

Synopsis of the Thesis

Adolescence and Extra-Curricular Activities: A Study of Select Schools in Kolkata

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By

Arunima Bhowmick

Department of Sociology
Jadavpur University
Kolkata—700032
West Bengal, India
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Introduction

This research was embarked upon with a very humble yet inviting purpose in view. Like any research it began with a dream to unravel the intricacies of training, at the same time self-inducted learning that happens at the fringes of formal education. Indian education system, and particularly schooling processes have been time-tested with long drawn tradition of home-bound learning to Gurukul set ups to semi-formal ‘patshalas’ and finally the formal modern education that came holding the hands of colonial rule. At every stage of educational development, the relationship between the teacher and the taught remained the pivotal point of interest as this gave way to exchanges which brought into its folds many more forms of influences and socialization, like that of the parents, state and religion. Schools today, unlike the pre-modern times, are expected to follow the universalistic and non-affectual modes of training the pupils of impressionable age. And if I take the leverage to put across this functional attribute of education in a more rigid term, I would argue it to be fulfilling the task of disciplining a more or less passive population, who are yet to be adults, and thus ready to be turned into desirable citizens of tomorrow.

The social and cultural significance of having such an institutionalized body for imparting requisite training, more often than not, lies in the political needs of the time that it comes to exist in. However, the training remains pertinent at any point, but with changes in mode of execution. Identifying the changes in mode of training remains a prime concern both in education and sociology of education in particular, as sharp inequalities, discontents over the state responsibility and intervention, course content, rising aspirations of the middle class, equality of opportunity, and the promises of employability have marked the contemporary education scenario of India.

In this light, I took a plunge into the modern schooling system to locate the extracurricular activities that it carries out beyond the curriculum course. The aim was to delineate the changing patterns of extracurricular activities (ECA) and exploring its influence on adolescents. Thus producing a more comprehensive account of the adolescent lives in the parlance of their engagement in education of a different sort that takes place in the field of extra- or co-curricular, as often used in tandem. The initiative was also taken keeping in mind that it would help highlight how the larger socio-cultural and political forces come to play in training the future citizens. In turn, the lacunae in these training programs and the education system at large could be located. Relevant Literature on education and postulates for training rendered thereby, guides this research into re-establishing as well as revising the epistemological exercise done till date. With that aim, the sub-field of extracurricular was selected to locate how the educational processes are carried out through these activities within the schools.

A fresh enquiry into the role of extracurricular activities entails contextualizing the action (institutionalized forms) and act (particularistic negotiations) in a distinct social setup to understand both—the point of convergence and recent divergent offshoots. Social context redefines the relationship between extracurricular activities, associated values and identity. Adolescents' activity-based identities that are nurtured by community and school-based value system are susceptible to change with regard to changes in economic, social and cultural conditions that they are played out in. Hence studying the social context (the school, teachers, parents and peers) and its influences in deciding extracurricular participation among adolescents became indispensable for this research. While identifying the social values associated with different extracurricular activities as unveiled in the

literature and as gathered from my pilot study with the adolescents, I came across few generic attributes. Such as: Students do enjoy a choice in pursuing extracurricular activity, but surprisingly, most of these choices are guided either through direct intervention of parents and schools or by a subtle sense of status attached in pursuing some activities, which, in turn, redefine the sense of achievement for students.

Academic achievement vis-à-vis the concept of ‘athlete boy’ or the ‘popular girl’ at school plays a determining role in the future career aspirations of the adolescent. Prior research has provided insight into the differences between poor working class and middle class parents in terms of parenting styles and school-related assistance. Such difference in availability of cultural capital and consequent structuring of adolescents’ ‘habitus’, as understood by Pierre Bourdieu, played a vital role in both choice and organization of extracurricular activities. Thus inviting an enquiry into the class dynamics that lay beneath the apparently egalitarian education system. Besides, Organization and Administration of Extracurricular activities, both determines and are determined by the participation level of adolescents. This cyclical impact runs from one epoch to the other, as schools move from serving one socio-political goal and developmental agenda to another.

The extracurricular, therefore, comes to accommodate varied conditions and possibilities within the education system. It acts as the foreground for replication of several social and cultural practices existing in the society at large. Religious orientation and education that are so integrally bound, find its lingering elements come alive through extracurricular even in a secular modern schooling system. Similar to cultural reproduction associated with religious and economic activities that consciously and unconsciously penetrate the teaching-learning processes at school, there takes place gender reproduction and

stereotyping. And enquiry into this has promoted several scholastic endeavors. Awareness about gender socialization at school has shifted the focus towards extra-curricular and informal activities to understand how gender stereotypes are reproduced on much expanded level. Inequality echoes loudly within our schooling system and understanding such power dynamics in the face of globalization could help highlight some niche areas of change. Besides, the designing of curriculum and extracurricular in times of some powerful counter cultural movements across the lines of gender could help reflect upon the intensity and strength of such social deviations.

As I have already stated that I would be conceiving the conditions of adolescence through extracurricular, the need to locate the significance of doing so in the present hour becomes very important. With industrialization and modernization setting foot across the globe the not-so-universal adolescence did find a defined presence within an age bracket. Modern education and formalized schools started to segregate the pupils on the basis of age at the entry level and made it a strict practice for serving requisite lessons based on age. With secondary education becoming an institutionalized mass experience adolescence found a new definition in relation to years of secondary schooling and saw an emphasis of their removal from the labor market, thereby prolonging their social dependency. Another important thing happened as educational system started to segregate according to the age of students i.e. the primary and secondary education drew distinction between childhood and adolescence and blurred the tendencies of overlap in actions and behaviors of boys and girls during these liminal times. This fluidity in experiences is surely important to understand the adolescence and invites a recourse through education itself to trace them as acting upon the adolescent. The journey from diffusive learning experiences during early

years to the specificity of educational training, the adolescent surely encounters and correspondingly imbibes plethora of socio-cultural practices that give them a new character.

The adolescents are also now a new category of consumers in the free market, whether it be for products like education or other material goods representing a specific culture. The cross cultural influences in the globalized social order has brought fresh products onto the selves of the commodity market and these at times are now solely designed to cater to the adolescent demands, if not needs. Their moody expressions, bouts of nonsensical laughter, incomprehensible sullenness, absurd fickleness, tendencies of defiance and trifling yet passionate arguments need deep interrogation with changing times.

Objectives of the Study

Some key concerns that have motivated this study could be posited in the following manner:

1. The need to explore the domain of extracurricular within the field of education and account for the changes.
2. Understand the need and utility of these extracurricular activities in relation to the adolescent age group.
3. Locate the political and cultural impingements upon this field of experience in education.
4. To comprehend parents', teachers' and other agents' (within the schooling system) negotiation in relation to construction of adolescence.
5. Delineate the religious practices that intertwines with varied extracurricular activities at schools.
6. Explore the economic forces functional in shaping the field of extracurricular and its corresponding repercussions on adolescence.

7. Trace the ideas of gender as they come to exist through educational practices, and more specifically through extracurricular activities.
8. Find how other lines of stratification in terms of class, religion and ethnicity gets reproduced or obliterated while carrying out these ECAs.
9. Observe how the adolescent self-negotiates and emerges through the field of education, both dependently and independent of the other controlling social forces and agents.

Chapter: Methodological Moorings

Doing social science research has always been a chase to locate and thereby treat ‘value’ in some way or the other. This grappling with value positions along with ethical negotiations have revealed a significant journey in methodological styles from the positivist school of ontological realism and epistemological objectivism to naturalistic paradigm of ontological relativism and epistemological subjectivism. The metaphysics undergirding the positivist enquiry of an ‘ultimate truth’ and the need to document ‘how things actually are’ or ‘how they actually work’ demands the scientists/researcher to follow the rigor of scientism rather than science. Their tasks thus boil to finding some causality in this ‘actual reality’ and thereby make predictions and determine the same. In this process, the researcher necessarily must distance oneself from the ‘object of enquiry’, ensuring no value preference or even value engagement of any kind to influence the order of the ultimate truth.

Thus to address the ethical costs of pursuing a putative truth, the social science researcher and the community forgo the underlying premise of ‘how things actually are’ or ‘how they actually work’. Instead, the concern for value could possibly be shifted towards a non-

deceitful enquiry from below, perceiving social realities as constructions embellished by social actors from among situations, stimuli and events of experiences. Experiences of the individual and their meaningful interpretation of the social justifies for a more personal, thus idiosyncratic construction and therefore accommodates a contrasting value orientation. Hereon the naturalists move to a fresh metaphysical assumption of multiple reality and methodologically contrast the traditional researcher-researched objective and distanced relationship.

I would rather propose a ‘lover model’ (Reinhaz, 1984) which is of mutual respect, trust and exchange between the researcher and the researched — a constant negotiation in getting to the elements called information or data. I find an interesting dimension to build upon from here in relation to my field experiences as a researcher, where I find my respondents carrying an imagination and therefore intuition of the reality and they collaborate with me in making meaning of their experiences and situations, proposing strategies and interpretations for the same. The locus of control never leaves the field and it’s always guided by an aesthetically informed imagination that is weaved by both the researched and researcher. Here it becomes important to mention the Weberian difference between ‘value preference’ and ‘value relevance’. The shift from ‘value judgements’ to ‘value interpretation’ that we observe in the methodological concerns of Max Weber, brings us to the notion of culture providing as well as protecting ‘value-ideas’ underlying any scientific knowledge. Thus aesthetic engagement becomes possibly the most plausible way for culturally weaving into the process of meaning making, keeping guard of the political motivations embedded in the cultural practices, expression and artefacts concerning both the researcher and researched.

Aesthetics as a science of cognizing through senses gained relative significance in my field of research experience. My point of departure for a methodological challenge came with art-centered aesthetics that I found extremely pertinent in my field. While, I was also aesthetically awakened by the sound, touch, expressions and gestures that I encountered within the schooling space with all its inmates during my ethnographic endeavor. Thus the assigning of meaning became a temporally and spatially determined exercise by the adolescent and gained value through their sensorial perception. Thus it coaxed me to account for the meanings in those terms. In the process there was a constant movement between the sensory and sensibility as I embedded myself in the atmosphere of my field. Having been conducting ethnography in 10 select schools of Kolkata, I decided to engage with my field in such a way that I could echo the narratives, as building up and being contested through the reflections of the participants in the process. Dealing with varied kinds of school and their execution of extracurricular, I was exposed to distinct school histories; varying institutional goals; difference in available infrastructure, vernacular medium, fees charged, teacher qualification and social class of students. This opened up the heterogeneity in the schooling process and coaxed me to trace the divergences and overlaps that were being encountered during these practices. And to account for the above heterogeneity the method of researching or even relooking had to be more layered and nuanced, taking into consideration subtle cues from adolescent behavior and hints of excess in an otherwise structured educational system. It is here that I started to deplore aesthetics as a mode of research in capturing the meaning as seen by the members and participants of the schooling process.

I was allured to look into experiences of everyday life of the adolescents, account for home-school nexuses and its bearings on them, collect impressions from memory with regard to activities participated, and their holistic self-assessment in the process of growing and participation as a social agent. Thus something that began as interviewing students and teachers, extended into recording gestures, attitudes, sounds, perceptions and imaginations. I was motivated enough to ponder on ways to use these varied sources of information for epistemologically qualifying the discourse on adolescence and schooling. Therefore, I started to mix methods. From mere interviewing, I shifted to ethnographic techniques and innovative styles for gaining more meaningful expressions of their actions. And at times added up by engaging the adolescents in focused group interviews.

Thus I ventured into the field not to dissect it, or live along with it but with a humble desire to plot it from all corners beyond a defined space and its orally produced spatiality by the mere responses of the field mates (i.e. respondents of my research). I rather sought to unravel the creation of schooling culture and more specifically that of the adolescence by tapping all information and counter-information in the form of imagination, cues from memory, literature, ritual excesses and aesthetic expressions of the same. My field thus became temporally and spatially extended beyond the schools and its space bound processes, as the students brought experiences from home and community into the school while they participated in the extracurricular activities of the school. My ethnographic engagement unobtrusively orients with the memories and temporally as well as spatially shifting narratives between home-community-school. Like the moral bindings and habitual practices learnt at home, larger cultural representations of the ‘popular’ picked up at the community level or through media, interactions in the social media and networking sites,

activities and experiences of the non-formal spaces. All of these seem to feed into the experiences at the school and vice-versa. Thus accounting for these historical narratives too become important in understanding the identity formation of the adolescents.

Adolescents as human subjects constitute the objective reality collectively and as an ethnographer I felt the pressing need to give primacy to their mindful engagements, aesthetic expression, creative gestures, meaning-making practices and at times even their discerning silence. The intersubjective position enjoyed through aesthetic association erodes the power dynamics between the knower and known to some extent. The adolescents built their own narratives while feeding me with the same and enriching my aesthetic experience. Besides, the Adolescent often transmit information through a plethora of physical and mental expressions, which gets recorded when engaged with the field aesthetically. Thus value that these girls and boys assign to their experiences in the schooling process helps them in rendering “understanding explanations” (as proposed by Weber).

Though the promises of validity do not get fully addressed in this interplay of subjects and objects (both the researcher and researched) in the field, but some sort of collaborative attempts at meaning making is surely assured. The ethical consideration of peer influences in a focused group interview is also not ruled out. But attempts have been made to cross check at every point with secondary sources of information and historical documents. Therefore, moving between the conceptual theoretical assumptions and absolute physiological sensations, ‘aesthetic-experiential’ ethnography possibly makes way for doing research in a more responsive way.

Chapter: Becoming an Adolescent in Bengal

As I was trying to explore the adolescent age group and their engagement in the field of extracurricular at school, I found an antipodal understanding of the same. The understanding grew with reference to ideas, popular opinions, social history, and rhetoric as well as everyday experiences with regards to parents, teachers and therefore the community at large. Nevertheless, the adolescent selves' negotiations and conscious as well as unconscious expressions remained a vital source of information for constructing the idea of adolescence. In this chapter a close review on few programs of the central and state government has been done to pose how the society conceptualizes the adolescents and thereby the political interventions it facilitates. I have then moved on to build the notions of adolescence through popular literature and fictional character like "Topse" in the detective stories of Satyajit Ray.

A leading newspaper of the country recorded that there are 1.2 billion adolescents in the world that account for around 16 per cent of the global population. About every fifth adolescent lives in India, and every fifth person in India is an adolescent. So, the necessity to focus on their welfare for the country cannot be overstated. The country's future development trajectory is inextricably tied to the wellbeing of today's adolescents since it is the key determinant of their transition into adulthood. A significant program for addressing adolescent health issues, named Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) was launched in 2014. The program aims to holistically approach the health problems of adolescents across the nation and in turn ensure their development. The program target is to find remedial measures for problems relating to adolescents' nutrition level, sexual practices, reproductive health, mental health, substance abuse and violence.

It is a community-based service whereby adolescents are approached through the education system and peer-influence mechanisms with a strong emphasis on the development of the adolescent of age 10 to 19.

In a not so similar league, but with some holistic purpose in mind the West Bengal Government introduced its “Kanyashree Prakalpa” in 2013, whereby it would make conditional cash transfer (CCT) to adolescent girls for continuing their education at least up to the secondary level and finally a one-time cash amount of 25,000 rupees be made at the age of 18. All records of the beneficiaries of the scheme is collected from the schools, as the aim remains to reduce school drop-out levels among girls and defer under-age marriages, ensuring school attendance as a necessary precondition for availing CCT scheme. Thus the “Kanyashree” program ultimately works with an objective to provide some sort of economic resilience, which in turn would help mitigate the multivariate health and social plights circumscribing the adolescent girls and to-be-women of tomorrow. However, none of these programs or schemes are free of their political ambitions, thereby the gaps in its formulation, execution and success persists. But highlighting these programs become necessary herein for mirroring the larger social concerns based on which these policies and programs get floated. We see in all these programs the ideas of sexual excesses in adolescence, and the need to taper them, strongly percolating over time. Though there’s also attempts of redressing them to find safer outlets and not blindly applying the stigmatization and therefore sequestration measures as previously used.

The image of adolescence that transpires most of the literature that I happen to be interface with, was that of a precarious age of liminality. From G.S. Hall’s (1904) notions of ‘stress and storm’ to Margaret Mead’s (1928) insights into cultural conditioning of adolescence,

an overwhelming concern was to tame this yet-to-be adult mass and their raging hormones. Similar anxieties did reflect in the philosophical and social ideals of the Indian sub-continent. Durjati Prasad Mukerji (1946) reiterates that sex-urge is only one of the forms of social energy that defines the youth and that, according to him, is controlled and subordinated to law, codes, orders, pressure of customs. Thus the main problem lies in subordination for youth and unpleasantness of control. In other words, the gap between the adolescence and his initiation into a membership of society creates the greatest problem. For DP the adolescent is a ward to his family, enjoying maximum protection and has no independent social existence of his own. He mentions that the girls are in even more severe conditions of subordination.

However, there cannot and mustn't be a singular construct of adolescence, as the self during these years draw upon varied and intersecting 'lifeworlds', keeping in tune with the time and space considerations. This chapter, keeping in view the above discourse on adolescence, has been an attempt to contextualize the idea of adolescence in Bengal, if not reconstruct it in systemic interlocation. With the onset of puberty, the lifeworld that produces experiences with objects, events and emotions of everyday can be shared between two selves and several lifeworlds. Therefore, posing a challenge to understand how the adolescent travels across the lifeworlds of neighborhood, family, and friends to arrive at a culture which both liberates and confines a self in terms of language, formal education practices, sexual practices, leisurely engagements and material aspirations. In trying to locate the self at the crossroads of several lifeworlds, I have re-read the character of "Topshe" from "*Feluda*", the famous detective novel of Satyajit Ray. Besides, to make the journey of the concept more meaningful in last 20 years I would review a film named *Open-*

tee-bioscope produced in 2015. This brought forth the change in the construction of adolescence for Bengalis in their popular imagination and their ideological and moral negotiations.

Ray's intended world of the adolescent was carefully crafted in keeping with an emerging new nation and pressing demands of colonialism for an independent, yet tutored urban boy. "Topse" appears to have mastered his anxieties from childhood but is still dependent on adult prescriptions for conducting himself in his everyday endeavors, as handed down from lifeworld of engaging beliefs and values of the concerned adult. "Feluda" is the daring, strong and affable detective cousin of "Topse", who turns out to be almost a role-model for the young boy. The necessary training and discipline for the young remains a constant in the interpretations of all Ray's formulations. "Topse" being the critical vantage point narrates the stories of daring adventure, ensuring awe and fantasy as an integral part of his growing up. The author's preoccupation with keeping the adolescent mind free of any violence or sex was accomplished with "Topse" narrating his experiences under the tutelage of "Feluda". The social in making was more accommodating of the innocence and moral uprightness of the adolescence in contrast to the experimental tendencies of the age that still remained at the "horizon" of the ever-exceeding society.

The vulnerability of the young boy wasn't ruled out and therefore even in the absence of an immediate family or any overt mention of institutionalized schooling system throughout in the narration, the role of the elder cousin remained exigent. However, the trust in the extended family and its members become pronounced in "Topse's" growing up along with "Feluda". Thus, the adolescence remained an important time for learning and relearning the emotional expressions and making of social bonds. Contrastingly, the truth-seeking

adolescent boy had also been upheld, compromising the comforts of a family as well as bypassing the lanes of sexuality and self-discovery in the lone moments of one's household. Thus, the negotiations between the sexually innocent child and physically able young boy continued. The elder cousin "Feluda" came across as an ageless hero, old enough to be more than a friend but not too old to play the authoritarian father. This hinted at the family structure of the urban Bengal in those times, where the father was too old to enjoy much emotional proximity to his children. The adolescent boy often found company in elder cousins turned peers of the extended family, resonating the values of sibling love and rivalry.

Chapter: Life Skill Lessons and Cultural Reproduction: Government Initiatives

To account for the non-middle class assertion and negotiations with regard to adolescence, an engaging ethnography has been done that shall be built in this chapter. But one needs to mention that the non-middle class experiences cannot be understood in total segregation of the middle classes in a society that offers formal and universal education. Life-skill and personal grooming have always been on the cards for adding utility quotient to education, whether by coercion to adopt given ideals of health, hygiene and cleanliness or making distinctions of esteemed lifestyles. At such crossroads, the pupils from the lower income group of an urban space are seen lacking the required "cultural capital" to survive a life of dignity in the cities. With such ideological misgivings and political ploy, often the state and its educator battalion run the mission of transforming them so that they drop their

indigenous cultural moorings and slip into a “cultured” lifestyle that befits the larger imagination of the former’s growth.

Thus, the chapter attempts to interrogate such an educational regime by reading through all extra-curricular programs of the Government schools in Kolkata, raising questions about the purpose of learning, conscious raising and “conscientization” (Freire 1971) among the adolescent students. These government schools carry out recommended extracurricular activities (ECA) like art, music and sports, as per the state order. Special days like Independence Day, Republic Day, Rabindra Jayanti and Teachers Day is celebrated ritualistically. In an effort to understand the learning and training in view to relive a social position, if not reproduce it consciously, I participated in several inter-school quiz competitions, sit and draw events and road rallies. And narratives from these events brought to light the ideological positions of a value-oriented education, raising questions about the ethical positions taken for justifying which values to be imparted over the other.

Education has been the harbinger of such valued lessons to ensure the cultural standards in any given society. But whose culture and what sort of appropriation of that culture is being done remains a point of deep rumination. An account of the extracurricular activities carried out at public schools exposed that values imparted herein got validation by negating an opposite set of values, based on certain socio-cultural and politico-economic motivations. Researching into the extra-mural components of education in these schools brought forth the lacunae in policies and practices, mostly promoting majoritarian ideologies and thus raising concomitant consciousness. It revealed how life skill training in these schools were designed reasserting a value position that was in the interest of the “other” rather than those imbibing them. Adolescent boys and girls were merely engaged

in the process of reproducing their socio-cultural positions through these activities. For instance, Rallies and hygiene lessons organised by the state government unravelled how the metropolitan city thrives on a popular perception of untidy settlements in poor neighbourhood, and conceives of a public space divided into contaminating and non-contaminating zones.

In fact this reflected in the consciousness of the girls and boys too who spoke of their relative position of advantage and disadvantage in relation to the hygiene conditions as prescribed and poised desirable by the school authority. Besides, the humanitarian position taken by the political players along with the teacher-collaborator often saw these adolescent members of the society as “containers” (Freire 1971) to be filled up. Structures of domination come to play in multiple ways to prepare the “citizens of tomorrow” with motives undeclared. Deep-seated ideas about cleanliness and environmental protection find fresh vigour with the “middle-class community” sprawling the adjacent areas of these neighbourhood public schools. Notions of safety, cleanliness, hygiene and health seem to reflect the need of protection of the privileges of some citizens at the expense of the other. These extracurricular activities reflected the passivity of adolescents belonging to lower income-group households. Alongside, a pressing desire to nurture that passivity was also noticed in the interest of some with manifold political, social and cultural mandates. But the same grandeur in training/ indoctrinating the adolescent students through state-sponsored programs were found missing in the private schools. The majoritarian control over value education even today, standing at the crossroads of neo-liberal economies and liberal democratic political formations, speak aloud through muted voices of the adolescents belonging to the fringes.

Chapter: Extracurricular Activities in Neoliberal Order: Pedagogy and Parenting.

While examining the predominant extracurricular activities at the Government-funded schools we found modes of cultural and political training at play. The aim underlying the above was to fulfil the labour-power reproduction function on the one hand, and ideological indoctrination on the other. Life skill training as per the central government and the state government policies and program seems to turn into tools for cultural and social reproduction of classes. It's no wonder that the state has always been committed towards carrying the interventional task of appropriating education for meeting the need of skilled and unskilled work force in a capitalist production system. This kind of state intervention through life skill training takes a pronounced form in an urban space with promises of not only preparing a labour force, but also socially and culturally nurturing faith in the necessity for such reproduction of lives and livelihoods. However, the role of the state with rapid neoliberalisation and privatization has taken a new form. Though the ideological indoctrination project still remains pertinent, the claim of providing skilled or semi-skilled workforce is now taken care of through direct market interventions. These privatized measures to educate the adolescents have surely encountered more innovations and corresponding motivations for and transition in employment. This chapter makes an attempt to locate these innovations in private education in terms of extracurricular activities and their collateral impact on parenting and pedagogy.

The attraction that the private schools weave around them to win their customer-cum-parent includes a plethora of cultural and social objects on offer, keeping line with

globalized culture and a trans-national job market. Extracurricular activities become an essential component in education to match the needs generated by the globalized society. To the parents, such education is considered as a pathway to suitable employment, enhanced life chances, and appropriation of status specifically among the middle classes. The four private schools that I visited for exploring the nuances of privatization at the turn of liberalization brought forth an account of middle class negotiations in terms of parenting, class identity, employability crisis and a new culture of consumption. Interestingly, this culture has been fast gaining its popularity that helps not only promote commodities of education but also sell cultural commodities for sustaining a ‘so-called-rewarding’ education.

Surprisingly enough, I could locate how adolescents along with their parents were fast being turned into consumers of educational products and services. And interestingly provision for and thus availing of these services were possible only because technology had made deep inroads. Free market orients its consumers towards “personalized consumption”, leading them to consume “goods” and “services” in the form of education as well. With the promise to equip one with new skills and give them an added advantage over others, the market lures the student-parent consumer duo into buying the best facilities and lessons on offer beyond curriculum. For instance, schools hire private agencies to offer a plethora of ECA for their adolescent students and the fees for the same are often hefty. And they too use technological aids to reach the students beyond the class hours to offer their training lessons.

Parenting:

A kind of commodification of the consumers (the adolescent in this case) take place, banking on a fast-paced “culture of consumption” among the middle classes. And this culture often evolved through acts of emulation and chain of reactions like any other embodied form of culture. Many parents and students were picking up extracurricular activities based on their peer’s choices of the same. In fact many adolescent boys and girls as well as their parents expressed how their friend’s, neighbors’ and relative’s engagement in a particular form of activity had a rippling effect on them. I could sense an anxiety of being left out that guided their choices. They too wanted to be part of a social group in all its intrinsic terms and were, nevertheless, nurtured into trusting and valuing group choices. I am not very sure if it could be seen as a “herd-like” behavior, but it surely represented an urge to cultivate tastes that define a class location. Plethora of extracurricular activities (swimming, chess, foreign language, abacus, pottery, martial arts, skating, dramatics, puppetry, cooking etc.) have been introduced merely to accommodate demands of the students and their parents. There are events and programs that reflect a cultural overture of the deep changes that were taking place in the economic and political structures of the society. Adolescents were trying to make choice in pursuing activities based on its alternative career implications and advantages too. Many adolescents in my study lay bare their insecurities of not finding a seat in reputed engineering colleges, and hence wanting to build an alternative career in either music or other performing arts. For instance, many parents and their wards told me how they were keen to go to a particular school because they knew that those schools were technological equipped and it would provide them greater exposure at every level. A girl said that she enjoyed the art classes in her school as

she learnt to draw using a software on Google Draw and therefore enjoy many mediums of painting.

Choices mostly were made under peer influence as well as parental guidance in lieu of credence for employability in a volatile economic scenario. The economic vulnerability was surely a driving force behind finding alternative avenues of income, but there is no denying that on several occasions the utility quotient of an ECA was superseded by needs to belong to one's social class and adopt corresponding practices. Parenting and its middle class anxieties in an insecure job market and an emerging "risk society" (Beck 1992) were constantly felt in my study. Middle class parents were seen responding to the dramatic changes in job opportunities and adopting alternative career choices. At times they were also found to be quite hopeful about the boom in service and entertainment industry, building dreams and nurturing desires of seeing their wards turn into celebrity someday. They were moving beyond the goals of securing an occupation for a lifetime to making their wards multi-talented and nurturing traits that would befit them to juggle jobs or even start new enterprise.

Mothering:

At this juncture, the role of mothers seem to stand out distinctly in relation to their historical position in the family and their responsibility of nurturing their offspring. Mothers of the middle class families were seen enthusiastically engaging with their wards and the schools during all kinds of events and programs. Her involvement extended beyond her need to groom her child, as these activities often turned out to be a ripe site for her to reproduce her cultural position. For instance, while making of craft items for her child or deciding

upon their musical or artistic endeavors, the mother seemed to be reliving her younger days practicing the skills that once she cherished, but had long abandoned due to varied reasons. The mother was found to be the first line of support and agent to deal with the biological and psychological changes of their adolescent boy or girl. She in a transformed social milieu, having to take up employment beyond the domestic sphere alongside performing familial duties, exposes herself to fresh set of anxieties in the role of a mother.

Thus other than exploiting the available economic and cultural resources, the middle class parents have cultivated and nurtured the home-school relationship with utmost commitment. And the mothers of Bengali urban middle class families seem to occupy a pivotal position here. The mother is also seen jostling with new choices on offer as ECA, trying to figure out which all would be befitting with the middleclass position in the neoliberal times. Thus retaining the “bhadrolok” image and its cultural rootedness on one hand and on the other, assimilating the new practices that come to define the middle class in the globalized age. For instance, one mother narrated how she wanted her daughter to learn “rabindra sangeet” but she also conceded to the idea of her learning guitar as the daughter wanted to make a career as a band artist. Mothers of middle class Bengali families seem to take up a provider-partner duo role along with her adolescent boy or girl. Her rich cultural training attained inter-generationally and institutional nurturing through good schooling in her early years make her adept for such task. Through her embodied form of capital, socially and institutionally imbibed, she paves new pathways for child-rearing. Thus we see the parent accommodating the demands of the market-nurtured education system and transforming oneself into motivated-individuals, seeking rational ways to

groom their adolescent boy or girl into suitable man and woman in a new social order of risks and uncertainties.

Pedagogy:

While exploring the field of extracurricular activities I have seen possibilities and attempts, may be not so conscious, on the part of the teachers to make learning a liberating experience. I believe it became possible due to two principle factors. Firstly, the humanist approach embedded in every individual acted upon the teacher to support and care for their students. Especially dealing with adolescent and children the paternal instinct seem to overpower all other emotive considerations. Secondly, the other socio-cultural forces that mediate our world of representation also has a great impact. In this relation the use of popular cultural modes in the form music, dance or literature during the extracurricular classes facilitates the teacher and the student to interact breaking down the hierarchical order. The adolescent exposed to the popular and mass mediated culture finds a new space to relate in terms of fictional characters, musical revolutions and other literary imaginations. The inclusion of songs from Bollywood movies, adopting ways of popular iconic characters in dramas and performing to rock or hip hop numbers build a space for self-expression and adolescent-adult rendezvous. During such times the teacher and student finds a common cultural space to exchange spontaneously and nurture a bonding that shall go farther. Besides, I found the promise of reality shows and talent hunt programs having an overwhelming effect on the adolescent mind. Thus the passion for creative pursuit seems to coax both the teacher and the taught, and they enter into a kind of negotiated space where they start appreciating each other for reasons beyond classroom

learning and examination-based performance. A camaraderie was seen constantly evolving between the teachers and students during the cultural events and stage shows.

Most literature on popular culture and its relation to education have dealt with the young as the producers and consumers of popular culture. Young students are engaged in learning across space and time. They are no more bound to classroom learning. The internet and television has fast transformed their world of experience. They immerse themselves in a wide range of transcultural practices and global political events through virtual platform, which transforms the teaching-learning experience to a great extent. For instances, a teacher was found picking up lyrics of a Bollywood number to sing along with his students for an annual day event. Hindi Bollywood numbers, pop and rap music, dances emulating the Hindi movie songs and even western music were integral part of school programs. Teachers with their middle class upbringing stated that they were also becoming used to this inroad of popular mass-mediated culture into the extracurricular activities. Though some did ponder and revealed their inhibitions around such inclusion in educational practices, but they also opined how it was inevitable as education couldn't remain divorced from the community and larger social and cultural changes.

Massive expansion of social media aided by technological revolution post liberalization and advent of an information-based society. The adolescents of 1990's who used to tap their feet to Michael Jackson's popular songs — "black or white" and "they don't care about us"— are now celebrating the musical scores of a Korean Band. Here we need to mention that the popular is now under the grip of commercial "Hindi-Hindu" cultural forms on one hand and globalized international forms on the other. Accommodation of both these forms into the commercially manufactured popular culture and transmission of the same surely

have certain manipulative ideological propaganda to meet in a capitalist order. Thus the changing dynamics of popular culture surely have a deep impact on the budding adolescent minds and thereby a rippling effect on the family and community at large.

In these situations the reaction of the parents and teachers to the fast changing character of the popular and thereby its absorption into the middle class, where principally they are situated, become a site for strong contestation. What would be retained as purely Bengali cultural tradition and what would be the new elements of “modern” that shall be picked up to define the new Bengali “bhadroluk” is quite varied, therefore culturally heterologous. Interestingly, here begins the dialogue between the personal preferences of the parent/teachers and the structural changes in cultural forms. Therefore, the popular too doesn’t come across as something fixed and free of contestation. The dialectics of resistance and containment inherent in any cultural form gets displayed here too. Schooling cannot happen in absence of local cultural relatedness. Thus paving path for a pedagogy that shall demand teachers to become cosmopolitan, democratic and transcultural in their views by accommodating the young in terms of the popular, both locally and globally.

Chapter: Rituals at school and The Adolescent Practices

The extracurricular activities as designed and administered in schools, reveal either strong mandates of the state and educational bodies or are catapulted by the demands of the market under the umbrella of “high-value” education. Thus producing contrasting experiences in terms of that which is enumerated and those practiced. All the schools I visited had fixed record of extracurricular activities that were to be conducted in any academic year. Some

of the activities and observances were common for both public and private schools, but their ritualistic character did expose some difference in terms of grandeur. Celebration of Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti, events to commemorate the Birth Anniversary of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Foundation Day of the school, Teachers Day among others were some such events that were observed by all schools. Though the celebrations and corresponding funding for the same weren't uniform, a common belief system seemed to bind the adolescents for participating with supreme enthusiasm. This common belief system at times resonated the larger political ideologies, and on other times reflected the contrasting regional cultural adaptations and indigenous socio-cultural affiliations.

I would like to draw attention here to the “Hindi-Hindu” popular cultural forms making its way alongside the age-old multi-cultural representation of nationalism via songs and dramas, mostly inspired by the Bollywood. However, the local assertion of the nationalist imagination and religious beliefs through music and dance dramas as created by the schools borrowing from the cultural heritage of Bengal, specifically in works of Tagore, have a lasting impact on the minds of adolescents. The process of ritualization that encumbered the ceremonies commemorating these days of significance surfaced a unique pattern of behavior among the adolescents, often oscillating between and at times merging the religious and the secular. Therefore, I did not stop at discussing the religious ways deployed by schools to attain citizenship ideals or the excesses in nationalist training.

Rather, I engaged in documenting ritualistic practices within the school that echoed the larger socio-religious practices and help identify the distortions, manipulations and/or the reassertions in the sub context of education at local level. This, in turn, helped me understand the other hidden forms of learning and unlearning that takes place therein.

Adolescents were found exploring the “other culture” through the rituals carried out as part of the extracurricular activities. To make a mention, one girl from a missionary school expressed that for her carrying the cross of the church is no different than cleaning the idols she worshipped back home. They were absorbed in these rituals as an act of play, overcoming them with a spirit of ‘collective effervescence’ (Durkheim 1912).

The citizenship training project always remained elemental in school education, whether through religious rituals or adoption of secular methods. But I found a mid-path being carved out by the adolescents to rediscover and celebrate both religiosity and secularism on new terms. Be it the observance of Independence Day, annual day celebration of a missionary school within the premises of the church or holding fests at the school premises during Christmas and Durga Puja, the rituals seemed to lie on, and move along, a religio-secular continuum. And interestingly, the adolescent boys and girls moved along the same continuum, redefining religious practices in terms of their local culture and challenging the given meaning of secular or religious after relating them to their immediate field of experiences. The edgy and exploratory adolescent seem to soak in the spirit of ritualistic exuberance and fun, enabling themselves to land on a multi-cultural site with unadulterated practices and corresponding belief systems. Behaviors exposing secular religiosities among adolescents also hint towards the identity-class-ethnicity nexus at play. For instance, I found a Muslim girl participating in the Navaratri celebrations at school and selling “firni” (a sweet dish typically prepared by Muslims on special occasions) in the school-organized “mela”.

Nevertheless, the universal ethics emerging from these rituals seem to shape the adolescents’ understanding of their own religion as well as other religiosities through ritual

participation in the later. Thus, the rituals, whether secular or religious, with its cultural overtures and significations within the schooling practices help the adolescence to dialogue with themselves under the spell of effervescence. Thereby often leading to new meanings and negotiated rituals, breaking down the watertight structures of religious and secular ideals. Therefore this research has invited a deeper enquiry into the multi-cultural reverberations that keep occupying the intuitional framework of education, at times under the garb of socio-religious cultural practices and other times the nationalist project.

Chapter: Adolescent self in the Field of Extracurricular

The transition from childhood to adolescence has always been infested with wreckage of mind, body and morals. Exaggeration in personality and excesses of emotion is used to describing the boy and girl, keeping in view the social expectations, sexual maturation standard, and institutions of religion, education and laws for the juvenile. While trying to draw an understanding of adolescence in Bengal, in the previous chapter and followed up by ethnographic experiences in this chapter, similar strains have been highlighted. Rhetoric such as, “It’s the difficult age, nothing can be done” echoes time and again the adolescents struggle with changes in the body and consequent reflections of the mind.

Therefore, moving into deeper cervix of training, we locate how the adolescent expresses oneself and negotiates with social realities and artefacts while remaining a part of this overt learning process and covert disciplining methods. It is through the dance forms, musical experimentation, paintings and poetry that the adolescent represent their socially maturing minds and deviations in personality. Tendencies to opine on several issues and voice one’s

self are traced along participation in these activities and their negotiations in relationships with peers, friends, trainers and educators. I have explored in this chapter the art and aesthetic representations by the adolescent and its wider meaning and ramification. The training of the body and gendered injunctions have been focused and the longstanding theories of biological and physiological changes in this age revisited. Thus an attempt is made to delineate the streaks of negotiation that the girls and boys make through their engagement in extracurricular activities and the relationships that emerge in such group participations.

The idea of body and its associated sense of identity gets nurtured and leaves deciding impact on the adolescent. The social engagements of varied kinds give way to such deep and overlapping cues about one's body in the adolescence. My account of the various extracurricular activities in the school brought me close to seeing such overlaps in the construction of gender as taken-for-granted universals and consequent individual negotiations among the adolescents. Most of the extracurricular activities, as I have discussed in the preceding chapters, with relation to performative arts have revealed certain preoccupation with the body among the adolescent. The uniform codes, dance gestures, articulation through paintings, physical training and role playing in dramas, all had elements of bodily self-discovery and manipulation of the same. In this light, I have drawn attention to a project called 'Sukanya' (2019) as undertaken by the Kolkata Police along with West Bengal Government to train girls of the government schools in self-defense as a part of the extracurricular. Besides, I have also fallen back on the 'Brathachari' movement as initiated in schools of Bengal in 1932 for spiritual and social improvement of the youth in Bengal. The founder of the program had initiated the movement to conduct physical and

mental training of the young, fashioned through dance, music and drama based on 'authentic folk traditions' of Bengal. The attempt was to historically locate the emphasis on physical training in education and thereby formation of gendered practices and identities.

Thus, the body image and the corresponding sense of sexuality gained significant importance and it got revealed through interaction with the peers at school and often more so when they engage in varied activities in their leisure time. The relationships that seem to build between the adolescent appeared to be very deciding for them. In all the poetries and paintings as well as physical activities examined, a clear indication was found towards the need for approval of the friends in varied ways. Friendship seem to be a strong factor in nurturing an adolescent identity. Deep languish and yearning for friends was as persisting as their need to voice themselves. Even though there were instances where friends often became their critique and teased them, yet their opinions left a mark in their minds to make a mention of. The girls and boys recognized the parallel voices of their peers and considered them as qualifying messages for their everyday activities and their self-development. In fact, the choices they made for taking up any activity or denouncing it was heavily influenced by the peers. It was the desire to spend the leisure time with the friends that gained paramount importance. The ideas of sexuality were subtly ingrained through exchanges among the peers of same and opposite sexes. Though standardized sex education was a prescribed mandate for many of the schools. But understanding of sexuality surely transcended the one-day lesson on sex as an act. The man-woman relationship or even the stigma of same-sex relationship is learnt through social interaction with the peers in the school and beyond.

Conclusion

As this research was constantly guided by reflections into and erudition on beyond-the-curriculum educational practices among a particular age group, theoretical and corresponding epistemological positions turned out to be eminent source of influence, if not determinant. Few natural assertions of already enumerated knowledge positions have been quite obvious and necessary. As I revisited the idea of cultural reproduction among the lower- and middle-income classes following Bourdieu's (1970) thesis on education and its essential impact with regard to social and cultural capital, I took a step forward and tried to locate the same reproduction in a newer socio-economic and political context. It is after Ulrich Beck (1992) that I have tried understand how the educational forces play upon the parents and their adolescent wards, making them experiment with themselves so that they can survive a risk-prone and crisis-ridden society. With globalization and neo liberalism setting its foot strongly in the Indian sub-continent from 1990, technological advancement, changing consumption pattern, transforming employment conditions and an attempt to move into cultural pluralism, with its own limitations and reservations in a state of rising minority politics, were becoming but evident. Education for the "becoming" adolescent in such times had to witness some palpable transformations. Thus the notion of "risk society" and its ways of dealing with the insecurities and hazards of modernization was also tried to be dealt with while locating the corollary effect on education and its role in the lives of adolescents.

However, in doing so the theses of critical pedagogues like Paulo Freire (1971), Ivan Illich (1971), and Henry A. Giroux (2005) were used as a canvas to locate the passivity that the education system is beset with. To mention in this league, some ideas of containment and reproduction of knowledge system in a hierarchical manner was surely seen but not without contestations and hope for innovation, if not total resentment and retaliation. Thus bringing into the foreground the work of Indian-origin thinkers and educators like Tagore, Gandhi and Sri Aurobinda, to name a few, and their institutionalized philosophies in the form of “Shantiniketan”, “Nai tailem”, and “Mirambika” respectively, one can still find the quest of critical thus democratic education alive. The mainstream modern education within its own furlongs and experimenting with alternatives, especially through the avenue of extracurricular, exposed few stark and pertinent cases of non-linear and non-subjugated teaching-learning processes. After all, the essence of education cannot be reduced to a capacity-building program for the market society or merely disciplining bodies and minds to that end; the dimensions of critical pedagogy, self-development, blossoming of creative faculty are inseparable part of the development of the adolescents as well as national development.

Significance of the Study

Adolescents are the future employees and citizens of any given society and in the rapidly growing terrains of consumerism is no more a docile and subordinate entity. They are also looped into the market dynamics as they are seen as potential consumers in their own right. Though they might not be in a position to actively participate in the market exchange, but surely their desires and needs are tapped by the market via the parents who are still economically their providers. However, the choices that the adolescent make being

exposed to the claims and enticements of the market often supersede the parental guidance and control. This agency of the adolescent transpires to other aspects of their being and becoming, thereby giving them a new character. This redefining of their position in the age hierarchy alongside social classification of class, gender and race becomes culturally very significant for any community. The urban adolescent can never be analogous, and all the more so in a heightened consumption culture. Therefore, this study was designed to identify the variations and offer an accommodative, non-linear understanding of adolescence. Such a non-universalizing view from below would further help in understanding the predicaments and thereby the needs of the future citizens in making, building hope for creating a suitably concomitant social scenario or ironing out the discrepancies as and when possible. Thus the larger goal of capitalism and political sanctions of the same could be unraveled through this study and a negotiated adoption of the same shall also be figured out.

Besides, the disciplinary demands of Sociology of Education can no way be limited to an isolated analysis of education system. The concerns that interlace the domain of education needs explanation from all sides, approaching it from varied vantage points (i.e., of culture, religion or politics). For instance, the rise and penetration of the popular culture into the widely spread social fabric via technologically mediated forms shall find representation in education too. Thus accounting for the same would furnish the discipline and enrich the already existing discourse on education. Sociology itself has long engaged in understanding social orders and disorders, but this pursuit shall remain unsatisfactory till varied actors in the social organization of life are identified and analyzed reasonably. Thus this study on adolescence with reference to education shall help build the bridge between

sociology and education, offering insights into the later with epistemological rumination of the former. To view the adolescent in new light under the prism of present socio-cultural and economic order, one can recognize their quasi-child or quasi-adult form. This form and its cultural as well as political validation surely hints at a new social order in incubation. Thus sociology needs to be sufficiently fed with these knowledge paradigms from below and enough impetus be generated for taking up fresh methodological and ontological challenges.

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