

**FROM ACADEMIC STRESS TO EMANCIPATORY SCHOOLING
A SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY**

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19th July, 2002

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**FROM ACADEMIC STRESS TO EMANCIPATORY SCHOOLING: A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY**” submitted by Bishakha Chakraborty, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

This is my original work.

Bishakha Chakraborty
Bishakha Chakraborty

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before examiners for evaluation.

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TO

MA & BABA

*Who by allowing me complete freedom have tried to
teach me the value of both discipline and freedom.*

&

SUBHADEEP

In anticipation of a grand future of togetherness

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The search for, and journey to truth, lights and eternity is the ultimate quest in life. This is true of every kind of endeavour –simple everyday activities to larger than life achievements. True education enables one to become purposefully aware of this principle. If there is any one who follows this principle in real life, it is none other than my supervisor Dr Avijit Pathak. I can go on at length about this man's greatness as a scholar and a human being. Instead I would just say that I am extremely lucky and grateful to have this profound person as my supervisor.

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INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM, METHOD AND MODES OF ENQUIRY

“Failures are the pillars of success.” This old proverb seems to have lost its meaning in the lives of the Indian students. Failing or not doing well in school comes as one of the worst nightmares for Indian students and their parents. All schools in India claim that their primary purpose is the all round development of an integrated personality of the students. But the schools forget this role and put excessive emphasis on academic performance alone. Based only on these criteria students are graded as inferior or superior. In India academic success is viewed as one of the only ways of accessing and maintaining respectability and honour in society. This is even more true for students coming from the middle class families. The schools also mirror this attitude. The students are forced to imbibe the value that academic success is the only gateway to success in later life. The students who fail to perform according to expectations in schools academics are treated as ‘problem children’. The reason for the inability of the student to perform is hardly ever sought. The student is immediately branded as dull, stupid, and incapable of achieving anything in life. The attitude of the teacher towards a student greatly affects the student’s self-perception.

The schools are also under pressure to force their students to put excessive emphasis on academic success because it improves and maintains the reputations of the schools. The private schools, which are mainly interested in making money, prefer to take in and encourage only the so-called brighter students. The better known schools often function like big factories producing and certifying students. A strong hierarchy is often created within the classrooms between the ‘bright’ and not so ‘bright’ students based on their academic performance. This division is often perpetuated by the teachers’ attitude

towards the respective types of students. Too many subjects have to be studied at the school level. Each subject generally has a huge workload. Often schools put too much stress on simply covering the entire syllabus rather than teaching the subject meaningfully. The subjects often fail to impress students because of their inability to relate to real life situations. They become boring and thus difficult to master. Memorizing without integrating these subjects thus is the natural outcome.

The so-called co curricular activities do not serve the original purpose of providing all round development of the student. They often form a core part of the curriculum and each student is also graded for these co curricular activities. Thus the fun and interest associated with these activities is often lost. These are also treated as means of improving grades. The main purpose of education in school has been reduced to issuing certificates and selecting people for manpower allocation. The grades obtained in class X and XII are very important. Every school and college has a specific requirement of marks and grades for admissions. The better known the schools and colleges are the higher is the cut off marks for admission. The cut off marks is generally calculated by the total marks obtained in the examination and also the total marks obtained in a particular group i.e. arts, social sciences or sciences. Thus it is important for the aspiring student to do well in all the subjects. Marks obtained in each subject add up to the precious total. There is however a visible preference for the sciences as most Indian students aspires to join the coveted and most prestigious professions of doctors and engineers. Thus a mad rush is always there for the medical and engineering colleges. Cracking the entrance examinations for medical and engineering colleges seem to be the national passion of the Indian student. Inability to get through these examinations spells dooms for the students.

Many students however are forced to take these courses simply because of the prestige value attached to these. Often it is the aspirations of the parents, teachers or peer pressure which are the guiding factor, rather than the student's own choice. The magnanimity of the marksheet is so important that many a times students take up courses of study simply because they have the requisite marks in the subject and because of the attached prestige value, irrespective of their choices. Equally true is the fact that many students are forced to get into other areas because they do not have the required marks in the areas of their choice.

Performance in school academics thus becomes a major source of tension for students and their parents. The months of March and April can be considered as the months of examinations in India. Education in schools has been reduced to certifying students, and all other purposes of education have been lost. Most of the major examinations, especially at the school level take place during this time. These months register a lot of examination related anxieties, sometimes even leading to suicides. A steady rise in stress, related to schooling and examinations is a major cause of concern.

In this dissertation we have tried to examine the sociological reasons for this excessive academic stress that school going children in India often experience. We have also tried to explore the possibilities of an alternative project or a libertarian quest for meaningful, creative and joyful education.

This dissertation can therefore be said to be situated in the larger domain of Sociology of Education. This is because sociology of education as a sub-discipline studies school as one of the most important socializing agencies in modern complex societies. It studies how in modern times schools tend to replace family and kinship ties

as a major force in shaping the child's consciousness. Schools, with their planned curricula, formal teaching, codified texts, examinations and evaluations define the learner's cognitive and emotional achievements. In other words, the life of a child in the modern world cannot be comprehended without understanding the culture of schooling. It is therefore not surprising that right from its beginning master thinkers in the domain of sociology of education have done a great deal of work on the social functions of schooling.

Emile Durkheim¹ and Talcot Parsons² pleaded for, the application of the well-known 'Functionalist approach' to schooling'. They contend that the schools discipline the child, restore order and cohesion in society and contribute positively to the maintenance of social order. Likewise there are critical thinkers in the new sociology of education like Michael Apple³ and Pierre Bourdieu⁴ who have argued how schools tend to reproduce existing social inequalities. Far from creating a just society it helps the dominant section of the society to maintain the status quo of power and authority. In fact sociology of education is a much-contested domain, filled with conflicting perspectives and theories. This dissertation is just a beginning, a modest effort to participate in this enriched tradition of knowledge.

The major objective of this dissertation as we have already stated is to examine the phenomenon called 'academic stress' and how to come out of it. The fundamental reason why this inquiry acquires special relevance is that our politico-ethical

¹ For further details refer to Emile Durkheim: 'Moral Education: A study in the Theory and Application Of Sociology Of Education; Free Press; Feb 1986

² Talcot Parsons: 'The School System' ; Harvard Education review, Issue Number 29; Fall 1959, p279

³ M W Apple: Ideology And Curriculum ; Roulledge and Kegan Paul, Boston 1979

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Reproduction And Social Reproduction In Education, Society And Culture; Sage Publication , London 1977.

aspirations are participatory democracy, social equality, peace and cooperation. If these ideals are to be pursued and implemented, schools will have to play a key role. This is because it is in the school that children develop their perceptions about the self, others and learn to relate to the immediate surroundings and the world outside. It is therefore important for the schools to help children develop into autonomous, democratic, cooperative and harmonic beings.

Ironically however the prevailing practice of schooling in India , barring some remarkable exceptions negates this emancipatory spirit. General schools in India equate knowledge with heavily loaded information, schooling with fear of punishment, skill with percentage of marks in examinations and teaching with a one way flow of unrelated information from the teacher to the taught. Under these circumstances the burden of schooling or academic stress tends to make man terribly one-dimensional. It destroys all other faculties, possibilities and experiences. As a result it reduces the prevalent form of schooling into a very narrow notion of academic success, creating a regimented, hierarchical and competitive mind set, which is certainly not in tune with the aspired politico ethical ideals of the society.

It is therefore important to see whether it is possible to create an alternative culture of schooling. It is in this context that this dissertation derives its inspiration from a great tradition in the Sociology of Education, the tradition developed by thinkers like Karl Mannheim⁵, Paulo Freire⁶ and Ivan Illich⁷. Their writings reflect a great anguish over, and a critique of this life negating system of education. Mannheim

⁵ Karl Mannheim: *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to The sociology of Knowledge*; Routledge & Kegan Paul 1962

⁶ Paulo Freire: *The Pedagogy Of the Oppressed*; Seaburg Press, New York 1973

⁷ Ivan Illich: *Deschooling Society*; Herper & Row 1971.

envisioned a dialogic relationship between the teacher and the taught as the ideal form of interaction in any learning experiences. Illich went to a further extent to propose a complete deschooling of society. Freire on his part critiqued the hierarchical, repressive, 'banking' form of education and appealed for a more imaginative, challenging and progressive education that stimulates the child's innate curiosity and inclination for learning.

In India too Sociology of Education as a tradition of knowledge is evolving and growing fast. In the recent times we have seen a growing concern over the politics and culture of schooling. We have seen how thinkers like Krishna Kumar⁸, have been critiquing the prevailing culture of learning and suggesting possible alternatives.

The dissertation has been divided into three chapters. In chapter I we have tried to study, or to use the Weberian language, 'empathetically understand the phenomenon called academic stress in contemporary school practices. We have also tried to see how some of the grand ideals of education visualized by the post colonial Indian state collapsed, and schooling became, to use the language of Yashpal Committee, an experience of learning with oppressive academic burden. We have tried to study the sociology of this academic stress.

This takes us to chapter II. Here we have tried to present the conceptual understandings in a more concretized contextual situation. The conceptual understanding that we have developed in chapter I gets further concretized in this chapter. Here we substantiate our argument through real life school situation that we observed in the three schools of Delhi- Delhi Public School (DPS), RK Puram, Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV) in New Meharauli Road (JNU campus) and Springdales School in Dhaula Kuan.

METHODOLOGY

At this junction it is important to mention the methodology used in this dissertation. It needs to be stated clearly that unlike the Phd thesis, M Phil dissertation is a short-term project. The essential idea in a MPhil dissertation is to evolve some kind of a conceptual clarity and pose a problem in a focused manner, so that it can be explored in greater detail in a Phd program, which is generally seen in a continuum with M.Phil. It is therefore a humble and modest endeavour to participate in the large and ever-expanding domain of Sociology of Education. Here the research work has been done in two ways.

Firstly general readings in the sociology of education and readings with particular reference to academic stress in schools have helped us to see the problem in a proper socio-historical context, and formulate it in a methodical fashion. In other words this aspect of research is based on careful selection and meaningful accumulation of secondary literature-appropriate sociological texts, official documents, Education Commission Reports and Recommendations and popular writings on the problems of education.

The second aspect of the research rests on limited primary data that we have gathered from the three schools in Delhi. Technically speaking this process of acquiring primary data or empirical information cannot be regarded as a 'field study'. A student of Sociology and Social Anthropology knows that a rigorous ethnographic field study requires sufficient time, which a M. Phil dissertation does not permit. It is because of this that one does not witness field data in a M.Phil dissertation. Yet in this limited time period we have tried to acquire some kind of primary data. We can rather term this

effort as field sensitization program. Unlike a rigorous ethnographic field study, 'field sensitization' is based on informal short-term interactions with research and the field. In this case the field of schooling is mainly represented by three schools in New Delhi- Delhi Public School (DPS), RK Puram, Springdales School , Dhaula Kuan and Kendriya Vidyalaya(KV) ,JNU Campus. I had visited these schools not with any formal technique of research like sampling excersises, structured questionnaire etc. Instead I have tried to gather a better understanding of school life through informal interaction with children, parents and teachers. I have tried to record my experience, observation, feelings and my general understanding of the meaning of school life. I have used this experiential knowledge in order to substantiate my arguments. In this field sensitization effort I am not expecting any mathematical, scientific or statistical precision. In this way I am just expecting to develop a familiarity with the social context and empirical locale of schooling, which ought to be explored in all details and specificity in a rigorous ethnographic work during my Phd programme.

The reason for choosing these schools needs to be stated. DPS is supposedly a '*good*', prestigious and successful school, which continues to attract the affluent section of Delhi. Springdales is yet another '*good*' school but with a difference. It is percieved as a '*soft*' and culturally sensitive school that appeals to the academic and intelligientia of Delhi. KV JNU, on the other hand is a government school which seems to have lost its rigour and seriousness in academic matters. The affluent and educated class does generally not choose this school for their children. This school caters mainly to lower and poorer section of the population. In other words these three schools constitute a

spectrum of varied schooling experiences. As a result the findings gathered from these schools may help us to have a general idea about the culture of schooling in India.

To conclude, here is a dissertation that seeks to raise the issue of academic stress and 'burden of learning', to use the terminology of the Yashpal Committee, and suggest possible alternatives to make schooling and learning more meaningful and emancipatory in nature. It is a humble effort to contribute to the ongoing debate in the domain of Sociology of Education.

CHAPTER 1

BURDEN OF SCHOOLING AN EMPATHETIC
UNDERSTANDING

In this chapter we would try to make sense of excessive academic stress that an average school going child in India experiences. We have divided the chapter into three sections. In the first section we would study the meaning of academic stress as an experiential reality; how it is all pervasive and can be seen and felt in every aspect of school education. This is reflected in the way parents choose 'appropriate' school for children, the way teachers reduce knowledge into discrete course material to be memorized for examinations, the way it processes people, condemns failure and hierarchizes children.

Secondly we would try to study why this problem of academic stress exists even though there are great traditions of learning/ education in Indian civilization. This would require an examination of the prevailing gap between the '*ideals*' of education and reality of school practices.

Thirdly we would explore how this academic stress manifests itself through the divergent components of school culture.

1) BURDEN OF SCHOOLING: AN EXPERIENTIAL REALITY

In a country like India, standing in the queue is a common sight. There are queues in the ration shop, queues for public transport and queues in any public office for minimum of work to be done. The children are socialized into the practice of standing in queue from early life. Before the child reaches the age of five or six he or she has the first experience of formally standing expectantly and patiently for the right turn to come. This

is the time for admissions in schools. The so-called 'good schools' are few and scares. Rush for these schools are higher. Thus the queues in front of these schools are larger. Anxiety attacks seem to be constant companions of the parents. Many of these schools conduct separate interviews for the parents and their children. The magnanimity of the situation is well conveyed to the children. The methods followed vary from gentle persuasions to cajoling and finally coaxing. Lots of things have to be taught to children before they can get admission to schools. These could include names of numerous animals and their babies, plants, vegetables, machines, colors etc. The children are made to realize that their admission in the well-known schools is of utmost importance to their future. Many of these children actually take tuition from schoolteachers or others in authority. Interestingly this preference for tuition before admission to schools is higher among the educated patents.

The children are thus initiated into their first encounter with the formal institutional structure of society. Soon the children learn about timetables, uniforms, over sized school bags, discipline within classrooms and most importantly the punishments for not adhering to these rules. Harmless looking booklets called 'Report Cards' start dictating their positions both at schools and homes. Holidays are spent doing home works or preparing for upcoming examinations. Most other activities are considered useless and waste of time. From a tender age the feeling of running against time is strongly instilled in the children. Too many things have to be learnt and reproduced in a short span of time. The ills of 'hurry up syndrome' start catching up with the children early in life. It is no wonder that the numbers of 'hyperactive' or 'withdrawn' children are on the rise.' Parents-Teachers Meeting 'is another ritual in the school that can turn nightmarish for all

the groups involved-the parents, the teachers and the students. In these parents and teachers do not view each other as equal partners in helping the process of the child's development. They often assume the form of two warring communities blaming each other for a child's inability to perform in class. Parents often complain that the syllabus of each subject is huge and teachers often expect much of it to be taught at home. The teachers often complain that parents expect their children to do well but often do not assume enough responsibility about their children's schoolwork. The teachers are themselves often aware of the burden but feel they are helpless. The board creates the syllabus and teachers have little say in curriculum construction. However the better-known schools often assume a position of authority vis- vis the parents. The CBSE authorities on their part point out that the curriculum is generally constructed keeping in view the needs of the society at large and the suggestions of teachers, parents and students. In this condition of chaos and uncertainty education loses its actual meaning, and children are left to suffer. The children soon learn to react and respond to this 'burden of learning both physically and mentally.

Children spend a crucial phase of life in school. The school plays a significant role in the development of the child's personality. The type of school one goes to and the kind of experiences he or she gathers determines his or her attitude towards the self, others and life in general. This is even truer in case of children coming from the middle and upper middle class of society. For many children coming from the lower stratum of society, education still is a distant dream. This is in spite of the constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education till 14 years of age. Many of those who join, drop out because of socio-economic pressures. The belief that education is the only

gateway to success is instilled in the minds of all the children from childhood. Even those who drop out of school or do not go to school believe that they have really lost a great opportunity in life.

In the present scenario the child who goes to school is expected to excel in all aspect of school curriculum. These include performances in all the subjects-language, sciences, mathematics and social sciences, as well as the extra curricular activities. Based on these performances students are graded as inferior or superior both within and outside classroom. Teachers are in a perpetual hurry to brand or label a student as very good, good, average or poor. The basic values imbibed in the classroom are that of excessive competition. The students are set against each other and the sense of competition outweighs any other emotions. The pressure to get good marks is so high that students do not deter themselves from adopting unfair means. Once a child acquires a particular 'label' it is difficult to overcome the image associated with it. This is true for both the so-called 'good' student as well as the 'bad'. The good students often struggle very hard to live up to that reputation. The 'bad students are caught up in a vicious circle and find it difficult to overcome the perils of the given image. The children themselves imbibe these hierarchical values and conduct themselves accordingly. Innovations, experimentation or inquiry are hardly ever encouraged. The weight of the 'cross of being good or bad' overwhelms the children. It takes away their initiatives to transgress these given boundaries. They are not allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. The children are most of the times unable to associate what they learn in class with real life situations. Hence integration of knowledge does not take place. Thus mere information gathering and the ability to score better grades in schools substitute true knowledge.

The family also contributes to the enhancement of identity based on school performance. Thus the parents of the 'good' students can often be seen boasting about their children's performance. The parents of the so-called bad students are perpetually anxious about the future of their children. Teachers assume a position of paramount importance in the lives of the student. The attitude of the teachers goes a long way in creating the self-perception of the child. Most teachers however are neither professional nor passionate enough to realize this.

Education has thus become too narrow and commercialized. The subjects taught in the classrooms have little or no relevance outside it. Subjects like history or geography fail to instill in the child the true notions of unity in diversity or a pride for the country. Civics does not instill in the child the ideas of duties and responsibilities. The subjects like physics, chemistry biology or mathematics do not give rise to the sense of experimentation and discovery or analytical ability. Similarly the sense of discipline taught within the classroom has no relevance outside it. The schools fail to teach the students to contribute effectively either to the society, self or their chosen subject. They are just taught to appropriate items or situations to the best of their ability. The sense of self cannot develop properly without the sense of social. Citizenship rights cannot be taught without the idea of citizenship duties. One cannot correctly know one's individual space unless one learns to respect the space of others. Equality cannot emerge in a society where individuals apply one rule for himself or herself and another for others. In a system like this where 'form' gains far more importance than 'content', formality is what matters, and real learning ceases to exist. Thus certificates are more important than what they stand for. Schools try to teach formal disciplines to students, which are not

internalized by the student. Thus it is not surprising that while schools are generally sites of disciplined behavior outside the schools indiscipline is more a social norm than an exception.

2) DOWNFALL OF GRAND IDEALS AND THE REALITY OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

The question that bothers one is that how did education in India come to this point. How did academic achievement gain precedence over all other aspects in school life? This remains even more problematic when India boasts of a grand educational legacy from the ancient period, where education was to provide proper direction to students in social, economic, political, ethical, emotional and spiritual life. This system seemed to have lost its relevance long ago and has become a part of a legendary past. What remains interesting is that in the present era also every school and all the educational boards claim '*all round development*' of the student as their primary goal. New educational experiments are carried out often to find out how the school curriculum can be made more effective in developing well-rounded and balanced personalities. The school curriculum does include co-curricular activities along with academic subjects to give it a balanced look. Yet the Indian schools are caught in a culture of mindless mugging of disconnected information, with excessive emphasis on certification and branding.

An attempt is made here to trace the history of Indian school education to locate the probable causes of this particular situation. India has a grand educational legacy dating back to the ancient period. But education in India took a very deliberate and distinctive turn after independence. It was officially declared as the most important vehicle in bringing about social transformation and progress in India. The Indian leaders had a particular vision of the new India inspired by the notions of modernity, rationality, science and democracy. India required a total socio-economic transformation to become modern and at par with other developed nations of the world. The national objectives, constitutional goals, directive principles of the state policy and socio-economic needs and problems determine the structure, design and content of any education system. The education system of any nation is conditioned by its own ethos, culture, character and requirements. Society however does not remain static. An effective education system has to be dynamic in nature and character and should be responsive to the changing situations. One of the most important requirements of the time was identified as large-scale industrialization for modernization and self-sufficiency. The other major goal before the nation was that of national integration and social cohesion by the firm establishment of the constitutional ideal of equality of all citizens in India. In a pluralistic society like India diversity is strength. But for diversity to be productive an underlying unity amongst the diverse people is necessary. A nation or people cannot develop without cohesion, understanding and respect for each other. Diversity can however be a very sensitive issue to handle. If not treated carefully it can be a major source of tension and conflict. A developing nation can ill-afford to dissipate its energies and resources in solving avoidable conflicts. A sustained effort is essential to ensure that none is allowed

to create unnecessary tensions amongst the people of the country. A grand vision of an industrially developed, unified, strong, and well-respected nation fired the imagination of the India. Education was identified as an important sector, which could potentially, and as a matter of fact, essentially contribute towards achieving these goals. This had to be achieved at a brisk pace since India has to catch up with the other developed nation as fast as possible. Education was identified as the most important vehicle in bringing about the desired changes. Thus it had to be tailor made to fulfill these dreams.

Several Education Commissions and Review Committees were set up to plan education in India. The most comprehensive of these was the Kothari Commission¹ set up in 1966. This was the first attempt to restructure Indian education system as a whole after independence. The commission clearly declared that the different levels of education- primary, secondary and university education are integrally related to each other. It is not possible to have a strong and progressive university education without an efficient system of school education. For the first time a lot of emphasis was put on school education and government efforts were promised for restructuring and improving school system. In fact, 'what is needed is a revolution in education, which in turn will set in motion the much desired social, economic and cultural revolution.'

The Commission identified three important facets of the programs that would bring about the desired educational revolution. These were: a) Internal transformation, which would relate to life, needs and aspirations of the nation; b) Qualitative improvement of education so that the standard achieved are adequate, keep continually rising and in few areas become internationally comparable; and c) expansion

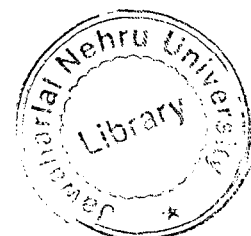
¹ Kothari Commission was set up under the chairmanship of Dr D.S. Kothari, to review the existing scenario of education in India in 1964.

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of educational facilities broadly on the basis of man –power needs, with an emphasis on equalization of educational policies.²⁾ The Commission suggested some important changes in the schooling pattern. Some important areas of change suggested by the commission were: a) introducing work experience as an integral part of general education; vocationalization of education at the secondary level; improvement of professional education, and research promoting national consciousness; b) making science and mathematics compulsory till the secondary level and developing scientific research; c) introducing a common school system making social and national service compulsory; developing all modern Indian languages to their best ;and d) inculcation of high values-social, moral and spiritual at all stages of education. These would help in the fulfillment of the national objectives of accelerating the process of modernization, increasing productivity, and achieving social integration and the cultivation of social, moral and spiritual values among the citizens. From now on the stress on science education increased keeping in view the necessity of rapid industrialization and mechanization of Indian society. It is true that importance was attached to the study of literature, language and history. It also attempted to tackle the much-debated question of medium of instruction to be used in schools and colleges. It recommended vernacular language to be used as the medium of instruction in the primary and secondary level of education. Major recommendations were made regarding the system of examinations. Since then the educators in India were aware of the problems of the examination and

²⁾ Taken from the section ' Education National Development' in Kothari Commission Report; Ministry of Education, Government of India 1966; p 61

³⁾ Taken from the section: Some recommendations by the Commission in Kothri Commission report of 1964-66; pp 112-117



evaluation system. The Kothari Commission recommended that examinations should be given to help test the analytical ability, to avoid unnecessary mugging of information. Since then numerous other review committees have been held and number of other recommendations put forward. Somehow in all the recommendations the same sentiments have been echoed and the basic problems remain the same. Almost 18 years after the introduction of 1968 policy, a new education policy was developed in 1986. It was felt that our education system is not able to meet the needs and aspirations of the people. "There are moments in history when a new direction has to be given to an age-old process."⁴ It clearly stated that "Education in India stands at a cross-roads today. Neither normal linear expansion nor the existing pace and nature of improvement can meet the needs of the situation. In the Indian way of thinking, a human being is a positive asset and a precious national resource which needs to be cherished, nurtured and developed with tenderness and care, coupled with dynamism. Each individual's growth presents a different range of problems and requirements, at every stage - from womb to the tomb. The catalytic action of education in this complex and dynamic growth process needs to be planned meticulously and executed with great sensitivity."

The National Policy on Education 1986 reaffirmed the decision of the 1968 policy that science and mathematics should remain as compulsory subjects in the first ten years of school education. It must be strengthened because all the areas of development are science and technology based and for that we need experts, middle-order workers and scientifically literate citizens. It introduced the famous 'Operation Black Board' to make primary education compulsory and available to every one. The

⁴) This is taken from the section 'Introduction' in the 'National Policy on Education'; p 7; Ministry of Education, Government of India 1986

pressure of curriculum increased further with a major revamping. We have already spoken about the ideals of education that the divergent education commissions recommendations suggested. In these recommendations, as we have argued there was a grand optimistic perception of schooling as an institution, that would lead to radical social transformation and the democratic egalitarian social order. These grand perceptions are not however easy to implement. In fact as innumerable studies in the sociology of education reveal there is wide gap between the actual educational practices and the stated educational ideal. The ideal is that education is essentially a liberating experience. It intensifies human sensitivity and develops faculties like reason, observation and analytical skills. It encourages one to take up new challenges with joy and curiosity. Ironically we see a negation of these ideals in the actual educational practices. For example, science is taught in a completely distorted manner. The kothri commission guided by the Nehruvian spirit of scientific temper thought of teaching and curriculum as a radical exercise that promotes the child's curiosity and ability to solve problems and puzzles.

However in reality the students are not taught to explore and experiment or develop a scientific temperament. Observation, inquisitiveness and problem solving capacities are not encouraged. This is also true for the introduction of work experience as an important part of school curriculum. The rationale behind introducing this is never conveyed to the students. Thus the idea of work experience as vocational education and as an attempt to change attitude towards manual labour is completely lost in the classrooms. These more often than not become great burdens for children to tackle. The belief that a lot was happening in the world and India had to keep pace with those

happenings, finds its way into the classroom through a cluttering of information that the children have to learn without actually relating to them in any effective way. Since there was a great need to emphasize the importance of equality, universalisation and Indian unity as major values to be inculcated, a uniform educational syllabus was set up for all Indian students, not keeping the diversity of the country in mind. Apart from this much of what is taught in classrooms are colored by European legacy. Hence it is not surprising that children learn more about other nations and their history rather than about Indian life and society. Hence for most Indian students it remains alien from their real life experiences. Education still remains a scarce resource in the Indian society and the schism between the educated and less educated keeps on increasing. English as a language is seen as more in terms of its prestige value. First generation learners and those in the villages always feel disadvantaged in this regard because of their lack of exposure to English as a language. Communication skill in English is always seen as a major indication of smartness and opens up better job opportunities. Hence the debate about educating in the vernacular remains ever current in the Indian society. Thus there is always a mad rush to send children to 'English medium schools'. The major causes of stress in school are because of the syndrome of too much to be taught in too little time- a huge syllabus followed in schools, hierarchization of science as superior, social science and arts as inferior and excessive importance of marks and grade.

The issue of excessive academic burden and unsatisfactory quality of learning is not new to Indian society. It has been addressed time and again by several education commissions and review committees. The question of excessive academic burden and unsatisfactory quality of learning has been discussed time and again by

several committees and groups like The Ishwaribahi Patel review committee (1977), NCERT working group (1984), and NPE Review Committee (1990). But the problem became acute with every new curricular change. In NPE Review committee (1990) pointed out to the basic problem of the education. The reason was stated that even though India had gained independence a long time back it had not been able to come out of its age old colonial mind set about education."One fundamental reason for failure has been that while we go on making radical protestations, our education to this day continues to be governed by the same assumptions, goals and values that governed it in the days of the British Raj. It is clear that the present system of education, in terms of education for the people, has outlived its utility, whatever it ever had. But before we have a new pattern of education we must have a new model of development."³ The need to move out of the old system of education with its stress on examinations and learning unrelated to life was questioned in every education commission and committee since Independence.

It was however 'The Yashpal Committee'⁴ that did a landmark review of the burdens of learning in India in the year 1992. It tried to deal with academic burden comprehensively and recommended ways of changing the situation. "Our Committee was concerned with one major flaw of our system of education. This flaw can be identified briefly by saying that 'a lot is taught but little is learnt or understood. It would be correct to say that this neglect of understanding has gone so far and deep in our education system that a child can pass almost any examination without any understanding of the phenomena she has been told about in books or in the classroom.

³ Taken from 'Preface' in NPE 1986 Review (Ramamurti) Committee; Ministry of Education, Government of India; 1990

⁴) Report of the National Advisory (Yashpal) Committee on Learning Without Burden (1992-93); p5 Ministry of Human Resource Development , government of india; p5

It clearly indicated its aim as “to advise on the ways and means to reduce the load on school students at all levels, particularly the young students while improving quality of learning including capability for life, self –learning and skill formulation.” After studying the problem of curriculum load in detail, Yashpal Committee identified the following as manifestation of the existence of the problem⁵:

- 1) Starting early: It has been observed during the last few years that admission age to nursery classes has been progressively lowered down to the age of 2 1/2 years at some places. It appears that the perception has taken a deep root that if a child has to succeed in life; he or she must start education early in life.
- 2) Size of the school bag: So far as physical load of the school bag is concerned, the situation has become worse over the past few years. However, the weight of the school bag represents one dimension of the problem, another dimension can be seen in the child's daily routine which includes completion of homework and attendance at tuitions and coaching classes of different kinds.
- 3) Examination system: The major, well understood defect of the examination system is that it focuses on children's ability to reproduce information to the exclusion of the ability to apply concepts and information on unfamiliar, new problems or simply to think. Both the teachers and the parents constantly reinforce the fear of examination and the need to prepare for it by memorizing a whole lot of information from the textbook and guidebooks. This sort of perception about the examination makes things difficult for children.

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- 4) Joyless Learning: Majority of our school going children view learning at school as a boring, even unpleasant and bitter experience. The limited purpose of preparing for examination is indeed a very important factor for the unpleasantness of learning. The child centered education and activity based teaching learning method are talked about but are seldom practiced in our school
- 5) Syllabi and textbook: The syllabi and textbooks if not prepared properly lead to the problem of curriculum load. It has been observed that most of the textbooks have high density of concepts and the style of writing is very terse. The language used in the books in some cases is beyond the comprehension of many students.

After discussing the indicators or manifestations of the problem of curriculum load, the committee identified the following as the roots of the problem:

- a) Knowledge vs. Information: The committee has questioned the assumption underlying most curriculum renewal exercises that some sort of knowledge explosion has taken place, therefore, there is a valid reason to add more and more to the existing syllabi. By equating information with knowledge, more things are added to the syllabus making it heavier for children.

⁵ Section II & III: 'The Problem' in National Advisory Committee Report on 'Learning without Burden' pp 4 - 23

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- b) Experts isolated from classroom realities: Experts commissioned to write textbooks for school students are isolated from classroom realities. Since they are not familiar with learning process of children, the textbooks prepared by them prove too difficult for majority of children.
- c) Centralized character of curriculum: Curriculum developed centrally is not relevant to the local needs of different parts of the country. There is need for increasing participation of teachers in the process of curriculum development.
- d) Convention of teaching the text: Majority of teachers perceives the content of the textbook as a rigid boundary or a definer of their work in the classroom. Boredom is the inevitable outcome when tersely written textbook is taught in a rigid and mechanical manner.
- e) Competition based social ethos: Our social ethos, particularly in urban areas is now fully entrenched in the competitive spirit, which is fast becoming our way of life. Rising aspiration of people in all sections of the society and the growing realization that education is an important instrument to fulfill their aspirations have resulted in a craze for admission to English medium schools which start imparting formal education too early in the child's life
- f) Absence of academic ethos: Adequate time, staff, accommodation and its maintenance, funds, pedagogical equipment, playgrounds are essential pre-requisites

for effective curriculum transaction but unfortunately, an overwhelming majority of schools do not have even the minimum essential facilities. The method of teaching used by majority of teachers is devoid of any type of challenge for the students. Children are hardly provided any opportunity to observe and explore natural phenomenon. The concept of library as a readily available source for learning simply does not exist in most schools. Similarly, science laboratories are not properly equipped and are not used for experimentation and discovery.

The committee suggested some major changes in the school framework to tackle this problem of 'burden of learning'. Some of the major recommendations⁶ included were:

- i) Greater involvement of teachers in framing curriculum and preparation of textbooks at State/UT level
- ii) Amendment of School Education Acts or Rules of State/Union Territories for laying down norms for pre-school
- iii) Abolition of tests/interviews for admission in pre- schools and discontinuance of textbooks and homework at pre- school stage
- iv) Abolition of homework and project work at primary stage
- v) Extensive use of audio-visual material and enforcing teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40

It is thus evident that 'academic stress in schools has been an issue of major concern for educationists in India and has been addressed in all major educational committees and commissions. In spite of these efforts the situation has not changed significantly for students in India.

Thus the issues raised in the Yashpal Committee still remain current even today. A survey of the three schools of Delhi suggests that curricular load still is a major cause of stress in schools. Academic stress in schools manifests itself through different aspects of classroom practices. Coping with a large syllabus is a major cause of trouble in classrooms. All the school going children are subject to it. The teachers are also under pressure to compel the students to complete such a large load in a short span of time. To force the students to go through this grill the teachers often take recourse to several disciplinary measures. However these measures sometimes fail to take into account the needs and the psychology of the students. Often instead of being beneficial they turn out to be harmful for them. When not dealt with properly stress built up during this school going stage can be a cause of life long problems.

3) CULTURE OF SCHOOLING: ALL PERVASIVE ACADEMIC STRESS AND ITS MANIFEATATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Academic load is a major cause of stress in schools. Stress within the classrooms, however is generated through different ways. Some of the ways identified here are:

- a) Curricular pressure
- b) The academic culture of a school
- c) Homework and examinations

⁶ Taken from the section IV: Recommendations in Yashpal committee report(1992); pp 37 - 43

is extremely difficult for a child to grasp a sense of time of 6000 years. So often the chapters are treated as discrete and not related to each other. Moreover history textbooks in schools generally treat history as anecdotes of large events and dates. The idea of society and culture at that particular point of time gets little reference. Students are caught up in remembering dates and facts, and fail to grasp the real essence of history. This is just one subject. There are 8 other academic subjects to deal with. The situation is same in the case of other subjects also. Each one in their turn offers a huge load and fails to make an impact on the child as an integrated subject.

Teaching of Mathematics requires an understanding of the cognitive abilities of the children at a particular age. Mathematics and Language are the two areas in which students generally face maximum problems. All the subjects in schools are distant from real life situations. This is however more pronounced in case of mathematics. While it deals with real objects in life, mathematics often come across as a web of meaningless numbers and formulas to the children. Children are introduced to too many concepts, which remain unclear to them. Thus there is a tendency to do Mathematics in a mechanical way. Teaching of mathematics often remains a problem, because teachers forget about the cognitive level of students. It is very difficult to understand related concepts if they are not individually clear to students. A student in class VI has to cover a syllabus having 12 chapters. These are 1) Natural Numbers and whole Numbers, 2) Operations on Whole Numbers, 3) Factors and Multiples, 4) Integers, 5) Algebraic Expressions, 6) Introduction of linear equation, 7) Basic Geometric Concepts, 8) Line Segments, Ratio, Proportion, 9) Percentage and Profit and Loss, 10) Angles, 11) Parallel Lines and 12) Statistics. Each of these is again divided into several

sub topics. The books are written in a extremely formal and boring way. The use of these different mathematical concepts in real life is hardly given. It is difficult to hold the attraction and thus attention of a child through such unrelated web of numbers having nothing to do with real life. These become more pronounced as children go to higher classes. Likewise in all the subjects the load of curriculum is heavy and the child is expected to excel in all of these.

It has often been suggested that education of a child should be related to his/her immediate surrounding. Indian society can provide different experiences and environments for different students. These cultural deviations are never taken into account while constructing a syllabus. Thus it is essentially the dominant cultural beliefs and attitudes of the urban city life that is reflected the syllabus. Here reference can be made to Michael Apple's work, 'Ideology And Curriculum'. Schools as formal institutions convey an image of rationality and value neutrality. It hides the economic and cultural power dimensions involved in curriculum construction.

b) HOMEWORK AND EXAMINATIONS

It is clearly evident that a lot is taught in the schools because of the NCERT and CBSE syllabus. The amount of homework given in most schools is high. It is possible that homework in individual subject on a particular day might not be high. When the homework in each subject however adds up there is often a lot to be done. Generally this is an issue of conflict between the parents and teachers. Parents point out

that the schools expect the parents to teach a lot to the children at home. These can be in the form of homework, preparation for examinations and sometimes teaching the entire chapters. Teachers on their part complain that many of the parents do not spend enough time with their children's schoolwork and later complain about their performance. However children in most cases have to handle a heavy load of homework. These can come as merely academic exercise or sometimes in the form of project work. Sometimes these project works can be of major trouble to children as well as their parents. Parents and students often point out that these are extremely 'tidious', time consuming and 'useless' work. They believe that they are a complete waste of time because the examinations are not conducted through the 'project method'. These become even more problematic before the examination time. Some students however seem to enjoy such 'Project works' because they are a break from conventional academic rigour.

In India examinations assume excessive importance and more often than not it becomes the sole purpose of education. Apart from three terminal examinations in a year, many schools prefer to take additional weekly tests. The schools are of the opinion that this maintains regular habits of studying among students, and creates less pressure during the terminal examinations. The students however differ in their opinion. They point out that these exams are often pressurizing because they comprise of fairly large portions. Apart from this a percentage of marks from these weekly examinations is added to the final mark sheet. Hence it is important to do well in all these weekly tests to maintain high scores. The terminal examinations are no less important. Hence the pressure of performance is always very high. Examinations get a high publicity and importance in the school calendars. It assumes magnanimous proportions during the

board examinations. These become public events. Students who secure top ranks in these examinations become national heroes. Their interview is taken in the national TV and radio. Examinations thus become more important than learning. The pressure of performance in examinations is so high that cheating during examinations has taken a menacing form in classrooms. Students are often caught cheating even during weekly tests and terminal examinations. The rise of 'help lines for students' during examinations is indicative of its pressurizing effect on students. Every year Indian newspapers abound with articles pertaining to stress among students in schools. While lots have been talked about the ills of examinations and excessive homework, these still remain major problems to be dealt with in schools.

c) REWARD AND PUNISHMENT SYSTEMS IN SCHOOLS

Every school develops some methods of rewarding the students who do well in school and also of punishing those who fail to live up to the expected school standards. Rewards are often given for good academic performance and also for some co-curricular activities. Punishments are meted out for bad academic performance and misbehavior of any kind in school. Both rewards and punishments are major causes of stress among students. Rewards are always few in number compared to the aspirants for those. Competitions are high among students for these rewards. However often a pattern develops in getting these rewards. It is often noticed that the same students keep receiving these rewards, thus creating a distance between those who do and those who do

not receive the rewards. Prizes are generally in the form of books, badges, shields and certificates. In DPS these can also be in the form of 'scholar's blazers' or 'scholar ties', special blazers and ties worn only by very good students. The students do not carry around rewards like books, certificates, or medals all the time. On the other hand rewards like badges and blazers act as constant reminder to all the students of the differences between the recipients and the non-recipients. The recipients often can become too arrogant and excessively proud of the possession. The other aspiring students can often feel left out and discriminated.

Punishments for not doing well in academics or deviations from classroom standards range from small 'corporal punishments' like slapping or occasional beating up of students, turning students out of the class room, making the erring student sit separately to calling of parents and rustication. Corporal punishments sometimes can play havocs with a student's life. It also conveys a wrong message to the students, that physical violence is an acceptable mode of behavior to get things done. This is worse when students are punished for physically fighting with each other. Children learn a lot by imitation. Hence it is unfair of schools to expect students to deter from violence if the schools follow violent measures to keep students under control. Schools like DPS believe in issuing different colored cards like in the football fields, apart from all the other forms of punishments. They however strongly reject corporal punishments. These cards act as warnings and each card carries a different weight or value. In case of punishments also one sometimes notices a pattern. The same students often become the victims of punishments. These students often point out that punishments are so frequent that they do not have any impact on the students. It is important to correct bad behavior or initiate

regular study habits, but punishments do not necessarily work out effectively. Punishing without going into the root of the problem often leads to its recurrence rather than eliminating the offending behavior. Irrespective of punishments being beneficial or adverse, they are stress producing by nature.

d) PEER PRESSURE

Adolescence is a period of great change in ones life. The adolescents are constantly in the quest for their own identity. They are caught up in a situation of neither being a child, nor an adult. Friendship and Peer groups become immensely important at this age. Performance in schools often plays a great role in determining ones peer group. The need to be accepted and appreciated is high amongst students of this age group. Academic performance often is the basis of peer group formation. Good students generally prefer to be around with the good ones. A strong hierarchy is often created within the classroom based on academic performances. This is often fuelled by the attitude of both teachers and parents. It is important to live up to the level of the peer groups. The attitude of the students towards each other is guided by their respective academic performance. The need to get noticed is as strong among the so-called '*back benchers*' as their 'good students' counterparts. So it is often found that these students try out different tricks, even if these mean getting punished in class. They develop their own circle and often become the victims of teachers' wrath. Peer pressure also adds to stress in classrooms.

d) RESTRICTIVE TIME TABLES

The Students in India are expected to learn a lot in a short span of time. Most schools have 8 to 9 classes per week. Some schools follow a 5days, or 6days/-week schedule. There are a few double period classes, i.e. one subject is taught through two periods. There are a few co curricular classes. There are a few 'zero' period or free periods when students can technically do what they feel like doing. Children in most schools point out that these periods are more often than not used up for extra classes to finish the syllabus in different subjects. Thus in most cases it means that students are expected to remember and grasp all the subjects taught in these eight periods. It is difficult for students to have such a high attention span. Moreover in forty-five minutes not much can be taught. The students are generally stopped from exploring the school premise even during the school hour. They are expected to be in the exact assigned place at every moment of school hour. Some schools like DPS and Ryans International have installed cameras in schools to track truant students.

Parallel tuition classes are extremely common in India. Most students do take tuition in some subject or the other. These are often followed by compulsory art /sport/both classes. From morning to night the students are bound up by a strict schedule. This leaves them little time to study or spend time by themselves. Sports and art often loose much of their charm because of their restrictive routinized nature. Rest also is a scarce luxury in their lives. A typical student's life starts with school in the morning, coming back, going to tuition classes, coming back and preparing for next days homework, perhaps intercepted by a little time to go out and play. This type of restrictive

for example, points out to parents in their school diary that the parents make it a point to make their children do homework regularly. This is perfectly understandable. What is objectionable is that they add that 'this may entail a little bit of sacrifice on your part, but the end result is worthwhile.' Another example is where the school diary asks the parents 'send your child in clean and proper uniform to spare him embarrassment in class.' This could mean that embarrassing a child in class could be a legitimate behavior from the teacher if there is any deviation from the standard prescribed. In a school like Kendriya Vidyalaya (JNU) many of the students are first generation learners. In such a case the school also takes a highly authoritative attitude towards the parents. They always assume that the teacher being more educated knows what is better for the child than the parents. More the distance between the parents, teachers and the students, the higher is the chance of stress generation in the schools.

f) BELIEFS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION

Education has always been on great premium in India. Even today education in India is confined to a small portion of the population. It remains a scarce resource in India. Education is seen not only as a means of securing a stable and successful job but also helps in maintaining status and respectability in society. 'English medium' and private schooling is seen as more respectable and more promising than the government sponsored schools. This belief is so widespread that it affects every student. A student from Kendriya Vidyalaya, believes very strongly that students from DPS are

always going to be ahead in competition, mainly due to their better competence in English, and better access to other resources in life. The students of DPS, likewise believe that they are going to do better than the students in KV because of they are 'smarter' than their KV counterparts. Here education is seen as a 'cultural capital' to use Pierre Bourdieu's term. It becomes evident that students who come from traditionally educated groups are able to secure better jobs. This is in spite of the Indian governments effort to bring about equality by reserving educational seats and jobs at various levels for the so-called 'weaker section' of the society. At an early age the distinction between rich and poor, status and power become important issues, which children start to negotiate with. The roots of differences are created here and generally continue through out life. Another problematic attitude is that towards manual labour. Traditionally education was the reserve of the higher castes in India. Lower caste people had no access to education. They were left to do the manual jobs. In modern Indian case it is the lower class people who are occupied in manual labour both in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Hence even today education and status are generally seen as antithetical to manual labour in society. Such attitudes are detrimental to the development of society, and create divisions within society. They are also major causes of stress among students in society. Children are not taught the dignity of labour. Hence people who are engaged in manual labour are often looked down upon, and feel deprived themselves. Even though mobility has increased a lot among the Indians, the kind and the level of mobility is often restricted by both '*cultural*' and '*economic*' capital'. This often creates a lot of pressure on parents and children. Parents would always want their children to do better than them and children always dream of getting better than what they already have. Thus children often feel the

pressure of having a dream and the uncertainty of not achieving it in real life. Hence children often feel that the questions of mobility are more technical than real. This is felt more strongly by students who come from the economically weaker sections of the population. All these uncertainties add to the academic demands on the students. In spite of loop holes and problems, the so-called successful people in India are more often than not educated. It is a oft repeated proverb in India that The goddesses of learning and money come hand-in –hand. Hence there is an excessive burden of learning, to ensure the accumulation of both ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ capital. The children are forced to take up quite a number co-curricular activities. It is however needless to point out that most parents and teachers do not encourage children to think of taking up those as career choices. People do search for the ‘illusive’ certainty of pursuing studies, leading to a hopeful *respectable job*. It is thus not surprising that India, having the dubious distinction of being the second most populous country in the world, has not been able to boast of a single medal in any of the worldwide sports events over the years. The exceptions have been only too few and far between.

All that we have said so far indicates the intensity of the academic stress or burden of schooling that an average school going child is experiencing. In fact, every component of the prevalent school culture- the prevalent form of teaching/learning, the excessive load of information, the preoccupation with examination and quantification of one’s achievement through percentage of marks, i.e. the entire culture of schooling deprives education of the spirit of joy, creativity and innovation. In this chapter we have tried to understand, to use the Weberian language, the ‘*meaning*’ of this academic stress. We have also examined how the grand ideals of education, visualized by the post colonial

Indian State eventually collapsed. The domain of education became a site marked by social hierarchy, an abstract knowledge without any organic link to the learner's biography or cultural experience, and a repressive form of pedagogy that rests on 'discipline', surveillance and the fear of punishment.

This conceptual understanding of the burden of schooling needs to be elaborated further through the example of concrete real life situations. In the next chapter we would examine how the burden of schooling and academic stress can be felt in three fairly well known schools of Delhi – DPS, Kendriya Vidyalaya and Springdales.

CHAPTER II

FROM SITES OF LEARNING: EXPERIENCING ACADEMIC
STRESS

School going age forms a very impressionable phase of a person's life. However the approach and attitude towards school change with age. The pre school stage starts at 2 years of age and children generally leave school after 12th standard around the age of 17. Through out this period the students' lives go through several phases. A particular type of attitude and reaction towards schools marks each phase. At the pre-school stage the school remains a place of admiration and teachers take the place of adored heroes. This is the stage when imitating adult behavior becomes a major pre-occupation of children. G.H. Mead¹ called it the 'play stage'. Through these role playing the child gradually learns about the expected adult behavior. If we observe this stage carefully then we can often find children trying to imitate teachers. However the images that are most vividly portrayed are those of teachers screaming, yelling, punishing and teaching. Interestingly enough we find that this trend of school as a dominating and correcting force a recurring image in the school going students through the generations. Tagore in his autobiographical work, 'Boyhood Days' and 'Reminiscence'² clearly pointed out to this trend. To assume the powerful image of a strict teacher, he would use the railings of his house as the students and beat the railing with sticks replacing it as the master's cane. He voiced the same sentiment in many of his poems in 'Sishu' or the child. In the poem 'Kanai Master' he speaks in the voice of a child who takes his pet cat

¹ G H Mead defines 'play stage' as that stage of a child's life when he/she tries to imitate the behavior of the adults and ultimately learns about expected behavior and 'role playing'
For further details see G.H. Mead: *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago University Press 1907

² 'Boyhood Days' and 'Reminiscence' are the translations of two autobiographical works of Rabindranath Tagore, 'Chhele Bela' and 'Jeevansmriti' originally written in Bangla. In both of these and especially in Boyhood Days, his great anguish over the life negating education system where children memorize subject without understanding or realizing them.

as the student and assumes the role of a teacher. Even in this the cane and punishments become the most important attributes of a teacher.

In present generation the situation has not changed significantly. Many schools avoid corporeal punishments but punishments still remain an important element of schooling and children are fast to imitate the punishing image of a teacher. In this chapter attempts will be made to analyze the reason why schools in India have assumed such an oppressive and negative image. What are the concrete practices, which contribute to this image of schooling and create stress and tension among students and their guardians? For this I am going to try and present the day to day activities of the lives of the school going children. I will depend heavily on my survey of three schools in Delhi, a close observation of two students one in class II and the other in class IX. Apart from these I have spoken to a cross-section of students and their parents from different other schools in Delhi. These include Modern School (Vasant Vihar), Ryans International (Vasant Kunj), Vasant Valley School (Vasant Kunj), Mothers International (Aurobindo Marg). I have also taken note of the general understanding on the issue of stress in schools from an interview with an expert psychologist working in a crisis intervention centre in Delhi.

The schools I have mainly concentrated on are DPS (R.K Puram), Kendriya Vidyalaya (JNU, Meharauli Road) and Springdales School (Dhaula Kuan). The choice of these schools was also based primarily on popular perceptions that DPS is a very good school but puts a lot of pressure on students. Springdales School tries some innovation and lessens the stress level of students. Kendriya Vidyalaya is the only government school that I have chosen. This unit of Kendriya Vidyalaya caters mainly to

the children of the staffs of JNU, IIT and NCERT. The composition of the students in this school thus significantly varies from the other two. DPS and Springdales generally cater to the well-to-do upper middle and upper classes. The Kendriya Vidyalaya caters mainly to the lower and lower middle class section of the society. Many of the students here are first or second generation learners. Hence their general experiences and expectations are sometimes slightly different from those in the other two schools.

First of all I will try to systematically describe my experiences and observations in these two schools. The areas which will get major attention are: a) admission procedure; b) The distribution of time for the children in school- a focus on the time tables followed; c) System of examinations and grading of students. d) Patterns of homework and regular class works carried on in school; e) Systems of rewards and punishments; f) The level of interaction among the teachers, students and parents; g) The attitude prevailing in the schools regarding education, life and society in general; h) The understanding of the level of stress among the teachers, students and their parents in the school.

2) DELHI PUBLIC SCHOOL (DPS)- RK PURAM

DPS with its red brick building and its formidable gate manned by a security guard can remind one of a well-guarded fort. A notice on the front gate tells the visitors the specific times when one can meet the principal. The guards deny any body entry without prior appointment. One has to reach early in the morning before classes

The admission to other classes depends on the availability of vacant seats. Each class has 12 sections and each section can accommodate about 45 to 50 students. The school claims that it does not take any tests or interviews of the children in the nursery classes. The parents of the students are interviewed to find out about their basic attitude to education and life in general. But after the nursery class, admission generally depends on the written tests and interviews of the students. It is followed by interviews of parents. In the higher classes however the students only have to prove their mettle through written test and interview.

The school claims itself to be highly disciplined and motivated. Everyone in the school- the students, teachers and staff are expected to follow this discipline. The principal is well known to be a disciplinarian and students respect as well as fear her. The teachers are also not out of her control. Children are not allowed to roam around in the corridors during the class hour. Deepa Raghavan, a student of class VI had lost her pencil box, but felt scared to go to the principal's room to look up in the box for lost property.

The teachers themselves point out that academic achievement is on great premium in the school. All students are expected to do well in studies. The school counselor points out that the teachers take extra care to help each and every student who are not able to cope with school academics. Most students are sent to the counselor either because they are not doing well in studies or exhibiting repeated behavioral problems in class. To help a student out, their parents are generally consulted. In this case however Ms Bhatti points out that many parents are not too cooperative. She says that each year the school authorities make a list of such '*erring*' parents. Then they try to reach out to these parents in a more effective way. The authoritative attitude of the school become

clear vis-à-vis the parents. The school diary also clearly reflects this attitude. In some of the recommendations to the parents the school takes a superior attitude. It is not that what is recommended is wrong but the tone is dictatorial. In one such recommendation the school authority asks the parents to send their children in proper and clean dresses. It says 'Please spare your child embarrassment by ensuring that he or she is properly and neatly dressed. In another of such recommendation it asks the parents to make sure their children do homework regularly. The tone however is objectionable. It starts with the sentence, "a little discipline is not a bad thing. Please see that your child does homework regularly and is prepared for all tests and examinations. This might entail a little bit of sacrifice on your part but the end result is worth it."⁴ These clearly indicate that the school takes a superior place vis-à-vis the parents. This is inspite of the fact that careful attention is given to parents while selecting their wards. This sentiment is voiced by many of the parents also. Some of them point out that the teachers are in the attitude of putting the blame of an erring student entirely on the parents. They do not want to assume any responsibility for the behavior or education of the students. Mrs Arati Bhatia's son went to a fairly well known school in Bangalore before coming to Delhi. She says that "the parent -teacher meetings in this school are a one-sided traffic of teacher's complains about the students." The teachers often complain that the parents do not always cooperate with the teachers. However some of the parents like Ms Arpana Bhutani seemed quite happy with their interaction level with the teachers. Both her children are in DPS- daughter in class VI and son in class II. She believes that "The school prepares the child perfectly for the competitive adult world. She happily says that, " Both of my children are extremely ambitious and manage to do well in school. Here also possibly there is a

⁴ Quoted from the section 'Recommendations to the Parents' in the DPS school diary.

difference in opinion based a little on the level of the performance of the students. Parents whose children fall into the category of good students are more comfortable with the pattern followed in the school than the parents whose children are not doing so well. . Karan Ahuja, a student in class VIII says “ Teachers are partial towards students who are good in studies. They often get away without punishments where others would be heavily punished.” Teachers however completely deny this. Some of the teachers point out that the good students generally get positive attention from the teachers because they earn it for themselves.

The students point out that teachers are generally very strict with the schoolwork. The scoring system depends on the regular Monday test, three terminal examinations and regular assignments. Not doing homework or not preparing class works and even day to day lessons are treated with strictly.

Co curricular and extra-curricular activities take up an important place in school calendar. Students are encouraged to participate in different kind of activities and competitions both within and outside the school. These generally include participating in sports, writing, quiz, debate, elocution and other competitions. Students point out that there are some students who take extra interest in such activities and it is generally they who participate in these activities. All the students do not participate in these activities. The school does not put too much emphasis on such activities. Many of the students point out that because of too much of academic pressure they cannot participate in such activities. Rahul Saxena , a student in class VIII says “ I used to enjoy sports in school till I was in class VI. Since then academic pressure has increased and I hardly take part in any sporting activity apart from regular PT classes.”

The school has an elaborate system of rewards and punishment for successful and erring students. Rewards are generally given for good academic performance. These come in the form of merit certificates, scholar badge and scholar blazers. Students getting more than 85% are considered for such awards. If a student gets more than 85% in a year they are eligible for scholar badges. If someone gets more than 85% for three consecutive years they are entitled to get a scholar blazer. These badges and blazer distinguish the so-called meritorious students from the not so meritorious ones. All students aspire for these coveted prizes. Ms Bhatti, the school counselor points out that this system of rewarding sometimes become problematic for students. She points out that it often becomes more of a problem for the recipients than the non-recipients. It does create a lot of pressure on the students to retain these distinctions. The students who do not do well also feel left out. The parents of Bidisha Roy of class XII feel extremely worried for her. They are concerned that their child is so tensed about school work and doing well in the board examination that she is becoming a nervous wreck. They pointed out that she follows a strange study habit, especially during the examination time. She studies almost the whole day and the night. "She studies at a stretch for long hours, sleeps for 15 minutes to half an hour, and then goes back to studies again. This pattern continues through out the day and night." She has been a scholar blazer holder and has always done fairly well in the class. She is keen on taking the SAT examination and going to study abroad after class XII. Her parents point out that they would prefer it if their child was a little more relaxed in life and could take schoolwork more easily. " She feels that not doing well in school is something she cannot handle." Bidisha herself however says " The satisfaction of getting the scholar badge is so great that I am prepared to get all kinds

of price for it. Her parents however are not happy with this attitude. Her father points out that Bidisha's mother used to be very strict initially about her school work. But now she herself asks her to relax and take it easy. Students sometimes complained that there is discrimination based on performance in class. The punishing of the erring students technically also follow an elaborate system. Corporeal punishment is strictly avoided. DPS follows a system of issuing yellow and red cards, detention and rustication. The most commonly used method is that of issuing cards. Detention and rustication are measures taken in extreme situations. Cards are issued most commonly for not doing homework and faring poorly in class works and tests. The other reasons that these cards are issued are for disturbing the class by talking and other misbehaviors. Students point out that the frequency of the issue of cards is fairly high. Here again it is noticed that often the same sets of students keep getting these cards. One such student Abhay Vardhan from class VIII points out that because of the frequency of the issue of cards they fail to hold much meaning after a point of time. Arrogance often is the outcome. The teachers also point out that the most common disturbing factor in the class room is too much talkativeness and inattentiveness. The more serious reasons for getting the cards are arrogant behavior and attempt to use unfair means in the tests. Turning out of the classroom and calling parents over are the other measures taken to rectify a student's behavior. Ms Bhatnagar, an English teacher believes that the children of the present generation are by nature more, rude, arrogant and disrespectful to elders, and the cards need to be used fairly often. However some students point out that The distribution of time in the school like most other school shows a distinct lack of understanding about the students and their capacities to grasp what is taught in the classroom. For example in

students apply abroad from this school. The number of applications is rising every year. The students are well aware about the existing problem of college admission and the requirement to get very high marks in any chosen field. Many of the students of class XI and XII take 'coaching' classes to prepare themselves for the well-known engineering and medical colleges. The fear of not getting admission in these areas looms large on their minds. The parents are also anxious about the future of their children. Some of the parents said that they try to create the best opportunities for the children by giving them all the facilities. Many of them insist that they demand and expect high returns. Others are skeptical about this. They believe that in the present situation luck plays a larger role than effort and hard work. They refer to the issue of paper checking and lost papers in the board exams. It is often seen that students who fare well in the schools fail to do so at the board level. Hence a lot is left on chance and luck. Students thus often feel demotivated to work hard. Jai Sankar Gupta of class X says "The board examinations are all about luck. How one is going to fare does not depend either on merit or hard work. It just depends on the mood of the examiner. If the examiner is in a good mood, then you will get good marks, if he is not then you are doomed." It is thus clear that the uncertainty of examination comes in different forms and the pressure to perform very well is extremely high.

Another feature that comes into focus in the lives of the children is the importance of peer group in classes. Students generally point out that they prefer to join the well-known coaching classes because their friends join these classes. Open or hidden rivalries in out scoring each other can easily be felt in the lives of the students. Students who score consistently well in the class point out that once some one gets into the habit

of scoring well, he or she cannot accept not doing well even once. Some students like Nikhil Arora says that they prefer to stick around with students who score well because it enhances friendship as well as competitiveness. Each one in Nikhil's group of friends are good in studies. To keep pace with each other everyone has to perform well. He admits that there are points of jealousy and rivalry, but they do have strong bonds of friendships also. Rohit Sigh, a student of class X says that friends and peers do make a difference to schoolwork. He hesitantly pointed out that he has a crush on a girl in class IX, who is an extremely good student. He said, " I had to be more serious about marks and ranks in school to try and get attention from Shivani."* This peer pressure is not only confined to academic success alone. It includes the kind of things one possesses. Flaunting one's possessions help students keep their images better in the eyes of the friends. The items to flaunt can include having items like mobile phones, expensive watches, pens, giving expensive birthday parties and going for expensive vacations. Most children are aware that to maintain such expensive standards one needs enough money. That in turn would require a secure future and good marks in the board examinations. Thus the pressure of performance sometimes become too much for them to handle.

On the other hand students who do not do well often loose the initiative altogether. Excessive importance on marks put them on the back foot and they also loose interest in the subjects. No one puts effort to create or bring back the interest in the subjects. They are caught in the viscous circle of not doing well, being bored, not putting enough effort leading again to not doing well. This often leads to complete lack of interest in education altogether. For students who fare well it is often the will to outscore

* These two names have been changed on the boy's insistence.

others dominate rather than enjoying what is being studied. Many of them report to have extreme nervousness during exams especially the terminal exams and the board exams. Parents also take the brunt of this system. Students often complained that there are some subjects that they enjoy but have to make sure that they do well in all the subjects to maintain a good 'total score'. In spite of these the students are confident that their school is one of the best in Delhi and most of the students do well in the board exams. The teachers similarly believe that they put a lot of effort to make sure that children prepare well for the board exams.

Students, their parents and teachers unanimously believe that there is a lot of pressure on the students to perform in the academic sphere. Coaching classes do a sprawling business. Most students do take extra coaching in different subjects outside school. The coaching classes they point out give better guidelines to do well in examinations. Moreover in coaching classes students believe that they get better individual attention and can improve on their weak points. The coaching classes also refer to better books. They unanimously believe that the NCERT recommended books are inadequate for the board exams. The school always refers to other reference books, practice books and sample test papers. For Mathematics the school refers to RS Aggarwal and RD Sharma as the important books to be followed in addition to the NCERT books. These books they point out have better explanations and also makes the students solve different kind of problems in the same chapters. They allege that NCERT books generally have easier problems to solve, and most questions asked in the Board exams are not covered in the NCERT books. This is one of the reasons why students in the government schools fail to compete with the students from the private schools. From the strict

disciplinarian DPS we now move to the Springdales School, which shows a lot more concern for the student's and their welfare and tries out certain innovative methods in the teaching of students.

3) SPRINGDALES SCHOOL (DHAULA KUAN)

Springdale School (Dhaura Kuan) is generally viewed as a school that allows the students a lot of freedom within the given formal mainstream education system. In terms of status and respectability it is close to DPS. The headmistress Ms Deepa Grover points out that outwardly Springdales is like many of the other well-known private schools with its fine complex of buildings and its excellent learning facilities. At the same time it has a particular quality of its own that makes it special to students, teachers and parents, resulting in 5000 applicants applying for 300 seats for the first entry point-the nursery class. The child who comes for admission in nursery level does not have to take any admission test or interviews. The head mistress of the school points out that Springdales believes that there is nothing more damaging to the personality and self esteem of a little child than to face an interview at the age of three years and be rejected. The interviews of parents are however conducted. If the school is to educate the child in the best manner possible, it needs the support and cooperation of the parents. The two

educating agencies-the parents and the teachers work hand in hand and the child does not suffer any basic conflict in the norms and values sought to be inculcated. The school looks for those parents who believe in its philosophy and the education it seeks to impart. They should thus feel enthusiastic about the child's endeavours, whether academic or co-curricular.

The school claims to believe 'that each child has a treasure within, which needs to be drawn out. A Good teacher has the capacity to draw out the best in every child who comes to Springdales. Springdales School, the Headmistress pointed out, believes in some strong ethos. In the school diary is given a clear vision of education followed in Springdales. It clearly states that 'In Springdales education is looked upon as a holistic learning experience, helping each child to develop those attributes and qualities of head, heart and hand, which will make him/her a self-reliant fine human being., socially aware and humanistic ,compassionate and kind, having pride in his country and belief in the concept of international brotherhood and peace, a person ready to work as an agency to for building a more socially just and equitable society.' The ethos of the school is deeply imbedded in its motto- 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which means 'the world is a family'. It is a concept that deeply influences in greater or lesser degree, the thought process, the value system and the way the life of its pupil. The school tries to shape the outlook and attitude towards the school, the community, the neighborhood, the nation and the world, as a part of the whole family of mankind.

The authorities of Springdales claim that " this is a school with a difference." It has introduced many innovative forms of teaching from its very inception. A concept of collective endeavour underlies the teaching and instruction. This encourages

students to work for the good of the whole and shun individual rivalries and competition. Ms Grover says that ' instead they are encouraged to compete with one's self for self-improvement. The school has abolished streaming and ranking of students till class VIII. As a result there are no formal examinations till that level. Promotion here is based on day to day assessment and unit tests. A strong sense of bonding and understanding marks the relationship between teachers and students. Ms Grover thinks that it is very much in the Indian tradition of 'guru' and 'chela'. Teachers claim that they try to take an individualized approach to each child. Innovative teaching method and learning practices include project work, library research, multi media presentation, student evaluation of the teacher and self- assessment. Remedial classes are arranged for weaker students.

The school has a counseling department, which provides information to students on various professions and careers. It also organizes vocational guidance conferences for the students and their parents. The old students association also organizes face to face interaction face to face sessions with old students of the school at the prime of their career.

The importance of co-curricular activities is also very high here. Ms Grover points out that co-curricular activities encourage personality development and draw out creativity and talent in children. It provides opportunities for leadership and character building inspired by the idea 'every child- a personality' There are numerous functional hobby classes, which include literary club, nature club, culture club etc. These clubs engage in different kinds of activities like running magazines and school wall papers, and organize competition for students. All students are encouraged to participate in either one or more of these clubs and activities. The students participate in different

types of competitions outside school also. Ms Grover points out that the school is distinctly known for participating and winning in competitions held in Delhi. All students are encouraged to take part in some sports and participation is compulsory in the annual sports event of the school, the annual sports event. The “underlying emphasis”, Ms Grover says, “is on sportsmanship, cooperation, team spirit and courage. The real message conveyed is ‘Sports is for all, Participation and giving one’s very best is important, and winning is not every thing.’” The school helps in developing the aesthetic senses of the children through different kinds of performing and visual arts. Painting and Art history classes are offered up to class XII. Folk dance, drama and street plays are organised to provide children with opportunities to express their ideas, talent and creativity.

Socially Useful And Productive work also take up an important place in school curriculum. This kind of work the head mistress pointed out assures the learning of manual skill and appreciation of dignity of labour. At the secondary level the school offers a variety of choices like interior designing, Batik, tie and dye, theatre craft, sculpture, photography etc. In the middle school activities vary from soap and candle making to gardening and bookbinding. Most children I spoke to point out that they enjoy these activities a lot. Ms Grover says that in the Springdales, “stress is always laid on a self disciplined approach to life and work; to have a discriminating mind; the courage to tread new paths, and follow the dictates of one’s own conscience, even if it means being different.” Value education does not form a separate dimension of the school curriculum but is integrally interwoven into the entire fabric of curriculum.

Even though there is a heavy stress on co-curricular activities, this is not done by a neglect of academic pursuits. The teachers point out that since evaluation is done on a day to day performance of the students in class, the students have to be regular with their schoolwork. Ms Anuradha Sen, who is the academic supervisor or counselor in the school points out that once regular study habits are formed the students also do not feel pressurized about schoolwork. This brought us to the issue of punishments in the school. She points out that punishments are not meant to rebuke a child. It is meant to correct improper behavior. Springdales does not have a rigorous code of punishment as DPS. The most common problem is however the same as DPS. It is difficult to make some children prepare their schoolwork and sometimes some students do disturb the class a lot. The commonly used methods to improve these behaviors are scolding the students, asking them to do extra school work, turning them out of classroom and calling over parents. Ms Sen however says that most parents are cooperative and teachers often take suggestions from them to teach the children better. There are however a few parents who do not cooperate with the teachers. But they are an ignorable minority. Rewards are given in competition in extra-curricular and sports activities. These generally come in the form of medals and certificates.

The students point out that some teachers teach well. Some others do not teach well. It depends on individual teachers whether they are strict or not. However they also point out that most teachers are not very strict. To the question, “ how do you define a good teacher?” Sudipto Chatterjee, a student of class X clearly defines the criteria of good teachers. He firmly replied, “ A good teacher is one who knows his/her subject well,

can come down to the level of the students and teach it properly, and is also a nice human being.”

A sense of informality marks the air in the school. The warmth of the teachers toward the students is reflected in their regular dealings. However the situation of freedom changes significantly once the students come to class IX. Here they are introduced to the mainstream schooling pattern of examinations, ranks, marks etc. Many of the students face a major problem during this stage. Like in DPS, teachers in Springdales also believe that NCERT books are not adequate. Hence students have to consult other books to make sure that they do well in the board examinations.

However many of the students and parents believe that they loose out the competitive edge because they are not trained in the craft of taking examinations from early on. The reaction to this innovative system is mixed. There are parents like Ms Pallavi Singh who are quite happy with the school. She says that “ There is no point in putting excessive pressure on the child from the beginning. As it is they will have to face pressure later on in life.” There are however some other parents who strongly believe that the school does not prepare the child enough for the tough world outside. Mr Rajiv Sadashivan, for one believes that till class VIII, children are forced to waste a lot of time on making numerous projects. SUPW and Co-curricular activities sometimes take precedence over academic work.” Instead they should be taught to be more disciplined about schoolwork. Children in other schools work a lot harder on homework and school work than students in Springdales.” To this argument another parent Amit Joshi says that the Springdales school follows the same NCERT and CBSE syllabus like most school in Delhi. So the subject matters taught are not different. It is only the method of teaching,

which slightly varies. And finally the children here learn the same things, if not more. Quite a number of parents and students however feel that examinations should be introduced atleast in class VII. Otherwise the children do not get used to sitting in the same place for long and taking examinations.

A look at the students does not reveal a great difference with those in DPS. Apart from the evident informality of relationship between the teachers and students and a little more relaxed atmosphere, there is not much difference between them and the DPSite. As far as aspiration level of the students is concerned they are at par with those in DPS. The Engineering and Medical courses get high priority. Taking 'tuition' in different subjects outside the school in class IX and X is quite high. Many of the students are forced to give up on their free time and join several coaching classes. The pressure to perform becomes high because of the lack of adequate number of seats in colleges.

However one can find some students who dare to dream differently. They do not want to join the much sought after areas of engineering and medical professions. I managed to find a boy, Arvind Vidyarthi of class X, who wants to teach in a school later on in life. He reasons, " Teachers can make or break a students life. I know that there are some teachers who can inspire you to excel in every thing that you do. Some on the other hand can be so mean that you can end loosing all interest in studies and life. I want to be a teacher who can make a difference." Airudh, a student in class VII wants to be a professional painter. He says, " I love to do projects because I have the scope to be creative. I also can use my talent of drawing in these project works." He felt even more inspired by the film 'Dil Chahta Hai' where one of the most important and loved characters was a painter. Neerja is another such student in class X, who wants to become

a professional dancer. She is already on her way as she recently had her first, formal public appearance as a dancer.

Arvind, Neerja and Anirudh are more of a minority in Springdales also. But they are a lot more visible here than in other schools which follow the hard core mainstream education system. The school by its somewhat innovative methods allows and accommodates such students more easily. Most students however are aware of the problems of admission and are ready to try very hard for their coveted areas of further studies. They are also extremely ambitious and competitive. The question of uncertainty looms large on their minds as well. The sense peer pressure is as true for student's here as anywhere else. The students in Springdales start feeling the pressure of academic stress from class IX onwards. Students here also are as much worried about the uncertainties of examinations and paper checking. In spite of its efforts the school cannot keep the students out of the reach of excessive academic stress for their entire schooling period.

However their efforts to keep it at bay for as long as possible is extremely appreciable. They act as rays of hope for those wanting to make a difference in the lives of the students. Dr Dasgupta, who teaches in JNU tries to sum it up well. He has two daughters Anindita and Anusha. Anindita is in class XII of DPS and Anusha is in class IX of Springdales. Both of them have been in their respective schools from the beginning. He points out that Anindita of DPS has always been extremely serious and competitive about school and studies. In fact she often feels very tensed and nervous about school and examination. Anusha, the one in Springdales on the other hand, has always been a little relaxed about schoolwork but a lot happier as a person. He often wishes that his elder daughter would slow down and relax a little bit. Yet he wishes that his younger child

would understand the importance of school examinations and the upcoming board examinations. At a level he is happy that his younger daughter is a relaxed, happy and carefree child. But a father's concerns makes him worried about the younger daughter's future plans and associated efforts. He hopes that she gets used to the examination system fast. In the case of his elder daughter on the other hand he knows that she is extremely focussed and should do well in her career. For her however he feels sorry that she is loosing out on her childhood before time. However neither Anindita nor Anusha seemed prepared to change places with each other. Anindita reasons, "It is important to be practical and in tune with time." Anusha on her part argues that it is more important to be at peace with myself and also improve my own standard by competing with myself."

4) KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA (JNU BRANCH)

From these well-known and reputed schools we move our attention to the less sought after government school- the Kendriya Vidyalaya. The confidence of the students of DPS and Springdales is visibly absent here. It is however important to remember the differences in the background of the students here from those of DPS and Springdales. It caters mainly to the children of teachers and non-teaching in JNU, IIT and NCERT. Some how the student population reveals that educated parents prefer to send their children to other schools. There are however some students whose parents work as non-teaching office staff in these institutions. The majority of the students are children

table is that of a PT class in which the entire school participates. This is known as 'mass PT'. Wednesdays begin with mass PT for all the students in the school. Mr AK Sharma says "that this is an attempt to bring all the students of the school together." Apart from this there are 8 non-academic classes out of 48 classes compared to only 3 out of 45 classes in DPS.

Unlike the students in the previous two schools students here seemed less focussed and sure about their career choices. Mahesh Singh, a student in class X vaguely said, "I would probably join 'computer' or take up commerce in class XI. I have not decided what to do as yet." His friend Prithviraj sounded a little more aware. He said that "it is difficult for me to get into any engineering college. I will possibly take some diploma courses in a technical area and try and get a job as fast as possible." Sri Ambaram Singh, who is a grade 4 staff in IIT says that he is happy that his son is going to complete his class VIII. After this he would want his son to help his uncle in his small hardware shop. His son Ajay is not at all keen on joining the hardware shop. He would rather prefer to take up small office jobs. He insists "I cannot possibly work in a hardware shop after completing class XII. But my father refuses to understand this. I want a decent and respectable job."

There are students like Pankaj and Amitabh who would want to take their entrance examinations for both the engineering and medical colleges. And they are extremely keen on leaving this school after class X and join a better school. Sri Jagadish Ram who works in JNU wants his son to study a lot and become a college teacher like the people he sees in JNU. He says, "I know that I'll have to work very hard to make my son

go to that stage. But I am going to try my level best. He is our only hope for life. If I invest in his education now, then we would have a secure future.”

One interesting aspect that is striking is the difference in attitude towards education among the boys and the girls. In the previous schools the distinction between boys and girls regarding education or career was not significantly different. Unlike in the other two schools visited, most girls here are not keen on a career. Few thought of pursuing studies beyond graduation. Many of them would probably leave education after XII. Poonam, a student of class IX knows that her education would not proceed beyond class X. Her parents are already on the lookout for a suitable groom. Sri Ram Deo , father of Radhika in class VIII believes that it is important to get a girl married between 14 and 17. He says that “the government rules are in their own places and reality is its own place. When one is a father of a young girl, one has to think of getting her married as fast as possible. People in our kind of society think there is something *wrong* with the girl if she is not married by the age of 17. Moreover if a girl gets highly educated then it becomes difficult to find a suitable groom. Anyway my daughter is not going to work outside home. So there is hardly any need for her to study beyond class X.” The same sentiment is voiced by Makhanlal Ojha, a gardener in NCERT. His daughter is in class VIII. He believes that, “ How much ever we try we cannot be like the ‘*rich*’ people. There is nothing more dear to us than our daughter’s *dignity*. I have studied only till class IV and my wife is completely illiterate. But we have managed to live a happy and honourable life. Girls are actually someone else’s *property*, kept in custody of the parents. The faster the parents can hand her over to the real *owner*, the better for every one.”

This is not to deny that inspite of several huddles there are some extremely ambitious voices also. But they are extremely feeble in this school. Ekta is in class XII. Her father works as a helper in the science laboratories in IIT and her mother works as a helper in JNU health centre. Ekta is keen on taking her entrance examination for Medical Science. If she fails to get that she would apply for a course for nursing. She sometimes dreams of doing science research like those scientists in IIT laboratories.

Such voices, especially among girls is very low. Ekta like her other ambitious friends want to leave KV and join a better school. Only a few boys and girls believe they can compete with students of better schools. Most of the students are sure that Engineering and Medical professions are most lucrative, followed by commerce and then by social sciences and humanities. Yet most of them lacked the confidence that they would get admission into these careers and compete with the students from the other schools on equal terms.

Disciplining the students in the school is occasionally problematic. Like in DPS, here also the teachers believe that they are superior to the parents. This is because many of the parents here are much less educated then the teachers. However it is not as rudely reflected in the behavioral patterns of the teachers or the school diary. Ms Sangeeta Sharma who teaches biology here points out that educated parents and especially mothers do make a difference in the behavior and academic achievements of the students. The students and the teachers seem to enjoy a fairly cordial relationship. One of the major problems faced by the teachers is that of retaining students in the school. The number of drop out increases with every passing year. One of the major huddle years is the Class VIII. Another chunk leaves after the X, never to go back to

studying again. However it is noticed that most children who complete XII think of completing their graduation. The reasons for quitting school vary from absolute disinterest in academic activities to the necessity of earning to support the family or getting married. Students who do well in class X board examination prefer to leave this and join other better schools. The higher fees of the private schools are sometimes a major hindrance. Vishwanath Rana, a student, who has been doing consistently well in school work points out that the science laboratories are so inadequate that the children can hardly learn anything properly. Ms Sharma points out that since this school shares its boundaries with JNU, it is open on one side and students often bunk classes and run away from schools. She also said that they often run away and go for movies in the nearby Priya Complex and Chanakya theatre. She thoughtfully adds that even though most of them do not have enough money, they manage to spend quite a lot on 'useless stuff'.

The teachers here do not expect too much of academic competence from most of the students. There are some very good students and the teachers expect a lot from them. Rewards and punishment systems are not as systematic as in the DPS. Here punishment range from slapping a child for misbehavior or academic incompetence to turning them out of the classroom and calling parents over. The teachers here often have to make a great effort to make parents understand the importance of continuing education properly. This school arranges for extra coaching of weak students after school hours. Prizes for academic excellence generally encourage the good students. They are given certificates and books as prizes. In sports and other co-curricular activities, they are given medals. The students point out that the amount of homework given is high. And tests are taken very seriously. Failing in class is looked down upon. The need to fare well in the

board exams is of utmost importance to the students. They more often than not, believe that this is a gateway to success and a better life.

It is very wrong to think that just because most students in KV are not so confident about their performances, they are not victims of stress related to school academics. Unlike in the other two schools, the number of students who fear that they would not be promoted to the next class is much higher. Like students elsewhere they are also worried about the board examinations and associated paper checking. They wholeheartedly support the regular allegation that marks often depend on the mood of the examiner. Added to this was another fear. Sanjay Prabhu fears that examiners are biased against schools like KV. He says, “ For all that you know they (the examiners) might not even check the papers when they know these are from K.V. They often end up putting average marks on all papers.” Many of the students do not have the support and understanding of educated parents. They often have to work their way through by themselves. The number of students taking tuitions outside school is also very high. Like Jagadish Ram, many other fathers feel that their children are their only hope. Hence they are prepared to go to any length to make sure their children get good education and make it big in life. The pressure to perform for these students is also extremely high. They are aware of their parents’ aspirations and sacrifices. Mohit, a student of class X says, I know what my parents are doing to make me do well in life. If I donot do well in the board examination I’ll not study any further. I would rather take up a small job to support my family. If I do well then I’ll take the entrance examination of some of the engineering colleges. Aziz is taking his Class XII board examination next year. He along with his close friend Chandrabhan wants to take the several state civil service examinations.

The will and the need to perform well in the board exams are high in many students. But they lack confidence about their future prospects. Given a true chance most of the students here would want to get good, respectable and well-paying jobs. The gap between the aspirations and the ability to translate them into reality is very painful. Like the students in DPS the students in Kendriya Vidyalaya believe that they are definitely behind the private 'good' schools in the academic race, mainly because they get better facilities and also their competence in the English language. The medium of instruction used here is mainly Hindi and children always speak in Hindi with each other. The students point out that teachers are not always serious about teaching. They do not always come to class in time and often do not finish the syllabus. The teachers complain that most of the students do not show too much interest in schoolwork. This often demotivates the teachers and they often lose enthusiasm to teach. Yet there are many teachers here who are really dedicated and students do respect them a lot.

In spite of some very disappointing stories from the school, it is still a source of hope and inspiration for the lower middle and lower section of the population. It gives them the scope to dream big and hope that it is possible to achieve them. Asish Meena, a student in class VIII dreams of becoming a doctor and going back to serve their native village in Rampur, U.P. The school has its sets of success stories too. Shiv Shakti Nath Manna, an ex student has become an IAS officer, there are quite a few who have become engineers and doctors. Some have managed to set up businesses of their own and many have joined so-called *respectable* jobs in various parts of the country. They are definitely a source of inspiration for the present students.

So we can see that whether it is in the well known task driver schools like DPS, or soft and culturally sensitive Springdales or the less well known and dejected schools like K.V. the issue of academic stress remains constant.

4) THE VOICE FROM A CROSSSECTION OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS
ACROSS DELHI

Akshay Tandon is a student in class X of Ryans International school. His father runs a big auto mechanic shop. His brother has gone to study Engineering in Nagpur after paying a huge capitation fee. Akshay, on his part knows that it would be difficult for his parents to spend that amount for him also. But he sounds fairly confident that he has got a fair chance of doing well both in the board examinations and later in engineering entrance examinations. He says, "I have consistently done well in my school work. I always rank among the top ten in school. So I should be doing well in my examinations."

He gives a glimpse to the lives of general students in Delhi. He points out that in most schools classes start around 7:00 to 7:30 am and the students are generally back home by 2:30. Most students do take tuition either in one or more subjects. He goes for Mathematics coaching twice a week and science coaching for three days in a week. The tuition classes are either in the afternoon or evenings. He comes back home and plays with his friends for half an hour and then sits down to finish his homework for the

next day. He points out that the major dilemma faced is whether to finish the homework or to prepare for the next days lessons. The amount of homework given for summer holidays is also high. Teachers more often than not ask students questions from the lessons taught in the last class. However after spending so much time in the school and coaching classes little time is left for preparing by himself. Like every one else he points out that the good colleges are few in number and the rush for those are high. He feels anxious about the future because one never knows how much he can score in the board examinations. He like many of his fellow students believes that a lot is in the hand of the examiners who can be whimsical and moody. They do not take checking of papers seriously. On the question of how to reduce the stress he clearly stated that it is important that the syllabus is reduced and teachers encourage students to believe that they can do it rather than pressing the point that they cannot do it.

Arjun Banerjee is a student of Heritage School in Vasant Kunj. This is one of those luxury schools like that of GD Goenka School. The school building reminds one of a multinational corporation rather than a school. Arjun is in class II. His classes start at 8 am and finishes off at 2pm. The amount of time spend on doing home works and preparing for lessons is fairly high. It is difficult to make a child work for so long. It is as much a pain for the child as for the parents. On top of that the school puts a lot of emphasis on project work. It is quite difficult for children to do it by themselves. The school expects a high standard for them. It is difficult to know who is expected to do the homework, the parents or the students. It completely takes away the innitiative of the students and encourages spoon-feeding. Holiday homeworks for them were also high. In a holiday of one month they were expected to do 5 sums, write a diary of 10 lines in

English, write about what they did on an hourly basis, do project work on a particular season, kind of food like protein and another one on silk. The sheer volume of work is horrendous. Most importantly for all these the children had to rely highly on their parents and could not carry out themselves. The question is what is the point in giving so much of homework. Admittedly some of these might sound interesting to the older people but for a child it is difficult to concentrate for so long.

Malvika is in class VII in Mothers International School. She finds it difficult to live up to her parental expectations of doing well in every thing. Each day of the week is engaged for some activity. Twice a week she goes for mathematics tuition and twice a week she has to attend dance classes. On Sundays she has to take music lessons and has to go for swimming lessons thrice a week. On Tuesdays she has both Mathematics tuition and swimming lessons. She comes back from school at 2:30. From 3:00 to 4:30 pm she has her mathematics tuition classes followed by swimming at 5:00 pm. Then she has to come back and do the next days homework. She sadly says, "I have no time to play with friends or be with my self.

Akash Bhalla loves to read storybooks unlike most children these days. But he hardly has time to persue this hobby. He points out that today if one wants to be popular with friends, he has to do a lot of outdoor activities. If one is interested in reading story books then he is considered to be a loner and friendless." Akash says that he does not mind being called a loner, but he hardly has the time to read books because of excessive school work. His mother wants him to be ahead of the others in his class. He is class VII in SriRam school, Vasant Valley. She insists that, "It is for his own good that I ask him to study chapters ahead of the class. When the teachers teach the same lessons it

then becomes easier for him to cope. He will have his entire life to read story books. This is the time to build up one's career. It does not make sense to *waste time* by reading books." She also fails to understand why her son can manage staying up all night to finish a story by Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christi, and not have the same enthusiasm and patience about his schoolwork. Akash points out that he definitely finishes all his homework in time. That takes up a lot of time in the day. Doing extra work is impossible. To the question of what profession he would choose, he sharply answers " do I have a choice? I would want to become a detective storywriter. But I know that my parents would want me to follow my dad's footsteps into IIT."

Vijay Aggarwal is in class VIII of Modern School, Vasant Vihar. His father wants to make all the best opportunities available to him. Vijay loves to play cricket. His father does not mind that. He just adds that be a cricketer like Srikanth or Kumble. They are both engineers yet they are among the top most players in the world. Studying has to come first and then cricket. He points out that it is not easy to make a dent in cricket and make it big in cricket. It is comparatively easier to pursue some course of study and get at least a respectable job. The competitions today are extremely high. So if a child is not prepared from the beginning, he will definitely lose out on his chances in life. Academic success can never be discounted on any account. In our present scenario it is extremely difficult , if not impossible to do well in life without good academic records. He points out that now even the business class people make sure that their children get good education. That adds to the credentials of the business.

Such stories of excessive expectations of parents and teachers, the uncertainties in a competitive atmosphere, along with the huge burden of school

curriculum are taking an unprecedented form in India. This year CBSE results claimed 9 lives in Delhi alone. But is this only the story of Delhi and CBSE? The answer is a definite no. The other states and board examinations also have their share of casualties. West Bengal had 5 such reported instances this year. One of them had failed in Madhyamik (the West Bengal board examination for class X.), two others after XII and another after being unable to clear the coveted 'Joint'. These poor children had taken the extreme step of killing themselves. There are a lot of others who do not go to such extent but suffer enormously. Each student might give a different account of his or her falls from self-imposed, parental and societal expectations. But the pain of dealing with that fall is difficult. For some students the reason might be the inability to get the minimum marks of getting admission to colleges of their choice to failing in clearing the board examinations. The students in lower classes of schools are also not immune to such pressures and the temptations of giving up altogether.

However there has been an increasing awareness about the problem among the people. One of the reasons for this is the portrayal of the problem in the popular media, the TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. The media plays a double role in relation to the problem of schooling and academic stress. On the one hand several articles and reports come out in the newspapers which talk about excessive stress on children and the ways of dealing with it. On the other hand the media also helps to give examinations undue importance and coverage. In a way public opinion and media influence each other in making some aspects of life more important than the others. Most newspapers give a detailed unfolding of the drama of board examinations. There are some stock images associated with examinations. The first set of images is those about

the beginning of the examination. It will definitely focus on extremely tensed students trying to take a last look at the courses before going to the examination hall. The second sets of images are those when the board examination results are declared. This brings in images of both agony and ecstasy- agony of those who fail to live up to expectations and the ecstasy of those triumphant. The children who top the board examinations become national heroes. Their interviews are taken from different newspapers, TV channels and radios. They do get a lot of publicity from every media. This reiterates the importance of scoring well in examinations. This kind of importance to the toppers in the board examinations also puts a lot of pressure on the others.

The issue of stress on children has gained a lot of attention of late. What do experts dealing with children have to say about this and how do they deal with children who are unable to deal with this pressure effectively. I spoke with Dr. Sundershan , a psychologist and the director of Sanjivani* points out that they do get a number of cases of children who are unable to cope with stress in school. She points out that the syllabus is huge and parental expectations are extremely high. Students force themselves to believe that not getting admission in the good colleges spells dooms for their life. It is also because career counseling is not done in most schools. Even in schools where career counseling is done it does not pay attention to the individual needs, aspirations and interest of the students into account. A very general idea about what students can pursue as career options after schools is given. More often than not they voice the same career options already known to the students. They do not give much importance to new and upcoming opportunities. There are few students who are keen on

* Sanjivani is a voluntary crisis intervention unit working on mental health in Delhi. It was set up in 1988 and has two branches in Delhi- Qutab Institutional Area and Defence colony

joining these new and upcoming lines especially those associated with the glamour industries. The trend is however a little on the rise. She pointed out that the number of such students coming for help is increasing. 'Examination time is the potentially dangerous period. We do receive most of these children during these times. The parents instead of being supportive become victims of this pressure themselves. The general level of stress can range from simple tension and uneasiness to acute depression. These are associated with symptoms like sleeplessness, loss of appetite, head aches and extreme restlessness or withdrawal from regular interaction. One of the major problems she pointed out is that, " the general understanding of mental health is so low in India that students do not come for help in time. Asking help for emotional or mental trouble is generally equated with 'madness' and has a lot of stigma attached to it. Hence the NGOs like Sanjivani, Saheli, Sneha and others cannot be effectively used by the Indian population. It is still a very miniscule minority of students who come for help. The same sentiments are repeated by Dr Achal Bhagat and Sanjay Chug, the well-known psychologists and columnists in their popular writings in newspapers and magazines. They repeatedly point out that "The parents see a lot of status and money as the outcome of such an endeavour. They believe that the service class sector has become extremely mobile and rich in the last few years. This trend they believe is here to stay. All parents want their children to lead a comfortable if not luxurious life. They point out that if parents don't make sure that the children are doing well in studies they will not be able to maintain a high status later on in life. Comparisons are natural to all societies and the children would loose out in the competition. Some of them also point out that later on in life children might blame the parents for not doing well in life. Hence they are also bound

to put pressure on their children's performance in school. The school authorities also believe that it is important for children to do well to ensure that they have a secure future. It also improves the reputation of the schools.

In this chapter we have seen actual school practices. In fact the academic stress seems to have become a common characteristic of our schooling practices. This phenomena of stress can be witnessed in all kinds of schools like the elite prestigious DPS, the culturally sensitive Springdales and ordinary government schools like KV. The phenomena of excessive academic burden, unimaginative pedagogy and joyless learning can be seen everywhere.

This clearly indicates the intensity and the reality of the crisis our education system is confronting. Although there are stories of the popular anguish and discontent over the functioning of the schools, there seems to be no enduring collective solution emerging. It is at this juncture that a question haunts social scientists and educationists- 'What could be the possible alternative educational philosophies or perceptions that could relieve the Indian education system of present vices? The second question is ' What are the possible social and educational measures that can be taken to radicalize the present system of education in India. With these two difficult questions we enter the next chapter and explore the alternative possibilities of life sustaining, joyful and libertarian education.

CHAPTER III

DEWEY, GANDHI AND TAGORE: TOWARDS EMANCIPATORY
EDUCATION

1) SEARCH FOR EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

The present Indian education system robs the children of their creativity and their initiative of learning. Schooling becomes a drag completely unrelated to the life of the children. Not only is the system unrelated to life, often the different classes are treated as separate and not as a part of the integrated whole. Thus it is not surprising for students of class VIII to point out that they do not remember anything taught in class VIII. Every class is treated as a separate unit. The only consideration for the students, parents and teachers is that of getting good grades and pass on to the next class. Once a child is through with a particular class, he or she is not required to remember what was learnt in the earlier class. All that is required of the child is that he must be able to remember an array of information and reproduce them during the examination. It is not possible for the children to remember these lessons a year later because they fail to associate the things learnt in school with real life. This is also because too much is taught in each class and is difficult to remember later. Children fail to find any meaning in education beyond passing of examination and an externally instilled belief that better grades in each class will eventually lead to a better future. Thus it is not without reason that students do not enjoy school academics. The only faculty used and trained in this system is memory and that too for a short span.

Education has always been considered as a way of training and all round development of children in the ways of adult life. Schools are specially designed to fulfil this purpose in complex societies. In any kind of planned schooling of children 'all round development' is theoretically considered as the most important purpose. Children should

be trained to successfully fulfil all adult roles, constructively contribute towards the improvement of society and be happy in life. But in most school system over the generation one aspect or other is given precedence over all round development. The question of all round development related to life in a particular society has been an issue of major concern for educationists and philosophers for generations and in different geographical locations.

In this chapter focus will be on three such educational philosophers who considered 'all round development of the students' personality and integration of school education with real social life as the most important and only purpose of education, and how they proposed to make this a reality. The three educational philosophers are American pragmatist educationist John Dewey, humanist-poet educationist Rabindranath Tagore and the champion of peaceful revolution M.K. Gandhi. They had different perspectives on education and had different approaches of dealing with education as integrally related to life. There was however some binding factors which were common to all of them. One of the most important factors is that when these philosophers were writing, their respective societies were going through several changes mainly due to industrialization of society at different levels. All of these three philosophers saw education as the most important vehicle of ushering in change and bringing about and sustaining development. India on top of that was grappling with a foreign power and fighting for liberation. It is however interesting to note that the issues of education addressed by them between 1905-1947 still remain current and valid in the present Indian education system. Several changes have taken place since Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore wrote about Indian education. Yet many of the problems of education referred by

them are true about present Indian education. Here the educational philosophies of these three thinkers will be revisited and solution for the problems of the present Indian education system will be searched in their writings.

Some of the most important binding features of these thinkers about education are that they all recognized the importance the child's agency in the learning process and criticized the reducing of education into mere bookish learning, unrelated to real life. They all voiced their opinion against a life negating education. Thus they all advocated a form of education where children are made to productively become a part of, and learn from society. All of them perceived school as a form of community living, the child as a creative agents and schools are instruments in creating a balance between the creative individual self, with one's participation as a social being. In other words they all recognized the individuality of a child and wanted schools to be a medium to channelise these traits for social causes as a member of a society. Schools for them are agencies to recreate the original unity of human beings with other human beings, nature and productivity. The schools should enable a child to effectively communicate with fellow human beings and live harmoniously with one's natural environment, contribute to and utilize it productively. All of them insisted on using the natural surroundings of a child to prepare him for life, rather than creating an artificial environment to teach them artificial materials unrelated to a life. They criticized the general acceptance that the child is incapable of learning and should necessarily be constantly taught and spoon-fed. Each of them tried to implement their educational philosophies through experimental schools established by them. A philosophical critique of Indian educational system will be devised through the thorough understanding of these three educational perspectives.

2) JOHN DEWEY

John Dewey was one of the most influential American philosophers, educators and social critic. John Dewey, along with Charles Peirce and William James founded the school of philosophy known as 'Pragmatism'¹. Dewey had a long and distinguished career as a teacher, school reformer and political commentator who was not afraid to deal with actual social issues in his philosophical writings. Dewey began his career, as a Hegelian idealist but he gradually moved away from idealism and adopted 'experimentalism' as his philosophical basis. Experimentalism stressed the continuity of human thought and natural conditions, and emphasized the way in which human intelligence may be applied through inquiry to real problems. Dewey published over 100 books in his lifetime. Dewey was often scorned by other philosophers of his time. They deemed his philosophy to be too concerned with practice and not enough concerned with theory or with traditional philosophical issues such as epistemology, ontology or traditional logic. Dewey himself emphatically claimed that, philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method cultivated by philosophers for dealing with the problems of man." He ranks with the greatest philosophers of this or any age on the subjects of pedagogy, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, and social and political theory.

¹ Pragmatism : Pragmatism is a philosophical movement, developed in the United States, which holds that both the meaning and the truth of any idea is a function of its practical outcome. Fundamental to pragmatism is a strong anti absolutism: the conviction that all principles are to be regarded as working hypotheses rather than as metaphysically binding axioms. A modern expression of empiricism, pragmatism was highly influential in America in the first quarter of the 20th century. Pragmatism has tended to criticize traditional philosophical outlooks in the light of scientific and social developments.

Dewey is however best known for his philosophy of education. The essential elements of his educational philosophy is enumerated in his works: My Pedagogic Creed (1897)², The School and the Society (1900)³, The Child And the Curriculum (1902) and especially in his most comprehensive statement in Democracy And Education (1916)⁴. Here we will try to concentrate on the educational philosophy of Dewey, propounded in these several works and try to see how his educational thoughts can be utilized in the present Indian context.

It is essential to appreciate the dieclectical context in which Dewey developed his educational ideas. Dewey was critical of the rigid approach to education, which existed in America in the 19th century. It was dominated by the belief that the child is a passive receiver who has to be given information and knowledge. He was however as critical of the child-centered approach, which advocated that, the child should pick and choose what he wants to learn. This approach he believed does not take into account the immaturity of the child and the interpretations of his own experiences. Education for him is or should be a continuous reconstruction of experience in which there is a development of immature experiences towards matured experiences, based on one's acquired skills and habits. In 'My Pedagogic Creed' he points out that "all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. This process begins unconsciously almost at birth and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas and arousing his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together.... The most formal and technical education in the world cannot safely

depart from this process. It can only organize it or differentiate it in some particular direction.”⁵ The same idea was voiced in ‘Democracy And Education’, he points out that education is a means of making younger generations aware of their own heritage, beliefs and practices, and gradually incorporate them into adult life. Education thus ensures a continuity of social life from one generation to another. Education is that process which ensures the right kind of communication between different generations.

“Men live in community in virtue of the things which they have in common ; and the communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge- a common understanding-like mindedness as sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing into physical pieces. The communication which ensures participation in common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions-like ways of responding to expectations and requirements....Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative.”⁶

For Dewey the process of education has two dimensions-psychological and social. The child’s own instincts and powers furnish the materials and give the starting point for all education. A thorough understanding of the social conditions is also necessary, to properly interpret the child’s powers. A child is active, curious and exploring by nature. A properly designed education must be sensitive to this active dimension of the child’s life. It must be able to guide the child in such a way that his

⁵ John Dewey: My Pedagogic Creed; p 77; Chicago University Press, Chicago 1907

creativity and autonomy is cultivated through his participation in different types of experiences. Thus the understanding of a child's psychological structures and the social conditions in which it can best develop is very important for any educational endeavors. True education cannot take place without due importance to both of these aspects. Dewey critically pointed out that the objects used in traditional schools are so child-unfriendly that it can never maximize and be just to the potentials of the students. Most traditional schools use materials made for 'listening'. It marks the dependency of one mind on another. There are certain ready-made materials prepared by the school authorities, from which the child has to take in as much as possible and in as little time. The construction of the classrooms is such that it negates the active nature of the children and reduces him into passive and absorbing masses. "The ordinary classroom with its rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order, crowded together so that there shall be as little moving room as possible, desks almost all of the same size with just enough space to hold books, pencils and papers, and add a table, some chairs, the bare walls and possibly a few pictures we can reconstruct the only educational activity that can possibly go on in such a place. It is all made for listening."⁷ In such a system the centre of gravity is outside the child. It is in the teachers, the textbook and elsewhere excepting the immediate instincts and activities of the child himself. Dewey delved deep into the psychological and instinctive aspects of children. He observed and roughly classified the impulses of a child in school under four heads. These are a) the social instinct as shown in conversation, personal intercourse and communication; b) the constructive instinct or the instinct of making. The child's impulse to do find expression in the play and make-believe; c) the

⁶ John Dewey: Democracy And Education; Chapter 1: 'Education as a Necessity of life' p 5; Chicago University Press 1916

instinct of investigation or the instinct of abstract inquiry. This seems to grow out of a combination of constructive impulse with the conversational; d) the art instinct or the expressive impulse of the children are a combination of communicative and constructive instincts. Allowing these instincts to grow and develop positively is the most effective way of developing an all round personality of a child. It is essential to make full use of these instincts as important resources in the teaching process. He answers the criticism that too much of insistence on the child's interest and impulses will not give the child necessary discipline, culture and information. To satisfy an impulse or interest would require the child to work it out, involving running up against obstacles, becoming acquainted with materials, exercising ingenuity, patience and persistence. This would definitely require and develop a sense of discipline.

The present era is the era of speed and change. The demands on an individual in a democracy are high. Individuals should be prepared for different kind of social set ups and interactions at every point of time. Unlike in the ancient and primitive times it is difficult to prepare a child for all eventualities in life. Hence stress should be developing the basic skills, which would enable a child to cope with any given circumstance effectively. Dewey rightly assessed that in the modern era it is difficult to prepare a child for any particular set of social conditions. A democracy can throw a person into different sets of conditions. Thus to prepare a child for the future life means to "give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgement may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it

⁷ John Dewey: School and Society; Chapter 2: 'The School And The Life Of The Child'; pp 30-31

complex for a child to comprehend. The school as a simplified form of this life should grow out of the home life. It should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar at home. The school should exhibit these activities to the child and reproduce them in such a way that the child will gradually learn the meaning of them and eventually be able to play his part in relation to them. The deepest and most important moral training is that which one gets through having to enter into relations with others in unity of work and thought. The social life gives the unconscious unity and the back ground to all his attainments.

For Dewey an effective education must make the child's own social activities the centre of school curriculum. Each subject in school should be introduced not as disparate pieces of information but as fundamental forms of social activities. The study of sciences is for Dewey science is educational in so far as it brings out the materials and processes, which make social life what it is. The problem with general education system is that it fails to create the link between the specific subjects and the experiences that the child has in his every day dealings in life. These are generally presented as a new and peculiar kind of understandings that has to be added to the other experiences that the child has in other aspects of life. Dewey points out that "science is of value because it gives the ability to interpret and control the experiences already had....It should be introduced not so much as a new subject matter, but as showing the factors already involved in previous experiences and as furnishing tools by which the experiences can be more easily and effectively regulated."¹⁰

The teaching of language and literature also loses much of its significance because of the elimination of its social content. It is generally treated as way

of getting information, rather than a means of sharing and communicating ideas and feelings with others. For Dewey “ the progress” in education is not in the succession of studies, but in the development of new attitude towards and new interest in experience.” Education is “a continuous reconstruction of experience.”

Every successful educational system should have a proper method of implementing balanced education in students. The method of teaching is nothing but the blue print or the steps to be taken in developing the child’s powers and interests in the right direction. It should be planned out keeping in view the natural abilities and inclinations of the children. The question of method is “ ultimately reducible to the question of development of the child’s powers and interests. The law for presenting and treating materials is the law implicit within the child’s nature.” Dewey shows that while planning for the education of the children, certain natural tendencies have to be kept in view. These are that the active side of children develops before the passive side; that expression in children proceeds before conscious impression: that the muscular development precedes the sensory development: that movements come before conscious sensations. He strongly believes that “ consciousness is essentially motor or impulsive” and “conscious states tend to project themselves in action.”¹¹ Dewey points out that much of school education is futile because it fails to take these basic natural attributes into account. The schools expect the children to be passive, repetitive and absorbing going against their nature. Thus it results in friction and waste. He pointed out that intellectual and rational processes also result from action and also evolve for better control of action. He terms ‘reason’ as the law of orderly or effective action. To develop reasoning powers,

¹⁰ John Dewey: Democracy And Education; Chapter 17: ‘Science in the Course Of study’; p 224

¹¹ John Dewey: My pedagogic Creed; Article IV- ‘The nature of Method’; p 76

the powers of judgement, the child has to recognize the existing relations between the means, the goals and the necessary actions to be undertaken. The school materials have to be arranged in a way that such a relationship is easily understandable by the children. Since the children are often unable to establish these connections the school subjects are often reduced to meaningless mass of arbitrary ideas imposed from outside.

Dewey put a lot of emphasis on image formations, interest, and emotions in the development of a child's capacity. He perceived image formations as great instruments of learning. Instructing a child would be easy if energy is directed towards proper image formation. Schools He observed that 'what a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the image which he himself forms in regards to them.' Much of the time in school should be spent in training the child's power of imagery and help him form definite, vivid and growing images of the various subjects with which he comes in contact in his experience.

Dewey put a lot of stress on understanding the interest of a child in the process of education. He believes that interests are signs and symptoms of growing powers in a child. These interests represent the dawning capacities in a child and should be observed as determinants of a child's level of development. These childhood interests throw some light on an adult's ability to work on in a particular area most fruitfully and productively. "Interest is always the sign of some power below; the important thing is to discover it."¹² Suppressed and repressed interests weaken intellectual curiosity and alertness, robs the child of his enthusiasm and initiatives in learning. For Dewey, emotions are nothing but the reflex in action. Right emotions can be secured by ensuring

¹² John Dewey: Democracy And Education; Chapter 10: 'Interest And Discipline' p 137

right habits of action and thought. Dewey points out that the effort to arouse any emotion apart from its corresponding activities is to create a morbid and unhealthy mind.

Dewey viewed school as the most important agency of social reform and progress. He pointed out that that all reforms that rest upon the enactment of law, or threatening of certain penalties or changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile. By law and punishment, by social agitation and discussion, society can regulate and form itself in a more or less haphazard way. But through education society can formulate its own purposes, can organize its own means and resources, and thus shape itself with definiteness in the direction. He believed that through proper regulation of the education process individuals could be made conscious of their social heritage and their responsibilities towards it. This sense of responsibility of individuals as part of a society is the basis of all-social reconstruction and progress. In Dewey's words, "education is the regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction."¹³ School is a right agency, which reconciles the individual self with the social self. It is individualistic because it makes the interest and the impulses of the child as the basis of learning. Yet it is social because it brings across to the child that these individualistic traits are developed only under the influence of certain forms of institutional or community life. Schools thus are not engaged in the training of individuals, but in the formation of proper social life.

It is interesting to find that the issues raised by Dewey from 1897 remains current in the Indian society today. Since the issues raised are so similar to the Indian education today we might try to locate the solutions in his philosophy. But before that we

would like to turn our attentions to the philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore and MK Gandhi and find out how they sought to solve the problem of excessive stress on academic success without any regards for their relatedness to real life.

2) M K GANDHI

MK Gandhi, better known in India as bapuji or 'the Father of the Nation' was one of the greatest humanists, philosophers and social and political activists in India. He was one of the most important architects of Indian Struggle for Independence from the British Empire. Gandhiji was born on 2nd October 1869, in Porbunder, in Gujrat. His family belonged to the Baniya or (merchant) class of Hindus. Gandhiji received a fairly orthodox, upbringing. At the age of 13 years, Gandhi's marriage was held, his bride, Kasturba, being the same age and chosen by his parents.

In 1893, Gandhi went to South Africa, then under British control, for legal work. Racial discrimination was freely practiced and in an incident that would change his life, Gandhi was forcefully evicted from a first class train compartment. This incident in South Africa opened Gandhi's eyes to the rampant racial discrimination and humiliation faced by non-whites. For 21 years, Gandhi stayed in South Africa, working towards rights for Indians in South Africa. He began the "Tolstoy Farm" in South Africa and edited the newspaper called 'Indian Opinion'. Gandhi began experimenting with non-violent methods of protest, promoting civil disobedience and strikes or "hartals." In 1915

¹³ John Dewey: School And Society; Chapter 1: 'School And Social Progress' p 83

Gandhi returned to India and toured the country extensively, making Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, his base. In July 1917, Gandhi first stepped into the limelight in India, when he headed a protest against the exploitation of the Indigo workers in Champaran (Bihar). By March 1918 Gandhi led a peaceful strike of Ahmedabad (Gujarat) Mill workers for higher wages and in June 1918, a remission of taxes was granted in the drought hit area of Kheda (Gujarat) after a no-tax campaign led by Gandhi.

Gandhiji believed that non-violent satyagraha was the only way of bringing home rule and independence in India. "Satyagraha" means insistence and adherence to truth, in a non-violent manner. Initially the term "passive resistance" was used to describe non-violent protest but Gandhi insisted that Satyagraha was more than that.

Satyagraha was a way of life, an evolving technique to bring change without violence. Non violence or "Ahimsa" to Gandhi was imperative as a search for truth involved fighting injustice. Fighting injustice required one to love fellow beings and this love demanded non violence. Gandhi believed it was necessary to first feel for the oppressed then fight for justice, thus making Satyagraha a "truth" and "justice" seeking force.

Facing any brutality without resorting to violence demanded exceptional self-control and courage. But Gandhi insisted that a Satyagrahi could only oppose an unfair act, never a person. Compassion for the suffering and constructive work were necessary ingredients of satyagraha.

The success of Satyagraha can be explained by the fact, that anyone, truly wishing to, could perform a Satyagraha with/without a leader. A single person could fast

entire nation's enthusiasm and expectation of overthrowing the British rule in India.¹⁵ The cardinal principles of his philosophy were truth, non-violence self-sufficiency and service to mankind. His view was that to overthrow the British it was essential to reject and boycott in totality every aspect of their thinking and functioning. He was fearful of replacing the foreign rulers by Indians, who believed and behaved in the same manner as the foreigners, once they get the power. The plight, problem and exploitation of the common people would not end with such independence. Indian citizens of exploitative frame of mind would replace the British exploiters. His political motive was to introduce the ideas of passive resistance and self-sufficiency on the part of Indians. The Indian village economy was completely shattered during this time under the British rule. For this he saw the revival of the Indian village economy as absolutely essential to bring about self-sufficiency and passive resistance. Only if the village economy is self-sufficient, can it non-violently resist the invasion of foreign products. He used the 'Charkha' or the weaver's spin as the emblem of self-sufficiency of the village. He wanted each of the villagers to be productive and produce their own livelihood. This kind of 'swaraj' or independence would demand a complete revival and restructuring of village economy. It would also require the development of a particular kind of character from the people. It would require the people to be strong and alert both physically and mentally. In a non-violent setup people would have to use their soul force and completely renounce brute force to bring about this type of silent revolution.

Gandhiji's idea of education was in complete consonance with this philosophy. Like the British civilization, he rejected the system of education introduced by the British through the medium of English. This English education used English as the

¹⁵ MK Gandhi: An Autobiography or 'My experiments with Truth'

medium of education, putting excessive emphasis on literary learning and 'book-learning' unrelated to Indian spirit or way of life. It did not have the interests of the Indians in mind. It was introduced to create English knowing clerks who would help in the perpetuation of the foreign rule. It failed to stimulate any initiative or skill in production. The educated looked upon education as a means only to their own advancement even at the cost of others. Most of the times people would not be able to utilize this education since it was hardly related to the Indian spirit or way of life. Hence the Indians educated in this system failed to contribute in any significant manner to the upliftment of the Indian society.

Gandhiji proposed a radical alternative to the then existing form of education. He widely advocated the introduction of The New Education or 'Nai Talim' in 1937 in India. His ideas on education are variously called 'Nai Talim' or New Education and Buniyadi Siksha or Basic Education.¹² He however pointed out that the ideas put across in Nai Talim was not entirely new and unexamined. He sought to put these ideas into effect in the education he gave to the children in Tolstoy farm in South Africa. Since then he followed this pattern of education wherever in India he has his colony of workers and children. Before its official proposal in 1937 Gandhiji tested it for 30 long years in actual practice and he found it worthwhile. Gandhiji saw that the only way of saving the nation was to revive the village economy and relate education to it. Education should be liberating and take care of developing an integrated productive personality. The educated people would be able to constructively contribute to the welfare of humanity at large and poor Indians in particular. Gandhiji pointed out that "the ancient aphorism 'Education is that which liberates' is as true today as it was before. Education here does

not mean mere spiritual knowledge, nor does liberation signify spiritual liberation after death. Knowledge includes all training that is useful for the service of mankind and liberation would mean freedom from all kinds of servitude.”¹⁶ He pointed out that servitude or slavery can be of two types: slavery or domination from outside and to one’s own artificial needs. Given Gandhi’s values and his vision of what constituted a truly civilized and free India, it was not surprising that he developed firm views on education. Education not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society’s fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals which compose it. His experience in South Africa not only changed his outlook on politics but also helped him to see the role education played in that struggle. He was aware that he had been a beneficiary of Western education and for a number of years while he was in South Africa he still tried to persuade Indians to take advantage of it. However, it was not until the early years of this century, when he was in his middle thirties, that he became so opposed to English education that he could write about 'the rottenness of this education' and that 'to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them ... that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation'. He was enraged that he had to speak of Home Rule or Independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue, that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue, that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in English for the chosen few. He did not blame the colonial powers for this. He saw that it was quite logical that they would want an elite of native Indians to become like their rulers in both manners and values. In this

¹⁶ The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol 6; 'The Voice Of Truth'; (Education & Gandhi: To Students)-Basic Education (Buniyadi Siksha); available at <http://www.mkgandhi.org/edugandhi/basic.html>

were introduced?' and then answered his own question by stating 'Precisely the same should be done today. As long as we cannot make pins without machinery, so long will we do without them. The tinsel splendour of glassware we will have nothing to do with, and we will make wicks, as of old, with home-grown cotton and use hand-made earthen saucers or lamps. So doing, we shall save our eyes and money and support *swadeshi* and so shall we attain Home Rule'.

Within this context of the need for a machine-less society, Gandhi developed his ideas on education. The core of his proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centrepiece of the entire teaching programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of the caste system. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather-work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and bookbinding, had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belonged to the category of 'untouchables'. India's own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly.

Gandhi's proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called 'basic education' thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society. in such a way it implied a

programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of 'education' and to change the established structure of opportunities for education.

Education should address itself to the development of the whole man-the body, mind and spirit or the hand head and heart. While the trinity best develops in coordination the most important is the heart. The heart can develop best only through a life of purity, austerity and simplicity. The student should be taught to exercise control in his thought, action and words at all points of time. Service to humanity should be taught as the greatest virtue. It should aim at inculcating internal discipline and sense of connectedness to the world around. Gandhi completely rejected the ordinary meaning of education and wanted to replace it by a life-centred and problem centred education.

He declared in no unequivocal terms his idea of true education for Indians. The real difficulty is that people have no idea of what education truly is. We assess the value of education in the same manner as we assess the value of land or of shares in the stock-exchange market. We want to provide only such education as would enable the student to earn more. We hardly give any thought to the improvement of the character of the educated. The girls, we say, do not have to earn; so why should they be educated? As long as such ideas persist there is no hope of our ever knowing the true value of education.

Integrated education can best develop in the Indian context through rural handicrafts. Knowledge of various subjects can be best imparted in integration rather than in a compartmentalized way. The harmonious development of the individual is the most important aim of education. The best medium of education is thus that which helps in the development of all three ingredients- body, mind and spirit in coordination. Gandhiji

believed that this coordination is best achieved by village handicrafts. Thus he pointed out that education at all stage should be through village crafts. The city-bred children should also be taught through these crafts so that they can make some contribution to the vast majority of the village population. Gandhi desired to bridge the gap that exists between the educated elite and masses, which work in the fields and factory.

The objective of craft work in education was two fold: to act as the focus for the integration of various subjects and also to provide the children with some skills which they can later on pursue as an occupation after leaving schools. The idea had far-reaching pedagogic, social and economic significance. Crafts provide children with activities, which they can handle. Activities throw up problems to solve which helps in the development of the mind. The usual way of developing the thinking power through books, unrelated to life is an irrational system. In Gandhiji's words "Information thrust on the mind apart from action is most often a burden on the memory and causes intellectual indigestion if nature does not come to the rescue and cast such learning into oblivion. Knowledge, which remains untranslated into action, is lifeless and clogs the intellectual and moral life of individual being."¹⁶

Knowledge based on craft comes as an integrated unit, instead of the compartmentalized form of knowledge. Craftwork leads to an integrated physical, intellectual and moral development Gandhiji points out that in spinning the child has to make effective and coordinated use of his physical organs, the hand fingers, eyes etc. It also involves the identification of problem and finding solutions for them through the knowledge of various subjects thus taking care of the intellectual development. The participation in a craftwork brings across to the child the importance of cooperation with

others. Gandhiji insisted that the handicraft should be taught scientifically and not mechanically. This would help in developing a scientific temperament. This child would be taught to investigate the 'whys' and 'hows' of every aspect of spinning. This would develop the spirit of inquiry and the scientific temperament. This would ultimately lead to rationalization in all walks of life. Further this system would cultivate the idea of dignity of labour visibly absent in India. It would help in breaking down the barriers of prejudice between manual and intellectual workers.

Another aspect of the basic education was that Gandhiji wanted to make education self-supporting. Gandhiji wanted the basic education to teach students socially useful craft. He did not want the students to be engaged in making toys. Depending on the area and the kind of production carried on in the particular village, students should be taught to produce socially and economically useful items. These items were to sold in the market, or the state should buy these items from the schools and sell them in the market. Gandhi's idea was to start basic education ideally at the age of seven and then at the age of 14 students should be returned to the family and society as self-sufficient and productive units. At the end of the 7 years the students would know that they have paid for their own education, leading to self-confidence and reliance.

University education similarly should be self-supporting and should not depend on state funds. He contends that all higher education should be need based and hence be run and funded by the consumers. "Engineering colleges should be run by industry and commercial colleges by commerce. Medical colleges would be attached to certified hospitals. As they are popular among the moneyed men they may be expected by voluntary contribution to support medical colleges. And agricultural colleges to be

worthy of name should be self- supporting, attached to self-sustained farms. State Universities should function only as examining bodies. They should be self –sufficient by through fees charged for examinations. Universities should be founded and funded by private organizations that want them. Such a close tie between the consumers and suppliers of manpower will ensure a balance and would reduce the chances of redundancy of highly trained manpower. For Gandhi “it was criminal to pay for training which benefits neither the nation nor the individual.”

Gandhi was opposed to the retaining of English as the medium of instruction in education in India. He believed that education at all stages from primary to university level should be conducted in the mother tongue. This would however call for giving provincial and regional languages their rightful place. It would also require a lot of initiatives to be taken in regional languages. New books have to be written in the vernacular language and enrich them further with translations from well-known authors of the world. “Those English books which are valuable should be translated into various Indian languages. He however realized the importance of English as a world language. He wanted to accord it a place as a second language not in the school but at the university level. He asserted that “ English is today admittedly a world language. I would therefore accord it a place as a second, optional language, not in the school but in the university course. That can only be for the select few not for the millions....It is our mental slavery that makes us feel we cannot do without English. I can never subscribe to this defeatist creed.”

The question of religious education also had to be addressed in the given Indian context. Gandhiji believed that “Rank atheism cannot develop in India.”¹⁷ But he was equally aware of difficulties of introducing religious education in a multi- religious place like India. He firmly believed that the Indian State cannot concern itself with religious education. It must thus be the sole concern of religious associations. But he warned that one should not confuse ‘religious’ with ‘ethical’. Imparting fundamental ethics is the function of state and also of education. He was completely against any kind of denominationalism. But fundamental ethics are common to all religions. Teaching these ethical principles is a part of true education. The students should be trained to cultivate the habit of understanding and appreciating the doctrines of the great religions of the world in the spirit of reverence and broad-minded tolerance. This, if properly done would help to give students a spiritual assurance and better appreciation of their own religion. However attention should be paid so that the students study them through the writings of known votaries of their religion.

To Gandhiji, teaching is a mission and not a profession. He expected the teachers to be committed to service to humanity while imparting education to the students. Hence it was inappropriate to pay them huge salaries. He believes that every human being is inherently good. It is the responsibility of the teacher to bring out these good qualities in students. Only those who have strong moral characters are constantly ready to learn and grow from perfection to perfection, can carry out such a ‘sacred’ function. Students should have great regard and respect for the teacher. There can be no knowledge without humility and will to learn. Persistent questioning and healthy inquisitiveness are the essential elements of any learning process. “Inquisitiveness should

¹⁷ M.K. Gandhi: Basic Education; Chapter IX: ‘Issue of Religious Education’ p 32

be tempered by humility and respectful regard for the teacher. It must not degenerate into impudence. The latter is the enemy of receptivity of mind.” Gandhiji was faced with the steep question of finding teachers for this scheme of handicraft based education. It was difficult to find and retain teachers who had knowledge of village handicrafts and were also prepared to lead a less affluent life. To this he replied, “the average educated man can be expected easily to master a craft. Our craftsmen will require much longer time to acquire the necessary general instruction than an educated man require to learn, say carpentry.” To the question of interesting an educated people to be interested in this scheme of education. To this he added that “if the scheme is sound and appeals to the educated mind, it must prove attractive in itself and thus wean the educated youth from the lure of gold. It must fail, if it does not evoke sufficient patriotism from the educated youth.” He also added that since those people educated in Indian languages could not enter the colleges they could find the scheme attractive.

Gandhiji’s scheme of education was based on the assumption of an intimate relationship between the teacher and the students. He believed that a teacher has a lot to learn while he teaches his students. He strongly asserts that “A teacher who establishes rapport with with the taught becomes one with them, learns more than he teaches. He who learns nothing from his disciples is in my opinion worthless....a true teacher regards himself as the student of his students.” Gandhi insists that students learn much more from teachers who believe in living their lives by the principles they teach in class. Mere words in the books cannot have such direct impact on the personalities of the students. " A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a

stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupils the value of self-restraint.”¹⁸ Hence he expects the teachers to set an ideal example before their students by living a simple and austere life themselves. The student’s perception of life is largely shaped by their teachers’ modes of living. The right to autonomy that Gandhi’s educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school’s daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy. Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that ‘the living word of the teacher has very little value. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils’. Gandhi’s plan, on the other hand, implied the end of the teacher’s subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. Gandhiji regarded teaching as a great moral activity.

Gandhi presented a comprehensive and systematic scheme of education based on strong convictions. To him education is not a mechanical activity, nor is it an end in itself. His educational principle like any successful educational philosophies tries to connect the individual to the social whole. His scheme of education would benefit both the individual and the society in which he lives. Through a life long process of learning, the individual can attain his ideal, the truth or the ‘Brahma’. As a necessary consequence of the individual’s quest for truth, society will also have better citizens ensuring a perfect social order based on sound morals in the milieu of love, justice and human

¹⁸ M.K. Gandhi : Basic Education; Chapter X: ‘Teachers in the Basic education Scheme’ p 86

emancipation. It involves a lot of self-discipline, honesty and courage. Gandhi acted as an initiator, guide, coordinator and organizer of the movement and program of 'Nai Talim'. The individual ideas underlying the 'Nai talim' are supported by modern pedagogic research as well by the ancient Indian saints. Gandhiji's uniqueness lay in the capacity to combine these two together into a proposed instrument of revolutionary change and transformation. Like all other philosophical systems it also had its own sets of adherents. The number of opponents was however much higher. The most important criticisms were its supposed excessive importance on craft based and manual education with neglect of other aspects. Secondly the idea of self supporting school system did not appeal to most. The present system of Indian education has moved far from Gandhiji's dreams of creating a new and resurgent India by reviving its village economy. The impact of industrialization and modernization has been too strong to resist. The gandhian philosophy lost much of its relevance in India, barring few intellectual and alternative efforts. The vision of India drawn by Gandhiji failed to match the dreams of present india. There have been many educational initiatives in India since independence. Yet the key issues addressed by Gandhiji still remain the same. But it is equally true that there is a very high level of discontent among the Indians. Voices of protest are often heard, sometimes feeble and sometimes strong and clear. Talks of the need to 'change the system' are heard every day. Most of the time there is a lack of planned initiative to bring about such change. A generation has passed since Gandhiji asserted with strong conviction that his "system of education has been conceived as the spearhead of a silent, social revolution, fraught with the most far reaching consequences." It is sad that the educational potential of Gandhiji's 'Nai Talim' has not been hardly been operationalised

and utilized in India. Even if we cannot utilize the educational principles of Gandhiji in its entirety, we can always learn from it and use them creatively to meet the present demands. Hence there is a need to revisit Gandhian philosophy of education and to try and use it in uplifting the present scenario of education, with its undue importance on academic success alone

4) RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the most luminous figures of the renaissance India. His greatest recognition from the world came in the form of the Nobel Prize for literature. But he was a versatile genius who applied his sensitivity in understanding every aspect of life and bringing about necessary and required changes in them. Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi were the inheritors of the great Indian legacy. Being born in the same time they were often addressing the same issues about Indian freedom and regeneration. However they had different perspectives in life which reflected in all their views about them. Even then they shared a great regard for each other and exchanged each other's views about the vital issues of India. It was Rabindranath Tagore who gave Gandhiji the name 'Mahatma'.

Gandhiji was essentially a political leader with the imminent aim of Indian emancipation from the British rule. Tagore, on the other hand was essentially an artist

who captured and communicated human nature in all its myriad forms. They were both highly proud of Indian heritage and were greatly distressed with its miseries and wanted to reconstruct India through their active participation in all aspects of Indian life.

Rabindranath Tagore(1861-1941) was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a new religious sect in revivalist 19th century Bengal.¹⁹ Rabindranath Tagore was highly influenced by this Upanisadic principle. He was educated at home. At seventeen he was sent to England for formal schooling, he did not finish his studies there. In his mature years, in addition to his various artistic and literary activities, he managed their family estate in Shilaidaha, in east Bengal, now Bangladesh. It was this project which brought him in close touch with common people, and increased his interest in social reform. From time to time he participated in the nationalist movement in his own visionary and non-sentimentalist way. Tagore was awarded the knighthood by the British in the year 1915. He gave up the honour in protest against the historic Jalianwallabag massacre in 1919 by the British in India.

In this paper we concentrate on the educational ideals and experiments of Rabindranath Tagore. We would try to look up to these principles and experiments as a guide in our quest for a more holistic, humanistic and joyful schooling. Like Gandhi, Tagore also believed that the education is one of the most important and best way of bringing about social change and resurgence in India. Like Gandhi, Tagore was also very critical of the English education system introduced by the British rulers. But unlike Gandhi, Tagore's critique of the English education in India was not an extension of a

¹⁹ This religious movement was started by Raja Ram Mohan Ray. It attempted a revival of the ultimate monistic basis of Hinduism as laid down in the Upanishads.

general critique of the west. He strongly believed that India should pay attention to the changing features of Western systems of education. He gave the example of the Irish people and their attempts to retrieve back their way of life through education from the Saxon yoke. The people of Ireland were forced to learn and study Saxon language, literature and history. Thus they were also demanding autonomy to teach their own language, literature, and culture. India like wise should reject the English education system and introduce a system that is reflective of, and contributive to Indian culture and heritage. He was ready to learn from and contribute extensively to every other culture. There was however always the question of this exchange being on equal terms. He was aware of India's potential of contributing to the world culture. But he was equally ready to learn from other civilizations.

Rabindranath Tagore had a thorough understanding of the nature of children and their learning abilities. This was partially influenced by his own experience of learning as a child and also by observing others. His life long and profound interest and understanding of children is indicated in his compilation of poems- 'sishu'²⁰ or the child, which views the world from the eyes of a child. A child in today's world of rat race and anxiety can still identify with almost all of these depictions. Interestingly enough, these poems were written by him at the fag end of his life. Apart from his understanding of the nature of children Tagore was highly influenced by the Upanisadic principle of the wholeness, unity or, oneness of human life. This idea permeated through all his major works. In his experimentation with education he wanted to bring across to the students this principle of unity, which is possible only through the natural development of the

entire personality. The completeness of life can be experienced only when one is in harmony with one's self and others. Apart from this the Upanisadic emphasis on happiness or bliss also appealed greatly to his artistic mind. Any effective process of education has to pay adequate attention to the element of happiness in learning.

Rabindranath Tagore clearly indicated that education should not be reduced to or dictated only by utilitarian terms. If the education of the child is confined to only what is essential and utilitarian their minds cannot grow completely. Confining oneself to the bare minimum essentials is not true to human life. Rabindranath Tagore strongly believed that the element of joy and happiness, guided by the natural developmental of the child should be the key to true educational process. In his characteristic mastery of words Tagore points out that " The human body can be tucked into a space as little as 3 and ½ feet, yet our homes are not created so small. Human life requires much more space than that for healthy living. It is important to be disciplined but to confine one self to bare minimum requirement is not true to human nature."²¹ Human will and creativity have to be allowed some freedom along with general disciplining for the proper nourishment of the human mind, body and soul. For this it is essential to develop in children a love for learning and education has to be recognized as an end in itself and not a means to some other utilitarian aim. Children have to be introduced to the idea of reading for pure pleasure and not because it is going to serve some other purpose. But in the case of unfortunate Indian students reading for pleasure has become an alien concept mainly because of the system of education introduced by the British. This does

²⁰ This is a compilation of poems about the feelings and understanding of children about everything around them.

²¹ Rabindranath Tagore: 'Siksha' or Education; 1st essay : Sikshar Herfer or 'Minor Alterations in Education'; Published by Viswa Bharati (1908) p 2

not take into account the developmental process or the psychology of the child and is completely unrelated to the life that they lead. They are forced to memorize concepts and ideas unrelated to life

The greatest drawback of English education was that it was for the British and by the British. The Indians were taught in such a fashion that they could just become instruments in the perpetuation of British rule. Both the content and the medium of teaching were foreign to them. They failed to connect the information gathered in the classroom with their real life situations. Hence these information would hardly be of any use in real life for them. Since children failed to relate to what was being taught in class, both in terms of language and content they were forced to memorize these. Ironically the English teachers were not competent enough to teach the language. Hence the students failed to learn English. In the process of education the mother tongue was not given due importance. Hence the children failed to master this language too. They were thus deprived of their capacity to express their own feelings and understandings in any effective way. Students were forced to endure this kind of a torturous system in the hope of getting a 'good job'. This system robbed them of their childhood. The natural tendencies of the children to play and enjoy life were curbed. The health of the students also took a toll. Thus they were deprived from all fronts. The mental, emotional and physical development of the children remains incomplete and they are forced to become lopsided individuals.

To mitigate this situation he called upon the youth of India to look beyond the books and into the true horizon of India. It was up to the already educated youths to make others aware of their culture and heritage, by compiling and writing books in the

vernacular language. Education in the classrooms have to be related to the real world outside. Because of the distinct lack of knowledge about the nation people are not enthused enough to contribute substantially to it. The educated youth will first have to empathize with the fellow countrymen at every corner of India, and actively try to change the situation. But it is important to move in a planned way. The majority of Indians live in the villages. Hence any knowledge or education in India would be incomplete without reference to and understanding of the Indian villages. The youth of each part of the country should be engaged in improving the condition of the villages and the districts nearest to them. For this the youths have to be physically and mentally very strong. The self-pride of the nation has to be aroused for any effective movement to take place. Without self-respect and pride, India would stand in an unequal relationship with other nations. To be able to contribute positively to the world India will have to draw from her own heritage and be proud of it. India should however be equally prepared to learn from other nations. But it should not be blind acceptance of any other system. Tagore had great regard for western science. He wanted the students to learn the science of the west and combine it with the wisdom of India. Whatever is learnt will have to be accepted keeping in line with the heritage of the land. India has to be strengthened. Thus respect for the other and self-respect are complementary without which education is incomplete. This sense of respect and pride and respect for others has to be inculcated from the childhood. This would provide for much needed balanced education.

The children should learn about respect in their everyday association with nature and other human beings. Tagore thus put a lot of emphasis on the environment of education. He was greatly inspired by the ancient Indian education, which were

conducted in the 'tapovan' forest ashrams or dwellings of the teacher 'rishis'.²¹ Children from all walks of life would come here and learn from these teachers through active work and play. Tagore believed that such a system could be replicated even in the present modern age. Such a system would also give the child from the city the chance to grow up amidst nature and learn about true Indian life through their participation in rural life. Like Gandhi, Tagore also put a lot of emphasis on engaging the students in rural reconstruction. The challenge in Tagore's concept of education however lay in the application of the Indian religious concept of an 'integrated life', as spelt out by the ancient sages, at the intellectual and creative levels of modern existence. He strongly advocated that an educated mind should be in constant quest for truth and knowledge. Along with this he also wanted to utilize the Indian notion of hospitality to others and extended it to include other civilizations and nations. The key of every educational process is the inculcation of love and service towards the earth and its inhabitants. He conceived education as the true meeting of human minds.

Following the tradition of the ancient forest-schools he created his ideal school in Santiniketan(1921). The school put a lot of emphasis on the freedom and enjoyment of learning for the children. The school admitted students from all sections of the society. Classes were held in direct contact of nature, under the trees. To make the children aware of and appreciate the changes in seasons, several functions were held in the school to mark the seasons. Art, music, craft, gardening etc got a prominence in Tagore's school in Santiniketan. These would help children develop their creativity and self-expression. It would provide them with the necessary space to move about freely and

²¹ Rabindranath Tagore: Sikhsha ;the 7th essay: Tapovan or forest school; p 78.

develop them physically. A sense of discipline would be ensured by their way of living actively and not by curbing their freedom. A cordial and warm love and respect marked the relationships between the teacher and the taught. This system put a lot of stress on the quest for the inner self and peace, which would help people, appreciate and contribute to the world around them.

The stated objective of the university started by Tagore was 'to study the mind of man in realization of different aspects of truth from different points of views.' Visva Bharati was established at the end of the 1st world war, to build a platform of cooperation among world cultures, when Gandhiji had given a call for non-cooperation movement. But Rabindranath was greatly committed to the idea of spreading out and associating Santiniketan with the whole world. In 1916, he wrote to his son from Japan , " We must establish in Santiniketan a centre for humanistic research concerned with all the world's peoples. The age of narrow chauvinism is coming to an end. For the sake of the future the first step towards this great meeting of the world humanity will be taken in these fields of Bolpul. The task of my last few years is to free the world from the coils of narrow chauvinism.'

When it started, Visva Bharati did not give away degrees. It was conceived as a meeting place of the 'East' and the 'West', where scholars and students would live in common fellowship, studying each other's culture. Artists from all corners of the world would create out of a sense of inner need and not out of the sense of narrow nationalism. The idea was that the entire humanity would benefit from such an interaction, and these art and scholarship. The emphasis on the Indian culture had been

got their education.

linked with an urge to explore the wider connections. Underlying this was his eternal vision of the search for the universal through the particular.

The ashram established in Santiniketan(1863), the school(1901) and the Viswa Bharati (1921)together form the totality of Rabindranath's philosophy of education. These three institutions were established with different goals but with the same underlying perspectives. The first one was a spiritual community, the second a school where children could grow creatively and absorb their education with enjoyment and at the same time conform to the discipline of ancient Brahmacharya life, the third aimed at cooperation between the East and the West in learning, culture and humanism. It was an endeavour to relate education closely to life through total activity. Students had to compulsorily collect information about the villages around. Later a department of agriculture and rural reconstruction was started two miles away from Santiniketan known as Sriniketan. Sriniketan became a centre where economists, agriculturists, social workers and specialists in various fields worked together to solve different problems of rural life. The assemblage of talented people from all over the world provided great scope for action. Tagore identified seemly behavior towards fellow students and seniors, introduction of ceremonies that will develop sociability, prompt assistance to neighbours in distress, interest in every aspect of the country and people, friendliness towards other sects and communities, as the basic elements of education.

Even though Tagore was greatly influenced by the ancient Indian system of education, he hailed change and progress. This system with its closeness to nature and its emphasis on day to day activity provided the best atmosphere for the development of children. But he was not pleading for a reversal back to the ancient society. He believed

that every society has its own course and the best way to develop is to follow that course. Education should be planned keeping the changes in view and making it contemporary. Education otherwise loses its relevance in real life and often forces people to become unduly conservative or prejudiced. He gave the example of a river that has changed its course. "It is similar to having a well guarded bank at the previous course of the river. A new bank has not been constructed along the new course. So where there is a bank there is no river and the boat remains confined in the bank since there is no water."* He takes the example of the Indian caste system, which should have become redundant in the present generation. It was probably constructed at a particular historical time, when it was used more productively. Now it has no functional value. Hence it has become a hindrance to growth and development. The problems of English education unrelated to Indian life combined with a redundant, rigid Indian system has rendered the education system completely ineffective. Education has to be made free from all prejudices to make it true, contemporary and effective.

Santiniketan and Viswa Bharati the educational brainchild of Tagore have gone a sea change since its conception in 1921. But it is important to look at the philosophical principles and find out if they can be utilized in changing the present education system in education.

* Rabindranath Tagore: Siksha; 14th essay- 'Bidyar Jachai' or Utility and Test of true education.

5) A NEW VISION OF A HOLISTIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the last chapter we tried to understand the educational ideals of three master thinkers in order to derive appropriate lessons from their experiments and experiences with education. We have observed that despite situational and contextual differences, lies a set of libertarian educational or pedagogic features, that can always inspire educationists to create a healthy pattern of learning and living. We have learnt the following from the three thinkers- a) Education is not a finished product, but a process of perpetual growth and renewal; b) Education is not just a process of cognitive and academic development or advancement. True education enhances the complete development of all human faculties like reasoning, thinking, and feeling, emotions and rational, intuitional and intellectual and vocational pursuits; c) Education , far from being fragmented is integral and should shape all round personalities. It is important for the learners to have an integrated relationship with the world, neighbourhood and community. d) Education requires an extraordinarily skilled and creative teacher. He/ She should have the capacity to inspire the child, relate to him and act as a catalyst to help him participate in a collective journey towards an understanding of the self, society and nature; e) Education is a perpetual challenge and should be an experience of joy, wonder and excitement. The goal of education is not to quantify one's success and failure, and act as a selecting or eliminating agency. Instead it should enable every child to recognize and fulfil his/her innate potentials and possibilities. The kind of education envisioned by them was far from exam-centric, textbook oriented and loaded learning. It invites the child to a

site of happy, fearless and free learning that opens all windows, and expands the horizon of the learner.

These extraordinarily creative and emancipatory principles of education are indeed sources of inspiration at this hour of crisis. Yet a question that haunts social scientists and educationists why does the dominant mainstream pattern of schooling deviate from these radical principles? A major sociological reason is of course the fact that education as a social practice cannot be isolated from the larger socio-political and economic structures. Therefore radical egalitarian education cannot be the common school practice in a society that is based on hierarchical division of labour (caste, jati, class, gender etc), exploitative profit-oriented market economy and all pervasive competitiveness (mainly because of scarcity of essential and basic resources in a underdeveloped country like India). In other words here the sociological argument is that, it is the logic of the larger social structures that shape the educational priorities in India. In such a system it is thus not surprising to have duality in school practices (elite private schools vs poor quality government schools), class performing role of school education (obsession with success for social mobility and retaining a position in class hierarchy) and heavy stress on children to do well in school examinations (because that alone prepares one to win a race in an extremely competitive socio-economical milieu)

The awareness of the sociological reasons for the continual life-negating practices of mainstream schooling does not however mean that nothing can be done to change the existing situation. Sociological awareness does not necessarily lead to social determinism or fatalism. It is possible to initiate change, reform or at least start a public awareness programme in order to replace these pathologies with an egalitarian form of

learning. It simply means that in every society, along with the dominant, mainstream form of conformity and consensus, there is also a voice of dissent and protest. These marginalized and latent voices dream of, and give shape to new illustrations and experiments. In Indian education also there are some such sites of alternative and emancipatory education both in urban metros and rural areas. The lessons we have learnt from Dewey, Tagore and Gandhi would be of immense significance to give a philosophical, conceptual and ideological character to this emancipatory quest for alternative radical education.

It is clear that excessive importance on academic achievement marked by a sense of competition to out do others has become the distinguishing feature of culture of schooling in India. It has been now identified as a major reason for rendering true education ineffective. The good thing is that there is a general awareness among people about the ills of the present education system. The parents, teachers and students however seem to be caught up in a dilemma of how to reduce pressure on children, yet make them competent for this competitive generation. The concern of most parents that this kind of pressure only prepares them well for a tough future. Along with this however they constantly voiced their grievances that there is excessive pressure on the children today in schools. Some of the parents suggest that children today are more intelligent than the previous generations. They often point out as to how much children in this generation know about the world which they did not in their generation. The quizing culture in India is another outshoot of the same education system with stress on remembering as much information as possible. This I believe can be attributed more to access to different kind of resources and information rather than development of intelligence. However this question hardly crosses their minds: is it necessary to gather so much of information at such an early age? And do we need to have such information, which we do not manage to utilize in our everyday life. It is true that what we learn in the classroom has little relevance outside it. It is not surprising then that when a student of engineering joins office he has to relearn everything. They have to essentially learn the ways of their trade only within the office and factory environments. What he/she learnt in schools or college has little relevance in these environments.

What is required to change the present educational situation entirely is nothing short of a revolution. It is important for people to recognize that the present education system serves no true purpose. It fails to make students capable of contributing effectively to any aspect of life including him/herself. Any purposeful education has to create the ability in a child to contribute effectively to all aspect of life. He should be able to do justice to himself, his environment, his profession and the society in which he lives. One has to recognize that such habits have to be developed from the childhood. The education process cannot negate the natural developmental stages of the children. On the other hand they should take full aid of these stages. The purpose of education is nothing but to facilitate this natural process by providing a conducive atmosphere. The primary requirement of this is to give the children back their childhood. Children are not naturally matured enough to properly handle undue pressure created in the schools. But situations force them to react like them. When children are expected to run around and play they are seen either trying to cope with too much studies or trying to make strategies to outscore other friends.

The present education system puts too much importance on achievement rather than the process of development. The goal of education is the formation of integrated personalities. Academic achievement can be a part of this but is not the only aspect of this goal. The present education system with too much emphasis on grades either makes children arrogant or makes them unconfident. What is essential is to try and make the children confident about their capabilities. Much is being said about the strength of positive thinking. While correcting the mistakes of children in the schools teachers should remember this principle. Every child has some positive qualities in him

or her. It is important to encourage and nurture these positive qualities, rather than only harping on the negative aspects. It is difficult to achieve anything without strong self-belief and self-respect. It is important for teachers to remember that confidence building of every child is one of their primary duties. This can only be developed in a happy and unobtrusive environment.

Children should be taught to be independent and fearless from the childhood. Life necessarily holds out different types of challenges to everyone. Education should be such, which helps them, be independent and bold. It should be such that each person after the completion of a certain period of education should have the necessary skill to fend for himself or herself socially, economically, morally and personally. The problem of Indian education system is that it fails to instill any sense of cooperation among students. The competitive spirit far outweighs the spirit of cooperation. Because of the lack of cooperative ethos in schools most children don't develop a true sense of belonging or association with others in schools. This attitude continues to dominate the Indian life. Most Indians have a distinct lack of true self or national pride. This leads to two types of reactions amongst the population- the complete aping of others or a sense of closed conservatism leading to revivalist tendencies. The Indians fail to come across as a united force. For a nation to develop fully national pride is a necessary element. This does not however mean closing doors to the outside world. It is important to be judicious in accepting and learning what is good in others while retaining the good things of the India. Each child should be made aware of his duties and responsibilities towards other human beings, country and the world. Encouraging the sense of friendship, cooperation

and respect towards each other can develop this sense of duty and love towards other human beings.

Discipline is essential for any purposeful life. Yet this sense of discipline cannot be thrust upon the children from above. The children fail to understand the value of such external discipline and resist them very strongly. They do not internalize them in their every day activities. Discipline becomes a decorative phenomenon within the classroom. Outside the classroom the discipline seems to have no meaning. Children have to be made aware of the positive aspect of discipline through their own activities. They have to be made aware that discipline is not a set of mechanical, routine activities, dictated by others. It is that state of person, which brings about the best-coordinated efforts of mind and body. This in turn brings about success in any realm of life.

Power of concentration is a necessary attribute of any disciplined person. Thus stress should be put in schools to help develop this power of concentration. No work can be properly completed without thorough concentration. It is easier for people to concentrate on things that they enjoy. The school curriculum should be prepared keeping in view the natural tendencies of the children. Instinctively children are drawn towards certain activities, which they enjoy. Concentration can be gradually developed by first helping children to concentrate on those activities, which they enjoy. Then they can be gradually helped to concentrate on things, which they might not enjoy so much. It is difficult for the child to concentrate equally on too many things. In the present generation children are expected to master too many things at the same time. Children are expected to excel in all aspect of school curriculum. Following this each child is expected to learn a few other extra curricular activities. These are more because of the aspirations of the

parents. They often want their children to be a C.V. Raman, a Sachin Tendulkar and a Zakir Hussain in the same mould. In the process they often produce confused and hyperactive children far removed from the parental ideals. It is important to discover and nurture the existing talents of every child and channelize them in the right direction. Excessive activity leads to distraction. Non activity is worse. Thus it is important to strike the right balance.

Spirituality like religion is a much-abused term in India. The meaning of the term spirit is essence or the essential elements of anything. Here it refers to the essential features of a human being. The true human essence is the ability to connect to other people and things in a meaningful way. It is the presence of communicable emotions and intelligence that most markedly differentiate human being from other lower animals. It is important that education be such that it helps children realize their relatedness to the fellow human beings and the nature around them. This again can be done by regular association and cooperation. It is important that the idea of love and cooperation be given more emphasis than is presently given.

The important basic skills which people require in all walks of life is the ability to associate, understand and communicate with others around them. Everyone requires an area to express these skills. It is the professional area, which allows a lot of scope for such interaction. In the personal life also the ability to communicate in the right way is of utmost importance.

The relationship between the teacher and the taught is of great significance in a school. Since children spend a significant amount of their time in school, teachers become the main role models for them apart from the members of the family. Teachers

do not take teaching in schools very seriously. The reasons are that they do not feel responsible for bringing up true characters. Most of them believe that their job ends with the completion of syllabus provided to them. The syllabus does not change much over the years. The teachers have to teach the same things over and over again. Thus teaching becomes monotonous and boring. It is often reduced to mere 'notes giving'. The possible reasons could be that teaching is hardly ever the first choice of profession for most of the teachers. Teaching in schools is generally seen to be a woman's job. Hence men do not often get left out. Many of the women teachers often treat it as an easy, respectable pastime, which also brings in some money. More than this, the basic problem is the attitude of reducing all the students into a mass of nameless children. Instead if teachers can pay individual attention to each child and try to develop their skills it would be rewarding both for the teacher and the student. However this kind of attention is difficult if not impossible in a large classroom. If the number of students is low then teacher can pay individual attention to them. Paying individual attention would make the teachers discover the special nature of each child. This would call for some innovative ways of teaching and take away the boredom of teaching the same things over and over again.

It is also important that teachers follow the same principles that they try to teach their students. If a teacher expects her students to be regular and punctual in class then they must make sure that they also follow these rules of regularity and punctuality. Most of the time students get punished for talking in class. Instead of that teachers should pay attention so that the child learns the right way of communication rather than stopping him from talking. Students often complain that teachers take offence when a student asks question in class. Inquisitiveness of the children should be allowed free scope. Children

often find it difficult to ask questions because they are afraid of being scolded. Many of the concepts and ideas remain unclear, which pose problems in later stages. Respect forms an important aspect of the teacher-taught relation. Teachers however point out that they do it only when they realize that the student is trying to disrupt a class by putting across questions. This respect has to be mutual in character. Students learn the best from teachers whom they respect and love. They generally prefer those teachers the most, who are competent as well as student friendly. Teachers' characters should be exemplary for teaching to be effective. True examples are more effective teaching tools than any amount of preaching. It is also important to tell children about the lives of great people. All great men through out the world would ultimately point out to the important tools to be developed for true living.

The environment of a place specially designed for teaching is also important. It is not possible in the present generation to go back to the ancient Gurukul system. But educational institutions can be planned in such a fashion that there is ample space for mental and physical development. It is important to have space for more activity while learning other than sitting in a bench and listening. Attempts should be made to design schools in a way, which facilitates the natural tendencies of the children, and help them realize their relatedness to the world around. A crammed classroom with too many students is not at all an ideal way of teaching students. It is important to introduce children to materials other than books from which they can learn. It is true that in the present schooling system such scope is given through SUPW and other co-curricular activities. Because of the importance of grading system the fun and the utility of these activities is lost. It is important to bring back the true meaning of these activities.

Due to the growing awareness of the problems of the present education system there are efforts from all sides to bring about a change. There have been several efforts by the governments to change the system. However more creative and useful methods have come forward as alternative systems. The alternative education movement began in the 20th century as a creative reaction to this mass production approach that dominated education across the world. This movement as a whole believes that each child is special and deserves special attention. The whole person must be addressed, not in fragments or parts. It believed that imagination and joy should form the key part of a child's life. In adolescence independent thinking and idealism should mark their lives. As they grow into adulthood they will create new ways and visions not only for themselves but for the entire human race. One of the well known alternative methods tried in India are the Montessori method, first introduced by Maria Montessori among some orphans and handicapped children in Italy. She conceived of education as a response to the child's initiative. She developed very precise teaching materials that are now very popular world wide. The others include the educational philosophy and practices of J Krishnamurti¹ carried on in India and other parts of the world through the Krishnamurti Foundation schools. For Krishnamurti, the real issue of education was to see that when the child leaves the school he is well established in goodness both outwardly and inwardly. The child should be open aware and fearless. Sri Aurobindo² and the Mother (the co founder of Aurobindo Ashram) developed the philosophy of 'Free Progress'- each child

¹ J Krishnamurti was a great Indian philosopher. He had very definite ideas about education and tried to implement them through several schools founded by Him. A world known Foundation has been started to spread his philosophy. For further reference to J Krishnamurti's see 'On Education' By J Krishnamurti, KFI Publication.

² Sri Aurobindo was a great militant nationalist but later became a mystic and set up an ashram in ponicherry. Sri Aurobindo Society is working through out India in the field of education and social upliftment. Mother's International School in Delhi is also a part of this society.

developing in an absolutely spontaneous, inwardly centered and self directed education process. The aim of education for Sri Aurobindo is “to help the child develop his intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, moral, spiritual being and his communal life and impulses out of his own temperament.” These educational philosophies have found their way into the society through Aurobindo Education Society. The Educational Renaissance Trust , which runs Sloka, is guided by the thoughts of Rudolf Steiner, German sage and mystic. Steiner set up his first school in 1919 for the children of the workers in Waldorf cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. Here he closely observed the needs of children at different stages of growth. He observed that upto the age of 7 a child is a creature of will. From 7 to 14 years, feelings predominate and from 14 to 21 thinking capacity is the strongest. The Steiner school takes its cues from this natural pattern of the child’s development. These are in addition to the ones already discussed before- ‘Nai Talim’ of Gandhi and Santiniketan of Tagore.

However the effect of such efforts are still not strongly felt in society. As long as these efforts remain the ‘alternative’ form only a lucky minority can make use of it. Even these students might have to face the bunt. After finishing these schools they are expected to merge with the mainstream education system where competition and gradation are the distinguishing features. Often these schools also are completely taken over by this dominating competitive ethos of society. One such school is the Ramakrishna Mission, which started off as an institution that would provide ‘man-making education’. However in course of time the institution was completely overwhelmed by the competitive ethos of society. This is true about most such efforts. Dr Meenakshi Thapan points out in her book, ‘Life in School’ that the Krishnamurti

foundation schools like Rishi Valley also fall prey to the present competitive spirit of the society and often the true efforts of creating a different kind of mind set among students is lost. Many of the students in Rishi Valley believe that Krishnamurti's philosophy of life is grand. However it is difficult to follow that philosophy in the present society. These efforts thus have to be made universal so that they can be used more effectively by the entire society. It is also true that the society will also have to undergo certain changes to make living more happy and meaningful. The excessive stress on consumerism and competition that predominates society is only reflected within the classrooms.

The parents and teachers are in a perpetual fear that if children are not prepared for a stressful adult life they would find it difficult to deal with stress later. The reason they provide is that since there is such a stiff competition in all aspect of life children have to constantly prove their mettle. What they fail to understand is that children can still prove their mettles without going through the stress of cramming too much information within a depressing classroom.

It is important to make quality education more accessible to all sections of the society. One of the biggest reasons for problem is the number of standard good schools is very less. The number of students aspiring to reach the so-called better level of education far outweighs the number of such schools. It is important to make sure that all schools in India maintain a minimum standard. So that each students feels that they are equally competent and can aspire for the same life chances. Technically all Indians are equal. But in reality some are more equal than the others, since they get better life opportunities. It is important to create more job opportunities and make children aware of these opportunities. The Indians themselves will have to create such job opportunities.

Hence it is important to plan education in such a way that it develops in the children the leadership qualities, which can be later developed into entrepreneurial skills. This would require a number of dedicated teachers, involve them in educational planning of the schools and make the profession more lucrative to retain these motivated teachers. Since efforts are being made from every quarter to make education more meaningful, change will definitely have to come have to come. It is essential to plan education carefully so that it reaches out to the masses and make every one capable of leading a meaningful and happy life. This kind of education in the long run will be able to create a just society. However this will require the complete participation of each member of a the society, who would feel proud to be a part of this grand process.

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