial knowledge about everything will make the child's life superficial.

Without understanding the significance of various topics and subjects, children are being force fed, in order to 'complete' the syllabus. Schools are preparing children to possess 'encyclopedic' knowledge -to know bits about everything - which is being considered as the ultimate aim of education. To know and remember something about everything is just a skill. But, the deeper understanding of the subject and the interconnection between everything is being ignored. What has become important is the extensive superficial knowledge. However, if a child is interested in plants and trees, can't we bring in Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Mathematics, Art, and Literature while learning about nature? Is it not the duty of a teacher to make such connection and throw light from various perspectives on the subject? But, through hegemony we are trained to accept classification and treat each subject as an end in itself.

However, with the hegemony of classification of subjects in schools, we are invariably training the children to distinguish personal life from what is being learnt in schools. We may study about violence and we may even write a wonderful paper on how to solve it, but in our personal life we may ignore to see that very violence, act on it and transform it. As we grow and become a working member of the society, we tend to forgo all that we had learnt, about labour problems, exploitation, and inequality. We become just 'another cog in the wheel'. We lose all our strength, as we cannot handle this fragmented mind. Our office and personal life would therefore appear as two different worlds. School and office, work and play, life and death would not appear like a continuum, but rather as mutually exclusive opposites. Therefore, we remain ignorant of the social problems and personal agony and continue to reproduce the existing pattern without any courage to change.

Danger of Naming and Categorizing

Classification and categorization of various subjects happens at the school level, but if we look further deeply, we would discover that the very knowledge itself is the result of categorizing and labeling. We label everything. We put a tag to anything that we come across. From a blade of grass to the biggest of trees, from the smallest particle on earth to the greatest of mountains, from amoeba to dinosaurs, from a piece of paper to the latest technological devices, we name everything. Even the unknown matter discovered recently in an atom is called as God particle. If something else is

discovered, we will name that too. Therefore, in a hegemonic structure, nothing is left unknown and uncertain. Even watching an evening sunset is not direct, our knowledge clouds the perception.

Knowledge is considered as ‘knowing’ about something. Knowing is nothing but gathering information about something and this information carries set of names. However, just by simply knowing the word or the name do we understand the thing completely? Suppose, I am looking at a tree for the very first time and I do not know what I am looking at and then if someone comes along and tells me that it is a “tree”, then I am ok with it, because I feel that I have understood it by knowing its name or by knowing something about it. But, seriously, have I really understood it completely by simply naming it and by grouping it under a category? The fact that we are ignorant about a new/unknown thing may disturb us. So, we go to a library, refer to the books, or ask someone and then we get to know that it is a tree. Maybe we may add more naming to it, that it is a neem tree and that it is green in colour and that it is used for such and such purposes. Sadly, this is what we have been thinking as knowledge. Possibly, there is a different meaning to knowledge itself, without naming and categorizing. Can there be an understanding when we do not name and put it under a category, while simply being in contact with it? Are we aware of such a possibility?

Definitely, naming, categorizing and analyzing have tremendous importance. Otherwise, all these discoveries, scientific inventions and cultural development would not have come this far. Without differentiating iron from copper, metal from wood, the whole process of industrial revolution would not have taken place. For sure, differentiating, categorizing and naming are special characteristics that human beings possess. These have done wonders. Yet, the same naming, categorizing and analyzing have made our mind fragmented and isolated. By categorizing and naming we have created rigid boundaries and isolated everything from everything else. A seed is isolated from the tree it is going to become; in fact, the tree is already contained in the seed. Without the seed, the tree is not possible and vice-versa, without the tree, the seed is not possible. From this end, a seed looks completely different from the other end as a tree, in its physical form and characteristics. But when we look at the whole

process of a seed becoming a tree, where do we draw the exact line of categorization? It's very strange, yet that is how it is.

By naming, it becomes easy to our mind but it is challenging if we see it without the name. Then our looking is complete. Then a seed implies tree and a tree implies seed. They are not separate. They are not isolated; they are one process that contains everything like a seed containing a tree. In a normal physical sense, yes, they appear different and it's funny to imagine both are the same or as one containing the other. But generally, we tend to ignore the whole process. We notice the intervals but not the entire process as a whole event. When we sow the seed in the soil and add water at regular intervals, after few days or weeks, it sprouts out of the soil. We may call it a 'sprout' and after few weeks as it grows little bigger, we may call it a 'plant' and after few years, we may call it a 'tree'. But what about the periods in between? Are they as separate and distinct as they appear? What do we call that which is in between? Is it not the seed becoming the full-grown tree a complete process? And therefore, is it not unnatural to categorize it? However, our entire school knowledge suffers from this hegemony. We constantly fill the children's mind with information. We do not allow any other possibility of looking at things, nature and life. Our relation with things and events is only through information, but we don't allow ourselves to come in contact with them directly, keeping aside all the information. If we allow them to enter us, something tremendous may happen. Alas! We are afraid.

When we cross the boundaries of physicality and see the process without names, then it appears as one. Then the whole world looks different and it may imply a completely different meaning. This is not an exercise that can be sidelined or ignored. May be if we look at everything around us in this sense, we may discover something tremendously significant. The world which we perceive as things unrelated to each other and events isolated from each other may appear one and continuous. May be that is how existence is. This complicated human being working in an office may be related to those distant stars in the vast sky. It could be a single continuous process. It is not a joke to admit that the physical forms and life came about from atoms. Life has evolved and transformed into different forms. And when we see it as a whole process we may come to a point that everything is one and happens as a continuous process. If we put aside for a while, the names and categories, we might see life-less matter

evolving into amoeba, plants evolving into animals, and animals evolving into human beings, as one complete process. Maybe this may bring about a change in our understanding and this may invariably change the very way we are living. Moreover, if we develop this sense to see the whole things as a continuous process, then we tend to care for others, love overflows automatically.

However, hegemony does not allow such possibilities to occur, because we isolate, we create distinctions, differences, and therefore the problems. There is this sense of separation that I am different from other fellow human beings, plants, animals and inanimate things. Therefore, I become extremely selfish, I would like to protect myself, fight and compete with every other person. Even the destruction of the nature by humans could be because of this separation. And hegemony is possible only in separation, isolation and fragmentation. Therefore, schools continue to maintain classification and specialization and thereby, depriving children from realizing this interconnectedness of subjects and life.

Does Age Really Matter for Learning?

Not only children are disconnected from what they are learning from schools, but hegemony prevents them from learning beyond certain age. Because, as long as people are kept under ignorance, the process of hegemony can be smooth and undisturbed. Therefore, the social pressure to learn beyond a particular age is nil. As a result, the accessibility to learning space is only till a particular age.

At the age of 45, can someone wonder about the plants and stars? Can we imagine a 50 year old house wife interested in learning about human body sit in a grade 6 classroom? Or a 64 year-old retired army person willing to enjoy Shakespeare's poems along with young children of class 9? Definitely, we are not so comfortable to imagine such a situation. Such imagination seems to disturb our general notion of "age limit" in school education. Our notion seems to allow young children for learning, but not elders and old people. We seem to not see any purpose in this. We would ask, "If they are educated, they would have learnt everything in their childhood, also they have many other means of learning available, so why school? And why 'now' at this age?"

Similarly, we have become so comfortable to the idea that the concept of geometry starts in class 4, Indus valley civilization enters textbook only in class 8, Newton's law of gravitation comes only in class 9, Anatomy and Physiology of human body only in class 11... for a moment, if we take away these concepts from the structural bindings of school, syllabus, subjects, grade and examinations, these concepts do concern everyone irrespective of our age, occupation, gender and other factors. To connect with the human body, to wonder about stars and galaxies, to play with mathematical patterns, to look into minute atoms and molecules, one does not have to bother about the age.

One might have studied in one's school time, but why does one deprive oneself of relooking at the whole world once again, for it gives a great joy every time to discover the intelligence that nature has and how it is unfolding in everything around us and in us. Now, at an age when one is considered as adult, one is not bound by examinations and the pressure of securing marks, maybe, one could connect to the world in a much more genuine way, freely and joyfully.

Once a child completes her formal education, enters the world of occupation and family, she does not just leave behind what has been learnt, but also the spirit of learning. She learns new things, only if there is any monetary benefit. But to just relook at the textbooks once more for the mere joy of appreciating life is something that is uncommon. Even the schools or other educational institutions do not have space for such learning to happen. If one wants to learn about historical events or physical sciences, there are books in abundance or courses available in a formal setup which has its own syllabus and structure. Simply to have a place where one can go find a group of people to share and explore together is very difficult. Learning as a life-long activity is completely missing in our culture. For most of us, once the school or college is done, learning is also done. There is no social pressure to read or learn when we are adults, forget about old age. But the implications are worse when we stop learning after a particular age; when what we have learnt in schools and colleges does not make sense when we are in 40s and 80s. Our life may become incomplete, dull and sorrowful.

Children are naturally very active and always eager to know about everything. As they grow, they become dull and heavy. So, why not young and old come together

and share the spirit of learning? Young mind is always yearning to learn, explore and experiment. Small children, the way they ask questions about everything around, the way they want to engage with the world is something that can trigger adults, who have over time become dull and bored. This engagement across ages can bring about a whole new possibility of relooking at the world in a different perspective. Children have that energy and spirit, adults have the world of knowledge and experience. Both the worlds can meet as mutual learners and rediscover the joy of learning. But, hegemony with its strict classification of classes and subjects have damaged our imagination. We stop wondering about other possibilities and alternatives.

3.3. Stolen Childhood

*I am the child
All the world waits for my coming,
All the earth watches with interest
What I shall become
Civilization hangs in the balance,
For what I am,
The world of tomorrow will be.*

*I am the child
I have come into your world,
About which I know nothing.
Why I came I know not,
How I came I know not,
I am curious, I am interested.*

*I am the child
You hold in your hand my destiny,
You determine largely,
Whether I shall succeed or fail
Give me, I pray you those things
That make for happiness
Train me, I beg you,
That I may be a blessing to the world.*

(Egan, 1986)

Perception of Childhood and Its Politics

Every second, babies are born, and their growth starts not only from birth, but right from the conception. And till the end of their life, change is inevitable. Their body and mind undergo continuous change. This process is not new, this has been going for

millions of years, ages after ages and civilizations after civilizations, from the time when we were nomads to the modern lifestyle and it has been the fact. Similarly, our ideas, values and lifestyles have changed; have in fact undergone a drastic change. The way we perceive childhood in the ancient times is not the same as how it is taken now; it has changed. Also, it is not a universal concept, it varies from society to society.

We have come to perceive of 'childhood' now as a separate and unique stage of life, to be protected and enhanced. Schools are meant to serve this purpose. Children are therefore well insulated, as Vasanthi Raman rightly identifies, "from economic and community life"(Raman, 2000, p. 4056). Many of the scholars including her, point out that this perception of childhood originated in the western countries and it has been taken as a model by the rest of the world. We feel it is right to take the children away from family and community and put them in schools. It looks incorrect to see children working in the farm along with their family or in a factory.

Childhood, as many people argue is a social construct with a complex interplay of social, historical, cultural and political factors. It is not as simple as it looks. In the history of Greeks and Romans, children were taken for granted, as a 'problem population'. French historian Philippe Aries in his books "Centuries of Childhood", mentioned that as children move from infancy to adulthood, they are considered as 'miniature adults', which showed in the way they dressed, behaved and conducted socially. In the eastern world, children grew as part of family and community. Taking part in the economic activities of the family was considered 'good'. Socialization was majorly taken care of by family and community. In non-western societies, as Vasanthi Raman rightly points out, the difference between the child's world and adult's world were not huge and were "characterized by greater inter-generational reciprocity"(Raman, 2000, p. 4056). Child was part of the larger units - family, neighborhood and community. This perception contradicts the fundamental position of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

In the present times, CRC and various policies that came alongside, seemed to have altered our perception of childhood. CRC was contested by various scholars as being Eurocentric, just as the development model of Europe is considered as universal and approved as a model for the rest of the world. Perception of childhood is not a simple

thing as it appears; it is highly political. The presumption underlying these Rights and policies have become non-negotiable. Ideas like compulsory schooling, alienating children from family and community, and taking away from the economic activities cannot be contested easily. Article 32 on child labor & Article 28 of CRC on education have become the norms of the present times. Article 28 offers school a primary importance in protecting and enhancing the growth of children.

On one hand, the concern for children expressed by CRC and other Child Rights movements, their stance against any kind of abuse, discrimination and torture, their emphasis on improving physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of children are welcoming. But on the other hand, the present conditions of schools, which are supposed to protect children and promote their development are really depressing. Hegemonic elements in school like, poor infrastructure, discriminatory policies against poor, disadvantaged and marginalized, punishments, overloaded curriculum, stressful examinations, overcrowded classrooms and authoritative teachers have made children's life at school painful and traumatic. Schools instead of protecting children and enriching their development, are going the other way. Besides, they seem to take away what children naturally possess- innocence, curiosity, imagination and playfulness.

Child is Not at the Center and Education as a Burden

Child is simply curious about everything around. The interest with which they look and explore their surroundings is a natural gift they possess. Their openness for learning and their constant wonderment about everything around them, be it a bubble or a flower or even a dead body surprises them. Nothing seems to miss their attention. It is very saddening to see how they lose interest as they grow. Children spend major part of their time in schools and must we not wonder, what is going wrong in the school that they lose interest or stop wondering, when schools are supposed to be the legitimate place for learning to happen?!

The burden of books, syllabus and examinations have taken away the creative spirit and freedom of children. When their tiny legs want to run and explore, they are arrested within benches from morning till evening in the name of learning. With

regimented rules and punishments, no wonder for George Bernard Shaw, school resembled a prison. As he says,

“There is nothing on earth intended for innocent people so horrible as school. To begin with, it is a prison. But it is in some respect more cruel than a prison. In a prison, for instance, you are not forced to read books written by the wardens and the governor”(Chiland, 1990).

Discipline, punishment and reward are the normative concepts of the school and society.

Schools do not believe in creativity of the children; they only sharpen the children’s skill to memorize. From the first word to the last full stop of the answer given by the teacher, children have to memorize and reproduce it in their examinations. Thinking, analyzing and writing creatively on their own are strictly not permitted. Even classroom interactions could only improve listening and writing skills. Gouldner’s idea of Multiple Intelligence is nowhere close to our school system. ‘Learning by doing’, ‘activity-based learning’ and ‘child-centered approach’ seem to remain only on the paper. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 clearly states that, “a child-centered and activity based process of learning should be adopted at the primary stage” (para 5.6). This was followed by Yashpal Committee report (1993) on “learning without burden” focused on reducing the burden for children. National Curriculum Framework (2005) cannot be forgotten for addressing similar concerns. Nevertheless, school knowledge for majority of the children still remains boring, irrelevant and burdensome.

Therefore, education in a hegemonic system does not evoke any critical reflexive spirit, rather, it trains children to become passive, submissive and unimaginative individuals. Thereby, they lose the ability to question, wonder and rejoice. For instance, rote learning and mechanical memorization has made their mind dull and passive. Their creative spirit is lost in textbooks, homework and examinations.

Creativity and Imagination Lost in Books

Human beings’ ability to imagine and create has been hampered by the system which operates on hegemony. Because imagination provokes creativity and when these are allowed to express freely, they may pose a threat to the existing system. It may

challenge the existing pattern and therefore, schools are discouraged from provoking children's imagination and creativity, rather they are endlessly lost in the pursuit of memorizing textbooks and securing marks. Because, hegemony is afraid of what imagination and creativity can do.

Imagination plays an important role in mankind. Rather, that is what makes us distinct from other living beings. We can imagine what we perceive. Without imagination, we wouldn't have progressed to this stage. We would have remained wandering, hunting and living merely for surviving. Imagination transcends our limitedness. However, atom bomb, unhealthy plastics, harmful chemicals and fertilizers, etc. are also the product of imagination. Therefore, imagination without creative spirit and sensibilities could be dangerous, for it may also take us towards destruction. But creative imagination is the only hope left.

Even scientific discoveries initially rely on imagination. An introduction to one of the books on astronomy says,

“...many of the ancient ideas seem strange nowadays. For example, some maintained that the flat earth was supported on the back of four huge elephants standing on the shell of an enormous tortoise, which was itself supported by a serpent floating in a boundless ocean. Another presumption that, when an eclipse occurred, the Chinese thought that the Sun was being swallowed by a huge dragon. The whole population joined in making as much noise as possible to scare it away”(Nicolson, 1970, pp. 6-7).

If man had not imagined and wondered, he would not have made amazing discoveries and science would not have progressed.

Greatest and most significant discoveries in sciences would not have been possible without imagination. Before he could prove scientifically the existence of subatomic particles, Ernest Rutherford imagined their existence. Imagination opens up new possibilities and it gives scope for new discoveries. But these days, schools have closed up any possibility for imagination. Children are expected to just repeat what has been given in books and notebooks even without changing a single word. To let them think and analyze a situation on their own, and to allow them to make their own statements, does not occur even for a day. It is almost a crime to write in one's own

words of what one has understood without referring to the book. Books have become too sacred, and to think and explore outside of them is simply not possible.

Children gradually lose their ability to think, analyze and imagine. They are scared to express and their freedom gets defeated. By just repeating the lines from the text books, they almost lose their confidence in wondering about life and expressing in their own way. To make children write on their own becomes such a difficult task once they are trained in this mindless game of repeating the 'sacred' textbooks. They almost stop growing mentally; unable to move a bit. They lose their ability to express and as a result, they have lost faith in themselves. They almost become like puppets.

Schools have become the training ground for these puppets. So that once they get into the world, they can just repeat what is already there. There is no scope for any critical thinking to happen. Where will they get the strength to fight, or even to notice ordinary things? They have lost it all in the schools, when the teachers scolded and beat them when they could not repeat exactly what is given. Teachers reduced marks, failed them when they dared to write on their own. They did all possible things to make them like a puppet. Then what more can be expected of them when they grow? When they are young they would have seen problems around them, like discrimination, crime, and violence. Now as they grow they will still see them and they will also repeat them mindlessly, just like how they recited the same phrases in the textbooks without changing a word.

When they were young, before entering schools, didn't they ask questions, the questions that are interesting, provoking and disturbing? And didn't they give imaginary creative weird answers to the questions that we ask?

"Why does it rain?" (Teacher asks)

"Because the god cries that we don't have water, so his tears become the rain." (Answers a girl in Kindergarten)

It is weird, yet it is cute, they imagine, they recreate the world. Whereas, when they grow, they are too obsessed with "correct" answers. They don't want to think, imagine and wonder, that why it can't be otherwise. They just repeat what has been given to them. If that is how we should live, then man would not have made discoveries, because for those who made discoveries, what was told didn't seem right.

When the world believed so strongly that god created all the creatures, for a man like Darwin, it didn't seem quite right. He imagined something else. At least he felt there was something wrong. Had he not wondered and imagined, we would not be knowing that different beings evolved from one another. We would be still believing that all beings are created. Though the whole world believed in creation, he dared to think the other way and he attempted to prove it as well.

Even discoveries in the present times are not possible without imagination, without 'out-of-box' thinking. Not just scientific discoveries, but even social values. At one point of time, Indian society believed in sati, child marriage. They were acceptable and unquestionable. But for some thinking individuals it was unsettling. They imagined a different country. It is their imagination that helped us get away with such values. There may be many such unquestionable, yet discriminatory practices even now, but how can we notice them and imagine a different world when our schools have taken away our imagination, our wings?

When we are young we are open to new ideas, new thoughts. Children naturally have the capacity to question the given social values. Family, job, education, religion, entertainment and their respective values are learned gradually. We must have seen children questioning the fundamental norms of the family, religion and other social institutions and their values. They don't simply accept, they have curiosity, but the hegemonic school system corrupt their minds. It kills the freedom with which children explore the world around them. Its fear prevents itself from letting the children to question. Such system dominates them, use force, discipline and punishments to make them internalize the social values. Moreover, along with schoolsfamily, religion and other social institutions also join the game.

Comparison that Kills Uniqueness

Hegemonic society is constantly comparing and measuring the progress of its members. School is not an exception There is so much pressure to be 'better'. The element of being better always comes in comparison with others. One's place is always examined in relation/comparison to the established standard, and this standard is generally in line with the dominant ideology. Therefore, the process of comparing

and making everyone uniform is to conform to the dominant ideology. This kills the uniqueness of individuals.

When is it possible to compare? When equality is the measure, then possibly we can compare. For example, to do any kind of operation on fractions, first the denominator is made equal/ same. Differences are negated. But the complexity of the human relation makes it difficult and nearly impossible to bring a common denominator, keeping in mind the varied mixture of caste, class, family background, personal interest, creativity, life experiences, possibilities, etc. In the simple world of fractional Math, there is only a single factor - numbers and nothing more or less to it. Therefore, it becomes easy to manipulate, as they are grouped under one category. But human beings cannot be grouped under one category for comparison as their social realities, economic status, cultural practices, interests, life experiences and intelligences are different.

A child who is interested in art and does not have flair for language would automatically show less interest in language class when compared to a child who is interested in literature and poetry. But in schools, there is always a pressure to bring the differences to an equal plane. And this is impossible and unnatural. If a garden is filled with similar flowers of similar size, colour and height, then that will look boring and dull. A garden looks beautiful when there are roses, lilies, trees, grasses of different colours and sizes. It looks natural this way, but if we expect a lily to be rose, then something is wrong. Such an expectation is unnatural. The pressure to make everyone equal is reducing them to objects that can be manipulated.

Providing equal opportunity is important, but if one wants to grow as rose, if one wants to spread as grass and if one wants to grow as tall as oak tree... why stop them? But very often, we mistake equal opportunity with equality. Generally, a barber's son is very likely to take his father's job, or a farmer's daughter is likely to become a farmer, same with a doctor's son. Often we see off-springs taking up roles of their fathers. Equal opportunity to become anyone is necessary and fundamental. Definitely, a barber's son should get equal opportunity in getting education as the doctor's son or an engineer's daughter and with her education she should have equal opportunity to aspire to choose her field. May be a barber's son wants to become a doctor or a computer engineer, or may be a doctor's son wants to become a farmer,

wants to discover better and ecofriendly ways of farming, may be a girl born into a Muslim family wants to join Air force, or may be a software engineer's son wants to become an artist. They should all get equal opportunities. There is a great truth to this fundamental value, that many of the social activists have been fighting for. But let us not misunderstand equal opportunity for uniformity.

Furthermore, hierarchy of occupations and respective social status that vary from level to level have created an undue pressure- certain prime occupations draw high concentration of students and this demands cut-throat competition. Every field is equally important and every talent is equally needed for the smooth functioning of a society. But hegemony has undervalued certain occupations and therefore certain skills and intelligences are likely to be looked down. Only certain talents and interests are appreciated and encouraged, but others are sometimes not even acknowledged and recognized. Art, cooking, carpentry, farming and taking care of animals, do not generally enter the syllabus. Hardly, we find a school where such things are taught and explored. It is very difficult for a child who is interested in farming to get an opportunity to touch the soil, to plant trees and to understand about the flowers and fruits.

Children's talents and interests are so varied that to create uniformity is a crime. The inclination to see each child as unique and different is missing in the schools. Imposition of uniformity has killed their innocence and uniqueness. It has already destroyed any genuine possibility. Schools have been producing cloned individuals to fit the society. Education does not help in discovering what one is interested and passionate about. The teachers hardly help the students in uncovering their talents. As one gets out of the school, one is confused and pressured to choose something which one may not be interested in. If a child, interested in art, is made to become a bank employee as she grows, but she would regret such a decision throughout her life.

Moreover, in the recent times, choosing an occupation of one's interest, instead of becoming a beginning step, has become the only goal of life for some. As one pursues one's interest, one does not look deeply into one's motives, desires, conflicts, competition, aggressiveness and concern. Hegemony does not allow to explore one's vocation; it only becomes a means to earn money and fame. Because if one is free and critical, it is a threat to the hegemony. Therefore, it does not enable one to become

free of all the problems be it personal or otherwise. Instead, one ends up as a fragmented and disintegrated individual.

Homework, Tuitions and Extra-Curricular Activities: An Additional Burden

Schools are not the only means of controlling children; hegemony enters even the “non-schools” hours in the form of tuitions, homeworks and extra-curricular activities. It monopolises even the sacred time of children spent in casual play and creative activities. Thereby, children are made occupied and dull, and even as they grow, it is nearly impossible for them to think creatively beyond the given framework.

If we try to remember our school days, we can't forget writing homework - copying passages mindlessly from textbooks and repeating them several times. More or less, it is the same now. We have never questioned homework and it has swallowed up the meaningful evenings we can otherwise spend in playing or in socializing. It takes away all the fun we can have in an evening. Firstly, school takes away the major part of fun and secondly, even the uncorrupted evenings have also been hijacked and have turned them into dull and serious sessions.

Children as they return from schools, tired of books, notebooks, imprisoning desks and chairs, feel liberated to see the house, its space, its flavor, its people, its lightness, fun and care. Bags are thrown to a corner, shoes fly in the sky, and uniforms dumped disorderly- they feel free and liberated. They run around the house for no reasons and anything other than books to them look interesting for play and exploration. Evenings become their prayer and verandahs, terraces become their temples. But these days even their prayers are destroyed in the name of home-works and home tests. Evenings are not free and refreshing, they further tire children and reduce them into mere machines.

The burden of homework has made their mind gloomy and uninteresting. The politics of homework is to make the child engage in academics even in the absence of school. It has nearly killed all the possible creativity that was left in the child. It has reduced play into a non-creative wasteful endeavor. Time spent without textbooks and notebooks are ‘waste’ and ‘unproductive’. Hence, schools have replaced toys and games and children end up with homework, which is meaninglessly repeated and

memorized. Schools control children not only within its premises, but have stretched far and entered children's sacred evenings as well.

The drudgery of the school work has continued to enter yet another boring, mechanical place, called 'tuition'. With tuitions, the day of a child gets completed. Moreover, these days it has become necessary to send children to tuition, for it has become a difficult task for the parents to engage with children in the evenings. If the parents are illiterate or semi-literate, it has become nearly impossible for them to help in any way in their work, therefore tuition becomes inevitable. It has become another business, another powerful commercial center. Tuition brainwashes the child entirely and therefore, children become completely dependent on others for knowledge. Their natural urge and interest are simply reduced to nothing.

After all these, if there is still time left, they are packed for extra-curricular; into other kind of institutions. Children learn other skills like drawing, painting, skating, tennis, cricket, swimming, dance, singing, music and what not. Here professionals train the children and make their extra-curricular also "meaningful". These activities are simply not the casual games children play with neighboring children. Of course, they definitely give them skills apart from academics. But these too have destroyed children's space completely. These have mechanized even play and art into uniform, mechanical display of skills. Besides, conducting these activities has become a huge industry, and it is innovating in all possible ways to make profits. It has commercialized every possible art and game. Dance is no more a simple act of joy, painting is not done for the sake of pure interest, even swimming becomes a task to complete and these are all loaded with competitions and have become means to make money. Academics are not the only commercial endeavor, but even arts and games have also become equally commercial. These subtle process of hegemony have damaged the child's inner self and destroyed their innocence.

Child Labour: A Popular Myth to be Debunked

One of the most boiling issues. A lot of awareness and activism has been happening to stop people from using children for work. Lot of children have lost their innocence and joy when they are taken into the mad rush of making money. Compulsory schooling has in a way relieved them from this drudgery and given them a chance to

learn and grow. Despite lot of awareness, Child Rights movements and laws in place, people are still finding loopholes to make children as labourers in industries, factories and small-scale businesses. Article 32 of the CRC (Child Rights Convention) raises concerns on child labor, where they are “to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education” or “is harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.”

Like any other law, this also has a loophole. The terms ‘exploitation’, ‘harmful’ can mean different things to different people. To a child rights activist or to a concerned individual, only certain forms of child labour are visible, the sight of a small boy in a dhaba or a hotel, a young girl working as home maid, children in factories, but what about the children who appear in advertisements for branded companies and also those who appear in serials and movies? Are they not deprived of their rights? Are their studies not hindered? Is this not ‘exploitation’? If we argue this way, it is never ending. It is high time we relook at the assumptions of these Rights and its underlying sociopolitical dynamics.

In a country like India, in ancient times, children participated in the economic activity of the family. Working for the family was not looked as derogatory, unhealthy or exploitative, rather it created strong bonds between family members, improved children’s self-confidence and self-worth. Children unlike present times, were not cut off from work, earning, family and community participation. Their learning included all these aspects. By adopting the western model of development and education, we have also given up our understanding of childhood, work, family, and community participation. The movement against child labor goes hand in hand with the emphasis on schooling. It assumes schooling as the only option left for children. But there is a danger in this approach, alerts Vasanthi Raman. She feels this approach

“bypasses intermediary institutions and structures and their complex linkages (i.e., that between the child, family, wider kin-structures, community, wider national society), can have serious consequences and will lead to further traumatization of children and families”(Raman, 2000, p. 4059).

It “decontextualizes” children from where they belong, relate and live. Such a strong and uni-dimensional approach makes it difficult for any alternative strategy to emerge.

Hence, for a country rich in traditional knowledge, diversity and rural lifestyle, Gandhi’s approach on education sounds more relevant. He vehemently opposed the western model of education and recommended self-reliant and self-financing system, where children would actively produce handicraft products for market, while they learn. This approach is not intended to make children money-oriented, but this allows integration of intellect and work. Through this model of basic education, he yearned to make villages and small communities self-reliant. His scheme of basic education was accepted by Wardha Committee in 1937 and *Nai Talim* as it was called, began to be implemented. But soon, the war in 1939 brought an end to Gandhi’s dream of ‘*Sarvodaya*’. May be such an approach is even relevant today and we ought to relook at these alternatives for it may help children regain their strength and joy.

However, hegemony would not let such scope unfold. First of all, it appropriates the wrong notion of child labour. Secondly, by schooling them, it has uprooted children from their culture, language and people. Thirdly, its approach is narrow and uni-dimensional for any alternative strategies to emerge. Over all, hegemony deviates us from the major issue and makes us believe in the trivials, therefore, we do not question its authority and its implications.

3.4. Teachers, pedagogic authority and violence

The dominant ideology works through teachers’ authority and therefore it is violent. Because, teachers are not only teaching the curriculum, but they represent the ideology of the dominant class. The power relation, formal distance between the teacher and taught, and punishment works to effectively transfer and maintain this ideology to the younger generation. With this hegemonic relation, children are constantly kept under legitimate bondage; freedom and creativity are, therefore, subjugated.

Teachers – The Neglected Gurus

Shouting from the height of one's voice, bearing a textbook on one hand and a stick on the other hand, reminds us of no one other than a teacher. When we look back and try and count the number of teachers who had passion for their subject and were also inspirational, I am sure it will not cross single digit, for some maybe it is only one or maybe even none. Most of them have become slaves to the corporate mechanical world. Teaching appears merely as a job; a way to earn money. It does not enrich them, does not free and enlighten them. They are simply bored, bored of life itself. Things around do not excite them and they have lost the skill to wonder about life. Then, how is it possible to provoke any interest and passion among children? They can only repeat what is written in the textbooks, because with the kind of education even teachers had, they have lost the ability to think on their own. They have lost the trust, trust in themselves. Mugging up, copying, and tuition becomes inevitable when teachers lose trust and passion.

Once again, for a brief while, if we go back to our ancient Indian literature, the role of guru mentioned seems so strange to us now. With the oppressive attitude most of the present generation teachers have, we cannot even imagine of staying at teacher's residence for gaining knowledge. Maybe in the present times, school hostel would distantly resemble the *gurukula* system of Vedic days, yet the relationship between the student and teacher remains formal and distant. In those days, guru apart from being a teacher, was also considered a mentor, a father and a care giver. Teachers enjoyed social respect in ancient times. Once the whole system turned bureaucratic, the meaning of the vocation itself underwent a change. Teachers lost the autonomy in choosing what to teach.

At present, teachers are denied the freedom to choose curriculum and texts. Someone else high up decides what he/she should teach in the class. Some schools have gone to the extent of issuing worksheets and instructions to the teachers on a daily basis for use in the classrooms. Syllabus prepared by an unknown person, distanced the teachers from what is being taught. Which worksheet and what topic has to be covered on a particular day are predetermined by officials. In addition to their teaching work, other administrative duties also fall on teachers, which make them lose interest in the vocation of teaching. Preparation of textbooks has gone too far from the

purview of teachers. Moreover, publishing textbooks has been a huge business right from colonial education to modern system of education.

However, the concern for improving the status of teachers have been mentioned in many national commissions and reports. The National Policy on Education (1986) has also mentioned the crucial role of teachers in successful implementation of educational programmes. Yet, teaching is considered as a socially powerless job, as a low paid job compared to other professions. A doctor, an engineer or a civil servant enjoy great status and their salaries are no match to that of teachers. Teachers in private schools receive even far less salary than they deserve. As I was talking to a private primary school teacher in a town in Andhra Pradesh, I was surprised to know the salary she receives (Rs. 2000 per month) is far too lesser than a daily wage laborer. This is the case of many teachers in the country.

Who is a ‘Quality’ Teacher?

Dissatisfaction with the status of teachers led to setting up of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) in 1993 with the objective to improve the quality of teachers. But what is meant by quality is a big question mark. If the system’s objective is to prepare children for job, then the quality would be determined by teachers’ ability to fit children for the prescribed syllabus and structure. But, if education is looked at as a way to understand life and oneself, then it would mean an entirely different approach by teachers. If a teacher plays an instrumental role in helping a child get through IIT exams or medical or engineering entrance, then he/she is generally considered as a ‘good’ teacher. Also, those teachers who carry extensive information on their subjects are considered to be intelligent. But, such a role is very limited, for it only helps us to find better survival methods. Such teachers cannot help us understand life, its complexities and mysteries. Seldom do we find a teacher who helps a student to relate her personal life to what is being taught. It is almost impossible to find teachers who would help us understand our mind and its complex functioning, for it is considered beyond the purview of the role of teachers.

Formal qualification for teaching (B.Ed.) does not necessarily ensure good quality education for children. They are simply trained to repeat what is given in the textbooks and prepare children for examinations. Though teacher training course

syllabus is very rich, it does not percolate. Because, on a practical level, it is simply enhancing the skill to instruct reading, writing, and some arithmetic skills. The objective of teaching is not enhancement of creative intelligence in children, but just to sharpen their memory. Teachers are unaware of different modes of learning other than seeing and hearing. This ignorance of other teaching modes goes against the Multiple Intelligence theory proposed by Howard Gardner, wherein he proposes eight ways in which people perceive and understand the world around them- linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. It points out that the children not only learn by simply seeing and writing, they explore the world through pictures, activities, music & rhythm, nature; through interacting with different people and also through exploring oneself (Gardner, 2006). Teachers with limited freedom are unable to explore the world of teaching. They are strictly guided by instructions and syllabus.

Any classroom is generally more complex with children of varied abilities. Teachers with heavy syllabus and fixed targets find it very difficult to address children individually. With a single uniform method which doesn't allow varied approaches and with strict discipline, teachers address the huge number of children with diverse abilities in classroom. In addition to this, addressing the children with special needs becomes even more complicated. The awareness about disability is almost nil among teachers. Even with specialized courses in disability, it has become difficult to address the complexity that this issue presents. Number of special education teachers in the country does not match the number of schools and the children with special needs. Even those who are trained in a particular disability find it challenging in a general classroom setup that has children with multiple needs. Our classrooms suffer the absence of teachers trained in disabilities.

Teachers, Students and the Inherent Power Relation

It is assumed that there is a knowledge gap between the teacher and the student. The assumption is that the learners' heads are empty vessels which need to be filled with information. Paulo Freire calls it as "banking" approach, wherein students are considered as empty bank accounts to be filled with the deposits made by the teacher (Freire, 1970). Real knowledge is assumed to belong to the teacher and communication is one-way with no participation, feedback or reinforcement from the

students. For teachers, textbooks, punishments, and examinations become their only way of connecting with students. Besides, fear of authority keeps the students from having any meaningful conversation with the teachers. Classroom interaction, therefore becomes formal and impersonal.

Teaching various subjects like Math, Physics, or Social Sciences does not seem to interest the teachers. They are constantly engaged with the knowledge that is given in the textbooks. Teachers, in a hegemonic system, work within the given framework and knowledge; they are afraid to go beyond and touch the unknown, because they themselves are powerless and scared. Therefore, even in the textbooks or in the classroom conversations, teachers are afraid to let children explore freely. The textbooks and the knowledge they provide becomes the dogma and no one dares to question it or go beyond it. Take for instance, teacher may not accept or may get even disturbed if the child says that stones, mountains and toys are living things. An educated mind which has already been stuffed with theoretical knowledge, would out rightly disagree this, let alone have doubts.

In the regimented system, teachers have lost a sense of love, care and respect for students. Children have lost their imagination and creative expression. Regimentation has dehumanized both the teachers and students. Prescribed textbooks, rigid syllabus and examinations have restricted teachers from making teaching-learning process meaningful. As Freire rightly points out, the banking system stimulates oppressive culture and practices in society. For him, the system of education is oppressive in nature and it dehumanizes all those who participate in it. With teacher being the oppressor, a “culture of silence” is created where the students are kept ‘submerged’ in a situation in which they are unable to critically think and act. Teachers’ authority, punishments and commands silence the voice of children. They tend to accept this system of oppression as reality. Not only at school, as children grow, she would automatically learn to accept oppression elsewhere, be it in family, or in economic, social or political organizations. The educated individual, for him, is not a thinking individual, but an “adapted person, because he or she is better ‘fit’ for the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 76). He would easily submit to the authority without a thought. Because, he is never made to think freely and differently.

With the authority and power of teachers, children become scared, not only of learning, but of life itself. To them, life no longer seems a joyful endeavor, but a struggle filled with authority, fear, and guilt. They are socialized into accepting authority and submission as natural. Teachers do not accept their ignorance of something that a child might ask. They are like demi-gods who have answers for everything. They cannot reveal their ignorance to students at any cost, for they are scared that they may lose the power and control. However, authority creates a gap between the teacher and student. Discipline, control and punishment come in the way of the relation between the two. In such a situation, meaningful learning becomes nearly impossible.

Furthermore, teachers and corporal punishments in schools generally go hand in hand in India. When there is no scope for understanding, physical punishment becomes an easier means to control and discipline innocent children. Supreme Court law banned corporal punishment in schools in 2000 in addition to that UNCRC and Article 21 of the Constitution of India have also argued against the corporal punishment of children in schools and elsewhere. The latest Right to Education Act (2010) made any kind of physical and mental harassment as illegal and punishable under section 17 (1) and 17 (2), but still teachers are unable to give up hitting children. Until a decade ago, it was considered normal to punish children physically in schools. Only recently, the news on corporal punishment is gaining attention. It has now become common to see news like,

“Teacher Assaults Student for Not Doing Homework in UP”
“Class IV Student Suffers Ear Bleeding After Teacher Slaps Her in Bengal”
“7-Year-Old Student Beaten With Belt for Not Completing Homework in Bengaluru”
“Rajasthan boy hangs himself after teacher beats him up”
“Kerala school locks up UKG student in dog house, principal arrested”

(Source: <http://www.news18.com/newstoppers/corporal-punishment.html>, dated 1st April, 2017)

School in a hegemonic system which uses punishment as a means of disciplining its members, then obviously teachers pickup sticks. It is high time we remember Foucault for reminding us that, prisons are not the only place for punishment and

order, it happens through various other networks like schools, hospitals, military and factories(Foucault, 1977). He also talked about the cultural shift from mere physical punishments to the disciplining of the “soul”. It can be noticed that in most schools in present times, where teachers no longer use physical abuse, but resort to mental abuse like comparison, putting pressure, discrimination and threat of failure. It is important to understand that the necessity for discipline and punishment arises when there is no love and care. Such a system, therefore, is only for keeping the system intact and running, but it will not bring about an intelligent &caring human being. Here, discipline becomes important and not the person, and it automatically kills the feeling and dehumanizes our consciousness.

Teachers are Not Learners

Hegemony creates the illusion that education is only for children and it may be extended until the level of college and university. To have interest in learning and the ability to wonder are reserved only for children. Teachers have no business in this area. Even if they have, it is simply an additional benefit but not a necessary condition. However, we cannot entirely blame teachers for ills of our education, because in a hegemonic system, teachers are kept in dark and the social expectations of the role does not demand them to be innovative.

Syllabus is laid out for students for all ages. They are supposed to learn, no matter how, and they have to complete the syllabus. Teachers are not expected to read more and wonder about life. Education literally stops once we finish a formal course. At the age of 50, to update our knowledge with latest scientific discoveries is not necessary. Scientists and philosophers are discovering something at one end, but it has nothing to do with housewives or bank employees. Simply it is not our realm and not necessary too.

In a normal adult world, education is for children. Adult educators would want children to learn, think and understand meanings. However, for an adult, all these are not necessary, because we falsely believe that we have already understood. Also, we know that, irrespective of the creation of new knowledge, we can still survive. Another important fabricated belief that keeps off adults from lifelong exploration is that, what they study and explore in classrooms is different from their personal life. We make a

clear distinction between personal and professional life. We don't see any link with the discovery of origin of atom to how we connect with family. We see no link.

To ponder about the history of earth, and to make sense of death of our beloved from that, has no connected meaning. They are looked as very distinct and discrete. The course of a river has not got anything to do with my job and same as the vast night sky and distant stars to my tears. If one can't see these connections, then definitely we are going to stop wondering after school. We are bound to see education is only meant for children. The objectives of teacher and student would be entirely different. Teachers are there only to teach and students are there to learn. Even updating teacher's knowledge is seen as a benefit for teaching children, but not an end in itself.

When such objectives are clearly set, then how is it possible for a teacher to be passionate, interesting? When they themselves are not wondering about life around them, then how can they imbibe it to the children? Imparting information to children is important, but more important is how it is given? For example, one can make children mug up the properties of a magnet or provide them a hands on, exciting activity with magnets and allow all kinds of questions from them. By both the processes they may get good marks, but which one will make them wonder and which will excite and interest them? Well, we know it and we can't deny it. Only a teacher aflame with interest even at the age of 30 or 47 or 55 can provoke interest in students. There are such teachers but they are just handful. The rest of them just survive in the system and keep the system running.

Even now, when we think of our own school life, not all teachers are worth remembering. Only few had the spirit to make learning joyful and meaningful. Like a social science teacher, while dealing a topic on 'social problems', would not simply repeat the words given in the textbook, but would bring to us the reality of beggars, burning caste issues in the neighboring villages, oppression of women and the unlucky children who don't make it to school due to poverty and child labor. The teacher of such a kind makes the class alive and helps to transcend the meaning of learning beyond examinations. We may never know, our liking for a particular subject could be because of the passion that teacher had for the subject. Teachers help us bond with the subjects and life. They make our life meaningful. Drawing class

becomes more than a transaction between color pencils and note book when teacher invokes the creative imagination of the children. But, such teachers are very rare.

However, we cannot see the role of teachers in isolation, because many aspects are interrelated. The conditions for fulfilment of teachers' needs lie with the larger community or the government. For example, teachers do not determine curriculum, their own salary, allowances, school building, conditions of service, etc. Even if others decide, these conditions don't fare well in comparison with other jobs. The lack of such conditions denotes government's insensitivity and irresponsibility towards raising the social status of teachers. Government's failure to meet such responsibility seems to have negative effects in the teachers' attitude towards their job, which in turn decreases their motivation to become an efficient teacher.

Who Should Teach? Unsolved Mystery

If our discourse clearly distinguishes between teaching a subject and actually dealing with it, then there need to be a group of professionals who are specialized only in teaching. But if we see it as a continuum, then it requires fundamentally a different approach. For example, who can teach me photography better? Only the person who takes photos, not the ones who just dissect the camera without ever taking a photo. Even if he is teaching, will it be only about the photo or will it also include his understanding of life through the photo? If the latter is the case, shouldn't everyone be learning as well as teaching and most importantly, doing what they are teaching. Why keep the responsibility only in few hands?? By giving the responsibility of teaching and learning to only a few hands, we are underestimating the knowledge as well as learning curiosity of others.

Then, who could be a best teacher? A person who has gained some knowledge and some expertise in a particular subject and repeats it? A person who clearly distinguishes her personal life from what is being taught? Such a teacher has already lost the interest for teaching, the zest for life. Does a B.Ed. qualification make someone a teacher? Technically, yes. But if we see it meaningfully, it is not necessarily so. Social image of a teacher in a hegemonic structure prevents us from exploring innovative and meaningful methods of teaching. We have restricted our imagination of teaching only to teachers, who are specialized professionals in

teaching. Our image of teachers would not allow parents, technicians, artists or farmers to take up the activity of teaching. We have left it to specialized professionals, trained only for teaching. Others are cleverly kept away from teaching, for they may challenge the established system.

Moreover, pedagogical innovations are generally negligible in a normal school setting. Mechanical repetition, rote learning, and textbook centric curriculum have monopolized the system of schooling. Using modern technologies like computer, projector and other equipment in classrooms are being misunderstood for quality education. Teachers use them, yet these does not produce creative people. At a time when technological development has come to a peak, the role of teacher majorly as imparter of information needs to be questioned. When information on almost anything can be collected from internet, television, books and other print media, what it is the role of teacher in a classroom? A computer can give better knowledge about oscillation in physics, geometry in math, Indus valley civilization in history using attractive pictures and videos. In comparison, a teacher's monologue would sound boring and uninteresting.

If we look at teachers as mere conduits of knowledge, then in most of the cases, the job is better done by other means. There is a growing trend, where many companies and organizations are making audio series and video series by presenting the subjects in an interesting fashion. With the click of a button, we can get the entire information of a particular subject on our table. Moreover, one can access it without getting beaten or scolded or being screamed at. Such sources can become the best replacement for a teacher, if we see education simply as transfer of knowledge. In most cases it is seen like that. That may be the reason for making classes teacher-free, where students learn via books and internet.

At this rate, teacher's presence in classroom may gradually become irrelevant and soon they may disappear. Therefore, the system can effectively replace teachers with information loaded technological devices and wipe off even the least possibility of creating critical reflexive classrooms. Gradually, children would become mechanical and lose the spirit to wonder, reflect and question.

3.5. Hurt, Disorient and Dominate–The Ruthless Strategy of Examination System

Generally, How do a system establish its domination over others? Firstly, hurt them, physically or/and psychologically, so that they are fearful. Secondly, disorient, confuse and distort them with false consciousness, so that the reality is hidden. And lastly, dominate them to reap the benefits at the cost of their life. This applies even to the system of examination and punishment in schools. They hurt, disorient and dominate the children.

Motives of Education and Examination

Children are curious about life from the very beginning. The questions they ask and things about which they wonder are so natural to them. No one has to teach a child to wonder about things around. It comes naturally and spontaneously. But, schools have reduced this curiosity to almost nothing. Schools do not trust the children. They do not trust their instincts. They want to assess what they learn and manipulate their abilities. Naturally, when the trust and faith is not there, then the children lose interest. But, when education is meaningful and interesting, then, is there a need for assessment? Children are naturally willing to absorb, when knowledge is given in a way that interests them. The language they learn from parents, the effort they take to walk first, the eagerness to touch flowers and explore things, no one has to teach them. They have it and all they need is support, a guiding hand.

However, school monopolizes their intelligence. In the name of assessment, it has created fear and anxiety. Education that is supposed to induce happiness and kindle their interests has made learning hard and fearful. It has killed the joy of learning. Exams, weekly tests, mid-term assessments and more fashionable ‘surprise’ tests have destroyed the charm and liveliness that children have. The fear of exams has made learning ugly and unpleasant. The whole purpose of learning is just reduced to securing marks and certificates.

Moreover, school is playing a great role in disconnecting the child from her world. The child is made to believe that she is empty and worthless if she is left alone. The creativity that each child possesses is reduced to almost nothing. All the worthiness is

seen only within the classroom, through books and exams. Anything beyond this boundary seems unworthy of learning. So, when one does not fit into the framework, then one is made to feel guilty. Without this guilt and fear, the system cannot exist. Moreover, hegemony can exist and sustain only by inculcating this sense of guilt and fear. The system's market value can be sustained only this way. Freedom and intelligence are a threat to the system. So, the system will do as much as it can to ensure its security by keeping the feelings of guilt and fear alive.

Learning is no more about celebrating life, but something to be afraid of. If one is not able to complete a degree course, one will find it difficult to get a job. It has become almost impossible to imagine life without schools. As a hegemonic institution, the main objective of schools now is to prepare students to get good marks, so that the students can be fitted into the job market. The importance of this motive can't be denied, but it is very disturbing and unsettling to place this objective on the highest pedestal above all other ideas and other possibilities that education could possibly hold.

Examination Triggers Competition and Self-Centeredness

Hegemony uses competition to trick people to subjugate to its authority. It creates an illusion that competition is necessary. Besides, competition diverts people from the reality, so that it benefits the privileged. Moreover, competition makes one self-centered and therefore, one is cut off from the rest of the human beings and surroundings. Whereas, life can be possible even without competition. But such possibilities are damaged.

Education is a process in which one is supposed to learn about life, about living. But what is the need to compare with one another? Is it really necessary? It is important to ask such questions, because the consequences are far more disturbing than one could ever imagine. What is the inner meaning of conducting exams? What does the rank system signify, that I am better than you, and you are better than 30 more students? Is it necessary that we compare? Assume that, I am reading about plants and animals and if I understand, then that should be fine, but if I do not, then teacher can make effort to help me understand. However, by comparing my understanding with others, what meaning does it convey? There is certainly a need for the teacher to know where

the student is and how far she has understood. But by comparing with others, we have damaged the faith of children.

Examinations are not an intellectual exercise, as they are intended to be, but they have become a means to trigger negative emotions. They lose all the intellectual character and are heavily loaded by emotional character: pressure of success and fear of failure. They are a trick to change people through emotional manipulation. At the initial stages, competition is imposed by outside forces like school, teachers, and parents, but slowly, they become internalized. One's own development and betterment becomes terribly important. Others are seen as a threat, as enemies. It makes one's sense of self very strong. Gradually, in pursuit of taking oneself upwards, one is ready to even destroy others.

Examinations do not increase the eagerness of children, their interests and their wonderment, but they divide children into enemies of each other. They inculcate competition, an ugly competition with life itself. One is constantly battling with others. Learning is no more fun and joy, but heavily loaded and hard hearted. One does not learn for the sake of learning and joy, but to compete with others. Competition becomes extremely necessary, competition with oneself and others. Though it helps one to progress, it also destroys one's innocence and joy. It kills the fun and makes learning a fearful and mechanical process. Children break their head during the time of examinations. They read and remember what has been given in the book, but once the exams are done, the rest is dropped. Children pass the days mindlessly reading and memorizing in the hope of holidays after examinations.

Children at a very young age are spending sleepless nights and spoiling their health because of examinations. They have lost charm, as their faces look dull and exhausted. Of late, children have complaints about their health like head ache, tiredness, grey hair, hair loss, stress and other psychological problems. This has become a common thing among children. Various styles of assessments and a constant battle to withstand the pressure of performing better has done a huge damage not just physically, but also mentally. Many schools have self-appointed counsellors to deal with all kinds of stress and psychological problems. Lately, it has become a common scene to take children to psychiatrists. The pressure is unbearable and also unmanageable.

Exams have become a horrifying experience. Even during our school days, it was very common to see some students suffer from stomach upsets and high temperatures during examinations. The worst thing is to see the news of suicides and suicide attempts by students who cannot cope with failure in examinations. It has been alarmingly increasing in the recent times, because the fear of failure has put a lot of pressure and makes their life look hopeless. What would have gone in a student's mind when one was pushed to commit suicide? How much pressure one must have gone through, that one decided to take away one's life itself? Can the situation be worse than this?

Examination and the competition it triggers has far reaching consequences than we could ever imagine. Competition promotes selfishness, self becomes far more important than anyone else. One's progress can be achieved by whatever means, even at the cost of defeating someone else. The culture of learning along with others has been lost. Others are seen as enemies to be defeated. We don't want to share our knowledge with others. Crime in the outside world and competition in the schools are not discrete, they are linked in a very subtle way. We are eventually generating criminals, self-centered, egoistic human beings in the name of education. At last, who benefits through competition? It is always the privileged, the dominant.

Certificate Furthers Inequality

When hegemony employs examination for the benefit of the privileged, certificates furthers this inequality, because not everyone are privileged enough to earn certificates. Moreover, the cultural capital of certificates complicates the issue further. People are placed in hierarchy based on the kind of certificates they possess and thereby, reinforcing the system of inequality.

A piece of paper has got so much value, that people are ready to spend lakhs and crores on it. It has become so sacred and valuable. It does not only have educational value but also economic value. It almost decides our destiny. A certificate issued by a Private English medium school is more valuable than a certificate issued by a Government school. A young boy who has a good working knowledge of electronic appliances but does not hold any formal certificate is unlikely to get a job in electronics field than a fellow youngster who has a formal degree certificate in the

same subject. It is not the ability and interest, but a piece of paper that carries the value. It does not matter the kind of knowledge one has, but the certificate speaks a different language, the language of a capitalist society.

Education does not happen in isolation, it is deeply and directly related to the economic system of the society. Schools and colleges are directly linked to the economic institutions like businesses and industries. And the major connecting link is the certificate. Without a certificate, it becomes very difficult to enter the world of work. Interest, skills and abilities cannot speak directly, but a certificate has become the legitimate way of entry into the economic institutions. Even to move from one educational institution to another, certificate has become mandatory. Once school education is over, certificate issued in the previous institution is necessary to enter into college. Certificates have become obligatory for everything.

Parents send children to school not with the concern for learning, but for earning certificates. In the ancient days certificates never existed, but now everything is certified. From birth to death, everything is certified. Our grandparents do not have any education certificate, not even birth certificate. Everything was through the word of mouth and trust. But, now certificates are issued for everything. We have given so much value to the paper. The dependency on 'paper' has come to such an extent that even the doctors do not look at patient's face, the medical report comes in between and even more worse is to expect a death certificate before cremating the dead body.

As we became highly dependent on institutions, certificates became mandatory. Because institutionalization emphasizes certificates. However, over emphasis on certificates results in inequality. Certificates keeps away certain sections of the society from economic progress. One thing is related to another thing. What kind of certificates one possesses determines what kind of job one is going to get. A girl from an economically poor background carrying 10th certificate issued by Government school competes with another girl from economically rich family holding the certificate issued by a private English medium school. Both the certificates do not carry the same weightage. The cultural capital of certificate is different for both. Therefore, certificate reinforces inequality. It divides people and the only way to survive is based on competition. As Krishna Kumar rightly points out, "Competitiveness is a salient feature of Indian education" (Kumar, 1985). However,

Competition furthers inequality and enmity. Various kinds of certificates divide people into different groups.

If we look at the history, certificates were not a part of Indian administration and institutions. With the invasion of colonial power in India, the mode of transaction through certificates became more prominent. Initially, in the field of education, Cambridge school certificate examinations became functional, then gradually it was replaced by Indian certificate (Ramkumar, 2005). Though it was replaced by our own, the significance of certification did not fade, in fact, it has increased over time. Besides, certification becomes important when we lose trust. Therefore, a piece of paper gains value over trust.

Certification also gives us a sense of identity. How valuable our life is based on the kind of certificates we have. It gives us more confidence more than interest and ability. Maybe that is the reason, there are various agencies which clandestinely provide certificates for money. A friend of mine had received her M.Phil. certificate without ever going to the university and even without knowing the topic of research. Handsome money earned her a certificate. What does this signify? Everybody is made to feel empowered only after earning a few certificates. So, whoever has not achieved feel disempowered, or rather they are made to feel like that. This whole thing has become a business. Those who do not possess certificates become insecure. Therefore, institutionalization and certification go hand in hand. Both generate insecurity. As we became increasingly dependent on institutions and certificates they offer, we have become more and more insecure, stressed and competitive. Living itself has become a struggle.

Punishments: Instrument of Fear

When the hegemony is challenged, then punishment becomes the best way to bring back the order. It generates fear among people. The moment they go beyond the expected limit, punishment is used to bring them back. It makes people to conform to the established order. Schools are not any free. Children with innate creative potentials are made to conform to the set pattern through various kinds of punishments.

Children are treated almost as animals in schools. Slapping, pinching and beating are common scenes that one cannot miss in a school. Wooden sticks and steel scales have spoken and silenced more than words. It has made them cry and weep. With the kind of exam pressure they have, children have already lost interest in learning, and punishments have made the situation even worse. Punishments have taken away all the confidence they had, and now, what else will be left, other than fear. When the interest is not there, then the only thing that can bring the desired result is fear. Punishments have created so much fear, that they have killed the innocence of children. They become almost dead when the teacher slaps left and right in front of everyone; this can be for a simple reason that they did not finish their homework. Whatever little interest they might have, gets destroyed with all the beatings and scolding.

General classroom resembles the larger mass, because school is an intermediary between state and family. Schools socializes the child about the collective. Power of the collective that transcends the individual – a power which is believed to be sacred. The roots of punishment lie in the sacred power of collective. Sacred is no longer sacred unless it has the power to enforce its will in case people do not follow it. So, punishment becomes very important for the collective will, for hegemony. For Durkheim, the child is transforming himself in the school through discipline and punishments. The physical aspect of the punishment is never the primary objective, but it is meant to arouse the child's mind to order and its restoration. Assumed morality and discipline play a significant role in the interaction of students with teachers and punishments they give. Even though some of the present-day schools have taken away any form of physical punishment, we need to be very careful about the other routes it can find to arouse morality in children. Because, as Durkheim says, the physical element is not important but the underlying intention is to discipline the children and make them aware of the bad consequences if they will otherwise (Durkheim, 1956). May be psychological torture, reducing marks, bad remarks, classroom surveillance with CCTVs could have taken the place of physical punishments.

The whole purpose of education gets destroyed when children are put through punishments. The fear of punishments has taken away the interest for learning. When

any work is done out of interest, there is so much grace and beauty, and the flavor itself is different. But, if it is done out of fear, then it becomes ugly and mechanical. There is no life in it, it becomes dull and meaningless. The damage is far more than we would ever imagine. We would lose interest in life itself, because we live in constant fear and anxiety. Life will lose its meaning. Then it is something merely to be lived. There would be no joy and happiness. Fear becomes the only drive to live and to survive. Already, we see it in every possible aspect. From education to business and from birth to death, fear has become inevitable.

Without education, one feels afraid and hopeless to get a job, to survive itself. Certificates have become so important that without which we cannot enter the job market. We are in mad rush to earn certificates, but not to learn. Learning has become the least important thing. Whatever one learns, exists only till one receives a certificate. It will definitely not stay beyond that, because the manner in which things are learnt, can only sustain until then. To sustain retention, schools need to use punishments. They become inevitable and important. When learning is not interesting and not a joyful process, then punishments are the only way. Only fear can do the work.

The worst part is when the fear gets internalized in our minds and hearts, it kills the innocence and freedom. We become afraid to explore. Out of fear we will close the doors and make it impossible for any new air to enter. It becomes easy to accept and admit what is given. There would be no strength left to even raise a question and explore. Anything unknown will always look scary and fearful. We miss the possibility of exploration and critical intelligence doesn't sprout. Although, children are always asking interesting and disturbing questions, but we tend to stop such questioning from the very beginning. We ignore their quests and make them feel that it is odd to question anything. Therefore, they become silent and dull. Slowly they lose interest and lastly, they forget the skill of asking questions itself.

Children always ask interesting questions: what is God? Why at all we exist? What happens after death? They are deeply philosophical and for most of the questions they raise there are no definite answers. But they ask. They are so eager to know about everything. They ask, what we call as weird questions. But we don't have patience and more over we are not interested in their life. We don't answer their questions

rightly and worse, we stop them from asking questions. We make them feel that it is wrong and irrelevant. They are supposed to accept what is given. Gradually, as they grow, they stop asking questions. They are afraid to ask any more questions. Out of fear, they accept what is given to them. Therefore, they become dull and lifeless, just as well seem to have become.

School is Not a Free Space

Children can no more sit comfortably on a class desk and take a nap, it is difficult for them to have silly fights with friends, or even sit without doing anything. They are being completely monitored. They cannot escape from it. Cameras are set in the classrooms, corridors, playgrounds and at the gate. There is no free space and children are under complete surveillance (CCTV). In the name of protection and discipline, this has become a fashionable, as well as a marketable concept among the schools. Parents also seem to like it, because their children are “well” protected. From the time, the students and teachers enter the school gate to the time they leave, everything is monitored and recorded. Nothing goes out of notice. There is an urge to know whatever is happening around and have control over it and this madness has multiplied with the development in technology.

Mobile phones, social networking, CCTV, security phones have made absolute control possible. By constant monitoring and watching, it is freedom that is getting defeated. The freedom to move around, to do things, even to think and imagine freely feels unacceptable. Is it necessary to watch every movement, be it a school, or a market place, a shop or even a religious place? We have mindlessly placed cameras at every possible place. We ignore to realize that it deeply damages our faith and trust. We have lost trust on everyone. School principal have lost trust on teachers, teachers on students, parents on children. We have lost trust with life itself. Everywhere there is suspicion and doubt. Doubt that children may not learn, teachers may not teach properly, children may commit mistakes.

Few decades back too, children went to school, where they learnt, talked, laughed, shouted, fought and played. Children did commit mistakes too. Teachers controlled them, advised them, but they also let them free. They were not constantly watched and corrected. There was a certain understanding and enough amount of tolerance.

Personally, I remember, except for classrooms, we had ample amount of freedom to roam in the school- lunch under the trees, sitting with friends, shouting and playing in free time. Even teachers were free to comment, laugh and 'waste' their time. Yet children learnt and teachers taught. There was certain freedom. But in the present schools, when I think of my nieces, I get disturbed. They have cameras in the classrooms, corridors, and playground. Except for prescribed timings, they are not allowed in the playground. Even the food they bring, how they eat, amount of water they drink are being watched. In one way it is good, they take care, but on the other hand, it is suffocating to be constantly watched. Even teachers have to report the routines, activities, lesson plans almost every single day.

Not just in schools, there is a growing amount of mistrust everywhere in the society. We are constantly monitoring everything and everyone. People have lost the art of trusting. Trust that people will not only do well, but will also commit some mistakes. Strangers are looked with suspicion, as potential criminals. Even there are detectives to monitor our husband, wife and children. Life itself looks scary and fearful. World is no more an easy place to live. With fear and suspicion surrounding us, we have lost interest. We have become hard and miserable. With all the technology, we have become even more miserable. Constantly being in touch with each other, one gets agitated if somebody does not pick up you call or respond to your messages. We are afraid that something wrong must have happened.

Such constant monitoring and control is necessary for maintaining hegemony, because if people are let free, then they may think, create or disobey, which would threaten the existing system. Therefore, they need to be controlled. However, an amplified monitoring system has created panic among the people, which has led to the restlessness in the society.

3.6. Absence of Social Motive for Learning

Imposed Selfishness

Individuals have isolated themselves in all possible ways and erected walls that separates themselves from the rest of the world. We have become very self-centered, as if without this self, the rest of the world would cease to exist. To feel that the world

can also continue to exist and life can move without this self is out of question for us. We are enclosed in our own 'self'- conditioned by desires, motives, values, knowledge, etc. - it is a kind of imprisonment. Maybe that is why we get bored, angry, frustrated and destroyed, as we live within this bounded 'self'. At times, we get an opportunity to move beyond oneself, while watching the sky, walking on the mountains and while spending time with loved ones, or while listening to someone's problem. Interaction and communication is possible because of this feeling to transcend this self. Otherwise there is no possibility to connect to others. And to live in a society with diverse populations, interests and cultures, transcending one's self becomes inevitable. However, our culture reinforces the feeling of self-centeredness- to place oneself at the center of everything.

At present times, the hegemonic culture is making people into automated, isolated individuals. People are striving for their own good and are excessively absorbed in their limited selves. Hardly have we any connection with surroundings, people and environment. A genuine dialogic relation between people, be it with family or society, even with his environment is missing. Even the modern education system hardly evokes any sense of togetherness among students. It is promoting competition by making students run after marks and certificates. To feel for others is completely lacking in the system. We study not with the intention to serve the society, but to get good marks and therefore, better jobs to "settle" in life. There are many problems in the society that are expected to be solved by the youth when they come out of the educational institutions. But what kind of world will they be able to create with the kind of education they are getting from the schools?

Separating School from Society

In a hegemonic society, people are disconnected from what they are learning to their everyday life. Such separation would make people ignorant about the socio-political complexities underlying everyday life. Therefore, people do not challenge the regimentation and hegemony of the dominant class.

What children learn in schools and how they live their everyday life hardly has any connection. They exist as two different worlds. Their daily life and experiences have to be kept aside as they enter school and the school knowledge does not provoke any

sense of curiosity about things that happen in everyday life. And then to expect a child to bring about a change in the society is something unattainable. His syllabus covers varieties of issues and remarkable ways of gaining information on endless things, but what makes children passive and unrelated to social issues? Newspapers, magazines, books, reports and online sources are endlessly filled with social issues like incidents of crime, rape, theft, environmental degradation, political instability and economic problems. In fact, such easy access to issues should make children socially sensitive, but they seem to become more isolated and self-centered as they grow. To gain maximum marks, to obtain certificates and to get lucrative jobs have become the most important aims in their life. Even getting a job is no longer in the spirit of serving the people and working for the wellbeing of the society, but to attain high status and get huge income. The possibility of a person transcending his self and reaching out to the other through an occupation has been destroyed in this competition driven job-oriented education system. John Dewey reminds us of this danger, when he says,

“Mere absorption of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat. Indeed, the only measure for success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of that term - a comparison of results in the recitation or in the examination to see which child has succeeded in getting ahead of others in storing up, in accumulating the maximum of information. So thoroughly is this the prevalent atmosphere that for one child to help another in his task has become a school crime” (Dewey, 1966, p. 14).

Our social and scientific imagination has been hijacked by our schools. With mechanical teaching, overloaded syllabus and confining classrooms, our education system has failed to make children realize the social and scientific aspects embedded in everyday life. We have failed to see the socio-historical link to our everyday life. However, everyday normal mundane life is not simply a momentary happening, but immensely filled with meaning. Daily activities like eating, going to school, working in office, marriage, buying and selling, celebrating festivals, street fights, etc. are not isolated events. They have strong connections -socially, economically, historically, scientifically and philosophically. Moreover, industrialization, commercialization, globalization are not happening out there, but in our daily lives. We can see how a lot of agricultural land in our villages is turning into industrial sites, how the number of

markets and products are increasing and how we have never-ending desires to buy commodities.

Our daily experiences are filled with meaning and they are not something that exist outside of our life. Issues on inequality and discrimination, are not happening only in newspapers, but we are constantly encountering them in our daily life. But we generally tend to ignore these meanings. Everyday life has been reduced to a simple momentary living with its pleasures and pains. Events that happen in our lives are generally personalized and owned. We ignore to see the link with the rest of the events that happen around and draw their socio-historical significance. Schools have been conveniently ignoring to develop intelligence to see this connectedness. Our schools have disconnected our everyday life from what we have been studying. It is as if, what we learn in History, Science, Economics and Political science subjects has nothing to do with our daily lives. School and everyday life, appear as two different worlds. Because, hegemony wants our everyday life to be untouched and isolated. Education which is supposed to enhance such sensitivities has failed to do so. This has caused a huge damage to our social imagination.

Furthermore, we assume education as the savior of all social evils. That, it will solve problems like unemployment, poverty, and all forms of discrimination. All other issues related to environment, economy and politics are also believed to be resolved by education. But on the contrary, education has become a major cause for various problems. Highly educated people run huge industries which pollute the environment. Developed countries are unable to solve the problem of poverty and discrimination. Even personal problems like fear, sorrow, loneliness and comparison do not end with education. The main reason is disconnecting oneself from the rest of the society. Generally, when we go to buy milk in a shop, we are just bothered about the price and quality of the milk. We tend to forget or ignore the bigger network of people, relationships and our dependence on others. Such a connection is missing in our day-to-day life.

However, unless we see our everyday life as emerging from the social, historical, economic and political events taking place outside, we would not be able to change it. There is a link between what happens at home, our personal choices, the religion we believe and the job we do to the larger social context. If we are unable to relate the

fight between parents and children regarding the choice of course for higher education to the competitive market economy, we would feel disconnected from the society and therefore it is very difficult to evoke any social responsibility. But reality is very different. Even if we ignore to see socio-historical links, our everyday life will not cease to exist in its complexities and interconnectedness. However, hegemony keeps us ignorant of this interconnectedness, and therefore, our daily life would lose its meaning and slowly it would take away the sense of responsibility from everyone and the society will forever remain in the state of darkness. As Dewey rightly argues,

“...but the great thing for one as for the other is that each shall have had the education which enables him to see within his daily work all there is in it for large and human significance... but it is certainly due in large part to the fact that the worker has had no opportunity to develop his imagination and his sympathetic insight as to the social and scientific values found in his work. At present, the impulses which lie at the basis of the industrial system are either practically neglected or positively distorted during the school period. Until the instincts of construction and production are systematically laid hold of in the years of childhood and youth, until they are trained in social directions, enriched by historical interpretation, controlled and illuminated by scientific methods, we certainly are in no position even to locate the source of our economic evils, much less to deal with them effectively” (Dewey, 1966, pp. 20-21).

Missing Emotional Aspect in Learning

Hegemony can also hamper our social imagination, concern and genuine action by detaching knowledge from feeling. System would feed the children with enormous information and carefully disconnects any emotional connection with them. Since emotion would trigger action, schools have found various ways to maintain this distance. Therefore, school curriculum does not provoke any reaction to the social system based on domination, inequality, violence, fear and sorrow.

Schools have become experts in giving memory training to children and they do very less to do anything meaningful in their life. Their natural curiosity has been hijacked and over obsession with mugging up and rote learning has damaged their imagination and creativity. If everything to do in the school is just about collecting and retaining information, then what kind of social imagination and responsibility can be evoked among the children? Children are just made to repeat what has been given in the text books and are put in a race to know who completes best. In such a scenario, to feel for

others and for the society is something that cannot be possible and it will be even looked as undesirable.

Moreover, apart from what has been taught, the ways in which content has been taught in schools and colleges also create problem. The facts and events are learnt as isolated phenomena, to be stored in the memory and used whenever necessary. There is absolutely no emotional connection with what has been learnt. To learn about world wars is significant, the times of their occurrence, countries involved, motives behind and the effects of the wars. To see them logically, as events to remember and analyze is one thing, but to bring them to feeling is quite another thing. Making an emotional connection with war brings about completely a different perspective to the issue itself; a different dimension to war. It makes the children feel that the events they learn in history are not mere facts to be remembered, but are events once lived and experienced by people. We may have a separate lesson in science textbook dedicated to the effects of deforestation; dedicated to cutting down of trees in cities for the pursuit of development. It can be learnt as a matter of fact and that is just one dimension. That is, one may learn about it mentally and analyze it intellectually, but to feel about the same is another dimension that needs to be nurtured. Such a relation would make a person sensitive and evoke a responsible action. Maybe she may plant a tree close to her house and nurture it. This dimension is very much needed, and in fact, that is when any learning becomes actually complete.

Normally, children forget what has been learnt in schools as soon as they complete the examinations, simply because there is no emotional connection with any of it. What was learnt was simply information and it has not touched their hearts. It was studied and remembered for a brief period and they do not feel any connection with it. Textbook carries only information; and its language does not evoke any feeling. Even a science book does not make us wonder about nature, it is only an arrangement of information. How often do we see books with beautiful and heart-touching illustrations that a book like *Planet Earth* carry? The editor of this book reminds the readers that “this is not a textbook or an encyclopedia”, but a kind of a “visual poem that invites us to see the glories of the natural world.” In his introduction, Richard Stengel argues,

“we often miss the beauty and simplicity of nature, she suggests, because of our “busy-ness” and distractedness. These days we often miss the glories of nature because of justifiable concerns that climate change and the challenges of sustainability may efface some of those glories. But there is much to see in Planet earth: An Illustrated History, for the purpose of this book is to make you stop and reel in the diversity, fecundity majesty of our planet and its life-forms. Its extraordinary beauties only reaffirm the countless reasons we should care about the future of life on Earth.

...Inside, in exquisite photography, you will see nature’s eternal and deadly dance between predator and prey, the curious and improbable ways that species adapt to their eco systems, the fascinating ways that animals and plants reproduce and mature, the lyrical beauties of our most remote and familiar landscapes. Share the thrill of scientists who are dissecting the first intact specimen of a colossal squid; smile as you watch a beluga whale blowing doughnut-shaped rings of air, just for fun; and marvel as a fuzzy caterpillar blossoms into a butterfly whose wings are as clear as glass and as toxic as a nightshade plant.”
(Planet Earth, 2008)

Appreciating the real beauty of nature may evoke a genuine action to protect it, rather than an un-emotional description of an environmental problem. Maybe, a book like *Planet Earth* would arouse a deep sense of gratitude towards nature and thereby, a strong resolution to protect it. However, hegemony makes textbooks and classroom interactions focus merely on the description of information and events. It does not allow children to evoke a sense of feeling for their environment, both physical and social. It disconnects the child from everything, even from life itself. Maybe that is the reason why children become inactive and do not respond to the needs of the society. Therefore, the dominant system is kept intact.

Absence of Collective Social Struggle

Though various policies and reformation steps have been recommended for improving the condition of schools, a collective social struggle in the field of improving the quality of school education is absent. Issues like caste, discrimination, poverty, and labour problems have been raised and protested collectively by people. But, what happens inside the school does not seem to appear as a social problem. Therefore, it lacks collective will. Also, considerable attention has been given on increasing the access to schools. It is definitely a welcome change, because there are still a number of villages without schools. However, at the same time, it is important to understand what is being done in the existing schools. Hardly any emphasis has been given on improving the quality of education in schools.

Quality of education is perceived within a limited scope: teaching-learning methodologies, teacher-student relationships and students' learning outcomes. To take the scope of education to different level is almost nil. Education when rightly given, can transform the individual and the society. For example, when the system of caste-based inequality and its ways of discriminating certain sections of people are well understood, not just intellectually but with feeling and emotion, then the student may not let an 'upper' caste person (say one's father) ill-treat a 'lower' caste person (say one's maid). Even if science is taught the right way, it may not only lead to great scientific innovations but it may also make the person sensitive to nature.

However, advocating a creative liberal dialogic education system is a danger to the system. It may back fire on the system itself. Though education is a part of the whole system, it has a power to transform, change and alter the system itself. For example, when a child is made to explore the demerits of industrialization in the real sense, she may leave her aspiration to become an engineer and may dedicate her life to agriculture or might become an artist. That is definitely a danger to the existing social order. So long as people are kept as passive recipients to the system, then there is no problem, but the moment questioning is allowed, then that is a danger to the system. Therefore, the system will try and keep itself safe by making the actor impotent to the reality itself. As Apple argues,

“Our concern for the abstract individual in our social, economic, and educational life is exactly that—it is merely an abstraction. It does not situate the life of the individual (and ourselves as educators), as an economic and social being, back into the unequal structural relations that produced the comfort the individual enjoys. It can act as an ideological presupposition that keeps us from establishing any genuine sense of affiliation with those who produce our comforts, thus making it even more difficult to overcome the atrophication of collective commitment. Thus, the overemphasis on the individual in our educational, emotional, and social lives is ideally suited to both maintain a rather manipulative ethic of consumption and further the withering of political and economic sensitivity.”(Apple, 1979, p. 9)

Therefore, emphasis on individual development/progress, disconnecting learning from everyday life and missing emotional aspect in education are the strategies to make children passive and insensitive. They remain ignorant about the socio-political complexities in everyday life. Inequality, violence, authority, fear and sorrow that engulfs everyday life continue to remain untouched and unaltered and thereby, hegemony of the dominant class continues.

CHAPTER - III

VOICES OF RESISTANCE

Hegemony is not the only rule of the game, it also provokes resistance. Time and again we have had critical individuals who fought against domination of different kinds. Because, resistance alters the commonsense of people and it is the only way to bring out any change or reformation. Resistance or conflict is looked at as bad and disturbing, but it could also be emancipatory and transformational.

Schools and other educational institutions being the sites of hegemony, also become the sites of contestation, where resistance happens. Alternative schools put forward their resistance against the rigid mainstream system of education by altering and innovating their curriculum and pedagogy. This chapter would therefore, devote itself to analyze and understand the different ways in which resistance is put forward by these alternative schools contradicting the ways of normal schools.

4.1. Philosophical Foundations of the Select Alternative Schools

Before we get to the philosophical foundations of the alternative schools, let us take a brief pause and wonder for a while, why all these ‘alternative’ schools sprang up in the midst of formal schools? Because, the present-day education system mainly aims at stuffing the young minds with information than providing a platform to bring out their capacities and abilities. Moreover, educational institutes are like factories producing rotten souls in readymade uniform. The rules and norms have killed the fun and joy of learning and teaching. These rules have made the learning place very mechanical. School subjects are not taught for the joy of learning. Learning is always quantified, measured and compared. Even the well-reviewed text books do not provoke any sense of wonderment and joy. In this system of memorizing and achieving marks, we have lost the art of knowing oneself, the art of knowing the mysteries of life. As education is majorly serving the economic needs of the society, it undermines other faculties of knowing and learning the emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects of life. All these have, therefore, created a platform for the alternative schools to emerge and resist this hegemonic system of education.

The alternative schools that stood up against rigid curriculum, rote-learning, examinations, and teachers’ authoritative power have taken the form of resistance. It is here, we should remember Gramsci’s “counter-hegemony” which explains us the reasons for the resistance. As Simon rightly points out that, for Gramsci,

“Civil society is the sphere of class struggles and of popular democratic struggles. Thus it is the sphere in which a dominant social group organizes consent and hegemony. It is also the sphere where the subordinate social groups may organize their opposition and construct an alternative hegemony- a counter hegemony” (Simon, 1999:30).

Schools have become the effective site for offering resistance to the hegemony. In fact, the domain of education also captivated various radical thinkers and philosophers. Among various others, Sri Aurobindo and J.Krishnamurti also believed in the transformative power of education. Apart from securing marks and acquiring jobs, for them, education has a deeper meaning and a power to transform the inner being and the outer world. Moreover, schooling of a different kind is considered as a sign of protest to endorse meaningful education for a just society. Therefore, it is

important to understand their philosophical position to make sense of the resistance it offers.

Relaxed Atmosphere: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

Ashram school is not an isolated component; it emerged out of Sri Aurobindo Ashram's deep longing to create a different kind of society. A society where people are not motivated by the force of market and its ideology, but by the inner calling to understand oneself. The school is supported and constantly reinforced by the ashram, its people, ideology, and activities. The knowledge about this school would be incomplete without understanding the basic aspects and ideology of the place from where it emerged.

Mad rush, competition and restlessness of the city seem to have not disturbed the ashram and the school. There, hardly anyone is busy and they do their work quietly and sincerely. Work acquires a different meaning here, as they carry simplicity in their eyes and dedication in their heart. Everyday activities are done with perfection, starting from cleaning the place, watering plants, arranging flowers, preparing food or attending to any specific activities. Most of them here are sincere. Though it is just normal everyday work, it does not become mechanical here. Everyday pattern flows like a rhythm. Just like the sun which rises every day and sets in the evening, flowers that bloom in the day and drop at night, everyday routine activities are done with care and sincerity. There is hardly any sense of boredom and dullness. Work becomes a way of offering and therefore, everydayness has the possibility of turning into a prayer.

Wearing simple slippers and casual dresses, going by walk or by cycles, have now become the culture of the past. Simple living has been stereotyped as 'poverty,' and 'conventional.' To be modern is to buy more things, have a car, and use expensive items. Even beauty is displayed in the form of expensive decorative items. However, in the ashram, flowers at different places, pencils and notebooks arranged on the table, slippers on shoe stand, enjoy the respect. From kinder garden to higher classes and even to the tiniest department of the Ashram, things are kept neatly and orderly. The orderly arrangement of things is not merely for convenience but has a great sense of beauty; not a narcissistic beauty with expensive decorative items, but beauty of a

different kind, of simplicity. Not only things, but even people in the ashram also carry simplicity in their eyes, in the way they dress, eat and live. It is a common sight to see teachers cycling their way to the school, wearing an old pair of trousers; untouched by complexity of modern culture and latest technology.

All these things did not come without a strong foundation and everyone knew from where it all started, that this change was not possible without a strong force working on it. There seems to be a strong connectedness in them with the ideas of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The central philosophy shapes the culture of the school, its aims and the way it functions. Philosophy enters the classroom and even the way they eat, talk and share. Before we understand their school and the system of education, we need to understand the basic philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on which it stands and grows.

Engagement with Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo



(Photo Credit: Sri Surobindo Society, Pondicherry)

Sri Aurobindo's interest in education initially started as a part of his political struggle for country's freedom. If we look at earlier phase of Sri Aurobindo's life, one can observe his strong interest in the country's independence. He participated in various

political activities between 1902 and 1910. His fight against colonialism can be noticed in his ideas of non-cooperation and strong nationalism. But nevertheless, he was neither a conservative nor a militant nationalist. He visualized a modern India, but at the same time did not give up on the ancient Indian ideals for the sake of Western influence. Because he felt, blindly following the West does not count for true progress. He says, “The scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilization of the West is now in process of dissolution and it would be lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on that sinking foundation” (Ashram, 1956, p. 11).

Like Gandhi and Tagore, Sri Aurobindo also was a strong critic of colonial education. He resisted its dominance and its dismissing attitude towards Indian culture and civilization. For him,

“All that appears to be almost unanimously agreed on is that the teaching given in the existing schools and universities has been bad in kind and in addition denationalizing, degrading and impoverishing to the national mind, soul and character because it is overshadowed by a foreign hand and foreign in aim, method, substance and spirit”(Ashram, 1956, p. 6).

However, he did not remain simply a critic towards colonial education, he stepped forward and proposed the idea of National Education. In his “A Preface on National Education” which was published in 1920-21, he gives a fair idea of his vision on National Education.

Though he was attacking colonial education while suggesting National Education, he was by no means against the spirit of modernity. He wanted to bridge the gap between the ancient Indian educational ideals and the western methods. He, in fact, criticized the idea of subscribing blindly to the ancient ideals and methods. He says,

“We cannot be satisfied with a mere resuscitation of some past principle, method and system that may have happened to prevail at one time in India, however great it was or in consonance with our past civilization and culture. That reversion would be a sterile and impossible effort hopelessly inadequate to the pressing demands of the present and the far greater demands of our future” (Ashram, 1956, pp. 6-7).

For him, militant nationalism was not the way forward, he was open to the knowledge of the West or elsewhere, as he felt education is “universal”, “without nationality or borders”. He wanted education to be modern in spirit. He remarks,

“After all we live in the twentieth century and cannot revive the India of Chandragupta or Akbar; we must keep abreast with the march of truth and knowledge, fit ourselves for existence under actual circumstances, and our education must be therefore up to date in form and substance and modern life and spirit”(Ashram, 1956, p. 8).

Our education system is mainly aiming at stuffing the young minds than bringing out their abilities. It does not help in understanding ‘how to live?’, but rather it focuses on ‘how to earn’? Whereas, for Sri Aurobindo, education is not about acquiring information; it is not about preparing the children for job, however significant it may be. He says,

“Amount of knowledge is in itself not of first importance, but to make the best use of what we know. The easy assumption of our educationists that we have only to supply the mind with a smattering of facts in each department of knowledge and the mind can be trusted to develop itself and take its own suitable road is contrary to science, contrary to human experience and contrary to the universal opinion of civilized countries” (Ashram, 1956, p. 58).

The central aim of education, for him, is the development of human mind as well as the spirit. He dismisses any superficial change in curriculum, language, because he feels that, if this “instrument of study” is not understood, then education, however different, is incomplete and inefficient. For him,

“Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind”(Ashram, 1956, p. 19).

School, for Sri Aurobindo, cannot be just seen as a place for preparing the younger generation to get absorbed into the social world. He was critical of the general system of education as well as the quality of education being imparted through them and therefore he argued for an alternative approach. He hoped to initiate a profound re-thinking on education through his three principles of education.

The first principle - also the most interesting and foremost confession of Sri Aurobindo was “nothing can be taught”. This implies that the children are not empty

vessels, but the knowledge is hidden and latent and the role of teacher is to simply 'guide' and not 'teach' or 'instruct'. Teacher should not impart knowledge to the child, he/she should be a friend and a catalyst, then the child begins to learn by himself/herself.

The second principle is that "the mind has to be consulted in its own growth"(Ashram, 1956, p. 20). The child should not be forced to fit into the pattern of society, of family and of schools. For him, every child is like a seed, has particular qualities and interests within. A proper environment is what is all needed to let the seed grow into a giant tree. The child also has its own future embedded in itself and a suitable environment is important for his/her growth. As the children already possess curiosity, the schools should be providing suitable environment to handle it, but generally schools follow their own direction and force children to be a part of it. Therefore, he asserted that the role of education is to bring out the best in each child and make it perfect for a noble use.

The third principle of education is "to work from the near to the far"(Ashram, 1956, p. 20). Children's initial knowledge and familiarity is built upon a particular surrounding, culture, nationality, soil and language where he/she was brought up, therefore, education should begin from where he/she is and about the things which he/she is familiar with and then move to something which is new and unfamiliar.

Moreover, children, for Sri Aurobindo, are not with empty minds, but they are natural learners. For him, a child is "an enquirer, an investigator, an analyzer, a merciless anatomist"(Ashram, 1956, p. 34). Therefore, a teacher should appeal to these qualities and not simply provide them with information. Teachers should make use of these qualities in children to induce interest in understanding various aspects about the world and themselves. Even the children's natural gift of imitation and imagination could be used to develop their sensibilities in art. He places a huge moral responsibility on the teachers, for they are the one who are capable of bringing out the best in each and every child. For such a possibility to happen, he feels that the teacher himself/herself should set the best example.

Above all, for Sri Aurobindo, the mere education of the intellect was not sufficient, but a moral and religious education appealed to him as the most important, because,

he felt that “the education of the intellect divorced from the perfection of the moral and emotional nature is injurious to human progress”(Ashram, 1956, p. 27). By moral and religious education, he meant not to force religious texts on the children, but to ‘suggest and invite’ the children for conversations on emotions, impulses, discipline, etc. Teacher should not insist excessively on the outer discipline, for it may create fear, rather he/she should set an example of himself/herself.

Mother on Education



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

The Mother, disciple of Sri Aurobindo materialized his educational ideals. For her, education of a child starts from the moment child is born. And at some places she has mentioned that it starts even before the birth, i.e. from the time of conception. Therefore, she places a huge responsibility on child’s mother for the development of the child growing within her body. She feels,

“the part of education which the mother has to go through is to see that her thoughts are always beautiful and pure, her feelings always noble and fine, her material surroundings as harmonious as possible and full of a great simplicity” (Mother, 1978).

The Mother also worked closely with children, evolving a philosophy of 'Free Progress', where each child is made to develop and flower in an absolutely spontaneous and inwardly centered process. For her, “Free Progress System” means, “a progress guided by the soul and not subject to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas”(Mother, On Education, 1978, p. 109). Through this system, she encouraged children to learn by themselves, by choosing their subjects of interest, amount of

syllabus and progress at their own pace. Children, for her, should ultimately take charge of their own development because all learning is ultimately self-learning and that is a very individual process. Different individuals learn best in different ways and at different rates. One child may learn better by reading, another by attending lectures and yet another by engaging in group activities.

For most philosophers, the world is a terrible place and that humans have become highly unnatural and materialistic. So, to bring order and to tap the hidden faculties in a man, radical education was seen a better instrument. The transformations that they talk of in the school are the transformations they would like to see in the society. For Mother, such a transformation is possible, if the education develops five principal aspects in the children - the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. These five principles follow the chronological order of growth of the individual.

Firstly, the *physical education* emphasizes on the perfection of the body - physical activities, exercises, games, healthy food, proper rest. The Mother feels that a child needs to be given good training for the physical body, because only when the body is kept fit and healthy, that it can act as a good instrument for creating productive work. She feels that the rest of the aspects can be perfected only when the body is perfect.

The second important aspect of education is of the “*vital*” which has two principal aspects. The first is to develop and utilize the sense organs, to bring them to precision and power. And the second is to become conscious and gradually master one’s character and in the end, achieve its transformation. She wants children to observe their own nature, impulses, desires, violent behaviour and fears. Moreover, she feels only with this process of observation, does the will towards progress and perfection arise.

The third aspect of education is the most familiar “*Mental education*”. This aspect can be developed through the development of power of concentration, capacities of expansion, thought control and mental silence. One of the main aspects in mental education is to develop child’s interest for learning. However, after suggesting various ways to improve the mental abilities of the child, she also suggests sufficient ‘rest’ for the mind. People may have a developed and a very active mind, but if it is not put at

rest, it may cause tension. Sometimes, change of activity may give rest to the mind, but for her, “the greatest possible rest lies in silence”(Ashram, 1956, p. 120).

For Mother and Sri Aurobindo, education is incomplete without developing the fourth and fifth aspects- *psychic and spiritual*. Therefore, they ask for an education which is related to real life, more flexible, humble and arouse the deepest philosophical quest for life. Unlike the usual crowd which is running after money and power, the Mother wanted to work and hope for something deeper and meaningful in life. For her, achieving something in life is not about earning more money, building a big house and owning huge property or not even achieving something great in career, but understanding oneself. We may know many things and master certain skills, but it is all in vain when there is no self-knowledge. That with which we live and that which is life, we have no knowledge of it. It has been the central concern for many sages, philosophers and great thinkers, including Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

About Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education

The Mother opened a school for children on December 2, 1943 in Pondicherry. Since then the school has continued to grow and took the name as *Sri Aurobindo International University Centre* in 1952 and then, later renamed by the Mother as *Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education(SAICE)*. The Centre of Education comprises the following sections and this division is different from the classification of grades in mainstream schools.

S.No.	Name of the Section	No. of grades	Years of age
1.	Kindergarten	1, 2 ,3	3-5
2.	L’Avenir (The Future)	1, 2 ,3	6-8
3.	Progress	1, 2 ,3	9-11
4.	En Avant Vers la Perfection	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	12-17
5.	Knowledge	1, 2 ,3	18-20

(SAICE, 1993, p. 115)

Kindergarten is at present in an old French colonial house surrounded by a large courtyard and a garden. The children normally arrive at 7.45 a.m. and leave at 11.30

a.m. Physical education program for them is compulsory and it starts at 4.30 p.m. and finishes at 5.30 p.m. A common academic programme is basically same for all the three years. However, there is a progression in complexity of material offered; precision, refinement of skills and performance is expected of the children as they mature. French and Sanskrit language starts from the Kindergarten.

L’Avenir (The Future): From Kindergarten, children move to the Avenir section in the Delafon building (also known as Flower Room). They spend the next three years in this well ventilated, beautiful building. Here the medium of instruction is French. Teaching of Sanskrit continues but written Sanskrit, English and Mother-tongue are introduced only in the second year of Avenir. The subjects taught are: French, English, Arithmetic, Sanskrit, Mother-tongue, Handwork (including carpentry), Singing (Indian and Western), “Body Movements” to Music and Story-telling by teachers. Embroidery and Indian Dance are optional.

Progress and En Avant Vers la Perfection: From the Delafon building children move to the main building for the next 9 years of education. This is often called as “Big School”. The Academic subjects include: English, French, History, Geography, Indian Languages, Mathematics and Sciences which include Botany, Zoology, Physiology, Biology, Hygiene, Geology, Physics, Chemistry, Applied Science, Solar Science and Computer Science. Apart from the academic subjects, students are offered a wide range of Creative Arts: Drawing, Painting, Handwork, Needlework, Carpentry, Pottery, Leatherwork, Music (Indian and Western- both vocal and instrumental), Dance (Indian and Western) and Dramatics. These activities are compulsory until the age of 14, after which students exercise their options.

Knowledge: This higher course represents the final stage in Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. In general, undergraduate and advanced approaches of study are offered there. The volume of syllabus is decided by the students themselves and this course can either fit in one of three categories mentioned below:

- a) Comprehensive Project- is a deep and an extensive study
- b) Major Project- is a less elaborate study
- c) Minor Project- is only an outline study

To repeat again, for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, education was majorly considered as a tool for social change and school as an institutional medium through which this change can be brought about. Therefore, the Mother did not want the kind of parents who are career oriented. She vehemently remarked,

“There are people who write wanting to join our University and they ask what kind of diploma or degree we prepare for, the career we open out. To them I say: go elsewhere, if you want that; there are many other places, very much better than ours, even in India, in that respect. We do not have their equipment and magnificence. You will get there the kind of success you look for. We do not compete with them. We move in a different sphere, on a different level”(Mother, 1978)

She wanted parents who aspire for a different kind of education for their children, an education which has inner transformation as the priority.

Feeling of the Place: Ashram School

A sense of slowness dominates the place, from arranging the flowers to going to class, to completing the syllabus. When the world is rushing and competing, this place offers rest, a kind of leisurely space to our thoughts and actions. There is no hurry, yet everything is done with care and perfection. Children make beautiful things in the carpentry department- wall clock, pen stand, wooden boats, varieties of house models and what not. There is absolutely no pressure to complete fast, because there are no deadlines that haunt them. They do not have to exhibit every year and it is when things are ready, only then they organize an exhibition, roughly every four years. Such arrangement makes it even more beautiful. Colorful threads lying on table, children stitching wonderful designs on cloth and instruction from the teachers, nowhere do we find any tension. They do it very quietly and slowly with much care. When there is no rush, everything becomes relaxed, beautiful and orderly.

At the carpentry department or in the pottery section, or even in the regular classrooms, there is no sight of scolding or any form of threatening. Suggestions are given with concern and teachers do not threaten them. They are soft and harmless. Even an academic setting hardly carries any authority. I happened to witness a celebration of Bengali New Year with a cultural program in the auditorium. Children were getting excited and they were making noise, but the teachers did not control them nor did they act like ‘police’ disciplining them to sit quietly. When the cultural

program started, everyone became quiet on their own. There was hardly any tension or agitation among the performers too. They moved freely on the stage. They looked relaxed and confident.

Mainstream schools are endlessly filling their schedule, but here children are occasionally made to sit quietly with themselves, with a mild, soothing music in the background. They become more calm and attentive. Their faces do not carry the boredom of everydayness but are full of energy and liveliness. The Primary section at Delafon carries a very pleasant feeling, and the atmosphere is so lively and joyful. Children look bright and happy and teachers are enthusiastic yet they do not carry pressure. They are not in a rush. Work is not seen as something to be finished with, but as an act of offering with total involvement.

All that our general educational system aims at is preparing children for a job or a career and the entire course of schooling would focus on this pursuit. But Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education aims at a different purpose. The purpose is not about increasing the material comfort and acquiring knowledge of the outer world, but it essentially aims for a growth of consciousness, a discovery, an increasing awareness of an inner power. Yet, children here are not forced to read or refer the books of Sri Aurobindo or Mother at any level. Meena di from carpentry department said that,

“children are not taught philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Mother at any level. They are just made to be in the environment. Only simple concentration and quiet time are observed. Also in the higher studies, there is a choice of subject on Sri. Aurobindo and Mother, but that is also optional. Mother never wanted to force a child to read any philosophy unless she/he is interested”.

Children are just living in the atmosphere where people around them are longing for something more than earning money, more than finding a career and increasing their material comfort. Understanding the meaning of life is an aspect of utmost importance at this place. This in a way influences the children, even if not directly, but in the form of care and affection they get from teachers.

Teaching for teachers is not simply a job but a way of offering something to life itself. Their work with children is considered something sacred, an integral part of their life. For them, teaching is not separate from their private life. They overflow into each

other. The way they approach the students and the manner in which the classes are conducted conveys a great deal. 'No political, social or economic change can bring in peace, only spiritual change' believes a social science teacher. He is very knowledgeable and active in class, yet, at sometimes, he sits near Samadhi quiet and unmoved, and at times near the lake project, watching trees and flowers intensely. This is a place for not only the instruction of knowledge about the world around them, but it is also a place where great care and opportunity is given to understand the inner self, if one is interested in. There is great 'room' for such explorations. A central hall in the Knowledge is used by the students for free time and a 'silence' room, which has the potential to evoke the children to understand their 'self'.

Teachers do not get a salary, but the Ashram takes care of their essential and basic needs. All the expenses of the school are also drawn from the Ashram and ashram, in turn, depends financially on its various commercial departments like the Handmade paper unit, Publications, Agarbathi unit and various others. In fact, the school fee is only Rs.500 per annum for each student (as on February 2013), which equals to "nothing" in the current economic terms. An institution trying its best to not overrate the value of money has definitely something to share. The basic underlying line behind any work is not money but "Service to the Divine". This feature has entered many aspects of the institution, for the teachers, teaching is not a "job" but it is an "offering" to the Divine. One of the office in-charges, Dheera di says, "Mother never wanted to sell education and she was very particular about that and when we bring money in between, then we will work for money but not in the name of service". So, when money takes its minimal value, education here reaches a different realm altogether.

Philosophical Foundation of Sholai School

The Sholai School with its immense natural beauty, alternative lifestyle, creative curriculum and innovative pedagogy emerged as a life-long project by a British-born, Mr. Brian Jenkins. His deep connection with J.Krishnamurti's philosophy altered his life mission and brought him to India. Before coming to India, he worked for 14 years in J. Krishnamurti Educational Centre at Brockwood Park, United Kingdom and after a few years, he started this school in 1989 in Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu. Along with the school, he also started the Centre for Learning, Organic Agriculture and

Appropriate Technology (CLOAAT) which is spread across 100 acres. His interest in nature has made him create a sustainable living in the campus with the use of Appropriate Technologies (Solar, Micro-hydro and Bio-gas), Water Harvesting practices, Watershed Management and Organic Farming. The school majorly draws inspiration from the teachings of J.Krishnamurti, where “children are encouraged to enjoy learning and to grow to be mature and sensitive individuals” (Krishnamurti J. , 1970). The study of this school would be incomplete if we do not understand J.Krishnamurti’s philosophy on life and his educational ideals.



(Photo Credit: kfionline.org)

Normally, we conform to the established social rules right from a very young age. Family, peer group, schools, relatives, religion and other institutions have influenced us. We are no more individuals, thinking and acting freely, but we are influenced by the society, with its values that are fundamentally based on competition, confusion, division, discrimination, fear and sorrow. We simply imitate what others do. With the fear of being rejected, out-casted from the rest of the people, we repeat the tradition. As we are being trained from an younger age, when we grow older, we are unable to question, stand against the established norms and values. But we are unable to see the impact that it may have on our mind. From the official to the very personal of relation, everything has been corrupted. Not only that, society is filled with violence, discrimination and destruction.

In such a chaotic world, a philosopher and an eminent educational thinker, Jiddu Krishnamurti asks, "What is the right action?" For him, "the right action" stems not out of a theoretical understanding, but while examining the facts "as they are, very closely, objectively, non-sentimentally, unemotionally" (Krishnamurti J. , Beyond Violence, 1973, p. 2). Because he feels, "in the learning is the doing; learning is not separate from action". Nevertheless, such a learning does not come easily. He understands the complexity of the issue and the inability of the mind to see facts as facts because, our minds are generally not free, they are conditioned with prejudices, beliefs and values. So, mind, being clouded by several kinds of conditions, is unable to see the facts clearly. Therefore, we are unable to solve any problem. Then, automatically we start looking for answers from books, religion and philosophy. But, such an approach, he feels, would further complicate the problem. Because, if all our problems are to be solved from outside, by now, we all should have been free from worries and sorrow. Outside influence, be it books, religious authority, philosopher or anyone else, have not brought about peace, happiness, joy, freedom to live. So, where are we to look?

As Krishnamurti feels, both the problems- social and personal are the product of one's own mind, one needs to look at oneself rather than looking for answers from outside. Right kind of education, he believed would enable a person to understand his mind, its conditioning and therefore, would bring out a free and happy human being. He says, "to understand life is to understand ourselves and that is both the beginning and the end of education" (Krishnamurti J. , 1992, p. 14). But, he felt that the present system of education is incapable of bringing any change in the individual. Educated people are loaded with knowledge, but they are devoid of intelligence. He adds,

"We accumulate a great deal of knowledge about many things, but to act intelligently about what one has learnt seems almost impossible. Schools, colleges and universities cultivate knowledge about our behavior, about the universe, about science and every form of technology, but these centres of education rarely help a human being to live a daily life of excellence" (Krishnamurti J. , The whole Movement of Life is Learning, 2006, p. 14).

We are endlessly filling our mind with information, we are learning certain skills to do some job, and we call that education, but will it bring out the capacity to understand life fully? Definitely, not. Technological and intellectual knowledge has

created technologies and improved our material comforts, but has it solved our problem? What have we created in the name of knowledge and efficiency, a world full of confusion and misery? We may be intellectually performing better, but inwardly we are dull, incomplete, fearful and alienated. That is why, Krishnamurti was skeptical of mainstream schools which acts as the sole place for learning academic subjects while dismissing the knowledge of oneself. In his words,

“Of what value it is to be trained as lawyers if we perpetuate litigation? Of what value is knowledge if we continue in our confusion? What significance has technical and industrial capacity if we use it to destroy one another? What is the point of our existence if it leads to violence and utter misery? Though we may have money or are capable of earning it, though we have our pleasures and our organized religions, we are in endless conflict”(Krishnamurti J. , 1992, p. 12).

But what is learning, if it is not about acquiring knowledge? Most of us equate learning with acquiring knowledge, but Krishnamurti feels that any knowledge is of the past. With past knowledge, we will be unable to even enjoy watching a tree or the sunset or a child. What we have read about them in our books, what others have told about them or our past experience with them influence how we look at them now. This is not learning, for Krishnamurti. But as he suggests, there is a way of learning without the weight of man’s accumulated knowledge. He says, it is possible through “pure” observation. It is not an observation which becomes memory, but an observation from moment to moment(Krishnamurti J. , The whole Movement of Life is Learning, 2006, p. 22).

Moreover, for the right kind of education to happen, he feels freedom is the basic necessity. By freedom, he does not mean one’s pursuit for success; true freedom, for him, comes with “self-knowledge”. To understand how one’s own mind functions, its insecurities, fears, desires and its anger, all this should become a major aspect of the school. First of all, for such a thing to happen, he feels, teachers should earnestly desire to understand themselves. He places a huge responsibility on the teachers for building a peaceful and enlightened society. Therefore, for such a social transformation to happen, he feels it is not right to depend on the regulation of any government or on a political movement. He feels the responsibility largely rests in the hands of parents and teachers.

An educator, for Krishnamurti, should help the student to discover what he/she is most interested in. He feels,

“If he (child) does not find his true vocation, all his life will seem wasted; he will feel frustrated doing something which he does not want to do. If he wants to be an artist and instead becomes a clerk in some office, he will spend his life grumbling and pining away”(Krishnamurti J. , 1992, p. 96).

By this, he did not mean taking up any vocation blindly; he feels that the teacher need to help children discover serious implications of the vocation he/she chooses. Also, a teacher, for him, is not merely a giver of information, he/she “is one who points the way to wisdom, to truth”(Krishnamurti J. , 1992, p. 98). Without the search for truth, he feels, society will soon decay.

To help bring about real transformation in individuals and society, Krishnamurti felt several schools should be started at different places. Not run of the mill schools; but schools of a different kind, with less children and creative teachers. He himself started several schools in India, one in England and one more in America. He engaged with children and teachers through talks and letters. He repeatedly insisted that blind conformity to authority would make us uncreative, dull and fearful. Because, with blind conformity, we would lose the appetite to look at life freshly.

In one of the talks with students in Varanasi in 1954, Krishnamurti was asked by one of the students, “Man has made great progress in the material world. Why is it we do not see progress in other direction?” for which he replied,

“It is fairly clear why we make progress in the material world, especially in the new world where there is great deal of energy, a great release of intellectual capacity. When you are colonizing a new world, you have to invent, you have to struggle. Man has made progress from the bow and arrow to the atom bomb, from the bullock cart to the jet plane that travels about 1600 miles an hour; that is generally called progress. But is there progress in any other direction, inwardly? Have you as an individual, progressed inwardly? Have you found anything for yourself?...Without these things, to make progress in the world is to destroy ourselves”(Krishnamurti J. , 2001, p. 112).

About Sholai School

Except for the sign board near the entrance, nowhere does Sholai has a trace of a “typical” school in its structure. As we enter, we see trees and plants spread

everywhere; birds whistle and the touch of a cool breeze enters our soul. The entire school is placed on a beautiful gorge among breathtaking hills near Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu. The school is situated close to a village, far away from the noise of the vehicles, tall buildings, and busy markets. It is isolated from the city influence and is closely connected to nature. Amidst the greens, it is difficult to spot the school building. Classrooms are also not set in a usual uniformly arranged row. Each one looks unique, with huge windows facing the mountains and trees.

School in a Non-Concrete Jungle



(Photo Credit: Kapilesh)

The school with total strength of 52 children and 12 teachers (as on 12/5/2014) offers innovative education. The subjects include English Language & Literature, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Hindi, Tamil, Development Studies, Environmental Studies, Sociology and Psychology. Children also do hands-on activities that enrich their theoretical understanding. Some of such activities include Organic Farming, Woodwork, Practical Engineering, and Cooking. Apart from these, they also participate in Theater Workshop, Drama, Yoga, Music and various Sports activities. The school is affiliated to University of Cambridge International Examinations and conducts IGCSE (10th Standard) and Cambridge A-Level (12th Standard) examinations. Children are divided into following six groups on the basis of their age and ability.

- 1) Pre-Primary
- 2) Primary
- 3) New Wings
- 4) IG-1

- 5) IG-2
- 6) A-level

Children are not arrested within the benches, they move around, run and play. Once they finish their Math class, students have to walk to their Science class which is about 300 meters, crossing the bridge that is built across the stream. Children talk, sing and laugh as they rush to their class enjoying the sight of water, trees, and birds. At times, even a tree shade becomes their classroom. They sit in groups, discuss with the teacher, even birds and butterflies enter their learning space. Silence and nature seem to relax their soul; a suitable condition for the mind to become very humble and sharp. It is very common to see friends sitting under the trees, walking in the greens and relaxing their weekends. There is no sense of restlessness.

Sholai School: A Living Place



(Photo Credit: Sholai School)

School starts with prayer, where they sing songs and listen to music and observe some quiet time. Children come in colorful dresses, each unique and simple and that relieves us from the regimented rule of uniform dress. Their discipline includes climbing trees, sitting along with teachers and making fun of them, asking all kinds of weird questions in the classrooms, shouting in the fields, staring at the sky for long, walking alone in the woods... A child does not feel 'odd one out' here to sit by the riverside, to share her problem with teachers, to make a mistake... Play time and

'free' time are not controlled by teachers and elders. The school runs safely without any CCTV camera (except at the entry gate). Children learn about different things without teachers scaring them with sticks or threats. Learning happens even without the fear of exams.

4.2. Humanised Curriculum

As we have seen in previous chapters, school curriculum is used as an effective tool to establish hegemony in the society. As Apple also rightly points out,

“the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a-people”(Apple, 1979, p. 1).

Moreover, learning in schools has no meaningful connection to our real life. What is being learnt in the school is so disconnected from the life outside. Also, not all subjects are equally important, some subjects enjoy high status and some remain unimportant. This is majorly determined by the economic requirements of the society. Unlike social sciences, humanities and arts, science & technology enjoys a high status.

Such hegemony has been contested by these alternative schools, and time and again replaced by a humane curriculum which is based on inducing creativity, moral sensibility and social responsibility. Learning in these schools, does not merely involve textbooks, but also activities and serious discussions which takes children closer to the reality. Subjects are brought alive by making connection with our everyday life. Moreover, children of these schools enjoy the freedom to explore their creative abilities. On the whole, their curriculum does not make the student dull, mechanical and fearful, rather, it enhances their creative abilities and prepares them to become critical reflexive individuals. Therefore, it is important to understand the content of the curriculum and its social implications.

At Ashram School

A huge door opens us to a beautiful building; lots of greenery and ample ventilation makes the primary school, “L’Avenir” (The future) look more like a home. There are benches and chairs like any other classrooms, but that is not the only place reserved for students. They play games on the floor mats, do some group activity in the corridor and even relax in the garden. Children are not arrested within benches, they move around the classroom very freely, picking up things and game boards that are kept in the cupboard. A child was playing with some colorful cubes as the rest of his class was engaged in writing. He played for a while and once he finished arranging a set of cubes according to a pattern given in the instruction book, he got up, went to the cupboard, kept the box and picked up another box to play. No one forced him to write or to do anything, he moved around freely and maybe, that is why he felt at home.

Teaching-Learning: A Creative Endeavor

The primary section is filled with vibrancy and joy; learning happens everywhere from a very subtle form to the carefully planned classroom activities. Academics are not a dry endeavor, it is done through various games and creative activities. Dynamic and a lower teacher-student ratio makes this possible. This can be as low as 1:1 and as high as 1:15. With the help of a teacher, students of Class 3 in one of their science classes demonstrated on ‘how the engine works in automobiles’. The class was divided into three groups and one of the groups performed in front of other two. Firstly, an explanation was given in the picture form, which then was followed by a demonstration using a play and finally it ended with a discussion. Bringing together some of the similar examples from the students’ everyday experiences, the teacher made the class really interesting. All the students got completely engrossed in it, so much so that, even when the class got over, the discussion didn’t end, it continued among students, their friends. The subject spread beyond the classroom and books. Physics, Math, History and other subjects here do not just remain in the books, but they become alive with full of meaning. Maybe, that is when a child realizes that books are not dead.

Generally, in a normal school, children inside a classroom are constantly engaged with blackboard and textbooks, learning has no meaning outside of these objects.

Whereas in this school, to see children learning at various places and in various ways looked interesting to me. Sixteen students with three teachers sat in a circle, they sang songs and that was followed by a conversation on a particular topic. Children sang beautifully, they were smiling and participating freely, they were not bored, there was joy on their face. It was a Sanskrit class. Here, they teach in all different ways other than making them sit in rows and making them to memorize. In another class, Dilip Bhai and his class of 19 students were playing Math games. It was very interesting to watch them play. There was no screaming, shouting or scolding. It went very pleasantly. Children behaved very nicely yet they enjoyed the game thoroughly. It didn't look like a typical Math class, but they still learned with joy. Even a typical writing class did not look dull. There was no stress on their face, neither was there any hurry nor any tension. They seem to like it. The teacher moves slowly and takes it forward with interesting games and activities. Children here are not empty vessels to merely dump information and to inject values, but they do receive respect, love, and care.

Learning Beyond Textbooks



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

The textbooks are not their only source, they do not become their holy book; concepts, events and relevant activities are freely drawn from various other sources. Teaching materials, reference books are drawn from various sources and the teacher has full freedom to choose. The staff room contained lots of educational games in different

shelves which was collected over 40 years. Games are meant not only for entertainment, but are meant to teach concepts to the children. It was not a random display of activities, games were sequentially arranged, carefully understood and utilized beyond their entertaining purpose. Games here enter classrooms legitimately. Teachers have full freedom to use any games. They may also use books, but that is not compulsory. Few pages from one book and few pages from another, various activities and games fill their classes. Dilip Bhai said,

“here we do not religiously follow everything from the book. I choose few pages which look interesting from books. I use books only as a reference and support material”.

They seem to have developed their own system of sequential activities according to the age and capacity of the child. With the use of books, games, cards and experiments, the syllabus not only looks interesting and colorful, but orderly. He added, ‘the Mother always wanted it to come from every teacher regarding what to teach and how to teach’.

Creative Pedagogy

Innovative materials and creative activities are not used mechanically in the classroom but children are made to engage with them meaningfully. It was a French reading class and there were around 12 students. Surprisingly, the reading did not happen for all students together. The class was divided. Around five were reading a French book with a teacher. There was absolutely no sense of distraction among the students. Each one was interacting and participating in the class with a lot of discipline. There was another group of 4 students, playing number games with a lot of interest. Two other children were playing some other game of their choice individually. One among them was very keenly arranging the cubes. He was not distracted even for a while. After some time, the groups were rotated and replaced. There was a student who was with another teacher separately doing French, as she was finding it difficult. It was very interesting to see how they handled a small group of children skillfully and carefully for reading activity while leaving the rest to play. Children’s interests, fears, likes and dislikes no more stays alien to the teacher. They become more familiar with each other.

Chaotic Order



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

As the children move to the main school after three years of Primary schooling, they enter subsequent stages called 'Progress' and 'Perfection' for the next nine years. English, French, History, geography, Indian Languages, Mathematics, and Sciences are offered at this stage. Of which, French, Mathematics and Sciences are taught in French; English, History and Geography are taught in English. Here, major part of the academics is explored through reading, writing, lecturing and discussing, nevertheless, the spirit of freedom and expression makes the learning joyful. A class of nine children (Avp-4, 10th) were doing Algebra (quadratic equations). Though it is considered as a boring subject generally, students willingly participated. For many of them, this could be 'meaningless algebra' in their life, but they enjoyed learning it. They discussed among themselves and were very keenly solving the problem with interest. Their involvement and enthusiasm suggested me that, playing a game and working on algebra does not have to be different. They solved it like a puzzle and none of them seemed to dislike it. The teacher created an atmosphere where they freely asked questions, had casual conversations and even cracked jokes with the teacher. There was hardly any tension between teacher and student. The teacher too didn't miss on fun.

Free Progress: A Liberating System

Students here have a choice to make for the last three years of the Main school between *Fixed System* and *Free Progress*. As the name itself suggests, in the fixed system, subjects, syllabus is fixed and timetable is pre-designed for the whole class. But in Free Progress, those are self-designed by students individually. With little guidance, they are free to draw their learning system. The school seems to have tremendous trust on the children. Whereas, in a regular setting, where children are taught to learn what is designed for those by the institution until the end of their education, the system of this kind comes as a shock. Planning one's own learning is a common aspect of the school. One of the teachers feels that free progress is to allow students to become independent learners. Ultimately, that should be the aim of any educational institution- to make an individual an independent learner. Not to always stick to a system, to institutions, to certain kinds of books and teachers. One has to move beyond. Therefore, one is not lost without an institution and learning continues even in the absence of an institutional affiliation. They gain their trust to learn from everything, anytime, for education is not only until the end of college; one has to be a learner throughout life.

Subjects are Brought Alive

Devika is a final year student in the main school. She has opted for free progress. She has chosen history as one of her subjects. The topic was about the art and artist's experience of art. The class began. The teacher has got few art books of Michelangelo and a related fiction. They had earlier, watched a movie on the topic together. This topic has been going on for some time and this was the last class of this topic. She seems to have liked it so much. It was about how Michelangelo got to make a sculpture depicting the moment of death, its feelings and emotions. They discussed with so much intensity. The curiosity with which she expressed; only her eyes can prove it. The teacher let her express whatever she felt. The discussion went from art to beauty to death to human emotions to philosophy. It was beautiful to see the teacher uniting different subjects and trying to connect it with life. The boundaries merged and there, history came alive.

Not just the classroom teaching, outdoor activities become even more interesting. A bus, with around 10 students took off from the school around 7.30 am. They were dropped in a beautiful garden close to a lake. Their faces became bright and light in the lap of nature with - blooming flowers, a feeling of the morning breeze and the warm sun. This is an attempt to expose children to a variety of living organisms, things and events in nature. Some of the students were running after butterflies, while one of them was referring to a book of butterflies trying to find out the details and shared with others. Another caught a spider and put it in a box and ran to the teacher. The teacher explained to her the general characteristics of a spider, as the girl kept looking at it for a long time. Something extra-ordinary must have gone on in her head. Some other students went around looking for some insects. They found one. It was a scorpion. They didn't get scared nor did they want to kill it. With a lot of excitement, they called their teacher. He came and looked at it for some time and slowly, he let the scorpion crawl on his hand. He explained their behavior of why it doesn't sting when it knows that you are not a threat to it. They all smiled. Simple things like running after butterflies, touching the texture of a scorpion, reading a fiction and putting up a play, children there are really living.

Graduation: Student's Paradise

Students from both free progress and fixed system are equally allowed to enter 3 years of Knowledge (Graduation). It is not just teachers who decide their syllabus and books, but here children also have their freedom to choose the topics, books and teachers. Here they are allowed to choose any combination of subjects. So much choice and freedom. It is not completely unorganized, but they have some minimum order to maintain the system. A maximum of 8 students per class and a minimum of 18 classes per week which includes non-academic classes like carpentry, painting, musicals well. Even at the graduation level (Knowledge), the learning still continues to be joyful with student's own choice of subjects, teachers and syllabus including the time. Even technical subjects are given a different flavor. In the engineering section, students are initially given skill training and teachers initiate some small projects, later students take up on their own and finish them. The rule is that none of the projects are to be repeated. I was surprised to see the machines students have created.

The teacher proudly said, 'even engineering/ B.Tech students cannot make the machines our students have made on their own'.

A Space for Deeper Engagement



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram)

It is very common in the mainstream colleges to see a single, uniform timetable for the entire class, but here it is individual's timetable. On December 16 and 17, the day of registration, all the teachers who teach in the Knowledge sit in rows, not for them to choose the students, but it's the other way around, the students choose their teachers they want to study with. Not just the teacher, students choose the subjects, the syllabus, number of classes and their convenient time. Overall, they make their own time-table. To my surprise, no two students' timetable is the same. Have we ever seen a science student opting a paper in philosophy and art at the same time? Yes, here we see all kinds of weird combinations of subjects from Philosophy to Science, from Social Sciences to Art and Music and each of these subjects is given equal value.

Brihas is in the third year of Knowledge and has taken Sri Aurobindo's 'Life Divine', English, French, Math, Basic Medical Physiology, Environmental Chemistry and Political Science. *Mayuresh* has opted for Sri Aurobindo's 'Synthesis of Yoga', French, German, Math, Solar Science, Bhagavat Gita, Eco-lake project and Carpentry (as on February 2013).

Self-Evolved Curriculum

Boards (CBSE, State board, IGCSE, ICSE) do not dictate them and condition their mind, because from KG till Graduation, the school is not affiliated to any Boards. Over a period of time, they have developed their own curriculum and it keeps evolving as and when required. The school has set up a board for each subject to structure the syllabus and prescribe books for reference, but it is still very flexible. Mathematics and Science have prescribed textbooks, graded syllabus and they are much more structured than other subjects. However, teachers are free to choose their books, topics and activities. They don't have to blindly follow what others have written, they are free to choose their own words and text. The syllabus flows their way. It is not a strict rigid syllabus that every child has to fit in, it adapts to the needs of each child. Still, if a child finds a subject/topic difficult or uninteresting, they don't make it a hopeless situation, they are given options that are more friendly and humane. Neeltje, a teacher, gave an example of a girl who was not good in studies but was very good in embroidery. Academics was taught to her only for functional purpose and the rest of time, she spent on improving her embroidery skills. She now works in the embroidery department teaching the younger children the same.

At Sholai School

Education here is not completely an exclusive activity, it involves much more than textbook learning. It is not just a strict classroom transaction. Learning starts with listening to music/theatre/singing/morning news and this morning session also includes the responsibility of cleaning their places. From 9.30 am onwards, the academics start, which includes diverse subjects as farming, carpentry and engineering. Though there is a prescribed syllabus, it involves taking in various aspects from real life. Here academics does not stand alone and it flows into their everyday life.

Freedom to Cherish

At a very young age, in a normal school, when children can't even properly hold a spoon to eat their food, they are forced to hold a pen and are expected to write innumerable lines of imposition. Here, in this school they roam around in the grounds, play in the fields, fill the papers with colourful drawings and sing rhymes. They don't

even know how to write A, B, C, D...yet they are learning. This kindergarten group of 5 are freely roaming and discussing what they saw in the trees, in the mud and on the farm.

Freedom flows casually in the classrooms. What a beautiful interaction they had in the social science class! One of the students was lying on the floor, another was sitting on the window slab and the rest took their positions on the chairs and the teacher did not have any problem with such “undisciplined” behavior in the classroom. It was surprising to see all of them being equally attentive. They were discussing Indian culture- cinemas, GDP and music. Another interesting teacher of the pre-primary class handles 6 children and experiments with different methods and tries to make learning joyful for them. She herself had been homeschooled and doesn’t have a degree certificate of any kind. Though she is not an expert-teacher, she feels that the freedom she gets in this school gives her immense possibilities to explore new things which no other school can. What kind of “training” would encourage teachers to allow that kind of flexibility in the normal classroom situation? I wonder.

Going Beyond Books

Books do not become a hurdle and do not stand in their way of understanding things. They are not obsessed with them, they use them wisely. Generally, discussions and explorations overwhelm the classroom. Children do not hesitate to ask questions. They express their doubts and curiosities freely. Teachers also do not threaten them for making mistakes. It was a chemistry class for one of the higher classes and the class was having a discussion on the effects of air pollution. They took some points from their textbook, yet the discussion didn’t stop there. They were bringing in situations, experiences and examples from their daily lives and also from what they have read and heard elsewhere. The entire class was filled with vibrancy and life. They felt at ease to speak what they had felt in their mind and that is the freedom they cherish.

Moreover, learning as widely assumed, does not happen only from books, but often meaningful learning happens through experience. Books are needed and they are important, yet one learns quickly and effectively through experience. Understanding the course of a river and its tributaries is possible from a book, but yet one gets a very

different feeling when we visit the river, touch the water, take the fresh air and sit by its side. Definitely, it is not possible to learn everything through experience and it is not feasible either. Learning about different countries, forests and outer space is not always possible through experience. Yet simple things about which we learn from the textbooks can be brought to our experience. Learning about plants, animals, people and culture, and doing simple Math, does not require extensive travel, expensive equipment and extra effort, it can be done anywhere. We are surrounded by that and just that we have to develop the intelligence to use it for learning. Such things do happen at Sholai school.

Here at Sholai, subjects do not stand as alien elements to the teachers, they try to relate them to children's life. Wherever there is any possibility, they explore subjects practically or they try to derive meaning out of the practical work they do there. They draw clues from their practical and extra-curricular activities for the concepts that are printed in the books. Such an approach gives life to books; and discussions bring meaning to activities. In one of the classes on food and nutrition, they had discussions on the crop they were growing in the farm and its nutritional content. Every child had their share of story to share. Farming, engineering and carpentry enter their classroom. Children can, therefore, easily digest the topics and concepts. Such a pedagogy makes the books more friendly and approachable.

Moving Beyond the Legitimate space of Learning



(Photo Credit: Kapilesh)

Even movies and videos are not just for entertainment, they do talk to children. They sometimes replace the textbooks or sometimes support it to add real flavor. A social science class was full of children, watching a movie called “Gods’ must be crazy”. In addition to their laughs and smiles, there was a discussion on animals, people, places, tradition and civilization. The discussion didn’t disturb them, in fact, they started watching the movie more keenly and paid attention to the details. Even a class about the mountains was followed by a documentary video on “*Expedition to Mt. Everest*” which interested the students. Surely, there are various innovative ways to teach than to simply talk about things.

Meaningful Mathematics

It was a Math class for primary and surprisingly it was just not about numbers and mechanical calculations. It was about fractions and it turned out to be an interesting way to introduce the concept of ‘sharing’. The teachers introduce it by mentioning ‘generous monkey’; generous because it shares what it has. Say, if the monkey has 66 mangoes, on the first day it gives $\frac{1}{6}^{\text{th}}$ away and then eats one, on the second day it gives $\frac{1}{2}^{\text{nd}}$ away to other monkeys and then eats one, on the third day it gives $\frac{1}{2}^{\text{nd}}$ of what was left and eats one and on the 4th day it shares $\frac{2}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ of what was left and eats one. So how many mangoes are left with the monkey on the 5th day? This was not simply a division but a meaningful way of introducing fractions. This teaches more than just abstract and impersonal mathematical operations.

Primary is a class of around 15 children drawn from different age groups. Even the eldest of them may miss out on the problem teacher has written, but they are not penalized for not understanding. The teacher moves to each student individually and checks whether they have got it. Definitely, he knows where the students are and he gives different clues and helps them to climb the ladder. Teachers are comfortable even when they go wrong. Space to make mistakes is given without a second thought. So, when children misunderstand, they don’t hide it. They share their knowledge freely and are not trapped by meaningless comparison. Each one has got a space to grow.

Living Science

Academics flow into their everyday activity. It is very difficult to draw a strict line to distinguish outdoor activities from classroom discussions. Academics and casual activity do not look very discrete. Children are made to see how books merge with what they are doing practically.

Learning Becomes Lively



(Photo Credit: Sholai School)

That was a science class for primary and they had a discussion on refrigerators. The class didn't end with reading a book and a discussion on it. The teacher made an interesting move by asking the children to make natural refrigerators. The class was divided into groups of 3 and they were taken to a beautiful green space. Each group was given the materials to dig their own pit. Once they finished making the pit, they had to fill it with some leaves. The idea is to keep some fruits and some vegetables inside the pit and cover it with some more leaves. Each one was assigned a task. Once they finished making, they all got together under a tree and had a discussion on refrigeration and its effect on the environment. The whole concept became interesting and alive.

Experiential Learning: A Joyful Process

Children here learn about fruits and vegetable not just from the books, they roam in the farm, till the ground, sow seeds, take care of plants and harvest them.

Surprisingly, you may find these very vegetables on your plate next meal. After bringing all the ingredients, utensils together, Zora and Karuna discussed the nutritional benefits with children and made them cook in groups. Children learned and enjoyed. They made ragi pancakes themselves and enjoyed eating and sharing with friends. Did the children know that they were learning about the fruits and vegetables?

However, our general education system has lost the element of experiential learning. It has been washed off. To wonder and admire about what one is studying is also not expected. There is a certain sense of emotional detachment with the subjects. This detachment has drained out all the possible connection that could have happened with the world around us. It has clearly separated us; made us feel that we are different from everything else, because we have always kept ourselves far away from what we are studying. By making a connection with what we do and see in everyday life recreates our bond to the world. Questions and emotions can trigger the bond. This connection can make us feel more meaningful than to feel fragmented with all different subjects and their subdivisions. Books can support experiential learning, but they are sadly replacing every aspect of our learning that is possible in schools. However, at Sholai things are different.

Some of the children ran to a class situated across the stream and the teacher was waiting for reading materials. It was about fingerprints. Every topic that is dealt here has something much more than just reading and writing. Teachers discuss, at times they practically do and show make children watch videos and try in many ways to make a topic on hand interesting. So that it is not just a piece of knowledge to be retained, but to see its relation to our life and also make the whole process joyful. Following the reading and discussion on fingerprints, they made their own fingerprints and rejoiced.

Debunking the Myth of Regular Classrooms

A classroom does not always have to be within four walls, even tree shades here, become one of the places for flowering of knowledge. With bird sounds and a cool breeze, even a Math class can become interesting under the trees. IG students were working on Math, solving some problems. There was so much joy and laughter while working out the problems. They made fun of each other for a while and got back to

their work. They copy sometimes from each other, but they don't make it look like a crime. Occasionally, they stare at trees and mountains and it is difficult to say what must be going on in their mind. But they looked happy and cheerful.

Sometimes classes do not have to be for a big group, even two students can fill a classroom, yet teachers take the class with same interest and enthusiasm. Sometimes it looks like they are having casual conversations, but to our surprise that may be a social science class or a language class. There was a class on 'mass, acceleration and force' for only two students. They did not lose attention even for a minute. Sometimes even a single student can have a serious conversation with the teacher with the same rigor as the class of 15 students. In fact, it is sometimes much deeper and meaningful than a teacher addressing the 'crowd' of classroom. Intimacy and trust develop as they explore together. A student was reading with her teacher, sitting on the stone bench outside the classroom. Their conversation looked deeper and intense and at times a friendly laughter filled the place with life.

Making Mistake is Not a Crime

The students here do not have to be always correct. They can make mistakes and not feel bad about them. Classes are very friendly and enriching. There is a lot of space for the children to explore, learn and even fail. New Wings had a Math class on 'area' and they had to solve some of the problems that were given. Once the discussion was over about the topic, they got down to solving problems. Everyone gave different answers, including wrong ones. But not even a single time they were made to feel bad for the wrong answers. The teacher explained the topic several times in various ways and made the students understand the problem. They didn't feel bad to show their ignorance, therefore.

On the whole, the social implication of such a curriculum which is flexible, creative, inclusive and life-related could be emancipatory. It can throw various possibilities for the children to become morally sensitive and socially responsible. Moreover, with a lot of freedom embedded in the system, children can explore the unknown without fear and challenge the hegemonic system which is based on inequality, discrimination, violence and sorrow. Children growing in such an atmosphere can aspire for a just society.

4.3. Extra-Curricular Activities are No More “Extra”

In a normal school setting, it is common to see children reading textbooks and it is considered legitimate. More legitimate than a storybook, however interesting it may be. We appreciate a child who can write A B C D, than a child who enjoys with crayons on a paper. Often we have heard parents or teachers screaming “enough of your games, can you be serious and study now?” We seem to know what is more serious, legitimate and desirable, therefore, we have taken away playgrounds, drawing, painting, music, and dance from the school. We do so because we think it takes away the precious time of students and kills the seriousness of learning, because academics have become very professional; there is an intrinsic seriousness to them. Casually reading a book or laughing while learning are not considered academic, because it is something “serious” and definitely, it is not for fun. We hardly wonder what music, dance, painting, farming, dramatics, and sports can do to children at various levels of their being. We mainly view them these as activities that will keep them engaged. Moreover, schools without creative activities have no clue on the ill-effects of depriving them of all these activities on children’s life.

Furthermore, the demarcation between academics and extra-curricular activities, its power relations are in line with the market situation. For instance, with the growth of industries, the need for Commerce subject and its related courses have increased tremendously than for a subject like painting or music. However, extra-curricular activities can do much more, they give the scope to laugh, make mistakes. They are basically “non-serious” in nature and they are not weighed down by the burden of future. They are very casual and creative. Sometimes, this clear demarcation of these activities from academics make them even more attractive for children. In fact, sometimes these are much more meaningful than reading a few pages from the textbooks.

However, going beyond the common notion of “extra-curriculars”, these alternative schools have a different story to tell. Here, extra-curriculars are not necessarily “extra”; academics and these activities merge. These creative activities like gardening, sports, music, drama, dance, drawing and painting, etc., connects them to their textbooks. These activities are taken beyond preparing them for the ruthless competition and becomes means for understanding the deeper meaning of life.

At Sholai School

Merging of Academics and Extra-Curriculars

At Sholai school, the demarcation between academics and extra curriculars are not strong. They flow into each other. Walking through the hills, watching birds, insects and trees are the most common events that happen at Sholai. Learning does not stop with books. It transcends textbooks and planned syllabus. Learning enters work and work enters the classroom. Suddenly, a construction site or a farm land gets converted into a classroom; becomes their subject of study. Subject overflows into the kitchen, into their casual conversations or into woodwork. Even the teachers are not necessarily just teaching. Their boundaries are blurred. They enter other spaces. It is common to see a science teacher working on the farm or rearranging the roof tiles of the dining hall. A Math teacher in the morning, but runs the school van in the evening. A carpenter for the major part of time, but becomes an expert in badminton while playing along with children in the evenings. There is an immense possibility for a person to cross one's boundaries and explore other realms of life. Even children engage in varieties of work starting from sweeping, to boiling water for bath, from farming to occasional cooking.

Right after breakfast, some of the students assembled in the farm with specific duties assigned. It was vivacious and pleasing to see those children work in the fields. The principal, Brian Jenkins believes that education should include learning and acquiring skills that are needed for basic living. It in a way, makes the students connect to their surroundings. Organic farming takes a significant share of the work done on the school campus and it invariably teaches children to care for plants without contaminating them with pesticides, chemical fertilizers, etc. One of the students harvested some beans which he grew in his plot of farm and headed towards the kitchen. Later, at lunch that day, I saw those beans in *sambar* and then I asked myself, 'can we call this "learning" or should we merely push it aside as an "extra" curricular activity'?

From Books to Real-Life Experience

Here at Sholai, children do a lot of activities - farming, vermiculture, carpentry, kitchen, cleaning, workshop, solar project etc. So, when they engage with academics,

they take in aspects from those outdoor activities into the classroom and therefore, their books become alive. The real-life experience finds a way to the classroom. What they did two months ago in the field on waste management suddenly appears in the textbook and they get excited to read about it.

Learning Co-Exists with Real-Life Experience



(Photo Credit: Raja Ashwartha)

Moreover, children do not just learn about fruits, vegetables, health and related things, but they really get to touch them, find right proportions and make a dish which is edible and nutritious. The whole group of primary and pre-primary children made a fruit salad. They got all the ingredients and each one had got a task- to peel, crush, mix and cut. It was noisy, yet they were all busy learning and doing together. Except for one or two, the rest were really into the work. It became a real-life experience for them. At the end of the class, they got to eat what they made. There was a sense of joy and fulfillment in each child. Simply learning about food from the textbook definitely does not give this experience. This way, the tremendous energy which children generally possess can be really put to use.

We have learnt measurements and geometry, we have also read about sand and cement, yet we hardly relate them to our practical life. Building a room, making a piece of furniture, constructing a wooden bridge - all these activities have scope for the academics to merge in them. One fine morning, some of the children were asked to assist the workers who are renovating the auditorium. The children arranged bricks, lifted buttresses and stones, took measurements of the room and did certain calculations with regard to the construction plan. They also discussed angles and

designs. Maybe, through this approach, they grow up learning that work and studies are not different. Moreover, children casually talking to workers and working with them sometimes are common there. An old man working in the farm needed some help and he called out for somebody, a student offered to go and helped the old man.

Learning that Stays for Life-Long

A major part of Sholai is surrounded by forest, with dense trees, waterfalls and some wild animals. Sometimes in summer, this forest catches fire and it spreads fast. Generally, we would have read about forest fires and the damage they cause, we would have also seen them on television. But the children at Sholai along with some of their staffs, picked up huge pieces of wood and other items, they ran up to the hill in the middle of the night and they rolled down these logs over the fire to stop it. They tried different means and finally came back with a sense of achievement. What more can build their self-confidence? This gave them the real strength. They may forget what they have read in their class, but such an experience will remain in their heart, the lesson it taught - to work in a group and all of that.

Participatory Learning: Making of a Wooden Bridge



(Photo Credit: Ramya)

Even if we think of our school experience, what comes to our mind is the fun time we had with friends, mischievous acts, punishments we got, trip to a beautiful place, sports day celebrations or the dance we performed on stage. Definitely, what we hold now is what we experienced practically and not much about what we learned in the

classroom- like, how to do arithmetic or the functions of different components of a plant cell. If the schools donotkeep the textbooks safe and separate from real life and instead, if they constantly relate them to activity or to experiences in real life, children will cherish such learning and it will stay with them beyond exams and school. It can travel with them their entire life.

Another instance at Sholai, where children of the primary class were busy in painting and the teacher also was busy assisting them. While they were immersed in the work, there was a lovely breeze and some birds' sang. This made the atmosphere light and pleasant. The class was simply not just about learning to use colors and improve hand-eye coordination, but it did more than that. They got to concentrate and their minds learned to stay with something for a while. As one concentrates fully, the mind seems to unfold something beautiful in such an atmosphere.

Beyond Mundane

'Mundane' work occupies some part of their day- cleaning, washing, cooking and arranging. As most of the students are residents of the school, they got to be 'doing' something. With the leisurely atmosphere and in the midst of nature's abundance, it is beautiful to see children wake up early in morning and heat water for bath using firewood, clean up their places and wash their clothes. In addition to that, farming, engineering, and carpentry make the entire experience holistic. When students in mainstream schools these days are prisoned within classrooms and books, here they are made to be aware of nature, of their daily duties, of work and of studies, and therefore, they become complete.

At Ashram School

Unlike most of the mainstream schools, this school's timetable looks very colorful and eventful. Apart from the academic subjects, a student is offered a wide range of creative arts: Drawing, Painting, Handwork, Needlework, Carpentry, Pottery and Music (Indian classical and Western classical- both instrumental and vocal), Dance (Indian and Western) and dramatics. The list is not done yet, students are also given the opportunity to work one day a week in different departments of the ashram like automobile workshop, electricity department, nursing homes, dairies, farms or

gardens. These activities enjoy equal status in the timetable along with academic subjects.

Carpentry can Also Teach Academics

In the carpentry department, skills are not taught randomly. There is a structure that spans over a period of time. Initial three months are for theory classes on wood, machines, and equipment. Then, children are given a project and slowly, they get to choose their own project. One of the elder children was making a wooden pendulum clock. As he was referring to the plan, his hands ran over the wood carefully. When children get to do things on their own, things around them may not seem alien to them. The doors, shelves, windows, tables no longer look unrelated. He was already making a connection with the wood, the labor and effort required. Such a work invariably develops an interest in academics. Because, when he was planning to make the clock, he was putting mathematics, geometry, physics to work. He saw his academics coming face to face with reality. Thus, physics, mathematics, geometry...do not just remain in books, they become alive, full of life. It becomes meaningful. Thus, a child realizes that books are not dead and books are not the end of everything.

Gandhi's Dream Coming True



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

Moreover, we may wonder, why should a child make a toy or a drawing when it is easily available in the market? Nowadays, in the market-driven society, children can easily be trapped into “buying” rather than “doing”. Everything is easily available for them and the faculty of imagination is hardly utilized. They mindlessly buy toys and games without knowing the amount of effort, kind of materials used and their value. Once they start making on their own, maybe they will begin to understand the worth of all that has gone into preparing a toy or begin to simply appreciate the beauty of making.

Inclusive Curriculum

With colorful threads, children enjoy the art of stitching flowers, animals and cartoons on the cloth. They work quietly and sharply. Everything is done with love and care. Embroidery is not seen as an ordinary thing. Each work on the cloth is done with so much perfection. Some children may not excel in academics or may find it difficult to cope with, but that is not threatening situation for the school. The teachers take such a situation lightly and open up other possibilities where children can grow. They are not given pressure to learn, but other faculties are encouraged. These days it has become quite common to brand a child ‘slow-learner’, ‘mentally challenged’ ...and more new terms are becoming famous- ‘dyslexic’...Because such children need a totally different way of teaching and more options need to be opened to them other than academics, mainstream schools find it difficult to engage with them or have them in their school.

Gayathri di, a teacher at Ashram school, gave an example of a girl who could not do well in academics but was otherwise interested in embroidery and music. She was given a chance to excel in that and academics was taught to her only for functional purpose. One does not have to suffer the entire life simply because one could not understand the concepts given in textbooks. How many of adults who are into job or business or who are artists or housewives retain the knowledge they acquired in their schools? Why make the life of children terrifying when they can’t make it? When drawing, carpentry, farming can enrich them and take them forward in life, why deprive them of such learning?

Preparing Beyond Ruthless Competition

Very often in mainstream schools, we hear complaints about children being restless in the classrooms. They are made to sit for hours and hours until lunch time or break time. Physical education is carefully measured and given only as a side dish. Children with tremendous energy find it difficult to passively sit for long hours and often they express it in the form of restlessness. Here in this school, physical education is no less important than academics. Soon after the classes are over, there is a quick free refreshing time to get back to their uniforms. From 4 pm to 7 pm they are engaged in physical activities completely. A variety of physical activities keep them busy and involved. With smiles and laughter, they enrich the playground. But, activities are not randomly executed, but they are carefully organized, supervised and trained. Some of them are put in gymnastics, some others in jumps and so on. It was such a sight to see all the children doing some physical activity or the other. From the age of six to the elderly members of the ashram - about 2000 men, women and children of various ages - take part in the physical education every day including Sundays. These members are divided into 13-14 groups according to their age and capacity. The daily schedule includes a variety of activities - games, gymnastics, athletics, swimming and combative sports. The fun gets to its peak with in-house competition conducted 4 times a year in 4 areas- track and field, swimming and diving, gymnastics and team sports.

Children these days are generally trained in particular sports with the motive of instilling competition in their young minds. Such intention corrupts the young mind. They are not taught to play for the joy of playing. Whereas, children in this school are neither sent out for any tournaments nor for other competitions nor children from outside are entertained in the school for such a purpose. It is solely intended to develop health and strength and not to prepare them for any competition. One may wonder, if they are not trained for any competition and tournament, then what must be guiding them to conduct physical education very regularly with great care and obedience? The chief instructor of the physical education department says,

“Body consciousness is very important. One should do everything rhythmically, even climbing a staircase. If only we keep the body in perfection, the mind becomes sharper”.

Moreover, stereotypical gender roles are broken when girls show their muscle strength in games and boys are proud to show their colorful embroideries. Gender here, acquires a different meaning. Physical education happens in three major locations: one, a tennis ground; two, a playground with attached buildings for gym and a dance floor; three, a track and field sports ground for track and field athletics, for field & court sports such as cricket, softball, football, basketball, badminton, gymnastics, wrestling, judo, boxing and weight training. This ground also has an attached pool for swimming and diving. Everywhere girls line up in equal numbers as boys. Raj kumarda says,

“Here boys and girls participate equally in every sport. Boys are also encouraged to take up music, drawing and embroidery.”

Breaking Gender Stereotypes



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

Work as an Offering

Art, music, dance and sports are deeply celebrated and most of the time audience are children of the same class. Sometimes children of the next class or children of the entire school form the audience. The aim is not to attract an audience, but it is done purely for the sake of art. Art is displayed, as an offering. Shoba di, the music teacher says, “performance for the bigger audience is not the motive, simply playing for the

joy of it is the main concern”. She feels that work should be done like a *sadhana*; it can be different things for different people and for her it is music. When the students are trained in art only to showcase in front of others, then the meaning of art is lost, its simplicity is lost and its innocence is killed. Then, art merely becomes a means to impress others. A means to enjoy power and attention. The pure joy of doing then is killed. Art then becomes worthless unless it is appreciated by somebody.

We encounter such an attitude in talent shows like ‘super singers’ on television. It only tells that every talent has to be popularized, otherwise it is a waste. Such an attitude has really killed the joy of doing. It legitimizes competition and popularity. Losing in such a competition is not taken lightly and the ‘loser’ becomes a victim. Have we not noticed the players who play matches at national and international levels - their faces are filled with tension and pressure, and every second of the match is spent for winning the trophy? There is no joy in their game, only a wild pleasure and even the audiences are divided and tensed. Maybe, that is why in this school, they do not send children to other schools for competitions and there is no obsession with the advertisement as well, for they may lose the joy of simply playing.

Group Activity: A Journey Together

These days learning has become an individual activity, something that isolates one from the other. Working with groups, sharing and learning together have lost their value. There were a bunch of students from P(1) class doing pottery together. They were making railway station with clay. It was amazing to see the enthusiasm they showed. They were busy thinking, making, arranging and discussing. None of them was bored. They seemed to enjoy the whole process of making it with Habulda and Sampath, teachers, helping them. When one of the students asked, “What is the name of the station?” another suggested ‘Howrah’. But Habulda put all the first letters of their names and gave the names ‘Karran’ and ‘P(1)Express’. They were all so happy. How easy it is when small gestures like this can create closeness and connectedness. How interesting would it be if children learn Math, science and geography in this manner?

Nature Drawn Closer

Children, now-a-days are brought up within walls, in big apartments quite far from nature. Sometimes they don't even know where fruits and vegetables come from. A five-year-old girl who studied in a metropolitan city, saw tomatoes in the field and asked very innocently, "why are these tomatoes here and not in the shops, how did they come here?" Such is the situation of present lifestyle, we are very far from nature. All that children know are concrete buildings, vehicles rushing madly and busy markets. To look at the sky or at trees or birds is the last thing that happens in a city. However, this school regularly connects children with nature.

Nature Becomes Teacher



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

The children from ashram school are taken once or twice a week to the lake estate. Once, I happened to go along with the children to this project. Along with us was a student named Mayuresh from higher class (knowledge), who was very keen on this project. He comes here very often and works on the land with plants and trees. Moreover, at lake project, students get a chance to come close to nature. Students who are interested in painting are taken to the lake once a week with Sanju di. They sit under trees and draw, immersing themselves in nature. This is not simply about learning a skill, but growing to be one with nature. Not only that, children get a chance to see the classified bookish academic subjects unfolding all at one place. History,

geography, science, literature, art and philosophy merge beautifully. The city life for a while seemed so far and that place drew me close to myself, to my soul.

Classical Dance and Music: A Divinely Touch

Art is one of the special features that human beings are gifted with. Graceful movements of the body and mind create wonders in the form of dance, music, painting, and many more. But, in the modern age, we have destroyed this rhythm of body and mind. Art has lost its softness, beauty, and depth. Heavy sounds, complicated movements, and vulgar expressions have corrupted our sensibilities. Classical art and folk art have lost their place. It is a surprise that this school has been encouraging classical dance, music, and art forms. When I happened to be there, the students put up a performance of Odissi dance. The expressions, melody and meaning were really wonderful. Such a performance makes the mind really quiet and calm very easily. The way they dressed, their expressions, involved participation of children and the meaning beat all the modern sensual vulgar performances. This classical music had left a nice feeling in all of us. It was about Durga and her fight with asura, and about moksha - the themes that are unheard in modern music. It created some 'sacredness' in the air. It touched everyone. It went beyond pleasing our senses. When such creativity is shrinking, this place offers a treat, a soulful gift.

Sound of Classical Music in Modern Times



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

On another beautiful evening, everyone gathered in the school premises. A Classical Kathak dance began and everyone became quiet and absorbed. Some other day, an

instrumental music performance –with sitar and flute, a divine combination - was organised and the whole place was filled with a magical presence. Can anyone quantify that experience? Classical music and dance in this time of restlessness and meaningless art- seem beautiful and soothing for the soul. Shoba di is in charge of the music department. She is a vocalist from West Bengal. Mother made her the in charge of the department in her early 30s. She interacts with every student individually and records their performance regularly. She says that “classical music is divinely and when the children sing what more can you ask for?” When extracurriculars are not seen as “extra”, they have the possibility of enriching the academics. They give wings to the textbooks.

School and Its Social Responsibility

In general, mainstream schools these days have become very self-absorbed. They have created a wall that separates them from the outside world. Children are not aware of what is happening around them. All they relate is to their textbooks, exams and some entertainment. The world around doesn't appeal to them, as the school has erected a huge mental wall between them and the society. The knowledge that they acquire is only for getting jobs. It doesn't bring them anywhere close to the concerns of the society, the world of others. Creative engagement with the communities is considered a waste of time. School deprives children of such engagement and as a result, society suffers from such separation.

We all know that our environment is degrading because of - pollution, over production of plastics and other non-degradable products, cutting up of trees in the name of development and misuse of water resources. We have read about all these in our books and heard about them a lot in the media, but rarely do we get down to right action. The action stays far away, so the problem remains unsolved. One of the social science teachers in Ashram School and also an important person behind “Marvel” project, Prakash Bhai feels a need for urgent resolution among youngsters to save our earth and its environment. His love for nature and biodiversity is abundant, so is Lipi di's, another teacher. The energy and passion they radiate definitely spreads to the people around. They were very unhappy with the present generation as most of them prefer software jobs.

However, things are different at Ashram school. About 12 km away from the Ashram near a beautiful lake, 100 acres of infertile, barren land has been converted into a garden and a huge forest. This project called 'Marvel' was started way back in 1970s when some of the teachers and members of the ashram felt the need to create a green forest on a barren land. There was hardly any sign of vegetation here initially. They started planting saplings of different varieties and now it has become almost like a forest, mostly rain-fed. The view of the lake was so beautiful and energizing. The beautifully grown plants, gigantic trees and shady creepers made the place lively and livable. Some of the teachers felt the need to do such things practically and give children a real experience of nature and ecosystem, as well as the means and intelligence to preserve them. Such an exposure may enhance the spirit of togetherness, care and love.

Taking Academics Beyond Its Boundaries



(Photo Credit: Ramya)

Moreover, society is not perfect, it has its problems. Often, we hear about violence, discrimination and inequality and the effects they have on weaker sections, minorities, disabled and animals. Society has not found its rhythm, it is disturbed. Although these problems do find their expression in textbooks, but it does not give way to a meaningful action, because schools have differentiated knowledge about problems from acting on them. But learning would be complete only when it finds its expression in action, otherwise education itself would become violent. Violent, because when it is not concerned about changing the society, it perpetuates the existing problems.

Therefore, taking up social responsibilities may bring children closer to social reality and they can alter it, reject it and transform it. Participating in different departments of the Ashram like Dairy farm, Bakery, Building department, Ashram press, Nursing home, Weaving, Batik,& Embroidery unit, and Lake Project can help students to connect with life beyond their books and syllabus. They can establish a relation between what happens in the classroom and the real world. Teachers also do not simply teach here, but they sometimes cross their boundaries and engage in other activities. Sekar da, a very kind and patient old man, teaches Sanskrit and Oriya. Children are very fond of him as he never scolds them, lets them express easily and moves around the classroom freely. In the evening, I saw him watering plants in the garden. At both the places, his face was the same. Seeing teachers do such work, children automatically unlearn the stereotypical role of a teacher which our education system seems to have assigned – of being an information dispenser in the classroom and nothing else.

On the whole, such promising curriculum and pedagogy makes a lot of difference in the children's life, as well as, it furthers social transformation. Children ought to make connection with creative activities, for academics alone cannot not make them creative beings. When children get to explore various activities like Drawing and Painting, Music, Drama, Dance, Carpentry, Embroidary, Gardening and others, their creative sensibilities gets nurtured. They would therefore, create a world not only with industries and technologies, but also a society which would equally celebrate the life through arts and aesthetics. Such a world would be more humble, humane and equal.

4.4. Not Prepared for Examination and Certification

Children in general, I feel, do not know what an exam really means. They run, laugh and explore the world around them naturally. They are simply curious, not because that will fetch them good marks but because they are living. They want to know about everything and they are constantly wondering. Very often we see small children asking questions about insects, sun and stars, and even death seems to be interesting to them. However, in mainstream schools, there is no escape from exams, how much ever they want escape from exams, they are always somewhere - waiting near the corner, to scare them. It has become almost impossible to think of schools without exams. To our schooled mind, it is difficult to think of a school without super-secret

question papers, sacred answer sheets, discriminating mark sheets and rank cards. We have lost the imagination to think of creative ways to know what is there in the students' mind. It need not be one particular scary day which will determine their future.

Besides, school, factory and prison are the disciplinary devices, within which the power and knowledge play. Time table plays an important role in controlling, and examination ceremonizes the power. Everything is controlled, school is like a prison. It is not the physical punishment but the intended disciplinary notion enters the soul, depth. Often we forget to ask, "whose moral order is it? whose society is it?". However, such things do not enter these schools, for they have kept themselves free from such influences- fearful examinations, ruthless punishments and mechanical homeworks. Yet, they have found a meaningful and creative way of assessment and discipline.

At Ashram School

Ashram school has taken away exams from all the classes, even board exams do not come in their way. The answer sheets do not determine their promotion, they are automatically promoted to the next class. They don't have to wait till the end of academic year to express their knowledge. Teachers do not need difficult question papers to know their students. They don't need the ritual of examination to determine their students' level, because they know their students well. They know their likes, dislikes, interests, fears, ambitions and dreams. They know that some of them do not like algebra, historical dates and some others do not like chemistry, but that is ok, they don't mind. They don't take them through a whole additional year, because they are not good in Math or Language.

Creative Assessments

The students watch the sky and flowers, they know the feelings of a butterfly and yet they will not ask how significant such a knowledge is for board exams, because they don't have them. They enjoy learning and it is left there. There is no need to test it. But all these does not mean that they don't have assessment. They conduct assessments in a creative way.

A History class ended and the teacher asked the students to write about what they felt about the topic and asked them to share their thoughts in the next class. In the next class, they came up with their write ups and shared them. There was hardly any tension on anyone's face. They were so relaxed, open and free, and yet serious about what they were doing. What a peaceful way of assessment! Is there any need to call it an exam?

Breaking Hierarchies



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

At another occasion, children sat along with teacher and they began discussing about the previous class- political parties and present political situation. Teacher very gently asked questions and threw some interesting remarks on the topic. This is also a test and it need not be conducted only on a special day and it doesn't need to have difficult question papers and answer sheets. It can also happen in the form of discussions, casual conversations or informal questioning sessions. Exams do not have to be always in the form of questions and answers, even wonderment or enquiry can become ways of assessment. In another class, children watched a movie and discussed about it in the class, which made the teacher aware of the children's knowledge.

Similarly, conducting a game can be for fun, but also can serve to be a test to know where the students face problems. Cubes of different colors were spread across, and a child was trying to make figures with the help of a picture guide, he struggled

initially, but was very keen to complete. Teacher didn't ignore to notice, he knew what the student had done and gave a pat on his shoulder once he was done. It did not stop here, teacher challenged him to make a little more complicated figure next time. The child agreed with a smile.

Board Exams Don't Come in Their Way

Ashram School does not participate in any standardized board exams. Even the word "exam" is not to be heard anywhere in the premises, not even for a joke. They really mean it. Even the over hyped board exams could not find their place in this school. Class 10th and class 12th are not given any special preferences, they are just treated the same and simple way as other classes. Students of these classes don't have any special classes or tuitions that will train them to get high marks. They follow the same rhythm as others. They don't have to go through punishments like children in other schools go through -like studying 10th class books in 9th class itself, spending extra hours in the school, taking tests almost every day, repeating the same book thousand times and anticipating the forthcoming dangerous exams by spending sleepless nights. They don't have to go through this, for they have no exams that will scare them. There are no exams in Knowledge (Graduation) too, but the teachers keep a note of each student who are under them. Unlike mainstream schools, mark sheets, rank cards do not shock and surprise students here. Their surprises are different- a book from the teacher or a pat or a smile that encourages them, helps them to celebrate their schooling. High marks do not crown them, but a smile from their teacher does.

Children Without the Fear of Exams



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

Generally, exams generate fear and the fear invariably creates a distance between the teachers and students. Teachers are constantly under pressure to make them perform and students have the natural urge to resist it in various ways. But, when there are no exams, they feel free to connect, laugh and learn. A set of students who are interested in animals, birds and travel, sit along with the teacher watching videos on wildlife every Tuesday at his residence. They watch these intensely and freely. In between they discuss about the landscapes, terrains and animals. The teacher definitely knows what they are interested in and increases their interest by sharing more information. Their discussions do not have an air of authority, they feel free to say what is in their mind. Discussions not only include academic topics, but informal friendly conversations about travel, people and even entertainment do enrich their space.

Certificate of a Different Kind

At present days, education system is more or less selling certificates and degrees. Needless to say, such system hardly has any regard for a meaningful teaching-learning process. Attaining a degree certificate is more valuable than what is happening in the whole process of learning. However, this school says “no” to certificates, probably because they don’t want to do the same mistake or they want to convey a clear message to the people. Such message is evident in the Mother’s words,

“there are people who write wanting to join our university and ask what kind of diploma or degree we prepare for, the career we open out. To them I say: go elsewhere, please, if you want that; there are many other places, very much better than ours, even in India, in that respect” (Mother, On Education, 1999, p. 119).

Generally, a degree certificate carries marks and grades. It is therefore, very unusual to see a certificate which does not contain marks or numbers or grades, but the details of subjects the student was interested and his performance in it. Given below is a sample certificate (should I call it so?), that students who are educated at Ashram School carry to colleges and universities for higher education and they are very confident about it. Over time these certificates have got recognition from various universities in India and abroad.

HIGHER SECONDARY CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Miss [REDACTED] daughter of Mr. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx, was a bona fide student of this Centre of Education from 16th December 2001 to 31st October 2012.

She has completed successfully our twelve-year **Higher Secondary Course** as a full time student on 31st October 2009.

The following are the subjects she studied:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. English | 8. Sanskrit |
| 2. French | 9. Music: Vocal: Hindusthani Classical & Sugamsangeet |
| 3. General Mathematics | 10. Music: Sitar |
| 4. Biology | 11. Music: Piano |
| 5. History | 12. Fabric Painting |
| 6. Geography | 13. Ecolake Project |
| 7. Bengali | 14. Project: Protecting the Web of Life |

Her date and place of birth, according to our Admission Register are, respectively, **November 199** and **Barasat, West Bengal**.

REGISTRAR

Though, over a period of time they have come to a point to give students a “paper” of appreciation (certificate) to avoid implied problems when they move out, and this paper still says “no” to marks, percentages and grades. A student who had completed her studies in this school, was applying for higher studies in other universities. She had got a form to be filled by the school, which consisted columns for marks and percentage. Gayathri di, one of the office members looked at it and denied to fill it.

When rest of the schools are preparing their students for the competitive world, these schools stand up and say “we don’t want it”. Then, very fundamental questions arise, in midst of the schools (conventional) which have made examinations inevitable and prepare their students for obtaining certificates, what does this school intend to do? When there is no examination of any kind and when there are no degree certificates, then what are their promises? In fact, all the students of Ashram School repeat this in their every day school prayer,

“It is not for our family, it is not to secure a good position, it is not to earn money, and it is not to obtain a diploma that we study. We study to learn, to know, to understand the world, and for the sake of the joy that it gives us”.

At Sholai School

We may wonder ‘what is the use of this assessment, ranking and grading?’ A reasonable answer would be- only to compare with others. General tendency of examination is not to create interest in subject, but to create fear; fear of losing marks. And to see that one loses confidence in oneself. Examinations do not stop there, they make us competitive, makes us feel either great or low in comparison with others. We are always judged and categorized, for the blame is not on the teacher or the system, but on the child. It is not a helping tool with which the teacher can provide right environment and appropriate methods to make a child understand better. It is not for the teachers to know where the child is, his interests and his problems. However, if taken differently, assessments can equip the teachers to become more creative and innovative to design methods that will suit children. It might make teacher a very active and important participant of the whole process of teaching and learning. Such possibilities are possible at Sholai School.

Innovative Methods of Assessment

Sholai school does not have a conventional method of assessment until 9th standard, but they have developed various creative ways of assessing children. It is not a one-time evaluation, it is an ongoing process, it can happen anytime and anywhere. Teachers are interested in knowing the children’s problems through various means. While playing in the ground, during casual conversations, while eating, they get to know what they like and dislike and what they are really good at. These don’t just remain as isolated events, they penetrate the classroom and the way of assessment. Sometimes the content of the assessment is shaped by what is being observed outside the classroom. For a child who is interested in birds, the teacher rearranges the question to include birds and therefore, the question automatically catches the child’s attention.

At one level, teaching, learning, and assessment are one and the same; it becomes difficult to differentiate one from another. To separate assessment from the rest, takes

away the spirit of learning. Assessment becomes learning, or to put it otherwise learning continues even in an assessment. That is the reason why, this schools may not be conducting formal exams but nevertheless they do not escape from assessments altogether. They conduct them creatively, innovatively and most importantly, without generating any kind of fear among the children.

Can Conducting Drama be Counted as Assessment?!



(Photo Credit: Kabilesh)

A student of class five was not good at Math and the teacher tried various methods through which he could make her understand. She struggled to understand even simple operations. The teacher, after many trials understood that the student had major difficulty with basic operations. But, the teacher did not stop there, he gave various clues and made those mathematical operations as interesting as possible. He was assessing almost every time and definitely, that was only to help him understand her mind, but not to put her down. He became a mentor, a friend who understood her problems and helped her get through. A conventional final test in this case will not serve any purpose, it will only certify her as a 'bad' student, and that would not help anyone. She would end up feeling low comparing herself with others and that would only worsen the situation.

No Exams: A Relief to Younger Children

Children here are relieved from the drudgery of life-threatening examinations and meaningless ranking system. They are all promoted to the next class without going through examinations, yet they learn meaningfully. A new admission to primary class, was fully happy being here in the school. He said, “I am really happy here because there are no exams. I hate exams and marks.” While talking to his mother, it was disturbing to know, that he had severe health problems during examinations in the previous school. She said, “He disliked going to school because of the fear of exams”. Another student who joined New Wings(equivalent of upper primary) also expressed similar views. He is also feeling too relieved and happy in this school. It has taken away the burden of being judged and compared. They feel free.

When the School does not Promote Competition



(Photo Credit: Kabilesh)

Moreover, their everyday life is almost filled with learning and fun. Then, definitely we can wonder on questions like: Why do we need exams? Why is learning assessed? There is definitely a great value in finding the meaning for these questions. When I realize that I am a good gardener, then what is the necessity of proving my proficiency in algebra, which does not make any sense to me? Yes! It does not make any sense. Exams in this sense are absolutely destructive and meaningless. Yet we

cannot easily give away the system, for it has greater linkages, which are quite complex. If one is clear that one wants to write the exam for that is the only way to get a job or to go for higher studies, then one can go for it, but there is no necessity to burn out all of one's capacities just for writing exams. It can be a part of one's learning, but it cannot be one's only purpose of learning. Then exams will stop haunting one. Then it does not become a hurdle, but just a game to be played.

Senior Classes: Exam with a Difference

The Sholai School is affiliated to the Cambridge University and prepares only the senior students for the IGCSE exams. It is popularly called as "O" level and "A" level which are equivalent to the 10th and 12th board examinations in India. The subjects offered range from Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics to History, Psychology, and Sociology. Unlike the popular combination of subjects like science group and arts group, IGCSE allows students to take any combination of subjects to complete the course. Among five subjects, there can be Biology, Psychology, Business Mathematics, Physics, English, Sociology, Information Technology and many more. Though primary school and middle school roughly follow IGCSE syllabus, there is lot of freedom for teachers to reshape it and customize it to the needs of the students and to the interests of the teacher. Drawing certain aspects from the syllabus, the rest is left to the creativity of the teachers.

For senior classes, textbooks do not scare them. They don't have to memorize and repeat the same in the exams. They are made to think and analyze, not simply reproduce what is given. Senior student Kavitha tells me that by the time students venture into their A' levels, they are aware of the subjects they are interested in. she adds,

"The 'A' levels are tough and challenging. The syllabus makes the students think beyond their books and understand concepts. 'Mugging up' won't help. The examinations (both IGCSE and 'A' levels) are based on the understanding and application of concepts, and out-of-the-box thinking".

Yes, they do have exams for senior classes, but they are approached with an understanding. There is a syllabus to complete, lessons to cover, facts to remember and assignments to write, but all these are not so dry here. There is a human touch, some breeze, some colours and some warmth. Exams are definitely not a period to be

hated and definitely not going to be a dark memory. They have some meaning and also a smile. The children are living, smiling, playing and taking up duties in spite of approaching exams. The exam dates do not seem like a monstrous devil, because they don't get to miss the fun everyday offers. They don't miss morning and evening games, occasional dramas, movies and casual chats. None of the teachers remind them about the exams, other than occasionally in the class. There is no tension either on the teachers' faces or on the students' faces during the time of examination.

Benches are set aside, white board is cleared and instructions are given about exams. Exam started on time and there is absolute silence- in the whole process they haven't lost the smile and charm. They looked relaxed. There is hardly any tension on their face. Yes! They are writing exams, yet they are approached freely, coolly and meaningfully. They know that the exams are approaching and yet they don't miss the fun that life is bringing to them. Both the teachers and students don't miss that fun. They know the functional aspect of exams, but that does not overtake every aspect of their life. Exams take their proper place and they generally do not spill over into other aspects of their everyday life.

Homework is Not Tiresome

Homework here, is not dry repetition of the words given in the textbooks or it does not serve as an escape mechanism for teachers to reduce their work in the class, rather it becomes a meaningful work for the students. In a UK(Understanding Knowledge) class, they all watched movie together "scarlet pimpernel" and at the end of the class they take back the homework which says, "endangering his life and his true identity from his wife, the scarlet pimpernel risks it all to save the aristocrats ---describe what you feel motivates him to do so---300 words". Such exercise makes them think and analyze, and in addition improves their writing skills. Therefore, homework becomes interesting like art. When I came out of the dining hall, I see this on the notice board and it made me wonder the creative possibilities of homework.

P.Ex. homework- *we have discussed different political parties in India and their manifestos, the political spectrum and different election issues such as status of youth in India and women's political empowerment...imagine you are starting a political party: what would be your manifesto? What issues you would address? Where would you fall on the political spectrum?*

Overall, such an approach to examination and certification makes us wonder the serious implications it may have on the society. A school which neither conducts any board examination nor issue any certificate have something significant to offer. It resists the society which is based on competition and comparison. When every job is linked to the formal certificate and the marks one acquires in schools and colleges, Ashram School questions this hegemony. It delinks learning from the career. Even the Sholai school, with its creative method of assessments does not induce competitiveness in the children. Learning, therefore, becomes more meaningful and related to life, than preparing them for the career.

4.5. Teachers are Catalysts

In mainstream schools, syllabus and textbooks are fixed and offer no flexibility irrespective of the learning capacities and interests of children. In such a scenario, when a child is not interested and inclined, is it not futile to place full responsibility on teachers to make the syllabus interesting and meaningful? In addition to that, expecting a single teacher to handle 50 odd children with full energy in a closed classroom is nearly impossible, but such schools had existed and are still existing. Children, when they are young, have tremendous energy. So, strict discipline and punishments become inevitable for a single teacher to manage such huge numbers. Shouting and screaming, beating and making them stand outside becomes a normal reaction to the pressure they face. To give individual attention and to understand their interests, becomes nearly impossible in such a setting and the pressure to cover the syllabus adds even more burden to the teachers. Whereas, the atmosphere for teachers at Sholai and Ashram school are different. Even the teachers themselves are motivated to create a different learning environment.

At Sholai School

Teachers don't stay within their limits, they touch different aspects of students' life. They may use a book, magazine, seek internet or even fixed syllabus, but the classes become livelier with shared life experiences, feelings, expressions, freedom and joy. Classes are not merely to stuff children's heads with information, but they fill their hearts as well. To see children chatting with their teachers, passing comments, sharing jokes are very common things that bring them together. The strong boundary that usually separates teacher and student do not exist here and even the non-teaching staff

enjoy the closeness with everyone else. Definitely there is a line, but it is not so strong and clear. Maybe, that is why Ashwath, a new admission to IG1 (equivalent of class 9) feels that the school is great mainly because of the way teachers relate to the students. He feels, that they are “very free, friendly and since most of the teachers are young, they are very enthusiastic and understanding”. Being stressed and unhappy all these years in a normal mainstream school, he feels that this school gives a lot of freedom and the friendly relationship makes him feel at home. His smile is the proof. He doesn't feel any pressure in the classroom or elsewhere and even the non-completion of homework is not taken very seriously.

Fruits of Informal Relationship

Teachers here are not highly informed about their subjects, but they are open to learn and explore along with the children. They don't seem to project themselves, as being aware of everything. Even, they don't feel bad to admit their ignorance, they humbly accept it and that makes it easier for the children to feel closer to them. Teachers are willing to learn and grow, and this openness has allowed them to become co-learners with students. At times, even students get to teach their teachers and they don't seem to get disturbed and even students don't seem to look down on their teachers. Moreover, they treat them with respect and become friendlier. This possibly reduces the usual hierarchy that divides them.

Breaking the Stereotype Role of Teachers



(Photo Credit: Kabillesh)

Teachers discuss freely in the classrooms, but classrooms are not the only place where they meet and engage with each other. The students connect to teachers in an unusual way - while they eat together in the dining hall, while they play football at the ground, while having a casual conversation sitting on the stone bench or while working together at the farm. Sometimes, they even talk like friends, share their problems, interests, longings and their doubts. The relationship goes far beyond textbooks and exams. Apart from the subjects that they have learnt in the class, their conversation also includes, changing climatic conditions, wild life conservation, even personal problems and their dreams. It is difficult to draw a line. They even pull each other's leg and become close buddies. That is possible because students spend time with teachers beyond their class rooms.

Minimum Strength and Maximum Learning

Participatory Learning Space



(Photo Credit: www.learningandcreativity.com)

Normally established student-teacher ratio (50:1) in mainstream schools has an inbuilt tension. The entire energy, time and intelligence of the teacher just goes into maintaining the quiet and order of the classroom. When children with varieties of interests and varied levels of understanding are expected to get what the teacher is conveying in a particular time frame. Obviously, it becomes very difficult for any learning to happen. And it becomes very difficult even for the teacher to make every student understand. May be, that is why rote learning has become very popular - to

just manage the entire crowd. Ultimately, classroom becomes a mess, a battle ground. From such an angle, to see a school where students in each classroom do not exceed more than 15, sometimes even five or ten, comes as a surprise. That is to see that the teacher-student ratio can be as low as 1:1 and when it is high, it is still at 1:15. To see lot of space between tables and between each child is in itself a relief. As there is more space, there are more smiles. Teachers are willing to address the questions children ask and get courage to move beyond textbooks. Learning happens more seriously and willfully. There is a possibility to connect to each other beyond classrooms and school.

Moreover, a classroom does not necessarily mean a flock of students sitting in the rows. It is also common to see three students per teacher or even at times, single student for a single teacher at Sholai. Moreover, it need not be a monotonous lecture. Generally, discussions, conversations bring forth mutual learning and understanding and at times it is difficult to figure out who the teacher is. Creative ways of teaching and experimenting with the subjects becomes easier when children are less in number. The teachers are aware of the children's motives, interests and dislikes. They know their parent's occupation, their culture, language and their birthdays. There is a possibility to connect to each other not just academically, but as human beings.

At Ashram School

Hierarchy is Broken

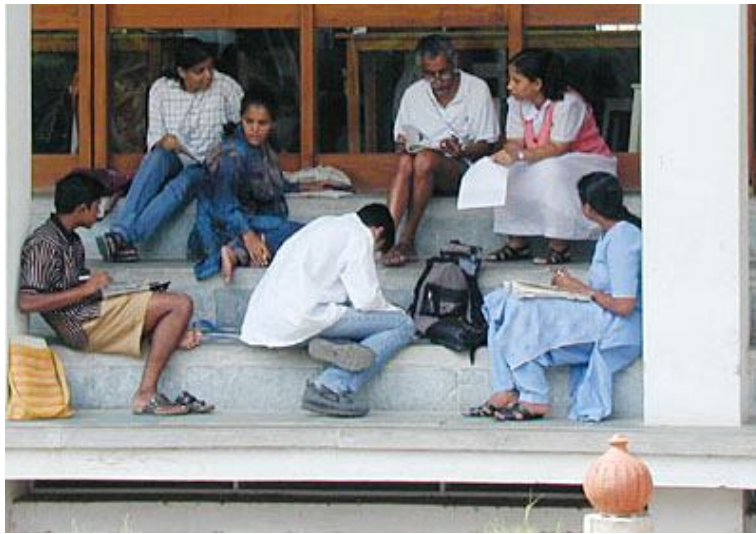
Teachers here, do not sit on a throne nor do they use the usual classroom weapons—sticks and abuses. They can get through teaching a concept or a lesson without scaring the children. They are more grounded, humble, creative and lively. It is common to see a Bengali teacher watering plants and taking care of the garden every day, a Science teacher going to the garden and digging the land. Hardly one feels any authority in this place. Each one's need is listened and attended to with love and care. Students call their teachers as 'da'/'bhai' and 'di'/'didi' (brother and sister respectively). Even the School Registrar is called as 'da'. Siddharth da, one of the senior office members says,

“everyone here is a sadhak, no one is up and no one is low, every work is considered important. Even the designation ‘Registrar’ is for the

government's sake and not for us. We call him also as 'da'. Everyone is equal here".

It is hard to feel authority among the inmates, for they have given different meaning to work itself. "It is not simply a job, but it is my yoga" says Shilpi, a young sadhak who along with other two sadhaks, looks after administration in Knowledge. She has been working in Knowledge since 2003 and since then, not even a single day she regretted about working here.

Breaking Hierarchies



(Photo Credit: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry)

Teachers are non-conventional, sensitive, innovative and they are living souls here. A small girl from class two had fractured her leg and had come to school after few days. She was sitting on a chair and all her classmates were around her. The bell rang and they had to leave for the class which is in the first floor. They were wondering how she would climb the stairs. Suddenly, a man with grey hair, must be in fifties, with a big smile appeared. He lifted and carried her on his shoulder. Singing and dancing, he took her to the class and the rest of the students followed him happily singing along and laughing. He is their class teacher.

Most of the teachers here are ex-students of this school and most of them are disenchanted with the normal school system. They try and relate to students in different ways and this seems to enrich their relationship and therefore make the teaching-learning process more meaningful. Every Tuesday at 9pm, some 6-7 students

along with 3 teachers watch wildlife videos at one of the teacher's residence. Students were lying down along with teachers, were enjoying the video and were discussing about animals and having a very casual conversation about what's happening in their life... how can we define these relations?

Teaching is Not a “Job”, But an “Offering”

Teaching here is not just a job to be done, but it is a service. Teachers here, do not receive any salary, but their needs are taken care of. Work acquires a different meaning when it is not done for the sake of money or power. They are here not just to teach, but to grow inwardly. Teaching is not a separate vocation distinct from their personal life. It is a part of it; it flows through it. There is only a thin line that separates personal and official life. They carry lightness in their body and their whole being speaks about it. The typical profile of a teacher can be easily deconstructed. They are people with grey hair, wearing old, but clean clothes, they move around in bicycles, talk to others very kindly and caringly. There is hardly any sense of boredom and restlessness shown in everyday routine activities. They are done with love and care. Teachers here give a different touch to the place and stand in the heart of students even after they leave. One of the ex-students became very emotional when he shared about his experience after leaving this school. He said, “I miss such people, they are very simple and caring and the worst part is that we don't realize until we leave this school”. Not just the teachers, but a whole lot of people linked to the ashram some way or the other, offer the school atmosphere a different meaning.

Teachers do not simply carry out their tasks, but they have a vision and interest. One of the teachers feels that the present-day education system is based on fear, marks and competition. She was deeply worried about how everything is driven by competition and money. She feels that competition corrupts people and dehumanizes oneself and the society. Moreover, good set of teachers, committed, kind and humble make this place interesting and joyful. To mention, there is a lot of rhythm and coordination between the teachers in the primary section. As a group, they looked happy and sincere. Anjana Ben (ashramite, studied in ashram school) in the Primary school who teaches French for first class, speaks so lovingly and politely to children. There is a charm around her.

It is not simply about what and how they teach in the class, but also about teachers themselves, the way they speak, their interests, dislikes, hobbies, the way they look at life. Teachers coming in bicycles, walking on their foot, wearing simple dresses - convey a lot to the students more than a lesson from an interesting book. The heaviness of the materialistic and commercial world cools down with such simple outfits. Here education is not only about making subjects more interesting, but it is also reflected in the way they take their life as a whole. A very humble flute teacher enters the class, with a smile all over his face and he starts his class. He is very friendly to students and does not put up an air about his talents, nor does he show any authority on the students. The notes he played touched everyone's heart. Definitely, what they teach doesn't have an intention to prepare children for the job market. They long to touch deeper; the deeper meaning of life. Their work with their students is an integral part of their spiritual practice.

Narrow and impersonal guidelines and norms for the teachers may help in running the system, they may help students get some information, they may help them in achieving good marks in the board exams, but they will not touch teachers' lives, their hearts and make them inspirational. But, here teachers are guided by a philosophy which makes teaching a joyful, a meaningful journey; and ultimately a means to understand the world and oneself. Prakash bhai, social science teacher feels, that there are three things that are important with regard to teachers. Firstly, a teacher should be really interested in the subject he/she is teaching; he/she must have passion and love to share this interest with others. Secondly, he/she must have knowledge in his/her subjects as well as wider knowledge in other areas, so that, he/she is able to address whatever the children may ask and be able to link up such questions with what he/she is teaching. Thirdly, how he/she is as a person. Because there are many things that happen in the presence of that person without him/her even uttering a word.

Teachers Making Wonders Without Formal Qualification

Teacher training course is not compulsory here, but a real passion for teaching and life itself is expected. Most of the teachers are not experts in their subject when they started, they learned along the way. Kala ben in Kinder Garden describes her moment of entry into the school. She joined as a teacher in 1954 and the Mother chose her as In-charge of KG. She remembers Mother saying "you like children and children like

you, so you just play with them”. Thirty years of experience in carpentry work that started with no technical training has now become a passion for Rajen da. His arrival to Ashram was not for carpentry, but for a different purpose, to understand the meaning of life. From small boxes to bamboo pen stand to an old model car to a grass hopper, various items made by students under his guidance were kept in the cupboard. Fine finishing and perfection give treat to our eyes. He says, “fruit of the work can be enjoyed only when you complete it and give it a good finishing. It should be aesthetically appealing and fulfilling”. I have never seen him scolding any of the students, though he politely insists on punctuality and perfection. Teachers here don’t have any formal certificate, but yet they have found their way to connect to children.

Formal teacher training course has now been made compulsory in our country without taking into account the real passion for teaching. Ultimately, this has produced people with mere skills to manage a crowd of 50 children or so and to cover the syllabus, no matter whether the children get it or not, because after all, it gives them a secured job. If the teacher training course has the potential to bring out all the best teachers and has an eye to identify the passion, interest and skill in individuals for teaching, there would not be any problem in the schools.

However, an important thing to note in this school is the kind of teachers they have and the spectrum of qualifications they possess. To my surprise none of them have ever done B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) or any formal teacher training course in their life. Their points of arrival to this school are very interesting, because, for them, it is not just about teaching, it is about their way of life. Even Lipi di, who is very passionate about the lake project, visits the farm every day, and has a tremendous love for nature. Her knowledge about bees, plants, flowers was acquired only out of her love for nature and not out of a tired routinized everyday ‘job’.

Though none of the teachers in Ashram school have any formal teacher training certificate, they still teach with great passion, they innovate new methods every time. Amala di in Kinder Garden with 40 years of experience of teaching also studied from this school. She has warmth around her. She is very kind to children, and is a caring, loving and entertaining woman. There is a certain sense of quietness and happiness around her. She says that there is no need for teacher training course, “one’s own soul is the teacher. Ideas will come when there is love. The Mother is there to guide us”.

Here teachers are free to choose any activity. Though there is a structure, they are still free to choose what they want to do and how they want to do. She adds, “Children are so clever, they will teach you if you are open. I am growing everyday with these children and it feels very nice and I am so happy here”.

Commitment Beyond Formalities

Years of experience in the school makes us wonder the amount of commitment and sincerity these teachers have. What makes Smriti di, who studied in the ashram school make her teach for 47 years in Kinder Garten? There is a long-standing connection with the place and people. Thirty to forty years of teaching experience in the ashram school has helped some of them to understand the system better and grow along with it. A lot of teachers who were ex-students of the Ashram school continue to be here not simply for the purpose of teaching, but also for the values the schools stands for. It has made them a part of the system. There is a great deal of respect and love they have for the Mother who was instrumental in giving a character to the school. There is a complete trust on the values and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. The teachings got expressed in various forms and has entered the classroom as well. Jumur di has been brought up in the ashram itself. In reference to Sri Aurobindo’s ‘nothing can be taught’, she said, “every child is born with an urge to learn. Teachers have to just facilitate the child to grow all the faculties that it possesses. The school is able to provide freedom to choose and in doing so they develop responsibility for their own learning. A teacher’s duty, therefore, is to give a child the ‘joy of learning’ and make it meaningful”.

Most of the teachers seem to have a strong connectedness with the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Shoba Mitra, a Music teacher has taught in this school for more than 50 years. She came when the Mother was there. Initially she was assigned to teach French. She remembers that one of her student was very mischievous and disturbing the class. He did not study properly. So, she went and complained to the Mother. But Mother replied,

“Only two things are possible. Either he is not interested in the subject and interested in something else, or he is not liking the way you are teaching”.

Mother asked her to speak to the child and find out what he is interested in. She did and found out that the boy was interested in painting. So, she decided to do painting with him during the class, but spoke to him only in French. To everyone's surprise, after 6 months, he performed superbly in French. Mechanical teaching of subjects, covering up fixed syllabus, establishing only formal relationship with students do not attract these teachers.

Teachers are Free to Explore

Not just the students, even the teachers enjoy the freedom the school offers. They are not constantly stuffed with what has to be taught in the class, which book to refer to. They decide the day, they refer to books they like and use games that they feel are right. They have lot of room to choose to add or to delete, not simply for their convenience, but for the larger good of the students. Ravi da, an English teacher says that, he takes any books he finds interesting- poem, novel and so on. He says, there is a lot of flexibility on choosing the books and style. Though there is a syllabus, it need not be strictly followed. Teachers are convinced about the freedom the school offers and the various possibilities it opens.

Such critical pedagogy in both the schools offer us a healthy break from the usual hierarchy and authority that divides teachers and students. It brings them closer and therefore, they explore the vocation of teaching and learning together. Such a system would be a challenge to the society which is unequal, hierarchical and discriminatory. Teacher here, by building informal relationships with students, breaking the usual hierarchy and learning together indirectly appeals for a society which is equal and just.

CHAPTER- IV

COPING WITH THE RESISTANCE

Although resisting the whole system of conventional education with all their might, alternative schools are grappling with their own set of problems, contradictions and ambiguities. Because, alternative schools cannot alone bring about complete transformation of the society, unless other institutions of the society also transform at their pace. Economic enterprises, family, religious and cultural organizations also need to reform themselves. Until then, these schools, apart from providing meaningful innovative education, would also succumb to various contradictions and ambiguities. Therefore, this chapter would look at how these problems, contradictions are arising and altering the nature of resistance itself.

Moreover, resistance in these alternative schools does not seem to be complete. Because, not all things are nice about these schools as well. Even these schools contain seeds of oppression. The intention to dominate, oppress and rule could be underlying all the superficial changes. This chapter, therefore, intends to develop critical perspectives on these schools and by conceptualizing resistance in new ways, it tries to bring about a deeper understanding of the larger system of oppression to which schooling is linked to.

5.1. Changing Nature of Schools

My analysis of these two schools (Ashram school and Sholai school) should not be seen as an attempt to celebrate everything about their practices without critical insight. There are two insights that have guided me throughout the thesis. First, the ethic of care that the ethnographer needs not merely to describe the cultural matrix of a social setting, but also to understand it, feel it and translate it in a way that is no longer remains absolutely separate from the pulse of the inhabitants of the cultural space. That is why, in the earlier chapter, the vibrancy of these two schools, their dreams, projects, experimentations, achievements has come vividly in my writing. Even if my praise for some of their educational practices and achievements is visible in my writing, I am not apologetic about it, because I believe a disenchanted distance did not necessarily be seen as a virtue.

Having said this, I would speak of yet another insight that I have learnt from critical sociology- the ability to see beyond what is apparently visible and explore hidden tensions, conflicts and power dynamics. In this chapter, these insights played a key role. Despite remarkable achievements of these schools, there are problems, paradoxes and contradictions that demand a thorough sociological scrutiny. And I am doing this while I am engaging with this in this chapter.

Academics That Emerge to Dominate

Students in Ashram school are not simply tied down to classrooms, they run from one corner to the other and engage in various activities. They fill the pages with beautiful sketches, spread colorful threads across clothes, make wonderful pieces of art with wood, play musical instruments, learn various forms of classical dances and undergo a range of physical exercises. Their day is not boring and monotonous; it is exciting and engaging. Their hands are not tied to benches; they move around freely and happily. Especially, the lower classes are filled with joyful activities and interesting games. It is hard to differentiate a book and a board-game, because they mean the same here. Sometimes, games educate and books crack jokes. Classroom and art room serve the same purpose. Colors teach them Geography or a piece of clay may bring life to a Social Science class. Every activity runs into one or the other subject. But as children move to higher classes, a difference seems to emerge. Certain books gain more

attention than others, not because they are simply interesting, but because they have more 'market' value.

Children as they grow, become aware of the market value of the subjects. They seem to understand that every subject is graded and is given a place in hierarchy according to its 'value' in the job market. Even when the school's ideology, as we have discussed in the earlier chapter, does not overtly support this trend and even criticize it, children seem to know which subject is "famous" and "attractive".

One of the students in Knowledge at Ashram School says,

"I have taken Foreign languages like French, Italian and Spanish as my major subjects. There is a good scope for these languages in the present times. So, I need not worry about my career."

Prakash bhai, a senior Social Science teacher feels,

"Of late, children are opting out of Geography and other Social Sciences because they think that these subjects may not fetch them good jobs. They are choosing subjects based on career and not for the sake of knowledge."

Although Ashram school provides enormous amount of choices, not only books, but activities that are necessary for our living and life. Yet, there seems to be a definite priority for academics over other activities, at least in the higher classes. For the higher classes, extra-curricular is compulsory. Even at this level, they cannot get away from physical education, music and art classes. But, they don't seem to give equal importance to academic subjects and these activities.

A student from the Free System feels,

"I am not interested in sports and games, but it is compulsory here. I am now grown up and I should be allowed to decide whether I should participate or not. I am interested in studies, but I don't get enough time as we are supposed to be involved in music, art and various other activities."

On the other hand, Sanju di, an alumna, presents a different view point,

"These days, children, especially the elder ones are interested in academic subjects, but during those days when we were studying, we used to play a lot and get involved in various other activities. But now students are busy with their academic subjects. They do not take other activities very seriously."

But, why is this so? Generally, knowledge is capsulated and branded. Not all forms of knowledge are equally valued; some are costly and some aren't worth a penny. Children are being sold to the market world which is endlessly indulged in the pursuit of making money. Whereas, education that Sri Aurobindo and Mother aspired is of a different kind. My understanding of their educational philosophy is that, when a child paints, he simply paints, he does not paint to become an artist, nor does he play with an electrical wire to become an electrical engineer. They just do things. It is adults who corrupt young minds with unnecessary values. That is why, as children grow older, they learn to impose all kinds of socially loaded meanings to activities. They want to study because that will get them good jobs, or that will help them in becoming famous and great. They don't learn for the sake of learning; for the pure joy of learning.

Some of the teachers feel disturbed with the present trend, as they recall their earlier days in this school. Most of the senior teachers in the Ashram School expressed that, the school now is more oriented towards academics, more into preparing students for their higher education and jobs. Some of them even feel that, the original purpose of the school is now lost because of this change. But, in the earlier times, the Ashram School "was more free, children simply were playing and enjoying", recalls one of the Drawing teachers. She feels everything was imparted through play, so much so that there was hardly any difference between academics and play. This was the feeling of many senior teachers who partly feel bad about this present trend in the school.

One of the teachers as well as the alumna of Ashram School feels,

"These days, children are focused on academics, they are not very interested and as involved as we used to be in extra-curricular activities like music, dance, carpentry, pottery, drawing, painting and gardening at earlier times. Their emphasis is more on academics."

Even a teacher-parent who was once a student of the Ashram School also feels the difference. She said,

"The school used to be very different back then. We used to learn various things. Even now there are as many activities as they used to have before, but now academics are given more importance."

The reaction of some of the teachers and their regret and displeasure provoke us to think of reasons behind this change. There is a fear that this school may become like any other school which prepares children only for jobs. Although, Ashram school may not conduct exams, but the orientation of the school may completely drift towards preparing children for the commercial world. On the one hand, there is this fear of becoming a 'normal, mainstream school', but on the other hand, the school didn't avoid change altogether. It has welcomed new possibilities by altering its curriculum.

Outside of this school, growing number of students are opting for 'popular' subjects like Medicine, Engineering and Commerce. There is a tremendous and mad competition for these subjects, not because they teach interesting and valuable concepts, but because these will get them good jobs and fill huge pockets. Generally, in mainstream schools, only certain skills are encouraged at the cost of others. Not that these jobs are any bad. Definitely, every kind of work is necessary and society requires every kind of skill. Although, Ashram School has tried its best to provide an atmosphere where learning can happen freely, yet the school is unable to stay as an insulated institution, the values of society enter the school in various ways and the school finds it difficult to resist these values at times.

In the higher classes of alternative schools, some select subjects dominate and they take most of children's time and energy. Children become serious and scared. The joy of simply enjoying a casual walk, aimlessly watching the birds and trees and doing some activities for the sake of fun seem to have no meaning for them now. In a higher class, every action is given a value and a rank. However, to make Ashram school preparatory ground for this mindless competition disturb the very fundamental values they stand for. The school which gave equal meaning to all kinds of activities in the lower classes also tend to hierarchies the subjects in the higher classes.

'Studying' Pushes 'Doing' Aside

Classes in Ashram school are presented interestingly, with meaningful lectures, thought provoking discussions in a friendlier atmosphere. Children are engaged mentally and intellectually, but in terms of practical experience, they seem to lag behind, of late. Being aware of the change that the school is going through, Atma da, who teaches genetics in Knowledge, remembers an event of the past year, when the school had sent 5 students every 3 days in a week to lake-project (This is an

environmental initiative of the Ashram). He was told that these 5 children were very naughty and they did not let other children study in the class. So, the school decided to send them to the lake where Atma da works. He says,

“We started doing a lot of projects with these 5 children- like feeding fish, breeding, calculating their size and weight and monitoring them regularly. They also helped in constructing a room and taking care of the horses. Even the room in the dairy farm is built by them. They dugout land, carried stones and built. They spent a lot of time here. They enjoyed, had fun and also learnt a lot. But otherwise, children just come for 2 hours a week, so we just show them what we are doing. Unless they do it themselves they won’t get involved and interested. Ideally, learning happens joyfully in that way.”

Another teacher is anguish about children’s choice of subjects. She says,

“These days children are not interested in working in the farms. They study about plants, trees, birds in the books, and hardly they feel the urge to touch the soil and work with the plants. This is very disturbing for me. I don’t know what these children are up to.”

Her anxiety is understandable and especially, in a school which believed in an integral education. But, now a days, children as they move to higherclasses, they tend to miss ‘doing’ things, rather they are constantly engaged in ‘mental’ exercises. The possibility to see that ‘everything is connected’ is missed out without practical experience. School, nonetheless gives scope for a lot of practical experiences, but at the higher classes, it is more theoretical. However, by creating a difference between practical and theory, we are distorting our view of the world and life itself. In such a process we are creating a gap between work and play, between studying and doing. Because, children study about plants, trees, flowers, soil, weather, insects, animals in their classrooms, but will they really learn if they don’t dirty their hands? Gardening can really provoke their minds as they get to touch the plants and watch the insects instead of simply reading about them. It can open up the sensibilities, that a book or a prescribed syllabus can’t give. In the same way, a football match can provoke various concepts on force and geometry. But, in higher classes, activities like gardening and football are simply considered as “extra-curricular” and hence they have no organic relation with academics.

However, it is important we ask, what could be driving this school to prioritize academics over other aspects? Children too feel uneasy to simply bypass the syllabus

or skip some of the topics. They fear to choose painting over a science class or basketball over a geometry. They feel that geometry and science are important and valuable than basketball and painting. But, why is this fear arising in Ashram school which believes in the over-all development of the child? Though the school wanted to break free the stereotypical notion of preparing the children for the career, but it could not with stand the pressure of mainstream values. The school has altered its position. Does it mean that innovative curriculum and radical actions are reserved only for the lower classes? Why has Ashram school compromised its ideals at the higher classes? Has it lost the trust in its ability to resist the mainstream values?

The Undercurrent of Exams

In the case of Sholai school, with abundance of nature around and activities that constantly provoke them to relate to nature, textbooks and exams gain their power in the higher classes. They engage in interesting activities, thought provoking discussions and friendly relations with teachers, but at the end of the day they are reminded that they are there to complete the course.

One of the children in A-Level feels,

“Once my studies are complete here, I would like to do something different. I am more interested in photography, but I have to study these subjects and also have to write these exams.”

Examination: Inviting Competitive Value System



(Photo Credit: www.Justdial.com)

Another student in IG-2 also feels burdened with exams,

“Until last year we did not have exams, but this year we are supposed to give IGCSE exams. I don’t like these exams. I wish I didn’t have to write these exams.”

Textbooks for higher classes here are meant to prepare them for the exams. This is very evident in IGCSE- Biology textbook by DG. Mackean, where he addresses to the students that,

“this is a textbook to help you in studying biology for IGCSE. This book however, also contains material specified by the 5 examination boards in the UK”. (Mackean D. G., 2002, p. vii)

Textbooks and syllabus become important as exams rule the game. Classes are oriented towards completing the syllabus and the teacher tries hard to relate the subject to the children’s surroundings. As the concepts get complex in the higher classes, children learn only mentally. To relate everything practically becomes nearly impossible with the amount of syllabus they have to cover for exams.

However, children may get confused with the school’s vision to create a sensible human being who can think independently on the one hand and its strategy to include exams and marks to find a way to the world on the other. Because, when we invite exams we also invite their consequences. Exams make the learning process political. Exams imply competition and the value of competition corrupts young minds. The moment we impose standardized curriculum, strict time-tables, graded syllabus and examinations, then we ought to tolerate their implications. This is exactly why J.Krishnamurti spoke against the schools which are preparing children to the competitive world. However, Sholai school though it believes in competition-free environment, but practically, could not give upexams in the higher classes.

Definitely, getting through academic exams helps them to go for higher education and qualify for high paid jobs, but it seems to completely distort their view of life. Children tend to compartmentalize events in life; and life therefore would appear fragmented. What they study and how they live would have no connection. Because, when we make exams important, we deprive children of the possibility to see maths, science, social science, philosophy blending in a drop of water or while growing a plant, or while cooking. Therefore, academics becomes heavy and repulsive.

However, academics are not to be kept in textbooks, examinations and answer sheets, it is simply not about accumulating knowledge, but it has to enrich our everyday life. It should transform the way we live every day. But, this possibility has been defeated when a school like Sholai started conducting examinations for higher classes. Though lower classes are freed from this rut, does it mean that innovative ideas and transformative actions are not meant for higher classes? Why not Sholai gain enough strength to resist exams even at the higher classes?

Certificates are Now Important

In the general education system, where marks become children's only aim and textbooks their only sacred books, sanity is lost. No matter what, marks are very important and the schools are ready to do anything for that. There are mainstream schools which are exclusively meant for classes 9th to 12th, and prepare students for the rat race. Reading the same books for thousands of times and mindlessly mugging up and reproducing them in paper are the daily rituals in these schools. It is nothing, but four years of imprisonment. This is the scenario of most mainstream schools. But, the Ashram School stands for values that exactly contradict this approach. For them, competition corrupts children's mind and certificates spoil the sacredness of education. However, in the present times, there is some tension in the school regarding competition and certificates. Some of the teachers feel unhappy with the way things are proceeding these days.

However, the Ashram School certificate does not appear as ridiculous as a normal school certificate which has only name, subjects and marks. The certificate issued in this school speaks about the student creatively and interestingly. It does not display marks, rather it talks about their interests, their choice of subjects and a description of their performance. We may wonder whether this may convince colleges, universities for higher studies, or an organization for a job, but luckily over time it has found its way through in some places. Even then, the issue of certificate did not fully convince students, parents, teachers and ashramites. Some of them felt it was better without certificate, but some feel it is necessary, as children have to move and live outside.

A senior teacher feels that they should not be given any kind of certificate,

“Our certificate is not like other institutional certificate; it does not contain marks or any grade. But, even this would make children career- oriented. Earlier times, students after finishing their studies, children stayed back in the ashram itself, but these days they are moving outside. Because of certificate, they are getting prepared to leave the ashram.”

But some of the parents and teachers feel otherwise. A parent of P2 student says,

“Certificate is important for the children, because after their studies, they have to join either higher studies or they have to get a job. So, this certificate is necessary, otherwise other institutions may not take them.”

But this decision has opened a new gate for both possibilities and criticism. This has the prospect to connect students to the outside world and let them evolve elsewhere too. This has made school not the only place where the child has the opportunity to aspire for the higher goal, but the scope is opened everywhere. Therefore, the ashram does not become a cocoon for all the aspirants but they can spread their wings elsewhere. May be this is one of the ways, the school has found to connect to the outside world. As a result, children are very clear and confident that, they are going to leave the ashram once their studies are over. They are not going to stay back in the ashram as opposed to earlier days when most of the students continued to stay in the ashram after the completion of their course. Now, they are confident that they will get seats in many universities for higher studies. That, I feel, is one of the reasons for the change in the characteristics of the Ashram School.

However, issuing certificate of any kind has its own implications. Children tend to see certificates as necessary for learning and they validate its importance for their living itself. Learning for the sake of knowledge and liberation, therefore, loses its meaning. Though Ashram school did not imagine these implications, when it decided to issue certificate, the consequences are apparent these days. But why did this school which was once against issuing certificate of any kind, gradually changed its position?

During the initial times, this school did not issue any written “paper” or “certificate” when students left the school. The school strictly said “no” to any form of certificate, as it was thought that would corrupt the intention of teaching and learning. As most of

the students stayed back in the ashram itself and their parents were sadhaks, the need also did not arise. But, during 60s, as Ashram got popularized and many outsiders wanted to admit their children in the school. And when these children passed out, they moved outside. Since, they could not get jobs, they appealed to the Mother. There was a huge dilemma while deciding on issuance of certificate to outgoing students, as the school till then completely stood against any form of certificate. To put an end to this dilemma among Ashramites - as Jugal Kishore Mukherjee in his book had explained - the Mother decided to issue certificate after listening to various views (Mukherjee, 2005, pp. 105-114). Then, finally Mother approached Union Education Ministry for recognition, which was then granted.

Moreover, school cannot be an isolated institution unaffected by the changes in the society. Society enters the school and the school does depend on society. Its values affects school's principles. When getting a job or an admission into higher studies depends on the marks obtained in the school, it does affect the values of the school. Then, schools can no longer take exams lightly. Certificates and marksheets can only speak or even money does a good job. When mainstream schools display cutouts/flex boards of the top rankers, this school also has moved from their position, reacted a little, changed a bit. But, many of the senior Ashramites are quite disturbed with the changing scenario. Not only in the Ashram school, but we have to remind ourselves that, education in general was taken lightly in those days. Students didn't have to go for tuitions or commit suicides for getting less marks. They might have scored less, but that was ok, it was not a crime. Our parents' and grandmothers' description of their schooling explains it much better than any document. No better proof can explain this scenario than their words and expressions.

Not just that, in those days, schools did not make any or much profit, but the present schools have become profit-making businesses. There is a huge difference. Added to it, is the growing trend of competition in the present-day schools. Fear and anxiety that competition generates are completely ignored. Now, even 95% marks are not enough. Growing number of tuitions, vulgar advertisements for school admissions, mad competition for courses have almost made educational institutions market places. Though Ashram school did not want to entertain such things, changes in the outer

society did have some impact on this School as well. This could be one of the reasons for the contradictions to appear.

However, these Schools(Ashram and Sholai) cannot escape the criticism for conducting examinations and issuing certificates. Though these schools have started 70 years and 20 years ago respectively, it is important for the schools to relook at their respective philosophies and reinterpret them according to modern demands and needs, not brush them aside as outdated. The schools' ideologies emphasize that the phenomena of examination and certification breed competition and fear. And the questions they raise on these phenomena are relevant even in the present times. These schools should not take the present scenario for granted and adapt themselves to it. In fact, they need to question the present situation. They need to remind themselves of the danger of taking certificates seriously. When certificates become important then the course of curriculum also changes. Then the alternative possibilities that these schools are longing for gets undermined and defeated.

Moreover, education is no longer a pursuit of knowledge about life, nature and oneself, but it has become a necessary process to obtain certificate, a means to compete. That is the reason there are conflicting views on the change in the orientation of school syllabus towards academics and exams. So, when obtaining a certificate becomes important, the character of the school cannot remain the same, it has to adapt to it. When the school starts worrying about the placement of its students as they finish their schooling, they start preparing for the requirement of the society. Even the students are aware of the situations outside. As most of them want to go outside as soon as they finish their studies, their choice of the subjects and their priorities get influenced. They are quite aware of the universities they would be applying for their higher education and the job opportunities thereafter. Once again, we should remind ourselves of the danger that may arise when the school prepares them for the outside world. Will such preparation corrupt their intelligence and sadly, will they get absorbed in to the materialistic commercial world?

This paradox makes us wonder about alternative projects, no matter how innovative they are, also succumb to the pressures of the society and its oppressive structure. Therefore, their power of resistance against the mainstream values gets diluted and corrupted. Although, it is not easy for an alternative school to stay completely

unaffected by the overarching oppressive values of the society, but on the contrary, this is the time alternative schools should hold to their emancipatory possibilities and believe in their strength and restore their resistance.

5.2. Conflicting Aspirations

Students' Aspirations vs. Schools' Concerns

Certificates do not mean a thing to the Ashram school, but they matter to the children who study there. They are sure of their entry to other institutions for higher education or jobs through the certificate the school issues. They are not even aware of the reasons for which the certificates were not issued in the initial times. Mother's vision of "no to certificate" did not seem to have moved them. On the contrary, students feel it is mandatory for the school to issue certificates, for the world demands it. This is visible when they express their problems regarding applying for other institutions. One of the students was sharing the difficulty of applying online. She says, "now that most higher institutions have made application process online, it is difficult to show our certificate and give explanation". Many students gave me similar response. The school's dissatisfaction with issuing certificate has not provoked many of them to think critically. In fact, one of the students in Knowledge gave a very "pragmatic" reason,

"At present times, certificate is very mandatory to apply for any higher studies or for job opportunities. We cannot avoid certificates. Our school certificate is not actually a certificate, because it does not provide any marks nor do we follow any standardized Board. Therefore, we have difficulty in applying online. Many columns have to be left blank. Though our certificate is equivalent to the normal graduation degree certificate, still I feel ours is insufficient."

Another student in AVEP also has similar views,

"Somehow, we have to get a job when we finish our studies, so we need certificates. Without certificate it is difficult to become a part of the society."

But, why are children interested in certificates? What is the reason for them to think it is mandatory? Did Ashram school fail to evoke students' critical abilities and make them think beyond the world of certificates and examinations? What has gone wrong?

Children as they are young possess tremendous energy; they run, jump and play. These activities can entirely occupy their day, because their interest in activities is endless and they can be kept engaged in one thing or the other. Some of them includes playing with toys, make-believing their own world, talking to chairs and other inanimate things. However, they play with the spirit to not win in Olympics or in any competition, but just for the joy of it. They have no big aims and that is not to say that, what they are doing is not meaningful. They are spontaneous and imaginative. They don't think of their future and plan their day accordingly. They play because they like to play, not because it will be useful for some day in the future. Some children are interested in electronic devices, whatever comes in their way, they want to open and explore, but not with the intention that they will become an engineer in the future.

But for an adult, whatever a child does has to be of some meaning, of some value in relation to the future. Otherwise, activities without such intent are “waste of time”. Since, children are surrounded by adults, at home, in the neighborhood and in the school, they are constantly under the pressure of socialization; everyone trying to teach them ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ of living. However, not all the values of the society are healthy. Social inequalities, stereotypes, marketization, commodification and what not, gradually enter them and corrupt their mind. Even the education is planned by adults who have already been conditioned by these values. Their view of the world slowly gets ingrained in children. May be, that is the reason, why children feel the compulsive need to obtain certificate. Although, Sri Aurobindo and Mother aspired to create an environment in their school which is not affected by the materialistic values of the society, but over time, school has lost its responsibility to arouse such critical thinking among children. We do understand that the mainstream values of society do affect the school which is trying to resist, but Ashram school also has to find its way to address it by making children aware of its implications.

However, by ignoring such critical intervention, children of Ashram school have been influenced by the ways of society. As we are aware that mainstream society is more interested in making an identity for the students, that you are an engineer or a doctor, or a business man or a painter, at the end of the school, this is what is expected. Our career gives identity. You cannot be someone without having solid ideas of career by

the time you finish your education. Occupation is a major source of identity and what we strive in schools and colleges is not to learn about life, but to build a career. As a result, students orient their education along the line of career and material prosperity. That is the reason, certificates become important for these children when the school, though it believes in revolutionary ideas, ignores to arouse critical consciousness in the children.

Student's Lack of Socio-Political Awareness

One another aspect that is crucial to look at this juncture is the “freedom” and the “choice” that Ashram school promises to offer. Does it mean that children can do anything they feel like? A child who is upset with someone, can he be allowed to hit another because he feels like? Definitely, this is not the freedom that the Mother wanted for children. It is the freedom that will allow them to progress, physically, mentally and spiritually. It shouldn't be misunderstood with the freedom to do anything one wants, even when it is destructive for oneself or others. Such freedom is dangerous. It may also lead to violence.

However, left to themselves, children can get fully occupied with gadgets. Smartphones, iPads, tablets, laptop or a computer can engage them endlessly. This is also not the freedom which Mother aspired for children through “free progress”. If free progress means to let the child do what he wants, then that is a bit dangerous. Their interests, intentions, actions have to be critically looked at. For instance, even the choice of their subjects is not personal, they are largely influenced by the society. And, not all jobs are considered desirable. To be interested in becoming a farmer or a cleaner or a shepherd is not so desirable.

Lipi di, one of the teachers is quite unhappy with the school children's choice of interest. She feels that students of Ashram are not passionate about farming. She says,

“They don't water plants, take care of their growth. How will they know the significance of life forms, if they don't get to do these activities? But, they don't prefer such work or have any connection with it.”

Even the present teachers are proud that some of the students - after finishing their studies from this school are placed in IITs and other reputed universities and

institutions. A teacher in Knowledge was proud to acknowledge their students' "success",

"Our children do not find any difficulty in getting seats in universities or in getting jobs. Some of them even got seats in IIT and also, many of our students are placed successfully in good jobs."

This paradox leaves us to wonder as to what they are preparing their students for. One kind of response, I feel, is that the Ashram School is not any less and the students do possess the competency to reach the level of IIT, Medical and Engineering colleges or to get heavy paid jobs. However, it is important to pose a controversial, yet, interesting question here, about the kind of meaning we attach to work. Will the Ashram school aspire their students to become sweepers, gardeners, cooks or will it want them to aspire only for 'sophisticated' jobs like teacher, engineer, or an officer? In that sense, there is a sense of "elitism" in their choice of careers and aspirations. We do need cobblers, cleaners, drivers, post masters, just as we need civil servants, managers, and principals. But, do they dare to see the equal significance of all kinds of work, at least in a school like this which is trying to make a difference? Why did the school fail to evoke such possibilities in the children?

Even the Principal of the Sholai School is upset about children's orientation towards examination than genuinely caring for nature. He says,

"Even our school children are not interested in protecting the nature, but they are serious about their examinations. I am quite upset about it."

At Sholai, every day they watch news after breakfast and sometimes it is followed by a discussion on a particular issue. Certainly, newspaper gives us a quick view of what's happening around the world, but such information is limited. It is necessary to read newspapers every day and listen to the news on TV, but it is shallow and doesn't have a depth. They need to go deeper into the issues and understand them from a broader perspective. School has put various efforts to make learning about nature more experiential, whereas, the social realities like caste inequalities, religious divisions, gender discrimination, occupational hierarchies, political instability, etc., are merely discussed. To prepare children to be socially critical, sensitive and active, mere discussions won't help, they need to embrace it with their feelings and actions. Otherwise, once they enter the outside world, those issues may look scary and they

may withdraw from reality or deny it altogether. If they are not prepared enough to face these issues, they might simply get swayed by the ways of society.

Moreover, social sciences in these schools are generally about remembering certain dates in the history, geographical divisions, and political parties and maybe some issues like sati, child marriage, discrimination based on caste, gender and race, religious divisions, elections and constitution may be discussed. These schools don't explore social issues deeply, they majorly give a superficial understanding of the society. They do not make social sciences experiential for the children; it is generally dealt as if the society exists outside, keeping oneself away from it. No wonder, most of the children are ignorant about what lies beneath every issue. The gender stereotypes, caste issues, class consciousness, globalization, commercialization, and endless other issues go unnoticed and ignored. Even if they get to study, they don't study them deeply.

Without an in-depth understanding of the commercial and materialistic world outside, how will they decipher the inner meaning of their choice of subjects, their choice of higher studies, their choice of occupation and the roots of family values? Without such in-depth and total understanding, they will be lost as they move out of these schools. So, they will either mechanically deny certain things that are taught as 'wrong', or indulge in them meaninglessly. This is because, Social Sciences is seen as a theoretical subject, as if it is happening out there, away from the school, and hardly any efforts are taken to make it experiential. Therefore, students lack deeper understanding of the society and their decisions and actions will have no meaningful implications in their life as well as to the society.

However, a pertinent question that arises out of this is, why are these schools do not make Social Science experiential compared to Natural Sciences? Are they afraid that it may arouse the socio-political consciousness of the children, which may in-turn disturb its own values and structure? Definitely, when the children are made to think critically, not only of the natural world, but also of the social world of which they are an intrinsic part, questions and doubts are bound to arise. These schools may be afraid of its consequence. However, by keeping children neutral/uncritical to the social world, would eventually undo the emancipatory possibilities which the alternative schools are longing for. Therefore, it is important for these alternative schools to

develop socio-political consciousness among the children. So that children are critically aware of their choices and freedom which they are claiming for.

Parents' Conflicting Goals

School educates the child, but the kind of home environment, socio-economic background of the parents, their educational qualification and orientation towards life also have tremendous influence on the child. However, with increasing industrialization and commercialization, family system has become much more complex and complicated. Everyone is running to make money to invest in business, to expand their property, to pay loans that haunts them every month, and to maximize all the material comforts as possible. It has become hard to stop and wonder why we are all running madly. Most families have lost their imagination to see life differently. Hands are no longer free to hold children, they are busy with mobile phones, constantly filling their ears with songs and parents hardly give any time to play with their little ones or engage in a meaningful conversation as they are busy typing smilies in their small gadgets that occupy their entire time. Moreover, children are also provided with lots of gadgets to keep them occupied.

However, Ashram school does not want to entertain such parents. They want ones who will think differently, who will wonder about life and give time in finding out the meaning of life. The school has also given very clear notification for the parents during the time of admission. The following Mother's quote is mentioned in the school's application form.

“Parents who want their children to be educated in the ordinary way and learn in order to get a good job, to earn their living and have brilliant careers, should not send them here.”

It is also very clear from the earlier chapter that the parents of children studying in these alternative schools have taken conscious decision to educate their children in a different environment, that is conducive for their child's growth-physical, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual. They are also aware of the schools' resistance against examination, certification and competition.

Ranging from West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh to Tamil Nadu, people from different states of this country, have come specifically for the purpose of their

children's education to Pondicherry Ashram School. Parents of Ashram School students are a mixed group. Some of them are devotees of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and some of them do not have much idea about their philosophy. There are some with both the parents working full time and engaged in other activities hardly spends any time with the children, whereas some of them give adequate amount of time to each other, spends time with their children and plays with them. There are also families which focuses entirely on increasing the material prosperity and bank balance, but there are also families which gives enough freedom and encouragement to children to follow their passion and interest, also which occasionally travels to different places and enjoys nature. However, almost all of them feel that this school offers great amount of freedom to children and adapts a different approach to education itself.

Sheetal, a parent of a student from Ashram School feels very delighted about the school. She says,

"I am very satisfied about this school. They take care of the children very much. Not only studies, but they also give importance to other activities. As long as my son is here I need not care about his wellbeing, because I completely have faith in Mother and this school."

Another parent from West Bengal has shifted to Pondicherry for the sake of her children's education and she says,

"We really like this school so much. We waited for three years to get admission in this school because the way they teach here is very different and interesting. They do not give any pressure for the children. Children get a lot of freedom."

Moreover, a school of this kind does not attract everyone, for the reason that it does not conduct exams, nor gives regular certificates, and there is the absence of pressure to study. Such things generally scare parents who desire secured jobs for their children and who want their children to make money. But this school aimed to attract different set of people who can devote their time wondering about life. This school appealed to those who perceived life not in terms of only making money and blindly following the values of the society, but for those who wanted life to be different and meaningful. When Sri Aurobindo and Mother were around, parents were devotees and totally aspired for their spiritual life. Some of them left their land, property, and the

place they belonged to and settled down in the ashram to devote their time in aspiring for higher consciousness.

However, overtime the trend has changed, says, Pranati pai, Editor of the Golden Chain magazine. For her,

“In earlier days, parents were devotees and most of them stayed here and served in ashram. They knew what the school served for, but these days many of the parents are from outside, and some of them have no clear idea about Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s teachings. They just feel that the school is good”.

Parents do not fully grasp the essential values the school is standing for. Therefore, the difference of values arises at home and school. School do not want to emphasize on career oriented education, but it may be different at home. Parents may want their children to choose the subjects which are more appealing, profitable for their career. Such conflicts arise and the children may get confused in between, as Meena di, in pottery department says that,

“Earlier, parents who stayed back were mostly spiritually inspired. They completely were in line with the school’s philosophy. So, for the children there was hardly any conflict of values between home and school.”

One of the ex-students and teacher (Atma) also feels that the situation was very different earlier. He says that,

“The parents did not bother much and they really left the children on the basis of the values of this school. Even the students were not pressured to do something. Education was taken lightly. He says that we learnt and also had fun. But nowadays, kids are not like that and it is mainly because of parents. They aspire something else for their children which is not in line with school values. They motivate their children to do academically good, so the students alter their preferences.”

That was the reason why Mother felt that, children should be kept away from parents, as they can influence children against the values of school. So, earlier most of the children stayed in the hostel itself. Mother strictly didn’t allow parents to visit very often. Even during holidays, they stayed back in the hostel itself. So, to those children ashram was their home. Hardly there was any Television, movies, and internet, but

from 80's onwards, parents began to stay close to their children in Pondicherry. Then, things started to change. Sunayana di, Golden Chain Editor, feels that,

“When they get to stay with parents, automatically the children are going to live in two different worlds with two different value systems. It is not only family influence but also internet, movies, TV... Parents being parents, even though they feel the spiritual importance they tend to emphasize on career, job... This gets on into the child's head. Earlier we used to enjoy physical education but now some students are asking “How is it going to help in getting a job?” Earlier education was considered for life. We used to repeat the prayer (not for a job) every day and it still lives in us. Nowadays the emphasis is more on academics and intellectual development rather than spiritual development”.

But, why was Mother antagonistic towards family intervention? Why is the gap manifold between the Ashram school and the present set of parents? As we know, family is a complex institution; it provides care and support, but it also forces its values on the children without much thought, and it restricts their freedom in various ways. Moreover, insecurities have increased manifold in modern days. This is evident when one of the parents shared her anxiety regarding her child's future.

“I am understand that my son is getting good education in this school, but I am not sure of what he is going to do in his career. He is interested in music, arts and also science. But he is not clear about what he wants to become in the future. I want him to take science seriously, but he keeps changing his interest. I am bit worried.”

Another parent finds problem with the teachers of higher class,

“Both of my children are studying in this school. No doubt this school is really different. They really enjoy studying here, as they compare with the children of the other school who are constantly under pressure to perform and compete. But as they move to higher classes, this school lags behind, as the teachers are not fully trained in the subjects. Teachers, here, do not receive any salary. Therefore, the quality of teaching decreases. They should appoint young teachers who are well trained in certain subjects. Because higher classes needs more qualified teachers as the syllabus and concepts also increases.”

Though all the parents were initially aware of the philosophies of the school, they still find it difficult to come in terms with its curriculum and pedagogy completely. As far as, younger classes are concerned, parents are welcoming their innovative curriculum and relaxed atmosphere. But as they move to the higher classes, they get anxious and

doubts tend to arise, whether such a curriculum would help their children get a job or find a career. Does it mean that in higher classes, no matter it is innovative or not, it has to prepare children for their career? Otherwise, the curriculum would be considered “inadequate” and teachers who believe in alternative pedagogy as “inefficient”. However, if this school has to adjust itself to the fears of these parents, which means a serious defeat to their alternative project itself.

However, in this context, parents’ anxiety cannot be easily generalized, because every home varies in the way it functions, depending on the economic status, occupation, and understanding of life, inter-personal relations and leisure. Because, the parents of Ashram school students are of mixed group. But, generally, the gap between the aspiration of the school and parents has increased over time. This could be because, not only the parents of Ashram school students, but nowadays, most parents are very protective of their children and want to enter into every bit of their time. They organize everything for the child, as they return from the school they have various types of activities lined up for them. Parents have become obsessed with the development of the child. From the morning till they get down to the bed, their schedule is prepared. They don’t get time for their own. When some of the teachers remarked that their parents in those days used to leave them without much attention, it didn’t bring me any surprise. I remember my grandmother’s remark on how they used to play freely without much surveillance and supervision. When my mom and grandmother share their school experiences, it looked like growing up was not too serious a business and for their insecurities, the parents were not dependent on their child’s school attendance or his/her getting degrees.

Therefore, family is not a sacrosanct institution. All that a family aspires for a child cannot be left unquestioned. It has to be seen critically. This goes true for the school as well. Ashram school should take a step forward to question the values and practices of the family. They cannot be left untouched. Questioning might disturb the set patterns, yet we cannot avoid it. For instance, without knowing the interest of the child, parents may force their views and ideas. Therefore, time and again, the values on which the family is based have to be revisited, relooked and questioned. Schools of this kind, instead of keeping themselves isolated from the parents, should constantly involve them in a dialogue and take them along.

Parents are Kept Far

Schools in general keep the parents away, except for the day of admission, for payment of fees and may be, a few times for giving specific instructions to the parents about their children. Parents in these schools are seen as outsiders, intruders into the affairs of the school. Sheetal, one of the parents complains about the Ashram School that,

“There is hardly any parent’s meeting, may be, once in a year or two and that too only about physical education regarding his behavior and uniform.”

Parents have no rights to ask on what happens inside the school and to intervene. Especially in Ashram school which believes that the children should be kept away from the family as much as possible, parents’ interference is looked down. Sheetal feels that the school do not emphasize any family values. She further adds,

“This school does not emphasize on family values. So right from the beginning, I made it a point that we spend some time together, that he(her son) takes care of parents, grandparents and relatives. He is occupied with the school activities, he hardly gets time to spend with family, so at least we have dinner together and makes sure he spends some time with the family.”

In the midst of nature, where trees spread everywhere and there are beautiful mountains around, Sholai school gives enough freedom for the children to explore, learn and wonder. But, all the experiences that the school offers are reserved only for the students. Parents have no share in them. They can visit their child only once in a few months on a weekend, or on their children’s birthdays, and when they come to drop and pick up their children for vacations. Some of the parents are not even aware of the ideology on which the school got established and grew. One of the parents mentioned that his main reason for putting his son in this school is English. He is unaware of the other important aspects the school believes in. He says that,

“One of the important reasons I feel is, this school prepares them to speak good English. Though other schools claim themselves to be English medium, they don’t train student well in English. Whereas, here, my son speaks in English very fluently. It is very important for him to master the language to get a good job outside”.

At this juncture, it is important to ponder on the lines in which the schools keep the child's family aside. A child is not only influenced by the schools through teachers and books, but they are also related to family, relatives and friends. They come from there and that cannot be ignored. Why are these schools not taking up the responsibility of educating parents? Why don't they give them a chance to see life again, to retouch the books, to wonder about nature and to rethink on the values of the society?

Parents line outside the Ashram school gate to take their children home, they can't easily enter the school gate. Boundaries are clear and dividing. They know that school is good for children, the way they teach, impersonal interactions that happen and the freedom they give, but those are only for the child. Ashram values do not interact with parents at any level. Parents are kept far, in dark, and anything that happens in the school is generally kept out of bounds from the parents. This attitude has furthered the gap between the school, parents and children.

As a result, children struggle between school and family. They find it difficult to cope with the differing values. School teaches them something, but parents believe in something else. Children cannot avoid both as they are physically, mentally and emotionally dependent. But when the school and family run separately without interacting with each other, a conflict is created in the child. It breaks the child apart and makes him/her a confused individual.

One of the students, Aditi says,

"Parents have no clue of what's happening at school. And schools have no idea about our parents. I feel that, there should be a collaboration between parents and teachers, and between students and administration so that the values are clarified and does not conflict much".

If we look at it from another angle, from the parent's perspective- in an adult life, once you get a job and build a family, the learning almost stops. Books don't interest and provoke adults. They get absorbed in the everyday mundane life. What they have learnt in schools and what they are doing now has no connection, except for finding a job. Their children learn and grow and parents have no connection to it, except in the case of supporting them financially. But their own growth, no one cares, except

themselves, and that too with all the complications they are engulfed in, there is less scope for them to wonder at life freshly. Schools just give up their hope on parents. Only rules, bills, instructions and report cards speak to them. There are no meaningful discussions that a school offers parents, except for the invitation for an annual day or a sports day. Parents just become drivers to pick up and drop their children. This is so because, parents are not aspiring to relearn, and at the same time, the schools do not offer them any scope for such learning. As a result, children suffer the contradiction. However, these alternative schools should provide conducive platform for the parents to get involved with the educational philosophy and its process. Moreover, unless these parents are taken along, these schools are letting the gap grow, and therefore, the parents, children and schools are bound to misunderstand each other. Overall, it is going to affect the course of resistance.

5.3. Changing Teachers' Role: A Welcome Change or a Cause of Concern?

Philosopher-teachers on the decline

Teachers in the Ashram School are definitely different from most teachers of mainstream schools. With the freedom and support they receive, the classes become interesting and meaningful. But, there is a worry among some of the teachers and parents. They worry about the older teachers who are retiring from work due to age. The older teachers have got direct guidance from the Mother, as she was there to help them understand the nuances of teaching. Teacher, to Mother was a 'yogi'. For her, teaching is more than a profession; it is a sadhana. One of the ex-students and currently, the editor of Golden Chain magazine, Sunayana di, feels shocked whenever an elder teacher expires. She says,

“In the next 10, 20 years when the rest of older generation expires, we don't know what to do. No one can replace them. They are very caring and friendly”.

One of the teachers, as well as alumnus of the school feels, that the steady decline of teachers who were directly associated with Mother is causing the problem the school faces now.. She says,

“In those days, the school had very good teachers. They were more spiritually oriented and the way they took classes was very different. They were more than parents to us. They took care of us very well. I cannot forget some of the teachers from whom I got inspiration. New teachers are academically sounder. But they miss something which the older teachers had.”

What was special about the older teachers in the Ashram school? Because, Mother wanted the teachers to be yogis, she felt the best teacher was the one who gifts you the ‘joy of learning’. She chose teachers not based on their qualification, but based on their intent and aspiration. She gave them direction and supported them with her insights, experience and love. But these days they suffer her absence. Some of the elder teachers still carry with them the guidance she gave. Ex-students and parents have a lot of respect for these teachers.

While narrating her first class with the drawing teacher, Sunayana di’s eyes were filled with tears of gratitude. She remembers when her teacher showed them to read Mother’s quote “it is through beauty, divine manifests in the physical” and asked them to think about it until the next class, before even letting them touch the paper and pencil. He began the next class with a discussion on it and he made them understand that

“Divine is manifesting in beauty, which means beauty is divine. If only you understand this, art can be appreciated, not simply by drawing leaf and flowers with perfect shape but by trying to see divine in it”.

She feels it is really hard to get such teachers these days. Not just her, some of the present teachers recollect their teachers who made learning a beautiful and different experience for them. They worry that such traits are rare to find with the newly appointed teachers. They feel that, the change in school’s character is because of the new teachers who are not very familiar with the philosophy of the school.

One of the parents as well as ex-student of the schools feels,

“The new teachers are preparing children for career, they do not have good grasp of the philosophy.”

An art teacher in the school also feels disturbed with the new teachers. She says,

“The senior teachers are simpler, caring and deeply drawn by their inner call. It is not a profession for them, rather it is a sadhana. But

the new teachers are not aware of the fundamental principles on which this school was founded. I am worried that this school would lose its essence without senior teachers.”

But, why is there a negativity towards new teachers? Because, they are more oriented towards academics than other activities. So, the difference between work and play has become more evident. There is a risk in it, for children may start looking at life fragmentarily, isolating oneself from what is being learnt. Also, a teacher who is not tuned to look at oneself as an important subject of enquiry, can make the children’s perspective of life superficial, a perspective that is more oriented towards the outside world. The inner world may remain unexplored and hence, disturbed. Also, the general trend in the education system and the expectations of the society do tend to influence the deeper intention of the teachers. As many of these teachers are themselves the product of mainstream schools, therefore, the mainstream values do enter their consciousness and affect their teaching space.

While on one hand, the legacy of senior teachers is remembered and cherished, students on the other hand feel that the older teachers are not up to date with present situations and therefore, they don’t understand the younger generation. The generation gap has triggered certain issues that are very apparent and significant. One of the students in the senior class feels the need for young teachers in the school,

“Because they (senior teachers) are quite old and most of them have been staying in the ashram itself, they are unaware of what is happening outside. So, we want more young teachers.”

Another student also shared similar view,

“Many of our teachers are not up to date. Because they are old, they do not to know what young people want. They do not understand the younger generation. They always feel that we also need to become like them. They don’t know our interests, our likes and dislikes. So, we want young teachers.”

Not only students but also some of the parents feel the need for young teachers as they would be aware of the present situation and understand the minds of the younger generation. One of the parents feels good about this school except for the fact that they don’t have enough trained young teachers in the main school. She feels the reason for not having competent teachers is because the school does not pay any

salary to the teachers. Their needs of course, are taken care of. Therefore, the quality of the teachers, she feels is not great.

One more parent says,

“Old teachers do not understand the present society. They think that their time was the best and the present society is very bad. Therefore, they reject change or anything new. They want to continue the same values. But I feel, young teachers understand the present generation students better than the older ones.”

But, why a certain kind of aversion towards older teachers arise among some children and parents? Definitely, older teachers are neither exposed to modern technology, nor do they have any formal qualification for teaching a particular subject. This may, certainly, put down some children as well as parents, if they are only looking at teachers as mere giver of information. For them, these teachers may look “inefficient”. Nevertheless, they are simple and interested in understanding the deeper meaning of life. Some of them were chosen by Mother based on their aspiration and interest towards life as a whole. Certainly, a teacher need to keep himself/herself up to date with the subject and the affairs of the world, otherwise, they may miss connecting with the younger generation. At the same time, merely updating information would not make a teacher efficient, he/she needs to be sensitive, caring and constantly evolving.

However, teachers’ search for inner meaning and their approach do not touch some parents who are aspiring a materialistic lifestyle for their children. They expect teachers to be well “trained” and “qualified” in a particular subject, but such a teacher may not be interested in philosophy of life and therefore, may not evoke inner sensibilities among the students. Whereas, a teacher who is interested in philosophy may not be well informed about the subject, but he/she can show something deeper about life than merely giving information to the children. But, if this school does not respond to this crisis, sooner or later, the increasing pressure to replace philosopher-teachers with trained professionals would take away the deeper essence of the school and the resistance is bound to get diluted and tinted. If that continues, this school also has the danger of becoming like any other mainstream school with oppressive values and practices.

Teacher's Fear of Technology

Children also feel that the teachers fear the exposure of technology to students. Most of the teachers see technology as something to be avoided and kept afar. The minimum use of technologies at school creates a gap, rather a tension between the students and teachers. As a result, children use all sorts of secretive ways to access internet to access information, download songs and movies.

One of the students in Knowledge says,

“Technologically, our school is outdated. Teachers do not know how to access internet and moreover, they don't allow us to use it as well. We cannot use internet and mobile phones for anything. They don't understand our interest. Therefore, we secretly browse for some information and updation, and sometimes we also download songs and movies.”

However, some of the teachers are also of the opinion, that the school should relax its rules to use technology more frequently than now and make it accessible for the students.

One of the teachers feel,

“Our students are not allowed to watch movies, go to restaurants and use internet. But these rules restrict the children. The school should relax some of these rules.”

But, why do teachers of Ashram school fear of technology? Actually, technology is something that we cannot avoid. It has entered our doorsteps even if we want to avoid. It is not all bad, maybe it can teach the concepts to students better than a teacher's lecture. Information about anything can be had with just a click of button. Added to the lecture, using technological devices can make the subject more interesting. With attractive visuals and interesting narration, numerous videos on every subject with detailed explanations are available in the internet. Therefore, students seem to like young teachers who understand the benefit of technology and does not stereotype the students' craving for it.

One of the students on AEVP says,

“Young teachers understand us better. They also know the benefit of modern technology. We relate to them more than the old teachers.”

Neither blaming the older teachers nor appreciating the younger teachers would help us. But, it definitely brings the issue to the front and responsibility lies on both. The world has changed and it is difficult to avoid technology. Teachers can't get away with complaining about the technology nor is it right to restrict the students. Even if the teachers start using technologies in the classroom and allow children to access them freely also invites a critical question. Internet can teach academic concepts better, however, with enormous amount of information which can be downloaded and studied, is it still possible for the teacher to connect to students and explore with them the meaning of available knowledge and our relation to it? Will the school be ready for such a venture?

At this juncture, it is also important to relook at the role of teachers and ask serious questions. With various technologies available at hand and numerous possibilities of accessing information present, what could be the role of teachers in classrooms in the present days? In this context, one of the teacher's view was very insightful and thought provoking. She said that

“Over the next ten years, the role of teachers in schools is going to change. Now that everything is available in the internet, what is expected out of a teacher is not the same information, no more repetition and explanation. It would be better if the teachers can give the children what the computers cannot provide- love, sensitivity, support, forgiveness, listening and caring... computer cannot give these things, but a teacher can make these things available”.

Generally, schools are not the place for discussing personal problems and issues. Teachers don't bring their fears and insecurities to discuss in class, neither students have any healthy platform to understand their desires, anxieties and confusions. Even their passion stays out of school boundaries. Things that cannot be discussed at home, personal solutions that cannot be found in the internet, difficulties with peers and all these generally bury inside their heart. Attraction to opposite sex that develops in adolescence, burning desires, confusions and pain are generally ignored and dismissed by the teachers even in these schools baring few. Brushing aside these life issues, we study about plants, animals, physical properties and what not.

An English teacher in the main school says,

“School should not only teach them subjects, which are any way available on the internet. We should discuss openly some issues related

to fear, attraction, anger, etc. Teachers should help children explore these things as well. Otherwise they will grow to be immature.”

Also, this leads us to the next question- will the teachers in Ashram school be ready to open up their world of fears, desires, conflicts and aspirations and connect meaningfully to the children’s world of disappointments, hurt, doubts, passion and love? With the complexity of the issues raised, it is important to relook, critically understand and alter the role of teachers, for, the children need not only the knowledge, but a friend, a trusting heart, caring hands and loving souls.

Teachers Do Not Stay for Long

Teacher becomes a friend and at times a mentor, a father or a mother especially when they get to share the living space in a school like Sholai. Classes with minimum strength, close conversations and discussions leaves a lot of scope for such possibilities to happen. Teachers and students becomes close and friendly that sometimes it becomes difficult to adapt to new teachers. This problem is more apparent at Sholai School, as most of the teachers do not stay for a long period. Within a year or two they leave the school. This has become a common feature of this school. Generally, the students find it difficult to adapt to new teachers after establishing a good amount of rapport with the old one.

Classes are not held mechanically in Sholai, teachers explore with students together, laugh and wonder. The bond that builds among them is not authoritative, but something that has trust and care. It is not unnatural to spot teachers having friendly conversations with students over the dining hall, or in the fields or even in the class. They get to know their interests, strengths and weakness and fears. Over time the bond becomes stronger with some teachers. As they get to interact with the students at different occasions, it becomes easy for them to conduct their classes. Teachers, by knowing the students’ interests, their likes and fears, have a greater chance to make the class more meaningful. Knowing that a student is interested in trekking and travelling, teacher brings a related reference to the student’s interest while teaching a topic. Therefore, the student becomes more attentive and interested.

Less number of students and close interactions in the classroom help the teachers to understand the students better. The knowledge, ability, interest and intelligence of

students does not have to be found only in the examinations. It unfolds in the classroom and outside of the classroom every day. It becomes easy for the teachers to organize their syllabus and the related activities. But all these bonding disappoints them when the teacher leaves the school. It has become a regular thing for the teachers here to discontinue the school after a year, on an average and sometimes even after six months. However, the close bonding and relationship cannot be made in a day or two, it takes a long period of time to establish the harmony with students. One of the students in New Wings recalls an ex-science teacher who used to teach interestingly. He says,

“He was really good in class, in fact he was like a friend. But he left last year. I miss him so much.”

But, why do teachers leave the school within a short period of time? Is there some problem with the management? Surprisingly, one of the volunteers who decided to leave the school, says,

“There are some politics in the school office. The office in charge plays tricks with staffs and sometimes with the students as well. She does not allow any staff to stay for long, except for one or two who have been here for several years. And I think the principal blindly listens to her. This is not right. This upsets me.”

Apparently, few teachers also shared similar views. Though the school principal claims this school to be democratic in many fronts, there seems to be some hierarchy and conspiracy, which is dividing the staffs and therefore, their decision to quit the school arises. However, on the other hand, the issue gets more complex when the teachers themselves come to this school already predecided for a short period. English teacher Malika - who has taught for a year and who has now decided to leave the school next month- says that, she wants to explore other options. She added,

“This is really a lovely place, but I can’t be here for a long period. I wanted to teach here only for a year. I want to explore other places as well.”

This is the case with some other teachers who have also decided to leave the school at the end of this academic session. But, why is this so?

Generally, people get bored in a place or with things after a long period of stay or even a repeated activity may put them down. They want new experiences and they

don't want to keep the possibilities closed. Most of the teachers who work here are young and active, and they do not want to stay with the same job for a long period of time. They want to explore and experience at different places. This has become a trend among the young teachers. When I revisited the school after two years in 2016, I found only three teachers who stayed back among the initial twelve, and the rest of them are new. The impermanency of teachers in the school leave the students with a sense of disappointment. As every teacher's method of teaching and his outlook on life differs, their approach with students differs. It takes a while to know each other. But that doesn't seem to matter much for the teachers. Looking for a high paid job, a city life attracts them as well. A school situated in a remote village becomes a place of burden. Silence in modern life is a burden.

Sometimes children like the fact of an existing teacher leaving because of the expectation that they may get a better teacher. If a teacher is not child-friendly and not creative enough to handle the children, this short time basis (three month trial period for the staffs) helps the school to find a better alternative. Children get to meet a variety of teachers with different interests, values and dreams. They get adopted. This throws different possibilities for the children to grow in various aspects. Some of the students were very unhappy with a teacher, as he was very strict and rude. They wished that he leaves and a new teacher comes. One student said,

“He is very rude with all of us. He does not know what he is teaching and he expects us to study well. He does not understand the children's mind. He expects us to always behave like adults. We don't like him. We hate his classes. I wish he leaves this school.”

Moreover, Sholai School does not have the facility to provide all sorts of avenues. It mostly depends on the competency of the teacher. If the teacher leaves, then it becomes difficult for the children and the school at large. It does not have a professional physical education trainer, or a Arts and craft teacher or even a music teacher. As the teachers do not stay in these schools for long, it becomes difficult for the school to have a steady character.

One of the students was interested in medicine, but the school does not have competent teachers to address his interest. It becomes difficult for the student to pursue there. One of the A level students has learnt flute from a teacher, but as the teacher left the school, she is at a loss. A new teacher joined the school from

California, he is handling few subjects along with the guitar class. Students will learn guitar as long as he is there. Children learn football as long as Math teacher - who happens to be a footballer - is there. Even the options for subjects of the higher classes are available according to the expertise of the teachers available. Students feel incomplete as they don't get to learn subjects of their interest completely.

Can we blame this entirely on the teachers who are leaving? Or must the school too take responsibility and look at the reasons that are making the teachers to leave? Nevertheless, the school principal need to address this issue seriously and resolve it as quickly as possible, for it is necessary to retain creative and enthusiastic teachers to continue the spirit of alternative curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, teachers also should reflect on their intentions, meaning and purpose of their vocation, because it is also essential for them to develop deeper and long lasting bond with the students to take forward the resistance.

Increased Load on Teachers

Sholai School is more like a community. Teachers' responsibilities and duties do not start at 9am and stop at 5pm. Their work do not only cover academic sessions, but generally it spreads almost across the day, and it includes taking care of the students in school and being in charge of the hostels, occasional cooking, sometimes driving, farming and repair works. It is unlike other schools where teachers take off after the school and has no relation to the school nor the children until the next day. But at Sholai it is not so, they have to get involved in many activities.

One of the teachers says,

“I liked Sholai because it gives scope to learn many things. I used to get involved in various activities like teaching, gardening, sports and building. This school gives a lot of opportunity to learn different things. I enjoy here so much.”

Being in a community demands attention in different directions. This definitely challenges the regular notion of a teacher who is expected only to engage with academics. If a child has any personal problems, in the regular schools, teachers are not necessarily responsible, and they should be mainly concerned about what is being taught in the classroom. As the teachers move out of the school, they can forget and

leave behind all the related things. They don't have to carry any responsibility home. School is different and their personal life is entirely different.

However, in this school, teachers play a major role even outside the classrooms. Their roles differ, vary and interchange from time to time. They are teachers sometime, and sometimes they are caretakers, carpenters, and at times physical trainers and even cooks. The role of a teacher here is not so simple and straight forward, it is complex and at times complicated. These complications have created confusion in teachers regarding their roles. Though there is a possibility of transcending the mechanical and generally stereotyped role of a teacher in such a scenario, yet there seems to be some discomfort with the varieties of work they have to get involved.

One of the English teachers, Thangamma feels that,

“I don't have time for myself, I am fully occupied the whole day with school activities. I hardly get time to do things that I like. Nor do I get time to relax and enjoy.”

Informal interactions have disturbed the role, there is not much clarity to the expected roles. The expectation that teachers should take charge of various activities have added burden on them. It has put pressure on them. So, time to engage with their own interest gets minimized. They become tired by the end of the day. One of the teachers stays out of the school campus and he works only during the school time and after that he heads back to his place. He says,

“If I stay inside the school, I may not get enough time to do other things, so I stay outside and I am engaged with other activities in the village”.

As they are fully engaged throughout the day, Sunday becomes their day to relax, go out and revive for the coming week.

Moreover, to make class creative, interesting and meaningful for all the children is not an easy task either. It is not like reading out passages, then verbally explain, and write a few lines on the black board and make the children memorize. To attend to each child and teach them in different ways using various activities within a period of 45 minutes is a very taxing affair, physically and mentally. It takes off all their energy and time. One of the science teacher, Dhruv says that, it is quite challenging to

address students of different levels. Some of students are from conventional schools and they do not have their fundamentals strong. A 15-year-old boy was quite confused and he could identify square and rectangle only with great difficulty. And he further pointed out a 12-year-old who is ahead of everyone academically. He says,

“It becomes challenging when you take into account their different learning styles. Some need concrete inputs and some are good at receiving abstract information and also it gets even more complicated when you take in their varied interests in different subjects. Taking all these into account and to conduct a class in 45 minutes becomes a really challenging task. I need to prepare for each student a different activity or cue. It gets really taxing when I have to take many classes for different groups. It becomes difficult to manage even a group of 10 children in such a scenario. I have become really busy.”

This school demands a lot from the teachers. Sometimes they become dull, restless, repetitive and mechanical. They may even repeat creative activities several times mechanically for a particular topic.

Yet, it is also interesting to know the reason why some teachers want to continue in the school. It is because their day is not monotonous, they are involved in various activities apart from teaching. The informal interactions and independent work culture seem to have added some value to their experiences. One of the volunteer teachers says that, he likes the school for the variety of activities it would engage him for the day.

“I worked in a corporate office for several years. A school of this kind is a surprise to me. I like to be in such a place for some time. I can learn various things about nature and life.”

The work here is not monotonous, it in a way deconstructs the regular notion of work. The school does not want to draw a line between various tasks as academic and unacademic. Though there are respective groups working on respective areas, yet it is okay to cross the line. That makes this school special, where all works are appreciated at one level. But at another level, it has added pressure on the teachers. They enjoy this confusion and at times it disturbs them.

At this juncture it is important to ponder upon the vocation of teaching itself. Very often we believe that our education gets over with a completion of a degree or two. Once we get into the role of an employee we stop learning, except for the learning

that happens on its own. We don't intend to learn further. A teacher is only expected to teach, he is not expected to learn. He also sees his work as separate from his personal life. Therefore, his personal life and classroom are kept separate. Teacher takes a lot of time in preparing for the class and delivers his preparation in the class. His personal learning has nothing to do with this preparation. Therefore, he may feel like keeping his personal learning separate.

If there is no learning happening or there is no connection with what one is teaching and one's personal interest, then teaching appears different and mechanical. If one does not have the spirit of learning even at the age of 50 or 60, then one is sure to get bored, however noble the work may be. It becomes only a repetitive activity and the mind becomes dull. The spirit of learning is very key element in keeping the class alive. But, if the school is keen on keeping the teacher's day busy without giving him enough time to ponder on life, nature and oneself, then they are bound to become restless, tired and bored even in an alternative school. Sholai school should initiate some measure to resolve this tussle and make learning and leisure available even for the teachers. Even teachers also have to relook at their roles, for they are the ones who can bring about change in students' life.

5.4. Politics of Alternative Schools

Protecting from Outside Influence

The alternative school not only separates itself from the society by physical walls, but even mentally we can feel the separation. On a casual look, how things happen in such a school are in many ways different from how they happen in the outside world and what happens outside the school seem to not influence the school easily. But on a closer look, the lines are grey and we do find elements of the larger society in the school. A school of this kind, in cutting off itself from the mainstream society in its values and practices, seems to create an island of itself. In protecting itself from the influence of society, it seems to have made the wall of separation thicker and the divisions more apparent. Except for issues like environmental problems and wildlife conservation, other issues like political and religious battles, social inequalities, family disputes stay out of sight. School seems to be neutral to these, separating itself emotionally from the issues that concern the society at large. They are merely

discussed, but it has remained itself majorly passive by not acting on it. These things may occur outside, but the school seems to have no role in it.

But, society is not peaceful, it is filled with problems from different corners. And definitely in such a society, we need a place where we can stay without any direct social, political, religious or economic influences and can see life freely, freshly and critically. Alternative school, in this sense seem to keep itself off from most kinds of influences. Naturally, such an atmosphere really protects one's mind, gives it a break from the constant influence and weight of the society in every angle. It helps us to ponder about our life freshly, and also to rethink, relook and refresh our views, ideas and knowledge.

However, such a process also seems to have separated alternative school from the rest of the world. It has become an island in itself. More so, when such a school stands against some of the strongly established values and practices of the society, it makes itself a cocoon, in an attempt to 'protect' itself from the outside influences. Ashram school says strict "no" to movies, restaurants, audio & video CDs, and internet. They don't allow children to make use of these. Children are even expected to spend their vacation in the Ashram itself. They are allowed to watch only selected movies which they play in Ashram every Saturday. It is also not easy to take leave from school. One of the students was feeling bad that she won't be able to make it for her sister's marriage in Delhi next month. They can't take leave and go out of station. Only when they are sick, they are given leave and are expected to stay at home. Students feel that the school is very rigid about certain rules, which were made more than 50 years ago when Mother was there. The school wants to continue the same way even now.

One of the students from Knowledge feels,

"The rules need to be changed regarding holidays, going out, eating out, watching movies and internet. They (school management) don't realize that the world is changing. Especially, these older teachers are so fixed about some rules. I feel young teachers who have seen the outside world are able to look at such rules in a better way. When we go for vacation in November, we are anyways going to go out, watch movies, eat outside, so why should they enforce these rules strictly. They feel that outside influence is very bad, but they don't understand that it is uncontrollable. It is there everywhere."

One of the staff members adds,

“The students get one-and-a-half month long vacation, but they are encouraged to be engaged with Ashram activities. Though it is not compulsory, even the hostellers are expected to stay back. Because, Mother felt that their interaction with the outer world may divert or corrupt their mind.”

We can definitely sympathize with students’ longing for freedom – a freedom to do anything they want. But we have to acknowledge the danger in this unbridled freedom as well. It is true that most of the commercial movies are filled with vulgarity, discrimination and violence. Though they entertain, they also corrupt our mind, especially young minds. Even casual magazines, TV and internet are not any exceptions. They are filled with gossip, implicit fears and mindless commercial advertisements. The ones who are exposed can’t remain unaffected, just like the air we breathe from outside, these things do enter our consciousness. While talking about the importance of Right Education, ‘Atmananda’ (Blauca Achlamu) in his book wrote,

“A child is far more sensitive than an adult. It is therefore important that the young should be in the company of men and women who have dedicated their lives to the supreme quest, that their pliable minds should be moulded by books of wisdom rather than by cinemas and light novels. A boy or a girl who has once deeply felt the necessity of aspiring after Truth and Enlightenment, who has been made to feel how treacherous and comparatively unimportant are wealth, name, fame, brilliant career, etc., will come back to the ideals that in youth have been engrained in him or her even though he or she should deviate from them for a time.” (Atmananda, 1983, p. 85).

It is important to keep the young children away from these influences. Yet, completely negating the outside world invites criticism. Once children from an Ashram school finish their education, they will be out in the open world, facing all that the school was trying to avoid and protect. Will completely avoiding and controlling such influences help them, when they face it? As long as they are in the school they will be protected, but as they come out, then what? Does the school evoke required critical intelligence in the children to face such influences? And when they face them, what are they expected to do? But, Ashram school by completely rejecting such influences, does not adequately educate the children about it. As a result, they may have no idea to handle them or they might end up rejecting them mechanically

and superficially. Definitely, there seems to be a discomfort with the number of movies and the kind of ideas they propagate. Yet one cannot avoid them, for they are there everywhere. Even some of the teachers feel the need for relaxing the rules.

One of the teachers of a senior class remarks,

“There are some rules that need to be changed, like students are not allowed to watch movies. They are not allowed to buy CDs or DVDs. So, they download it from the internet.”

Whereas another teacher feels other way round,

“The quality of the school is diluted because of the large number of fringe population and many of them are those who studied in ashram school and gone outside and came back to put their children in the ashram school. They did not only bring their children along with them, but also the values of outside world and technology.”

Added to this, is the repulsion created by the expectations of the teachers over the students. Earlier, students used to stay back in the ashram itself after the completion of their education, but nowadays, they move out in search of higher studies and occupation. That teachers expect them to serve in the ashram itself and to follow the belief system has become problematic.

One of the teachers, Lipi di says,

“These days it is very difficult to see children staying back in Ashram after studies. They are going outside.”

The general feeling of the Ashram is that, ‘anything outside is not good and desirable’, but the younger generation resists this attitude. They don’t want to stay back in the ashram. They want to go out and explore. Though the school management does not restrict any student from moving out, this expectation has created some tension in the school. Over time, the teachers have adapted to the fact that most students would enter the outside world.

It is important to ponder at this moment the protective nature of the school. By keeping all the possible negative and dangerous influences on the children away from schools, is this school not handicapping the students in handling these things, as they move out? Won’t they become incapable of judging what is right and what is wrong for themselves? By completely avoiding these influences, they may never get to

understand them. For example, when a child is kept away from video games on purpose, most often she may mindlessly overplay those games as soon as she gets access to them. She will rarely have a chance to understand the negative effects of videogames as she was never allowed to think through.

It is not necessary that this school play every movie that comes in the market, or let children search internet for every answer, or have television in every class, that is definitely not what is suggested. Maybe a creative way of engaging with these things can bring some harmony. We cannot avoid TV, movies, mobile, internet with the development of technology; they are abundantly present. In this present age, it is not easy to bypass these things, but we need to develop an intelligent way of relating to them, to engage with them and see for oneself its trajectories, problems and even the benefits.

Besides, technology is not dangerous by nature. It is the way we use it that makes it dangerous or otherwise. Sometimes, a movie may surprise children with a good meaningful story or internet might present them abundant and diverse information about an unexplored topic. These instances might open up new learning possibilities. One does not have to be always dependent on the teacher or a book to get an answer, sometimes a click of the mouse will give what is needed. A mobile will connect us to our beloved ones or in case of an emergency, say when we are lost in dark in an unknown place, which is more helpful? A book or a mobile? Technology cannot be blacklisted completely. Nevertheless, school need to develop children's intelligence to use it, analyze it, keep it in its proper place or altogether reject it when not required.

However, Ashram school has become a world in itself. They have disconnected themselves from the rest of the world. Though what children learn is about the world and society, there is a clear distance between the school and the society. As long as the children are in school, they are protected from all other supposedly 'negative' influences. Though this protection has its place, but this may damage their intelligence and handicap them as they enter the world after school.

Moreover, by completely putting the blame on technology, we may ignore the role of a teacher, her understanding and intervention. It is true that technology has increased manifold and has entered every sphere of our life, from the huge machines to the

gadgets that occupy our hands. The schools no more need to impart information; television, internet and books can do the job better than teachers. But at this point when technology stands at its peak, it is important to develop other faculties that a computer or a mobile can't give. At this point I am reminded of a teacher who feels that in many cases students are much more informed than teachers, so obviously they will feel bored. He says,

“Let the children refer to books, internet, and what not to collect information, but let the teacher help them to process that information. Why waste time on giving information in a class, but guide them to think and process this information and ultimately, they will learn what is right and wrong”.

May be that would make the children more active, independent and confident. Other teachers of Ashram school also need to rethink on their role as teachers, in a technologically occupied and information loaded world. Definitely, not by negating the use of technology, but through building a healthy relationship with it. Even students should be made to reflect on the implications of technological development and its obsessive need. Without such a healthy dialogue, children would continue to misuse technology and the gap between them and the teachers would continue to increase. As a result, the school would lose its integrity and therefore, it would lose its strength to resist the mainstream ideology.

Risk of an unstable curriculum

A teacher in Sholaischool does not have to memorise the syllabus, follow the textbooks, nor repeat the activities year after year. They have freedom in what they want to teach and how they want to teach. They don't mind creating new activities and enriching the syllabus. Sholai school does not force the teachers to follow a pattern, they are left free to discover their way of teaching. Although higher classes follows IGCSE syllabus, younger classes do not have a fixed syllabus to suffocate teachers' freedom and intelligence. It trusts teachers' creativity and intelligence. It provides enough space to explore new possibilities. They have the power to question the syllabus, activities and the sequence.

However, there is a danger to this freedom; it may mislead us and takes us nowhere. Teachers from different backgrounds, orientations and different levels of intelligence

may go in contradictory to the purpose of the school, confuse the children and may disorient the journey. There are endless ways to teach a topic or a concept creatively, but one should ask “Is it the purpose of education to merely allow a variety of ways to teach?” We need to pause and wonder. Multiplication or division can be taught in thousand different ways to keep the class interesting and engaged, but is it essential to do so? And will such creative engagement alone be enough to make the child intelligent to understand life and face it? Will it ensure his knowledge of self and the world? Will it be of any way help in finding the meaning and purpose of life? The answers are not so simple.

Definitely, Sholai School conducts the classes in a more meaningful, entertaining and interesting manner than a normal mainstream school. It also provides a lot of freedom to the children and teachers. But, we need to ask, is this enough? Some of the teachers, find the syllabus for the primary not being properly structured and some feel it is necessary for them to have a structure at this level. One of the teacher says,

“The syllabus is not very structured. We can follow anything we want. It gives a lot of freedom to explore, but this vagueness creates a lot of confusion. Also, the teachers keep changing, so the syllabus also changes accordingly. This is a serious problem in this school.”

Even the so-called creative activities can become routine, mechanical, and lifeless when they become repetitive, purposeless and isolating in nature. When a Math topic does not match with Science and the Science activity does not relate to our everyday life or a Social Science class does not alter the way we look at life, then the activity, or the class becomes isolated, meaningless and has very limited significance. Our mind becomes fragmented when it does not interconnect, it rather isolates us from everything, even from life itself. The child may be kept engaged in some activity or the other, yet the mind may remain fragmented and divided. As J. Krishnamurti says,

“We may be highly educated, but if we are without deep integration of thought and feeling, our lives are incomplete, contradictory and torn with many fears; and as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook on life, it has very little significance”(Krishnamurti J. , 1992, p. 11).

We may wonder what can therefore unite everything and make the child intelligent enough to face life? Can a fixed syllabus bring about this change? Can we leave all the responsibility on a fixed syllabus? There is a danger here too. Teachers may repeat

the syllabus mindlessly. And their mind may become dull as the syllabus is already given. It does not make them reflective and creative. Such a scenario may bring a certain amount of distance between the teacher and what is being taught, as the teacher is not involved in developing the syllabus. Whereas, Sholaischool gives freedom to the teachers to decide on pedagogy and syllabus. But the school faces a dilemma here. Though the school gives enough freedom for a creative intelligent teacher to make learning more meaningful for children, there might also come a scenario where a teacher with limited imagination and less creative spirit can make the learning process dull and mechanical.

But then, it leads to the next question- with the freedom teachers have in Sholai school, how do these they decide on the content of the curriculum? As life is filled with possibilities, anything about it can be studied and efforts can be made to understand its various aspects. Over the ages, scientific discoveries, socio-cultural development and technological innovations have opened up various possibilities for man to ponder upon. From the smallest of the smallest to the largest of the largest, anything can be made into a subject of study. But it is also necessary to wonder, whether it is possible to learn about everything around us? Though knowledge of life to a great degree improve our quality of living materially, is it necessary that we know about everything? If 'yes' is the answer, then schools in general are doing the right thing by stuffing the curriculum with lot of information, by constantly filling up the child's mind with knowledge. But can we ever feel that we have learnt about everything? And is it humanly possible to learn everything about the world and the universe? And is not new knowledge being constantly added to the existing knowledge? Schools are bound to fail if they have 'knowledge of everything' as the purpose of education.

But, to remind ourselves again, how does teachers of Sholai school decide what is to be included in the syllabus and what not? Can something be important than the other? How do we decide? Keeping aside the aspect of preparing a child for future career or job for a while, what are the important things that a child needs to learn? How simple or complicated it is to prioritize knowledge? And who has the power to decide what has to be a part of curriculum and what has to be avoided or ignored? These are the fundamental questions that the school need to grapple with, when they think of

curriculum. As we think deeply, these questions haunt us and disturb the very idea of a syllabus. As a result, school can get very scary about syllabus and leave it completely free to the teachers. In a free system, even stupidity can also be justified. But, if we avoid it, then it is no more a free system. Therefore, Sholai school needs to address this dilemma, whether to trust the intelligence of a teacher completely and leave it to him? Or, must he/she be given a direction? Where do the school let free and where to have a plan?

Too Many Activities Exhaust Interest and Creativity

Ashram School has got various activities and they almost fill the day of children. From drawing to carpentry, and from sports to music to dance and academics, the school has planned almost everything for the students. It is definitely good to have various activities for an all-round growth, but these innumerable activities have left no space for them to relax or to simply break the pattern. One of the teachers in carpentry department and who is also an alumnus says that,

“These children are into too many activities that we do not want to force or put too much pressure. When we were studying in 80s there were not these many activities. But, now these children are busy with so many activities- sports, arts, music, academics that they have very less energy to focus on pottery.”

Children as they grow, they are interested in various things and they would like to pursue on their own, but when they are already filled with too many activities, it becomes difficult to even think of their interest. One of the students AVP-6(name changed) says,

“On Sundays they should give leave completely, (there should be) no group activity. Because, now I know what I am interested in and I should get (time) to do that.”

From morning till evening, they are engaged with numerous activities planned for them, that at times it makes us wonder ‘what are they up to?’ Moreover, learning various concepts, writing, intellectual development, acquiring information, play and other creative pursuits are looked at as exclusive activities of schools. They don’t enter the world of work. Even physical activities and creative works are limited to the idea of schooling. They don’t mingle with the ‘real’ ‘serious’ work. The work that one does to ‘earn a living’ varies greatly from what one does at school. With various

activities and innovative ideas, children here do get to 'do' something rather than simply exercising their mental abilities, which is so common in most of the schools outside. But, even here the difference is established between the activities that we do as a part of the curriculum from activities that involve marketing.

Children could be doing wonderful painting work in their school time, but it is entirely different from the painting done for the sake of marketing. It could be similar work, but the intention and ideology behind both are completely different. Every society suffers this difference, for school separates learning from work. Especially, in the higher classes when they are planning for their future, taking subjects that are related to their career, why not involve them in the real work, let them earn money and also learn about it in different aspects?

Here, it is important to remember and revisit Gandhi's idea of involving children in traditional art and craft, not only as creative activities, but also as activities which would also produce money for the school. The purpose of the entire activity is not about solely earning money, but to come in terms with the market world; to learn, reflect and therefore, reform it. Unless these children are exposed themselves to the market, they are not going to gain strength to alter it. School can help them establish a creative forum to discuss, share and reflect on their experience. Such an experiential learning would help them critically understand the world of economy, than just merely studying about them intellectually. Therefore, once they pass out of the school, they would not feel lost and helpless. However, such an approach would immediately invite criticism, especially among the parents of middle class and upper class background. But, the school has to find a way to address these parents and make them understand the importance of such an approach.

Rule Oriented- No Longer Free And Casual

Rules are necessary conditions for a place to live on, when its members lose their trust, faith and love for each other. The more the rules, the more a place becomes lifeless and mechanical. It then loses its flavor and warmth. Ashram school has laid certain rules hoping that they will help the children to learn. But, the moment they have strict rules, it implies that the school has lost trust in children, in their intelligence and interest. It is important that the school have timetable, fixed syllabus

for the purpose of learning to happen, but once they make it very strict and rigid, then they have lost the ability to trust children.

Freedom and choice become limited when rules become rigid. Mielhad finished his education from Ashram school in 80s. He said that there was always a sense of fear he felt in the school atmosphere. He says,

“They call it free system, but actually it is not free. I was interested in something else but I was forced to study all subjects. I felt that why even in lower class they cannot have free system. Even in higher class it looks free but they have similar pattern as the other schools.”

Ashram School has also over time imposed rules on itself, as Atma da feels that

“those days school was more like a family, attention was given differently to different children depending on their interest. Individual was more important. But, nowadays school is bound by rules. Now parents hold administration responsible. So, the school has rules.”

He likes to take students to a lake around 5 am in morning but the school registrar says “no, the girls should not be taken.” He feels what is wrong with it. The school he feels, is afraid because they are answerable to parents. While he was studying in Knowledge he used to go for surfing and diving. And when the weather was good, he used to ask teacher and they would not hesitate. He adds,

“So we had that choice and freedom but now it is not there. Some of the teachers were very interesting and understanding. Now also they can do, but they are tied down by the rules.”

But, why rules becomes strict and restricting? Why is the school afraid to relax certain rules? It definitely impossible to run an organization without any rules. When people work together, certain rules help in smooth functioning. However, when the rules become strict and mechanical, then it tend to oppress people, for we have lost trust in them. To give an example, it is for safety reason that we keep a security man at the gate. We then feel normal, safe and cared for, but at a deeper level, it signifies that we have lost trust on each other. That somebody may attack us, may steal things or something wrong may happen. We feel sacred to let any stranger enter without permission, notice or without an identity card. Deep down we have lost trust. Hearing about constant terrorist attacks and other unpleasant incidents very often in the news, has scared our consciousness. Similarly, in the school setting, certain wrongs and

accidents would have prompted them to enforce certain rules, but these school should not lose trust with the people. Because, the rules based on fear and mistrust would eventually bind the children and teachers. Therefore, school has the relook and reconsider the rules time and again. Otherwise, alternative school, instead of providing a liberating experience, would become oppressive and eventually, disrupt the project of resistance.

Reinforcing Inequality- Expensive Fee Structure

A couple along with their three children had come to visit Sholai school. They are looking out for alternative schools to put their children in. They seem to have liked the school but they found the fees way too expensive. One of them asked, ‘Why are these schools very expensive?’ and ‘Why should education be too costly?’

Praveen’s father, a carpenter by profession, wanted to put his son who was in 6th standard in Sholaischool. Praveen was allowed for a trial period of one month in the school with boarding facility. He did not have good knowledge of English, so he felt a little isolated among others. After a month he went home and never came back to join the school. Though his father liked the school, he felt two lakhs per annum was too “expensive” to afford for his son’s education. He says,

“I liked the school very much, the nature around and the kind of education that happens here is very interesting and different from other schools. My son is also very active and I feel he will benefit from this school. But I cannot afford this much.”

The cost of primary and higher secondary education in Sholai school was Rs.2,17,000 per annum and Rs.2,47,000 per annum respectively (as on 16/4/2014) with accommodation facilities. One of the teacher informed that over the last three years, the school fess has increased substantially/steadily. This has made it even more difficult for children from middle and lower classes to imagine studying in such a school. The cost of the education in such schools puts off many genuine parents who are looking for a different learning environment for their children. One of the parents, who resigned his job in IT company from Bangalore and looking for an alternative lifestyle for himself and his family found this school very interesting. But the expensive fee structure was one of the important reasons which forced him to withdraw his son from continuing there. He said,

“We want our children to get meaningful education and myself to settle for some simple work. Hence, I left my IT job to look for an alternative simple lifestyle. Yet the expensive fees is forcing me to withdraw him from this school.”

Nevertheless, school provides scholarships for those who cannot bear the entire school fees. One of the A level students is giving only Rs. 20,000 per annum and three of the village students are giving only Rs.500 and 800 per month. Such policy makes the school more accessible for children from all social groups. Some of the children from the village are also accommodated in this school. It makes the composition of the school population very colorful. Children get the opportunity to peep into each other’s social world. However, the scholarships are valid for only one year, and the next year they have to apply freshly. Therefore, parents and children feel a little insecure to continue in the school.

One of the students who is receiving scholarship says,

“I am receiving scholarship for this year. I need to pay only Rs. 50,000 for this year. But next year I have to apply freshly for the scholarship. I may or may not get it. I don’t know. But I can’t afford full fees. It is too much for my parents to pay.”

But, why is it too expensive? Schools are meant to be a sacred place where learning happens. We feel a sense of uneasiness when a school runs like a business firm. Normal conventional lifestyle has got its own defects and as one turns towards an alternative lifestyle, beware! It comes with a huge price. Anything alternative is meaningful and desirable but it is nearly impossible for the economically backward people or even the middle-class to aspire for anything alternative. To take an example, a normal tender coconut costs Rs.15 to 20, but an organic one comes for not less than Rs.30. Same applies to vegetables, fruits, cosmetics and even the service sector has not escaped this trap. Losing hope and trust with the conventional system, people tend to look for some alternative or for a change. The change is available, but at a huge cost.

However, the school with a mission to provide innovative educational experience to children does not have to be expensive. To teach differently and make children wonder and think, schools do not have to extract so much from the parents. Because, when alternative projects become expensive, then it no more holds its sacredness.

Moreover, it reinforces inequality and maintains the hierarchical structure. Although, Sholai school with the scholarship program and admitting few students from village, tend to believe in inclusion, but with its enormous fees it is in a way maintaining the unequal order. It may put down a lot of people even before they approach the school.

Though it is difficult for the principal who has invested his entire personal property to build and maintain such a huge campus, it is still unfair to make education costly. Apart from the school fees, economy of the entire campus also depends on the coffee plantation, castor oil and pepper unit. But the farm manager and the accountant says that, “there is no profit made through those units, as they are sufficient only for paying wages for the labourers”. They also say that the major share of money to maintain the entire campus comes from the school fees. However, the school has to seriously think of finding an alternative arrangement for its sustenance and survival. So that the entire weight is not placed on the parents of the children studying in this school. Whereas, such measures will also invite genuine parents who are philosophically oriented and are otherwise not economically wealthy to participate equally in an innovative educational space. Otherwise, this school would become a legitimate place only for the economically rich and therefore, inequality gets reproduced.

5.5. Education as An Inner Journey: A Missing Link

Absence of Self Knowledge

Is education about oneself necessary? In modern education, we go on accumulating information, knowledge about the outside world, but we are hardly worried about what is happening in the mind. What one is concerned is the world outside and that is all. There is nothing wrong in that but it is never connected to one's inner world. The knowledge of our “self” is generally superficial- our family background, educational qualification, our interests, fears, past experiences and desires. Even this superficial knowledge seems to fall outside the purview of school education. It has never been a part of our school life: to know about oneself and how our mind works. One gets a feeling that this is something that is not linked to schooling. As if schools have nothing to do with it. What schools teach children about the outside world has no link

to their self-knowledge and to their personal life, except for accelerating their self-interest in jobs.

However creative, enjoyable and interesting these two alternative schools present education for children, it still looks incomplete without the component of self-knowledge and the mind. They may present the information in a very interesting way in the class, but does it draw children anywhere close to knowing themselves? Maybe that is the reason why learning has become monotonous and disconnected from oneself. Because, to live is to also ponder on the purpose of life, on what it means to relate to someone else, on why certain things happen the way they happen, on what is life and what is death, on what does it mean to lose something or someone, on where will this journey of evolution takes us to? These questions do occur to us once in a while, but only in our secret times and spaces. But the schools seem to remain alien to such concerns. While we encounter fear, loneliness, attachment, jealousy, love, pain, loss, desire, wonderment and happiness in our everyday life, why are we not bothered to take up these basic aspects of our life seriously and understand them? Very often schools regard these issues as ‘moral’ or ‘religious’, and keep them out of school curriculum.

Now that technology has improved, facts and information are easily and readily accessible to everyone. There is no need for us to remember everything. Now a handy smartphone or a laptop can tell us about everything. As the internet has reached our doorsteps, we can get unlimited information on a specific topic. Visual aids and videos make the information more interesting. If collection and retention of information is the stated end of education and internet is good enough to take care of it, then what is the role of a school?

Nevertheless, some of teachers of these schools are aware of the importance of self-knowledge. As Prakash bhai, one of the senior teachers in the Ashram school, has mentioned that spiritual change is very important. He adds,

“Spiritual component is very important for a school of this kind. Even Sri Aurobindo said no political, social and economic change can bring peace, but only the spiritual change can bring so.”

However, he is also aware that such aspects hardly become a part of their school curriculum. As he further adds,

“Here, children are given different kind of education; they also get so much freedom. There is an option in the higher classes to study about the works of Sri. Aurobindo and Mother, but it is not compulsory. Even in classes we teach them various subjects, but hardly we deal with the knowledge of the self.”

The school has taught children about the sun, its colors, its properties, its effect on earth and man, but has it ever bothered to talk about how it feels when they watch the sunset and how it brings warmth with every sunrise? Is it not rejuvenating to watch nature and wonder about it? Not just gather some facts about it. We do wonder at times, when we are close to nature or in aloneness, but is it possible to bring it up in the classroom, in the textbooks, and in the curriculum? No matter how much these schools teach children creatively about outside world, but without the knowledge of the self, won't all education become incomplete?

A teacher from Sholai school is disappointed in this respect. She says,

“we study about various things, but hardly do we know about our own self, the way our mind works. Even in this school, we hardly have such discussions.”

But, why are these schools which are influenced by the philosophers for whom the primary emphasize was about knowing oneself than presenting information, has also remained indifferent to this subject? Why are these schools not gearing enough courage to deal with these aspects as a part of the school curriculum? May be, the intention to keep the school curriculum more secular has kept these aspects of self-knowledge at a distance. Though religion has pondered on the fundamental questions of life, it definitely has also created divisions and conflict. It has created a huge damage to human life and human consciousness. Nevertheless, how can we miss the beauty of nature? It provokes us to wonder about different forms of lives, the purpose of this incredible journey, where is it going to end and from where does it start and why does it start? These are the questions that haunt us when we are amidst nature, when we visit a hill station or when we stand in the banks of a beautiful river, or while watching a dead body or while enjoying the smile of an innocent new born baby or while talking to an old man. But, sadly such an enquiry so necessary for our living has been kept out of bounds from the school.

Philosophers like Sri Aurobindo and J.Krishnamurti have talked about bringing a radical change in the education system, not just some superficial changes in school. However, merely changing the teaching strategies, textbooks, curriculum does not account for creating a better human being, but education about oneself is equally important to make it happen. This is not to suggest, “guru worship” or blind repetition of what these philosophers have said. But, this journey into the inner world may help the children know about their own thoughts, desires, fears, passions, love, greed and ecstasy. Such an education is very important in the present times when everywhere we are witnessing sorrow, misery, violence and hatred. We may know about the whole world but if this piece of mind, which is so intimate to us, which is ourselves, is not understood, then what is the point of knowing about everything else?

Even in schools like Sholai and Ashram school, such an effort is very minimal. Actually, one does not have to even bring in the aspect of religion, but the very enquiry of oneself- taking cues from our everyday life, will definitely make us more aware about ourselves. It is not to make oneself more important and unique, but understanding of this self would eventually help us to understand the rest of the human nature. These schools are reluctant because there is a fear of making it a separate cult or religious body by bringing in such aspects in the curriculum. Another possibility is that, they are not very keen in the total transformation of the individuals. All the changes and alterations could be just reactionary and superficial.

Missing Connections

Sholai school provides ample space for the children to explore the nature. However, to be with the nature and to understand them is not to reduce them merely into academic subjects. Children have to learn to embrace themselves in the presence of nature. Nevertheless, the school has to be appreciated for the kind of initiatives it has taken for preserving and maintaining the nature. The school principal’s interest in nature has made him create a sustainable living in the campus with the use of Appropriate Technologies (Solar, Micro-hydro and Bio-gas), Water Harvesting practices, Watershed Management and Organic Farming. Such an intervention is extremely significant in a society which is constantly destroying nature. This has in fact aroused students’ responsibility to protect nature. However, the connection children can possibly make with the nature does not generally go beyond the notion of

conservation. Although children do variety of activities which connects them with the nature, the moments of silence and reflective observations are generally dismissed. The school has not imagined other possibilities of exploring nature.

However, life, when it is taken in the spirit of learning about nature, becomes more rich and meaningful. Do we realize that nature already existed before even humans emerged and it has possibly evolved from nothingness to this stage? Rotation of the earth around the sun, appearance and disappearance of the moon at night, the distant stars, flowers that bloom, wind that blows, are possible without the human mind acting on it. Nature works on its own and it has been working on its own. In fact, the entity called human being has not come out of human will or of human mind. It has evolved on its own over billions of years. So, it is very significant to understand that life is more than the immediate world we are living in. We are only attempting to understand the nature, but we have nothing to do with it. Even our own body functions miraculously without us being conscious of it. The non-stop heartbeats, the air we breathe, the food that digests, complicated connections of nerves and blood streams from head to the toe do not ask for one's command. It just happens. But, obsession with the immediate world- people, situations, things - doesn't let us to see this connection to everything around. Sun, stars, trees, atoms, air...without all these we are nothing.

Thirty-five years of age, after studying in college and university, worked in between for a while, travelled to many places, now when I go back to the school books, I become more alive and rich. To learn about leaves, stones, water, stars, physical properties, atoms, etc. seems so exciting to me now. They give a different meaning to the life now. That all the things around are made up of atoms, is actually such a philosophical revelation. To know that life evolved from plants to insects to birds to animals to finally human beings is a piece of knowledge to wonder at. However, this knowledge and enquiry about nature and life is not to be stopped at schools and colleges. It is something that needs to be read, learnt, remembered, pondered at every moment of our life, for our life is not possible without these. Life encompasses all these and these are the things that gives meaning to life- not simply earn money, have family and buy a house and finally die.

This separation could be the reason for all the problems- social, political, economic, environmental and personal. We may study about nature, but it doesn't touch us, it doesn't move us, inspire us, therefore we may use it mindlessly, pollute it and finally destroy it. The very fact that we have cut ourselves from everything else has taken life out of us. We have created shelters and enclosed ourselves inside them. There is no relation to nature other than using it for selfish and utilitarian purposes. What best solution are we going to find when our mind is fragmented and alienated from nature and life itself? Anything that comes out of such an alienated mind is going to create more problems. Take for example our developmental projects, they lack integrity, inclusion, love and care for people and nature.

However, Sholaischool has been doing tremendous work to preserve the nature and create an eco-friendly lifestyle. The students are sensitive about the environmental issues, wildlife conservation and alternative technologies. Yet, the school (also Ashram school) has to widen its scope in connecting itself with the nature, not only through the tone of conservation, but by building an organic relationship of oneself with the nature around. It has to find its poetry through silence and wonderment. For instance, children know how a human body functions, but never get to wait for some time and simply wonder about how nature has evolved over time to create a wonderful, complex and incredible human machine. Knowing the facts is important and equally important is also to appreciate and wonder about them. Such exercises may open up other possibilities to connect with nature and thereby, bring out sensitive and happy individuals.

Separating Oneself from Subjects

What is education after all? Is the knowledge of the stars different from the knowledge of my 'self'? Quantum mechanics seems to disprove this difference. So, when everything is made up of the same element called "atom" then can my learning about trees and rocks provide scope for self-knowledge? Can it also be otherwise, that knowing about oneself may also uncover the realities of the world that exists outside of us? But, we have disconnected ourselves from what we are enquiring. The study of the outside world is so different from that of the inside world. Because, schools have failed to make that subjective connection. As a result, children have kept themselves aloof from what they are studying. Even in these schools, hardly, there is a discussion

on 'meaning of life' and other meta-physical questions that usually haunt our head once in a while. I wonder, why study of trees, soil, culture, geometry, atoms, etc. has become so boring and uninteresting? Instead, it should be exciting and enlightening. Every subject is a joy to study, because we are studying about life, about ourselves.

When we are studying about early humans and their lifestyle, do we have the feeling that we are studying about our own history, do we get goose bumps when we hear that it took millions of years to finally come to where we are now or, are we simply reading it objectively without attaching our life to it, as just a piece of knowledge to be gathered? Can the children feel those characters in the history as their ancestors? Or do they see them as somebody who appear only in textbooks and museums? What is happening now cannot be possible without what has happened in the past. Without man trying to make fire out of stones, millions of years before, our present life would have been very different. If we take off certain events in the history, we may have to reshape the present time. History is not just in the past but the essence of it is continuing even in the present. But, are these schools able to prepare children to make such meaningful connection with the subjects? I doubt.

Why does this separation appear so very distinct? Why don't these schools let their children explore through history, physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics...as a part of exploring oneself? Is this separation necessary and does it not damage the consciousness and make children's mind dull? Obsession over objective enquiry of varied branches of knowledge has created a wall between oneself and the world, between feelings and knowledge, between heart and mind. Definitely, let us not blind ourselves with just our own feelings, but let one's feelings also speak and explore, when one reads about the evolution of species, when one hears about the forming of a new star or about the world wars. Can one feel oneself in those aspects? Does that spirit flow in the subjects that I study or do I just take the subject as something to be covered by the end of this term and forget it for the rest of my life? After all, this is life and we are trying to make sense of it together.

In the broadest view, is education not about life? Studying about plants and animals and distant stars, does it have any significance beyond just acquiring knowledge and preparing for exams? Do these schools let what children studies alter their perspective of life or do they remain the same? Even after completing course from these

alternative schools, when they still get hurt, then what is the point of their innovative education? Generally, these questions do not enter their classrooms and their notebooks. But, these schools need to address such questions and allow the subjects to touch children's life, otherwise, however innovative the project may be, children would still remain fragmented, alienated and therefore, violent.

Limitations of Acquiring Knowledge

Present day education has given a lot of emphasis on acquiring knowledge about the outside world which is quite contradictory to some of the views on learning expressed by philosophers. They present a very different approach on this. They say real learning happens by dropping whatever knowledge that has been acquired in the past. It is in the dropping of the known that anything new can happen.

Through our education, we may try and understand the world out there. Even that cannot be complete. What a man can know is always limited, because knowledge itself is endless. This is not a "philosophical" mystery, but it is the reality. When a scientist in his whole life time tries to understand about the universe, he misses out on the knowledge that an archeologist or a biologist uncovers in his limited life span. Similarly, a computer engineer spending his entire life in understanding and inventing a device is definitely missing out on the knowledge produced by the neurologists or the social scientists. It is not possible for a person to know everything, every minute of detail knowledge. Then, what is this urge of knowledge accumulation that we celebrate legitimately? This endless process of acquiring information has made us the containers of available knowledge. But there is a tragedy in this.

In our pursuit of knowing everything around us, we are missing out on understanding ourselves. The strange thing is that, our very existence has no connection to what we know or what we do not know. For the earth to revolve around the sun, the flowers to bloom, the embryos to grow into a full-length man, nature does not need our knowledge. Leave out other things, take our own body; I am conscious of the food that enters my mouth, but what happens after that I have no knowledge of it, unless we refer to a biology book or talk to a doctor. Our digestion has no link to our knowledge of digestion. Funnily, our brain works without the knowledge of its own. Isn't it strange? This religious mystery we miss to wonder.

May be that is why, across civilizations and time, some of the great thinkers have been reminding us about the limitations of knowledge and the very process of knowing itself. Certainly, there is a great deal of significance in learning about something and that is one of the important reasons for where we are now, in terms of improvement in lifestyle, material well-being, and astonishing scientific discoveries and development. But, can we ever feel content about what we know before we die? Where is this civilization heading towards? Knowledge itself could be a myth and our thirst for knowledge could lead us nowhere. So, can these schools dare to address this vacuum and travel to the places unknown? Unless, such initiatives are made possible, these schools also would become a dumping ground of information and knowledge. They would not realize what a silent mountain is longing for, nor they can even imagine a man who is content eternally.

Discounted Subjective Aspects

The inner most feeling of the person is being undermined by education. Anything that is subjective is looked with a doubt and suspicion. Definitely, it has a danger but nevertheless without the subjective aspect, life in general is going to be very mechanical and devoid of feeling and almost dead. Education is also successfully engaged in separating the subjective aspect from everything that there is. Because, personal space does not enter the classroom, books keep away the feelings.

Take for instance, a boy of class 4 comes to his class dull, he had some misunderstanding with his friends last night, but what is expected of him? He should keep away his 'personal' problems out of the class and should enter the classroom prepared to absorb what is being planned for him. His problems, agony and feelings are silenced. It is generally not desirable to share this in the classroom. Teacher is only bothered to cover the prescribed syllabus within the timeframe and it is not in her legitimate sphere to enter the personal life of students whom she interacts with every day. As a young fellow, he may have doubts, fears, anxieties, desires, love, passion and interest on matters other than what is being taught in the school. But they are simply ignored. Imagine a four-year old girl asking, 'Who is God?', 'Why is he not appearing to our eyes?', 'Does he really exist?' These are very deep philosophical questions. If the same question were to be asked in the classroom, will any teacher be

interested in engaging with her, leaving aside for a while, the duty of covering syllabus? I doubt.

Not just adults, each child faces the realities of life every moment. But the basic feelings, quests, and interests are kept away from the class timetable. Why do these schools fear dealing with these aspects? These are the things that we face every day, but they never become an intrinsic part of the syllabus. What is the point of learning more and more, when we are still fighting and still holding fear in our heart? The purpose of education is to uncover the ignorance and help us relate to life, engage with it and celebrate it. Then what is the point of securing marks and obtaining degrees and certificates, when we are not happy? When it does not provoke or engage with the basic fundamental questions of our day today life, then how can we liberate ourselves from the realities of the everydayness- perpetual fear, anxiety, endless desires? How do I confront the society which is divisive, hierarchical, and suppressive? How will I earn sacredness in everyday living? If my everyday mundane normal life is untouched and undisturbed by education, then how will I alter it, change it, transform it or reject it?

Many philosophers and great thinkers including Sri Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurti have been reminding us about the danger of distancing the school knowledge from everyday living. There is a danger if what we learn in the school has no relation to what happens in our personal life. Life is a gift equally distributed to every one living, no matter you are educated or not. You have to live. Every now and then we encounter death of some near and dear ones, of new life coming to being, problems that arise in the personal relations, all these we encounter in our daily lives. But we don't seem to probe them in our classrooms with our teachers and fellow students, even though these are something most common to every person.

But, the disturbing question here is, why do these schools which are influenced by these philosophers, shy away from such 'personal' 'subjective' investigation to happen? If Ashram school and Sholai school do not entertain such subjective exploration, are they also not misleading themselves? If they also shy away from engaging children about self-knowledge, the mysteries of the mind and nature, it means a real death of an alternative project. Because, without the knowledge of this self, one cannot transform oneself and the world, and even if there are changes, it can

only be superficial and destructive. This is so evident in the present society. Therefore, these schools should not shy away from providing legitimate space and time for such enquiry to happen.

Concluding Remarks

Critiquing these schools does not mean a failure of these alternative projects. In fact, these dilemmas and contradictions, would inevitably arise when these alternative schools have to survive amidst rigid mainstream society. Therefore, it is difficult for these alternative schools to remain unaffected when the rest of the social institutions does not undergo transformation. We saw it clearly in this chapter about, why and how the meaning and course of resistance gets altered over a period of time. We also saw, how these schools with their inability to overcome the overarching pressures of the mainstream values, tend to dilute their resistance against the hegemonic structure. The point here is not to suggest that, these schools should start considering mainstream values as “inevitable” and alter their core values which these schools are standing for. We are also not arguing that, these schools should cut off from the society to avoid its influences, because school cannot exist in isolation, it is invariably connected to the larger society.

However, these contradictions and dilemmas suggests another possibility, that these alternative schools should become more critical and self-reflexive. They have to undergo serious introspection to understand the deeper meaning of these conflicts and restore their faith and strength in carrying forward their emancipatory ideas and practices. These schools should perpetually redefine their meaning of resistance and continue striving for the complete emancipation of individuals and society. Moreover, their innovative curriculum and pedagogy gives us the courage to think and act differently and meaningfully in a society which otherwise worships inequality, competition and violence.

CONCLUSION

The Conclusion does not claim to offer a single, concrete solution for the problems raised. However, in the earlier chapters, in the very process of analyzing various issues and trying to understand them, the solutions came out naturally. Haven't they? This conclusion did not wait for the end, unlike popular movies that end with a clear climax. At many instances, the question itself contained the answer. Therefore, the answers are not to be found only at the end, they appeared in between, in the midst of the problems.

Nevertheless, at the end, efforts are made to get an overall understanding of the entire issue and also to derive a "new" meaning of education. The conclusion may not only address the problems in education, but also the problems of society in general. This conclusion is, therefore, a humble attempt to offer possible solutions and I do not want to shy away from hoping for a better society.

6.1. A Brief Review

This study started with a lot of disenchantment with the present system of education. It not only exposed the degrading situation of schools and other educational institutions, but it also indicated that, people in general are not happy. They are happy, may be, only momentarily. Even, all the social problems around us denote that there is something wrong with us. People are in a constant state of fear, sorrow and misery. Be it a rich business man, or a poor laborer, everyone seems to suffer. We may attain material comforts with scientific discoveries and developmental activities, but deep inside we are all bearing a life of burden, grief and guilt. Nevertheless, time and again there were many attempts made to change this situation. And changes also have happened. Yet, deep down we still suffer, society suffers and all its institutions suffer the pain.

But, why are we still suffering? Why, after all the material and scientific development, is society unable to find its peace? Because, society, as we have seen in the previous chapters, is not very neutral and simple. It does not serve the interests of all, it favors only certain groups. The dominant class controls the power and decides what the rest of the people ought to think and perceive of life. But the modern state functions not merely on the coercive apparatus of “domination”, and this is where Gramscian concept of “hegemony” comes to rescue. For him, “hegemony” is a process of getting active consent even from the subaltern and resultant consolidation of the ruling class ideology. Through the elaborate network of civil society it succeeds in acquiring consensus from those over whom it rules. It is rather interesting to see how the dominant class wins ‘consent’ to its power from the subordinate class by influencing their commonsense. To take a simple illustration, if competitiveness is the central characteristic of a capitalist free economy, the fact is that, all of us tend to normalize it and accept it as the real.

Family, religion and other civil societies have been manipulated to achieve consent from most people to the dominant ideologies. Likewise, we saw in detail, how schools also become one of the means through which hegemony of the dominant class gets established. Legitimized and institutionalized knowledge, colonial interventions, western developmental strategies, industrialization, commercialization and social inequalities are the ways through which the hegemony of the dominant class acts

through the system of education. In this hegemonic exercise, we also saw how schools are normalizing the ideology of competitiveness, achievement orientation, meritocracy and success. And thereby, eliminating all other possibilities of learning through cooperation, sharing, psychic-spiritual elevation and joy.

Above all, hegemony does serious damage to the children by disconnecting them from life; it hurts, dominates and disorients and finally takes away their childhood. It restricts their imagination and freedom; and therefore, they become unaware and uncritical of the existing social structure. Thereby, inequality, competition, fear, violence, and greed get reproduced and people remain in constant state of misery.

However, this trend was resisted by various philosophers, social scientists, activists and creative individuals. They saw education also as an arena of protest and resistance, to bring about equality and freedom. The history of such resistance to this monopoly of mainstream schools gave rise to a variety of new schools. These people talked of 'alternative education' rooted in philosophies about life and learning that are fundamentally different from mainstream schooling. They insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, psychological, physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of a developing child. Moreover, resistance to the dominant ideologies are placed in these schools through friendly school atmosphere, learner-centered curriculum which involves play and innovative activities, integrating extra-curricular activities, minimizing the importance of examinations, setting aside mechanical homework and encouraging dynamic teacher-student relationships. All these factors of resistance are meant to not only revolutionize the alternative school, but also the very society in which it exists. For example, a school which does not conduct examinations challenges the competitive aspirations of the society. A system which allows free interaction with the teachers, questions the hierarchical and authoritative structure of the society.

However, even the resistance could not free these alternative schools completely. Because, it is a huge challenge for these schools to survive amidst the mainstream values of the society which are mainly based on competition, rigidity, comparison, discrimination, violence and greed. There is an immense pressure on these alternative schools to conform to these mainstream values and practices. And this pressure generates fear, doubt and anxiety amongst everyone. Whether the children of these

alternative schools would be able to “adjust” and “survive” in the mainstream society is one such anxiety. We can see this anxiety when children of higher classes in alternative schools being still worried and confused about their career choices; they are generally drawn towards the “successful” career choices. Even the fear that their students would get absorbed in the competitive world is visible among the senior teachers when children leave the school and join higher education courses or jobs elsewhere. The contradiction can be seen even with the parents who ultimately want their children to choose “career-oriented” subjects.

Though these schools believe in alternative ideologies, and though parents make a conscious choice to pursue these new ventures for their children, there are still various doubts and fears in their minds which makes these alternatives difficult to survive. Moreover, in a hegemonic structure, alternatives are silenced and made insignificant. Their spirit of exploration is handicapped by rigid rules and normalizing laws. For instance, there is a growing concern among the members of various alternative schools that, the Right to Education Act (RTE, 2009) imposes certain limitations on these alternative schools in terms of infrastructure, qualification of teachers, standardized curriculum and evaluation. Therefore, with all these pressures, these schools gradually push themselves away from their core concerns in their efforts adjust themselves to the mainstream ethos and practices. Moreover, as education is closely interlinked to the wider social system, these alternative practices sustain only when the rest of the society undergoes a transformation.

Changes in the education system alone cannot bring about absolute transformation in the society. Making the curriculum children-friendly, easy assessments, enhancing teacher-student relationships - these changes alone would not ensure happiness and freedom for all the individuals in the society. Society is based on inequality, competition, fear, greed, violence and misery. The responsibility of changing the society doesn't lie with schools and other educational institutions alone. It lies with each and every individual. Each individual has to free himself/herself from all kinds of sorrow and violence. Each individual has to live freely, happily and peacefully. Then, institutions like family, religious organizations, economic enterprises, cultural groups and other civil societies also will transform themselves. We can't expect schools to simply give up examinations, when we still celebrate competition in the job

sector. The interconnectedness between all the subjects cannot be felt unless the concept of family moves beyond the existing rigid structure. Otherwise, all the effort to change the education system and therefore, the society, would become futile.

The Way Ahead

The attempt to critique these alternative schools does not undermine their creative spirit and emancipatory possibilities they long for. In fact, existence of these alternative schools amidst the wider society which is highly competitive and violent, gives us the hope that not everything is out of hand. This indicates that we can still resist the existing rigid system and bring about a new social order. Because, resistance is the only way to restore the order, and earn freedom and happiness. Resistance may be disturbing, yet it is the only way forward; it is the only way we can become free and happy.

As we look at the issue deeper, the resistance is not completely against the society that is outside, but it also against the society inside - which we have internalized as 'personal'. As we have internalized the oppressive structure, the resistance here is also against oneself. Because what exists outside, also exists inside. The inequality which the caste system perpetuates, the competition which the schools worship, the divisions that family and religion generates - all these not only exist outside, but they also occupy our inner world. Therefore, the resistance is not only against the outside world, but the inner world which represents the outside world. However, resistance in the inner world is difficult because the oppressed thinks that oppression is the reality, we have internalized the 'consciousness of the oppressor' (Freire, 1970). It is like, we want freedom, yet we believe in oppression. This applies even to the alternative schools. The school may believe in competition-free society, but certain practices in the schools may trigger competitiveness among children. Similarly, various ambiguities and fears that arise in these schools are out of this contradiction -between ideology and practice.

However, ambiguities that are stemming out of these alternative schools are not necessarily negative and undesirable. They make the entire process dialectic. At this juncture, it is important to recall Hegel, who believed that any progress is possible only if there is "contradiction". In his *Science of Logic*, he says,

“...everything is inherently contradictory, and in the sense that this law in contrast to others expresses rather the truth and the essential nature of things...contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity”(Hegel, 1969, p. 439).

Whereas, traditional belief is that, development is possible only by eliminating contradictions and conflicts. That is the reason, why conflict is seldom taught to the students, it is no way encouraged. Conflict is seen as something bad and to be avoided at any cost. It is rarely thought that of being transformative. Some changes in an unequal world are possible only with conflict and contradiction. Like Hegel, even Marx feels that humanity advances every time when there is conflict. Therefore, these alternative schools do not have to fear the conflicts, rather, they have to be welcomed, worked on and understood. Because, it is a continuous dialectical process of self-discovery and progress. Even the “negativity” that the contradiction generates, has the capacity to discard or dissolve the rigid hegemonic structure and make it more fluid and adaptable. As Hegel believed that, this whole process is a way towards the “whole”.

Ironically, the resistance posed by these alternative schools is not complete; it can also have the trace of oppression. Confusions, contradictions and ambiguities in these alternative schools show that their resistance is not absolute. Conflicts do not end, rather they find different means of expression. In fact, replacing an old ideology with a new ideology becomes another monopoly within the structure. Like a curriculum which is innovative and yet does not evoke interest in the meaning of ‘self’. Children may choose “alternative” subjects like music, gardening, but still they are worried about their futures, careers and families. Such a resistance does not emancipate the children, school and society, rather it perpetuates – in new ways - competition, fear, greed and violence. It is therefore important that even the alternative schools should become self-critical and continually renew themselves. Although, it is a difficult task for these alternative schools to come out of the contradictions and to fight for themselves against the ambiguities and odds, but they have no other go. Otherwise, even these innovative projects may become mechanical, and monopolizing. Hence, time and again, they have to reaffirm their core values, renew their faith and relook at their practices.

Moreover, conflict shouldn't mean a mere reaction, but standing against the domination and oppression in any form. Because, a reactionary resistance cannot free us completely. Resistance should not be blind, but it must be filled with meaning, critical consciousness and love, and only that can bring out real transformation. In such a context, resistance earns a different meaning and becomes more humble and meaningful. Such a resistance is born not out of anger, but out of love. And resistance would continue until we establish an egalitarian and free society where every single person on this earth is completely free, happy and peaceful.

6.2. Deriving a New Meaning of 'Education' and 'Schooling'

Much has already been discussed and analyzed, yet it is difficult to derive single definitions for "Education" and "Schooling". However, when these are not contained in single watertight definitions, they have the possibility of transcending their regular meaning and expand beyond their set limits. Our imagination of schooling and the purpose of education have already been defined by the regular mainstream schools. And alternative schools, as we have seen, have been challenging and replacing this 'popular' meaning of education and schooling. These schools gave us the courage to dream differently and dare to imagine beyond normally defined structures.

Many such new ideas and insights on education and schooling came out in the analysis we did in the previous chapters. But some of them may not find a mention in the following pages as I sum up. One need not look for such ideas only here in this conclusion. They sprouted along with the questions and remained there. They emerged spontaneously and made their presence. Nevertheless, it is important to recall some of the significant insights and thereby, make humble attempts to rethink and redefine the meaning of education and schooling.

Learning: A life-long Endeavor

Learning is 'normally' meant only for children. Schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions are destined only for young people. As we wind up learning in schools and colleges, and grow into adulthood, a different kind of life begins to set. One gets ready for a job and family, where it is assumed that what is necessary has already been learnt. Maybe that is the assumption that makes people not

to care whether they learn or not in their later years. To touch a book or to have a discussion on certain aspects of nature and life, seem so irrelevant in adulthood. Whereas, learning is not just an obligation to be finished within 20 or 25 years, but it is an ongoing process of discovery, of understanding life. Skills and opportunities that support learning as a life-time tradition must be developed and efforts must be undertaken for learners to develop a positive attitude and enjoyment towards learning. Also, we need to create a society where learning possibilities exist for anyone wanting to learn. We should dare to imagine a world, where a 52-year-old-man interested in geography gets to share his space with other young learners in an educational institution, where a skilled yet poor carpenter gets an opportunity to teach geometry in a school, where a young learner can travel to different places, talk to different people and rewrite her history book as not only people but trees and mountains become her teacher.

To learn about leaves, stones, water, stars, history of civilizations, etc., seem so exciting. Such learning gives a different meaning to life. Knowledge born out of that learning need not just stop after schools and colleges. It is something that needs to be read, reread, remembered, pondered over, questioned and wondered at every point of our life, for our life encompasses all of it. These questioning and wonderment are the things that make life meaningful, rich and joyful, not simply earning money, buying a house and property, and finally die in misery and loneliness.

Education Should Be a Humbling Process

Family, society, schools, religious organizations, political parties, economic institutions and what not - our everyday experience revolves mostly around them. We tend to forget that we share this planet with animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers and skies too. Though scientific discoveries and astronomical observations have revealed how tiny and insignificant this planet is in comparison to the vast galaxies and the unimaginably huge universe, our everyday knowledge has hardly crossed a few kilometers. Home, office and entertainment have become our everyday experience and to imagine our existence in this infinite universe, seems to never even occur to us for a second. Whereas, life, as it is, does not demand so much from us. Almost everything that is needed for our living seems to exist already. The stars, space, mountains, trees, plants, animals, even the earth that we stand on, metals and

chemicals that we use in industries, already exist. But, we, the human beings have been arrogant in asserting our existence and achievements. We have created an imaginary world around ourselves. We no longer have any connection with birds, trees, stars and the vast empty space.

Human beings certainly have some intelligence to understand nature and use it for their own survival. Definitely, without that, it would be impossible to think of our life today - our houses, tools, factories, vehicles, electricity, computers, rockets, satellites, books and so on. As a result of this intelligence, we have also created some comforts to live, like transportation, information, entertainment, etc.. Nevertheless, we have also created inequality, poverty, slavery, theft, crime, fear, violence and war. . May be our intelligence is limited, because, we have forgotten that we are part of the nature and have missed our link with it. Human beings did not arrive on the earth by magic. It took billions of years of gradual evolution to reach where man is now at present. From nothing to the birth of stars to planets, and the evolution of plants, animals and finally human being. So, from nothingness to the evolution of modern man constitutes history of our life. We need to imbibe this journey. As we are living in the age of immediateness and superficiality, we ought to take this journey mentally to understand our relation with the stars, moon, mountain, trees, plants and animals. It is a wonder to admire, how after millions of years of evolution (5 million) human being has arrived at a stage where he can contemplate about his own mind and the nature he emerged from. Such a larger picture makes the mind calm, tender, loving and intelligent.

However, teachers are generally busy covering up the syllabus, but largely missing the greater purpose of our life. Also, when college is done, we turn off learning and very often, we indulge in work, family and entertainment and miss to wonder about our life and nature. Work and family become the most important things in our life. Understanding nature and learning to be a part of it, takes a back seat, except for the visits to hill stations, rivers and forests during vacations. We are majorly preoccupied with immediate relations (family, friends and colleagues), technology and things. But then, when people lose this connection with the larger meaning of co-existence with nature, they miss the very purpose of their life.

Hence, education needs a broader vision, much more than preparing students for corporate jobs and creating boring human beings. Even in the academic subjects, when we go deeply into a topic it would finally end in wonderment. It is like climbing a mountain, reaching the top and doing nothing else but wonder about the space and valley. Such is the case when we take up any topic- water, stars, body, mind, continents, numbers, flowers, cells, etc., as we go deeply, it all ends nowhere and one can't stop wondering and the sense of wonderment fills the heart and gives a deep sense of meaning in life.

Liberating Aspects of Education

Education nowadays is quite obsessed with books and it keeps real life at a distance. So, it is very important to make children creatively engage with textbooks, bring those books alive and relate them to everyday life. Efforts should be made so that children are at ease with textbooks and subjects. Be it cooking, cleaning, farming, carpentry, house building, rearing animals, music, dance, drawing, playing, or taking care of the old, everyday life is filled with all the subjects. Take for example, a normal mundane act of cooking a meal, not in the laboratory, or not as an extra-curricular activity, but, a real-life cooking activity involves chemistry, history, geography, art, etc. Pondering on how certain vegetables came to our country and which climate is suitable for respective vegetables involves Geography. The world of vegetable market involves Economy. The combination of different vegetables and their tastes involve Art and appreciation. And one can discuss the chemical compounds of various items, its benefits for our body and the culture of cooking food in different places, aesthetics of presenting/decorating the food and the ethics of sharing food with others. All these could enrich the simple act of cooking. Cooking then becomes educational. Then cooking is no more a dull mechanical mundane act, but it becomes so rich with meaning. Similarly, we can see Mathematics in the structure of a house, physics in electrical appliances and biology in gardening.

Everything around us is interconnected. Life exists as a whole and not in compartments. If we take a glass of water - the water we drink, the water we wash our clothes with, the water we offer plants -it started its journey way back with the evaporation of ocean, then it became clouds, fell as heavy rain carried by a river, crossed dams and projects, and finally reached a tap at our home. It is the same glass

of water that contains molecules and minerals that Chemistry is interested in. It is the same glass of water that is being polluted due to the development of industries and cities. It is the same glass of water which is unequally distributed among the people, in which the Social Sciences are interested. The same glass of water, its gentle flow evokes poetry, becomes literature. The same water, the beauty of its arrival to my home from the oceans and mountains - when I make it into a beautiful painting becomes an art. So, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Literature, Art and Social sciences are interconnected and are parts of a whole and so each part must be approached holistically leading to holistic understanding of everyday life. Therefore, what we study in schools under different subjects are not isolated topics, but forms of knowledge, interconnected in themselves and also have connection with our daily life.

Therefore, children realize that everyday mundane, repetitive activities are not separate from learning in class and in books. By bringing different dimensions to these activities, they become rich and meaningful. Moreover, children naturally carry the spirit of play in everything they do, so the activity becomes livelier as well. For example while making chapatti, children love to make toys with the dough and therefore it becomes an activity not only with rich meanings, but also of fun. With such activities, they may not remember every fact, but they will definitely be able to appreciate different aspects of life. Education with this approach, has a transformative power to make the mundane work into rich and interesting educational activity. This can weaken the boundary between the school and outside world. The entire exercise makes the school boundary merge with real life and therefore children continue to learn even after they leave the school.

Learning About Our 'Self' Needs To Be Integrated in The System

By and large, there is a feeling that knowing about oneself and how one's mind work, is not at all linked to schooling. Also, what the schools teach children about the outside world seems to have no relation to themselves on an individual basis and to their personal life. Even the alternative schools which conduct classes creatively and innovatively, which are part of my field study, the knowledge of one's "self" is not attended to. We may know about the whole world, but if this piece of body and mind is not understood, then what is the point of knowing about everything else? May be that is the reason why learning has become monotonous and disconnected from

oneself. Because, to live is to also ponder on the purpose of our life, to see what it means to relate to someone else, to question why certain things happen the way they happen, to find out what is life and death, what it means to lose something/ someone, to wonder where this journey of evolution takes us to? Schools should venture to explore these things not as a separate subject, but by integrating it with other subjects and life itself.

Learning is Also Meant for Teachers

Teachers are meant to teach and students are supposed to learn. This is the general feeling in the existing school system. It cannot be otherwise. Once they get into the role of teachers, they stop learning, except for the purpose of teaching. Because, their personal life is different from that of the professional work. What they believe and what they teach could be contradictory. Such a separation might create conflicts. They may teach about stars and mountains but it may not alter the way they look at their life. The information is only for the students, but it does not transform them into better persons. Therefore, their work becomes a repetitive and dull activity and the profession becomes more hypocritical than transformative. Their deeper fears, jealousies, longings and love remain hidden. But, when the school also becomes an educational space for the teachers, the profession of teaching can become transformative. Teacher can enter the world of children and offer meaning and life to the subjects. Students can become their companions in understanding their deepest fears, momentary pleasures, confusions and even the meaning of death. Then, school becomes more than a place of employment; it becomes a place to learn, share, live, love and care.

Participation of Parents

Family and school function as separate units. Even the alternative schools with different approaches to life and education, create a distance between family and school. Family is consulted only during the admission and while conducting some functions. But, for a child, family is as important as the school. Children usually suffer the gap between the value systems of the family and the school. Moreover, when the school and family run separately, they create conflict in the child. This conflict tears them apart and makes them confused individuals. For example, the

school may not want to emphasize on job-oriented education, but on the other hand, parents may want it. The child is going to have a mixed value system and therefore he/she ends up being more confused. Therefore, the school should rethink their own role and that of the of the family and parents, and include parents as a part of the educational process. Parents should not be left alone. School should sensitize and provide educational experience to the parents as well. Therefore, school, family and the children can co-exist peacefully and harmoniously. Otherwise a situation of conflict and confusion may prevail.

Do Not Separate School From Society

For all the problems that occur inside the school, we normally blame it on teachers, administration, students and parents. We have learnt to blame each other, as we have forgotten the larger link of schooling with the entire society. Society around us is also changing, and school cannot be left unaltered. Schools do have to respond to the change. Alternative school cannot always glorify the past and blame the present situation to escape the criticism. It should also evolve new strategies and actions in tune with the changing circumstances, but at the same time not give up on the basic philosophy it stands for. For instance, schools can allow using internet and mobile phones, but it has to also prepare and sensitize the children about its effects. The school should adapt to the changes and prepare the children to face the world outside, not simply by giving them certificate, but making them aware of the social issues, their deeper meanings. For example, it is important to sensitize, how their choices of subject, occupation, family values and the ultimate aim of life are influenced by the ways of society. How their choices and actions are not very pure and personal; but are very political and have lasting implications for the society at large. Otherwise children are going to suffer keeping the ideals and values on the one hand and struggle to adjust to the society on the other. If the alternative schools act like mere cocoons, then students would get confused and suffer the difference when they are out.

Importance of Social Science

By and large, the social status for subjects like natural science, biological science is generally higher than the social sciences. One of the reasons could be the specialized scope of applications that physical sciences offer for the betterment of society, and

society's development is seen to be possible and profitable only with science subjects. But it is not the case with the social sciences. Social sciences need to find their use in the society. They need to prove to everyone on how understanding social life leads to the progress of the society. For example, by understanding the process of urbanization, industrialization and its effects, one may become a farmer or an environmental activist or a doctor who would like to work in rural areas. Being sensitized about the present system of education and its impact on the society, one may choose to start a new school with innovative, child-friendly curriculum and pedagogy, or may homeschool his or her children.

Development in society would become holistic only when people become socially sensitive and active, and not by simply building fly-overs and sky scrapers, improving traffic facilities and multiplying industries. Because, there is a constant interplay between self and the society, social sciences should become means for transcending one's own experience to the larger societal experience, where one starts feeling 'one in the other' and 'other in the one'. Hence, social sciences should not be with just few scholars, it needs to come close to the people and the wider public. As Sherwood D. Fox mentions in his introduction to Emile Durkheim's *Education and Sociology*,

"These two (social science and social practice) go together, it would seem, in much the same way as the use of hospital facilities increased as the facilities themselves improved; that is, when hospitals were dangerous, there was public resistance to using them; and as the techniques of medicine were improved through the application of science, so that hospitals became safer, people began to lose their realistic fear of action personnel can learn from them, and discover what sociology can contribute to social action; at the same time, the sociologists can also learn from the action personnel, and discover hitherto unsuspected errors of omission or commission the correction of which can lead to advancement of theory"(Durkheim, 1956, pp. 23-24).

Moreover, to make social sciences more accessible and meaningful, they have to transform themselves. Normally, social sciences have endlessly engaged within the human world. Constantly thinking of human conditions, societal values, problems and revolutions, social sciences have not considered the co-existence of man with mountains, birds, animals and even astronomical bodies. It has made human existence far more superior and exclusive. It is hesitant to take other natural sciences along with

it. Even with all the critical analysis of the social world, its struggle and change, man is still not happy and fulfilled. His inner world is filled with fear and anxiety. Problems have never stopped. May be wondering at the moon or an ocean, may give him certain peace, some answer. May be travelling to the mountains will free our mind. But, do we dare to imagine such possibilities? I doubt. We may find it weird to connect our problem in office to the far shining star or a flowing river. May be, it has an answer, or at least a clue. That is why social science should become poetic, and help us to connect with everything around.

Knowledge Should Be Closer to People

It is important that sociologists, historians, political scientists and philosophers have their role in analyzing and understanding the education system, but more important is not to keep such understanding aloof and away from the public consciousness. It needs to be shared to the public and also be readily accessible to the schools. Let the teachers, parents, students also engage with it. Let it be not a monologue. Let the school teachers, authorities, parents and children be given space to review and reconstruct the educational space. Teachers, schools authorities, students should start engaging in understanding the needs of the society and rearrange and review the educational objectives and practices accordingly. Only then there would be some change in the society.

Conflicts are Necessary

Contradictions are not necessarily negative. At times they allow us to think, reflect, reform or reject certain ideas and practices. This is a natural process. Contradictions and conflicts allow us to grow and refresh our perspectives. The school cannot settle down with the values and rules laid several years back. It needs to relook and refresh. Alternative schools do not have to be content with their values and practices, because such an attitude may lead to stagnation. Moreover, dilemmas appear naturally when values are followed mechanically without any life, without any meaning. But at the same time, we cannot brush aside certain ideologies that these schools strictly stood for. They have overcome some of the normative values like examinations, rigid curriculum and authoritative relationships. As some of these schools were started several years ago, it was relatively easy to implement the ideology. But in the modern

times, the problems of competition, fear, insecurity have multiplied. Therefore, there would be increased resistance for such transformative ideas. But, at the same time, we should not take the present system of competition for granted. We need to question it. Such questions are valid even now, in fact much more important for these days.

Redefining the Role of School

Earlier, school was the only center of information and knowledge, but nowadays school has ceased to be the only place or means to knowledge. The development in technology, television, media, the arrival and exponential growth of internet, have made other means and sources of knowledge possible. It is no more like the ancient times when the print media was unavailable, and therefore, oral instruction and memory were the only way to preserve knowledge. However, even in the modern-day schools, the legacy continues. Teachers spend most of their time in stuffing the students minds with varieties of information. On the contrary, as we all know, there is no end to acquiring information; it is also impossible to know everything. Moreover, if the entire energy is used in acquiring and storing information, then how can we enquire, question and explore? Hardly there is any space for the children to ask 'why?' Luckily, with the development of technology, we have got the choice to unburden ourselves of all the information. It is a great relief that we don't have to remember everything in our brain.

Life would have been rather simple, if it is only about gathering information. But, the fact is, it is not! Therefore, the role of a school should change, more into a place where they bring in the aspects which they otherwise do not get in other places. It should be made into a place where discussions can happen, where there is a possibility to have a quiet time, where there are caring souls, as well as love and support. As the religiosity is lost among youngsters, this could transform itself into a place of wisdom and joy. It can become a place of worship, not with religious beliefs, but with the spirit of learning and sharing. They may collect materials and facts from elsewhere, but school can become a place for discussion, contemplation, joy, meditation and sharing. The time they spend in schools can be relooked and reformed in such a way that these things can be included. All these are possible only when the teachers and parents are transform themselves into creative and reflective individuals.

Unschooling: A Healthy Break from Routine

It is time we ask whether, the structure of school is necessary or at least, the prescribed syllabus mandatory? Because, life is such that, it cannot be searched and found only in books. When every day, the children are kept busy with some activity or the other, when will they ever be made to explore on their own or even sit quiet? Won't there be a need for the child to stay without doing anything? Can't that choice be given to them, to attend or not to attend the school? When the syllabus is rigid and the classes, the timetable are all fixed, how can we understand the student's interest? Can creativity sprout in a rigid system? Either school should be a place where they can include interests of all the students or otherwise school should only have a minor role in children's life, so that they have a choice to learn from other sources as well. As Illich reminded us about the danger of institutionalization, we ought to take a break from schools, at least for a while and explore other ways and means of learning.

Be it "schooling" or "homeschooling" or "Unschooling", children ought to become independent learners in life. Institutions should not become the only places of learning. We should be able to tolerate a system, which would allow students to take a break from the schools and pursue their interests and allow them to come back with their experience and share it with their peers. The school should not restrict them from taking a break from institutions and the society should not scare them from doing so. Schools should prepare children in such a way that, even in the absence of school, syllabus, textbooks and instructors, they will have the spirit to learn, explore and evolve until death. Such an experience would help them to free themselves from the bondage of all kinds of institutions. Individuals would therefore, become curious of life, irrespective of the institutional affiliation.

Don't Look for Results Immediately

Very often we hear the concerns being raised regarding the quality of outcome from these alternative schools. They have a pressure to attend to the questions like, "Are these children able to cope up with the normal social world?", and "Are they able to make any difference in the society?" Because, for most of us, the validity of these schools depends on the outcomes they produce immediately. We are skeptical that, it is also like any other school or it may even turn worse. Though it is important to be

critical of these schools, it is also important to see why we are in a hurry to assess the outcomes? It is very difficult to have particular parameters on which we can evaluate and conclude about these schools. The effect of the school may happen when the children turn 40, or 50 or in their old age. Or it may not happen at all. The philosophy may touch them later in their life. The friendly nature of the teachers may strike as important to a student when he goes for a job in the future. It may start acting then, not necessarily in the immediate present. I studied Marx in detail in my Post Graduation, yet he became more meaningful and lively only after ten years. We never know when we are going to get touched by what we are studying, yet we can't stop studying.

Not all children when they grow up in these alternative schools are moved by the method and philosophy of these schools. But their very presence at these schools gives them a touch, a gentle touch. Their aspirations and interests may be different. So not everyone can be moved by these schools. To some of them it is very moving, to some it has some impact, but to some it is only a very superficial touch. So the problem may not always lie with the teacher or school alone. There are various factors acting on children. They should be left free. They should not be forced towards goodness. Even when some children are not inclined to their philosophy, such disinclination should be respected. So it is very difficult to expect every child who comes out of this school to have a radically different character, interests and feelings. So therefore we cannot judge the school depending on the complete transformation of child. If the school still has the vibrancy, it can bring out very lovely students, but the effectiveness of the school should not be determined by the number of such children it produced. Since many other factors are interrelated like family, personal and social relationships, the school can continue its work and take it as a chance to transform the children.

Need More Schools

The number of schools and number of children are not at all proportional. We need more schools. Moreover, to have less number of students in each class demands one school to every two or three streets. For such an idea to become practical, we need more relaxation of rules and procedures and decentralization. Therefore, government

should support and promote small schools and alternative schools without compromising on the quality.

Up-Scaling of Innovative Ideas in Government Schools

Growing number of alternative schools does not mean that the normal mainstream schools be untouched and unaltered. They also need to undergo serious transformation before they turn out all the children into dull and uncreative individuals. Alternative schools, instead of becoming isolated institutions, need to constantly engage with government schools and also private mainstream schools. Various innovative ideas have been tried to improve the situation of the government schools. For example, inspired by the initiative of an alternative school (Rishi Valley Rural Schools), Activity Based Learning (ABL) method was implemented in all government primary schools in Tamil Nadu to bring about a transformation in learning environment. Of a similar nature are initiatives like Nalli kali (means 'joyful learning') in Karnataka, where all the teaching learning processes take place through songs, games, survey, storytelling and use of educational toys. And the famous Hoshangabad Science teaching Programme (HSTP) transformed various schools in Madhya Pradesh. Likewise, several more approaches should transform the existing schools.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, education and schooling become an important instrument for understanding society. Because, to understand the system of education also means to understand our society, its ideology, people, conflicts, accomplishments, failures and dreams. If we want a change in curriculum and teaching, it indirectly means that we need a change in the social situation.

The social implication of alternative schools and the role of new education could be revolutionary. Such an education would bring out creative, intelligent and loving people. People therefore would become more critical of the given social structures and values and would dare to imagine a world which would be equal and free. Because, education is seen as a means of social change. For many revolutionaries, including Gandhi, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and J. Krishnamurti, a new kind of education meant preparing a new society. However, one must be aware of the interconnectedness between education and wider social system. That is the reason,

why alternative schools are facing limitations. Because, without a socio-political transformation in the wider society, alternative schools find it difficult to survive the spirit of emancipation. However, these new initiatives and innovative ideas should not become another means of hegemony. Therefore, these schools need to be critical, self-reflexive and humble until everyone becomes happy and peaceful.

To be honest, any conclusion would remain incomplete until I change, until each individual changes and the whole world change completely. In a world where there is only joy, happiness and peace. Until we achieve them, this conclusion also can't be absolute.

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