Where Nerds Are Normal:

Peer Relationships in Six Indian High Schools

by

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE: Why the material is being made available in this form.

In early 2007 I had a Fulbright Fellowship to India and spent the first three months of that time as a visiting scholar in the Sociology Department of the Delhi School of Economics. Shortly after arriving I asked a group of graduate students whether any of them would be interested in participating in a study of Indian high schools that roughly paralleled the study I had done of American high schools as reported in *Geeks, Freaks, and Cool Kids* (Routledge 2004). Several expressed interest. I then approached Prof. Meenakshi Thapan, then head of the department, to see whether the department had any objections to such a project and asked whether she might be interested in joining the project since she had published material about Indian schools. She agreed to participate and played an important role in supervising the students doing fieldwork and provided funding to some of the graduate fieldworkers, though I was not privy to the details of these payments.

My fellowship called for me to move from Delhi to St. Edmund's College in Shillong when their term began late in the spring. St. Edmund's is associated with North-Eastern Hill University. I organized a similar data collection project there using undergraduate students as fieldworkers. Fieldworkers made observations and wrote up fieldnotes that were posted on a University of Virginia private website. (For the Delhi team this made each other's fieldwork notes available to one another.)

It was my understanding that Prof. Thapan and I could draw on all of the data and that each graduate student fieldworker could use the data they had collected. Prof. Thapan and I agreed to attempt to co-author a monograph drawing on all the data.

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After returning to the U.S., I spent the better part of two years analyzing the data and writing a narrative about each school studied. I sent drafted material to Prof. Thapan and the relevant student fieldworker as each chapter was written requesting their comments and criticisms—and encouraged Prof. Thapan to take responsibility for drafting some of the chapters. She always responded by encouraging me to continue, but giving little or no specific feedback. During this period our two families had developed very friendly relationship. We visited in each other's homes both in India and the U.S. My wife and Prof. Thapan described themselves as "soul mates."

After I completed a full draft, I insisted that Prof. Thapan respond in detail to the draft. While she was in Paris for several months she did provide chapter by chapter comments. In my opinion her interpretation of a significant portion of the data was quite different from mine. As we exchanged e-mails about this her tone became increasingly hostile. I reached the conclusion that we could not fruitfully co-author material. I was disappointed, but did not attribute ill-will to either of us knowing that good and honest scholars often disagree about how to interpret data. I wrote saying that I was withdrawing from the project and that she could use the manuscript and the data as she saw fit, but that I reserved the right to write an article or two drawing on the data. She replied in an accusatory and bitter tone that my wife and I found shocking. Communication ceased.

In 2013 I published an article in *Sociology of Education* drawing on data from both the Delhi project and the Shillong project in which Prof. Thapan played no role. I explicitly acknowledged that Prof. Thapan, Maitrayee Deka, and Pamposh Raina had played an important role in collecting the Delhi data. I received a vitriolic e-mail in effect accusing me of stealing the data without the permission of those who had collected it. I responded pointing out that I would have no reason to have started the project, much less spend two years writing a manuscript if I did not have a right to use the data.

The version of the manuscript below is to the best of my memory and my records the version I wrote before I received or used any of Prof. Thapan's comments—in order to avoid other accusations of plagiarism. It is clearly a "first draft" which I would have refined both analytically and stylistically if I had published this material as a book.

A caveat is appropriate. I am writing this introduction in October of 2017, more than ten years after the events recounted above. It could be that my memory is faulty about some of the details, but I am confident that the key thrust of the description is accurate.

I am making this material available in this form because, however imperfect the manuscript is, it provides useful and important data for those interested in comparative education and youth peer cultures.

Prologue

UTTARNAGAR GOVERNMENT SCHOOL IN DELHI

During the morning assembly the principal says:

November is a month of activities and holidays—sports, election and other [things].

But [students] should keep up their studies. One will now hear all the campaigning and

fuss about the election. Many of your parents and relatives will go there, but your duty

right now is to study. So you should remember that the politicians are here [in pursuit

of] their *OWN* gains, so do not drift away towards all these issues . . .

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Fieldworker: "I wanted to know what subjects they liked to study. The girl replied that

math was her favorite. [M]any expressed their [agreement]. I asked why they like it

. . . . [They] replied that it was not because they liked the teacher, but because the

teaching was good."

ST. MARKS SCHOOL IN NORTHEAST INDIA

Five Hindu Bengali boys: "Said [they were] not interested in having girl friends

because cannot concentrate on studies . . . . Said they wanted to do research when

they went to college. Care about marks and their future profession."

*   *   *

Six class 12 girls: "Hang out together at school and usually have lunch together. Rarely hang out after school because 'we are all science students and we have to concentrate more with our studies.'"

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Two Bengali girls, eventually joined by four Nepali girls: "All made good marks and very concerned about this. Wanted to become Chartered Accountants or M.B.A.'s and make their parents proud."

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Four girls from different cultural background: Described themselves as "fun loving" and fashion conscious, but: "Exams very important to them. There was competition among them, but it did not hamper their friendship."

RISHI VALLEY SCHOOL IN SOUTH INDIA

"I sat in prep [study hall] for a while," reports the fieldworker. "The students were studying quietly on their own. Occasionally someone might go out to drink water or use the toilet or borrow stationery, but by and large there was no movement within the class itself. People were intent on their work."

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Later the conversation shifted to marks and I came to know that Abhinand had topped the 9th final exams with ninety-one percent. He was modest about this. He said, "In Rishi Valley School this was the highest, but if I had been in St. Mary's [in Mumbai] I would have been 31st. They count marks up to three decimal points! . . ."

RAMPURA SCHOOL IN DELHI

"Whenever I would be chitchatting in any of these classes there would be a few

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students plying over their notebooks and solving sums. The school gives lot of assignments, apart from that they have [home]work . . . from their . . . coaching centers . . . . "They were quite a focused lot and their life seemed to revolve around school and coaching classes."

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The school has maximum students in the science stream in the higher classes, followed by commerce and humanities. Humanities in fact had a single section as compared to six sections for the science stream. As I went to the senior classes with board examinations round the corner, students were pretty serious about their studies. One thing that was unanimous was that most of them want to opt for engineering after their [class] twelve boards.

Introduction

This is a book about secondary schools in India. It looks at relatively elite schools, though these range from very high prestige schools to those whose reputation is strictly local. It includes government schools and non-government schools operated by various charitable trusts. Schools like these are the source of most of India's expanding middle classes; this expansion is what has so transformed Indian society in the beginning decades of the twenty-first century. This is also the type of schools from which much of the next generation of Indian's leaders will emerge. A primary focus of this book is on student culture and the informal peer relationships. The latter are both the source and the result of this culture. The first key task of this book is to provide a better description of these student relationships and cultures than is currently available in the social science literature. A second task is to show how the structure of secondary schools and the school cultures that emerge create a set of disciplinary structures that affect not only secondary school students, but also the broader society. The third key task is to explain variation: similarities and differences in peer relations and student culture within India and between India and the U.S.

The distinctive features of social institutions are usually clearest when they are compared to similar institutions in other social and cultural contexts. Our base of comparison will be primarily secondary or high schools in the United States

Why Compare Schools in India to Schools in the United States?

Why do we compare schools in India to those in the United States? It is *not* because we think that U.S. schools are a model of excellence that Indian schools should try to copy. Since peer relationships and student culture is a key focus there are three reasons we use the U.S. as a basis of comparison. First, there has been more research on school peer cultures in the U.S. than any other society. Second, and even more important, youth cultures around the world have been influenced by the portrayals of American youth culture in the mass media. TV programs like *Beverly Hills 90210*, *My So-called Life*, and *Gilmore Girls*, and movies like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Clueless,*

Ferris Bueller's Day Off, *Breakfast Club,* and *10 Things I Hate About You*, have been distributed world-wide—often dubbed in other languages or provided with subtitles. Popular music from the U.S. has also been an important influence on youth cultures around the world— though of course music from many countries has become part of the global youth culture. This is not to say that secondary school cultures in India (or elsewhere) simply copy the patterns portrayed in American TV programs, movies, and music. Often students in other countries are critical of the U.S. patterns that are portrayed. It is, however, a rare secondary student any place in the world that does not have some notion of what American teenage life is like—however, exaggerated or distorted that image might be. While it may be regrettable, American teenage culture is a reference point for most secondary school students. The third reason we compare India and the U.S. is that it builds on our past work. One of the authors has long studied Indian schools and is an expert on how these schools operate. The other has studied U.S. high schools and offered a systematic set of explanations for why American teenagers behave the way that they do.

While there are some parallels between Indian and U.S. teenage cultures, in general, secondary students in India do *not* behave in the same way as their U.S. counterparts. Hence, the analytical task is to explain both the similarities and, even more importantly, the differences. The intent is not only to better understand Indian schools, but see more clearly why U.S. schools are the way that they are.

Why Focus on Youth Culture and Peer Relationships?

In 1998 Judith Rich Harris wrote a book entitled *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do.* It was a detailed survey of the literature on childrearing and development. One of its central themes was that other than biologically passing on behavioral dispositions through genes, parents and their parenting styles have much less effect on how children turn out than is usually assumed. That is, she criticized the widely held assumption that how children were nurtured by parents was the key determinant of the kind of people they became.

The second and related argument was that peer relationships have much more effect than is usually assumed. The book was a detailed review of the research literature, but the observation that summarizes her argument is that the children of immigrants tend to turnout much more like their peers than their parents. The article version of Harris's work received the American Psychological Association's Award for an Outstanding Recent Article in General Psychology. Her argument went against many of the conclusions of developmental psychologist and much of what they had been teaching. There was much debate about her conclusions including a major conference and a resulting book that evaluated her arguments.[1] The debate continues, but most social scientists recognize that much of the early work on childrearing probably overestimated the effects of parents and under estimated the effect of peers.

Sociologists have long studied student culture and peer relationships in American high schools and there are literally thousands of research articles that touch upon peer relationships. Some of the better-known studies of this phenomenon include early work by Hollingshead (1975) and Coleman (1963) and continue with studies in relatively recent years (e.g., Brown 1990, Foley 1990, Eder 1995, Giordano 1995, McLeod 1995, Peskin 1991, Best 2000, and Milner 2004).

There are studies of adolescent peer cultures in various parts of the world (e.g. Nilan and Feixa 2006, Manderson and Liamputtong 2002, and Venkatesh and Kassimir 2007). With the exception of Willis's well-known book, *Learning to Labour*, virtually none of these, however, look at youth cultures in the structural context in which students spend most of their time: schools. Of course, many youth are not enrolled in schools, but the likely future leaders of most societies are. Hence, they are an especially important and strategic focus for research. If the literature on global youth cultures tends to leave out schools, the comparative educational literature largely ignores

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[1] For example, Deborah Lowe Vandell, "Parents, Peer Groups, and Other Socializing Influences," *Developmental Psychology*, 2000: 36:6: 699-710; Judith Rich Harris, "Socialization, Personality Development, and the Child's Environments: Comment on Vandell," *Developmental Psychology*, 2000: 36:6: 711-723; John G. Borkowski et al, eds. *Parenting and the child's world : influences on academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development.* Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum, 2002.

peer relationships and student cultures. For example, Baker and LeTendre's (2005) very useful survey of global trends in schooling barely touches upon peer relationships, except for brief comments about bullying and gangs.

In India there are several notable studies of truly elite and unique schools such of Rishi Valley, the Doon School, and Indian "public" boarding schools.[2] There are not, however, careful descriptions of a broader array of the schools that middle-class students typically attend. Nor is there a study that pays adequate attention to peer relations and student culture.

Moreover, peer relationships are precisely what have tended to be neglected by those who run school systems and those who train the teachers and school administrators. Schools of education have an extensive set of courses on child development, educational philosophy, curriculum, classroom techniques, testing and evaluation, and school administration. We know of no school of education that has even a single course on peer relationships and how these affect the total educational experience. This does not mean that peer relationships are never mentioned in schools of education, but this subject is certainly not seen as a core feature of training teachers. In fact the "professionalization" of teaching has in part meant that teachers are seen as having less and less responsibility for what happens outside of the classroom. Older notions of *in loco parentis*— the teacher as a substitute parent who has the right to intervene into students "private lives"—is increasingly seen as not only unprofessional, but illegal. Certainly few teachers in Western societies would think that they have the right to interfere with who an adolescent's friends are or who they are involved with romantically. Only if students engage in illegal activity, such as using or selling drugs or carrying firearms, do school officials have the right to intervene in students' personal relationships. Even where they have the right they often do not have effective sanctions to discourage what they consider to be undesirable behaviors. While such trends are less developed in India than in most Western countries, they are nonetheless present. So we have paid special

[2] Thapan 2006, Srivastava 1998, MacDougall 2000, (Alfred De Souza, *The Indian Public School*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974.

attention to peer relationships both because they tend to be neglected and because of the increasing evidence that they have crucial effects on long-term outcomes.

As early as the 1920s and 1930s during the famous studies of the Western Electric plant in Hawthorne New York social scientists became aware that the informal relationships and culture among workers was a key determinant of the productivity of a work organization. This insight later became incorporated into a wide variety of management techniques including the use of consensus building and work teams that are created to carry out specific projects or solve particular problems. In short, in many if not most sophisticated contemporary work organizations recognize that the relationships among workers is at least as important as the relationship between superiors and subordinates. This is not to say that supervision and leadership in such organizations is unimportant, but a key characteristic of strong leadership is to shape the nature of peer relationships. Often this includes informal and recreational activities as well as work per se. This is an insight that is not completely absent from the literature on schools, but it certainly is not a central theme. Of course, even in team oriented work organizations informal ties and cliques develop and some of these may resist even the newer more collegial forms of organizing work and measuring performance. Our claim is not that peer relationships by themselves determine educational outcomes, but we do claim that they are a much neglected phenomenon in educational research, teaching and administration.

Why Characterize India as "Where Nerds Are Normal"?

Since the title of this book is "Where Nerds Are Normal" it is important to make clear what we mean by "nerd" and "normal."

Normality

Some synonyms for normal are "usual," "common," "conventional," "typical," and "ordinary." Normal does not refer to the statistical average or even necessarily include most people. Rather it

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refers to a social typification, that is, the concept and image that most people draw upon to talk about a particular phenomenon.   Such typifications and images often exaggerate and distort, but rarely are they completely detached from the social reality to which they refer. Many typifications are stereotypes, which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as: "something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; *especially*, a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion . . ."[3] Typifications point toward important tendencies even though they may overstate and embellish the actual state of affairs.[4]

For American teenagers the typical," normal" image is a young person who is concerned with fashion, dating, parties, romantic relationships, membership in a particular peer group, and at least the occasional illicit use of alcohol or drugs. They may or may not be interested in their studies; some are, some are not. Adults may disapprove of such patterns of behavior, but they are not surprised when they occur. Stated another way such typifications and the behaviors associated with them are more or less expected and hence normal. There are many American teenagers who make good grades and are committed to serious intellectual development. Some are concerned about crucial moral issues or contemporary politics. Many never even try out alcohol or drugs. These are not, however, the image of the typical or "normal" American teenager—and certainly not the image portrayed in most of the mass media. Some examples of typifications of particular types of American teenagers include "jocks," "brains," "beauty queens," "geeks," "druggies," and preps." Some of these social types (or their equivalents in local languages) are commonly recognized in other cultures.[5]   This is increasingly the case for the term "nerd."

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[3] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype; 1-2-10.
[4] Some sociologists would use typification as a synonym for "ideal-type," drawing on the concept developed by Max Weber (See for example, John R. Hall, et al, *Sociology on* Culture. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 11-12). In our usage an ideal-type is a special kind of typification that refers to the epitome of a particular typification. For example the ideal-types for the terms vacuum and market would be "a perfect vacuum," and "a perfectly competitive market"—states that most normal vacuums or markets do not attain. Perhaps the epitome or ideal-type American teenager is the beautiful cheer leader or the handsome football quarterback. These are not, however, the "normal" or "usual" American teenagers.
[5] They may have been borrowed from American English or they may have indigenous origins. Of course, borrowing of words has always been a two way process. Consider only words that begin with the letter C:

Nerds—Old and New

The origin of the word "nerd" is obscure.[6] It did not come into wide usage before the 1950s. Throughout most of its "career" the word has had pejorative connotations. The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary gives this definition: "an unstylish, unattractive, or socially inept person; *especially*, one slavishly devoted to intellectual or academic pursuits."[7]   The word continues to have negative connotations, but other even more negative words have been coined to refer to young people with low social skills, for example, "geek," "dweeb," "dork," and "loser." In recent decades "nerd" has taken on a more positive image; it is used to refer to those preoccupied technical pursuits. Frequently such people are seen as the key leaders in information technology, i.e., "IT", which has been the leading sector of the world economy. Bill Gates, the leader of Microsoft, and Steve Jobs of Apple are worldwide celebrities and, for many, folk heroes. Such developments have produced a gradual shift in the meaning of nerds. The online Urban Dictionary[8] allows people to suggest definitions and then lets visitors to the website vote the suggested definition or description up or down. The first three definitions—in order of their popularity—are:

1.   One whose IQ exceeds his weight.   (votes: 12695 up, 1395 down)

2.   An individual persecuted for his superior skills or intellect, most often by people who fear and envy him. (votes: 5791 up, 1955 down)

3.   An 'individual', i.e. a person who does not conform to society's beliefs that all people should follow trends and do what their peers do. Often highly intelligent but socially rejected

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some common English words of Indian origin include camphor, chintz, chutney, coolie, and cot—and there are many others just for this one letter.

[6] Perhaps it was taken from a children's book by Dr. Seus, *If I Ran the Zoo*, but there is no clear evidence that this was the case.
[7] Webster-Merriam Online Dictionary, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Nerd, 11/16/2009. The Oxford English Dictionary gives a very similar definition.

[8] This online dictionary of popular and slang terms claims, "the *Urban Dictionary* is the dictionary you wrote. Define your world; 4,451,497 definitions since December 9, 1999." http://www.urbandictionary.com/; 12/21/2009.

because of their obsession with a given subject, usually computers. Unfortunately, nerds

seem to have problems breeding, to the detriment of mankind as a whole (votes: 4531 up,

1264 down)

Increasingly public figures identify themselves as nerds. The 2009 Harvard commencement

address was delivered by Steven Chu, the U.S. Secretary of Energy, who is a Nobel Prize winning

physicist. He began his address by saying, "The year before, Bill Gates, the mega-billionaire

philanthropist and computer nerd stood here. Today, you have me. I am not a billionaire, but at

least I am a nerd."[9] Such shifts in meaning are clearly present in India too where nerds are

becoming celebrities. The 2009 Nobel Prize in chemistry went to Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, who

grew up in Tamil Nadu, India. This event received front page coverage in many Indian newspapers.

The headline in the *Times of India* was "Super nerd loved idlis . . ."[10] and goes on to say that as a

child he "immersed himself in studies."[11] So in India too, "nerd" has developed some positive

connotations.

On the other hand, nerd has not escaped all of its negative implications and can suggest

someone who is obsessed with technical details without necessarily being concerned about their

implications or value. It can also imply that someone is a drudge or a grind and not especially

creative or thoughtful. A New York Times article written from Bangalore quotes Indians who

recognize this tendency and expresses concern about it:

People here are also worried about the future. They fret that Bangalore, and India

more broadly, will remain a low-cost satellite office of the West for the foreseeable

future . . . . "The same idea, if it's born in Silicon Valley it goes the distance," said

Nadathur S. Raghavan, a investor in start-ups and a founder of Infosys, one of India's

most successful technology companies. If it's born in India it does not go the

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[9] http://www.thefreelibrary.com/U.S.+Energy+secretary%3a+'I+am+a+Nerd'.-a0201218446; 12/7/2009.
[10] Idils are a small savory caked made of rice and fermented lentils that is popular in South India.
[11] http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Super-nerd-loved-idlis-nimboo-pani/articleshow/5099773.cms; 12/27/2009.

distance." Mr. Raghavan and others say India is held back by . . . an education

system that emphasizes rote learning over problem solving, and a culture that looks

down on failure and unconventional career choices.[12]

Indian scholars have not used the notion of nerds to describe the problem, but a number of them

have expressed concern that India's new economy centers on providing other countries relatively

routinized work and a job structure that provides relatively little economic security—what has

been called a workforce of "cyber coolies"—and an economy that is too dependent on the ups and

downs of global trends.[13]

To summarize, we use the word "nerd" to symbolize the Janus sided image of the "new

nerd." On the one hand, intelligent, hardworking, and disciplined, but on the other hand

concentrating on rote learning and developing skills that may not prepare one for creative work

activities. In many respects this describes the typical or "normal" Indian secondary student: one

who intelligent and disciplined, but in most cases narrowly focused on learning in order to do well

on examinations. Just as the cheer leader and the football quarterback are the celebrities of

American high schools, the "topper"—those with very high scores on the national examinations—

are the celebrities and superstars of Indian secondary schools. Most students know that they

cannot attain such a status, but their central preoccupation is how they will score on these

standardized examinations. It is in this sense that in Indian secondary schools, nerds are normal.

Certainly this is not the whole story of Indian secondary schools—any more than cheer leaders and

football stars adequately characterize American teenagers. Many Indian students are brilliant and

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[12] Vikas Bajaj, "In India, Anxiety Over the Slow Pace of Innovation," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2009.
[13] Fernandes, L. 2000a. "Restructuring the New Middle Class in Liberalizing India." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* v. XX, Nos. 1 & 2:88-112.
Ghosh, R. N. 2003. "The Globalization Process and Economic Liberalizations in India: Lessons from Classical Economics." In Banerjee et al (ed) *Economic Institutions in India: Sustainability Under Liberalization and Globalization.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Jetley, N et al. 1997. "Blood, Sweat and Downsizing." *Outlook*, Apr 23.
Ramesh, B. P. 2004. "Cyber Coolies in BPO: Insecurities and Vulnerabilities of Non-Standard Work." *EPW,* v39, n5, January 31 – February 6.
Singh, P. and A Pandey. 2005. "Women in Call Centres." *Economic and Political Weekly, February 12.*

creative and many others have little interest their studies. Nonetheless, "nerdiness" is a central phenomenon that has profound effects on both Indian education and more broadly Indian society.

We readily acknowledge that there is no one true definition of nerd. Like many concepts and labels it refers to a number of related notions that share a family resemblance, but are by no means identical. We use the term here as an initial orienting image that succinctly summarizes what school life is like for many and probably most Indian students. As our story unfolds it will become clear that the social identities of Indian students are more complex than the image—but it is nonetheless a useful gateway to grasping the more complicated social reality.

Reluctant Nerds

To point out that a central thrust of secondary school culture in India is a preoccupation with doing well on examinations is not to ignore the fact that students are often reluctant scholars. They recognize that study is necessary, but they often resent and resist such requirements. As Thapan reports in an earlier study, students who answer a teacher's questions about their lesson too frequently are told by their peers "to study a bit less." She notes, "[S]tudent culture . . . conflicts with the goal of success . . . . There is a constant playing out of this tension in the everyday life of the classroom and school . . . .[T]here is a devaluing of school work in the peer culture that accords a certain legitimacy to such derision, as individuals [very concerned about their own performance on exams], students have a different view."[14] As we shall see the data reported here also indicate a high level of ambivalence toward academic and intellectual pursuits. It is precisely these highly contradictory attitudes and behaviors of the students that makes the dominance of a "culture of nerdinss" so interesting.

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[14] Thapan, Meenakshi. 2006. "'Docile' Bodies, 'Good' Citizens or 'Agential' Subjects? Pedagogy and Citizenship in Contemporary Society," *Economic and Political Weekly*, XlI, 19, September 30, pp. 4195-4203.

The Nature of Adolescence: Biology, Culture and History

Much of the popular literature in the West, and in the U.S. in particular looks at adolescence as a time of stress and conflict. This began with G. Stanley Hall's famous book entitled *Adolescence,* first published in 1905. This theme continues in popular literature and culture. Some recent titles include:

Yes, Your Teen Is Crazy! Loving Your Kid without Losing Your Mind

Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me & Cheryl to the Mall: A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager

Parenting Your Out-of-Control Teenager

Stop Negotiating With Your Teen: Strategies for Parenting Your Angry, Manipulative, Moody, or Depressed Adolescent

7 Things Your Teenager Won't Tell You: And How to Talk About Them Anyway

While this theme of conflict and angst is less prevalent in Indian society it is increasingly present. There are books written by Indians and published in India that focus on adolescents and their problems.[15] Even more attention is given to teenagers and their problems in various websites and popular magazines.[16]

Much of the literature on adolescents focuses on their biology. There is strong evidence that the parts of the brain that involve careful judgment of risk are not fully developed until people are well into their twenties. Behaviorally it is true across virtually all cultures that adolescents and young adults are much more likely to engage in risky behavior. Moreover after young people go through puberty in virtually all cultures they undergo a shift in their social identity from being a

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[15] For example, D.B. Rao and D. Harshitha. *Adjustment of Adolescents*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004; M. Mehta. *Adolescent Psychology*. Jaipur: Pointer Publishers, 2000.

[16] Some examples include: http://lifestyle.iloveindia.com/lounge/teen-fashion-2009-3793.html; 1/2/2010; http://lifestyle.iloveindia.com/lounge/how-to-bond-with-your-teen-6153.html;1/2/2010; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/22/india-teens-skirt-traditi_n_219084.html; 1/2/2010.

child to being an adult—though the exact timing and the extent of the shift in responsibilities and

privileges involved varies from culture to culture. But to say that there are biological and social

processes common across cultures is not to say that all societies have "teenagers" in the sense that

it is used in the U.S. Even in the U.S. the term "teenager" did not come into popular usage until the

1940s. At the beginning to the 20th century most young Americans finished their education by the

8th grade and usually went to work, though often this was on a family farm or in a family business.[17]

Even at the beginning of the 21st century most young people in the world are not involved in the

kind of youth cultures characteristic of American teenagers.   While there is no needs to deny or

ignore the significance of adolescents' biological and psychological developmental processes, these

are not very useful in explaining why contemporary young people behave the way that they do and

why they are different from earlier generations of young people. Biological maturation and

development of adult identities happens in all societies, and hence cannot explain cultural and

historical variations. In a classic book, *From Generation to Generation*, S.N. Eisenstadt looked at

variations in youth over time from an evolutionary and historical perspective. He argued that youth

cultures become more important when the division of labor shifts from being primarily within the

family and kinship network to a more complex economy, as tends to be the case with urbanization

and industrialization. Yet, as he notes, while this is broadly accurate, there are significant

variations even in societies with similar levels of modernization and similar divisions of labor.[18]

Consequently, our focus will be on explaining both the similarities and the differences between peer

relationships and cultures within India and between India and the U.S.

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[17] In 1910 only 13.5 percent of the U.S. population had completed secondary school and it was not until 1970 that a majority of the U.S. population (55.2 percent) had completed high school. In 1910 only one million students were enrolled in grades 9-12 out of about 10 million in the 15-19 age cohort. Clearly most young people were not in high school and were not "teenagers" until much later in the 20th century.
Digest of Educational Statistics, 2008. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, chap. 1, Tables 3 and 8.
http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_003.asp?referrer=list;
http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_008.asp?referrer=list.
[18] S. N. Eisenstadt. 1971 [1956]. *From Generation to Generation.* New York: Free Press.

The Broader Impact: Consumerism and Nationalism

In many societies it is common for parents to ask their children about what happened in school that day. During the 1960s Tom Paxton wrote a song, made famous by Pete Seeger, entitled "What Did You Learn in School Today." It was a satirical critique about how U.S. schools taught not only academic subjects, but a much broader set of conventional values and assumptions. The lyrics include the following lines:

What did you learn in school today,

Dear little boy of mine?

I learned that Washington never told a lie.

I learned that soldiers seldom die.

I learned that everybody's free.

And that's what the teacher said to me.

I learned our government must be strong.

It's always right and never wrong.

Our leaders are the finest men.

And we elect them again and again.

I learned that war is not so bad.

I learned of the great ones we have had.

We fought in Germany and in France.

And someday I might get my chance.

That's what I learned in school today.

That's what I learned in school.[19]

One does not have to share the cynicism or politics of Paxton to recognize that students learn much more in school that "reading, writing and arithmetic."

Two of the spheres that seem especially important are how the school experience shapes economic and political attitudes and behaviors. With respect to the economic matters a key theme of this book is how both schools and students are shaped by the enormous pressure to do well on national exams in order to secure good jobs.

This is not, however, the only tie between the schools and the economy. Perhaps even more important in the long run is how status relations in secondary schools shape consumer behavior. India and China have rapidly expanding economies involving more than two billion people. If their levels and patterns of consumption follow those of the West, it is likely to result in an environmental disaster—affecting not only these countries, but the global ecosystem. There has been great debate about which nations have what responsibilities for reducing pollution. Without taking sides in this debate, it is undeniable that high levels of consumption in India and China will have an enormous impact on the globe's ecology. Many factors will affect the future patterns of consumption. One of these is the attitudes and behaviors that people learn when they are young about how to consume. The secondary school experience is especially crucial in this regard since this is when people have both increased autonomy and when they are most strongly shaped by peer pressure. Hence, we have tried to document the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that are developing among middle class Indian young people.

In the realm of politics and international relations, there is another key issue. How nationalistic will India become in the future—and will this lapse into various forms of chauvinism

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[19] http://www.mydfz.com/Paxton/lyrics/wdylis.htm; 2/19/2010.

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and aggression? This is a pattern that was certainly characteristic of the U.S. and other nations when they were making the transition from rural agricultural based societies to urban industrial societies. The conquest of Native American lands, the Mexican –American War of 1846-48, and the Spanish-American War of 1898 are only the most obvious examples. However, reprehensible such behaviors may have been earlier, in the age of nuclear weapons, an integrated global economy, and an ecologically fragile planet, even coming close to the patterns of the past could be not only detrimental for India and her neighbors, but for human existence itself.

It certainly seems to be the case that Indians are developing considerable pride about the economic progress they have been making. Whether this understandable pride leads to arrogance remains to be seen. Studying the emerging attitudes of students about citizenship and nationalism cannot answer the question of how cosmopolitan or provincial, how universalistic or chauvinistic India will become in the future, but young people's understanding of and commitment to their nation-state will be one important determinant of this future. Hence, we have been attentive to what students say and how they act in terms of their commitments to the Indian state and those they see as enemies of India.

Chapter 2: Rampura Secondary School

The Data

The data on this school were collected by Maitrayee Deka and Pamposh Raina, M.A. students in the graduate sociology department at the Delhi School of Economics. They were part of a team of graduate students and faculty who collected similar data in other schools. Team members attended various training session in addition to their course work in research methods. They collected data primarily in the months of July and August of 2007 and 2008, wrote up extensive ethnographic fieldnotes. The data collection was largely supervised by Professor Meenakshi Thapan. The student fieldworkers then wrote papers summarizing their findings. Prof. Milner and Prof. Thapan are deeply indebted to them for providing this data.

A Note on School Terminology

A note on some Indian school terminology is required. In India the two broad categories of schools are government schools and non-government schools. There are several subcategories of *government schools,* which will be described later. *Non-government schools* are sometimes referred to as "<u>public schools</u>," drawing on British terminology, which means they are open to the public if would-be students have the money to pay the tuition and meets the entrance requirements. Such public schools may or may not favor (or discriminate against) some social class, language, ethnic, or religious groups. This usage of "public schools" is the reverse of the American terminology where "public school" means "government schools," and other schools are referred to as "private schools." In Britain "public schools" primarily refers to elite boarding schools. India has about eighty non-sectarian elite boarding schools that to some degree model themselves after British public schools. In Indian, however, "public school" is sometimes used in a broader sense to include all non-governmental schools that charge tuition, most of which are day schools. To further complicate things, the American usage is

becoming more common in India, so the same school may be called a "private school" and a "public school," which in both cases refers to a non-government institution. Another important category of schools are those started by various Christian groups. Some of these are boarding school, but most are day schools. Many of these Christian schools were girls' schools founded by orders of Catholic or Anglican nuns and they are often called "convent schools."   Christian boy's schools are also sometimes referred too as convent schools.

Many schools are actually composed of three separate schools located on the same site, that is, a primary school, a middle school, and a senior school, each with its own head who in turn report to a principal responsible for all three units. On the other hand, a lot of schools are stand-alone units that only deal with students at one of these levels.

Within a school students are sorted by age level and divided into "batches," "standards," "classes," or "grades," that is, all the students in the same age cohort and grade-level. An example would be all of those who are in class (or standard or grade) ten. A section refers to a group of students who receive most of their instruction together, and usually they are assigned a particular classroom where they spend most of their time. In most schools all of the students in a given batch or grade will be divided into several sections, for example class 10A, 10B, etc. "A house refers to a subdivision of the student body that contest. In most schools these houses will be composed of students from several classes or batches, and hence they serve as a mechanism for creating solidarity between students of different ages. The term comes from British public schools where students live in small dormitories called "houses", usually supervised by a resident faculty member and a hierarchy of senior students who serve as prefects, that is, student monitors, who enforce the rules on more junior students and often take leadership roles in extra- or co-curricular activities. This is also characteristic of most Indian boarding public schools. In India, however, most non-government schools (and many government schools) use the term "houses" to refer to similar divisions of the student body—even though no

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residence is involved.   Most Indian schools also use a system of student prefects or monitors, though these may or may not be associated with houses.   , During the last two years of senior secondary school students are divided into <u>streams</u> that specialize in a particular subject area. Typically secondary schools will have science, commerce, and humanities streams. There are other ways in which groups of students in different schools in India may be organized and this varies. See for example (ref.) on the Mirambika school in Delhi which follows quite a different form of organization of the student body.

   With respect to the academic evaluation of students, the most common term is "<u>marks</u>," but other terms such as "<u>grades</u>," and "<u>scores</u>" are also used. For the centrally administered examinations given to class X and XII, students are classified as scoring in the "first division," "second division," and "third division."

   Most schools issue students a <u>diary</u>. This is a notebook that begins with basic information about the school, rules that students are expected to follow, songs to be sung in assembly, etc. In addition teachers write to parents about students' accomplishments and shortcomings. Students are expected to bring their diary to school each day.

   Two caveats are required. Like in most complex societies the use of this terminology is not completely consistent and the particular meaning varies somewhat in different schools. Moreover it often depends on the context. For example, "class" can refer to those in a given class room, those in the same year in school, or those from the same socio-economic class. Second, the above distinctions refer only to the English terminology. There are eighteen official languages in India and while the English terms discussed above have often been incorporated into other languages, or roughly parallel terms are used, this is not always the case.

The City and the School

Delhi is a large metropolitan city of ten to fifteen million people, depending on how its boundaries are defined. People are from many regions, but Hindi and (for the educated) English are the lingua franca and most signs are in both languages.

The Rampura Secondary School (a pseudonym) is located between the inner and outer ring roads of Delhi. It is what might be called an old, and now densely settled, suburban area. The school is located in two large brick buildings and adjacent grounds and play areas. In terms of the terminology discussed above, it is a non-government "public" school, in the broad sense of that word, but it is not an elite boarding school. The non-profit educational foundation that runs Rampura operates five other schools or teacher education institutes in Delhi. Its website list twenty-two institutions operated or under construction scattered around North India. The members of the board of directors are usually wealthy business people or upper level government officials. The ambiance of this school is in many respects nationalistic. A fieldworker reports, "I have been to the school for about five days now. As you just enter the school, there is a lobby which has [a] statue of [the] goddess Saraswati and other idols. There is a feel of Indian tradition and its appreciation throughout the campus . . . . [A]ll the school hangings and collages were of Great Indian scholars [or] famous Indians of the past including leaders of the Independence movement." With respect to assembly programs and cultural events, only classical Indian music and dance or allowed and Western forms are banned. In short, there was what the fieldworker called a "relatively uncontested notion of Indianess." On the other hand, the school's website includes epigrams from Margaret Fuller (early nineteen century American women's-rights advocate), Harry S. Truman, and George Bernard Shaw. This does not indicate very much except that the school through these citations on its website seeks to place itself in a western context of liberal thought.The school is officially non-sectarian, but the eight members of the Board of Management all appear to have Hindu names and are all men. Of the nine "advisors/invitees" to the Board of

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Management one is a woman. One man has a Christian name that is usually associated with the ancient south Indian Mar Thoma Church in Kerala., The rest are men and appear to have Hindu names.

It is a co-educational day school and draws students from middle class and upper middle class Indian families. It's has nearly 5,000 students. There are usually 35 students per sections (i.e., classroom) and the number of sections for each class (i.e., grade) varies from 8-11. For purposes of intramural competition the student body is divided into four "houses," all named after famous Indian religious or literary figures. There is a mix of students belonging to different religions though Hindus are clearly numerically dominant, as is the area in which the school is located.

The Academic Ambience

As noted in the previous chapter, students, families, and teachers are usually focused on how well students score on the external examinations, and this is the case at Rampura. For most schools these exams are given and graded by the Central Board of Secondary Education. Examination scores are published in newspapers and online, and the students with the highest scores—the "toppers—are virtual celebrities. At Rampura most—not all— students' and parents' attitudes toward academic accomplishment tended to by highly pragmatic; it was important because it is the route to good jobs and high incomes. To accomplish this, Rampura families are paying significant fees to the school. These come to approximately Rs 2100 ($45) per month plus admission fees and deposits of Rs. 700 ($15). In addition many families pay for after schools coaching tutorials—often run by commercial companies. "Tuition [academic coaching] classes, which cost monthly around Rs700 to Rs3000 ($15-$60), is a general trend in commerce and science sections." Both fieldworkers were impressed with some students' very serious commitment to their studies. "Whenever I would be chitchatting in any of these classes there would be a few students plying over their notebooks and solving sums. The school gives lot of assignments, apart from that they have [home]work . . . from their . . . coaching centers

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. . . .The second fieldworker comments, "They were quite a focused lot and their life seemed to revolve around school and coaching classes."

Not only is there a concern for academic achievement, but a characteristic that is even more associated with nerds is a focus on science and technical subjects. In Indian schools the streams of science, commerce and humanities are usually ranked in that order in terms of their difficulty and prestige. There are certainly bright students in all of these streams—and humanities students sometimes protest this ranking—but there is little doubt that the ranking prevails in the minds of most parents, students, and teachers. We will look at concrete examples of this in later chapters.

Most students who selected the science stream have little interest in being scientists; rather they see it as the entrée to becoming a doctor or engineer. About three-fourths of the science students enrolled in after-school coaching institutes. A fieldworker reports: "I was really amazed by the engineering craze. This is why I have mostly covered the science sections, as there was just one humanities section in class XII. [Even more surprising] was the craze for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT). Girls and boys alike saw IITs as their coveted dream—and the coaching institutes as helping to fulfill that dream. A student [said] that the expense at the coaching institutes was justified as they could really benefit from them."   Of course, not all students were preoccupied with scholastic matters. "The commerce section was a little more relaxed and their discussions were not about academics . . . . I heard a group of boys talk about a cricket match and they seemed to have all the makings of the next generation of cricket fans . . . . Another group in same section seemed to be budding film critics as they discussed Bollywood-star Shah Rukh Khan's latest film "*Chak De! India.*" [Go for It, India!].

Even for the studious science students Intellectual issues per se are perceived largely as a secondary concern or even a luxury. A fieldworker observes:

Students had major study pressure, but were not complaining much. Someone

remarked that life revolved around studies and there was no time for introspection.

However, there was some kind of irony as even though these people were surrounded

by books and assignment booklets . . . most of them did not seem that serious about

studies. In fact a girl had said that they do everything but study.

While the latter statement is an exaggeration, it captures the ambivalence that students have toward

learning. They often engage in a "nerd-like" obsession with mastering the "right answers." There are, of

course, some strong students who do well on exams and have broad intellectual and cultural interests.

They are, however, the exception and the typical student seeks to be a "new nerd" and hope for the

economic rewards this will supposedly bring.

The school's academic ambience is complicated by the school's focus on Indian

traditions, which poses a dilemma for the students. On the one hand, they did appreciate and

honor many aspects of Indian culture—even though they resented the schools requirement that

this had to be the focus of all school assemblies. On the other hand, they are vitally interested

in contemporary popular culture. They also face a dilemma with respect to language; a good

command of English is usually crucial for academic and economic achievement. The fieldworker

notes, "It is an English medium school, but the students are more comfortable conversing in

Hindi. The teacher teaches in English, but the school events are all about Indian tradition and

culture." So students had mixed feelings about "how Indian" they wanted to be. Or at least

they resented not being allowed to draw on Indian and Western popular culture in addition to

classical Indian sources. At the same time they claimed that they did not suffer from "any

complex" of inferiority vis-à-vis the better-known, more Westernized public schools. They said

that they were better versed in Hindi—and they felt good about this. It seems likely that this

latter sentiment, while not inauthentic, expressed some anxiety and a certain amount of

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"whistling in the dark," since the highest paying and most prestigious jobs tend to require a strong command of English. The point in drawing attention to this dilemma is not to criticize the school's emphasis on Indian traditions, or to be dismissive of the student's appreciation of classical Indian culture and language, but to point to the complexities faced by contemporary Indian youth.

Discipline and decorum

The school is noted for its discipline and for its unusually rigorous efforts to suppress inequalities. To this we may add the school's effort to regiment students as a body and bring about homogeneity in their appearance if they cannot in their behavior. Uniforms are required. Fancy or expense jewelry is banned, girls' hair must be braided, and boys hair neatly trimmed. A research observer reports:

> My first day of fieldwork began with an interesting [event]. While I was waiting to meet
> the counselor at the school reception, I saw a teacher standing next to the receptionist's
> desk with two boys. Soon, a man and a woman walked into the reception area and
> began talking to the teacher and within no time both of them took the children out of
> the school premises. On inquiring, I learnt that both the students—one from class VI and
> the other one from class VIII—had been sent off because the length of their hair was
> way too long . . . . Since the parents had paid no heed to the repeated notes that the
> teacher had written in the school diary of both the boys, she had no other option but to
> call the parents and [insist] that they to take a hair cut before [the boys] could be
> allowed to sit in the class. Decorum, indeed is an integral part of life at and students
> don't take it lightly either; that's of course not out of choice, but simply because they
> don't want to be reprimanded.

Many of the teachers, but not all, enforce the rules, and students who fail to comply are sent home.

The first period is for assemblies on Tuesday and Friday and on other days for events like quizzes and debates. At the end of assemblies students must line up by classes and "march past" monitors who check whether they are in conformity with the dress code. Despite the emphasis on discipline, students are not usually required to attend the assembly, which is an exception to the pattern in most secondary schools. "The attendance was relatively scanty for the assembly. There were only about 80 students when the school had roughly about 500 students in the senior sections." As we shall see this avoidance of the assembly is a reaction against and resistance to the school's requirement that the content of the assemblies have to always focus on Indian culture and traditions.

Assemblies give "a feel" for the content of the schools efforts to instill discipline and decorum. One fieldworker gives a detailed account of an assembly:

As soon as the school bell rang at 7:40am, students congregated at the quadrangle near the playground. On the day of the assembly—which I had mentioned earlier was not everyday—students had worn the white uniform instead of [the usual uniform] they wore on other days. For boys, it was pair of white trousers with a white shirt and for the girls it was a white shirt and a white skirt. As the students settled down the Principal came and stood at the podium and to his left were the head boy and head girl of the school and to their left were two music teachers with their musical instruments.

Facing the podium stood students from class IX-XII all arranged in their respective houses, with students belonging to the Vivekananda[20] House to the extreme left, next to them were those who belonged to Kabir House, contiguous with them were

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[20] Vivekananda was the key disciple of the 19th century founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, a Hindu reform movement, and was largely responsible for introducing Hindu philosophy and yoga into the U.S. and Europe. Kabir is a famous 15th century poet and saint. Guru Nanak was the first of the great gurus and founders of the Sikh religion. Dayanand was the founder of the 19th century Hindu reform movement known as the Arya Samaj.

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the Guru Nanak House students and on the extreme right were those belonging to Dayanand House. In each of the houses there was a separate queue for girls and boys, in both they stood in height order, with the shortest in front. Behind the students' lines the teachers' in charge of their respective houses positioned themselves.

The assembly began with the Principal addressing everyone and it was followed by a two-minute prayer in English. The principal as well as the students prayed aloud together. It was followed by two hymns in Hindi, both of these were taken from the school diary. One was a hymn in praise of the lord and the other was a patriotic song. Then students from Vivekanand house—since it was the house on duty—stepped on to the podium and from the group of four, one of them presented the news headlines for the day. As he stepped back a girl came to the fore and read out a speech on "globalization." (The topic for the speech is decided before hand by with the approval of the teacher-in-charge of the house on duty; the topics specifically need to be contemporary.) Then another student narrated a story in Sanskrit that conveyed a social message. [Since most students do not understand Sanskrit] a Hindi translation of the story was carried out by the last student of the four from Vivekanand House.

[When the students from Vivekanand House finished] the principal made certain announcements about the basketball tournament held for the Delhi zone in the last week and called the winners to the podium and gave certificates to them. Finally, he concluded the assembly with the aphoristic teachings of the Indian guru Swami Vivekanand. (All of these teachings are printed in the school diary and students are familiar with most of them.)

As soon as this ended everyone . . . was asked to stand at attention and sing the national anthem. After the anthem the principal left the podium and the head boy

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announced that all the students can now depart. As the students walked out of the

quadrangle their uniforms were checked. At all times the students are expected to have

black polished shoes. The girls are supposed to have neatly tied hair and knee-length

skirts with no accessories except a simple watch. The boys have to have very short hair

and no low-waist trousers are allowed. Some of those who did not follow the rules were

warned and then let off, but for some others, especially boys with hair longer than the

permissible length, the punishment was to take three rounds of the playground.

Rebellion and other forms of Resistance

Students' expressions of resistance were not limited to dress and hair length. A fieldworker

notes that one of the commerce sections was "known to be rowdiest of the lot. In fact one of the

teachers warned me against them and asked me to inform him if they were too disobedient. The thing

that was most strikingly is that the class was never silent. The class was too noisy and students were

laughing aloud. They would not give any straight answer." One small group within this section was

especially unorthodox:

They . . . called themselves Danchayat, which was derived from Panchayat [meaning

literally group of five but commonly used to refer to a council or ruling body]; they

changed the initial letter from P to D since they were in section D. These five boys were

different from the usual studious lot. They admitted that they did not care terribly

about studies.   [Students in other sections] told me about this group of boys and how

they were very naughty and did not care about disciplining their behavior. The other

students shared a certain disdain for this group.

The use of the word 'naughty' by the fieldworker suggests that the students are disruptive and non-

serious about schoolwork and other school related activities. These students were not, however,

unintelligent or completely indifferent about grades. "They were not topping the class, but what

pleased them was the fact that they were not "losers" like the rest. They had a life outside school and were not bored and dead like the 'nerds'." Their unorthodox behavior carried over into non-academic realms:

> All of them would have haircut together and were presently flaunting hairstyle from latest movie "Omkara,"[21] which their batch mates perceived as silly and juvenile. When I interacted with [them] for the first time they were . . . very playful and were asking me lot of questions as to why I was in their school. For them it did not matter too much what was going on around them and whether they did well in their studies, but they were in for having a good time and having a good laugh . . . . [22]

The very fact that this group was looked upon as notorious indicates that most students—even in non-science streams—were relatively serious about their schoolwork.

Egalitarianism and Diversity in the School

The school rules, described earlier, are common—and even the norm, in public schools in India. Rampura, however, seems to go beyond most Indian schools in trying to eliminate inequalities between students. A field observer notes:

> The rules and regulations of the school try to enforce an egalitarian kind of setting. For instance, commuting to school by the school bus is made compulsory and there is no question of a student riding a bike or driving to school. The school does not have a canteen and one of the staff members claimed that the school doesn't want the students to get into the habit [bringing] money to school. Similarly, the students are not even allowed to buy ice-cream from the vendor selling it right outside the school gate. If

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[21] A film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello.*

[22] Their attitude and behavior was reminiscent of "the lads" in Paul Willis's *Learning to Labor.* Add the specific example you are referring to as the reader may not have read the book

they are caught doing so, their identity cards are confiscated. Girls are only allowed to

wear a simple pair of studs in their ears. Other accessories like watches can only be

worn after class IX.

Students are not allowed to bring mobile phones, radios, or CD players. Nor does the school allow

students to celebrate birthdays or similar events by bring sweets for classmates or exchanging presents,

a practice that is fairly common in many schools of this type.

Religion, ethnicity, and caste did not seem to significantly limit friendly relations, at least in the

school setting. When a fieldworker kept probing about possible discrimination a girl replied that

"discrimination was in my head so I was asking them about it; for them it did not matter at all." She

goes on to report:

I was very keen to find out if the students actually bothered about the caste and religion

of their classmates. But none of them seemed interested in caste and religion and they

thought it was quite a boring question to ask.[23] To them it was absolutely immaterial to

question their classmates about the same and they actually claimed to have never

thought on those lines. All of them were aware of their religion, but not necessarily of

their caste affiliation.

The students' great concern about academic accomplishment and the status attributed to this did not

significantly qualify the egalitarian ambiance.

There is some formal differentiation by gender. There are separate toilets, segregated physical

training classes, and boys and girls line up separately during assembly. In their classrooms, however,

girls do not seem to be particularly intimidated by the boys or deferential to them. On the other hand,

there is an informal physical segregation.

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[23] See Meenakshi Thapan, "Youth Cultures and the Making of Citizens," Economic *and Political Weekly*, 44: 18 (May 02 - May 08, 2009): 10-13, for a description of a similar reaction among French students.

In most classes the seating arrangement is such that the girls and boys don't sit together

on a common bench. Most students claim that they like it that way, it's not because of

any specific reason though, since boys and girls are on friendly terms otherwise.

However, some boys were candid enough to say that they preferred sitting with boys

because they could relate to them better and they could share a lot of things with their

guy friends and could not talk about the same issues with the girls.

Peers

There were no apparent elitist cliques as such, nor did there seem to be any students who were

shunned or isolated. While individuals had close friends there did not seemed to be very many well-

established cliques with relatively clear boundaries. The second fieldworker writes:

Identifying a particular group was proving to be difficult as in class they sat randomly

and the interaction was not limited to a definite set of people but I saw people flocking

together to catch up on any major gossip. As lunch break was also relatively short there

was little possibility of stable subgroups forming. Sometimes people did hang out

together in large clusters, but they were very fluid . . . [with] people moving out and

new people coming in to chat for a while. The very temporary groups were intrinsic to

the way the students wanted to utilize their limited free time.

In any given class there seemed to be considerable solidarity and camaraderie. While boys and girls

tended to sit in different benches and there was considerable interaction between them. Frequently,

the boys teased or mocked the girls, but it was generally the kind of antagonism that occurs between

members of a family or group of people who know one another relatively well. One of the researchers

observes:

The boys mostly liked to mock their female classmates. They would just pass some

nonsensical remark or throw chalk at them to annoy . . . . [T]he girls . . . in turn did not

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[usually] create a hue and cry over this small mischief. [They] would lightly warn the

boys or get busy with their own chores. As a class there was some amount of unity and

indifference to certain things which otherwise would have offended some. They were

unmindful to many of the taunts and remarks. There is a strange way to let go things.

They would say, . . ."he is like this only . . . keep quiet now," (i.e. ignore him) . . . [This

seemed to be a] typical way of [of maintaining] order; . . . you [could] at times flout the

boundaries, but this is restored again by the members—reinforcing the ties which they

had built over a long time. Some of these people were together since nursery class so

their bonds were pretty strong. This gave them the liberty to joke and irritate each other

beyond a point which would freak out a stranger.

On the other hand, the significance of school relationships was limited. The first fieldworker reports,

"They . . . did not hang out with their schoolmates after the school hours as most of them didn't stay

close to each other's residence. So, neighborhood friends were close buddies after school . . ." But as

the fieldworker notes they did have some contact with school friends in other locales:

[I] asked if they visit friends after school . . . . I found largely the same group of people

are likely to meet up in tuitions and coaching classes outside school. They were hanging

out with the same set of people. This was also because most of the students stayed in

the vicinity. [A] few of them also had good friends from other schools from South Delhi,

but majority of them were happy to spend time with friends from their own school.

So outside of school many students did have small groups of special friends that they spent time

with. For the most part, however, this did not seem to result in clearly defined cliques within the school

setting per se. Rampura's egalitarianism was an equality between those who are relatively privileged.

Still when we compare this to either American schools or other elite secondary schools in India, the type

of egalitarianism they achieved is no small accomplishment.

Romance

Predictably, boys frequently found girls attractive and vice versa. This was especially the case for the boys—or at least they were more open about such interests. A fieldworker reports:

One of the topics which boys were enthusiastic talking about was girls. They called it

"bird watching." There was this boy called Siddha who narrated his incident of a blind

date which went wrong as the girl turned out to be contradictory to his expectations.

He claimed that his friends had framed it up on him and had shown some fake picture of

the girl . . . [On the date] he ran out of the place . . . at the first opportunity. That

however was not his last attempt to try out blind dates and as his friends told me that

he was quite fast in getting girl friends. To have a girl friend was not the most important

thing, but the boys do have fun checking out girls in school, or outside like in the

[housing] colonies where they stayed.

In addition to momentary flirtations and encounters there were couples with more ongoing relationships:

The corridors were also the place for couples to meet. Many people already mentioned

about that how the corridors become a lovers' hub during the lunch breaks. Indeed I

spotted a few couples holding hands in the corners and having their own small talks.

This was probably the time they get when they could meet up their partner from other

class.

Other students and the school officials were clearly aware of such relationships, but generally ignored them as long as they were restricted to surreptitious handholding. There seemed to be two or three students in each classroom who had such a relationship. Often, however, the partner was from a different section, and hence time together was limited to brief moments in the hallway or during lunch.

It was not something most students were involved in, or even tried to be involved in, but it was not considered scandalous.

Gossip

Of course, some of the gossip focused on such romantic pairings, but it was not the primary focus of interest. A fieldworker reports:

> For the girls, gossip and food topped the list of their favorite pastime. To talk of the latest gossip in school and also some amount of back biting was fun, and [discussions about] boys were in the periphery . . . .The yapping was about friends, about coaching classes, which one was good and which one was shady. They also frequently spoke about any event in school and there was also lot of jokes going around about the teachers. They were mostly about day to day happening. If there was something juicy, like if someone got a thrashing or scolding from the teachers, the boys were seen to join them.

There is an undercurrent of student activity which appears to be dominated by conflict across genders although this is presented as harmless bonhomie. In the absence of data about this aspect of student relations, we would not like to pass this off as merely friendly encounters between boys and girls. The conflict is offset by some romantic linkups that appear to cut across classes and are a part of everyday school life.

The Broader Social Context

The relatively egalitarian atmosphere within the school does not, however, mean that students are unaware of social distinctions in the broader society.

Other schools

An inequality that students certainly affirm is the superiority of their school to most government schools. One inequality that students strongly resisted is the notion that their school is inferior to some of the longer established, more upscale public schools in Delhi. "Delhi Public School and Modern School were seen by students as posh schools where the students [had a] lot of 'attitude' and carried fancy gadgets. However, the students that I interacted with saw them as fake, and said that they did not suffer from any [inferiority] complex . . ." They took pride in the fact that their debate team won against one of the better known and most prestigious schools in the city. Part of this concern with the prestige of their school is a matter of adolescents' "school spirit." There is also a sense in which the emphasis on Indian traditions has been internalized; students often perceive some of the better known schools as too westernized, and even as decadent. On a more practical level, they are concerned to defend the legitimacy and prestige of their own educational credentials.

Social class

As one fieldworker became more familiar with the school she came to recognize that at least part of the egalitarian spirit of is due to the relative socio-economic homogeneity of the students and their families.

In my earlier work I felt [there was] as status equality. As I am observing more students I feel this has . . . to do with the fact that the students come from similar family backgrounds, which is either upper-middle class or middle class. The families have their

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notion of what consists as status markers [such as] privileging engineering over

nonprofessional fields, membership in clubs, or staying in posh neighborhoods like

Punjabi Bagh in north Delhi. [These] do not have a direct bearing on status ranking in

school as income patterns are a difference in degree and the students are used to

certain kind of lifestyle.

Caste

While students may see their own generation as unconcerned about caste, they acknowledge

that they often come in contact with exclusionary practices even in their own homes. "Shasha from

humanities section mentioned that at home her grandmother made sure that the sweeper did not touch

anything with her hands. She was made to have food in different utensils and not allowed to sit inside

the house." Many Indians still consider Sweepers to be a very low caste; formerly they were regarded as

Untouchables. "Ayanna , another girl of the same class admitted that she was a Rajput by caste and her

grandmother openly practices discrimination. 'When any one comes to our house my grandmother first

asks if he or she is from the scheduled caste and if yes they are not allowed to sit in the sofas. My

mother says this was done for assuring hygiene. I feel by doing such things you show disrespect to a

person.'"

The students were also aware of long-held cultural stereotypes: Merchant castes known as

Vaniyas or Banias are seen as stingy and money grabbing; Punjabis are considered ostentations;

Brahmans are fussy and pretentious. Even though most students acknowledged that these stereotypes

are condescending and exaggerated, they were well aware that these were taken seriously by many

parents and could affect their own marriages. While stereotypes exaggerate they often contain an

element of truth. A Vaniya girl said, "Sometimes parents do not even spare their own sons from being

sold at marriage," (i.e., the boy's parents arrange a marriage with a girl whose family offers the biggest

dowry).

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More subtle than crude cultural stereotypes is the common assumption that there are recognizable differences in the names, appearance, and behavior of those from different castes and regions.

> When I asked the class about what they thought about any discrimination [on the basis of] caste, a boy stood up and said that he can know about caste through the [names] that the students have. He pointed to particular boy called Saurav and said he was a Bihari, then after a while, half of the class was shouting that he was actually Marwari [a merchant caste originally associated with Rajasthan, not Bihar]; then they were making him a Brahmin. They said they even had an OBC (Other Backward Classes) in their class and then again pointed to Saurav, saying he is one. I knew they were just goofing around, but what amazed me was the fact that they were not ignorant about the caste and regional distinctions although they were not well versed with the internal dynamics. They had . . . stereotypes which were built in[to] them—in seeing an OBC as someone which was to be defined as a distinct category. However these issues came to the forefront only because I was enquiring about them.

The famous Mandal Commission estimated that Backward Classes made up about 50 percent of the total populations and other estimates usually include at least 25 percent of the population.[24] Given this, it is noteworthy that students could joke that they "even" had an OBC. Notably no mention is made of Dalits (legally defined as Scheduled Castes and formerly known as Untouchables), which it is generally agreed make up around 20-25 percent of the population.

In an attempt to redress the past discrimination against low caste groups, India has long had what is known as a reservations policy, which reserves a significant percentage of the places in

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[24] The commission, headed by Prasad Mandal, was appointed by the central government in 1979 to study discrimination based on caste membership and to make recommendations about "affirmative action" or "reservation" policies.

universities and government jobs for those who come from lower caste and tribal groups. (The

reservations policy is what would be called in the United States an affirmative action program.) Such

programs reserve as much as 50 percent of places for those from "backward" groups. Like most human

beings, students were more likely to express support for abstract ideals than some of the more concrete

consequences of such ideals. This is the case for India's reservations policies. While many students

supported such programs in abstract they were acutely concerned that this might greatly reduce their

own chances of success. Hence, these mainly Hindu upper-caste students were quite ambivalent and

inconsistent in their evaluations of these policies.

The key point is that while caste is largely irrelevant within the school context, students are well

aware that this is not the case in other important social context in which they must live. As we shall see

this is even more the case for religion.

Religion

There are very few Muslims in the school. A fieldworker reports:

An ex-student who is an acquaintance [said] that the Muslim population . . . is a minority

in that vicinity, which might be a major reason for their [low] representation. When I

posed this question [of why there were so few Muslims in the school to the students] in

Class 12-D, a boy said that it was because Muslims were not a very affluent section . . .

That class did not have anyone from other religions [i.e., they were all Hindus]. In fact,

they could point out in which class there was this Muslim guy . . . . For a while it felt as if

I was talking to them about some museum category. A boy from the back of the class

had remarked that if there were Muslims in class he would have shouted "mullah

mullah." When I asked why, he said because of their appearance. Another boy said that

one particular teacher was getting married to a Muslim girl.

There seems to be an implicit double standard that many Hindu students use to judge the actions of Muslims. "One of the student remarked 'Muslims pick up fights'. She referred to terrorist, extremist and how historically [Muslims] conquered india." This student oblivious to the fact that at an earlier point in history the Aryans, who are the ancestors of the Hindus also invaded India—apparently from central Asia. Nor does she note that Hindus have also been the instigators of fights as in the case of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by a mob.[25] While it seems accurate to say that neither the school nor most of the students hold explicitly anti-Muslim or right wing Hindu attitudes, many implicitly see Muslims as a relatively esoteric "other" and are less than even handed it judging political controversies related to religion. (The same may be true of many Muslim students, but such behavior and remarks were not observed during our study.)

To try and clarify the status of Muslims in the school another fieldworker asked the students about the widely discussed Mohammed Haneef case. In 2007 Haneef, a 27 year old Indian Muslim doctor, was arrested and detained in Australia as a possible terrorist on evidence that turned out to be flimsy at best. "In a class of thirty-one students, more than half the class claimed that he was being targeted because he was from a minority community and about six students felt that was not the case. One of those who sympathized with Haneef stood up from his seat and said, "It's a form of racism." The fieldworker continues:

I further inquired if any of them had personally experienced any sort of racism,

so a Muslim girl stood up and narrated an incident where her uncle was

targeted. It was a discussion that everyone was engaged in and when she began

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[25] In the 16th century the Babri Mosque was built in Ayodha. There were some ancient accounts that say that this was built over a Hindu temple that was supposedly the birth place of the Hindu god Ram, though there is considerable scholarly controversy over whether this is the case. What is clear is that the mosque had been there 500 years. In the 1990s Hindu nationalist began to agitate to tear down the mosque and replace it with a temple devoted to Ram, the god who has become the symbol of contemporary Hindu nationalism. On December 6, 1992 a Hindu mob of thousands stormed the site and destroyed the mosque.

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to speak there was silence in the room and everyone listened in rapt attention.

She told me that one of her uncle's had come [back] from the U.K. to visit them

in India. Since he was associated with the banned students' organization SIMI

(Students Islamic Movement of India), he was denied a visa to go back to the

U.K. for months. It was after a lot of interrogation by the British High

Commission officials in India that he was finally granted a visa. She described it

as harassment . . . She felt that her uncle was a soft target just because he was a

Muslim. After she finished I asked her if she was ever singled out in school, to

which she said, "No."

It is noteworthy that in both of the cases that were brought up, the culprits were foreign governments.

Neither the fieldworker nor the students mentions the many documented cases of discrimination and

violence against Muslims and other minorities that have occurred within India in the last twenty years.

To summarize: Few of the students at Rampura come from the most privileged strata of the

city. This is not to suggest that they consciously and deliberately discrimination against Muslims, or

those from lower castes, or that the students' affirmation of egalitarianism is hypocritical or

disingenuous. Rather the egalitarianism that most affirm, and that the schools policies aim to

encourage, results primarily in an equality between relatively privileged, middle-class, upper-caste

Hindus.

Consumerism

As we have just seen, the apparent lack of preoccupation with status differences among school

peers does not mean that students at Rampura lived in an isolated utopian world. They must on the one

hand deal with the issues of class, caste, and religion that operate within their families and their broader

social networks. Secondly, they must deal with the economic and political institutions of their society.

In general students seem much more involved and conversant about the first, which are more

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immediate and personal, than they do the second, which they often see as beyond their powers to affect. This does not mean that these "distant" institutions do not affect them. For example, they seemed quite knowledgeable about and interested in the global consumer culture. A field observer reports:

> All seemed to spare some time for the Internet, which meant chatting online with
>
> friends and signing up for popular websites like Orkut and Facebook . . . Forty percent of
>
> the total students claimed that they liked treating their friends at the popular eating
>
> joints, like Mc Donald's and Pizza Hut . . . They did not wear or talk about brand clothing
>
> much, but the] . . . boys admitted that they did window shop for branded sportswear
>
> whenever they were out with friends. For the girls a trip to the malls also meant
>
> checking out clothes and trinkets . . . The students clearly had an interest in consumer

status symbols [and] a knowledge of what is "in."

By Indian standards the students had a significant amount of spending money: "They gave me a rough account of their monthly expenditure which on an average ranged between Rs. 2000 to Rs. 4000 [$40-80], the outliers were Rs.200 ($4) and Rs.12000 ($240)."   Given the Indian average per capita expenditures *per year* are about $600, and that in a national survey of Indian youth ages 14-34, fifty percent of the respondents spent less than Rs. 100 per month on movies and DVDs and less than Rs.100 on clothing and footwear, the amounts spent by Rampura students are substantial.[26]

With respect to what they spent money on, the top item would be clothes and accessories. The fieldworker elaborates:

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[26]The World Bank estimates that India's per capita Gross National Income for this period was $950 and per capital expenditures were probably about $600; http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20541648~menuPK:64133152~pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html; accessed 2 March 2009. Survey data from DeSouza, Kumar, and Shastri (2009, p. 35).

The students prefer branded clothes. [B]oys are splurging on shoes and girls, apart from shoes, on beads [and other jewelry] . . . [Money is also spent] on eating, travelling and recharging their cell phones. The movie halls that they go to are the multiplexes near to there, which are the areas around north, east and west Delhi . . . . They go to these movie halls once in a month and the ticket cost is between Rs. 125 to 150 [$2-3] depending on the timing and how well a particular movie is doing.

A second fieldworker reports about shopping:

Shopping is a monthly affair, sometimes even twice or thrice in a month—if they want to get the newest look in fashion. Fashion is mainly Bollywood inspired. When asked about shopping . . . clothes are the main item. The extravagant purchases include shopping from places like Marks and Spencer and Espirit, which the students admit are not done frequently. Frequent shopping jaunts are the malls and the composite stores that keep different brands like Adidas and Levis, as well as non-branded apparels. They go for flea market shopping rarely.

Nonetheless, these concerns about consumption and fashion did not seem to significantly affect peer relationships. Neither friendships nor status among peers seemed linked to the possession of such consumer commodities—and the fieldworker is surprised at this:

In some schools that I had been to it was easy to become popular for a boy if he had his own car and he and his friends could chill out after school. In this school I did not find the necessity for the students to [have] such status symbols to ensure a good group of friends and have fun. This was visible in most of the sections that I went to. It did not matter what was a particular girl or boy's social background. Even though they knew each other's parents' occupation, they would find it absurd to set that as a criterion for

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making friends. For them to be a friend of someone would depend on the personal

qualities and amount of time spend with each other.

Not only are students concerned about clothing fashions, but they are aware of the "in"

activities. As we will see later this ranged from going to international chains such as McDonalds and KF

Chicken to staying "in shape." There was, however, considerable variation in how conscious students

were of fashionable places and activities. The fieldworker remarks, "Surprisingly there was a section of

the class who had not even heard of PVR Priyas, [which is arguably the largest and most fashionable

movie theatre in Delhi]. [The] one or two who have been there were the ones who were in maximum

monthly spending league . . . and they clearly made the point that they like going to Priyas as 'the crowd

was better.'"

Bodies and Embodiment

Much of consumer culture is focused on how people look. In earlier work Thapan (2009, esp.

pp. 42-50) has discussed the preoccupation adolescent women with their bodies and their appearance.

Of course, such concerns are not limited to women. At the time of our observations a popular thing to

do, especially for boys, was to go to one of the commercial gyms to workout.

> When asked why they are taking part in this activity the boys and girls equally agreed
>
> how it has become a very popular activity of late; being fit is "in" . . . [T]he students
>
> didn't have personal trainers, which they saw as very expensive, costing a minimum of
>
> Rs.5000. The boys went to places like "The Gym" in Vikas Puri . . . which cost them
>
> around 700 to 800. There were at least twelve people out of a class of 20 both boys and
>
> girls who went to gyms . . . Now they are complementing it with aerobics and yoga,
>
> which many of them practice at home. One girl amongst them was part of the "The
>
> Gold Gym," which charged Rs 4000 ($80) per month as the trainer was from America.

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Students' concern with fashion was especially related to their anxieties about how they look.

> Looking good has become very important in terms of maintaining clean habits,
>
> fashionable dressing style, and how they are carrying themselves off. There was a
>
> general opinion that no one want to appear a fool in front of others so they took care to
>
> look proper—but they were not fond of very loud [i.e., conspicuous] styling like wearing
>
> lipstick or nail polish or even sun glasses.

For some women this concern with looks has led to a preoccupation with being thin. A fieldworker says: "In humanities section . . . there is a craze among the girls to be thin. There was a girl who appeared to be in perfect shape, but she was skipping her dinner as she felt she was fat. She said her parents wanted her to look thin and tall; comparisons were being made between her and her cousins—[and her parents said] . . . her cousins stood out in being thinner and taller."

Citizenship, Nationalism and Religion

Students' involvement and knowledge of political issues was more limited and more remote from their day-to-day concerns. This does not mean, however, that they were unconcerned or had no opinions on such matters.

Unsurprisingly when students were asked about citizenship, most of the responses were rather conventional platitudes:

> At an individual level the students felt that, within [the limits of] the kind of resources
>
> available, . . . they are trying to be a good citizen. Prina, a studious-looking girl, said, "I
>
> do not litter things on the road; I try to keep the city clean and green; cleanliness for me
>
> [is] a virtue that citizens should have." Akuti reiterated, "I feel I am a good citizen. I
>
> have reported about crimes; a few days back there was stealing before my house; I
>
> screamed, the watchman came to the rescue. Nationalism for me would be to respect
>
> national anthem, not saying rubbish things about the country, not cursing the country."

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Sanidhya felt he was a good and sensible citizen as he was peace loving. "I do not go

out in the street and pick fights."

While most students claimed they want to be good Indian citizens, seldom did they connect this

concern with what happened at school. In fact, they were ambivalent about the school's strong

emphasis on Indian traditions:

The school has left no stone unturned to inculcate the values of Indian tradition and

culture. The students unanimously agreed to such an emphasis although the reception

to such values is mixed. Some saw it as useful to learn about the country's rich

tradition. However the majority showed disappointment [that] they could perform only

classical Indian music and dance—not even Hindi film songs. In assemblies students

were mainly allowed to narrate sayings of Swami Vivekanand. Most students that I

asked said they either dozed off or bunked [i.e., skipped] the assembly.

The notion of Indian citizenship had its strongest emotional saliency when it concerned conflict,

especially conflict with Pakistan. It is precisely around the issue of citizenship and national loyalty that

some reported or expressed strong suspicions of Muslims. The fieldworker reports, "At the onset [of

the discussion] most students were of the opinion that Muslims were as much a citizen of India as the

Hindus, [which they claimed was the] view held by their generation." On the other hand they

recognized that there were widely held stereotypes that equated "beards/Muslims/terrorists." They

specifically mentioned, "the intensive checking that a Muslim guy undergoes [when traveling] in

comparison to someone of different religion."

They also were well aware that their parents and other family members did not all share

the view of their generation. Ajita sitting at the first bench earnestly remarked, "My

grandmother is not fond of the Muslims; she had gone through the pains of partition and she

feels that the Muslims have unduly captured privileges." Sanika, a smart girl in humanities

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section, mentioned that her mother was not too fond of Muslims. Her mother held that [the communal violence of the Hindu extremist against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002] was justified as a response to the earlier burning by Muslims of the Sabarmati Express [in Godra] carrying Hindu pandits.[27] She said the Muslim population was increasing by the day and she feared that very soon they would capture the whole of Indian India. I feel the problem . . . is . . . how history has been interpreted; the notion of the Muslim as an outsider has always been there."

Another student named Sanika, implicitly questioned whether Muslims were loyal to India and whether they were good citizens:

The kattar (orthodox) old Delhi Muslims are the majority, educated Muslims are really less. Sometimes I also doubt their allegiances; one of my neighbors is a Muslim family; whenever we are watching a cricket match together on TV they always cheer for Pakistan and not India—probably because in India they feel suppressed and exploited." Sanika wanted to join politics; her father was an active member of a prominent national political party. She [thought] the Muslims were a vote bank of the Congress Party. She referred to one incident when a Congress Party leader was supposed to have [bought the votes of] an entire [Muslim] slum in the Trans -Yamuna [suburban area of Delhi].

It is unclear whether Sanika is arguing that the majority of the people in old Delhi are Muslims or the majority of old Delhi Muslims are uneducated. Old Delhi is an unofficial term

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[27] The State of Gujarat has for several decades been a center of right-wing, Hindu nationalism, which has often been involved the criticism and intimidation of Muslims.   On February 27, 2002 a Muslim mob, who had been in conflict with some Hindu radicals, stopped a train in Godhra, Gujarat and burned it. The train was carrying many Hindu pilgrims. Twenty-three men, fifteen women and twenty children were killed. This set off riots throughout much of Gujarat in which at least 2500 were killed, about 2500 were injured, and over 200 are reported missing. More than three quarter of those killed were Muslims—none of whom had t participated in the initial train burning. Local Hindu politicians and police were accused of encouraging and leading the riots rather than stopping them.

that refers to the older parts of the city that existed before the British built New Delhi. It is usually identified with the northern and eastern parts of the present city.

If Sanika means that Muslims constitute a majority of the old city, this is simply untrue. The 2001 census of religious affiliation shows that for Delhi as a whole the Muslims constitute 11.7 percent of the population. It also divides the city into nine subdivisions. The highest concentration of Muslims is in "Central Delhi" (29.8 percent), "North East" (27.2 percent), and "North" (16.1 percent).[28] There are small regions in the city where Muslims are concentrated and represent the bulk of the population, but these do not make up a significant proportion of the total city. Hence, the perception that Muslims make up "the majority" of the population in major portions of Delhi is a form of social paranoia on the part of some Hindus—even highly educated ones. If Sanika means that most of the Muslims in Delhi are less educated than Hindus, this is the case. Seventy-five percent of Hindus are literate compared to 60 percent for Muslims. But Christians and Jains in Delhi have a literacy rate of 90 and 95 percent respectively, so the educational inferiority of Muslims compared to Hindus is no greater than the Hindu inferiority compared to Christians and Jains. The point is that the kinds of statements that Sanika and others make about Muslims are largely social stereotypes that are very common among middle class Hindus in Delhi.

Concerns about who is a loyal Indian citizen are most intense around the long conflict between India and Pakistan over the control of Kashmir. "As Sanikawas talking to me, her close friend Pallavi joined us. She brought in the topic of Kashmir and how she felt Kashmir was superficially a part of India and the residents are more inclined towards Pakistan than India. She said she experienced such sentiments when she had visited a relative who was posted in Kargil [Kashmir] last year." Kargil is on the "line of control," i.e., the de facto border, between India

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[28] Census of India, 200l, http://des.delhigovt.nic.in/Census2001/religion.htm; accessed, March 1, 2009.

and Pakistan and the site of the military conflict between the two countries in 1999. About three quarters of the population are Muslims and the area is heavily militarized. Pallavi continues, "We ordered chapatti roti[29] in a hotel. The waiter asked if they were Hindustani," [which in this context meant Hindu Indians]. Then he commented, "Roti toh hidustani khate hai. [Indians have chappati]." Pallavi was amazed when the waiter said, "Hum toh Hindusthani nahi Pakisthani hai" [I am a Pakistani]. It is not clear whether the waiter literally was a Pakistan citizen, which seems unlikely given the extensive military control over the area and the Indian government's strong concerns about infiltration of Muslim guerilla groups, or whether he simply meant that he was sympathetic to Pakistan's claim to Kashmir. In either case for students like Sanika and Pallavi, citizenship is primarily defined in terms of uncritical loyalty to the Indian state—especially in any conflict with Pakistan. Hence, they are highly ambivalent about whether Muslims meet this criterion.

In sum, on a day-to-day basis political issues were generally less salient than concerns about obtaining consumer commodities. In general students tended to be enthusiastic participants in India's emerging consumer society. Likewise they share conventional opinions and even prejudices about the nature of citizenship, who their nation's enemies are, and who within the society can be trusted to be loyal citizens. Such attitudes and behaviors are, of course, prevalent in many if not most societies and are by no means unique to India. Except for lip service, Gandhian economics and politics, Nehruvian socialism, or extreme forms of Hindu nationalism are largely irrelevant to Rampura students—even though it is a school that prides itself on stressing Indian traditions.

Summary

Like in most good schools in India, the student culture tends to encourage the development of nerds in the sense that was described in chapter one. Most students work quite hard and are vitally

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[29] A particular type of flat bread.

concerned about their marks and examination scores. On the other hand, much of the learning borders

on rote memorization. Concerns about fundamental intellectual, political, or moral issues are

considered at best secondary—a luxury that they do not have time for right now. Not only are students

focused on getting good grades, a highly disproportionate number want to become nerds in a second

sense; they want to enter a technical professional field such as medicine or engineering.

Ironically, this egalitarianism between peers is to a significant degree rooted in the high levels of

inequality between students and teachers; the cultural context assumes that adults in general and

parents and teachers in particular should receive high levels of deference from those who are students.

This does not mean that the students necessarily like their teachers; in fact they claim to be fond of only

a few teachers. Nonetheless, in part because of the cultural assumptions about authority and

deference, the school is able to enforce levels of discipline and control—including a norm of equality

between students. The taken-for-granted authority of adults and the deference toward school officials

would be rare in most secondary schools in the West.   This does not, of course, mean that Indian

students never resist and subvert such authority. Some certainly do so in pursuing romantic

relationships, and in gossiping about these and the various foibles of the teachers. Yet, Rampura

students seldom explicitly question the school's ideology of equality, and within the school context they

see differences in caste, religion and economic status as largely irrelevant. Students are, however, well

aware of the salience of such distinctions in the wider society and realize that such social distinctions

will impact their own lives—for example, who they will marry. This egalitarian ambiance does not mean

that students are not aware of the consumer culture characteristic of middle-class India. In other

context they certainly express an interest in fashions and participate in various forms of consumerism.

Within the school context, however, such concerns seem to have relatively little impact in shaping

friendships and interactions with peers.   While the school is not self consciously anti-Islamic or part of

the right-wing Hindu political movement, it does take for granted a largely Hindu oriented nationalism.

The students notions of citizenship are, on the one hand, platitudes about such relatively mundane civic virtues as not throwing trash down, and, on the other hand, patriotism and loyalty to the Indian state, especially in its various conflicts with Pakistan. For some this nationalism includes accepting stereotypes of Muslims and suspicions about their identity as Indians and their loyalty to the Indian state. Such attitudes may, however, be suspended or repressed in their interactions with the few Muslims who are their school peers but nonetheless form the basis for their relationships with Muslims in later life.

Now we will turn to a school that does not have an official emphasis on Indian traditions and that has a peer culture that comes closer to stereotypical patterns of behavior attributed to young people in the U.S. and Europe.

Chapter 3: Saint Anne's Girls School

This is a "convent" school operated by an order of Catholic nuns. As we shall see, student relationships are much less egalitarian than at Rampura. In some respects St. Anne's peer culture approximates the patterns in U.S. schools with students from well-to-do backgrounds. Yet, as we shall also see, it is in many respects significantly different from American schools. This school also allows us to ask, what are the differences between a co-educational school like Rampura, and a girls' school? Does gender segregation significantly modify the nature of peer relations and the overall educational experience?

The Data

The fieldworker made observations and interviewed students and faculty from July through October of 2007, July and August of 2008. (She requested that she not be identified.)   During the 2007 period she concentrated her observations on the section of Class XI students who had selected the Humanities stream. During 2008, she carried out more extended and intensive observations. She observed the same students as she did in 2007, who were now Class XII Humanities students, the Commerce section of Class XI and the Humanities section of Class XI. She also observed and talked with students from other sections in the halls and at various school events. Ethnographic fieldnotes were written up and shared with other team members. Questionnaires were collected from a section of Class XII students concerning their notions of citizenship. In addition she spent time in the teachers' lounge talking with the staff.

The School

This school is also in Delhi, and was founded in the early part of the twentieth century by an order of Catholic nuns originally from Western Europe, but the order currently operate schools in many parts of the world. The order has eighteen convent houses scattered over India and most of

these operate schools. St. Anne's has classes for students from Kindergarten through grade XII. There is a junior school, a middle school, and a senior school.

The senior school has about 640 students and runs from class IX to XII. Each of the four classes has four sections or classrooms with about forty students in each section. Each school—junior, middle, and senior—has its own headmistress and the three schools are under the direction of a principal, who is a nun. The nuns report to superiors in their monastic order. St. Anne's is officially "recognized" by the Directorate of Education of the Government of the National Capital Territories of Delhi, but is not "aided" (i.e., partially funded) by the government.   Nonetheless St. Anne's in large measure follows the government approved curriculum—in part to be an officially recognized school, and in part, to insure that their students compete effectively in the standardized examinations administered by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

The students elect a Head Girl, a Catholic Leader, and a Sports Captain, all of whom must be in class XII. Seven vice-captains are elected from class XI, and fourteen individuals are elected to the student council. Like Rampura, the senior school is divided into four "houses," which compete with each other in athletics and academics, and rotate the responsibility for leading assemblies and other school-wide activities. Each house is given the name of a particular virtue, such, as "Effort," "Initiative," "Creativity," etc. In addition each house is identified with a specific color. "The fieldworker notes, "Houses are very important . . .[M]ost of the competitions . . . were inter-house ones and students are recognized . . . on the basis of their houses." In addition to athletic competition and competition for grades, houses are assigned special projects.

> The teacher was discussing with them about another inter-house competition—a
> chart making competition. Each house drew out lots and got a particular period in
> history – ancient, medieval, Delhi Sultanate, and Mughal [Mogul]. And the house
> was supposed to make charts which were to be displayed in the gym. Each house

would be allotted one of the four walls of the gym where they would put up their

charts.

Every student has a house patch, which is to be worn by them throughout their four years in the secondary school. Other formal distinctions are also made visible by various patches. For example, the student council members wear identifying [patches] as do the house captains and vice captains.

Like most schools a key function of St. Anne's is to instill in its students the conventional values of the society. Like many schools in India, the leaders of the independence movement are honored and held up as models. These leaders are honored for their heroism and leadership during the independence movement against colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century. Through this, schools in India hope to instill values of patriotism and loyalty to the nation among students. The pursuit of instilling nationalist values is therefore a core legitimate objective in most schools in India. The forms this takes however varies across schools.

I noticed that in the corridors portraits of freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi,

Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, etc. are [hung on the wall in the halls]. There are

also portraits of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, [and] Mother Teresa. Every class has a

framed picture of Jesus Christ. In the corridors there are bulletin boards, on which

children put up charts. These were generally about moral messages like virtues of

honesty, forgiveness etc. There were also Bible verses, these are framed and put up

in each corridor.

In addition, the 'moral' life of students is of concern to schools and teachers seek to impart virtues of being a 'good' citizen or 'good' social person. This is seen as a legitimate objective of the schools and is valued by parents, school management, the community and the government authorities.

One indication of this concern with the moral life of the students is the numerous posters with Inspirational and moral messages displayed in hallways and classrooms:

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as

by the obstacles which one overcomes.

Fear melts when you take action towards a goal you really want.

What you are is God's gift to you. What you become is your gift to God.

While St. Anne's has a greater display of Christian and Catholic images and messages than most Indian schools, its vision of what children should learn is not dramatically different than other schools of its stature. Non-Christian students are sometimes suspicious that Christian students get special privileges. For example, the Head Girl of the school, though popularly elected by all students, has always been a Christian. Some students question whether the election is really fair, though there is no concrete evidence that it is not. Even more significant, there is an admission quota system that reserves a certain number of positions for Christians. While there was variation from section to section, in most classes of 40 about 15 of the students would be Christian. The majority of these were usually Catholics. The catechism classes for Catholic students are closed to other students, who sometimes wonder if these students are provided information that might advantage them. There seem to be no attempts to convert Hindus or Muslims to Christianity. One probable reason that non-Christians are excluded from the catechism class is to avoid being accused of "forced conversions,"—a charge often made against Christian organizations by Hindu nationalist groups. There is, however, apparently no effort on the part of school authorities to explain the situation to non-Christian students so that their fears about the privileging of information may be allayed.

On the other hand, it clear that at least some of the Christian staff members do consider non-Christians to be less moral. The principal, who is of course a Catholic nun, attributed this to factors outside of the school experience:

According to her, a lot has to do with one's family background. She said, "You know

like when the rain falls, some part of the ground takes the water in and some will

not and the water will just be lying there or will flow away. All this is depending on

the quality of the soil. So, even here it is the quality of the student's background,

their home environment, that becomes important...there is only this much that we

can do....I strongly believe that value cannot be taught, it has to be caught; we give

the same values to all the students, and if some are able to imbibe them more than

the others it is due to the outside environment."

Another teacher expressed an even stronger view of the moral superiority of the Christian students, or perhaps more accurately, the moral inferiority of Hindus:

There is a difference; Christian girls have, right from the beginning, been brought up

in an atmosphere where their faith has been inculcated in them. We go to Church

every Sunday, and it has been imbibed in us to know the Bible, because many a

times we are presented with situations where the other [non-Catholic] sects in the

Christian community might challenge our knowledge, and we have to say, "Look I

know my Bible well." So we have always been brought up in that atmosphere. You

are Hindus and you barely go to the Temple on a regular basis; the Muslims are even

stauncher than we are. So, a lot depends on the home environment of the students.

If the religious atmosphere of the school is relatively free of attempts to convert non-Christians, there certainly are signs that at least some of the top leadership have and express a sense of the religious and moral superiority of Catholicism. Predictably, many of the non-Christians resent this.

The moral superiority expressed by the Christian teachers and nuns is linked to the fact that the earliest English-medium schools started in the country were by the Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. Over time, these schools became coveted institutions and acquired a reputation of providing good English education in a clean physical environment with qualified teachers. The Christian community in India has also been very active in providing health and

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education services, often in remote and difficult regions of the country. This has resulted in the high literacy rate in the northeastern region, for example, but has also earned them the reputation of providing services with the hidden agenda of proselytization.

Academic Ambiance

Like in most schools, students like assignments that focus on contemporary issues and are not too demanding. "Their English subject project gives them two or three topics to choose from, one of the topics being global warming. They like the project since it has to be just for three to four pages and it is something easy since they can . . . go online and cut-copy-paste from [various] websites."

Nonetheless, the emphasis on academic performance is very similar to that at Rampura, though perhaps it is even stronger. The great preoccupation is with doing well on the national examinations. For most students, intellectual questions and critical thinking are secondary issues at best. The fieldworker notes: "When asked . . . about satisfaction with the discussion level in class, they . . . said they were not too happy. There was nothing much that could be done [about it] so they were okay with it—as long as the teacher was telling them what was important from the examination point of view . . ." Even more than at Rampura students they felt under great pressure from their parents and teachers.

> Mrs. Abraham . . . talked about the Parents Teacher Meeting that was to be held on
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> Saturday morning. She asked the students what they wanted her to talk about to the
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> parents and what not to talk about. They all pleaded her not to talk about the
>
> marks, to which she agreed. She said "I want to know more about you through your
>
> parents and how much of interaction is there between you and your parents. I
>
> won't discuss about marks." Someone [said], "It's never good to talk about marks
>
> since parents end up comparing [students]." Mrs. Abraham asked, "How many

parents compare?" Some seventy percent of hands went up. Then Neeta said [softly to me and the girls sitting close], "Not only parents! Teachers also compare."

Students too make comparisons and, at least for some, it shapes who they hang out with. A student asks the fieldworker, "Have you noticed since the time Saura has scored more than us she is sitting away from us?" She goes on to worry that the teacher will start expecting such marks from them too. Students that are too blatant about outperforming others are resented and looked down upon.

Manju said . . . she hated Natalie. Then Samiya . . . said "You don't like her because she does better than you in class—she came second in class and you third." Manju said that that was indeed correct and she does compete with Natalie. [Samiya said,] Manju knows that she is better than Natalie, but the teachers favor her more [and] "that's why she is the hot favorite. Back in class 10 Natalie just got [higher] marks than her in only one subject." While Manju was talking the others were giggling and making fun of her geekiness in front of her, and she didn't seem to be very affected by it.

Many of the non-Christian students perceive Christian students, especially those from South India, to be inferior students who were admitted to the school through the quota system. There is at least some impressionistic evidence that supports this stereotype. On the other hand, it certainly seems to be an over generalization. The fieldworker, who is not a Christian, reported on a class discussion she was asked to lead on the value of freedom in the Class XI Humanities section. She noted, "In this class, many Catholic/Christian girls were vocal; [I] couldn't see [why] they were branded as the geeky, Christian "quota girls."

There certainly are some students who have interests that go beyond scoring well on the examinations.

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Rima said that she wants to be a politician and loves to have discussion about

current affairs and events. She said she really wanted the teacher to hold a

discussion about the nuclear deal with U.S., however it was of no avail.[30] Then

another girl said how Rima loves reading newspapers and can vouch for [the fact]

that Rima is better read than the others . . . [T]he other girls just watch the news

channels . . . . When asked why they don't initiate a discussion in class they said,

"The others don't want it, nor does the teacher."

As in other schools the different academic streams are ranked. "I got the usual responses, 'Science*s*

are smarter than Humanities people.'" But there are more subtle gradations of ranking:

The students had to decide their streams before their [class X examinations] board

results were out. A few of them they got better marks than they expected and now

wanted to shift from commerce without math to commerce with math . . . Also, a

few in the humanities section wanted to shift their elective from home

science/political science to math. So the headmistress was busy with this shifting,

students had brought letters from their parents addressing the principal to make

the necessary changes.

It is doubtful that these concerns to change streams were rooted in shifts in intellectual interest.

Rather they primarily wanted to enter the stream that they thought they would enable them to

maximize the status of their academic credentials.

In short, like at Rampura, most students and their parents are primarily concerned about

scoring well on the standardized examinations and the implications that this has for pragmatic

concerns such as college admissions, securing jobs and arranging good marriages.

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[30] "Nuclear deal" refers to the Indo-U.S. Civilian Nuclear Agreement of July 18, 2005 in which India agreed to separate their civilian and military nuclear programs, subjecting the former to international inspections, and the U.S. agreed to cooperate with India on civilian projects.

Discipline, Decorum, and Dignity

Like Rampura, St. Anne's students are usually inspected after assembly to see that they are in compliance with the dress code. The emphasis on neatness, cleanliness, and perfection in appearance and attire is linked to the idea of schooling that is based on instilling virtues of personal hygiene, another school objective, and particularly so in Christian schools in India. There is an almost obsessive concern with nails being clipped short, hair being neat and tucked away behind the ears, the uniform being washed and ironed, and so on.

> After the morning assembly, which is held in the quadrangle, all the students exit
> from the two doors, at which are stationed six to seven [student] council members
> each, who inspect the students for long nails, short skirts, dirty [or] unpolished
> shoes, ankle length socks, untidy hair, and wrong color hair band. All those who are
> guilty of any of the above . . . are asked to step out of the queue and their names are
> noted and then sometimes they are made to undo their mistakes, for instance if a
> girl has long nails, the prefect would cut her nails or if she has not plaited her hair
> and left them tied in a ponytail, then her hair is plaited with a red hair band. If a
> particular student repeats the offences more than two to three times then marks are
> deducted from her final aggregate. Thus there is a regimented order in school; I
> would say [it is] a very military like establishment . . . . There are rules about how to
> line up and sit during assembly and about proper wearing of uniforms.

Being on time is considered even more important. "The students are expected to reach the school by 7:30 a.m. If students who travel by private conveyance (cars or small vans) [are late] they receive their punishment in the form of marks being deducted from their final aggregate [grade] for the year."   The emphasis on punctuality continues through most of the day. "After a final warning by the prefects [at the end of] morning recess, the senior school doors are shut—so students rush

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back. Anyone who . . . is not able to make it . . . remains outside. The P.T. teacher comes and punishes her. No one was left outside this time around."

Current students complain that in the last few years the school has become even stricter: "Then I asked them generally about school and suddenly so many of them gathered around me and said how the school had become very strict. Apparently, if their uniform isn't correct then parents are called. Like this one girl said that because she had worn *kajal*[31] in her eyes and her skirt was above the knees her parents were called to school. Also, if the students don't wear a red hair band they are fined Rs. 100 ($2.00)." Since people in general and students in particular frequently complain about how "things are worse now than the use to be," we checked with a former student who now worked at the school. She agreed that the school has become strict in terms of the rules, such as the length of skirts, hair bands, etc. It has imposed heavy fines also. But at the same time there is more interaction between the teachers and students and a more informal attitude between them. In some classes, "The girls are extremely friendly with the teacher and even answering back and arguing—something that NEVER happened during my time."

The fieldworker's comment on the 'regimented' nature of the disciplining present in the contest of appearance draws upon the idea of 'disciplining bodies' in Foucault's work and the role of the institution in this process. This regimentation is an effort to project the student body as one, with no external, visible markers of difference. While this may appear as a laudable effort, especially in view of the differences of class and caste present in all schools, the attempt in most schools is to actually seek the submission of students to school authority rather than to achieving an explicit goal of equality. It also becomes a process through which punishment can me meted out for trivial offences such as an unironed dress or a lost hairband. Such tyrannical methods are often the processes that result in the defiant and explicit forms of resistance undertaken by students to express their independence and autonomy.

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[31] A traditional black cosmetic used to outline the eyes.

St. Anne's is apparently concerned about more than simply extracting conformity to the rules. The St. Anne's vision statement concludes, "Our dream is that the girls educated in our institution will become: faith-filled women of God, faithful wives and mothers of happy families, [and] dedicated women influencing others for the good." While the actual behavior of teachers and even administrator recognized that many of these young women will also become active professionals, there is still a sense that they should be taught how to behave "properly," which assumes a rather conventional notion of female decorum and dignity. There is an assumption that after God and her husband, a woman can only find refuge in her children. She is expected to lead a rather limited existence in the service of God, husband, children and the 'good' of society, in that order.

On one occasion a girl had blatantly misbehaved and been disrespectful to a popular teacher. The next day the teacher not only discussed how she had been hurt and offended, but how such behavior had implications for the kind of people they would become. She reminded them that the goal of "this school and for that matter of education was to turn them into 'young ladies and not the fisherwomen outside.' Then she talked about following the school uniform and cleanliness. How they should always keep a comb, paper, soaps and sanitary napkins with them. In short, a central aim of the implicit curriculum is to develop in the students an internalized sense of dignity and decorum compatible with being female members of the upper-middle class. In addition to there being a class component here, the teachers wanted to distinguish the students inside the hallowed portals of the school from what she saw as the rather common and crass people outside.

Resistance and Deviance

Despite the heavy emphasis on discipline and proper behavior and the significant sanctions for failure to follow the rules, many of the girls engage in various forms of resistance and deviance. The fieldworker notes: "The students do not fear authority as much as one would think . . . in a

school that is obsessed with discipline and academics." Many students deviate in relatively surreptitious ways. For example, evading clothing regulations is fairly common.

> [Despite uniforms] there are ways of showing off one's status. The most common of all is wearing short skirts and ankle length socks to flaunt one's long slender fair legs, or rolling up the sleeves of your *kameez* (the top) and opening the first button of the *kameez,* or secretly carrying an expensive watch or mobile [phone] at school, or tying one's hair in a high pony . . . giving a bounce to the hair, which is considered a symbol of a model-like attitude. (The girls consider other girls who have bouncy hair as very model like.) . . . . Students pointed out that it is not just about what you do with your uniform, but more importantly about your attitude. Thus, those girls who have a very "babeish" attitude, a nonchalant and one-up attitude, are the ones who practice the above ways of status display and do so very confidently.

Unsurprisingly, students conform when they are being closely supervised and deviate when such supervision declines. "Right after the assembly is over—and so is the checking [of uniforms by the council members]—the girls pull up their skirts up a bit (to shorten its length), roll down their socks to ankle length, change their hairstyle from [the required] plait to a high ponytail, change the hair band from [the required] red one to some other color (usually black), take out their mobile phones and send text messages secretly."

It is their bodies through which conformity is being sought. They therefore seek to assert their agency by explicitly rejecting school authority in school space as soon as the formal process of ensuring compliance is over. They return to their preferred state of being carefree young women by showing off their legs and wearing a ponytail instead of a plait. In this manner it is also however the case that they conform to a more general socially expected image, that of the 'desirable young woman'. The irony is, and their resistance and agency, which they are so quick to assert, becomes a channeled into another kind of conformity. They end up in fact conforming to expected stereotypes

about how young women must engage in bodily display (of the legs for example) to express their femininity. This is an example of the ways in which resistance is often double-edged, indicative of agency but simultaneously, also about submission. In more general theoretical terms this is a struggle over the nature of their embodiment. Embodiment is not about conscious thoughts and attitudes, but about how humans, often unconsciously, are inculcated with certain bodily movements and stances that have both social sources and social consequences. The imposition of a dress code and the resistance to this is a good example of a conflict over the form and content of such embodiment.

Some of the resistance is clearly directed against teachers:

The most popular way of challenging the P.T. (physical training) teacher's authority

is by not wearing the P.T. uniform, or faking an injury to avoid playing during the

games period. The maximum reprimand one gets for not wearing the right uniform

is to run around the field five times, and the girls prefer doing this since instead of

running they generally jog . . . chatting with their friends who are their fellow

offenders. The most [common] behavior is to make fun of the clothing and hairstyle

of the teacher. For example, if the color of the *sari* and the blouse do not go with

each other it is a big fashion faux pas and becomes the talk of the school. If [a

teacher's] hair is not [neat], then talk occurs about the teacher not having had a bath

or combed her hair . . . . Also, nick names are allotted to the teachers usually on the

basis of looks. For example, one of the teachers, according to the [students in] class

XII humanities section, looks like a transvestite as she has manly features but wears

Indian traditional [women's] clothes, so she is nicknamed as *"hijadi"* (transvestite).

Another teacher's name rhymes with that of '"George" . . . , hence she is nicknamed

"George of the Jungle" [after the character in the illustrated children's book].

Some students deliberately challenge the teacher's authority by "answering back." "For example, in one of the classes the economics teacher made Nila stand up as she was constantly talking to the girl sitting next to her. The teacher said 'Why are you constantly disrupting the class. Why can't you sit down and quietly study.' To this Nila replies 'coz I don't feel like it!'—and the entire class started laughing."

Even students who are respectful toward teachers sometimes assist those who are more rebellious. "In fact there seemed to be immense unity in the class, for example, when the teacher asked one girl in the class, "Sudha, what are you doing?" (She was chit chatting with her friend while the teacher was teaching.) Her friend said, 'Ma'am she just missed a point that you said and was asking me about that,' and then they started giggling. The teacher obviously knew what they were up to."

Not even the most popular teachers completely escape students' attempts at resistance and deviance.

> In the morning an incident had occurred where a girl was sitting on the floor and secretly eating food while the teacher was [teaching]. Obviously the teacher could sense that this girl . . . , Nila, was up to something. When she asked Nila what she was doing, she said, "Ma'am I am just sitting on the floor." And the class supported her. This really infuriated the teacher. Then when she went out to the staff area to get some books, the class started making a lot of noise . . . . [A]pparently the girls got scared of a lizard. [Small geckos are very common inside buildings and quite harmless]. These two incidents made the teacher, Mrs. Abraham, very angry and she was red in the face and stormed out of the class. Now, Mrs. Abraham has a reputation of being the sweetest and calmest teacher in the school. If she gets upset it IS a big deal.

Another popular, but even more risky form of deviance is "bunking," that is, skipping class, or even skipping school for the entire day.

[Some] student's parents had been called. [D]uring the break I had noticed . . . anxious parents with the teachers. I eavesdropped to learn what really happened . . . [S]ome girls were found outside of school by the teacher. They had got down from the morning bus and not entered school, but a teacher who was late to school caught them outside. [One of the students who was not involved exclaimed,] "My boyfriend also asked me to bunk the whole day with them; thank God I didn't."

Students also engage in forms of resistance that are directed more toward parents than the school as such, though as the story below indicates the school often becomes involved.

Pampa, who is from a very well-to-do family, spends hours at night on the phone talking to [her boyfriend who is a telephone repairman and seven years older than she is]. Once her father caught her . . . and he was so furious that he confiscated her mobile phone SIM card. She was desperate to speak with him. In the meantime she had befriended Samiya, as they were made to sit together in class. One day she asked Samiya for some money as she wanted to buy a new SIM so that she could talk to [her boyfriend]. Samiya refused since she said she wouldn't have any explanation to give to her parents . . . for the money. And the same day some money was found missing from the bag of one of their classmates.

[Before the theft was discovered] Pampa goes to Samiya hands her . . . money and says that it is her money, but since she doesn't have a safe place to keep it, she asked Samiya to keep it. [T]he girl whose money was stolen, complained to the teacher . . . . The bags of all the girls in the class were checked and the money was found in Samiya's bag. Samiya was taken to the headmistress' office and asked why she stole the money. She said that she did not. However, the teachers refused

to believe her. Her parents were called; even they did not believe her. Two of her

best friends also deserted her since they thought she was the thief. She then said

that it was in fact not she but Pampa who stole it. Pampa denied the charge. Yet her

parents were called. She at first refused [to admit the theft], but then broke down in

front of her father and confessed to the theft.

In addition to explicit acts of resistance and deviance, there is a more general and subtle

skepticism about the values that supposedly lie behind the various rules and moral precepts that

are taught. "[Some students] pointed out that . . . the virtues of honesty and unselfishness were very

utopian . . . . [they said] that the most often stressed virtue of the school is honesty, and it would be

difficult to cope . . . with the fast moving world if one were to totally follow it. Many commented

how one has to be "street smart," [and] "worldly wise" if one was to be successful—and [said]

honesty would certainly not be the best policy.

None of this is to suggest that the students at St. Anne's are especially deviant or cynical,

much less youth revolutionaries. Quite the contrary, the students of St. Anne's are seen—and see

themselves—as the future female elite of the country. Nonetheless, they consciously and

unconsciously, resist many aspects of the discipline that they are subject to and question many of

the values and assumptions that lie behind these. To what end? We need to make some general

observations here.

This is also linked to the idea of 'dissenting citizenship'. We need to bring in theoretical component

here linking to the main point we need to make in the Introduction to the book.

Peer Groups

Predictably many students perceive and claim that there are no significant status

distinctions within the student body. To the degree that this is true, it varies for different class

cohorts and for different classrooms.

> [One class} said . . . . their whole class is very united. I . . . said does that mean there
> are no [sub]groups in the class, to which they answered that there are groups in
> terms of people being closer to some more than the others, but over all there is lot of
> unity. Even the teacher's pets are their friends and in fact they all laugh about the
> special treatment meted out to the teacher's pet including [the] girl [i.e. the teacher's
> pet] herself. They said they do not discriminate against anyone and everyone is
> helpful to everyone else.

It does not take long, however, to notice that there are identifiable groups and networks that limit
their interaction with others and vary in their concerns and typical patterns of behavior. For
example, during recess and lunch breaks students circulate in the halls and on the grounds. The
fieldworker notes, "What I saw mostly was groups of three or four. They would eat their tiffin [i.e.,
lunch or light meal] together. Not all would get their tiffin from home; many ate from the canteen.
They would occasionally say, 'Hi,' to other students, but generally stuck to their own respective
small groups." On the other hand, after eating many people may move from one group to another.

A class project unintentionally illustrated that there were subgroups and differences in
status within the classroom.

> Sudha showed me the board on the wall and it had flowers made of paper stuck on
> it. Every flower had a name of a girl written on it and five petals on which the
> friends had written messages and things about that girl on it. It is a perfect way to
> see the group formations in class because clearly only the friends will write
> messages for their friends. When I asked what the idea behind it is, she said, "Each
> girl's five positive qualities are to be written over here. It's encouraging, isn't it?" But
> what I saw was the contrary, there were certain flowers in which the petals weren't
> completed and there were still others in which there was hardly any space to write
> and students had squeezed in their handwriting. So, in a way it gave a sense of who

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really is the popular one in class and who isn't. When I pointed this out to them, she said, "No, no nothing like that" and quickly changing the subject.

Apparently, some groups form because a key experience they have in common is that they have been rejected or looked down upon by others.

[Four girls were standing by the flower board.] I asked her their names to which she replied, "Renata, Ann , Pampa and Alice." It seemed . . . that these four formed a group. I turned back towards the board to see if these four had written messages for each other and I found that Pampa's flower was the least filled. It barely had two . . . messages. And Alice's flower was quite empty.

[Later] I pointed this out to Sudha and asked what the reason behind this was. She said "They are very funny people. We asked them to fill up the spaces, but they did not." I asked, "Are they a part of one group?" She said, "Well yaa, but still they bitch about each other and wouldn't write messages for each other. Anyway they are slightly mad." I asked her to explain herself; why would she call them "mad"? She said, "They are just weird people; they don't know what they are doing or saying. Also they have a little *gavaar* tone to themselves." *Gavaar* is an oft used Hindi word implying a certain crassness, associated with villagers or uneducated people. What is to be noted is that this was a [mostly] Christian group. And in Sudha's [group] there are no Christians.

While Sudha does not express this in terms of social class or religion—but rather because they are seen as" weird" and "crude"—it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that their religious and class origins contribute to this perception. In short, both social class and religion seem to play a role in lowering the status of some students and the formation of subgroups.

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Since students have relatively little time outside of the classroom, the groups within a classroom are probably more important than they are in U.S. or European settings. The groups in Class XI Humanities illustrate this. The fieldworker identified the following five groups:[32]

The Geeks: There are a few individuals that other students refer to/designated as geeks. This label has pejorative connotations. Not all the intelligent students and those who do well in examinations are included. Rather, geeks are those who are characterized as wearing spectacles, attending all the classes, paying careful attention to the teacher, and who are generally social introverts, who have relatively few connections with other students and who do not actively participate in co-curricular [i.e., extra-curricular] activities—unless they are required to do so.

Average-type Group: These girls are moderate in most activities respects. They were average in their studies. They would on occasion participate in class discussion. While they were serious about their studies, unlike the geeks, they were not asocial or preoccupied by studies all the time. From time to time they would indulge in small pranks in the class: ask permission from the teacher to go practice a sport, fake a headache, or go to sleep.

The Notorious Group: These are the girls who are seen as troublemakers by both teachers and most other students. They seem to derive pleasure out of vexing the teacher and disrupting the class. They are often the "entertainers" of the class; due to their mischievous acts the class frequently breaks into laughter. For example, Sudha was not paying attention in class and was busy doing some other school work and chitchatting while the teacher was teaching. The teacher asked her what exactly she was doing. She very innocently replied, accompanied by her signature chuckle, that she was indeed paying attention and not disturbing anyone. This group is not intimidated by the teacher's authority and in fact seeks pleasure in flouting it. Three of them were

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[32] The English terms "geeks" and "hi-fi's" were actually used by the students. "Notorious group" is a translation of a Hindi phrase that means essentially the same. The other two terms, "average type" and "looked-down-upon-group," were terms coined by the fieldworker to described clearly identifiable clusters of students.

suspended from school for two months because they were caught 'bunking' or missing school in order to go out with their boyfriends to a market place. From the perspective of most girls in the school they are infamous for their daring acts. Unsurprisingly, the members of this group rarely do well in their examinations or the regular class tests. In fact, the implicit norm of the group is to avoid doing too well academically. The individual girls vary in how rebellious and disrespectful they are toward teachers and others. Two girls are the most "in-your-face ones"—as many girls described them. They are often extremely rude, and even ruthless, in their treatment of nearly everyone, including teachers. They "answer back" and "show attitude" to others. The other three are notorious in that they too create trouble—often by breaking the rules—but according to other students—"they don't show as much attitude." A possible reason for the more aggressive behavior of the first two students is that they hail from quite well- to-do families. Moreover, one of them gains a certain amount of attention because she is the cousin of a budding Bollywood movie star. The other three members of this notorious group are from the average middle class families. There was another girl who belonged to this group, but she was "dropped" due to certain "boy issues." In the context of the broader student body, these girls are part of the popular girls in the batch—as indicated by the social invitations that they get from the other even more-popular (and usually richer) girls in other sections of their batch. For example, they were invited to the nighttime informal farewell party, hosted at a discotheque. The richer girls who were organizing it gave them a Rs. 200 "concession" off of the tickets, which costs Rs. 1000 ($20).

Looked-down-upon Group: There were four girls in class that most students did not like and were generally looked down upon. Three were Christians, who were admitted under the Christian quota, which usually meant they were weaker academically than other students. The Hindu member of the group, Pampa, had been caught stealing money from another girl and been ostracized by the entire class for this. The group was thought of as "the insolent ones." They "answered back" to teachers, were rude to fellow classmates, "talked dirty" about boyfriends and

sex, were constantly bitching or gossiping about others, and they giggled incessantly. They also got extremely low marks in unit tests and mid terms.

Hi-Fi Group: This is name that most girls used to identify a group of the rich girls in the class. Normally they traveled by car to school. They were not only extremely rich, but they were very style conscious. They always wore brand name clothes like Esprit, Sisley, D&G, Gucci, etc. They were most "famous" for the parties they organized: Diwali parties, farewell parties, birthday parties. Often these were held at huge houses in posh localities, in nice hotels and discotheques that they had booked for the occasion, or even at their families' farmhouses (i.e., country retreats or ancestral homes). Having an association with these privileged and fashionable girls, irrespective of what one thought of them, was a way to gain greater status.

There were, of course, a few students who do not fall clearly into any of the categories. Nonetheless when the fieldworker got to know the students better, it became apparent that they were well aware of many of the differences described above.

> I had a rough sort of focused group discussion with two groups that I had identified: the Average-type and Notorious Group. When asked them about . . . differentiation or peer group formation [they discussed this in terms of the] spatial organization of the class. The notorious group stated that of the three columns of seating that are there in the class, the one that they occupy which is right in front of the teacher's desk is the one of the '*mast*' and '*bindaas*' (cool and carefree) people of the class. The middle column is occupied by the *mallu* Christians. [*Mallu* is a somewhat pejorative slang word used to refer to Malayalam speaking Indians, from the state of Kerala in southern India.] According to [the Notorious Group] they are sweet and "harmless." The last column of seats is the "weird" ones who are very brand conscious and keep to themselves. The Notorious Group do not consider themselves to be brand conscious. The Average-type Group also identified this spatial organization and said

that the column right in front of the teacher's desk is for those who are very naughty

and disrupt the class . . . and are not good at studies.   They also identified the middle

column as being occupied by the *mallu* Christians. However, their perception about

these people was different. For them these middle column people were stupid and

dumb and would laugh at no rhyme or reason. And for the column which they

occupied they said that "people like us sit here." When probed further they said it

means those who are not naughty or disrespectful, but dutiful and more

levelheaded. Thus, we see very strong self perceptions and ideas about the presence

of other cliques in class which are further spatially demarcated.

I think we need to comment here how one of the factors against mallu Christians is

the fact that they are academically weaker students. So they are not nerds in any

sense of the term. Academic success is valued among all the other groups? No, not

among the looked down upon ones, we need to link up with our introduction in each

case study I think..

In addition to their weak academic performance, another factor that gives "*mallu* Christians" a low

status is their relatively dark skin. In India beauty and attractiveness are associated with a light or

"wheatish" complexion. Many think of dark skin as a sign of low-caste origins. "A (Christian) girl's

boyfriend was extremely dark and this was made fun of by others. As a girl pointed out "Her

boyfriend is as black as coal . . . he's a *pucca* (bona fide, diehard) *mallu* Christian." The use of the

term "pucca mallu" indicates that the disparagement of mallu Christians is not simply a matter of

individual judgments on the part of other students, but that there is an established negative label

that stereotypes members of this group—quite independent of their own individual characteristics.

This is not to deny that many members of this groups may not be academically motivated or skilled,

but that there is a social stigma that handicaps any member of this group.

None of this is to suggest than even the closest-knit groups are completely stable or fixed; students do on occasion move from one group to another.

One girl from the 'average' type has shifted to the Notorious Group. And now I find that one girl—Nila—from the notorious group has shifted to the Average-type. One day she said "You must have noticed that I am not with them now." I said yes and asked what happened. At first she brushed it away, but the next day . . . she said that she is still polite with the other three of the notorious group, but she wonders why the break up between them happened. She said that she felt that they were ignoring her, and after much probing she said it could be because of one incident: After school the four of them went to C.P. [i.e., Connaught Place, which is the center of the city] and the other three were behaving in their usual way—"rowdy, loud and embarrassing." Nila objected; they were in their school uniforms and [said] there is a "certain standard about St. Anne's" which they were not maintaining. When she asked the other three to mellow down they accused her of being too uptight. Since then on they slowly drifted apart.

Keep in mind that Nila was the girl who, as reported above, brazenly talked back to the teacher, yet she had qualms about how the others acted in public. Apparently some other factors also contributed to Nila's exit. "In the classroom each column [of seats] has rows which can seat three people. She noticed that the other three would always stick together and she would have to sit away from them. She also mentioned some boyfriend issue that came up between all of them; however, she seemed reluctant to talk about it.

Many friendships are between girls who are not in the same classroom. One of the students points this out to the fieldworker: "One girl asked me, 'How will you understand our friend circles when most of us have friends in different sections?' I said that I am aware of this aspect and I am taking it into consideration." Some girls have longstanding relationships as illustrated by a group of

friends that the fieldworker talked with at lunch. These girls were in the same Class XI room when they were interviewed, but this had not always been the case and was not necessarily the origin of their friendships.

> I sat with Sachi and her group. They were talking . . . about the next unit-test to be held the following Monday. Also, it would be Jocelin's birthday that weekend so they were planning out a small get together at her place [and discussing how late their parents would let them be out] . . . I asked them for how long they [had been] friends. Sachi said that she knew Jocelin since Class VII when they were seated together in class and that's when they started bonding. And she and Ritu travel in the same bus so that's when their friendship began, somewhere around Class IX."

While changes occurred the basic groupings were quite stable. A full year after the initial observations that led to the identification of the five groups, the fieldworker reports:

> Most girls during what was called the 'zero period'[33] would be out sitting in the field, and yet again one could see clear demarcation of cliques. The Notorious Group, the Looked-down-upon Group, the Average Group and the Geeky Group would sit separately and have minimum interaction with each other. However, one day a girl from the Geeky Group was sitting with the Notorious Group. When I asked them about Natalie, the Notorious Group said they liked her; she could be sweet and helpful at times. Then I asked why she didn't 'hang out' much with them. Vidya said "No! WE don't hang out with her!"

It was clear that the Notorious Group maintained their "attitude" and sense of superiority.

How are peer relationships at St. Anne's different from those at Rampura? Clearly, crowds and cliques are much more prevalent and central to peer culture at St. Anne's. Moreover, it is

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[33] The "zero period" is before "first period" and the beginning of academic classes. In some schools this is the "homeroom period."

evident that class, religious, and ethnic backgrounds are much more variable in St. Anne's than at

Rampura—and this clearly shapes the formation of friendship groups and peer culture.

Romance and Gossip

Because this is an all-girls school, it was not possible to observe romantic couples[34]

rendezvousing in the halls or on school grounds. Hence most of the information we have about this

comes from gossip and the girl's own descriptions of these relationships, which may be highly

variable in its accuracy and reliability. Nonetheless it is useful to report the student's own

perceptions.

> Samiya came and joined the group. Sachi said that Samiya is the real gossip monger
> of the school and so if I want to know any "hot-gossip," I should talk to her. She said
> "She knows [all about] which girls have boyfriends" At this remark, Samiya gave a
> very self-congratulatory, modest sort of a smile. She said "No, no, that's not really
> true. I mean I do know some stuff, but not everything." To which I replied, "Doesn't
> matter; tell me whatever you have." And then started her stories!

> [S]he started by [saying that ten to fifteen percent of people in this very
> section (Humanities XI B) have boyfriends. Then she told the story (recounted
> earlier) about Pampa's father confiscating her telephone SIM card to keep her from
> talking to her "unacceptable" boyfriend, which in turn motivated her to steal money
> to buy a card.

> Then Samiya went on to talk about her own love story . . . . She went with her
> family to Europe where [she met] Vadin, Samiya and Vadin exchanged numbers, and
> then their affair began. When I asked which school her boyfriend studies in she was

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[34] We did not specifically inquire about lesbian relationships since it would have probably jeopardized our access to the school. There were some rumors about girls who seemed to have close relationships, but this may well have been simply gossip. The absence of such data is, of course, a shortcoming of our research.

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a reluctant in answering and said that he studies in a school in Gurgaon, which is not

that well-known. [She] quickly added, "Well I am just doing time-passing, nothing

serious with him. You know I have never ever even been physical with him." I could

sense a feeling of embarrassment because of her boyfriend [attended] a not-so-

reputable school. Then she went on to say, "You know a lot of people get physical

with their boyfriends. Pampa does. Can you imagine? He is even like seven years

older. But I don't want to be so attached with Vadin; he's just like a friend."

Two things are striking about her account: first, her apparent lack of emotional (or physical)

involvement; second, her awareness of how the status of her boyfriend will affect her own status,

and how the status of his school is crucial in defining his personal status. In addition to the status of

his school, the status of his residence is probably also relevant. Gurgaon, which is on the far

outskirts of Delhi, is the home of many call centers and other high-tech industries. Hence, because

of his school and his residence, Sana's is ambivalent about her boyfriend and his status. Sana is not

alone in the significance she places on the status of schools. "Another girl [describing] her fight

with her boyfriend said, "Then I told him, 'Excuse me! Look before you speak. I am not some

random girl. I come from St. Anne's School.' How dare he talk to ME like that, especially when he

comes from such a shady place [referring to his school]!" Such concerns are by no means unique to

these two girls. The fieldworker notes:

One of the ways in which the Average Group described the Hi-Fi group was, "They

all have rich boyfriends from St. Ignatius," the neighboring boy's school . . . "They

never date normal guys. The first requirement is that they have to be filthy rich." If

a girl dates a popular boy, she too then is considered popular. For example, . . . a girl

from the Hi-Fi group was dating the "best" guy from the neighboring boy's school,

that is, a guy who is good looking, very good at sports, and very rich. Since the time

she started dating him, more people acknowledged her in school, and according to

some girls she even acquired "an extra layer of attitude!" Likewise, one of the major

reasons for disliking the Looked-down-upon Group was because they didn't have

"good" boyfriends.

It is obvious that many of the girl's at St. Anne's have romantic relationships. More striking is the

range and diversity of social class and cultural composition that these romantic relationships make

evident. Some girls and their boyfriends are from some of the richest and most privileged families

in India; others are from relatively low social origins. Given the diversity in social and economic

origins, it is not surprising that this is reflected in the structure of friendship cliques, romantic

relationships, and the gossip about such ties. On the other hand, keep in mind that the girls tend to

deny that there are significant social distinctions within the school or to downplay their significance

more than would typically be the case in American high schools.

Fashion, Consumerism, and Parties

The girls from the most well-to-do families are seen as especially fashion conscious and

other students pay attention to what these privileged women wear and do.

[Several students reported], "Those belonging to the Hi-Fi group] usually come from

extremely rich families and have the money to flaunt it." When I asked them how

they knew what those girls wear even when they are not friends with them, they

said, "You get to know . . . you know, girls "talk" [i.e., gossip], so when someone goes

to their birthday parties they tell the whole school afterwards what everyone was

wearing, [and how they were] behaving. Also at the farewell parties they are always

flaunting their designer clothes . . . in fact it is through their designer clothes that

they show to others that they are rich." Then in a mocking way a girl said, "If they

don't wear such clothes, how will they tell us about their richness...eh!"

It is hardly surprising that rich girls are fashion leaders, but consciousness of fashions is not limited

to them. This was made apparent by a game that some of the Average-type Group played. The

original game involved one person silently reciting the alphabet in their mind. Another person tells them when to stop and then has to name an animal, place, or thing that starts with that letter.

These girls were playing a new version of this game called '*Celebrity, Car, Movie, Brands'. What was astonishing* [emphasis in the original] was that one of the girls was always writing the names of the premium luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Versace, Chanel, Fendi, Jimmy Choo, etc. The other three girls would sometimes write the names of the premium luxury brands, but would more often stick to the standard brands like Lacoste, Chhabra Sarees [a well-known store for relatively traditional Indian wear], Esprit, Reebok, Adidas, Nike, etc. . . . [T]his was due to their exposure to the fashion world through TV, magazines and movie, especially the movie "Sex and the City." They said, "We are brand conscious. This does not mean that we wear all the brands, but that we are . . . very aware of the various brands . . ."

When I spoke to the Looked-down-upon Group about their shopping sprees, two of them said that they really like shopping especially for good brands like Nike, Reebok, [and] Puma.

Thus, even though there is a uniform, there is an obsession with brands, and a hierarchy: . . . [T]he Hi-Fi group . . . wears designer clothes. [Those with less money] mostly wear or wish to wear clothes from "good" brands like Nike, Reebok, Adidas, and Esprit. There are very few who say that they are not brand conscious.

They generally come from the Looked-down-upon Group or the Geeky Group. Sometimes girls come into conflict with school authorities, family members, and friends over their attempts to be fashionable. We have already seen how girls frequently "rearrange" their uniforms after morning inspections. Criticism from family and friends is not uncommon. "Samiya [said] when her grandfather bought her some cloth to make salwaar-kameez, she used it to make miniskirts. Her girlfriend keeps telling her not to wear such short clothes. In fact even her younger

brother, who is in class IV, once told their mother, "Mummy, Samiya wears such short skirts when she goes to meet Vadin [her boyfriend]. Tell her to stop doing that!"

In addition to a concern with clothes and fashions, another important aspect of consumerisms that expressed one's status was entertainment: movies, discos, and parties. The richer more trendy girls tended to go the newer more fashionable cinema complexes. Some even went to discos with their dates. Private parties were also an important measure of one's status and popularity. Generally only relatively wealthy girls gave big parties—because of the cost involved. But who was invited, and who was not, was also considered a mark of one's social standing. Parties that involved both men and women seemed to be more common than in the past, and—perhaps because they were less a rarity—not as much of a "big deal" has they had been in the past. A former student exclaims:

> I was so shocked to hear that the previous year St. Ignatius had formally invited the
> [St. Anne's] senior school to attend their farewell party at school. And this
> happened during the school hours with the permission of the principals. Other than
> that they continue to have the informal parties at five star hotels; however, I sensed
> that people weren't as excited about it as [they were] in my batch.

Certainly, the ability of these students to organize private parties in five-star hotels indicates that many of these students are accustomed to levels of consumptions that are available to only a tiny proportion of even the well-educated population. The fact that these schools are formally sponsoring mixed gender parties is an indication that, despite the strong stress on discipline and decorum, new norms are emerging about relationships between men and women—and that this is probably related to images and social forms that are seen in the mass media, as well as new levels of wealth and new forms of consumption that in part copy the patterns portrayed there.

Citizenship and Nationalism

Like most schools, St. Anne's attempts to build nationalist sentiment among students by the most common method followed in most schools, i.e. by holding up the founders of the modern Indian state as heroes and role models. This is intensified on national holidays, especially on Independence Day and Republic Day.[35]

The fieldworker noted, "The teachers were discussing having a play for the Independence Day—a play on India's freedom struggle covering the Non-cooperation Movement [early 1920s] to the Quit India [during World War II]. It was the history teacher's idea." A former student who was present said she was very impressed. "During my stay in the school we never had any play, apart from the traditional Christmas play. Once [there was a special a school play], which was staged after school and was a big event; people had to pay to watch it." Apparently, a play about India's freedom struggle was a new type of activity at St. Anne's. Not only are they having such a play, but all the classes were being involved, especially the ones that the history teacher was teaching.

Moreover, military-like symbolism is used to communicate and reinforce relatively nationalistic themes. On Independence Day and Republic Day, classes of students usually march by the honored guests and the staff in formations, which are obviously modeled after the parades that the military services use to train troops and to symbolically display their loyalty to their commanders and the nation. Once again, the school uses a regimented mode of disciplining the students in its care. They are required to copy existing military models of displaying loyalty. In part this is a matter of building a generalized loyalty to the state. It is probably also indicative of the assumptions that lie behind much of the schools pedagogy—that is that the core of education is drilling until one can reproduce a copy of what has been taught.   Part of the official curriculum focuses on the history of India, how the government works, and the privileges and responsibilities

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[35] Independence Day is celebrated on August 15 to commemorate the independence of India from Britain in 1947. Republic Day is celebrated January 26 and commemorates the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950 and the shift from being a dominion of the British crown to being a fully independent republic.

of citizenship. Different streams and classes of students varied drastically in how engaged they are by such topics. For example, a commerce section had little interest in such topics:

> When asked about what democracy and citizenship means to them, they burst out in a giggle and said, "We are not interested in all this; for us it's all about numbers," [i.e., accounting, economics, etc.] Then the girl from the prefectural board remarked, "I like India because we are free; free to do whatever we want. China is like a dictatorship since people cannot even voice their opinions; they have to go to other nations to protests (against the government). When I [brought up problems in India such as] the Godhra riots, the Sikhs' quest for [an independent] Khalistan and their protests against the Indian government in London and Canada, she was absolutely clueless.

Their concept of freedom is quite limited and focuses on their immediate life situation:

> [They talked about their dislike [of] this values-education class and the topic that they were given to write on (freedom for the contemporary society). They said they found all this a bit boring, and freedom to them would mean partying, no rules, and for the Independence Day celebration at school [to have] a DJ and dance party. And they said that the whole class wants it.

Not only are these students uninterested in what they see as remote and abstract topics, but they seem to resent having to be bothered about them:

> Towards the end of the class, the teacher approached our group and showed me the paper that the [commerce section] girls submitted about what they feel regarding their idea of freedom and [she] was appalled by the sheer callousness that the girls have. The disappointed teacher vented to the group of girls that I was speaking to, and said, "My humanities class would have never written all this; they are so much more aware and passionate about what is happening." To this a girl interrupted and

said with utter disregard to the teacher, "So why don't you ask them to write this!

WHY US?!"

In contrast to the attitudes expressed by this commerce section, was a Class XI humanities section. The fieldworker recounts: "The teacher then asked me to hold this similar discussion in the humanities section XI-B. I was very impressed by the class as they were truly a stark contrast to the commerce section. When I started the discussion I was inundated with ideas, values, and opinions. From freedom they understood freedom from communalism, women's status, personal freedom."

Disciplinary streams in schools like St. Anne's have an apparently huge impact on the ways in which students are aware of social issues pertaining to different forms of inequality. It is striking that it is only among students in the Humanities stream that the fieldworker finds empathy and a readiness for discussions pertaining to inequality, justice and freedom. This raises important questions about the limitations of the curricula in the Commerce and Sciences streams in building students' consciousness, let alone critical inquiry, into such issues. The school itself is rather immune to discussions around such themes as the attitudes of the teachers in the following vignettes disclose. This buttresses our argument that in the end it is the academic curriculum alone that appears to be the responsibility of the school, buttressed by a frame for the strong disciplining of the body and its appearance. The rest is not something that is of apparent concern to them and in turn, the attitude of the teachers and the school at large kills what little interest may be present in students.

The [humanities] students became most animated over issues related to gender:
For them women's issues were not just about getting permission to be out late . . . or about the dress code. They . . . talked about the right of women to education and not being the oppressed one in the house . . . . The girls pointed out to me the charter of the school as printed in the diary . . . [O]ne of the ideals is purity, which states that a girl should behave in a ladylike fashion and not be loud or noisy. The class was very

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enraged with this ideal of the school and all of them said that this appalled them as the school was ensuring that they turn out to be submissive, ladylike good homemakers.

Even more surprising is that in a catechism class for Catholics some of the girls had raised the issues of homosexuality and the legitimacy of patriarchal notions in the Bible:

> The Christian girls told me how they questioned the Bible during the catechism class, especially issues relating to homosexuality, which according to the Bible is a sin . . . . When I asked how the moderator (the nun) reacts to it, I could feel an awkward silence. One girl said, "Well she listens and often a discussion ensues." One Catholic girl said, "We even question the oppressive status of women as depicted in Bible and . . . why is Jesus a man? Why such reverence to a man?"

At least some teachers were at best half-hearted in their attempts to discuss controversial topics, especially those that involved criticism of contemporary Indian society. There were a few students that were quite passionate about values and especially the injustices that they perceived:

> In the sociology class the topic taught was "social exclusion." The teacher, in a period of one hour, just spoke for ten minutes, explaining social exclusion with the help of the examples of the untouchables, women, and blacks in Africa. She had just three or four points to give, [and] was not looking enthusiastic about this topic. Then [she] retired to her chair and asked the girls to write a class assignment on five or six questions that she dictated to them. One of the questions was on prejudice and stereotypes . . . [W]hen Natalie asked what the difference was between the two the teacher couldn't explain to her properly. A discussion then ensued between Natalie and her neighbors; they were disappointed and angered by the conditions meted out to the lower castes and were questioning as to why there can't be equality in a democratic and secular country like India. Then Natalie steered the

conversation to the plight of women, exasperatedly stating that despite the fact that

women procreate and carry forward the world, they are the "weaker gender" even

though they are not the weaker sex. This statement made me realize how she and

others around that table had quite a good distinction between gender and sex.

Even in this humanities class, however, there were students who thought these kinds of questions

and discussions were a waste of time—at least at this stage of their lives.

There were [those] in the class who were extremely silent; and even though I really

coaxed them to speak, they did not utter a word. Then after much persuasion one of

the girls from one of these groups went on to say, "What is the point of discussing all

this . . . we always have discussion and nothing comes out of it."   [A]nother from the

same group joined in and said, "We can't do anything about this at this age."

Indifference about such matters was not limited to this particular group of students. About a month

later the following exchanged occurred in another section. "The teacher was . . . talking about the

process of impeachment. The class didn't want to study and kept delaying by saying, 'Mam, please

don't teach.' The teacher said, 'If you want to listen, listen, otherwise don't.'"

Conclusion

St. Anne's in some respects the school in our sample that is most like the stereotypical

model of an American high school. There are clearly identifiable subcultures and the identity of

some of these is so obvious that the students have labels for them, for example, Hi-Fi's, Geeks, and

the Notorious Group. Peer status is in part linked to consumer culture. Some students are much

richer than others and display this with designer clothes, lavish parties, and rich boyfriends. Others

are denigrated because of their "geekiness," their accent, their lack of cultural refinement, and even

their skin color. By no means does is seem appropriate to characterize the highest status students,

or even the typical students, as nerds—new or old. Yet, despite the similarities St. Anne's and

American peer culture, there are substantial differences.

To highlight nature the differences between U.S. peer cultures and those of St. Anne's, it may be helpful to report the experience of a St. Anne's student who spent a year in a U.S. high school. Natalie does not clearly fall into any of the five student subcultures outlined above. She is a *mallu* Christian, but she is respected by most students and served as captain of her house her senior year and as vice captain the preceding year. . Her parents are both professionals. When she was in Class V her father was posted in the U.S. She did not have a very positive experience, in part, because she arrived a couple of weeks before 9/11 and her school mates were soon suspicious of any foreigner. But her relatively negative experience was the result of more than this particular historical circumstance. "I was the outcast. The kids wouldn't even touch me. This one girl said to me, 'Get your hands off my desk . . . I don't want your germs.' The shocking part was that this particular girl was not an American, but Korean." She was particularly surprised that it was the girls who most rejected her.

> The girls were the worst ones; the girls just didn't even want to talk to me. The boys
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> were nicer; in fact I even played ball with them. Because of my [greater] interaction
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> with the boys I even got "a reputation" in class! I mean kids there are trying to grow
>
> up a bit too fast. They talk about affairs and kissing—even in class V. They would
>
> say things like, "Oh you know they both were behind the bushes, kissing." Over here
>
> things are not so bad; Class V students still are innocent . . .

She also commented on the salience and importance of cliques:

> Groups there were very watertight. There was this group that was just into
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> academics and was made fun of and called geeks; and then there was this group that
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> was just into sports. If you are good at academics you can't be good at sports; you
>
> have to choose one. But this is so not the case here. I play badminton, and earlier
>
> was an average student, but now a good student, and I am even in the council, and
>
> no one thinks it's too big a deal. There are many others like me.

Interestingly enough she was positive about the level of discipline at St. Anne's:

> The discipline is [St. Anne's] biggest strength according to her. [This especially] comes out as she contrasts the school with the U.S. schools. She feels Indian students "are more responsible with a different sense of the world. In India is it not only the religious diversity that is present, but [it] also has regional and caste diversity; and so we Indian students are naturally built to work more to have a bond [with others]. Whereas in the U.S., there is lack of discipline in schools; there are even "gangs" of boys who are very violent. And also people try too hard to "fit in." I have seen Indians who try too hard to be like Americans, but this is not the case with us [at St. Anne's]; we come with our baggage of religion, region and caste, and live with it."

Of course, Naomi's account cannot be taken as an accurate and objective account of all of U.S. secondary school. Clearly, her personal experiences and biases affect her account. But it is interesting and useful in that it highlights how a participant in both systems perceives the two settings.

Summary and Conclusion

First, let us consider the ways in which Rampura and St. Anne's are similar. In both schools, students, parents, and teachers are primarily concerned with how well students perform on nationally administered examinations. Second, both schools expect higher levels of discipline and decorum than is typical in most U.S. and European secondary schools. Third, students in both schools resist such control and are often successful in doing so. If anything there seems to be more student deviance at St. Anne's than in Rampura—though we have no quantitative data to document this. Fourth, while the relationships between students are by no means as egalitarian as they sometimes claim, the significance of cliques and crowds is much less than in many Western schools. Fifth, students do not have the freedom to use fashions as a status symbol to the degree that they do

in most U.S. schools, but these seem much more central to St. Anne's than to Rampura. The students at Rampura, however, reported greater concern about being thin and having a good body, and the popularity of commercial gyms. We did not, however, specifically ask about these kinds of activities, so we cannot say for sure that St. Anne's students were less concerned about this matter. Sixth, in both schools, students are well informed about international consumer culture and quite brand conscious. Sixth, while students vary greatly in their concerns about citizenship and politics, in both schools most students are relatively uninterested in such matters. They are especially indifferent about the curriculum which explicitly deals with values and civic education. They feel these issues are remote from their day to day lives and that they have little power to affect such matters. There are, however, students who are very concerned about these ideas. Interestingly, unlike in Rampura, the issue of conflict with Pakistan did not seem very salient in St. Anne's school. The student who most defended the India's political culture and institutions did so in relationship to what she perceived to be the more oppressive institutions of China. Like in Rampura, the most salient sources of citizenship and nationalism did not arise from the formal attempts to inculcate them, but in relationship to "the other," that is other nations that they perceived to be threats. Finally, it seems clear that while Indian schools have an informal student culture that offers various forms of resistance to the official norms, the effects of peer culture in shaping the patterns of behavior within the school seem to be much weaker than is the case in the U.S. Comparatively speaking, Indian students are "nerds" both in academic matters and in their compliance with the authority of adults in general and school officials in particular.

The above description has focused on the structures of informal relationships between students, and the youth culture that is both the cause of the effect of such relationships. Such a description tends to emphasize the less attractive side of school life, "warts and all." This is in no way to deny that St. Anne's is in many respects an excellent school and that most students are proud to be a part of this institution. Nor should it be assumed that all U.S. schools are as much of

"a jungle" as Natalie's portrait implies. What the data do suggest is that the informal student cultures have very significant effects on students' educational experiences—perhaps even a greater effect than as the formal school structures and the official curriculum. Despite its rigorous academic standards and its strong efforts to instill discipline and decorum, St. Anne's seems to be no exception.

As noted, St. Anne's is a prestigious, elite school. Rampura, though less renowned still serves primarily relatively well-to-do privileged member of society. Next we will focus on a government school that serves primarily those of lower socio-economic status.

Chapter 4: Uttarnagar Government School

The Data

Anannya Gogi, who was an M.A. student in sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, collected the data. The fieldwork was conducted primarily in September and October of 2008 and supplemented with additional observations in April of 2009. As for the earlier schools, detailed ethnographic notes were taken and this was supplemented by material available from various official websites.

Overview of the Schools in Delhi

We have postponed until now an attempt to give a picture of the array of primary, middle, and secondary schools in Delhi, for it is a very multifaceted system—actually a number of systems. Like in many major metropolitan areas, the structure of local government in Delhi is rather complex. There are essentially three separate municipal governments, not counting far suburban areas that are not technically part of Delhi. The largest local government is the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), which provides public services to most of the city. The part of Delhi where the national capital, important national monuments, and many central government buildings are located is under the separate jurisdiction of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC). Most of the military bases and facilities, which are located mainly in South Delhi, are under the jurisdiction of the Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB). The Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCT) is an overarching entity, roughly equivalent to a state government. The Directorate of Education is a department or ministry of this latter agency. Each of the subsidiary municipalities also has an agency responsible for education in their areas of jurisdiction.

Each of these government entities operates a significant number of schools. Generally, the New Delhi Municipal Council and the Delhi Cantonment Board operate schools within the

specialized areas for which they have responsibility. The website of the Directorate of Education[36]

shows that in April of 2009 the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) operated eighty-two and the

Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB) operated eight schools respectively. The Muncipal Corporation

(MCD) operated 1754 schools and is especially responsible for primary schools in most areas of

Delhi.[37] However, the Directorate of Education of the National Capital Territories (NCT) also

directly operates 925 schools in most areas of Delhi. Of these, 326 are Sarvodaya Vidyalayas (Uplift

Schools). These are "composite" schools that have primary, middle, and secondary schools in a

single location. They were created, in part, because students who came through the MCD's primary

schools had great difficulty performing adequately in secondary schools and these Sarvodaya

schools attempt to remedy this problem.

To further complicate the picture, the central government's Department of Human

Resources operates forty-eight Kendriya Vidyalaya (i.e. Central Government Schools) in the Delhi

area. These serve the children of central government employees of who are transferred around the

country (e.g., the military services). In addition there are 221 non-government schools which

receive financial aid from the MCD.[38] There are also 1200 unaided non-government schools

recognized by the Directorate of Education of the NCT and 785 unaided non-government schools

recognized by the MCD.[39] In general the poorest students tend to be concentrated in the

government schools, the richer families send their children to unaided schools that charge

substantial tuition, and the students in aided non-government schools tend to be from families with

intermediate levels of income. We want to stress that this is only a very rough correlation and

many schools and individuals depart from this pattern. Schools in all three categories receive some

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[36] http://edudel.nic.in/; 4/16/2009

[37] Figures reported by the various educational authorities are not completely consistent. For example the number of MCD schools shown on the MCD website is 1819.

[38] The website for the MCD shows about 60 schools in this category.

[39] The MCD website shows 777 schools in this category.

supervision by the government and are required to use curriculum approved by one or more of the above agencies. Finally, there are an unknown number of commercial and non-government schools, which operate with some or very little ties to the government.

To place the schools we have described in context, Rampura and St. Anne's are both schools that fall in the category of public unaided non-government schools that are recognized by the Directorate of Education of the NCT. In contrast, Uttarnagar is one of the 326 government Sarvodaya schools, directly operated by the Directorate of Education of the NCT.

The School

Uttarnagar Government School is a co-educational institution founded in 1986. It is located in a part of Old Delhi a few blocks from a large metro station. The neighborhood includes housing colonies for lower-level government employees and private housing of similar quality. There is a market nearby and shops along the more traveled thoroughfares. The whole school has 1450 students from standard (or grade) I through XII. There are about 60 teachers and 30 classrooms, a library of about 5000 books, and a computer lab. The senior school has about 450 students and a proportionate number of teachers. The subjects covered include Hindi, English, Sanskrit, History, Political Science, Economics, Music, Home Science, Multimedia, and Physical Education including Yoga. Most of the classes are taught in Hindi, one section of Class XI and XII are designated as English medium. However, only Science and Math are taught in English and even in these sections teachers in fact use a mixture of Hindi and English.

Like the other secondary schools, the student body is divided into four houses for purposes of intramural competition, leading assemblies, and some housekeeping duties. Similar to other schools these houses are named after heroes of the independence movement or earlier critics of British colonialism. One is named after the rather controversial Veer Savarkar, who was a founder of Hindu nationalism and creator of the concept of Hindutva, which advocates a type of Hindu-

oriented civil religion and rejects the notion that the Indian state should be secular with all religions having equal status.

The academic year starts in April and runs until the next March with significant holidays in May (the hottest weather), October (Diwali), and December (Christmas and New Year). The school is usually closed for a day or two around the key holidays of other religious groups. However, celebrations in the school are organized only for the major Hindu holidays and national holidays such as Independence Day and Republic Day. School is in session from 7:30 a.m. to 12:40 p.m. in the winter and 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the summer.

The student body is overwhelmingly Hindu. There are about 100 Muslim students and a few dozen of Sikhs and Christians. The majority of students are from the lower middle class backgrounds. Many of the parents are employed in lower-level government jobs as various kinds of clerks, or in quasi-manual jobs such as bus drivers. Some have small-scale private business such as retail shops. For example, one family has a shop selling artificial jewelry. A large number of the students are from families who are Garwali, Pahari, or Kumaoni, originally from the state of Uttarakhand on the edge of the Himalayas. Partly because of their distinctive cultural background, many of these students do not usually use the Hindi word "jati" (or the English translation of this as "caste"). When given examples of such notions, however, they readily recognize the concept. Hence, while caste differences are relatively less intense than in most Hindu groups, they are not irrelevant. In some respects, social class is a more important differentiating factor. Students often draw a distinction between those from government colonies and students from the "Inner Areas," which is a euphemism for a low-income, near-slum area. It is students, especially boys, from the "Inner Areas" that are accused of being "naughty" and creating trouble in the school.

Most students are required to pay a fee of Rs.60 ($1.25) each quarter, though the fees for students from low-caste backgrounds are reduced to Rs.40. The teachers are responsible for collecting the fees directly from the students or their parents.

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Academic Ambiance

Uttarnagar is thought to be one of the better government schools in Delhi, but it has a bit of an "inferiority complex." This seems to be rooted in at least two factors. First, it still has the stigma of being a government school—and people assume that most if not all government schools are inferior to private ones—though this assumption is slowly changing.[40] Second, because it is a government school, it accepts virtually all students within a given geographic area that have completed elementary school. This means that the talent, motivation, and family resources of its students are much more diverse than in most private schools. Private schools charge substantial tuition and hence of students in these schools on average have more economic and cultural capital. Uttarnagar has some quite bright, motivated students whose parents strongly encourage their educational efforts. Other students have little interest in their academic work and probably relatively low levels of parental support. Many of the latter probably come from families who have little education themselves. This duality is illustrated by the following account:

> When the monitors had collected the copies, the teacher asked if anyone has not
>
> completed their work, and a few of the students, both girls and boys stood up . . . .
>
> [She said that] the course was almost finishing and they should be sincere towards
>
> their work as they are doing senior secondary. She told the deviant kids to learn
>
> something from the "good kids" who always did their homework. And specially

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[40] Parul Sharma, "A jolly good show by Delhi in Class X exams," *The Hindu*, May 30, 2009: "Continuing with their success story, the Delhi Government schools have performed extremely well with a pass percentage of 89.44 compared with 83.68 last year. 'The government schools are in no way less than the public schools, which is quite evident from this year's results. The pass percentage of government schools has seen an increase of 5.76 pass percentage points, while the percentage of public schools has increased only marginally from 91.10 in 2008 to 91.67 this year,' said Delhi Education Minister Arvinder Singh."

pointed to a boy and said that he was always a late comer and should try to mend
himself.

Many teachers have a sense that there are good students and bad students and they do not hesitate to express such views.

In some respects teachers and officials—though not all of the students—are even more preoccupied with examinations and test than in Rampura and St. Anne's. If one class is having a test or examination, many classes are cancelled—even for the students who are not taking the exam. For example, the science teacher said to the fieldworker, "[T]omorrow the pre-test for class 10 and class 12 will be held, so there would be quite a lot of 'free periods' for the students as many teachers will be keeping guard at the examination halls." On another occasion the fieldworker notes, "They don't have an assembly today because of their class test." In assembly the principal announces, "Exams are near so you must concentrate on studies now."

Some of the students take their academic work quite seriously. Suryani, for example, goes to tutoring classes each evening after she has eaten. Others take an interest in difficult material. The fieldworker records: "I wanted to know what subjects they liked to study. The girl replied that math was her favorite. [M]any expressed their [agreement]." Clearly, some students are quite motivated and willing to tackle serious subjects. Others, however, are quite concerned about non-academic subjects. The fieldworker notes, "[A] cooking exam is also held where students cook and the teachers have to taste everything and give them marks. (The girls from even other groups and class are actually very ga ga about these classes rather than academics." Later the fieldworker adds, "Cooking . . . is a very important skill that every girl must know, and the girls are quite proud of it."

Some students seem primarily concerned about sports: "Usually the sports people are always practicing on the ground and hardly attend classes. Specially at this point of the academic year [when] there are interschool and national competitions going on . . . ." The fieldworker adds,

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"They are allowed to do so by the school itself; these are the students who get admission in various institutes of higher education through sports quotas."

In some respects the school has a "split personality." The fieldworker summed up her feelings about the school's academic ambiance:

I felt that it was in a condition of uncertainty regarding what values to follow, where to lead its students and teachers. The teachers and the students always expressed their desire to be on par with private schools. The relative ease [and popularity] of the principal as compared to the former ones provided full scope for this. [Yet], both teachers and students were critical about many things in the school. Ultimately this was reflected in their daily routine activities, which I would say were not very ordered as compared to . . . other government schools that I have visited.

Perhaps the accurate thing to say is that Uttarnagar has its nerds, but they are less common than in Rampura or St. Anne's.

Discipline and Resistance

Like the previous schools, both teachers and students talk a lot about discipline. Obviously the principal, teachers, and the gatekeeper all play a role in enforcing the rules. So do the students, and the nature of their role needs to be elaborated. Each classroom has three monitors appointed by the teacher to assist in checking the roll, taking up homework, and reporting misbehavior when the teacher is out of the room. The three classroom monitors are ranked and their relative rank is made visible by different color badges. Like in the other schools, "The students were checked for any fault in the uniform such as not wearing the prescribed color of [hair] ribbon, wearing a grey dress on a Saturday, which is for white dress and shoes, etc. . . . The deviants were made to take a round of the playground." Ironically, such punishments often had the effect of creating further disturbance since the chastised students were often late for the next class.

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In addition to classroom monitors, seniors, i.e. students from class XI and XII, are sometimes asked to help enforce discipline on younger pupils, especially with respect to policing behavior in the halls and on the grounds. The fieldworker recorded the following: "When I came out of the class, I found that students from class XII were monitoring the school on the orders of the principal. Nobody was allowed to go out of the class without a pass." Senior monitors [from class XII] were assigned to supervise a particular house for a month. The respective houses got points or were given awards for their good performance by the principal, which in turn reflected on the supervising seniors. While the organization of students to assist with discipline varies somewhat for different schools, the organization described above is pretty typical.

Most students avoid alienating a monitor because of the power they exercise over others by being able to list people present or absent, handout passes, and report misconduct to the teacher. Not surprisingly, students often have ambivalent feelings about monitors. It is consider an honor to be appointed to this position, but on the other hand, their actions are often resented. This is especially the case if monitors act superior, arbitrary, or show favor to their friends. The fieldworker at Uttarnagar reports:

> I followed [the monitor] to IX-C. But when we reached in front of the classroom, she
> suddenly shouted out [for the students to go into the classroom]. Her tone was
> quite authoritative. A male teacher was talking to a few students outside the class.
> This particular girl even defied him and rushed all the students inside . . . She said,
> "Now, be quiet when a teacher is present." I said that I was not a teacher. She
> replied that the students must know how important my work is and they should pay
> attention. (She didn't actually know why I was there.) . . . . This time I could see a
> few sneering faces and sarcastic smiles directed towards the girl.

In talking with the fieldworker, some girls complained about a more subtle form of power and privilege that monitors have. "You know . . . our boys' monitor, Mohin, and our girls' monitor,

Bhavya, are a couple. They often sit together, even when our teachers have specified that boys and girls should sit separately. I have no problems with that, but when the same thing is done by another couple like my friends Shephali and Amir, they are teased by everyone. It's very mean." This comment suggests the nature of control monitors exercise over their peers. It is in the context of cross gender relations, which is fraught with problems in Indian schools in any case, that the monitors appear to have the greatest power and choose to exercise it. In this way, they appropriate the norms of 'good' behavior in the school and set about asserting compliance. It also indicates the complexity around cross gender relations in the peer group culture much as it may be disapproved of by the school authorities.

Of course, the teachers themselves play a key role in discipline, both within their own classrooms, and in supervising the halls when they are not teaching. Even popular teachers, such as the instructor in social sciences, did not hesitate to criticize and discipline students. The fieldworker reports:

> After we entered the class [the social studies teacher] immediately told the students who have not brought their books to stand up. Almost all the boys didn't bring [them], including the monitor and a few girls. The teacher said, "You remember to not wear your tie, and leave open you collar buttons to reveal the color of your *banian* (i.e., vest or undershirt). Ha! And you remember to do all such funny things in school, but you don't remember to bring your books to school . . . [S]hift to the left row of benches, stand there raising your hands. And so it happened. A few of the students (boys and girls) looked at me helplessly.

The actual enforcement of discipline varies by time and teacher. The fieldworker notes, "Today was a bad day for the late comers as all of them were made to take 'a round' of the playground with their bags above their heads. Many students were smart enough to keep their

bags in their classes before they were caught." Similarly, some teachers are much stricter than others. The following account illustrates both points.

> The environment today was quite tense; unlike other days and the school seemed to be unusually quiet. I found a girl from class IX-B outside talking to a boy. They were in the open area that stood between two wings of the terrace and provided no view for others [to see them]. They were busy talking. I said, "Hi." She returned the gesture. She was the monitor of the class (she had a badge) and I have talked to her earlier. I asked what they were doing there and if they did not have a class. She said that both of them were late for the class by a few minutes and didn't want to go inside [because of] that. The class was still going on and the Hindi teacher was really strict. She said that the teacher keeps beating up (i.e., pulling hair or giving slaps) to the students, especially girls. The boy said that even today she slapped a girl. The girl said that she specially tries to discipline the girls because the girls sometimes do not behave according to the rules: do not wear their belts nicely and other such petty reasons. I said that the school seemed very deserted and silent today and she [said] that the Principal had given "a warning" to all the students to maintain discipline.

Unsurprisingly, just before a major holiday, like Diwali, discipline is relaxed. The teachers say that it is impossible to try and get the students to concentrate, which is in part true, but it is also a matter that many teachers are also in a festive mood and had rather not prepare and teach students who are even less receptive than usual.

As the account of the Hindi teacher illustrates, some teachers do not hesitate to use corporal punishment. This is especially true in the earlier grades, but not limited to these. The fieldworker reports, "[One] teacher often slapped the students, particularly one girl who was continually running away and making noise." Sometimes the provocation seems minimal: "A teacher near

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class IX-B . . . caught a girl outside the classroom and asked her where she was going and before she could answer gave her two tight slaps." More typically, angry teachers shout: "Another teacher caught a few boys near the staircase and shouted at them . . . the boys [quickly] disappeared."

The principal is concerned both with the discipline of students, but also the discipline of teachers. On his own initiative the principal had installed TV monitoring systems in several halls and classrooms. When I asked about the purpose of these, he said, "They were installed due to security reasons—like keeping away outsiders/intruders, warning in case of accidents like fires. They also helped to see if the teachers were doing their job or were sleeping in class. The students also could be monitored. I asked if there were any ill effects of this step. He said 'No, No! What loss? It's always beneficial.'" Keep in mind that this principal is relatively popular with students and teachers.

This elaborate organizational machinery for enforcing discipline does not mean that there is no deviance. For example, "a class monitor pointed to the girl sitting at the teacher's desk who was playing games on her mobile phone concealed in her handkerchief. The boy said that it was not allowed, but still they brought mobiles and played games." According to him, "They even bunked classes and went to see movies." Predictably, the students take advantage in any weaknesses in the system of social control. The fieldworker reports, "I peeped inside and saw that a blind male teacher was taking the class. [On instructions from the teacher] a girl student was reading out loud from a book. A few students were seated at their benches and were concentrating in their books, but a few were going in and out of the class, without making a noise [to escape detection]." Like in the other schools, wearing school uniforms in an unauthorized manner is quite common. Of course, some individuals are noted for being especially "naughty" and even disrespectful to others. The fieldworker tells the following story:

Another boy came in and enquired who I was. I replied and asked him if he [lived in this neighborhood] and he said, "Yes." To this the other group said that the boy was

a liar and I should not believe his words or talk to him. The boy called me "madam"

and then "aunty" [in a sarcastic voice] and [rudely] told me to sit down. The whole

group [objected to] this and said he should not call me aunty. [They] said that he

was ill mannered. The boy went away and the group told me that I should be careful

about a few boys in the class as they are very ill mannered and naughty.

Perhaps because of such individuals and groups, many students are much more

appreciative of discipline than might be expected. This is particularly true with respect to

their attitudes toward teachers and administrators:

The teachers are liked on the basis of two contradictory qualities—understanding

the problem of the students and sympathizing with them, and strictness in

discipline. The students therefore consider strictness as a necessary attribute of the

teacher. This, according to the students, not only maintains decorum in the school,

but also discourages a teacher's-pet culture, which may lead to bias and conflict

among students. A teacher who is rational in judging students is highly respected.

Less surprising is the tendency of groups and categories and students to call for the discipline of

others. For example, the fieldworker reports, "[T]he girls [think] this strictness is . . . necessary in

order to discipline the boys, who [they claim] are always the ones to create problems." The

fieldworker reported her own observations confirmed this.

There are certainly limits to students' support of disciplinary measures:

[S]trictness and use of force beyond a certain limit, which [they think] reflects

irrational behavior, is attributed to the teacher's "bad mood." The students who

suffer in such circumstances often withdraw from any kind of interaction with the

teacher and thinks that teacher simply does not like him/her. I have often noticed

that the peers of this student help him/her to look at the positive traits of the

teacher by narrating their own experiences with the teacher, rather than joining in the criticism.

The data from Uttarnagar adds several things to our description of the patterns of discipline found in Indian schools. First, it provides a more detailed account of the way students are organized and used to enforce school rules. Second, it draws attention to students' ambivalence toward student prefects and other student authority figures. On the one hand, many students support the proper enforcement of rules and regulations. They see discipline as a necessary prerequisite for a useful educational experience. Some even appreciate the efforts that prefects go to carry out their assigned responsibilities. On the other hand, they resent it when prefects engage in behaviors that they would not allow in others, or show arrogance and haughtiness toward other students. Third, it shows how students are reluctant to challenge prefects even when they may misuse their authority. While the prefects power is limited it is nonetheless real, and there are definite risks in challenging it. Fourth, and perhaps most interesting it shows how students deal with teachers they consider to be unfair or harsh. First of all they tend to avoid them. If they are late for class, they may skip a class taught by such a teacher. When teachers act particularly harsh, they tend to attribute it to "being in a bad mood." Other students sometimes try to console harshly treated students and to encourage them. We did not hear of an instance where a student complained to a principal or even their parents. This is not to say that such things never happen. The apparent lack of any formal rebellion on the part of students does suggest the taken-for-granted, largely unquestioned authority of teachers—even when they engage in behaviors that might seem unprofessional or even abusive.

Peer Groups

In many respects the salience of peer groups at Uttarnagar falls in between those described in Rampura and St. Anne's. The administration does not articulate and attempt to enforce a rigorous egalitarian ideology as at Rampura, but neither are there the large socio-economic,

cultural differences and strong cliques that were present at St. Anne's. A distinction is made between those who live in government colonies and those from "inner areas" who have a reputation as being especially "naughty."   Nonetheless there is some tendency for Uttarnagar students to stress their equality. The fieldworker asked, "Who stands first in the class [academically]," and interestingly they replied that there is no one as such. "Some are best at one subject and some at another. Here all are equal." The fieldworker comments, "Another exaggeration of how united and . . . cool they are."

The field observer then illustrates the social differentiation within the girls in Class XI A with several examples:

> Aapti had moved away from us and was chatting with a few girls whom she
> identified as her friends. The groupings became obvious: Baruni was getting all the
> attention now and Charita continually backed up what the Baruni was saying. [T]he
> girls on the first two benches of the middle row did the same. The left row seemed
> to comprise of the silent girls. I asked whether there was a . . . formal seating
> arrangement or there are rotations and whether they sat with their group members.
> Baruni replied that there was nothing like that and they talked to everybody. Darika
> now came in and joined the discussion. She too supported what Baruni said.

Obviously Baruni has much more status and influence than many students.

> Peer group boundaries are reflected in the seating arrangements:
> Two rows were for girls and two for boys. My informant, Ladi, was sitting on the
> first bench of the middle row. The studious girls [sat on] the second [row]. Three
> girls [formed] a group and . . . did more girly things like wearing kajal [black eye
> liner], and making their hair in a certain stylish way; [they] sat on the last benches of
> the second row. There were more dyads in the class rather than bigger groups,
> especially among the boys.

As is the case in many schools, friendship ties and cliques seemed to be more salient and exclusive for the younger students. "I asked [a group of girls] in Class IXA who their best friends were and they definitely identified their group. [They added] . . . that the boy [who happened to be sitting with them] was not like them; he often mixed with others, so that they could not trust his loyalty. [This was] said in good humor, [but not entirely in jest]."

Cliques are not only present, but there is often a de facto, if unacknowledged, ranking of members within the group. This becomes even more obvious when some students are able to give directions and assignments to others:

> Then I went to class XI-A and this time sat with another group of girls rather than
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> the usual group . . . . The current group was the one that was good in studies, but
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> were not silent, [like] other studious girls or boys. [Earlier] the Muslim girls told
>
> about [this group's use of] physical "coercion" . . . among friends. They did it
>
> jokingly, but it had serious consequences. A girl from this group, who also seemed
>
> to be a good friend of the topper invited me to sit amongst them and sent another
>
> girl to fetch *mathris*[41] for all of us from the tea shop near the sports ground.

As in many schools, some groups are less integrated than others. This often occurs for those who are newcomers: "Ladi and her friends seemed to distance themselves from most other girls. The reason given by them was . . . "We always sit together, the three of us. We joined this school late and we don't like the students here . . . [We are so close now] nobody would think that we [were] from different schools.'" This group, however, seems to be an exception. For most older students previous ties seem to shape friendships more than present circumstances. If school officials move students from one section of a class another, for example, to balance out the numbers in each section, people tend to maintain their older friendships.

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[41] A snack food similar to a cracker or biscuit.i really do not thik we should give such minute explanations! It will be laughable in India! If you read American books, they presume everyone knows their culture. I do not think I would like to exoticise Indian social and cultural reality in this way by setting it apart and making it an object!

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Some tensions exist between different sections of the same class and different class cohorts: "I asked if the school was united, as in a single school fraternity of the students. She said that . . . [different] sections and senior and juniors had tensions, though not out in the open. However, there was also cooperation [between these different groups]."

Some cliques seem to seek relative isolation. Those who are more gregarious tend to look down upon such groups: "I noticed that a few of the girls remained silent throughout while others at least reacted to my presence and speech with a smile. I enquired about them to Baruni and she said, "Oh don't talk about them, they are weird, they don't talk to us."

Finally, there were individual students who tended to be isolates in various degrees: "Sudha, who had the problem of having fits,[42] came up to me to said, 'Hi,' and asked how I was. When I asked the same question back, she said, 'Ah, don't ask; I am really sad; people are so mean. I feel very lonely and don't know what to do because I want to discuss things with someone, but there's no one like that.'" She presents a very interesting case that illustrates the importance of peer relationships to young people:

> Sudha's father's elder brother is blind and according to her neither her aunt nor
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> their two sons respected [him because] he was earning no more. She was the one
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> with whom her uncle liked to talk and he encouraged her to study and treated her as
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> even a daughter. I told her that her uncle then seemed to be her friend [even
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> though] she always considered herself to be without friends. She gave a thought to
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> it and said, "Yes."

The fieldworker then observes, "This shows how important school friends are with whom they spend most of their time and who had a great impact on their personalities; they often forget about the emotional support they get at home." Sudha's problems may well be physiological or rooted in her home life, but it is clear that she is not without support and sympathy from her uncle.

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[42] It is unclear how much these "fits" were physiological, e.g., epileptic seizures, or more psychological in nature, but whatever the causes, the consequences were to increase her sense of isolation.

Nonetheless the rejection of her peers seems to be the primary source of her sadness and sense of isolation. Peer relations are important in school and outside school settings, in the neighbourhood, the community, hanging out with others, going to film shows, shopping, 'chilling', all this is constitutive of peer group culture among adolescents in urban india. Exclusion and marginalization by peers is experienced harshly by students in any culture and Indian students are not an exception. So far we have focused primarily on subgroup formation inside classrooms. While students have relatively little time outside of class, there are other social formations that were observed on the school grounds:

> Many boys and girls liked to sit near the drinking water taps that lay between the secondary building and the larger playground. There was shade and [this] can be called a hangout place. But I never saw any of the students I interacted with sitting there except for the [Muslim group known as the] "corridor girls," [who went there] . . . very rarely and only for a few minutes. This was a "legal" place it seemed, for I spotted the principal many times talking with the students there in their "free time," and he didn't seem to oppose them [being there]. Mostly the XII standard students and the games people sat there.

> Social differentiation was also a basis of certain forms of peer solidarity. The fieldworker describes this norm.

> The group members of any group are supposed to care for each other. This includes giving company, providing solutions to their petty problems, [and] keeping secrets. Sharing food is another important feature of group bonding. Moreover, the group members also act as go-betweens among couples. Trust and exclusivity are the major criteria for being in a group and their breach is often the only cause of expulsion from the group. Friends also provide financial help.

Another source of differentiation and solidarity is ethnicity. As noted earlier many of the students' families are Garwali or other similar groups from the foothills of the Himalayas. Numerous friendships cross such ethnic lines, but such differences nonetheless shape most peer relationships.

In sum, as in the case of all schools, peer relationships are very important to students. The story of Suryani 's sense of isolation clearly illustrates this. In a sense, the structure of peer groups at St. Anne's and Uttarnagar are the mirror image of one another. At St. Anne's the Hi-Fi girls from rich families are have a strong identity and relatively identifiable boundaries. At Uttarnagar the group with a strong identity is composed of students from the other end of the socio-economic ladder, that is, the "naughty boys" from the inner areas. The boundaries and identity of this latter group do not seem to be as strong and distinctive as the Hi-Fi's at St. Anne's. In general, the relationships and boundaries of most peer groups are weaker at Uttarnagar than they are at St. Anne's or most American high schools. On the other hand, neither the students nor the teachers at Uttarnagar seem as committed to the ideal of egalitarianism as is the case for Rampura. The result is a school that is somewhat in the middle with respect to the power of peer relationships.

Gender

For Rampura gender was discussed in the context of consumerism. It was clear that gender affected the patterns of consumption; girls seemed much more concerned about their looks, and hence were more concerned about such things as clothes, cosmetics, exercise, and dieting than boys. The previous chapter on St. Anne's did not explicitly discuss the issue of gender, in part, because it was an all-girl school. Nonetheless, it is evident that both the school and the broader environment encouraged women to not only be very concerned about their appearance as well as expecting them to become "proper young ladies." There are obviously other aspects of gender relations and we now turn to some of these at Uttarnagar.

Like in most social situations there was some gendered division of labor. Girls more often than boys served as monitors, participated in preparing assembly programs, carried out the housekeeping and organizing activities. For example, during preparations for the school's Diwali celebration:

> [The girls] were busy shifting the benches to the corners of the room . . . and a girl then began sweeping the floor with a broom. There was lots of noise and everyone was shouting at each other to do the work properly. The work was basically done by the girls with only the boys' monitor helping them. Other boys were seated in their respective places giggling away and [saying] that the girls never work at their home and its only today that they are working, and adding [sarcastically], "It will be good for their health."

Girls were more likely to participate in the schools music program and boys more likely to take an interest in sports.

In addition to a gendered division of labor, both girls and boys perceived the opposite group as an "other." This means that with respect to academic marks and other school activities, they are seen as competitors. In most classrooms there are more girls than boys and in one class there are only eight boys out of 55 students. Consequently, girls were often more outspoken and aggressive than might have been the case where they were in the minority. Moreover, the girls frequently characterized the boys as lazy or naughty. The girls said to the fieldworker that if she sat with the boys, "I would know how much they talk, and how funny and naughty they are. The boys smiled . . ." We will see some more concrete examples of this competitive relationship shortly.

A substantial subgroup of girls felt that their male schoolmates and men in general were disrespectful toward women. One girl, Ladi, felt very strongly about this issue was particularly out spoken:

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There is no unity in this class. Specially, the boys have no respect for the girls. (She

was now jumping from one topic to another, her cheeks were red and she was

talking very loudly). "They don't respect girls, no boy respects girls. Didi [an older

girlfriend] and I were going on a bus. [A] boy was just staring at us. Didi is docile;

she didn't say anything, but I scolded the guy and told him to look elsewhere . . .

[T]he guys here also try to 'flirt' with me and. . . . [L]ook at them, they are so

disgusting they always try to hold our hands. She was getting aggressive, I told her

to calm down. "In our earlier school this did not happen, everyone would support

the 'victim' if something like this happened, but here no one's united."

In evaluating this statement, several things need to be kept in mind. First, as suggested earlier (and

will illustrated shortly), the girls were often critical of, and even condescending, toward the boys

about issues that had little to do with gender relations per se. Second, the fieldworker was female

and by her own account she received cooperation and information from the women. Third, it is

probably accurate to say that many of the girls would agree with Ladi's assessment, but they would

not feel as intensely about the matter as she did; Ladi was noted for her relatively aggressive and

outspoken views on many things. Fourth, even Ladi eventually reached a degree of reconciliation

with the boys in her class. The fieldworker notes, "Ladi specially mentioned that her 'idea' about

the guys had changed very much after yesterday's picnic, where they were very chivalrous." This

paralleled the more positive, though not uncritical, portrayal of boys by the other girls. None of

these qualifications are to deny the high degrees of patriarchy and gender inequality that exist in

Indian society and in most of the society's secondary schools.

Other issues came up that were of concern to one sex and not the other. Often these

concerned "private" matters that most felt needed to be hidden from those of the other sex.

The monitor came in an announced, "Girls' the bus fare has been increased to Rs. 5.

Got it, no?" I asked what the bus fare was about—if they were going for a tour. All

the girls gave a hearty laugh and Sumati Sushmita explained that actually it was not bus fare, but the sanitary pads were going to cost Rs. 5 from now on. This was their code to hide it from the boys.

While the girls repeatedly accuse the boys of various kinds of bad behavior, some girls perceived that there was more competition and conflict among the girls themselves than there was among the boys. "I asked Geeta about their seniors, whether they come to monitor their juniors or not, and she replied that they did." [Then she spontaneously added that] the boys were much better in behavior than the girls. I asked why is it so, and both Hemal and Indrani replied that [it was] because girls are jealous of each other and are critical of each other."

Of course, many students found members of the other gender romantically or sexually attractive. As we shall see, only a minority of student acted on these interests, but like most adolescents, they were not oblivious to the opposite sex.[43]

Romance

Students at Uttarnagar are generally from lower socio-economic strata than students at Rampura and St. Anne's, and are less Westernized. Hence, it might be expected that they are much more traditional about gender relations and romance, but this is only partly the case. No one openly went out on dates—as some students at St. Anne's did. Nor did couples rendezvous in the halls between classes and hold hands—as some did at Rampura. There was, however, plenty of interest in the opposite sex at Uttarnagar, and some students were identified as "couples."

The fieldworker reports, "I asked if there were any couples in their class and Esmi pointed me to a girl and a boy who were sitting at the next bench. Keeping their heads low on their school bags and whispering to each other." On another occasion:

. . . [T]he boy monitor comes in to the discussion and calls to me, "Look Ma'am, the class is turned into a lover's point." All of the girls laugh at this and explains to me

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[43] We did not observe any students who expressed homosexual interests.

that there are a few couples in the class. Tabita [says] that she strongly disapproves

of these things as she thinks that it is bad to hide any such thing from parents . . . .

Others had mixed views saying that this would not last long. Many said that this was

now a part of normal school life. "This is common nowadays; many people have

boyfriends and girlfriends." I asked whether these couples met outside school, they

said they were not aware of it.

The fieldworker reports, "Mohin and Bhavya were sitting [together] behind me. I asked them if

they met outside school also [and] they said that they did not, even though their houses were just

across the road." When asked why, they said they were very afraid of their parents finding out

about their relationship. They did, however, talk over the phone.

Several couples did, however, meet outside of school and kept this from their parents. "I

asked [another girl] what [couples] did for fun outside school, if they went together somewhere.

The girl answered that they just went one or two times to the backyard of the metro station, which

was the favorite hangout place for the students, especially for couples." Probing further about the

nature of the behavior these student were engaging in, the fieldworker asked, "[W]hat do people do

at these hangout places? . . . . After noting that they did not wear their school uniforms, the girl

replied, "Oh! Nothing much. We did not enjoy going there. After a few visits we stopped."

In Rampura, boys were more vocal than girls about their interest in the opposite sex. In

contrast at Uttarnagar, girls seem to be less shy and more open about their interest in the opposite

sex than the boys. This could be because the fieldworker was a woman, or due to the well-known

tendency for adolescent young women to mature more quickly than young men. Nonetheless, the

phenomenon seems present and noteworthy. On one occasion when the fieldworker was talking to

a group of girls:

On being asked if they met [the other girls in this group] outside school, they replied

that they did. I asked, "So you go out together?" [A girl responded by deliberately

misinterpreting the question as an inquiry about girls dating one another and replied], "Let's teach Ma'am how to kiss," and all of them laughed. "We hold hands and even kiss" . . . . Now it was obvious that they were trying to add an extra bit of spice on to their answers . . .

On the last day of school before the Diwali holiday, there were no actual classes and the students were celebrating in various ways.

[The girls in a classroom of eleventh grade students] began to sing Bollywood songs [and] challenging the boys—saying that the "girls are best" and "boys are useless, insensitive and dumb." The boys kept looking at them and smiled. Suddenly a girl called Shina stood up and started dancing; others joined. The boys said something and they were immediately challenged by Raju, the second monitor, to dance with [the girls]. They boys backed off . . . a boy who was [making sarcastic] comments was challenged by the girls to compete with Shina. The boys just smiled. Finally, the girls began to dance again, in pairs.

Since the girls repeatedly described the boys as "naughty" and "loud" the fieldworker was puzzled by the latter's reticence: "I asked the girls why didn't the boys dance, in spite of being challenged again and again? "Aren't they feeling ashamed?" Then two girls said that [the boys] would dance only if I went away. I watched the girls dance for a while and then left them to enjoy."

The girls' interest in boyfriends (or those they would like to have as boyfriends) is illustrated by the following account:

Shephali was sitting with Amir, her 'boyfriend,' and on the next bench [were] Badhra and Mohin. Their friends, both from this class as well as other sections, came in because it was tiffin break. Sudha called a boy and asked him about Rishit, (her interest). [She wanted to know] if he got hurt while getting into the bus yesterday, as she had heard . . . . The boy replied that it was not that bad and winked

and smiled at her. Sudha told him not to tell Rishit about [her inquiry], and he gave

a laugh and she shouted at him [not to tell Rishit]. Meanwhile other boys and girls

noticed this and started to tease her. Rishit was sitting right here but not reacting

much.

Of course, none of this is to say that the boys have no interest in girls, only that the girls seem more

open and active in expressing these verbally. As we have seen, even for girls, these expressions of

interest are often shown surreptitiously or through intermediaries.

While gender seems to affect the degree and nature of romantic interests, age seems to have

less effect—and least within the senior school. Romantic relationships seemed to be as common for

Class IX students as it was for their seniors—though undoubtedly some of the reports by younger

students exaggerated the extent of romantic activity in order to show that they were "mature."

For both genders and most age groups much of the communication of romantic interest was

indirect. "Hitting" is one way student furtively express interest and affection toward one another.

The boy's monitor came running after a girl, caught hold of her hand, and gave her a

slap on shoulder. At first the girl was giggling, but as the boy gave another slap—

and as she saw me there—she hid her face with [her] hand and started crying (or

pretended to cry). [T]he other girls . . . ordered the boy to apologize. And after a few

seconds of reluctance he came up to the girl and said, "Sorry," while pulling her head

out from her hands. The girl seemed okay now.

The fieldworker continues:

I have noticed similar "beating scenes" between boys and girls earlier. In fact,

almost every second day I have noticed them—and among students from different

classes [and] age groups—[with] both the boy and the girl later giggling away. This

was also practiced among girls' groups. [It] can be termed as some kind of "rite"

between potential friends and old friends. This is . . . a common thing. Couples

rarely talk to each other in a proper manner in everyone's presence; they just 'hit'

each other or shout at each other . . . . Otherwise they were well mannered to each

other.

During the Diwali celebrations at the school, "Rajni accidentally spilled water on a boy and they all

started throwing water on each other. [The girls exclaimed], 'Boys are so naughty.'" Whether or

not the initial spill was "accidental," the event almost certainly became a variation on "hitting" as a

form of flirting and intimacy.

Teachers often criticize romantic relationships. "The 'strict teacher' mentioned it and

thought that students were falling into these things at an inappropriate age and . . . at an 'alarming

rate.' The students too are preoccupied with 'these things.'"

Many students were also critical of such relationships, and some even took concrete action

to discourage and punish such behavior. One girl said, "She and her friends . . . complained to a

teacher about a couple who were 'showing off too much'" [i.e., engaging in public displays of

affection]. She took the teacher to the backyard of the metro station[44] to catch them red handed,

and [they were] expelled." The key offense seems to have been "showing off too much," not

meeting your boyfriend there, which was not uncommon.

In sum, even in government schools where most instruction and nearly all conversations

are in Hindi (or some other indigenous language), these teenagers are exploring romantic

relationships in ways that are not dissimilar to patterns in the West. This is not to say that these

students are simply copying Western patterns. Rather, it seems to be more a matter of patterns

that tend to emerge in the context of a school as a co-educational formal organization—in which

boys and girls interact with one another on a daily basis. Such relationships are probably also

encouraged by both Western and Indian media. Of course, the organizational structure and the

media do not determine everything. What does seem apparent is that the details of gender

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[44] Some metro stations have a combination parking lot and a small public park behind them.

relations such as whether boys or girls are the most open about romantic relationships, whether students hold hands in the halls, and whether students hide romantic relationships from their parents, is affected by the socioeconomic background of the student and their peers. Open romantic relationships seem more verboten among low class students than among upper class students. Ironically, this is a reversal of the pattern that was prevalent in many parts of the old caste system, where upper caste were usually obsessed with preventing any romantic relationships for women until their marriage was arranged and consummated, and lower class were seen as more casual about romantic and sexual relationships.

Consumption, Fashion and Popular Culture

Very few Uttarnagar students or their families shop in the most fashionable malls or stores. The kind of blatant consumerism that is often characteristic of the newly wealthy upper-middle classes is much less obvious, both among the students and their families. The most basic reason for this is that very few of the families have sufficient income to engage in such patterns. The fieldworker notes, "They shopped mostly from their nearby markets where [goods] are available at reasonable rates." In many respects students at Uttarnagar seem less conscious of consumer commodities as status symbols than students in the U.S. or in the many other Indian schools.

They are not, however, completely oblivious to fashion and its implications for social status. Students will *say* they don't care about such things, but their behavior and the testimony of others belie such statements—as the following incident reveals.

I asked Abha who was cool among them. He said that everyone was cool. Then I asked him what kind of fashion they did. He said that they were not interested in all these things. The girls protested, and said that the [boys] showed off their bracelets, watches and loosened their ties. Sushil gave a smile and shook his head in agreement. He said; "But we are not bad, you know. I was earlier, but after I came

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here I made many nice friends, specially Mohin. After that I have mended my ways."

The girls laughed and agreed with him.

This exchange shows both that the students are by no means oblivious to the status implications of fashion and consumption, but that such matters are less central to their peer dynamics than in many other schools. It also comments on the negative association with being fashionable as Mohin had to 'mend' his ways in order t be acceptable to the group.

Of course, such concerns were not limited to the boys. " I asked [the girls] what clothes they like to wear outside school. Most of them said jeans and tops. Some liked skirts. All of them liked to wear *shalwars*[45] when they went to visit someone. They also expressed their desire to wear nice *lehnga* (skirts) and saris someday." I . . . asked what style means for them. They again gave the names of dresses that they would like to have and Rajul mentioned that she liked to apply 'light makeup.'" Some students were even more fashion conscious.

A girl from class XI-A came up to me. I had met her earlier. A particular thing about her was that she was wearing *kajal* [black eyeliner] and it seemed that she made an effort to look presentable, unlike the other girls who just tied their hair in a usual manner. The same was [true] other two girls in her group. Interestingly all of them were Muslims and shared the same neighborhood.

Such fashion consciousness was not limited to the Muslim girls, but the majority of woman seemed to be critical of too much attention to such matters.

They strongly disapproved of [showing off clothes and fashions] in school – pulling up the skirts, taking the dupattas [in a wrong way, applying too much kajal in an obvious manner. I asked about Poonam –a [Hindu] girl from the "hip girls" group

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[45] *Shalwar* is an abbreviation or contraction of *shalwar kameez*, and traditional form of dress in much of South Asia. The *shalwar* is a set of baggy pants, and the *kameez* is a long loose fitting blouse worn over the *shalwar*. A *dupatta* is a type of scarf or shawl.

who dressed up in this manner. Rajul and others protested that she just tried to "show off" her straight hair and she was actually a "wannabe."[46]

Other students are not adverse to diverting events that were intended for other purposes into displays of status and fashion:

> [On} Teacher's Day . . . every senior would enact a [particular] teacher and present the teacher with flowers, and receive their blessings. But [the seniors] did not come to the classes to actually teach the students. On the contrary [they] clicked photos of each other and [had an informal] "fashion show."   [Since they were allowed] . . . to dress up in saris and all.   They said . . . they did not get a chance otherwise.

Fashions concerns are not limited to clothes. "Then I asked what was the craze in class . . . [The] majority of them said that it was music. Almost every girl could sing." The students are very interested in the latest trends in both Bollywood movie music and in Garwali (and other regional) folk music. Cycles of fashion or not restricted to clothes and music, but are also seen in more localized patterns of behavior.   "They mentioned the senior boys always walked around the school and tried to show 'style' and influence other students. I asked what was the 'craze' in school [for these senior boys] . . . and they replied that roaming around in the school premises was '*THE THING*' that they liked to do."

In addition to its impact on musical taste, the mass media seem to play an important role in shaping not just their sense of style and fashion, but also those who they look up to and would like to model themselves after.

> When I asked them who their ideals were, apart from [family members] . . . .
> [m]ostly [mentioned] the names of film actors. A few of them mentioned Sachin Tendulkar, a famous Indian cricket batsman. [A] girl . . . brought a note book where she has been keeping all the photos of Salman Khan's, a popular male movies star.

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[46] The fieldworker notes that the girls did not actually use the English term "wannabe," but a local equivalent.

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Of course, she hid them from her parents and family. When I asked them about freedom fighters mostly said that they liked Gandhi because of his nonviolence policy.

When it comes to naming role models and heroes, film stars and cricket batsman are not only placed in the same category as Mahatma Gandhi, but are frequently mentioned with more real enthusiasm. This centrality of contemporary celebrities to the popular culture and students' mindset is illustrated by a discussion of the environment in the social studies class. In discussing the laws protecting endangered species, the teacher asked who had been prosecuted for breaking these laws. The students immediately responded as a chorus, "Salman Khan!" Khan, the popular Bollywood film star mentioned above, was convicted in 2006 of hunting an endangered species of Indian gazelle. This is not to suggest that students do not admire Mahatma Gandhi and the other founders of the nation. It is to suggest that the values and symbols of the mass media and Bollywood are much more central in shaping their notions of about consumption, style, and fashion than is the thought of Mahatma Gandhi.

Citizenship

Like in most schools, posters adorn the hall bulletin boards extolling the virtues of the various leaders of the independence movement. At assemblies and school celebrations there were often patriotic dances and songs. Frequently, these were planned and performed by some of the students, but they had to be approved and supervised by the teachers.

The students at Uttarnagar seem less oriented to international relations and therefore relatively little was said about Pakistan, the U.S., China, etc. Hence, their notions of citizenship tended to take the form of relatively unform platitudes. Let us begin with sampling the kind of information they received during formal instruction in their social studies class. Sometimes the teacher lectured and sometimes she drilled students by asking questions. For example:

Teacher: Which elections are we going to have these days?

Student: Vidhan Sabha [lower house of the state legislature]

Teacher: How do they campaign?

Student: Loudspeakers, flags etc.

Teacher: What is [an] important [requirement] for casting a vote?

Student: Age 18 years is required.

Teacher: What about the maximum age?

Student: [The students look puzzled and are silent]

Teacher: There's no such limit. Haven't you seen on TV old people sitting in wheelchairs

                  casting their votes?

The social studies teacher is one of the most dedicated and popular teachers in school, but she goes

through these drills because these are the kinds of questions students will be asked in their exams.

Apparently, the curriculum does not actually deal with the notion of citizenship. The

fieldworker reports:

I asked them if they were taught citizenship in their class and they said not as such.

I then explained what citizenship meant—membership in a specific nation . . .

[T]hey looked confused . . . Then I asked . . . what [does] being a good citizen mean?

They replied that one should serve the country. I asked how, and they said, by

helping each other, and being patriotic, respecting the freedom fighters, and

following their principles. On being asked what principles, they again said, helping

others, being united and non-violent.

After questioning them about their notions of citizenship the fieldworker asked them about

other commonly expressed values.

Then I asked them what they meant by freedom. Uniformly came the reply,

"Freedom means to be able to do whatever we want to do." I asked the boys, "What

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if what we do disturbs others?" They thought for a while and said that freedom should be limited, but rules and discipline should not suppress anything and everything. When I asked the question to the girls they gave the same answers . . . Their understandings of these concepts seem to be conventional notions that they have picked up from parents, teachers, and the media, which they dutifully repeated. This is not to suggest that they are insincere or do not "believe in" these ideas. The fieldworker continues, "I then asked if it was actually practiced by people around them, and they said, in unison, 'No!' I asked why, and Ladi replied that nowadays people are really selfish they don't even think about each other, let alone help each other. In fact, everyone tried to outdo each other and therefore harmed each other."

These students are not old enough to remember much before "nowadays." They have, of course experienced selfishness and conflict in their own lives, both with peers and in their families. (One girl specifically mentioned that brothers often fight over the property inherited from parents, and noted that this had happened in her own family.) But probably more important, these rather pessimistic, if not cynical views, have been picked up from adults. Such views are commonly expressed about politics and politicians. What is especially striking is that teachers, who supposedly are responsible for instilling positive attitudes about Indian democracy, openly disparage the political process. This is a sign of their wanting to instill in students a critical view of the processes of electioneering and political participation during elections in India and is significant as it is government school. In the examples below, it is clear that the students are being compelled to think, to question the processes and not merely submit to them without any form of engaged involvement.

Teacher: What is the consequence of elections?

Student: Prices came down.

Teacher: Is it, or is it just that the politician promises to do so? Don't they try
             to lure people to cast votes for their parties through these promises?

Student: Yes.

A few minutes later the teacher continues comments on the superficial nature of politicians and political campaigning.

> After elections nothing turns out according to our expectations. Sometimes you'll hear people saying that this or that will [happen if they] win, but that doesn't happen . . . . Now what are the strategies of campaigning? The candidates hire people to shout [i.e., cheer for them]. Film stars [come] to speak for them, [but] always come late. [Candidates] also provide food and refreshment. [These] are mostly why people attend these functions. Don't you hear your neighbors' and other people saying how close they had been to a film star, or how good the samosas[47] were?   And they will ask you to come next time too.

She then goes on to say that these are very poor reasons to be involved in the political process and that picking those who will be in authority is a serious business that should be based on less superficial criteria.

> These are not the attitudes of simply this particular teacher. As noted in the opening prologue of the book, the principle of this school told students to ignore elections and concentrate on their studies.

> While few students actually take a real interest in politics or broader social issues, they do continue to profess loyalty to their society and their country.

> I asked them if they actually believed in patriotism and saw any use of the concept in the present day when people always try to move out of the country and do not share the feeling of brotherhood or belongingness to the country. Two of the girls . . . [said] that they believed and people should believe in the value or ideal of patriotism . . . . I asked whether they would like to go abroad if given a chance or

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[47] A small pastry usually filled with spice potatoes and other vegetables.

thought that India was worse than other countries. The two girls replied that they

would stay back . . . but would prefer to go to a less polluted and congested place

than Delhi or if possible make this place better. Many other girls shook their head in

agreement and a few remained silent.

A telling exchanged occurred in the social studies class that suggests they largely think of

citizenship in terms of cultural identity. The teacher asked, "Why did Sonia Gandhi[48] not become

the Prime Minister?" The students replied, "Because she was not Indian." The teacher responded,

"But she had contested the election and to do that the most important criteria is [that you have] . . .

Indian citizenship. So?" There was no response by the students. The teacher added, "She herself

stepped down and remained the party president, [and] said that Manmohan Singh was most suited

to be the Prime Minster."   The tendency to taken for granted assumption that cultural identity and

citizenship are synonymous is obvious and once again, the teacher was trying to build awareness

through very topical and pertinent examples.

In sum, we see that the notion of citizenship held by the students at Uttarnagar seems to

combine ideas of cultural identity, conventional platitudes about loyalty and solidarity, and—on the

part of the school, an effort to bring about an awareness of the corruption in Indian schools and

thereby develop a questioning mind and even critical consciousness among the students.

All of the schools we have discussed so far are in the greater Delhi area. Now we turn to a

school in North East India, which is both geographically remote and culturally different.

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[48] Sonia Gandhi was originally from Italy. Her husband, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1989 while he was campaigning. In 1998 she became the president of the Congress Party. She led the party to victories in 2001, and in 2009. There is a strong tradition in South Asia of politicians inheriting political power from their parents and spouses. For example, Rajiv Gandhi was the son of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister. Nonetheless, at the time that the students and teachers were discussing Sonia Gandhi, she was probably the most powerful political figure in the country, and it is revealing that the students did not consider her to be "Indian."

Chapter 5: St. Mark's Higher Secondary School, Shillong

The Data

The data were gathered by informal interviews and direct observation. In addition to fieldwork conducted by one of the authors (Milner), 28 college students who were third year sociology majors conducted fieldwork under Milner's direction. Each student made observations on from one to four occasions and wrote up fieldnotes. All fieldworkers participated in an all day workshop funded by the United States Education Foundation in India (Fulbright Program) where they were trained in how to carry out participant observation in a secondary school system. This is in addition to the regular training in methods that they receive as part of their course work. The observations were conducted primarily in the months of May and June 2007. Milner also interviewed the principal, vice principal, and several teachers.

The Region and the City

Since this area is culturally and geographically different from most of India, a more extensive description is in order. North East India, which is an official government category, includes seven states located mainly north or east of Bangladesh, and hence relatively isolated from the rest of India. Many areas are hilly or mountainous and slash and burn agriculture has been the most common traditional form of production. It is a tribal region, which means that the indigenous population is composed mainly of tribes whose languages are Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic in origin (rather than the Indo-European and Dravidian languages common to most of India).   The population is traditionally animist rather than Hindu or Muslim. Roughly half the population has become Christian, though this varies by state and district. In the North East resentment against those whose cultural origins are from other regions of India is common, in part, because these "outsiders" have been vastly overrepresented in commerce, government bureaucracies, and educational institutions. Moreover, many think the central

government has neglected the region, especially with respect to development funds. Many areas have long had armed insurgency groups demanding greater autonomy or independence from India. In some areas, though not in Shillong, bombs go off with some regularity. There is a large military presence in the area and it is not unusual to encounter police and soldiers with automatic weapons patrolling the streets. Many people from other parts of India consider the region backward, underdeveloped, and troubled.

Shillong, the capital of the state of Meghalaya, has long been characterized as "the Scotland of India" because of its scenery and moderate temperatures. It has a number of colleges, schools, and the most prestigious university in the region, North East Hill University (NEHU). The tribal group known as Khasis (and closely related groups) makes up about two-thirds of the population in the state and is dominant in the Shillong area. Yet, because of its educational and military facilities large numbers of non-Khasis live in Shillong.

The School

St. Mark's Higher Secondary School was founded in the early years of the twentieth century. It has about 3000 students from grades I-XI. It was founded by a Catholic order which operates schools in a number of other locations in India and in over one hundred other countries. St. Mark's is an all-male institution through class 10. It admits women into classes 11 and 12—just as many girls' schools admit men into this "senior-secondary" level. All of St. Mark's senior-secondary students in these grades choose either a science or a commerce stream. At St. Mark's there are usually two or three sections (i.e. class rooms) for each grade for each of the two streams. For example, students in grade 12 of the science stream are divided into three different sections with about 68 students in each section and each in a separate classroom.

Academics

Like in the other schools, students and teachers were preoccupied with how well they will do on the central examinations. A group of five boys in the class 12 science section characterized the examinations as "scary" and "a headache." They said they usually did nothing but study for a whole week before—in addition to the usual work they did during the school year. Another group of three boys, one Assamese and two Khasi, said "they find exams interesting." They claimed that they "never put off their studies (that is they study every day)." A group of five Khasi girls, all of them seventeen, said:

> [T]he teachers were very cooperative and encouraging. They were [usually] free and
> frank with them, though some of them were very strict and not so friendly. They got
> homework and assignments almost every day and regular test were conducted. After
> school . . . they would either go home straight or go for coaching classes that they took
> with other private teachers.

Virtually every group of students we observed and talked with mentioned the importance of "studies," "marks" or exams. Here are some excerpts from fieldnotes:

- Five Hindu Bengali boys: "Said not interested in having girlfriend because cannot concentrate on studies . . . . Said they too wanted to do research when they went to college. Care about marks and their future profession."

- Four "beautiful girls" in 12th Science, three Khasis and a Bhoi[49]: "Besides marks, [they] care about their looks and character.

- Six class 12 girls: "Hang out together at school and usually have lunch together. Rarely hang out after school because "we are all science students and we have to concentrate more with our

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[49] Bhoi is a dialect of Khasi and many using that dialect live in Ri Bhoi District that lies between Shillong and Guwahati, which is the capital of Assam and the location of the airport that services both Meghalaya and Assam.

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studies."

- Two Bengali girls, eventually joined by four Nepali girls: "All made good marks and very concerned about this. Wanted to become Chartered Accountants or M.B.A.'s and make their parents proud."

- Four girls from different cultural background: Described themselves as "fun loving" and fashion conscious, but: "Exams very important to them. There was competition among them, but it did not hamper their friendship."

Undoubtedly some of these students were exaggerating the diligence with which they pursue their academic work. Nonetheless these expressions indicate that students feel under great pressure to do well academically. Such pressure is not just from parents and teachers, but also from peers. As a group of class 10 males said, "respect and status come from good academic performance."

Discipline

The consequences of doing poorly academically went beyond receiving a low grade or personal embarrassment. A fieldworker reports, "My attention was drawn toward five students who [were] holding their books and seem[ed] to be studying. It's odd to see someone studying during lunch break [especially when it is] not . . . exam time . . . They told me they were having a test [and] that they have to do well in order . . . to avoid punishment."

Academic performance was not the only area in which students were disciplined. There was the usual morning assembly in which students lined up by class. As in most Indian schools students were expected to wear uniforms, and on at least some mornings they were inspected to see that they were conforming to the prescribed dress code. When asked about this a group of boys from class 12 Commerce said, "It was very strict inside the school premises . . ." Some students complained about the level of discipline. Six girls who spoke fluent English—some Khasi, some Nepali, some Bengali—were asked what they found cool in the school. Instead of saying what was cool, they complained about what

they thought was "uncool": "They said things are boring since rules and regulations are strictly maintained." Observations were also carried out at, St. Luke's Secondary School, another Catholic school in the city. This was an all-boys school that only went through grade 10. Several fieldworkers comment on "how much louder and unrestrained the boys at St. Luke's were compared to the relatively well-behaved boys at St. Mark's." The discipline at St. Mark's was not, however, especially Draconian, nor was it the case that students were always quiet and orderly. Following his first trip to St. Mark's one fieldworker wrote: "[It was raining slightly] and we entered the corridor [from the main entrance]. The first thing that I noticed was that it was very noisy—students laughing, murmuring, shouting—just like a fish market . . . The corridor was like a playground for the junior students. They were running here and there and in different directions." Another reported, "[I was] surprised by the hugeness and how noisy it was." In short, St. Marks was a relatively large and reasonably ordered school, but the students still expressed plenty of youthful exuberance.

While most students were quite concerned about their academic performance others were openly deviant in this respect. A group of about nine Khasis boys claimed they were largely indifferent about their studies. A fieldworker reports: "I asked whether they had a group motto or theme. They replied their motto was "TLOT" (i.e., "weak" in Khashi). They explained that they tried to sleep a lot during class and that when in class 9 seven of them failed the final examination, since they were not serious about their studies—even though they claimed some of them were quite intelligent." There were certainly other students only half-heartedly pursued their studies. This seemed to be especially the case among some class 11 students since, unlike class 10 and class 12 students they did not have to take external examinations.

A form of exercising authority among students is that of bullying other students. This is common in many schools in India as in other countries around the world. The age of the students is important as is gender as we saw in Uttaranagar school in the last chapter. Apparently, students had

varying experiences in this regard. A number of students claimed that there was no bullying and that students showed respect toward one another. Other students, however, claimed that bullying did occur. One form seemed common and in some respects authorized: "When five girls from the commerce section were asked about bullying, they claimed the class captains were quite arrogant and bullied others, but said "they were supposed to do this.") A group of Khasi girls admitted that they often did not get along well with non-Khasis. One of these girls "confessed they [the Khasis and other tribals] called the other [non-tribal] groups in their class 'the intelligent group' and considered them to be 'different'" . . . . Depending on the context and the way an individual used the phrase it could imply envy, resentment, or sarcasm . . . . "The [tribal] boys in the class at times bullied the non-tribal 'intelligent' boys and would often copy down their homework."

While there was disagreement or different experiences about bullying, all agreed that there were occasionally fights. Some of these were simply personal disagreements, but others were linked to ethnicity, and socio-economic class. Apparently such fights had been more common in the past, but students reported that the principal had cracked down on this, and they were now relatively rare—at least in the school itself.

Peers and Inequality

The peer structure at St. Mark's is more pluralistic and complex than in the other schools. To give the flavor of this I will briefly describe a number of different groups.

Group 1: Five Khasi girls, all seventeen, said they always hung out together as a group: ate lunch, went to washroom, sat together. They did not meet after school as they lived quite a distance from each other and had little spare time. Friendships seem to be restricted to the school setting and the "closeness" of the group seems to be limited: "when [the fieldworker] asked a girl what music another girl liked to listen to, she said she didn't know. In addition . . . the girls didn't remember each other's birthdays." "They did not mix . . . much with other groups of non-Khasis girls. When asked why,

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they simply said that they did not get along very well." They perceived the non-tribal students as "much smarter and more intelligent."

Group 2: Five boys who were Hindu Bengalis claimed that they "were all quite cool." They said they were not interested in having girlfriends because it would mean they cannot concentrate on studies. During holidays they spend time together and sometimes go to parties, but do not drink alcohol because they are all "good boys." This group seemed to be very concerned about their grades and their future profession.

Group 3: Six boys conversed in Nagamese, the language of one of the states in the North East. They like to party on the weekend, which can include drinking, and smoking. Since they lived in a hostel, they said their parents could not control this, but some parents asked them to keep this within limits. They said their group did not have a name, but when asked to characterize their group they said they were "the naughtiest."

Group 4: This group of two Bengali and two Khasi girls said that they were friends with everyone, but had one or two 'best friends'. They use Khasi when speaking to other Khasis, but English for everyone else. They said they had no leader and were all equal. They live in different neighborhoods and don't hangout out after school. No boyfriends; don't have time; they have to get younger siblings ready for school and go to tutoring classes at night from 7:00-10:00. They all follow the latest fashions as much as they can with respect to dress, earrings, and hairstyle. Go to friends' birthday parties and other special occasions, but not to [night] clubs.

Group 5: This group of Class 10 boys included six Khasis, one Mizo, and two Bengalis who had been friends since Class 4. They usually speak English. Two said they had girlfriends. They admire hip-hop fashions, and like Western music including: punk rock, hip-hop, and heavy metal. They specifically mentioned The B-52s [an American New Wave rock band]. They have a leader who was a good-looking, well-built guy, who all said was a "good guy."

Group 6: Four boys in 12th Commerce class all liked cricket and football, but were very into their studies. Most were interested in older girls in other schools, but one had a crush on someone in the class. Each has his own style copied from videos; one liked to dress punk. Sometimes they partied at Tango, a small club and bar, but this required money, which they usually did not have. They really care about their exams and want to be successful.

Group 7: A group of five Nepali boys in class 12 Commerce said they "were naughty, but cool. Claimed to be . . .'very freaky.' They partied a lot, but most of the time only with guys. Two had girlfriends. Style and fashion was considered very important and that they [were] big fans of Rock n Roll. When asked what is cool they replied "the environment," [i.e., the environmental movement]. They complained that some girls were "very touchy and feel themselves like Queen Elizabeth."

Group 8: One Khasi and four Bengali boys were all busy solving math problems. Four claimed to have girlfriends. They complained about their parents [apparently not wanting them to have girlfriends] and they asked the interviewer to explain to them the notion of "the generation gap." When asked what they cared about other than grades, they said, "Their parents' hopes, girlfriend's wishes, earning money and gaining a high socio-economic status." They claimed, "Being 'cool' centers around having spiky hair styles, being stylish in walk and talk, and, of course, being good in studies. Fashion means a lot to them, which is manifest in their going for branded stuff and also having a haircut in one of the AC [Air Conditioned] parlors . . . ." According to them, "'Gossip is for girls as partying is for boys." Then female fieldworker asked them to characterize their group and they replied, "Sister, listen! We are like . . . like the title of the Hindi movie . . . *Good Boy, Bad Boy*; we are the shining gems and the rugged stones of our class." . . . Later, some girls nearby said they were "the most intelligent as well as the naughtiest boys in the class."

When students were asked about status differences within friendship groups, most claimed, "We are all equal." A few groups will acknowledge having a leader, but deny any significant distinctions

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within the group. Initially they say the same thing about status rankings between groups. For example, a field worker talks with six girls eating lunch together in 12th Commerce classroom, one Bengali and five Khasis. They asserted that no ranking existed within or between groups, though they acknowledge that they share their secrets and gossip selectively. A second observer talked with another group of five girls in Class 12. They claimed parents' status and wealth did not matter for school friendships; they would mix with anyone provided they get along. A third field worker spent time with a large group of Class 10 boys of diverse ethnic backgrounds. They said there was no ranking of individuals within groups or between groups. Yet, when the topic of fighting came up they said, "Fights are invariably inter-group and often the issues are trivial." However, "the fights are often brutal" and according to the students, fights often serve as a way of asserting group superiority. The fieldworker notes, "This contradicts their earlier no-ranking claim." A fourth fieldworker directly confronted a group about inequality:

> They all said that there is no such thing [as ranking and inequality among the students].
> I told them . . . I do not believe you . . . you're saying there is no distinction between
> tribes . . . ?! Two of them eventually went away and I was left alone with one boy.
> Gradually this guy began to open up . . . He said there is inequality between students,
> the smart, the average, the weak . . . the smart ones tend to show off and boast in class
> . . . even the teachers also tend to make them the first priority when comes to selecting
> participants for competitions. The weak are always left behind. He went on saying
> there is a gap between the rich and the poor also. The rich are always with the rich . . .
> and mostly [people] go with their own tribes . . . because of the security . . . . He said
> for him it is to avoid being humiliated and abused by other tribes and this is very
> relevant from adolescence onward.

Unlike Ramapura School there are identifiable cliques with relatively stable boundaries and many groups are ethnically homogeneous. Yet, there are many friendship groups that contain members from varied

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tribal, religious, and linguistic backgrounds—and nobody seems to care. Moreover, there seems to be more cross group friendships and more relaxed boundaries than in many U.S. schools. The structure of groups in St. Marks seems to come much closer to that of pluralistic high schools in the U.S. (see Milner 2004, chap. 6)

Romance

Like in other parts of India, parents and adults often object to their adolescents having romantic relationships. Hence, romance was often a form of deviance that was hidden from parents and other adults. A multiethnic group of four girls described themselves as "'fun loving' and said that partying and dating "was an issue for them because their parents were very strict and would not allow them to date or party." Though this group did not explicitly admit that they had surreptitious romantic relationships, other students did. One group of boys, two Khasis and two Nepalis, said, "They loved having a girlfriend and dating in secret." Three Khasi girls "at first claimed they had no boyfriends and said they were interested in their 'careers and ambitions. One girl eventually admitted she had a boyfriend 'much older' than she was."

Actually, romantic relationships are fairly common, and were often a source of status among peers. This was especially the case for some groups of boys. For girls having a boyfriend was usually a source of pride. One group of girls said jokingly, "Life without a boyfriend is like a girl without hope." Romantic relationships were, however, often kept disguised from parents and teachers. There were exceptions to this. A Catholic sister was one of the fieldworkers and she asked a group of girls, "Do you have any boyfriends? They all said yes. One girl confidently said, 'I even go for dates and parties.' I asked her what about your parents? She said they all know about my relationship so there is not much problem." Most girls and some boys were, however, more reticent about admitting they had boyfriends or girlfriends. Perhaps because of the need for discretion in the school setting, a number of students

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seem to prefer a girlfriend or boyfriend who goes to a different school. This also seems to make it easier for students to concentrate on their studies. Several girls said they were interested in boys, but that "it was not yet time."

Consumption and Fashion

The six Naga boy's (Group 3 above) who partied, drank, and characterized their group as "the naughtiest," nonetheless expressed reticence about consumerist behavior. A fieldworker asked the group if they owned bikes, cars, cell phones, etc., but they said no. Then she asked if they pressured their parents to get such things. "They told me that their parents know what is good or bad for them [and that] they could rely on their parent's decision. They emphasized that the parents were the culprits if their children got spoilt. I asked if they would like to work part-time. They said, 'Yes! . . . to earn extra money.'" Here we see the ambivalence that many students shared: a desire for more money to spend on the latest fashions and consumer goods, but a rejection of—or at least doubts about—the more affluent lifestyles portrayed in the media and characteristic of the wealthier young people in urban India.

This is not to say that some students did not try to use money to increase their status among their peers. For example, an observer notes, "[In the canteen I saw] a boy buying chocolate and tossing it up to the sky just to get attention." Another fieldworker reports, "At the school coffee bar one boy was buying a girl a cup of chocolate . . ." Several groups of boys said they liked to party and go to clubs or bars. This behavior is, however, a long way from the lavish parties in hotels that some of the richer students in Delhi organized. Part of this relative restraint is simply a matter of income levels. Meghalaya per capital income and GDP are well below the mean for India and certainly for metropolitan areas like Delhi and Mumbai.

Nonetheless, many students are quite fashion conscious. A groups of four girls said, "They follow the latest fashions as much as they can with respect to dress, earrings, and hairstyle." Concern with fashions and looks was not limited to clothes. "I saw three girls . . . in a corner of the corridor. They were holding a mirror . . . [and] were applying creams on their face and were combing their hair. They were using makeup. Just as they were about to finish I went to them and asked . . . what they were doing. At first they were reluctant to tell me, but then they told me they were applying makeup. I asked if these were allowed in school. They told me 'no' and that if found out [the cosmetics] would be taken away . . ." Of course, concerns about fashions and looks was not unrelated to interests in the opposite sex. Five girls said they wanted to be stylish; otherwise "no boys will look at them."

If anything the boys were more fashion conscious. Five boys made it very clear that "they care about fashion and style, especially those set by their favorite bands or celebrities. They called it 'cool fashion'." Other groups also modeled themselves after images in the media. A group of six Khasi, one Mizo, and two Bengalis admired hip-hop fashions and liked Western music: punk rock, hip-hop, and heavy metal. Copying outsiders, however, is not simply "Westernization" per se. Five Naga boys said they like to wear low-wasted pants, use hair gel, and have pierced ears and tattoos. "I asked if they were following the American style. They corrected me that it is not the American, but the Korean style they were following." A group of class 10 boys stressed that more was involved than wearing the right clothes: "the 'hepness' of hairstyle was . . . a fashion statement." Imported hair gel was a fashion symbol. A group of class 12 boys stressed the importance of having stylish shoes.

It is clear that young people in even this relatively remote place are well aware of international products, images, and media. As one observer recounts, "The first thing that struck me about the school was the television. Students, probably belonging to the smaller [younger] classes were watching the

Sponge Bob Square Pants cartoon[50] and clapping and imitating its tune." One student specifically talked about outside influences and globalization:

> "When I asked what they thought about American youth and their lifestyle, one [said]
> that she loved the atmosphere and the exposure they received. Be it in books,
> education opportunities, and other aspects like fashion, technology, productive
> information, etc. [Americans] seemed to be more advanced. They envied that they get
> to do part-time jobs . . . When asked if they would . . . take up part-time jobs, they said
> their parents would not be happy with that. Another girl said she loved the dressing
> sense of boys and girls [in America]—punk and off-the-wall styles. Prom nights also
> interested them. They were quite disappointed that schools in India didn't have such
> opportunities. The only thing they did not like was the typical teenage movie portrayal
> [of American teenagers]. One of them remarked that if such movies really reflect the
> truth—that people are branded . . . geeks and nerds [and] bullied and looked down
> upon, [and] popular 'girlie groups' getting all the attention and popular boys likewise,
> [and] looks being more important than the qualities of the person—she was not in favor
> of this.

In short, students in Shillong were at least as fashion conscious as students in other parts of India and they were probably even more influenced by foreign styles than young people from other areas. On the other hand, more limited budgets, parental supervision, and the requirements to wear school uniforms limited such inclinations.

Nationalism and Citizenship

As already indicated, feelings in the North East about national identity and the Indian state are highly variable, ambivalent, and often conflicted. Because this is a sensitive issue and because St.

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[50]An antimated TV cartoon character who is a sea sponge. The character and his friends were created by Stephen Hillenburg and initially broadcast on the *Nickelodeon* channel in the U.S.A starting in 1999.

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Mark's was the first school that was studied, we deliberately did not instruct the fieldworkers to specifically raise the issue of national identity, patriotism, and loyalty to the Indian state. Hence all of the data available about this issue were acquired fortuitously or indirectly. Three conversations Milner had with Indian colleagues were particularly telling. One was with a Khasi social scientist in Shillong who serves on a couple of international committees. He stressed two issues. First, he complained about the central government's neglect of the area. Second, with considerable feeling and emotion he bemoaned the rate at which "the people are being asked to change." These two concerns express the conflicted and even contradictory attitudes of tribal people in the region: wanting something new, but reluctant to give up their traditional identity and customs. This ambivalence is hardly unique to this region. Two other conversations illustrate the considerable cultural difference that remains between tribal and non-tribal groups in the region. One was with another Khasi social scientist that lives in Delhi. I was discussing with him collecting data in Shillong schools. I mentioned the name of a graduate student in his department who was from Shillong as a possible fieldworker. He responded, "She won't do; she is Assamese[51] and the tribal students will never tell her what they are really thinking and feeling." On another occasion I was conversing with a group of three Bengalis on the faculty of a college in Shillong. One said, "We were all born here, but we will never really be a full part of this place"—meaning the local, tribal oriented culture and society. Keep in mind in all three of these instances the informants were all well-educated professional academics and that the city of Shillong and the state of Meghalaya are one of the best integrated and most peaceful areas in the North East. The key point is not that the tribal people in the Shillong area want to separate from India, but such conversations do indicate significant social divisions and tensions.

These divides are less intense and less evident in the school setting of St. Mark's, but, as we have seen, they are nonetheless there. The students who are bullied are generally non-tribal nerds who perform well academically. Fights are often between different tribal groups. On the other hand, many of the students have close and meaningful friendships across tribal and ethnic divisions. Moreover, young people, especially those who do well academically see their future opportunities in terms of the broader Indian society. The jobs they hope to get—or perhaps more accurately the ones they fantasize about—are professional jobs with multinational corporations or appointments to the top Indian civil

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[51] Assam is the state immediately north of Meghalaya, but most of its population is non-tribal. Assamese is an Indo-European language historically related to Bengali and Oriya.

services. In a number of contexts young people refer to the "generation gap" to stress what they see as the differences between their views and their parents, including their sense of being part of the broader Indian society. For example, a group of boys, four Bengalis and one Khasi, said that they usually spoke Hindi. When asked why they spoke Hindi, since it is not the mother tongue of any of them or the language of instruction in this English medium school, they responded, "Because it is our national language." It remains at least uncertain whether these new, more national attitudes will be sustained.

Special Events: Sports Day

It seems likely that one of the reasons for the generation gap in people's feelings of attachment to the Indian state and the broader Indian society is due to the unapologetic nationalistic orientation of many of the rituals that children participate in during school. The morning assembly with the singing of the national song and various quasi-military formations and inspections are the most obvious example. But perhaps even more important are the special events such as Independence Day, Republic Day, and Sports Day, Teacher's Day, etc. Students often spend many hours preparing for these programs that usually contain a considerable amount of national rhetoric and ideology. The following are the fieldnotes reporting on of Sports Day at St. Mark's, which happen to occur the first day Milner arrived in Shillong.

My wife and I arrived in Shillong last night and are staying at the guesthouse on the grounds of St. John's College. About 9:30 this morning we began to hear band music and singing. By looking out our back window we could see a stadium full of school children, hear various songs and announcements as well as cheering. You could also see the various classes of students marching in formation. There were probably 2000-3000 students and spectators, though this is a rough estimate. All announcements, instructions and speeches were in English.

About 10:30 we walked over to the stadium. When we entered we were given a program by ushers who were obviously older students. The program indicated the event was St. Mark's "Sports Day." A teacher soon spotted us and instructed a couple of students to take us to "the seats in the front." This was completely across the stadium so many saw us being taken to the seats marked "Invitees."

Almost immediately it was announced that classes would present their "drills." They started with the two youngest grades (I believe 3-4). They lined up . . . in ordered line formations about 4-5 feet between each child. There were four different groups each one with a leader standing a bit in front. All of these groups faced the side of the stadium toward the reviewing stand and us where the school officials and the chief guests were seated. Music started and they carried out a combination dance routines and calisthenics in rhythm with music over a loud speaker. They had obviously spent a lot of time practicing and most took their efforts very seriously. The younger group did their routine to a count of three. The next age group did theirs to a count of eight and had a more complicated routine. The oldest group had a yet more complicated routine, but seemed to take it less seriously. Each age group filled up about 75 percent of the total soccer field, though the number of students performing declined as for the more senior classes—probably because many young people finish or drop out of school before reaching the more senior levels.

Next there was a speech by a priest who told a parable about a young boy named "Peter" encountering a magical figure in the forest who granted his wish to be older. He soon found that he was an old man close to the end of his life, and of course, he wanted to be younger. The moral was don't waste your time wishing you were at

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some other stage of your life, but live each moment to the fullest. This talk went on about 15 minutes.

Next the chief guest was asked to address the group. He was a member of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (an "MLA") who was "leader of the opposition." He began by recognizing about a dozen categories of people that were present: "Madam Principal, honored guests, parents and family members," etc. The thrust of his remarks were that sports were important, in fact, just as important as "education." He only talked about 5-7 minutes. After each speech the chairwoman, who seemed to be the principal, thanked the speaker for their valuable and inspiring remarks summarizing very briefly the thrust of what they had said.

Then the various athletic contests began. It started with 200 meter sprints by various age groups with each individual identified with a particular hostel or "house." Of course, the members of each hostel cheered for their representative.

About noon we had to leave because of a previous appointment, but the events went on until about 3:30 or 4:00. The drills and the whole event were modeled after a quasi-military discipline, and individual and group competition. The intended result was a form of both social differentiation—some won and some lost—and an underlying form of solidarity. Implicitly it seemed a form of "good-citizen education" needed for patriotism and support of "the nation and the state"—though none of this was said.

Conclusion

St. Mark's is a large Catholic school that in broad outlines is fairly typical of other such schools in India. What make it relatively unique are the complex tribal and ethnic backgrounds of the students and its location in an area that is in many respects marginal to the mainstream of Indian society. This results in friendship networks that are more pluralistic and more complex than in most schools. While students

are well aware of the broader society and of global cultural trends, they participate less in consumerist behavior because of more limited resources. For the most part they perceive themselves as loyal and patriotic citizens of India, but they are well aware of the tensions between both their region and the rest of the country and of the tensions and conflicts between tribal and ethnic groups within the region.

Catholics are certainly not the only religious group to establish schools; numerous Protestant Christian schools exist throughout India. Muslim groups have founded many schools. Much less well known are the schools founded by the Jains, an ancient indigenous Indian religious group. It is to such a school we now turn.

Chapter 6: Ahimsa School

The Data

Runa Lahan collected the data between September 5 and December 20, 2008. She was an M.A. student in sociology at the Delhi School of Economics. Like in the study of other schools she observed students both in and out of their classroom and interviewed the principal and some of the teachers. Extensive fieldnotes were kept and this information was supplemented by information from public sources and the schools website.

Jainism

Ahimsa School was founded by Jains, adherents to one of the ancient religions of India. A brief note is required about Jainism. Jains make up about one percent of the Indian population and are often concentrated in urban areas, including Delhi. The key founder of Jainism is Mahavira, whose traditional dates are 599 BCE to 527 BCE. This is roughly the same period in which Buddhism was founded and like Buddhism, Jainism was a reform movement in criticism of the Vedic religion of the time, which was the precursor to Hinduism. Accordingly, it shares some of the characteristics of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Jainism is noted for its concern for ritual purity and a disciplined life. It attributes sacredness to all life, and emphasizes detachment from worldly concerns. In addition to the laity, Jains have both male and female monastic orders that lead quite acetic lives and are the exemplars for detachment and the ordered life. There are two monastic sects, one who wear no clothes and one that wears white seamless robes. Agriculture typically involves dealing with impure substances, many unpredictable contingencies such as the weather, and the killing of animals and insects. Hence, Jains have traditionally avoided agriculture and engaged in trading and commerce. One result is that they tend to be wealthier and better educated than Indians of other religious traditions. Their wealth should not be overstated and is not usually expressed in conspicuous consumption and display, since a deep streak of asceticism is at the center of the religion and in some ways reflected in their lifestyles.

The School

They operate a number of schools in the Delhi area. This school is located in a quite urbanized area of the city. It is a comprehensive school that includes students from classes I to XII—though we will focus primarily on the senior secondary school. Nearby is a Gurdwara (i.e., Sikh temple and meeting house). Next to the school gate is a row of small shops and not far away is a major bazaar.

> Their prosperity is also reflected in the school facilities. The fieldworker notes:
>
> The school compound is huge and big; surrounded by walls. There is the parking place inside the school compound. On the other side of it is the sports field. The infrastructure is good and is well maintained . . . . [T]he lobby is not that spacious but is decorated nicely with paintings which are framed properly: paintings of birds, flowers and some modern arts. There were chairs to sit outside the Principal's room . . . . [W]hat strikes me [about] the school [is] not only the building itself, [but] inside it has a fine decorations . . . . [The table outside] the Principal's door is decorated with flowers. It's very neat and clean.

Again, this should not be overstated; the facilities were not extravagant or luxurious, but they were a cut above most secondary schools in India.

The religious origins of the school are apparent. An image (*murty*) of Mahavira is behind the principal's desk. Jain mantras are used in the morning assemblies, Jain magazines are found in the library, and special note is made of Jain holidays. The Jains' tendencies toward asceticism are reflected in the schools admission criteria. Each applicant is scored on a scale of zero to one hundred. Five points are given if the parents do not smoke and five are given if they do not drink alcohol. The school is not, however, a religious seminary or proselytizing agency; it follows the usual government mandated curriculum and it operates in most respects like other schools in India.

The secondary section of the school (classes 9-12) of the school is relatively small; there are twenty-two teachers and about 450 students.[52] Unlike many schools there are no regular classes on Saturday. "The teachers need to come to the school and some of the students also come if they have some work . . . This day teacher's take extra classes for the under achievers."

In contrast to the secondary section of St. Anne's, where only the principal and one of the staff were Christian, all of the teachers and officials at Ahimsa are Jains. However, like St. Anne's, in which most of the students are non-Christian, most of the students in this Jain operated school are either Hindu or Sikh. The school is owned and run by a charitable trust, and most of the trustees and board of management are Jains. This board employs and supervises the principal and teachers. Most day to day decisions are made by principal or senior teachers who serve as his assistants.

Educational Philosophy and Academic Ambiance

This school specifically proclaims that its goal is broader than producing students who do well on examinations. On the home page of the school's website is the following welcome from the principal:

> According to Martin Luther King, *"Education must enable one to sift and weigh*
>
> *evidence, to discern the true from false, the real from the unreal and the facts from*
>
> *fiction . . . Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education."* This is what
>
> we, at Ahimsa try to achieve and impart to our students. We aim at the holistic
>
> development of a personality, rather than aiming at one particular aspect. For this
>
> the child should not only excel in studies, but also in all other areas . . . .

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[52] The school did not provide actual enrollment numbers, but public records show that in 2008 212 students appeared for class 10 examinations and that 110 students appeared for class 12 examinations. It also reports that this constituted 100 percent of the students in each of these classes. It is reasonable to assume that classes 9 and 11 had approximately the same number of students and hence the total in the senior school is approximately 450.

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But the only other data on the webpage that indicates the schools success in producing "a good human being" are the student's scores on the centrally administered examination.[53] This is not to suggest that the school is not sincere in trying to develop a broad concept of education, but despite this there are strong cultural and institutional pressures that divert most educational energies and concerns toward scores on centralized examinations.

Discipline

Like many other schools, the administrators, teachers, and to some degree the students, emphasize the importance of discipline and attempt to recruit parents support in attaining this end. The second half of the principal's webpage welcoming statement focuses on maintaining a disciplined student body through the use of the school diary:

> We at Ahimsa give our best and also need your co-operation making the child a good human being . . . . [The] Student's Diary is one of the means by which the parents can keep track of their child's performance and regularity at school. Therefore I take pleasure in presenting this school diary. You are requested to read through the entries in the diary [regularly], and sign all the communication notes.

Printed in the beginning of the diary is basic information about the school including the following rules and exhortations:

DO:

- Be regular in bringing school diary and I-card [i.e., identification card] every day.
- Come to school well-groomed and in proper uniform with shoes well-polished.

  Boys: get a regular haircut.
- Be regular in attendance and never be late to school.
- Be courteous and respectful to parents, teachers and visitors.

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[53] In 2008 ninety percent of Ahimsa students were in the first division on the class 10 examination and eighty-four percent were in the first division on the class 12 examinations.

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- Be kind to trees, flowers and animals.

- Look after the property of your school. Help to keep it clean and tidy.

- Keep your classroom clean and tidy. Throw waste paper, wrappers etc. into the waste paper basket.

- Read the newspaper daily and ensure that you carry it home for further reference.

DON'T:

- Bring articles of value such as rings or pieces of jewellery (sic) to school. The school will not be held responsible for the loss of such articles.

- Carry mobile phones and cameras.

- Distribute gifts on birthdays.

These are followed by the student pledge and another list of rules and regulations governing behavior and use of books in the library. The diary also contains safety "tips" about walking to and from school, the texts of various songs that are used, a general calendar, a sports activities calendar, a list of school holidays, the attendance record, the homework record, teacher's remarks about the student's academic work and conduct, and parents' responses to the teacher, and a record of supplementary reading.

During an interview the principal articulates the school's commitment to discipline. "Discipline is very important. It is basis of all life, growth, social activities. Respecting and feeding of others is discipline. Respecting the other person, property, and nature—that is discipline. Lack of discipline will lead to conflict and clashes."

The attempt to enforce and instill such rules begins in the morning school assembly. "Then at around 7:30 a.m., they got ready for their morning assembly. Boys and Girls lines are made separately . . . . The physical instructor announced in the mike: SILENCE . . . ATTENTION!! READY

FOR VANDE MATARAM[54] (i.e., the "national song"). The music teacher . . . plays the harmonium.

She starts the morning assembly and then the students sing after she begins.

A few teachers are rigorous in their enforcement efforts: "Once someone [spilled and] left

some dal [lentil soup] while eating [lunch]. The Hindi teacher saw [this] and was very angry. She

[would] not give the test because they made the classroom dirty. For that reason every single child

was investigated and penalized." The teacher's anger maybe related to the strong emphasis in

Jainism on purity. Hence spilling dal and leaving it is not only thoughtless toward other, but also a

religious offence that corrupts everyone in the room. On the other hand, there certainly were no

reports of teachers slapping students or using other forms of physical coercion, as was the case at

Uttarnagar. The fieldworker reports that she asked a girl . . . . "does the school have any strict rules?

She said the school doesn't take any strict action towards anyone." Another girl in Class IX says,

"We are not studying, not responding, and not disciplined. We just laugh all the time and make fun

of the teachers." The field worker asks, "And how are the boys?" She replies, "Boys are notorious!"

This description probably overstates the situation, but Ahimsa is certainly less draconian than some

schools.

Of course, students do break the rules, sometimes in rather blatant ways. At a morning

assembly close to the Diwali holidays the principal makes the following remarks:

Dear children this is the season of festival and you all are enjoying. Yesterday two

[fire] crackers were bursted (sic) by some of the senior students. School is a temple

of learning. By doing this you are becoming anti-social. What are you doing and

teaching to the young kids? Some students were caught [including] Rajan (class X),

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[54] "Vande Mataram" means, "Bow to thee mother [India]. " This is the "national song" in contrast to the "national anthem." The verses were written by the famous, Nobel prize-winning, Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The song has been controversial because one verse of this poem specifically refers Hindu gods. That verse is usually omitted in most schools. Some secularist and non-Hindus feel that the song is still Hindu in spirit and style. Nonetheless, it is sung in most schools in India.

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Vijay (class XI), [and] Ashok (class IX) . . . . What is to be done with them now? The

day before yesterday, some of the students were suspended.

Students also make fun of the teachers and the principal behind their backs:

Fieldworker**:**   Do you listen to your teachers or pay attention when they are

teaching?

Students**:**   Both boys and girls make fun of the teachers.

Fieldworker**:**   In what ways?

Students**:**   The way in which the teacher scolds. They make fun of new

economic ma'am [i.e., the new economics teacher]. The way she teaches.

We called our sports teacher "Jojo", the Principal as "Princi." It is just for

kidding . . . because our principal is very stubborn and at each word he used

to scold us . . .

Some students at least surreptitiously use profanity and show a keen interest in quasi-

pornography. The fieldworker reports, "I then went to the mathematics/audio-visual room. Inside

the room, posters were hanged (sic) and below the posters, written in pencil, was "fuck." A few

days later she was looking through materials in the library. "[Inside the] PTA [Parent Teacher's

Association] Magazine section, I saw a Hindi magazine [for teenagers] named *Suman Saurabh* [in

which there was an article] about Marilyn Monroe's death . . . I looked inside the magazine and saw

some of the exposed parts of the lady were being spotted and circled with blue ball pen distinctly."

In sum, the school's commitment to producing good people results in patterns of discipline

those, though they do not use violence, are in many respects similar to other schools. In turn,

students use fairly common forms of resistance and deviance—but usually keep it hidden from

teachers, school officials, and adults in general. On the whole is seems accurate to say that though

discipline is a central concern of school officials, compared to the other schools it seemed rather

lenient and relaxed. The result, however, is by no means rampant disorder, but a pattern in most respects akin to other upper-middle class schools.

Peers and Gossip

Like all the schools we have looked at there are small groups of friends and larger networks that share common lifestyles—though the latter seem to be less distinct than in St. Anne's and Uttarnagar and more prominent than at Rampura. When a girl was asked the deliberately ambiguous question, "What is school?" She succinctly identifies the two essential features for most students: "School is for studying and doing fun with friends."

The students who discussed friendship groups often said that their main function was a place to gossip. The fieldworker asked, "Where do you go to hang out, and with whom?" Hamsa replied, "We do hang out with our friends and often with our parents." "Do you have your own peer group?" "Yes. We like bitching and making fun of others. We even laughed at them. We do play pranks with our friends, classmates. But, our intention is not to hurt them. It's just for fun. We even make fun regarding the appearance of the teachers. Sometimes the kind of shoes they wear and also sometimes through the way they speak and make gestures." The fieldworker continues: "I interviewed a girl named Indu from class X-C. I asked her do their classmates make fun of their friends? She said, 'Yes they make fun to tease someone. If a person is stubborn or very sensitive, they also make fun of those things.'" These girls also go out together outside of the school: "I then asked her do they go to a hang-out with their friends. She said that they hang-out in Nala Bazaar. . . . Sometimes they also go to watch movies on the holidays. One of their parents also accompanies them." On occasion they go to the home of one of the girls in their group.

Predictably friendship groups tend to share food with each other during lunch and snack times. The fieldworker observes, "Students sit among their own groups and have lunch together. They share foods such as chapatti [flat bread], dal [lentil soup], sabzi [vegetables], etc." She asks other students about this. "Do you share your food?" Janki replies, "Within our own friend circle

we do share our food. Even with sections from X-B. We feel awkward to connect with those to whom we don't share food."

Of course some students have more friends than others. The fieldworker speaks to another girl, Laasya:

Fieldworker: Do you have any close friends?

Laasya: Jasmit, Panna , Dalaja, Deva, Lali, Pariyat, Toshiba.

Fieldworker   Do you go out together with your friends?

Laasya: Once we went to McDonald. After that whenever we decide to go out

                 the program is canceled or postponed.

Fieldworker: Is everyone treated equally in your class?

Laasya: I am a Bania (caste). We treat equal importance to each and every

                 caste.

Several things are noteworthy here. First, a sizeable number of "close friends" are named, but they have only actually been out together one time. Second, Banias are a merchant caste and have economic reasons why they must deal with a variety of castes in order to succeed commercially—though often more personal relationships outside of their caste are quite restricted. Third, caste is a relevant enough social category in this setting that the student brings up the issue on her own. This is noteworthy, but does not mean that students in this school are especially concerned about caste differences.

In contrast to Laasya, who claims many friends, Abhas from class X-C is relatively isolated. He is a Hindu, is considered to be a "boy nerd," was "topper" on the exam scores, and is resented by many students [for his sometime arrogant manner]. The interchange with him goes quite differently:

Fieldworker: Do you think that you are being isolated?

Abhas: Yes, I am being isolated. There are some groups, they are of 'halla' (noisy) types. And some other groups crack jokes. [Then there] are the . . . *baccha* (kid) type . During the free period, boys go to play volley ball. And . . . they don't include me with them. Sometimes in the morning, I do quarrel with my mother regarding this. Deveshi, my best friend, gives me suggestion and to whom I should say [I'm] sorry. She gives me better suggestions.

Fieldworker: Why do you think, you are being isolated?

Abhas: I don't know. They might be jealous of me because I scored well in class.

Fieldworker: How many peer groups are there in your class?

Abhas Lot of peer groups. They don't share things with me, [but] Deveshi is included in one of those peer groups.

Gender and Romance

When it comes to how boys and girls relate to one another, the story is similar to that at Uttarnagar. When a student was asked, "What are the boys and the girls known for in their class?" she replied, "Girls [for] arguing [with each other] and being silent [in class] whereas boys are known for giving nicknames." The girls complain about the bad behavior of the boys. One girl is especially perturbed by them:

Fieldworker: How are the boys?

Girl: Some boys are cheap, intolerable. They use abusing language for fun . . . . They do it sometimes to tease a boy [about] a girl just for fun. They know that girls are sensitive and offended [by such behavior].

Fieldworker Do you have any male friends?

Girl: I feel [oppressed[55] by] boys . . . Some girls speak with them, but I

don't. Teacher's gets irritated with them.

Gender relations get discussed in class, not only as a contemporary issue, but in reference to interpreting descriptions in novels and historical accounts. The phrase "male dominated" is used by students, but the content of the notion is seldom elaborated. Nonetheless there are several obvious forms of gender differentiation, both formal and informal: at morning assembly girls and boys line up separately, when working in the library the girls and boys usually work in different areas, and most lunch groups are segregated by gender. There are, however, significant, non-romantic friendships between some men and some women.

Fieldworker**:** Are there any gendered differences in your class?

Abhas: Boys and girls [discuss personal problems with] each other. Even

my best friend is a girl (from this class).

Fieldworker: What topics you share with her?

Abhas: I share my feelings with her. Even my [desk] partner with whom I sit

does not understand my problem, even though we are good friends

[for a] year and a half.

Some students claimed there were many romantic couples, but they seemed less visible than in the other schools we have observed. Those who were in romantic relationships seemed less afraid of parental outrage and sanctions. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend to celebrate birthdays with seemed to be considered especially desirable. If they did not have a regular partner they seemed to arrange to have one for these occasions.

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[55] She actually uses the English "obsessed by," but it is clear from the context that she confused the English words "obsessed" and "oppressed."   What she seems to be saying is that she was annoyed and exasperated by the behavior of the boys.

Citizenship and Nationalism

Many students have rather vague understandings of such notions as citizenship and nationalism. For example when asked, "What are your ideas regarding citizenship?," a student replies, "Sorry, no answer." Others express rather conventional pieties. One boy said, "[It means] to do anything for the nation. A girls said [it means], "Bharat Mata [i.e., Mother India]; love towards our country. [Another student] . . . said that it also" means not to feel any difference between castes, [providing] reservation [i.e., affirmative action] for women, [and making] capital available for the peasants." Other students emphasized the rights of citizens: "[H]aving a freedom; free to give their ideas." Another student linked notions of freedom and duty and said "that nationalism meant freedom [of] speech, [and] being volunteers for the nation." The fieldworker questioned a small group:

Fieldworker**:**   What are your ideas regarding nationalism?

Ans.:   Nationalism is a spirit through which . . . our country became

               independent. Today's generation are less concerned about the

               nation--but still we respect our country.

Fieldworker: Why do you think it so?

Ans.:   It's because of the generation gap and modern ways of thinking.

Another student began by referring to past national leaders adherence to the Jain and Gandhian tradition of nonviolence: "National heroes . . . lead the path of *ahimsa* (i.e., nonviolence)." Yet three girls, Gita, Savita and Saroja, . . . specifically rejected notions of nonviolence:

Gita [said] that she does not believe in the ideals of Gandhism. For her, modern

youth are those who are able to take revenge. "[We] don't like the subjects such as

civics, history because these subjects are boring and teach you about the past. They

are not contemporary." Gita is in favor of extremists. She said that [in the past] the

national heroes were too liberal; now it's not time to be liberal like Gandhi. It's the

time to take revenge; . . .[nonviolence] . . . does not influence today's world.

A Jain student said she "does not like the idea of democracy because it's leading to corruption and

poverty.

These rejections of democracy, nonviolence, and calls for vengeance need to be placed in the

context of the time in which the data were collected, September to December 2008. During this

period the country experienced four major terrorist attacks in key Indian cities. Bombings

occurred in Jaipur on May 14 (80 killed), in Ahmedabad on July 26 (49 killed), and in New Delhi on

September 13 (26 killed). On November 26, Mumbai was attacked by a commando-like team who

kept the city terrorized for three days and killed 173 people. In addition to those killed in the

attacks, many more were wounded or injured. There were less serious attacks or bombings in

other areas. The role of the media and Bollywood in the construction of an image of sacrifice and

heroism in combating anti-nationalists is undeniable. Bollywood films on the life of Bhagat Singh

are very significant in valorizing the idea of revenge, sacrifice and martyrdom in the cause of the

nation and have played an important role in mobilizing Indian youth in northern India at least to

think along the same lines. Such perspectives are also a form of 'dissenting citizenship' (provide

citation) whereby students reject dominant constructions of citizenship values and construct their

own. This exhibits a form of resistance to authoritative and so-called legitimate notions of what

citizenship values are—and offers an alternative perspective. It is even more interesting that such

perspectives are emerging in a school that ostensibly promotes a culture of nonviolence and

pacifism.

One student remarked, "Terrorists should not be given a single place on the earth. They

should live in hell." At morning assembly class XII students performed a skit entitled, "Terrorists: A

Group of Monsters." In the teacher's staff room there was a big poster on the wall about

"Awareness in an Open Area" [i.e., in public places]. A caption read, "Let's pen down our thoughts

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and help in our small way to curb [the] international monster: TERRORISM – Issued by A.T.L.A.S. [Alliance to Lead and Serve]." A.T.L.A.S. is a service and social club.

The first three of these attacks were attributed to the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) or one of its offshoots.[56] The attack in Mumbai was by a team of Muslims from Pakistan. Therefore it is not surprising that anti-Muslim sentiment was high and openly articulated. Sahil said, "they have [i.e., there is] a problem with Muslim governments . . . they kill other people. Through this they want to spread Muslims everywhere. In Pakistan, from 18 years onwards, people are made terrorists. Through this innocent people get harmed." When specifically asked about the significance of religious differences with the student body, non-Muslims students claim it is irrelevant.

Ques.   Any differentiation on the basis of religion?

Ans.   No . . . During Eid[57], the school organizes a small function and the Muslim
        students were free to speak.

Probably the accurate characterization of the situation at the school is that most non-Muslims are suspicious of Muslims; in the presence of other non-Muslims do not hesitate to express such concerns. On the other, hand they hesitate to openly state these feelings in public settings—especially in a school rooted in a tradition of nonviolence. This is not to say that there may not be genuine friendships that cross religious boundaries, including positive relationships between Hindus and Muslims, Jains and Muslims, etc. Instances of respect and trust on the micro level do not, however, prevent the usual cultural assumptions and sentiments on the macro level being those of hostility and mistrust.

What is especially interesting is that suspicion and hostility toward Muslims seems to be more intense at Ahimsa than it was at Uttarnagar—even though the data on both schools was

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[56] Whether or not this attribution is accurate, it is clear that most Indians think that Muslim extremist were the perpetrators.
[57] The most festive Islamic holiday.

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collected during the same time period. This raises the question of why this would be the case, given that the students at Ahimsa generally come from more well-to-do, better-educated families. The support for Hindu nationalism has been especially strong among urban commercial and professional classes. Perhaps it is the case that the student attitudes at Ahimsa and Uttarnagar are influenced by the class and family origins of the students more than they are influenced by anything that actually goes on in the schools. It is often the case that families who have experienced the trauma of Partition during independence from colonialism during 1947 have a deep influence on a negative construction of Muslims in subsequent generations. See for example the work of Ashis Nandy, and also Latika Gupta on how children construct negative images of communities other than their own.

In sum, students can usually repeat conventional platitudes about what citizenship and nationhood mean as this has what has been conveyed to them by the school and the family as part of conventional character education. It seems to be the case that notions of what it means to be an Indian citizen are formed not only by what the students are taught in the school, but also by the events in the broader culture, and the way in which family and peers interpret these events. More specifically, they are shaped by the history of conflict with Pakistan and the continuing relationship of distrust and dislike.

Consumption, Fashion, and Pop Culture

Some students say that they are unconcerned about brands and fashions. When asked what kind of clothing he wore, one of the male "brains" replied, "Clothes which suits me. But not any such branded clothes." This spurning of brands is not limited to men. Pankaja in class X-B said she is not brand conscious . . . "people are simply mad [to do] such things." Another set of students from the science stream in class XI-C claimed they wore no branded clothing.

Many students were, however, quite brand conscious. The fieldworker asked Neema, "Are you brand conscious?" She said, "Yes, such brands as Reebok, and Adidas 'inspire' people." Jarul,

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whose father is a property consultant and whose mother is a housewife, said she liked cosmetic brands such as Lakme,[58] Lotus, and Maybelline, and apparel brands such as Madame[59] and Reebok. The concern with brands was not limited to girls. Sabal said he likes Levis, tQs,[60] A-Cooper, FOB, — and added, a comment to the effect that "nothing comes between me and my Levis." This was a variation on the line from a TV ad featuring U.S. movie star Brooke Shields for Calvin Klein jeans. The original line was a double entendre implying she was wearing no underwear. It is unclear whether the student is cognizant of the double meaning, but it is certainly likely that he is acquainted with the original advertisement—showing his awareness of international consumer brands. Several people noted that the particular brands aside, most young people like to wear what might be called an international youth "uniform" of jeans and a shirt or blouse. When the fieldworker asked Padma, "What kind of clothes do you like to wear," she elaborated, "Funky tops which looked cool, tight fitted jeans, . . . bangles, bands, boots." When asked where she shopped, she mentioned Nala Bazaar and Greater Kailash, and added that she had been to one of the new shopping malls. Damini said that she and her friends like to spend time at Nala Bazaar and to buy accessories such as rings and bracelets. Rajni was very much concerned about accessories like bracelets, necklaces, and shoes. "I asked her, 'So you like wearing gold or silver?" She said not [real] gold, but the ones that you get in the market. The funky stuff . . . "

Fast-food chains such as McDonald's and KFC were named as popular places to hang out—though they are relatively expensive and students do not go there often. "Rajni is . . . fond of KFC. Though she is a vegetarian she said that she once went with her brother and there she found that the service is good. She ordered an ice-cream [and] asked the counter man for extra chocolate. [She bragged that] he didn't charge her extra." The fieldworker asked her why? She said, "Because I'm very sweet."

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[58] Lakme is a brand marketed in India by Unilever who makes such internationally known brands as Lifebuoy, Lux, Dove, and Vaseline.
[59] This is a chain of exclusive women's stores in India owned by a Jain family.
[60] A chain of retail clothing stores in Delhi and surrounding regions.

Many students also have a keen interest in various forms of popular culture. One of the girls seemed quite enamored with the possibility of becoming a contestant on Boogie Woogie, an Indian dance television series. Of course, nearly all of the students watch TV. As noted earlier, it is common for groups of friends to go to the movie together on weekends and holidays. Students are not, however, totally accepting and uncritical of the popular culture. Parmita who is in class 10-C said she was "very fond of movies. Recently, I watch the movie *Fashion*[61] . . . [and] I came to know about the fashion world [and] the reality of fashion. After watching the movie, I had a very bad impression about models. I wonder why it is a career."

Of course, parents and teachers tend to be even more critical of consumerism, fashion, and popular culture—at least of the variety that their children are often preoccupied with. An interview with the principal illustrates some of these concerns:

Ques.: What are your ideas regarding students' consumer behaviours?

Ans.: First, they are more influenced by consumerism. They are getting habits of buying more and more things that they don't need. Second, it affects them by making them anxious, worried, frustrated, and leading to extreme steps, [for example], when they want mobile [phones] which they or their parents can't afford. They get diverted from their main goal.

Ques: What ideals does the school follow?

Ans.: School follows the ideals of simplicity, hard work, cleanliness, being [on the] right side of law, respecting [and] conserving of traditional values.

Ques: So the students engaged in consumerism?

Ans.: They are surely engaged in it. This is . . . how society reinforces these things; [the] media and exposure to outside influences [shape] their ideas . . .

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[61] She is probably referring the Indian film with this title directed by Madhur Bhandarkar. It portrays an industry and profession that is ruthlessly competitive.

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The ideas expressed by the principal are in agreement with what many teachers and adults say—even though their condemnation of consumerism is not necessarily reflected in their own behavior.

It would certainly be inaccurate to portray the students at Ahimsa as unusually preoccupied with fashions and popular culture or unusually extravagant in their expenditures—especially considering the fact that many come from relatively well-to-do families. It is, however, telling that even for students in a school that is operated by a religious tradition that places a strong emphasis on simplicity and detachment from the world, many tend to hold about the same values and engage in the same behaviors that are common in the broader society. (Of course, it needs to be remembered that most of the students in the school are not Jains. The principal seems to clearly recognize and acknowledge the students' tendencies toward consumerism. This speaks well for his candor and integrity, but highlights the limits that schools face in trying to shape the character and behavior of their students.

Special Events: Teachers' Day

India is a very multicultural society. Accordingly, a large number of religious and ethnic holidays are celebrated by substantial numbers of people. In 2009 there were fifteen to twenty official public holidays, depending on where you lived. Three national holidays are almost universally celebrated: Republic Day on January 26, Independence Day on August 15, Gandhi Jayanti (Mahatma Gandhi's birthday) on October 2. The religious festivals that are widely celebrated include Diwali, Holi, Eid, and Christmas. Often special events are held in the schools themselves. For example, most schools hold celebrations related to Diwali and Eid (if there are substantial numbers of Muslim students). In addition there are special days that are celebrated primarily in schools. These include Children's Day, Teachers' Day, and Annual Day. These various special events make up an important component of students' experience in school and hence it is important to describe the nature of these events. Here we will focus on Teachers' Day in one school.

Teachers' Day is a modern and somewhat secularized event that follows in the tradition of honoring teachers and gurus. It is celebrated on September 5, which is the birthday of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a world renowned philosopher and the second president of India. Often the President of India gives a speech on this day about the role and importance of teachers in the society.[62] Usually many of the regular classes are suspended and special programs are presented by the students to honor the teachers.

Teachers' Day at Ahimsa began at 8:00AM and was held on the playing field in front of the school. Students from class III to class XII participated. The first order of business was to get the students lined up by class, seated, and quiet—and this was not easy. One teacher asked the students rhetorically, "What is the meaning of 'attend'? It means to listen quietly and politely without making any noise." Several other teachers used the microphone to request silence. The fieldworker reports, "It took many times for the teachers to keep the students silent." The program began with a speech paying tribute to Dr. Radhakrishnan. Following that a group of teachers sung "Sahu Ram (honor or bow to Ram, an important Hindu God). At this point the students started paying attention and clapped at the end. Then one of the teachers stood up and said, "Children, you are the future. So in uplifting you, your teachers do an important thing. So don't forget your teachers." Then the teachers sang another song. Keeping the children quiet continued to be a problem: "The other teachers were seated by the side of the students. And the Principal was sitting at the back. Some of the lower class students were making noises; the teacher's separated them and kept them aside. It was a very funny thing to see . . . they pulled each other's hair and often ask the teacher, 'Ma'am can I go to toilet.'" Eventually a representative of each class came to the stage and recited a line or two that in various ways praised teachers. Some examples include: "The guru (teacher) is sitting above and students are sitting below; teachers are gods." A younger student

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[62] See, for example, the speeches by two presidents, Pratibha Devisingh Patil and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at http://presidentofindia.nic.in/sp050908.html and http://www.indianchild.com/teachers_day_india.htm respectively; accessed 6/18/2009.

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representative proclaimed, "Good Morning! Every year 5th September is celebrated as Teacher's

Day. I love and respect my teacher very much. Thank you." Some even younger students began

reciting a poem, but they could only remember the first few lines: "She is always smiling like an

angel . . . Like an angel . . . angel . . . . Eventually they gave up and sat down. Next was the most

memorable part of the program. Fifteen children dressed as important religious or historical

figures came out one at a time and recited some appropriate saying or verses—with the students

sometimes adding brief greetings or commentary of their own. The figures represented included:

> Rishi Muni: "In order to achieve success, education is necessary."

> Maharishi Arvind: "If you do something good for India, then you can lead your life
>
>> peacefully."

> Former President Abdul Kalam: "Always respect your teacher."

> Swami Vivekananda: "I love all people and all religion. [People of] all religions have
>
>> the right to get education. No religion teaches us to live without love."
>>
>> Thank you.

> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh: "I believe education is the most important tool to
>
>> get ahead in life. " This is our country, so participate. Victory to India!

> Mother Teresa: "The result of a prayer is love, respect, peace. God always shows the
>
>> right path."

By the end of this students were getting restless and again a teacher came to the microphone and

exhorted them to be quiet. Another teacher asked the audience to "give a huge round of applause"

for the students who dressed up as various personalities and gurus.

Class III-A then presented a brief drama in which three individuals argue with one another

about a disagreement, but then the three come to a consensus and note that they are following the

way of Mahatma Gandhi.

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About 9:00AM the principal comes on stage and wishes the teachers a "Happy Teachers' Day." He does not make a speech. Next is the recitation of a poem:

Oh! My teacher

You, make my future,

Increase my knowledge day by day

I can really believe you with my eyes closed.

Earlier we called [you] Guru, now Sir or Ma'am.

Next came a dance entitled Guru Vandana (i.e., reverence to the teacher). The audience seems to start paying attention at this point. Next was another dance by students of class VIII in which there were three groups of dancers, each group wore a different color: saffron, blue, and green. Some students from this class also performed magic tricks and others recited Sanskrit *slokas*. This was followed by students from this class giving their teacher a small token of appreciation.

A group of students from classes VIII and IX performed another classical dance. A student from class XI delivered a speech:

[A] teacher is a social entity. An outstanding teacher motivates and has a good sense

of humour. [They] give the students a chance. A good teacher respects students.

She/he is approachable, caring, of high spirit, and inspiring students. Goes extra

mile for their benefit. She is skilled, flexible, professional. [A] teacher needs

encouragement.

Again the teachers had trouble keeping the children quiet.

Finally, Students from class XII-B recited a poem. After that they sang a song from the film *Taare Zameen Paar*.[63] The film tells the story of an eight year old who has great difficulty in school until a caring teacher recognizes that he has dyslexia and arranges special education for him.

At around 10:30 a.m., the program ended.

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[63]The title of the English version is *Like Stars on Earth*.

Two points are rather obvious. The traditional culture, the state's ideology, and conventional platitudes, all hold teachers in high esteem. On the other hand, such occasions are largely arranged by school officials and teachers, and students are at best ambivalent about having to sit through such events. This is not to deny that many people genuinely respect and appreciate the role that teachers perform and at least many of individuals who take on this role. There seems to be, however, a big gap between the extravagances of the rhetoric and the sentiments of those participating.

Conclusion

To conclude, Ahimsa School is distinctive because of its roots in Jainism. This is reflected both in its facilities, its official ideology, and in the teachers' and students' ambivalence and restraint in participating in consumerism and contemporary popular culture—at least compared to some of the other schools we have looked at. This is not however true of the student culture which rejects outright the official and dominates discourse on citizenship and constructs its own notion of citizenship as an idea and as practice. At the same time, it is in most respects very similar to other private secondary schools whose students are from relatively well-to-do backgrounds. For reasons that are not completely clear, anti-Muslim sentiments were expressed more openly by some students than in other schools. This is ironic given that tolerance and non-violence are at the roots of its religious tradition. The students do not however belong to this tradition and have therefore provided a perspective that emerges directly from within the student culture. Students have a very clear and well thought out perspective on their role in the complex and conflict ridden times we live in. This is a sign that schools in India have not entirely succeeded in suppressing students' voices and indeed their agency, which is expressed in full force here. It brings to the forefront the idea that schooling is not only about the reproduction of dominant social norms and values but also about how youth seek to distance themselves to these normative structures and struggle to evolve their own.

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Chapter 7: Rishi Valley School

The Data

Bhavya Dore, who at the time of the fieldwork was a graduate student in sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, collected the data. She is an alumnus of Rishi Valley School (RVS). In September of 2007 she spent fourteen days observing and interviewing students and faculty at the school. She recorded detailed fieldnotes. She returned and did fifteen days more of observations and interviews in July of 2008. During the first period she concentrated her observations on class 11 students. During the second period of research she looked at a broader range of classes in the senior school. She was advised and supervised primarily by Prof. Meenakshi Thapan. Prof. Thapan is the author of, *Life in School* (1991, revised edition 2006), which provided a detailed ethnographic description and analysis of this school based on fieldwork done in 1981. The school permitted and facilitated the original study by Prof. Thapan and the fieldwork for this study conducted by Bhavya Dore. Therefore, unlike the other schools studied, no pseudonym has been used for this school. All of the students and faculty, however, are given pseudonyms.

The Founder, the Location and the School

The Founder: The school was founded by Jiddu Krishnamurti (1885-1986), a distinguished philosopher and lecturer who developed a world-wide following. He was born in Andhra Pradesh of a Telegu Brahmin family. As youth he came under the tutelage of key leaders of the Theosophical Society, Annie Bessant and C. W. Leadbeater. He was named "World Teacher," a messiah-like figure expected by the Society. In 1929, however, he dissolved his connection with the Theosophical Society, proclaimed that he was not the "World Teacher." He rejected the legitimacy of all forms of formal religion and sectarianism, and the notion that he was a guru seeking followers. Thereafter he developed a philosophy that emphasized the rejection of all forms of authority, and the responsibility of each individual to pursue the truth and to constantly transform themselves. His

educational philosophy is specifically aimed at transcending the limits and assumptions of contemporary society. As the RVS principal writes, "Krishnamurti's educational philosophy reaches beyond the particularities of culture, and locates it in a universal moral space. 'The function of education,' he said in 1956, 'is not to help the young conform to this rotten society, but to be free of its influences so that they may create a new society, a different world.'" (Chennai, February 1, 1956).[64] In 1926 he began his efforts to actualize this philosophy by establishing the Rishi Valley School just outside the town of Madana Palle.

Location: By all accounts the school is situated in a beautiful valley not far from Krishnamurti's birthplace. The area is in the southern part of the State of Andhra Pradesh and is quite rural and remote. The language of the region is Telegu. The closest major urban center is Bangalore in the neighboring state of Karnataka, which is about a three-hour drive. In addition to the school, the foundation also operates a rural health center, a rural education center, and a conservation program on this site. All of these are aimed at helping local residents and to serve as demonstration projects for the broader society. The RVS campus has been designated a bird sanctuary and is an internationally known site for bird watching.

The School: RVS is a "public school" in the British sense of this phrase, meaning that it is open to all members of the public who meet its entrance requirements, can pay its very substantial tuition, and who will abide by its rules. In U.S. terminology it is a non-denominational, private school. RVS is a longstanding member of the Indian Public School Conference, which includes about 80 other boarding schools, but it is somewhat distinctive because of the way it is shaped by Krishnamurti's philosophy and ideas about education. The school facilities, located on a 350-acre campus, are substantial and well maintained, though not luxurious. It is certainly the case that the extent and quality of the facilities, the number and training of the faculty, and the high teacher-student ration means that RVS, like other public schools, offers a quite privileged form of education.

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[64] http://www.rishivalley.org/features/An_%20Overview_of_J.pdf; accessed 9/25/2009.

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The facilities also include a guesthouse used by parents, those interested in learning about RVS's educational philosophy and techniques, and bird watchers.

Students come from all over India and from several foreign countries, and RVS is more cosmopolitan than most schools—even most public boarding schools. Nonetheless, the school has a noticeably South Indian ambiance, including the vegetarian food. A plurality of the students comes from Andhra Pradesh and the adjacent states. All students except the children of faculty and staff reside in about twenty small "houses", i.e., dormitories, and eat in the dining hall, known as "the DH." Each house is supervised by one of the resident faculty members, though the degree of supervision seems relatively relaxed in most houses compared to other public schools.

There are three divisions in the school, The Junior School (classes 4, 5, and 6), the Middle School (classes 7and 8), and the Senior School (classes 9-12). The latter school is divided into two sections, classes 9 and 10, and classes 11 and 12. The last two years are referred to by the school (but not the students) as the "Plus Two" Program. Class 10 students must reapply for admission and only about half of them are "called back," (i.e. admitted). In this sense RVS's last two years are a "senior secondary" or"PUC" (Pre-University College), in fact if not name. A few students from other schools are admitted into class 11. The Junior School and the Middle School combined have about 190 students. The senior school has about 160 students.

RVS has an unusually well qualified staff. At the time the school was studied there were 55-60 faculty members—though many are part time. The faculty includes four people with Ph.D.'s and most have degrees or certificates from some of India's most prestigious institutions. Eleven have degrees from foreign universities, including Harvard, Sorbonne, Heidelberg, Toronto, Ottawa, and Ohio State. The school is governed by a complicated set of committees. Some of these are composed primarily of board members of The Krishnamurti Foundation, some of only faculty members, and some are composed of a mixture of these two groups. The guiding principle is that all-important decisions are reviewed by a group of people rather than a single individual. When

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Krisnamurti was alive he in fact made many decisions and the various committees nearly always ratified these.[65] Since his death in 1986 these various committees play a greater role with the principal and senior faculty members of the school gaining more authority and the foundation board being the ultimate decision making groups. The faculty has increasingly attempted to assert their authority, arguing that they are the ones who are aware of the day-to-day realities of school life. As we shall see later, there are mechanisms for student input into school policy, but they have relatively little effect on most decisions.

The Academic Ambiance

There is ambivalence about academic work as it is usually conceived. RVS sees itself as having a broader vision of education than even the more prestigious Indian public schools. Krishnamurti's philosophy makes young people responsible for their own education and development and hence education is seen as including much more than absorption and regurgitation. Education should include not simply the usual academic subjects, but the aesthetic and practical and aspects of life. According to Krishnamurti, the school has several aims. One is to make people competent to use the newest technology productively. Equally crucial is to see that:

> . . . the child may develop fully as a complete human being. This means giving the
> child the opportunity to flower in goodness so that he or she is rightly related to
> people, things and ideas, to the whole of life. To live is to be related. There is no
> right relationship to anything if there is not the right feeling for beauty, a response
> to nature, to music and art—a highly developed aesthetic sense." (RVS website,
> Aims of Education, http://www.rishivalley.org/school/aims.htm; accessed
> 8/31/2009)

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[65] See Thapan (2006), chap. 3, for a detailed discussion of the authority structure while Krishnamurti was still alive.

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Students are also expected to participate in the mundane aspects of life and in service to others. This is the reason that students are required to take on responsibilities such as serving food, and helping with maintenance of the grounds. They are also strongly encouraged to participate in the village development programs, which are operated by the Krishnamurti Foundation's Rural Education Centre. Here students engage in such activities as tutoring students in the local village schools.

Nonetheless, RVS school is quite intellectual for a secondary school and most students are committed to academic excellence. The level of discussions in class is impressive. For example, the fieldworker reports:

> The first class after assembly was an 11th standard history class. [This was] my first appearance at the same. Four girls and one boy had taken history and the class was being taught by Janak Nayanar, or "JN Sir" as he was popularly known. They were doing World War I . . . . He asked the students to do presentations on the various battles in World War I, and he himself assigned them topics. At this point Rani asked which battle was *All Quiet on the Western Front* about, to which JN replied, the Battle of Somme.

Another class session indicates the level of student interest and involvement in the academic process:

> Ramna, [the teacher, said] he wasn't going to teach today, but [was going to] supervise a student recapitulation of the previous lesson he had taught. . . . Ganesh, at the front of the class had drawn a bunch of columns on various aspects of the Indus Civilisation and was taking suggestions from the class to fill these in. Examples of these are, time period, artefacts, coins and so on. Students raised their hand; Ganesh asked them to speak and subsequently made points on the board. At one point during the class a debate erupted on whether the timeframe to be used

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was B.P.[66] or B.C. Ramna Sir said B.C. at first and then said, "Look up the book and check for yourselves, I may be wrong." Throughout the class there was talking and interruptions, students quibbled over points being made on the board, most seemed involved and were speaking without referring to their textbooks.

Students also made good use of the required study period known as "prep." "I sat in prep for a while," reports the fieldworker. "The students were studying quietly on their own. Occasionally someone might go out to drink water or use the toilet or borrow stationery but by and large there was no movement within the class itself. People were intent on their work." This was true even when there were interruptions.

> During the course of the next half an hour. . . the electricity must have come on and gone off a good four times at least. While the lights were on everyone was seriously working and keeping to themselves, except for when they communicated with each other by passing "chits" [i.e. notes]. When the lights would go out students would suddenly break out into chatter and laughter, a kind of carnivalesque release that the darkness temporarily allowed.

Intellectual concerns were not limited to required classes or study periods. The fieldworker recorded a number of instances when students engaged in intellectual discussions during their free time:

> The ringing of the bell didn't signal a quick slamming of desks and putting away of books—there were times when discussions continued after the bell and teachers had to end the class. The pedagogic encounter often appeared in disguised forms in other locations—the dining hall for one—where I heard students discuss differential equations . . . . On another occasion . . . a student thought he was skiving off work by

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[66] "BP" presumably refers to "Before the Present," a concept which is used by some scholars, especially non-Western scholars, in order to use a baseline for historical time not tied to the birth of Jesus Christ—as is the case with B.C. or B.C.E.

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reading Hawking's *Brief History of Time* instead of doing his Environment Education

project, when in fact Hawking in another context might be considered highly

academic reading.

On other occasions students discussed the winner of the last Booker Prize and the books of an

American-British travel writer—and they were quite familiar with their work. Of course, some

students do the minimum required, but those who do this too much are usually not allowed to

continue in the school.

In summary, Rishi Valley School tries to have an expanded view of learning and recruits

students who are unusual in the breadth and intensity of their intellectual interest. This would also

be true of the better public schools and of many denominational and convent schools. The

difference is that at RVS the goal of translating these academic interest and accomplishments into

high paying prestigious jobs is at least called into question.

Peers

Many students denied that there were any significant cliques or divisions of RVS students

based on status or popularity. The fieldworker reports, "The four or five boys who I was walking

with were convinced that I wouldn't be able to make any observations about groups or coolness

and that no theory of American school caste-like formations could be proved here." The next day

she reports, "I made my way to the DH [dining hall] and I found myself at an all-girls' table and

primarily in conversation with Pranita and Meena. They asked me about my project and what kind

of research I had come to do. They vehemently denied any kind of [peer] groupings in RVS." On one

occasion the fieldworker notes:

 I found myself sitting at a table with eight boys, but I looked around and found that

the other 11th standard tables were more mixed. I could barely tell the new boys;

they seemed wholly integrated; however, the new girls were easy to spot . . . . After

lunch Shankir told me that there were no groups, "It's not like that in RVS… there is

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no such thing as coolness." He cited "attitude and outlook" as common features he shared with people he thought of as friends. He also added that boys tend to be a sort of group and equally friendly with each other.

During a lull in a basketball game the fieldworker asked several boys about "groups, groupism, and coolness. "

Madesh didn't seem to think any of these existed. According to him there were no fixed formations or people who thought they were cool [because] of athleticism or looks or talents. He shrugged, smilingly indifferent, "it's all one community after all. Sooner or later everyone becomes part of RVS. Some people take more time to adjust, but eventually everyone is accepted." His answers were mostly non-committal and rather than getting the feeling that he didn't want to divulge information I got the sense that these were things he hadn't really thought about it. They didn't feature in his ambit of reality.

In a discussion period with those in Class 11 the fieldworker asked, "What defines who walks together or sits together in the DH? They responded, "Whoever is having a conversation walks out of class together, or if you are eyeing someone then you try and walk with them." The fieldwork, however, reports, "When walking back from the auditorium to class I noticed the same walking pattern—twos and threes of the same sex of the same class . . ."

Students who had recently arrived at RVS commented on the difference between RVS and other schools.

Kalidas, [a new student from "Bombay"[67]], said he was completely enjoying the RVS experience and even though he had been here just two weeks he felt totally assimilated and part of the community. In fact, on his first night here, he had been

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[67] Both the fieldworker and this student were from Bombay. While the official name of Bombay was changed to Mumbai in 1996, residents of that city, especially those whose mother tongue is not Marathi, frequently use the old name.

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sat down and told the whole history of their class, about the various people and

various anecdotes. He pointed out, "There's no uniform; things are so relaxed. In my

earlier school people were actually concerned about coolness and possessions and

such things. There was a mobile phone group, a Nike group and things like that.

Everything is so informal and relaxed here. There are no groups, everyone is

friendly with everyone.

Such views were not limited to the boys.

Mira . . . was a new girl, from Ahmedabad [a major city in the northwestern state of

Gujarat]. Her father had been a student at RVS, but despite having the option of

coming here earlier, she had only joined now since she had been pursuing Kathak [a

classical form of North Indian dance] . . . She seemed tentative in her responses to

her classmates and when I asked [about] her first impressions of them, she said,

"Easy going and funny," and that there were "no apparent groups."

Some students did think that there were proto-groups. The fieldworker asked three girls in the arts

class, "Are there groups? 'Yes, to some extent.' I asked what kind, to which one of them replied after

some thought, 'flirty, studious, the kind who play pranks.' This seemed to be an on the spur of the

moment kind of distinction; it didn't seem like these were standardized categories everyone might

agree existed."

Compared to other schools, it seems accurate to say that, at least in the upper grades,

students made relatively few invidious distinctions and there were no cliques with clear

boundaries. This is not to say there were no tensions between students. Andha commented, "It's

not true that everything is hunky dory and smooth in the 11th, but now they are more settled [than

in previous years]." Nor does it mean that there were equal amounts of interaction between all

students, and hence no social differentiation.

Space played a significant role in shaping social relationships. The most obvious way this happened was in terms of dormitory assignments. Those who lived together interacted more and this led to sharing common experiences and usually significant levels of social attachment. The school officials were well aware of this effect and considered very carefully who was assigned to a given dormitory and a particular bed. The effect of room assignments was not limited to what occur in the dormitory itself, but affected who walked with whom on the way to the dining hall, classes, etc. Even small amounts of spatial distance can affect social distance. The fieldworker noted, "There doesn't seem to be much interaction between the upstairs and the downstairs . . . of girls' hostels."

Similarly those who took the same elective classes shared more experiences and common sentiments. Language also played a role. "In Gulmohar [one of the dormitories] there is a group jokingly called 'the digas' because they are all Kannadigas [i.e., native speakers of Kannada] and tend to speak to each other in Kannada . . . . [T]here are also people who speak to each other in Telegu."

Some social segregation occurred at meals. The fieldworker reports, "I noticed that the seating arrangements were as I had observed at lunch. A particular bunch of boys was grouped together yet again. I also noticed that the old boy-new girl dynamic was not as strong as the new boy-old girl one."

None the social groupings identified so far involve any significant invidious distinctions, that is, claims of superiority or attributions of inferiority. Several exceptions to this egalitarian ethos were observable. First, as in other Indian schools, marks mattered; those with the highest test and exam scores were respected and admired. Second, there were not only distinctions between cohorts, but older classes were sometimes condescending to younger students. Strangely, there was tension and conflict between Class 12 boys and Class 11 girls; the former treated the latter with condescension and even derision. On the other hand, Class 11 boys and Class 12 girls

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were often on friendly terms—though not usually involved in romantic relationships. "Mira [spoke] about her experiences playing volleyball. 'The junior boys are friendly and welcoming, but the senior guys aren't like that.'" The fieldworker continues, "This is something I have also consistently noticed: junior boy-senior girl friendships flourish, whereas it doesn't work the other way around." We will consider this pattern in more detail when gender relations are discussed.

Students in Class 11 also "complained about their immediate seniors and how they didn't particularly get along with them. They [said] that [the members of Class 12] had [not] stood up against the administration when the variety program[68] was cancelled, and now they (the present 11ths) had to suffer as a result." In short, there is a significant amount of class solidarity, even though school officials discourage competition in general and competition between classes in particular. Supposedly, one of the reasons the school canceled the annual variety program was because they thought it as fostering such competition and class solidarity.

A few individuals were unpopular and were close to being isolates:

Unpopularity might come as a result of a few people determining this. I was both told and observed that exclusion occurred as a group phenomenon, when a few of the boys deemed that someone was not worth talking to, they made this obvious, and the others followed suit. One of the girls also remarked to me how Falguni was friendly with Hamsa only when it was just the two of them but "it's surprising how different people can behave in a group."

Our data collection was not focused on younger students. Nonetheless, a number of students and faculty reported that cliques, competition, and conflict are much more prevalent in the slightly younger classes. The term "class politics" was often used by students to describe a variety of forms of conflict and competition among peers. The fieldworker records the following:

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[68] For four or five years there had been an annual variety or talent show that was extremely popular among the students. This event had been permanently cancelled by the school officials. This decision was very unpopular with many students and there was much discussion of this issue during the first fieldwork period.

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Mita's insight on their class politics was a summary of what I had been hearing by and large: there had been groups and frictions in the 10th, but it was more settled now. She said, "Too many of them left for there to be any significant politics at present. Earlier the groupings were very clear; you could spend two days here and tell within the space of a couple of meals (by seating arrangements) who was friendly with whom.

This higher level of conflict among younger students is theoretically predictable. More senior students generally have more status than younger students; many class 9 students look forward to being in class 12, but the reverse is not true. Hence, the total amount of status available is much less for younger students and there is, predictably, more competition and conflict in the pursuit of the limited amount of status available. This is accentuated by the fact that about only half of the class 10 students are invited to return for their last two years, and hence simply being in a more senior class is a significant honor itself. Finally, the school administration does not invite back those who are noted for lording it over others or who tend to create conflict. Accordingly, the levels of equality, solidarity and camaraderie are significantly higher.

To summarize, among Class 11 and 12 there are very few cliques and little status differentiation among students, though a few students tend to be shunned. The patterns of structuration that emerge are largely related to where students live, their gender, mother tongue, age and school class. Despite some differentiation and conflict most students were very pleased to be at RVS. The fieldworker asked them how they felt about being in RVS to which they variously replied, that they loved it, "there's no place like it", "all our friends are here," "we don't miss city life, there's so much more to enjoy in RVS; but sometimes we miss home." In short, there are high levels of solidarity and most students strongly identify with the school.

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Coolness, Popularity and Status

Like in other matters, there is some ambiguity about the extent to which the concept of "coolness" is relevant at RVS. It is clear that some students consider themselves to be cool. The fieldworker observed, "The three boys sitting at the table at the back seemed to be some sort of honchos or at any rate seemed to consider themselves cool. [They] constantly passed comments and cracked jokes whenever people came to serve themselves from the table. With my back to them during dinner they also kept trying to say things to me to amuse themselves . . ." Abhijit noted, "Some guys think they are damn hep and cool. Sports is a big deal . . . especially football . . . Vijay for instance considers himself cool." This view of coolness was not limited to AbhijitAbhiroop. The fieldworker reports: "I spent [quite a while] chatting with Arjun, the class topper . . . . Do you think there is a definition of coolness at work in RVS? How do you think this is determined?" He replied, "Studies and how you do in class doesn't affect coolness. It's more about what you play. Sports is crucial to making someone cool, particularly football." (Since he was the school "topper"—and in part known for this—it is ironic that he discounts the significance of academic performance in affecting your peer status.) Some of the girls also acknowledged a notion of coolness. Rima said that one of the girl's in their class thought she's "damn hep" and had apparently said, "Oh I have such a cool boyfriend, but according to Rima that was just [distorted] self-perception . . ." During a discussion in one of the girls' dormitories, a student said, "The girls downstairs are much more looks conscious. They follow fashions and are constantly trying to impress the boys . . . They think they are cool; they are quite self-conscious about themselves. But that does not really make them cool."

To summarize, when students were asked what made people cool they mentioned a variety of factors including participating in sports, good looks (especially for girls), being fluent in English, speaking well, playing a musical instrument, and having a boyfriend or girlfriend. However, there was disagreement about some of these things.

While it is clear that some students held relatively traditional notions of cool drawn from the broader culture, this was not true for many students—at least when they were in residence at RVS. As one student said, "What is considered cool elsewhere doesn't necessarily hold true at RVS. He pointed out that a particular boy from Bombay who wore all the right clothes, smoked and drank, [and] was friendly with the girls, [but who] had not been properly assimilated here because 'in RVS things are different.'" The fieldworker concluded that it was important to distinguish between coolness and popularity:

> Popularity was never a word I heard being used unless I floated it, but it had a definite presence in all the classes I observed. Many people felt that being popular was a function of personality, determined by 'niceness', ability to talk and mix with everyone. I think at RVS we can see a distinction between being well liked and being cool. Coolness is an attitude that is overtly recoiled from whereas popularity comes of some other nebulous quality. The two might intersect, but they can also be seen in operation separately.

Another way of conceiving of this is to say that there was both a general and a local definition of coolness. The former roughly followed the notions prevalent in global popular culture, which has its roots in jazz (see Danesi 1999). The local definition placed much more emphasis on "niceness." The fieldworker notes, "I asked what defined a cool or popular girl? Was it looks, talent, brains? He replied, "One who speaks nicely to the boys . . . if she doesn't, the boys don't like her . . . take Meena, for example, people don't like her . . . But Rima is really nice, she is liked among the boys . . . when we all went to Bangalore after the 10th exams it was her birthday and all the boys bought her a t-shirt." Some students associated coolness with this more local version and others did not. For example:

> The subject shifted to coolness and what defined coolness and Abhijit said something to the effect that everyone in their class was nice. He asked if there had

been so-called "cool people" in my class. I recalled that there had. Upon hearing this

Abhijit seemed surprised, "Those guys were cool?! But they were so nice, man!" . . .

Gajrup quickly asked, "Can't cool people also be nice?"

In short, both the general notion of coolness and the alternative local concept, stressing "niceness,"

were common in the RVS student culture. Most students denied that coolness in the general sense

increased one's status within the RVS community. On the other hand, it is also clear that a

significant minority was strongly influenced by the broader cultural notion of coolness.

Gender

Gender inequality and patriarchy are a worldwide phenomenon and India is no exception.

In a school like RVS, however, with an ideology that rejects the legitimacy of all authority, it might

be expected that this kind of inequality would be significantly less than in other secondary schools.

In many respects this is not the case. In fact, in some aspects of gender differences seem

accentuated.

It is clear that there is a strong tendency for boys to interact mainly with boys and girls

mainly with girls. This is quite common for younger age groups in most schools, but by the time

students reach Class 11 and 12, this pattern usually weakens—though the tendency is still quite

apparent. This does not seem to be the case at RVS. After observing a class the fieldworker says, "I

noticed that no boy and girl were sitting together." Gender differences go beyond an informal

segregation and often involve various kinds of domination. Later the fieldworker concludes:

In each of the classes I observed, it was always the male voices that were dominant,

whether on current affairs, at student council meetings, or even in class. More often

than not, there would be a couple of strong male voices who would be best informed

and heard most frequently, and whose eloquence was clearly tied to their status in a

group. Boys and girls tended more often than not to sit at different tables on entry

and only then if there was no space would they sit at the same table.

This carried over into most areas of RVS life. The fieldworker reports," [I went] to the basketball court at 4:30 since I was told there was going to be an external match . . . Girls and boys from different classes were grouped accordingly. Say, on one side there was a bunch of 12th girls, on another side a bunch of 11th girls and so on . . . . In between boys and girls might get up and wander and chat with one another, but the seating remained sex-locked."

There are also strong tendencies for men to study science and math and for women to specialize in humanities. Men who do the latter are sometimes teased and called "housewives." In the co- or extra-curricular activities there is also gender differentiation:

[When talking with three girls in Arts and Crafts the fieldworker] asked if the

choices one made in the Arts and Crafts section were gendered. (Options are

general art, needlework, woodcraft, batik, pottery and construction.) They said that

no boys took needlework and most wanted to do woodcraft, construction or pottery.

[The fieldworker asked], "Were there any boys in their class who took dance?" They

said there had been one, but no longer.

According to the boys this pattern prevails with respect to participation in sports. "Abhir remarked, 'Girls never play, they are useless. Once in a while they come in a big group when teachers notice they haven't been coming.'"

To some degree the fieldworker's observations confirm this pattern:

I went back to the Guest House, changed into games clothes and headed off to the

basketball court. There were about fifteen boys who showed up, but not a single

girl. I asked Rahul (one of the teachers, a basketball regular and now a kind of team

coach) how come this was so. He said that they had started girls' basketball

coaching separately so the girls played on a separate court. When I asked one of the

12th standard boys the same question he said, "They aren't good enough."

The girls' non-participation in sports may, in part, be due to the way the school officials organize the curriculum. As the fieldworker notes, "Games timings and music/dance timings generally clash. [Students have] to make a choice between sport and cultural activity? Hence, fewer girls play games?"[69]

The students generally recognize that this gender segregation is the usual pattern even in informal relationships:

> In talking with Ishan, I asked whether the gender gap was a major factor and whether people tended to be friendlier with those of their own sex. He said this was so, and that boys could possibly be considered a consolidated gang as against the girls. There weren't any significant boy-girl platonic friendships. He said, "There are some things you cannot include the girls in," but on further probing couldn't clarify exactly what he meant, merely shrugging and added, "I don't know, there are just some things."

Social segregation and being outspoken are not the only signs of patriarchy. The boys are often snide and condescending toward the girls.

> [Gajrup] then spoke about boy-girl relations. I asked if he had close friends among the girls. He mentioned his girlfriend and "some of her friends." "Yah we get along with the girls, make a lot of fun of them." I asked if there was an attitude of subtle superiority or condescension on the part of the boys. He thought for a few seconds and then said, "Yes, the boys are a bit condescending."

Some of the men went well beyond being "a bit condescending." Abhir orated:

> "The girls can be so dumb. I mean the girls in my class; they are just so incredibly dumb." I asked if he thought there wasn't even one smart girl. All three boys shook

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[69] Of course, the fieldworker's observation is itself rooted in an assumption about gender differences. It would be logically possible for all of the girls to choose sports and all of the boys to choose music and dance. On the other hand, given the cultural background, the organization of the curriculum probably does accentuate gender segregation.

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their head and repeated their earlier statement about all girls being dumb. I asked on what basis he made this judgment. To which he replied, "All the people who have dropped math are girls, there are no girls in math, astronomy or chess club."

Gajrup denied that the boys were condescending toward the girls, but the fieldworker comments, "I felt his comments revealed a distinct supercilious attitude."

The boys also accused the girls of being mean spirited toward each other. "[Gajrup commented] that the girls were highly petty and political and made and broke friendships in the matter of days. He said it was hard to keep track of who was friendly with whom, they were so fickle." Several other boys made similar comments. "I started chatting with Sabal (11th), Anandi (10th) and Abhir (10th). I asked about class politics and rivalries. Abhir said, 'Ask the girls about politics, they have plenty of politics.'"

The older boys were especially condescending and even exploitive of the younger girls such as those in Class 9:

I asked the boys present if they were friendly with the junior girls. To which one of them replied, "Why should we be friendly with them, we have nothing to say to them. Except when we want extras from them . . . . The 9ths always give us extras." I probed further. "They give you whatever you want without asking? Have you been ever turned away?" All three boys said they had always been successful whenever they wanted any food items, junior girls would apparently never think of turning them away empty-handed.

Gajrup, who had denied that the boys were condescending, started talking about the girls in Class 9:

"Ninth standard girls are sluts." This was a bit . . . sudden and extreme . . . Gajrup continued to illustrate this assertion with a story. Apparently there was a particular girl who had agreed to go out with a particular boy. Now this boy had not been sure whether she really liked him . . . . So he got his friend to ask her out as well. He did,

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and she said yes to him too. Thereafter the two boys approached her together and collectively "dumped" her.

The girls were not completely accepting and passive about the boys' behavior toward them. In one of the classes being taught by "Rajeesh, Sir," one of the students named Girish was leading the class discussion:

At some point one of the girls said that Girish was only giving the boys a chance to speak and Rajeesh Sir hastily intervened to say that Girish better be giving both sexes an equal chance else he would be retired from the supervisory position. Halfway through the class a girl was told to take his place (not [because] of his alleged partiality to the boys, but simply so as to give someone else a chance). One of the boys said as this exchange occurred, "Now she'll support only the girls." And indeed, it did appear that the girls got a greater chance now as opposed to earlier . . .

Some girls were rather generous in their interpretation of the boys' treatment of them. At "folkie," a weekly folk dancing event in the evening, the fieldworker asked Rima whether she felt the boys were condescending. "She thought for a minute and then said, 'Some of the boys, some of the time . . . but you don't respond and its okay . . . they only think they are cool.'" The girls admitted that most of them did not take much interest in current affairs. The fieldworker reports, "The newspaper was lying on one of the table's in the corridor. I asked Dipti if the girls read the papers. She said, 'No, not that much. Not as much as the boys at least . . . they are much more well informed . . . except for Anusha she scans the papers quite carefully, she's going to take the law exam.'" The fieldworker notes, "The girls openly spoke of hardly reading the newspaper, one even proudly referred to herself as a 'big bimbo'."

It should be noted that this male chauvinism seemed to be especially intense among the Class 11 men during the first round of fieldwork. When the fieldworker returned about a year later she stressed that the boys' negative attitudes toward girls seemed much less intense. Nonetheless

it seems clear that even among the boys in this progressive school, chauvinistic attitudes toward women are common and deeply rooted in at least some of the batches. Moreover, some of the girls seem to have internalized the notion that women are in many respects inferior to men.

Romance

Romantic relationships are, of course, a particular aspect of gender relations. Like most schools in India, RVS discourages romantic relationships between students. Students are considered too young to be involved in such relationships. RVS's concern heightened since this is a co-educational boarding school; the school is responsible for the student twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for eight months of the year. Hence, the school has the *in loco parentis* responsibility to look after what they perceive to be the students' best interest. If it were known that students were sexually active or anyone had become pregnant, it would greatly reduce parents' willingness to send their children to RVS. Several additional factors exacerbate and complicate the matter. First, since RVS students live together, they therefore have both more motivation and opportunity to become emotionally and romantically involved. Second, the ratio of supervising adults to students is less because parents are not available to supervise out of school activities. Third, unlike day schools, which can profess ignorance about surreptitious public displays of affection, such claims are less credible in a self-contained boarding school. Fourth, it is more difficult for students to hide such relationship since they live in a small community in which there is very little privacy. As we shall see these complications lead to a rather unusual pattern of gender and romantic relationships.

"Peculiar" Relationships: The most notable characteristic of romantic relationships is that couples often act as if they do not know one another. As one student put it, "You can't tell who is a pair; they don't publicly interact with each other." There were exceptions to this pattern, ". . . Mohan was quite comfortable with his girlfriend in public in the sense that he spoke to her normally unlike other couples who tend to avoid each other in public." While pairs usually try to

keep their relationships disguised from teachers, they are more open about them with peers. Gajrup and Abhijit mentioned that among classmates and friends the pairs aren't secretive, but Gajrup added, "I wouldn't tell someone I was going out with so and so; it's understood. If someone asks, then I tell them, [and] that's that." Students who are new to RVS often find the nature of girl-boy relationships in general and romantic relationships in particular quite strange:

> Kalidas was from Bombay. I [asked] whether he found the boy-girl relationship
> here restrained? He heartily endorsed that viewpoint, saying restraint aptly
> described the inter-sex mingling. He said that in his old school there was no big deal
> in hugging a girl or just saying platonically, "Hey how are you, I missed you so
> much," but here if you even talk to a girl, people say, "Haa," and start teasing you . . . .
> The "couples" (and here he gestured making inverted commas in the air) never
> interact with each other. I don't know how Ritesh has a girlfriend; he doesn't even
> talk to girls!" He added, ". . . I still haven't had a one-on-one conversation with a girl
> . . . It's just not happened."

Recent alumni who were visiting seem to share the view that such relationships at RVS were eccentric if not abnormal:

> On our way back to guesthouse, the [male former students] made an interesting
> observation. They said they had been thinking about their own times in school and
> how they saw it now. "RVS 'unnaturalizes' boy-girl relations . . . It's normal for a boy
> and girl to like each other. What's the big deal if they hold hands; it's not like in
> America where they are having sex in Class 8," said one of them.

> **Dating:** What constitutes a "date" or "going out" is also unusual. Kalidas exclaims, "How

can they speak of 'going out'; where do people go out? I mean, you can't even go beyond the gate. Look at Krishna and Padma, for example; I don't think they have even hugged each other. Dating here is strange." One younger student gave his answer to Kalidas's question about what constitutes

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"going out" by describing his own dating experience. "'I've dated sometimes myself in RVS.' I asked him how he would define dating. 'Mostly chatting with girls and sitting next to them during movies. So I've dated a couple of times. We chat a lot and talk during the movie. It's lots of fun.'" Others described "dating" as arranging a time to meet in private in some relatively secluded place, but noted that this was difficult and that couples often got "caught" or at least interrupted. There was both conventional wisdom and norms about the times and places that were appropriate for dates and these included walking to the gate on Sunday night, dancing together at folkie, walking back together after the required prep period, sitting together at athletic games or during morning juice break, giving each other presents on certain occasions. One girl remarked on the stupidity of a pair who met at *astha*,[70] 'Who goes for dates to *astha* man!" Someone else commented, "Anand was so dumb; he set up a date behind the games room; obviously, he got caught."

Intimacy: With regard to physical intimacy, the fieldworker notes:

> Physical contact seemed to be more muted than those of urban Indian teenagers. At
> any rate, it was not something openly spoken of among students. A new boy
> remarked to me, as a quasi-outside observer, on the strangeness of "going around"
> in RVS. "Rohit and Kala are supposed to be 'going around' but I never see them talk
> to each other. . . Cross-gender touching, even in platonic relations, was rarely seen.

The fieldworker adds, "It was important to not get caught or be seen in a 'compromising position' for . . . that could mean not getting called back[71], getting suspended, or having privileges repealed."

    Romance and status: As noted earlier some people thought that having a girlfriend or boyfriend and dating improved your status among other students. When Kalidas was asked if dating increased status he cited the Pratap case: "When he started going out, his status definitely improved, people knew his name immediately and started speaking to him." Abhijit also seemed to

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[70] *Astha* is the local abreviation for *asthachal* that refers to gathering and watching the sun go down. It is generally understood as a period of meditation and even worship.
[71] That is, being allowed to come back to RV for class 11 and class 12.

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think that those "who went out with girls were cool." He added . . . that "going out" made one socially desirable, but there were no adverse effects to 'singledom'." Devi, however, felt "that pairing did not particularly improve status." Probably it is accurate to conclude that most students thought having a boyfriend or girlfriend improved your status—and this was especially the case among the men—but that this was not a requirement for being respected by other students.

Flirting: An especially notable feature of the romantic scene at RVS was the strong norm against flirting. This was especially the case among the boys and if there was any sign you were flirting with a girl you were teased mercilessly. The following fieldnotes capture the ethos about this matter: "At dinner time I found myself at a mixed table—four boys and three girls. They were talking about their favorite topic: ranking the boys in the class according to who flirted the most. Arjun (who was at the table) emerged as tops, followed by Mahant (also at the table), and then Gajrup" Even the fieldworker, who was six or seven years older than even those in Class 12 was teased:

> Arjun said he "would speak to (me) later." I said yes, we should fix up a date. The others were thoroughly amused by my usage of this term and said, "With Arjun you better be careful in using that term; he is after all the number one flirt around." Soon after what followed was an enumeration by ranking of the flirts in class, a practice that would be a mealtime conversation staple and general obsession over the remaining days of my stay.

Kalidas, the new boy started complaining about this preoccupation with flirting:

. . . . People get teased so easily . . . . When people say things I just go along with it . . . saying, "Yah, yah, I love her". . . . I mean what is this?! Why can't boy-girl interaction be seen as natural? Why does someone have to be labeled a flirt just because he talks to girls? To this harangue Farsheed gleefully replied, "Because our way is more fun!" Arjun, who was coming up a lot in conversation didn't seem to mind being rated the number one flirt, even though in this ethos being the number one male flirt was the most undesirable and derided post one could hope for.

Abhijit summarized the romantic dilemma for RVS students, "If you flirt you are teased like mad, but if you go out you are respected, and considered cool." Some felt that the RVS environment produced a kind of emotional retardation: "People in RVS are so immature about these things." Sahana, sitting right beside me heartily endorsed that viewpoint. "Yah exactly, I totally agree with you. I mean what's this whole deal about the biggest flirt and all."

Rumor and Gossip: All of this talk and concern about flirting is similar to a closely related phenomenon: gossip and rumors. Since RVS is a small community in an isolated setting, people regularly talk about local matters. Anything someone defines as a form of deviance is of special interest. Since all romantic relationships are officially a form of deviance, these are of special interests. Girls are generally accused of being especially prone to gossip, but at RVS the boys seem to be equally active in this regard: "I asked Abhijit . . . about the boys' hostel. He said that gossiping was indeed a major pastime even among the boys. He continued, "My friends from outside say, 'What are you people?! Like girls or what?'. . . I'm telling you RVS boys gossip like mad; people sit down and say, 'Come let's gossip.'" Since people often go to considerable efforts to hide deviant behavior, others often have to speculate or "makeup" information and hence the prevalence of rumors. The fieldworker reports:

I asked about gossip and rumors. Being as RVS was a small community was not everyone interested in the goings on in everyone else's lives? Shana and Tamra

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heartily endorsed this view saying that rumor mongering was rampant. "If

classmates hear something about you they come and ask you directly, but often you

hear strange things that the juniors are saying about you." She continued, "So

someone will say that so and so got caught in the class by the teachers," [even when]

that's not true; rumors spread like hell around here."

The fieldworker adds, "Shana and Tamra both have boyfriends, is that why they feel the pinch of

rumor mongering more so than others? Also notice the language that this is couched in: . . . going-

out rumors about two people [tend to focus on] "getting caught" in class by a teacher."

Conclusion: In summary, Rishi Valley School tends to foster some rather peculiar patterns

of romantic relationships. Having girlfriends or boyfriends is officially forbidden. Such pairings do

happen, but they must overcome the hazards of being sanctioned by the school and the difficulties

of starting such relationships when people are likely to be teased for any signs of "flirting." The

results are relatively low rates of pairings, rather awkward and constrained sets of romantic

relationships, a student culture that is at least as preoccupied with such relationships as most

groups of adolescents, and high levels of gossip and rumors. These patterns probably also

contributes to the boys' tendency to both seek out particular female companionship, but to

disparage girls as a group.

Consumption and Fashion

Any inclinations toward consumerism were restrained by the very isolation of RVS. There

were few places in the immediate vicinity to buy middle class consumer goods—even if the school

allowed this and the students had the needed money. While many of the students are genuinely

concerned about the environment, the uplift of the poor, and remedying other social ills, they find it

easier to incorporate these values into their behavior when they are at Rishi Valley than in the

"outside" world. Rishi Valley School is a "special place" in more ways than one. Not only is it a

progressive school that most students love and value, but it is akin to a religious retreat center. In

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the terms of Victor Turner (1995 [1966]), it is a liminal space and their school years are a liminal time. In this place and time of liminality—of being "in between" or on the threshold—it is much easier to avoid the pressures and temptations of the wider, more "normal" world. Consequently, it is not surprising when they leave Rishi Valley the more typical "worldly" pressures and patterns of behavior emerge. Two concrete examples illustrate this. One is the behavior of students when they go on class excursions to other sites. In local jargon these are referred to as an "excur." This is especially the case when Class 10 students go on what is known as the "Bang Bash." They have just completed a harrowing set of examinations, which may narrow or widen their future educational opportunities. Moreover, they know that about half of them will not be invited to return to RVS next year. These Class 10 students spend three or four days in Bangalore together. This "excur" is not supervised by teachers, though students often stay in the homes of fellow classmates who live in Bangalore. The fieldworker observes, "As an event it draws heavily on the practices of the mainstream consumerist world—partying, late nights, binging [on food] . . . some people even tried beer." There are also stories and rumors about students having sex. This trip itself is, of course, a carnivalesque period of liminality, but it is a time away from the usual restraints of RVS—and in a sense draws on the students' conventional images of the "real world." The second, example, is what happens when students go home for holidays. Many admit that they spend many hours watching television. Several girls acknowledge that they had another set of more fashionable clothes that they wore only at home. The point of noting these "deviations" is not to be dismissive of the students' or the school's values and integrity. It is simply to point to the significance of social context. Despite spending eight months of the year in a liminal place, these young people are well aware of, and at times participate in, the patterns of consumption that are typical of the middle classes both in India and globally. This is not to argue that there is no difference between the students at RVS and those who attend other schools, but rather to suggest that these differences are a matter of degree rather than kind.

This pattern is especially visible with regard to fashions. At school many students dress casually and without pretension. For example:

[There were] two girls who had been preparing a presentation for class the next day in the lounge during Prep. One was from Madras,[72] the other from a nearby town in Andhra Pradesh. Both had been in RVS since the 6th. Both were simply dressed, in a pants and cotton tops. One had her long hair tied in a plait, the other in a ponytail. Neither had any accessories. Their footwear was also non-branded.

This is, however, not the whole story. The fieldworker talked with three girls during the arts and crafts period. When asked about fashions they replied: "'Yes, some girls follow these,' . . . [but]'no one pays them any attention . . . . they think they are hep . . . by buying the latest clothes and accessories . . . more so among the girls than the boys.' Do these people think they are cool? 'Yes, there are people who think they are cool . . . among the boys and the girls.'" Another student reported "how some girls tended to be quite concerned about their looks. She added, 'We've even had a few cases of anorexia recently.'" A few days before, the fieldworker observed, "As we chatted I noticed one of the 12th standard girls was in shorts and highly conscious of the length of her shorts and kept hiding behind her classmates. They teased her a bit and then she later went in to change. Obviously, students are not unmindful of the way they look and how their peers view their appearance. "This was particularly evident at the beginning of the term . . . when students came back to school with new clothes, but by the middle of the term people's clothes had gotten borrowed and lent, [or] damaged by the dhobi . . ." and anxieties over appearance declined.

Attention to fashions and appearance were not restricted to a few individuals, though this was more muted than at other schools. The fieldworker, who was herself a graduate of RVS, notes, "Skirts seem to have made a comeback among the girls; on any given day at least one of the girls in the 11th will be wearing a skirt. Also, bag carrying has become the norm." It seems likely that this

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[72]The name of the city was officially changed to Chennai in 1997, but many continue to refer to it as Madras, which was its former name.

use of school bags or backpacks at RVS is part of the near global spread of this phenomenon among students.

Younger pupils seem even more affected by global fashion trends: "I spoke to juniors who readily attested to brand consciousness among their classmates and pointed out people who coveted their branded items and thought themselves the better for it. [Brands] generally included sports labels such as Nike and Adidas, and clothes . . . like Levis." Yet they noted, "[W]hile there were brand conscious boys, the girls tended to be more concerned with the way they looked, and how they dressed in way not necessarily linked to brands. . . ." The fieldworker notes that "in the early stages . . . students are heavily influenced by mainstream values since the majority of the student population comes from the metro[politan], upper-middle-class, English-speaking homes where a consumer culture is prevalent.

Two patterns were especially evident at Rishi Valley. The first was borrowing clothes from other people to expand one's wardrobe and to add some variety to what one wore. This was especially common among the girls. The boys often joked that they did not know which clothes belonged to which girl. A second pattern that was common among students was wearing clothes from the chain store, Fabindia. This company was founded to market apparel made in Indian villages. It specializes in relatively traditional forms of Indian dress. The chain now has about 100 stores, including outlets in the United Arab Emirates and Rome, as well as distributors in the U.S. Wearing such clothes is compatible with the general values and goals of the Rishi Valley School, and with a more general social movement toward indigenous cultural forms. In some respects it is a protest against globalized brands and cultural forms. Like many forms of cultural protest, it has itself become a fashion, with the accompanying social pressures for to conform. This transition from protest to conformity is a common phenomenon illustrated by many examples including the fatigues and beards of the Cuban revolution, the baggy clothes of Hip Hop, and the Gandhi caps and Nehru jackets of the Indian Independence Movement.

In short, there is ambivalence about the patterns of consumption and fashion that are common and perhaps typical of middle-class Indians. Clearly, such patterns have not been completely abandoned at RVS, but they are called into question, muted, and modified.

Nationalism and Citizenship

Such notions of as citizenship, nationalism, and patriotism present a pedagogical problem for the Rishi Valley School. Krishnamurti rejected any narrow notions of national identity and urged people to become citizens of the world. Moreover, his emphasis on the responsibility of the individual for his own development largely downplayed the significance of inherited social identities such as kinship, caste and national citizenship. Yet, the curriculum and national examinations require the teaching of "civics." While for the most part this curriculum does not emphasize overtly chauvinistic notions of nationalism, it does implicitly support the centrality and legitimacy of the nation-state and loyalty toward that entity. Moreover, most students and teachers consider themselves to be patriotic citizens of India. When the students were asked about their notions of citizenship, their responses were in many ways similar to those in other schools.

For example, when Mona was asked about what it meant to be a good citizen she responded that a good citizen was one who, "follows rules, doesn't bribe, pays taxes and one who stays and works in their own country. What's the point of going abroad and earning money?" According to Manhit, being a good citizen entailed knowing one's rights and duties, and . . . exercising the right to vote. Another girl emphasized "obeying laws; not committing crimes like theft and blackmail."

Some students also emphasized that using and honoring the symbols of patriotism were important, while others disagreed. Kalidas and Farooq got embroiled in a good-natured argument about the relative merits of Delhi and Bombay and which was the superior city. Somehow the conversation veered towards the practice of playing the national anthem in Maharasthran theaters before screening the main movie. [Bombay/Mumbai is located in the state of Maharashtra.] Vipul, from the other half of the table, thought the practice idiotic and unnecessary, a practice he felt

should be done away with. Kalidas on the other hand was vehemently upholding it. I asked him

why he felt this way, to which he responded, "I feel it's a great gesture." Nita said, "[Good

citizenship] means you should be proud of . . . and true to your culture. RVS does so; there are so

many cultural activities here. Arjun, the school "topper," also expressed support for patriotism and

tradition:

> I think a good citizen is someone who is patriotic, someone who is proud of being an
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> Indian, proud of the country's cultures and traditions . . . RVS does try to teach us
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> this to some extent. With all the cultural activities we have here . . . I do wish we
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> celebrated festivals here, especially Holi. We only celebrate Pongal, we should do
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> more than that.[73]

Some students questioned the legitimacy of loyalty to the nation-state. "One said, "Why do you ask

what it means to be a good Indian citizen?" You should ask, "How can you help people, without

worrying about which country they come from." The fieldworker concludes that there is a

"conscious attempt on the part of the school to denude students of their identity as national

citizens, and instead to try and shape them as world citizens and good human beings—in keeping

with Krishnamurthy's vision." It is probably accurate to say that while most students are aware of

the call to avoid the more provincial and chauvinistic understandings of citizenship, they vary

considerably in the degree to which they accept and internalize this perspective.

Many students thought that RVS had been successful in teaching them to be good citizens.

The fieldworker asks, "Does RVS help you become a good citizen?" Pritap responds, "Yes, RVS does

this by teaching us not to cheat, by having so many rules that you have follow when you live here. A

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[73] Holi is a widely celebrated and popular Hindu festival that supposedly celebrates the escape of a loyal devotee of the god Vishnu from a fire which consumed a demon. It involves a relaxation of many usual prohibitions, often involves the use of marihuana, and the throwing of colored water on almost anyone including those who normally would have to be treated with deference and respect. Pongal is a harvest festival celebrated primarily by Tamil speaking communities, who are concentrated in the state of Tamil Nadu.

group of younger students were asked, "Does RVS try to make you a good citizen? Has it worked?" They responded:

> Yes, definitely, from the junior classes on, RVS tries to do this. By taking you to the REC (Rural Education Centre) and RHC (Rural Health Centre), which gives you hands on experience of helping people. Nowadays we go there voluntarily, though we don't go so often. RVS also tries to make you connect with nature, for example, the "no plastics"policy. Also, last year just before the 75th anniversary gathering, there was a lot of cleaning up of the valley; this was done by all of us. We weeded the gardens, planted flowers and saplings, and generally made the place look nice.

Another girl said she thought being a good citizen meant "having good manners, appropriate dress." When I asked her if RVS taught these things she said she thought they did.

The issue most students kept coming back to was, "keeping the environment clean." RVS has succeeded in inculcating an unusual level of social concern about the environment. One of the girls seemed to strongly feel that RVS did . . . make them good citizens. When she was ask in what way, she replied, "Through the no plastics policy, by telling us to not bring grub and use plastic pens." Another added, "They always talk about nature and teach us to love nature." Later two girls said "that taking care of the environment was an important part of being in RVS. They thought the no plastics policy was a good thing and that they didn't miss illegal grub at all."

The fieldworker concludes:

> Most students answered the citizenship questions in broad terms ranging from "following rules" to being "in harmony with nature" [most common response] to "not bribing, cheating, [or] being corrupt." Invariably the students said they thought RVS tried to make them good citizens, largely in [regard to] nature [and] related activities – reducing the use of plastics, picking up litter, weeding, and so on. And

most students felt they were in some small measure . . . reasonably good citizens—

though they always added . . . that their behavior at home differed.

Conclusion

In many respects Rishi Valley School is like other public boarding schools in India. It draws students from relatively privileged and educated upper-middle class families. The facilities and faculty are well above average compared to most secondary schools. On the other hand, its ideology, rooted in the thought of Krishnmurti, makes it a distinctive institution. It produces students who have been made aware of ideas that call into question the conventional notions of success characteristic of the Indian upper-middle classes, and makes these young people especially appreciative of "nature" and humans' impact on the environment. While they are in school students seem to live between two worlds: the world of Rishi Valley, which in part incorporates Krishnamurti's vision, and the world from which they come. Most will return to the latter world. The degree to which Krishnamurti's vision and their experience at RVS will cause them to live differently from those who went to other elite schools is at best unclear.

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Chapter 8: Explaining Variations

The Analytical Strategy

In earlier work on status systems Milner developed a theory of status relations to explain the patterns of behavior characteristic of Indian castes (1994), religious groups (1994), celebrities and their fans (2005, 2010), and American high school students (2004[rev. ed. 2016]). It is clear that while there are some similarities between American youth and Indian youth, there are significant differences. [In Milner's book on American teenagers (2004, 2016) there was a systematic attempt to explain variations between different types of high schools.] An obvious analytical question is can the theory of status relationships help explain both the differences between American secondary schools and Indian schools, and the variations across different Indian secondary schools. Let us re-emphasize that we draw upon the American model not because it is something to be copied by other societies, but because it approximates an ideal-type in which certain kinds of patterns can be more clearly seen.

This is a well-known analytical strategy used in a variety of disciplines. Three obvious examples come to mind. Newton's laws of falling bodies predict the movement of planets, spacecraft and feathers—as long as they are in a vacuum. Outer space is a near vacuum and hence theoretical predictions are quite accurate in this context. The movements of objects in the earth's atmosphere are predicted much less accurately because it is not a vacuum. The theory is much better at predicting the movement of a cannon ball dropped from a tower than it is a feather dropped from the same tower and it helps to understand why this is the case: variations in the density and shape of the object are irrelevant in a vacuum, but not in the earth's atmosphere. A similar strategy is used by economists to explain the relationship between the price of goods and the supply of and demand for these goods under the condition of a perfectly completive market. If, however, a market is not perfectly competitive the predictions of the theory can be quite inaccurate.

Nonetheless the economists' model can be quite useful starting place in helping to explain why imperfect markets such as monopolies and oligopolies operate the way that they do. A third example is Max Weber's ideal-type model of rational-legal bureaucracy, which drew on observations from the relatively extreme case of Prussian bureaucracies.[74] Most actual organizations operate in a much less rational and legal manner than Weber's model suggested. Weber was aware of this, but saw his ideal-type description as a useful benchmark. Much of organizational research and theory has been devoted to showing departures from rationality and rote rule following and the sources and consequences of such departures. The states described by such ideal-type models do not imply that these are necessarily desirable outcomes. There can be ideal-type models of despots, psychopathic murders, genocide, or a "perfect" storm. Rather such models are tools for comparison, not forms of approval or advocacy.

Without meaning to suggest that the theory of status relations is as powerful analytical tool as these examples, we use it in a similar way: to explain both the general patterns that tend to occur in well-developed status systems and departures from those patterns. To illustrate the theories usefulness in explaining the patterns in well-developed status systems we will very briefly allude to its applicability to the status systems that are characteristic of American teenagers. We will draw on a simplified, ideal-typical description model of American teenage life.[75]   Then we will take up the patterns of Indian secondary students and offer explanations of why these vary from the American pattern and the variations within the Indian schools that have been described.

A Theory of Status Relations

Status is the accumulated approvals and disapprovals that people expressed toward an actor, group or object. The theory attempts to explain the key features of social relationships when status is a central resource and is significantly insulated from, and hence not reducible to, economic

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[74] Weber draws distinctions between various types of rationality (1978, pp. 24f, 85f.). What we are referring to here is probably what Weber would call a form of formal instrumental rationality.
[75] For more complex and qualified descriptions of American teenagers see Milner 2004.

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and political power. The main elements of such a theory can be stated in four points. The first two focus on how status differs from other resources, the second two on the sources of status.

Inalienability

Status is relatively inalienable. It is "located" primarily in other peoples' minds. Hence, in contrast to wealth or political position it cannot be appropriated. Conquerors, robbers, or parents may be able to take away your property or remove you from office, but to change your status they have to change the opinions of other people. This relative inalienability makes status a desirable resource. Those with new wealth or political power nearly always attempt to convert some of these resources into status to gain greater security and legitimacy. Once status systems become institutionalized they are relatively stable.

With respect to American teen culture, adolescents repeatedly report the difficulty of changing their status once it is established. The ranking of social categories is also relatively stable. Cheerleaders are not the core of the popular crowd one year only to be replaced by nerds or punks the next year.

Inexpansibility

Status is relatively inexpansible. Some societies have a per capita income that is many times greater than other societies. In contrast, status is basically a relative ranking. If a monarch knighted ten thousand warriors each year, the honor would be much less prestigious. Inexpansibility means that when someone moves up, someone moves down. Consequently, where status is the central resource, mobility tends to be highly regulated and restricted as in the pre-1954 South of the U.S., the American Social Register, the British peerage system and most aristocratic societies.

Where the ranks of American adolescent cliques are well established, it is notoriously difficult for those of lower status to move into higher status groups. Conversely, one way of staying

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on top or moving up is by pushing others down. This is apparent in racism, negative campaigning, and intellectual competition. In American high schools, the "popular crowd" frequently makes snide remarks about those "beneath" them. Women often complain that they are the victims of gossip and backbiting. Males frequently put one another down with ritual insults and even physical intimidation. Unsuccessful attempts at upward mobility are also derided; these people are "wannabes." In short, the common adolescents' proclivity to (1) maintain group boundaries, (2) gossip, cattiness, and insults, and (3) the denigration of those who attempt upward mobility are all rooted in the inexpansibility of status.

Conformity

Conformity to the norms of the group is a key source of status. This is an obvious point, but the consequences are somewhat less obvious: those with higher status tend to elaborate and complicate the norms. These norms often govern lifestyle and consumption. Elaborated and subtle norms make it harder for outsiders and upstarts to conform and hence become competitors. Accent, demeanor, body language, and notions of taste and style are hard for outsiders to copy. When outsiders can acquire or copy high status symbols relatively easily, as is the case with clothing, insiders keep "ahead" by constantly changing the norms about what is "in," hence the preoccupation with fashions.

These processes are especially characteristic of American adolescent cliques and crowds where being "in fashion" can be a very important aspect of status competition. Non-conformity to adult rules can be a crucial aspect of conformity to peer norms; popular teenagers frequently flout the norms of adults in general and school officials in particular. It is okay to be bright and make high grades—as long as you express indifference about academic matters. In short, there is a student subculture with its own norms, many of which are often antithetical to official norms, and conformity to these is a crucial source of status.

Associations

If you associate with those of higher status, it improves your status, and if you associate with those of lower status, it decreases your status. This is especially so if the activity and the relationship is expressive and intimate rather than instrumental and impersonal. Intimate, expressive relationships imply mutual approval. Sex and eating are the classic symbols of intimacy. Accordingly, American teenagers tend to be very concerned about who is going with whom, and who eats with whom in the lunchroom. But, as the theory would suggest, students are much more relaxed about who they associate with in the classroom because this is instrumental activity. Conversely, the same people you were friendly with in class may be ignored or shunned outside the classroom. As we shall she, the significance of instrumental and expressive activity is one of the crucial differences between the American and Indian secondary school systems.

A Note on Pluralism

There has been a tendency for peer status systems in the U.S. to become more pluralistic: there are distinct subcultures—preps, brains, jocks, rappers, punks, etc.—but much less agreement about the ranking of these groups. One source of this pluralism is larger schools. In a school of 200 the ten percent can be a cohesive "popular crowd" that everyone knows. In a school of 2000 ten percent is too many people to be a cohesive group, much less to be known by everyone else. Hence, many more people are both excluded from the popular crowd, and have no relationship and little knowledge of them. Instead of trying to copy the popular crowd, people create alternative subcultures that reject the values and symbols of the groups that have rejected them, and create other values and symbols. Black becomes beautiful. Instead of button down collars, loose, sloppy clothing becomes fashionable. A status hierarchy is replaced by a pluralistic system of multiple crowds. This process is accentuated when students come from more diverse ethnic backgrounds. On the macro level ethnicity may be a socially constructed category, but most teenagers experience it as an inalienable social category that gives them a common identity, which can serve as a basis for

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friendship. The result is a tendency for cliques to be ethnically homogeneous. On the other hand, if students identify, not with a particular background, but with a certain kind of performance—such as being an excellent student, a star athlete or a skilled dancer—they may associate with similar students and participate in ethnically mixed groups. Or if childhood experiences have included intimate relations with those of other ethnicities, participation in mixed groups is more likely.

The claim is that the theory, summarized in these four points (with the elaboration about pluralism), can help to explain some of the key features of social organization whenever status is a central resource. Equally important when the intensity of status concerns and the sources of status vary, the theory can help to explain why other patterns emerge.

Indian versus American Peer Culture

We will organize the next part of our analysis in terms of the elements of the theory, but will consider them in a different order, beginning with conformity.

Conformity

Consumption and Fashions

Indian students are much less able to engage in status competition by elaborating and complicating the norms of style or pursuing status by acquiring the latest fashions and consumer commodities. First, the vast majority of students do not have as much money to spend on clothes, jewelry, shoes, eating out, etc. as the typical American student. Since very few students have jobs, they are usually totally dependent upon their parents for spending money. Second, and most obvious, the overwhelming majority must wear uniforms and they are regularly inspected to see that they comply with the dress code. They do try both to violate the code and to differentiate themselves from one another by subtle differences in the way they wear their uniforms, but the scope for deviance and innovation are quite limited. Third, most parents and teachers tend to discourage a preoccupation with fashions, cosmetics, and other forms of conspicuous display.

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These measures work, in part, because Indian parents, teachers, and adults in general, both expect and are given more authority and deference than is typical in the U.S. In part, this is due to broad cultural differences. These include the greater significance and strength of kinship ties and the lower status of the young relative to those who are older. This effectiveness is also due to more specific organizational factors such as the relative ease with which Indian schools can punish, suspend, and expel students who do not follow the rules. This does not mean that students have no agency or that they do not resist and deviate from the norms that are imposed on them. Like humans in most organizations they create informal norms and counter cultures of their own. In general, however, they have less leeway to do this than American students.

Indian students are by no means oblivious to clothing fashions and other forms of consumerism such as going to trendy commercial gyms, American-style fast-food restaurants, and new cinemas in shopping malls. Nonetheless fashions and similar forms of consumer commodities are much less central to Indian secondary schools than to most American schools. The students we studied were well aware of national and international brands and trends in fashion, and they and attempt to follow these to the degree that they can. Such constraints are breaking down to some degree. For example, the almost worldwide preferred "uniform" of youth has become jeans and a top.

We see in this analysis of consumption and fashion a key theme that will run through much of the analysis. The basic status processes that operate in most status systems and are especially apparent among American teenagers also operate in many Indian secondary schools. However, various cultural and organizational features of Indian schools restrain and retard these processes. Again, let us make clear here that when we say "restrain and retard," this does not mean we think such constraints are bad or undesirable—any more than when it is said that levees or bunds retard flooding. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that all of the tendencies in status systems are inherently bad, or that any means of restraining these are desirable.

Exams and Marks

What is strikingly different about Indian and U.S. schools is the extent to which status among peers is affected by how well one performs academically. In India a student's status and is closely tied to performance on examinations. This is generally a much weaker relationship in the U.S.[76] Equally striking is how Indian students, parents and teachers take the examination system for granted. In some respects the ultimate forms of conformity are when patterns are seen as natural and simply "the way the world is." How do we understand such levels of conformity and the status system that emerges from it? One way of talking about such a situation is to say that the social institution of exams—that is the assumptions, values, norms and organizational forms that make up the examination system—has itself come to have a high status. Hence, as a social institution the status of exams has become relatively inalienable—most students, parents, and teachers come to accept the status of this social institution as inevitable. It is seen as legitimate, i.e., it has a high status, even if it is resented. The same could be said for many peasants' attitudes toward such institutions as nobility or kingship. In both cases, the result is that is elaborate efforts to conform to the norms of such institutions. In the case of peasants and nobility it would include learning and conforming to elaborate forms of ritualistic deference and to the requirements of laboring to produce crops that would be appropriated by their superiors. In the case of Indian secondary students and their families, it involves investing significant amounts of time and energy getting in the right schools, paying for tutoring, and organizing much of family life around the schedules of their children—and in large measure taking all of this for granted. When an institution takes on such a status and the norms and rituals associated with it become the way the world is,

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[76] Many families and U.S. schools in upper middle class areas are definitely becoming as concerned about test scores and grade point averages as Indian schools. The better students in these schools often work as hard as or harder than the good students in Indian schools. Where these families decide to reside, and hence residential property values, are strongly affected by how good the schools are perceived to be. This is only beginning to shape the peer status structures of most American high schools, however, and except for very academically elite high schools, high academic accomplishment is not the primary sources of status among peers. For a useful study of one of these high pressure American schools see, Demerath (2009).S

new forms and levels of social control and conformity emerge. We turn to Michel Foucault's notions about discipline to further clarify the nature of this process.

Foucault argued that increasingly power has shifted from what he called sovereign power to disciplinary power.[77] The first was intermittent and irregular, but in its most extreme form relied on the spectacle of horrific sanctions often involving public torture. The second was continuous, all pervasive, and relied on near constant surveillance. The latter type tended to become embodied and internalized into those that were under its sway. Often it was not experienced as control per se. Rather it became the taken-for-granted way of doing things. What we have seen is that Indian schools rely on a combination of these two forms of power. There is plenty of "old fashion" punishment, but there are also more subtle disciplinary processes that shape what constitutes knowledge. One clear example of this is the image of what constitutes gender-appropriate behavior for the girls at St. Anne's. Girls may break the rules in various ways, but it is a rare St. Anne's student who does not want to become—in the words of the teacher—a proper "young lady" rather than a "fisher women."

The most obvious of example of Foucault-like disciplinary processes is the examination system. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the whole education system revolves around these exams. Examination scores come to constitute the relevant form of knowledge/power. This is so not only in the educational system, but scores are a key determinant of where and on what terms one enters into the occupational structure. One of the striking things is the extent to which this is accepted and taken for granted. On occasion university students have protested or even rioted over what they felt were unfair examinations, but this has rarely happened at the secondary school level. Rather families and children in many respects organize their lives

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[77] Michel Foucault. 1995 [1977]. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison.* New York: Vintage Books. Michael Foucault. 1980. *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books. See also Michael Sauder and Wendy Nelson Espeland. 2009. "The Discipline of Rankings: Tight Coupling and Organizational Change," *American Sociological Review*, 74 (February): 63-82 for a discussion of how the U. S. News and World Report rankings of law schools have imposed a Foucault-like form of discipline and organizational change.

around the social fact of these examinations. Middle-class families spend enormous energies and substantial amounts of money to get their children into the "right" school and for after school tutoring.

The older more conventional forms of punishment-based discipline are seen—by students as well as adults—as a necessary foundation for the more subtle forms of discipline identified by Foucault. In many respects it would not be a great exaggeration to say that the caste system, which classically was the core mechanism of social inequality and social discipline in India, has been replaced by the system of educational examinations, which is the new core of social inequality and social discipline in India.

Given this level of taken-for-granted legitimacy, it is hardly surprising students' scores on examinations becomes a key source of status, not only for teachers and parents, but also for peers. It is why "toppers" are celebrities.

Deviance and Resistance as Conformity

While students may take the examination system for granted, but this certainly is not the case for all aspects of school life. In all of the schools we have examined students engage in various kinds of deviance and resistance. Rearranging one's uniform after inspection, talking back to teachers, bunking classes, bringing mobile phones to school, text messaging when teachers are not looking, and surreptitiously meeting boy or girl friends are only some of the most obvious examples. Some of this is rooted in the students' resentment to having to do things they had rather not do. A much more crucial and somewhat less obvious point, however, is that a crucial form of conformity to peer norms is to offer a certain amount of resistance to official norms. Yet, in both Indian schools and American schools this requires a careful balancing act. Too much deviance and resistance is seen by peers to be not only self-destructive but antithetical to the interest of other students. In India such deviants are labeled as "naughty," "ill mannered" or "notorious"; in the U.S. they are seen as "thugs" or "losers." The key point is that, quite aside from the psychology of the

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individuals involved, there are social sources of deviance and resistance in status systems in general and in secondary schools in particular. To be a respectable member of the student community you have to conform by deviating—but not too much.

Associations

Ranking and Boundaries

In all of the Indian schools observed there are small groups of friends who often eat lunch together and offer each other various kinds of social and emotional support. Often they gossip about other students and their teachers. In some school s, for example, St. Anne's, these cliques are linked together forming subcultures such as geeks, fashionable types, and "average" crowds. It is clear, however, that both the ranking and the boundaries of such cliques and subcultures are much weaker than is typically the case in the United States. How is this difference to be explained?

First, Indian adolescents—at least the middle class ones that are in secondary schools— have much less autonomy than American youth. Indian teenagers spend a lot less time with school friends outside of the school setting (or tutorial session) than in the U.S. When they do spend time together it is often at events such as birthday parties in which adult family members are present or at least in the immediate vicinity. Where they seem to have more autonomy, such as the Hi-Fi crowd at St. Anne's or the Nagamese boys at St. Mark's who live in a hostel, peer groups are more important and they have stronger boundaries. Second, Indians students have less free time. Because of the pressures of the examination system they spend more time studying and many in effect attend two schools, their actual school and their after-school tutoring classes. Many, especially girls, have other responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings and helping with household chores. Third, and perhaps most important, the activities at Indian schools are much more focused on instrumental activities and concerns, that is, scoring well on the exams. Schools do have extra or co-curricular activities, but these usually occur during schools hours. Moreover,

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Indian schools do not offer the array of services characteristic of American schools, such as, driver's education, special classes for students with disabilities, vocational counseling, sex education, and anti-drug programs. School sponsored social activities such as dances and proms or Friday night football games are rare in the Indian setting. Instead Indian schools tend to focus their concerns to imparting the curriculum. As the theory would predict, where activities and associations are instrumental, informal friendships and cliques are narrower in scope and importance. Friendships are sometimes formed and broken on the basis of having similar levels of academic performance. Moreover, the opportunities that are available for more intimate expressive relationships are more limited. As the theory points out, sharing food and having romantic relationships are key forms of intimacy. In most of these schools lunch periods are short, romantic relationships are often forbidden, and times together outside of school are limited, so three of the key sources of small group solidarity are unavailable to most students. Where the opportunities for more expressive relationships are more available—as for the Hi-Fi girls at St. Anne's or some of the students at St. Mark's where tribal identities are important, ranking and boundaries of peer groups are more pronounced, and patterns more closely approximate the patterns found in American schools.

Romance

Until relatively recent years open expressions of sexual and romantic interest by secondary school students was strongly discouraged by adults. As we have seen this is still largely the case, as illustrated by teachers and parents saying that they are "too young" to be concerned about such matters. Because of short lunch periods, few after school activities, and watchful parents and teachers, couples have only limited opportunities to spend time together. Nonetheless a significant minority of students do have boyfriends and girlfriends. Moreover, the prevalence of this seems to be increasing. As we have seen some parents and school officials not only forbid or discourage such relationships, but they actively intervene to punish those who violate these prohibitions. Hence, it is no surprise that most students do not have girlfriends and boyfriends and that those who do

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usually keep these relationships disguised from adults. Many students, however, considered that such relationships were "now a part of normal school life."

What is more surprising is how many students themselves either agree with adults that they are "too young" or say they simply do not have time for such matters. Objections seem to be especially strong if the couple is "showing off," meaning engaging in public displays of affection. Sometimes a surreptitious form of intimacy is expressed among couples by "hitting" one another, and this seems to be tolerated by adults if not approved. To a significant degree disapproval of romantic relationships, especially by students, seems to be related to the largely instrumental orientation of the Indian school setting; school is a time for studying and exams, not romance. This is a significant contrast to the cultural assumption in American secondary education where it has been thought that "growing up" and developing romantic relationships are a normal parts of the high school experience. However, instrumental activity and academic accomplishment has become increasingly important in American schools.

Inexpansibility

As the theory suggests in highly status conscious social systems, mobility tends to be restricted. In addition superiors or would-be superiors often denigrate others. Where status is distributed relatively equally, however, this kind of behavior tends to be less prevalent. Even if status is inexpansible, if "all are equal" there is no place to move up or down. Hence, putting others down tends to lower the status of the aggressor, not the victim. Hence, on average Indian students to "put down" others less than American students. As we shall see later, there are variations within Indian schools and in some there are significant amounts of aggressive behavior. Indian students certainly tease one another, but they quickly proclaim that it is just in fun. As the students at Ahimsa School said, "We like bitching and making fun of others. We even laughed at them. We do play pranks with our friends, classmates. But, our intention is not to hurt them. It's just for fun." Undoubtedly more aggression is intended than the statements indicate, but Indian students feel the

need to proclaim the innocence of their putdowns. In many American schools this would not be the case, though it would in some. It is true that in Indian schools there are isolates, which others avoid and are sometimes condescending toward. Such isolation is usually due to individual eccentricities and rarely do such individuals form a social group or category. None of this is to say those Indian students are more thoughtful or moral than American students. Rather, the point is that the social contexts differ with respect to the way status is distribute and this produce variations in the rates of aggressive behavior and concerns about upward and downward mobility of school peers.

Inalienability

The Stability of Peer Status

The more inalienable status is the more difficult mobility. Such inalienability is characteristic of aristocratic societies, caste-like systems, racist societies, and peer status in American high schools. It also tends to be true in Indian schools. Rarely do *mallu* Christians become members of the Hi-Fi set, or vice versa. There are, however, cases of relatively dramatic mobility in the Indian schools due to the examination system. Students who do much better or worse on their exams can experience significant changes in their peer status. This is because Indian schools are more instrumental in their orientation and performance on exams is a key source of status. On the whole, however, once students develop a particular level of status with their peers and their teachers this rarely changes significantly because of the inalienable nature of status.

Nationalism and Chauvinism

If one's status is secure and inalienable, people are usually less concerned about slights or disrespectful behavior, than people whose status is less secure. The same tends to be true of organizations and collectivities. If some people are snide or dismissive of the academic status of Harvard, Yale, Oxford or Cambridge it is doubtful that the officials of these institutions lose too much sleep over the matter. If their status drops in a recent poll they may be concerned, but not

nearly as concerned as a middle-ranking institution whose rating declines. A similar process seems to operate for nation-states; they tend to most affirm their own status and disparage the status of others when they are under attack. It is not surprising that in the U.S. some of the most chauvinistic and propagandistic portraits of foreigners emerged in World War I with highly derogatory references and pictures of the Germans as "Huns," alluding back to Attila and his "hoards" that terrorized Europe in the fifth century. Similarly, highly racist portraits of "Japs" were used in World War II propaganda.

Hence, it is not surprising that Indian students would see Pakistan in relatively derogatory terms following years of conflict over Kashmir and more recent terrorist attacks originating from Pakistan. This nationalistic reaction is probably exacerbated precisely because the status of India as a nation state has risen enormously in the last two decades. In addition to hostility toward Pakistan, these events caused at least some student to be suspicious of the motives and loyalties of Muslims in their midst; that is their status is lowered because of the perceived association with Islam and Pakistan.

These attacks, as horrible as they were, did not seriously threaten the Indian state or the overwhelming power of India vis–à–vis Pakistan; there is little doubt that India would win an all-out war, though the cost could be enormous. Such attacks are much more a matter of dishonoring the Indian state and people than they are a military threat—though war can, of course, be a tragedy for those that are directly affected. It is therefore at least in part because these students do not see the status of India in the modern world system as inalienable that more nationalistic sentiments are expressed when this status is directly attacked. As the above examples of U.S. chauvinism indicate, this is hardly unique to Indians, but rather a common pattern across varying historical situations—and the theory helps to explain such variations.

Pluralism

In general Indian secondary schools are less pluralistic than U.S. schools *in terms of their peer culture*. This is despite the fact that many schools have students from quite diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds with respect to religion, caste and language. For pluralism to operate and become a relevant social concept at the level of the schools peer culture, there need to be fairly distinctive subgroups and subcultures. Hence, the relative lack of pluralism is simply in part due to the weaker identities of groups and subcultures within schools. We will consider the effect of other factors when we compare the six Indian schools.

Comparing Indian Schools

In this section we will reverse the organization of the exposition and instead of grouping the arguments under the categories of the theory, we will take up the ways in which the schools vary and then suggest how these variations might be understood in terms of the theory.

Ranking and Boundaries

What the theory predicts is that where status is a central resource, rankings are likely to emerge. Predictably those of equal rank have things in common that serve a basis of solidarity and hence the tendency for status groups to emerge. The solidarity and intensity of such status groups are accentuated if those of different ranks also share different cultural characteristics such as language or religion. After initial status differences emerge, rankings are likely to become relatively inalienable. These tendencies are especially strong when activities are expressive rather than instrumental. Ranking is likely to occur when activities are instrumental, e.g., sports teams, but status groups with well-defined boundaries are less likely. Competitive sporting teams may be very concerned about their status and ranking, but they are unlikely to exclude an excellent player because they do not like the way he dresses. If, however, the team is a group of friends who play

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"just for fun," they may very well exclude people on the basis of their lifestyle or other primarily expressive behaviors.

This helps to understand why it is the Hi-Fi girls at St. Anne's tend to carefully police the boundaries of their status group. They may well want a good education, but failing to be a "topper" does not condemn them to a monotonous job and low income, the way it can middle and lower middle class students. Hence, it is not surprising that expressive activities like lavish parties in hotels are a central part of their identity rather than exam marks per se. On the other hand, the *mallu* Christian girls tend to come from weaker academic backgrounds, lower socio-economic families, and they are "dark"—an inalienable and visible low-status attribute—and they are denigrated by other students. Hence, they tend to be both more alienated from academic work, and more likely to have distinct group boundaries.

It also helps us to understand why St. Mark's has distinctive groups, but less ranking. There is not simply one clearly identifiable ethnic minority, but many: Naga, Mizo, Garo, Bengali, Nepali, as well as the majority Khasi and their various subgroups such as the Bhoi and Jaintia. Such language and cultural differences are also quite visible and relatively inalienable. Moreover, at St. Mark's there are not the same dramatic differences in socio-economic backgrounds as at St. Anne's. Accordingly ranking is more contested by multiple identifiable groups—and fights have been more common. On the other hand, there is enough egalitarianism so that some individuals can form multi-ethnic groups, especially if they share common instrumental goals such as doing well on exams.

At Uttarnagar the differences between those from the "inner areas" and better-off families are rooted in socio-economic differences that are often correlated with the cultural differences. Egalitarianism among those from government housing developments is fostered by the relative socio-economic homogeneity—though this is an equality of those in the lower-middle classes and upper-lower classes, rather than among the upper-middle and middle classes as is the case at

Rampura and Ahimsa. At Uttarnagar, however, there are greater variations in academic

commitment and performance and this creates tensions that are less prevalent than in Rampura

and Ahimsa. Ahimsa is relatively egalitarian, but it is an egalitarianism of the relatively well-off, and

it lacks the ideology and rigorous efforts to suppress inequalities that are characteristic of

Rampura. Again keep in mind that this relative egalitarianism is aided by the relatively

instrumental orientation of parents and students.

Rishi Valley is unique in that it is much smaller than the other schools (only a 160 students

at the secondary level), and it is highly selective. This selectivity involves not only academic

criteria, but its distinctive ideology rooted in the thought of Khrisna Murti, which emphasizes the

students' own responsibility for their academic, emotional, and moral development. While student

are recruited from all over India and even internationally, the selectivity-involved means that in

many respects the student population is very homogeneous.   After class 10, only half of the

students will be allowed to return; this is a powerful mechanism for both disciplining students, and

creating further homogeneity in classes 11 and 12 with respect to students' commitment to Rishi

Valley's ideals. Finally, it is a boarding school in an isolated region and hence the level of sustained

contact students have is very high. All of this contributes not only to a kind of egalitarianism, but a

form of solidarity that more approximates that of an extended family than a network of school

friends. This does not mean there is no differentiation or conflict, but it is between those who are

very similar in many respects and does not usually result in the emergence of permanent cliques,

except those rooted in age or gender.

In short, the theory, supplemented by data about the degree to which student bodies are

homogeneous, and the scope and intensity of their interaction (in the case of Rishi Valley), is useful

in helping to understand why the peer relations at different schools vary.

Consumption and Fashion

The theory suggests that when status is important people will tend to elaborate and complicate the norms to maintain their status advantages. A concern with keeping up with fashions in clothes, music, technology, and language is one result of this. As we have seen, virtually all Indian secondary students have some awareness of and interest in, national and international fashion trends. During school hours students are constrained from openly expressing these because of school uniforms—though as we have seen surreptitious efforts at differentiation are common. (Rishi Valley does not require uniforms, but there are considerable social pressures from peers and from the schools ideology not to openly engage in status competition with one's peers.) How involved students are in fashion and other forms of consumption outside of school is in part a function of how much money students have available and how westernized they are. The Hi-Fi students at St. Anne's are clearly at one extreme and the poorer students at Uttarnagar at the other. Even in Uttarnagar "keep in up" is of concern. One form this takes is an intense interests in various celebrities, which is a relatively inexpensive way to being "up on things." Students at St. Mark's are quite fashion conscious and surprisingly westernized. In part this is a way of expressing what they see to be the neglect and exploitation of the North East by the central government and non-tribal Indians. Students at Rampara and Ahimsa are both quite conscious of fashion trends and have moderate amounts of money, but these schools attempt to discourage such inclinations by ideologies stressing "Indian traditions" or the ascetic restraint of Jainism. Many ignore such notions, but others feel at least ambivalent about an over preoccupation with such matters. As in other matters, Rishi Valley is a deviant case because of the unique nature of the school. For the most part fashions are not very important in the school setting and other forms of consumption are limited by the location. On the other hand, many admit that their behavior is quite different when they are at home or places besides Rishi Valley. In short, the basic tendencies predicted by the

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theory are present, but they are constrained and channeled by both cultural and organizational factors characteristic of India or particular schools.

Romance

Few women openly date or have boyfriends. The partial exceptions are some of the girls at St. Anne's (Catholic girl's school in Delhi) and a few of those at St. Mark's (school in tribal Shillong). This is as would be expected since these two schools seem most Westernized and have the most fully developed set of peer status groups. In most of the other schools there are a number of romantically linked couples, but these relationships are kept either secret from teachers and parents or at least they are not publicly acknowledged to adults. In part this is because traditionally for most Indians no legitimate romantic relationships existed outside of marriage—which is not to say they did not occur.[78] Moreover, most marriages are arranged by parents, not by the young people involved. Equally important, however, is the emphasis on instrumental activities and relationships in the school context. A much greater percentage of the students could engage in clandestine relationships if they really cared to do so—for they certainly do not hesitate to engage in other forms of deviance from adult norms. Many students say they do not have time for such relationships. There does not seem to be a lot of variation in the rates of secret liaisons at Rampura (Delhi school emphasizing Indian traditions), Uttarnagar (Delhi government school), and Ahimsa (Delhi Jain school) though we have no quantitative data about this. As in most other matters Rishi Valley (South Indian school based on teachings of Krishnamurti) differs from most schools. While Rishi Valley (RV) students generally help couples keep their relationships hidden, men who are perceived to be flirting are mercilessly teased and disparaged. Apparently, in a small self-contained community like this, such pseudo intimacy is unacceptable. Even when adults are not present couples generally ignore one another, except in rare instances when they are in private. It may very

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[78] Very high status people such as kings were often exempted, not to speak of illicit relationships by the less exalted.

well be that since this is such a small community young people feel very ambivalent about romance and couples. Since status and intimacy are relatively inexpansible, the supposedly greater status and intimacy that couples show toward one another reduces the supply to other members of the community, and hence they do what they can to discourage such relationships—short of betraying fellow students to school officials, which is simply "not done" at RV.

As the theory would predict, those engaged in romantic relationships care about the broader social status of their partner, including the status of the school they attend. This is seen most clearly in the case of St. Anne's, where the higher status girls only have boyfriends that are good looking and "filthy rich." Also at St. Anne's it is seen in the relationship between Samiya and Vadin and the former's apparent embarrassment that Vadin lives in Gurgaon and goes to a school of questionable stature. Having a partner that is "dark" also lowers the status of both partners.

In short, the general tendencies of adolescents to develop romantic relationships and to be concerned about the status of their partners are present in most schools. They are most common and intense in the two schools where peer status systems are most developed. In all of these schools, however, these tendencies are much less developed than in the U.S. both because of traditional cultural norms and because of the pressures to focus on instrumental activities.

[2017 Note: Paradoxical Inequalities/Differences]

The school in Shillong (Northeast India) was much more "cliquish" than the schools in other parts of India. This seemed paradoxical since in general the tribal cultures of the Northeast are noticeably more egalitarian, especially with respect to gender and age. The basic reason seems to be that the greater authoritarianism of "mainland" India enables adult to suppress the tendency of young people in school settings to elaborate status differences and organized much of their activity around these differences. For a more extended discussion of this phenomena see, Milner, Murray Jr. 2013. "Paradoxical Inequalities: Adolescent Peer Relations in Indian Secondary Schools," *Sociology of Education*, 86: 3 (July): 253 - 267.

Citizenship and Nationalism

As we have seen in most schools students are usually bored by civics and values education. The Humanities section at St. Anne's was quite interested in politics and related matters. Many students at Rishi Valley are also interested in politics and quite international in their outlook. These exceptions are predictable since these are relatively elite schools—and elites are more active in public affairs and gain status by being knowledgeable about such matters. In this sense, these students were simply conforming to the norms and expectations of their social background as well as to the ideas espoused by some of their teachers.

Rampura and Ahimsa were the schools where the most nationalistic and chauvinistic opinions were expressed, especially suspicion toward Pakistan and doubts about the loyalty of Indian Muslims. St. Mark's is in an area where many people are at best ambivalent about being part of India, though students seldom express such sentiments. Students at St. Anne's are aware of these issues, but this seems to be less the case at Uttarnagar. Why are Rampura and Ahimsa the most nationalistic? The answer may be because these schools most identify with Indian traditions and attract families and children who have similar outlooks. Both Hinduism and Jainism are religions that have been largely confined to India and have in some respects been less universalistic and internationalist in their perspectives.[79] Hence when India is attacked and dishonored, they are the groups that are most offended and react most strongly.

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[79] Hinduism has not been confined to India. It is the dominant religion in Bali and was the dominant religion in Cambodia and other parts of Southeast Asia in centuries past. In the 19th and 20th centuries communities of Hindus developed in parts of the British Empire such as the West Indies, Trinidad, Singapore, and Fiji. In the last quarter of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, substantial numbers of Indians have migrated to the U.S. and Europe. Nonetheless it seems accurate to say that Hinduism has not been as universalistic and as motivated to spread its ideology to other people as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Well into the twentieth century high castes individuals could lose their caste status by traveling outside of Indian. There are, of course, branches of Hinduism that have a more universalistic orientation, but these are exceptions rather than the general tendency.