The Power Game: A Case Study of a Private School in Odisha

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1 Introduction

A child is initiated into the process of learning from the moment he/she is born. As the child grows up, the needs and desires keep step with him/her. These become diversified and complicated with time. Not every need can be met at home, around the family. Hence, the child steps out of home into the precincts of a formal institution called school. Thus, a school becomes the first 'other', the outside entity which a child encounters away from the gaze of family. Being the chief 'other', the school has immense potential and responsibilities in shaping the child into a responsible citizen. Hence, education in school is the child's introduction to 'formal' learning.

A typical day at school begins with the ringing of the school bell, children in uniform lined up for the morning assembly, the school gate closes, the late-comers rounded up in a separate group (an act of formal punishment for flouting rules), call of attendance-formal education begins with the introduction to the idea of discipline and punishment. Here, the question that requires attention is what is the purpose of schooling? Schooling is often considered as one of the most important agencies of socialisation. History, science, politics, language, literature, art, music, sports, morality, ethics-school opens up facts and stories about culture and human civilisation, about modes of behaviour and etiquettes, about universalism and particularism, about the untenable dynamics of 'us' and 'them' etc. Schools, as the formal agents of socialisation, are responsible for training the child in a manner that is quite different from training by the family. The school, being the most stable socialising agent, exercises strategic power relations on its members. It not only teaches the child about conformity to the societal norms but also inculcates the ideas of critical questioning.

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J. B. G Tilak (ed.), *Universal Secondary Education in India*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5366-0_7

Thus, the school serves as a catalyst, wherein dynamism is valued, besides acting as a stabilizer by promoting the idea of obedience and conformity.

If one looks at the idea of schooling, it is born out of the necessity to perpetuate an established view of the society. It acts as a mediator between the 'particularistic values' of family and the 'universalistic values' of the world outside. Schools enable change of the diverse population into one society with a shared national identity while preparing the young generations for their future citizenship roles. School, as an organisation, has goals which are formally prescribed, membership, a hierarchical order and a lot of other informal goals, like getting a formal degree, orientation for higher goals, fostering competitive spirit, friendship etc. The school is seen as a hub for different kinds of activities and also a space where relationships of different kinds are constructed, constituted, maintained, contested and celebrated. From its inception, formal schooling has been designed to discipline the body, regulate the minds, and inculcate the values of punctuality. Some of the other functions have always been the shaping of conduct and beliefs, as well as the acquisition of a particular form of knowledge through a prescribed curriculum. Performances in the schools, in terms of writing an essay, tests, exams or the behaviour of the child in the classroom, is regarded as evidence of the child's intelligence. Formal schools not only have some kind of moral and patterned expectations from the children, but also from the teachers as well as the parents. And slowly, these expectations take the shape of school culture which is then regarded as the 'culture of learning'. Thus, the 'culture of learning' within the school set-up is not created in a day or two but it evolves over a period of time. It is reinforced by the day-to-day engagement with the process of schooling. Hence, it is not a finished product. The 'culture of learning' changes with time, space and actors and evolves continuously. Since schooling is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the world, a number of similarities are there in its patterns of relationship and functioning, but each school has its distinctive quality too while defining its 'culture'. The core elements of the school culture would comprise of: A shared sense of vision and purpose norms, values, beliefs and assumptions history rituals and ceremonies structure of relationship and trust.

Weaving the core elements of culture into an artistic tapestry is similar to inventing a magic word from the letters of the alphabet or stringing words together to create a poem. Juxtaposed with one another, the letters and the words form a meaningful expression. Similarly, by combining these elements of culture, a cohesive culture of learning takes shape. Since each 'culture of learning' has its distinctive existence, it is also important to look at it with a fresh mind. While societies and cultures are not the same thing, they are mutually related because it is only through society that culture is created and transmitted. Culture cannot be produced by just one individual; rather it is shared and is, thus, continuously evolving through the everyday interactions of its members in the society. It is shared by each member of the society. Thus, school, being a mini-society, also transmits the culture to the next generation.

2 Colonialism and Education

In the Indian context, if one looks at the process of schooling historically, it can be seen as one of the most favoured instruments of socialisation. The colonial interest in educating Indians was based on two reasons. The first was to produce cheap labour in order to assist them in their functioning while the second was to garner the unconditional support of the dominant sections of the Indian society for the establishment of the British Empire. For acquiring this support, the British very cleverly infused their ideas in the Indian education system through the process of schooling. As Avijit Pathak (2002), reflecting on colonialism and education, said,

> Colonialism is about power. It hierarchizes the world. It privileges the colonizer; enables him to suppress the colonized. And this violence is not just physical; colonialism is inseparable from moral/cultural/symbolic violence. The colonized are generally a demoralized lot. It becomes difficult for them to have faith in themselves. They tend to think that they are inferior and they associate qualities like strength, courage, education and civilization—in fact, all that is positive—with their colonial masters. Colonial education, needless to add, is an important component of this ideological apparatus. As one looks at the history of colonial education, one realizes how education played a key role in the process of legitimization. The meaning of English/modern education, (a gift from colonial masters) was primarily an exercise of cultural invasion. It condemned all our civilizational ideals and equated knowledge with Western ideas; it was not particularly sensitive to the history of our educational heritage. Besides, in a subtle way it legitimized colonialism, because the colonial masters looked like great school teachers (learned adults) from whom, as passive/ignorant children, we must learn the fundamentals of knowledge!

This shows that the socialisation through the schools, initiated during the colonial rule, compelled the natives into a different way of thinking and acting, primarily through a British lens. The British intellectual, Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his *Minutes of Education* (*1835*), cleverly deployed the funds of education to create a class of individuals in India who were Indians by blood and colour but English by opinion, tastes and ideas. Macaulay was a utilitarian and he could foresee the power of English education which would justify the Britishers 'civilising' mission. And he justified the very idea that English education was modern, a symbol of humanism and political altruism, and was given to Indians as a gift from the Britishers. Like Charles Grant, even Macaulay advocated cultural imperialism without having any respect for Indian culture and civilisation. The lure of English education was barely resisted by many Indians like Raja Rammohan Roy and many Bengali *bhadraloks*. For them, this English education was a promise of a new era. Poromesh Acharya has also reflected in his writing on Bengali *bhadralok* that none of the ambitious class of Bengal resisted this elitist English education. Many of them saw this as an important opportunity for lucrative employment and, hence, they ignored its negative effects. However, this attractiveness of English education did not help the Indians gain techno-scientific knowledge, with the knowledge remaining merely literary in nature. Thus, this colonial education was successful in creating a small section of English-educated *babus*, primarily from the upper castes who majorly joined the colonial government jobs like civil services. Despite these consequences, not everything was reprehensible about colonial education. It furnished a secular idea and a new kind

of critical consciousness among the people of India which, in turn, ironically, sowed the seeds for the process of decolonisation—a classic case of constructive effect of colonial education. Not everyone was happy with the agenda of colonial education and, hence, the dissenters saw a new possibility. Thus, the plan of the colonialist was not successful for a long period and their idea backfired on them with the emergence of revolt and vociferous criticism against colonial rule. The criticism of colonial education led to revivalism, which was based on glorification of the 'nationalist' Hindu past and this was problematic in nature. As Pathak (2002) observes, '*In a multi-religious society like ours, revivalism would always appear extremely hegemonic; it would like to destroy the identity of minority communities. In other words, it could prove to be a debacle in the freedom of the oppressed and marginalized sections of society…there was indeed a revivalist current in the 'nationalist' pursuits. Moreover, the lower castes needed their emancipation …Instead of viewing colonial education as alien; it sought to see great potential and possibility in it for the emancipation of India's marginalized castes*'.

There were many like Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore who resisted colonial education and wanted to develop an alternative perspective. Gandhi felt that English language has made us strangers in our own land. Ambedkar was apprehensive about the colonial apathy towards the lower castes where it came to educating them. Similarly, Tagore was critical about the disconnectedness of colonial education with the everyday life of the Indians. But slowly the dissent of these people was forgotten and as India gained freedom, a Nehruvian idea of education, paralleled with the idea of modernity and scientific temper, took shape. The Nehruvian agenda was a break as well as continuity since it tried retaining our culture with a blend of scientific modernity. '*In a way, Nehru was the child of modernity. He believed that India must modernize herself, overcome her fixation with the past, and enter the new era. He disliked the glorification of past… 'India' must break with the much of her past, and not allow it to dominate the present. Nehru was known for his celebration of scientific temper… His vision of modernity was essentially Western, with emphasis on industrialization, secularization and material well-being*' (Pathak 2002).

3 Post-Colonialism and Schooling

In post-colonial India, with the scientific temper of Nehru, schools continued to be the ideal agency of socialisation that paved the way for social change. For a new nation-state in the making, both modernity and science became an integral part of education, paving the way for change. For Kumar (1992/2004) '*schooling is 'as an agent of preservation and social transformation*'.

In post-Independence India, the *Radhakrishnan Commission* (*1949*) emphasised on science and technology. Similarly, Kothari Commission was appointed in 1964–66 for advising the Government on the national pattern of education in order to develop education in all aspects and at all stages. Dr. D. S. Kothari, who headed the commission as chairman, also articulated the need for scientific education. The

commission recommended that '*the destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms*'. After a thoughtful deliberation and nation-wide brainstorming on the Kothari Commission Report of Education, the Commission realised the absence of a concrete policy in the field of education and proposed a *common school system* of public education. This would create an egalitarian atmosphere with an urge to fight educational inequalities. This paved the way for the formulation of the National Education Policy in 1968. Based on the historical situation, the socio-cultural milieu and in order to meet the challenges in post-Independence India, the National Policy of Education 1968 marked a significant step. It tried to bridge the gap created by the colonial rulers and focussed on promotion of 'national progress', 'citizenship and culture' while emphasising on strengthening of 'national integration'. In 1986, the NPE was reviewed. It stressed the need for promoting technical/managerial education for the growth of industry. It also highlighted the need for equal opportunities for the marginalised sections and for the abolishing of inequality through the provision of various scholarships, with special reference to rural India. In order to improve the quality of primary education and primary schools countrywide, the NPE called for a 'child-centric approach' and launched 'Operation Blackboard'. In 1992, the NPE was revised again with the objective of keeping core constitutional values of democracy, socialism, secularism and professional ethics intact in India. The NPE (1992) made three commitments with regard to elementary education: universal access and enrolment, universal retention of children upto the age of 14, and improvement in the quality of education.

The NPE (1992) also favoured a national framework for curriculum in order to evolve a national system of education in keeping with the cultural and geographical diversity of India and, at the same time, ensure a common core of ideals and value system along with the academic components. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was, thus, formed to serve as a manual and a reference for the implementation strategy of curriculum, actions and benchmarks for pedagogy, monitoring and evaluation in the country as envisioned by the NPE. In 1975, the NCF was designed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and was, subsequently, revised in 1988, 2000 and 2005. The recent NCF (2005) focusses on innovative pedagogy to be implemented in the classroom so as to make education more diverse and contextual. It also focusses attention on the plurality of textbooks and on overhauling of the examination system and imparting training to teachers in order to encourage critical thinking and holistic learning in schools.

Hence, post-Independence India has visualised an education system that is primarily oriented towards science and technology. Science promotes the idea of technology leading to development. Science encourages rationality and critical enquiry and, hence, it is problem-solving and practical in nature. However, the preoccupation with modern technologies and its negativity was also cited in all the commission and policies. Since it is only through education that there is a possibility of coexistence of tradition and modernity, education must bring about a synthesis of change-oriented tendencies with continuity of cultural traditions. The paradox in our educational policy lay at the level of implementation, thereby creating a gap between the ideal and real. For example, till date even after the introduction of economically weaker

section (EWS) quota, equal access to quality education remains a distant dream. Even though the numbers of government schools have increased in quantitative terms, qualitatively they languish. The pathetic state of affairs of the government school led to the emergence of a parallel system of private schools that brand themselves on the basis of quality education, AC buses and classrooms, swimming pools and English as the primary medium of instruction. This duality within the education system is the reality today wherein children from the affluent class can afford to attend private schools whereas those from the poor class takes the education route through government schools. And this leads to a 'sponsored upward mobility!' These private schools portray themselves as exclusive in nature since their selection is primarily based on 'merit' even as they charge hefty tuition fees which everyone cannot afford to pay. This creates categorically different class clienteles for such schools. Thus, the failure to implement egalitarian values in the process of schooling creates a huge gap, reinforcing the superiority of elite schools over the government schools. These so-called elite schools create their own symbols, imageries and behaviour patterns, that act as a mirage chased by all, but provide entry to only those who have social, economic and the cultural capital. Thus, the purpose of schooling gets defeated in the system of schooling and by the structure of schooling. In the process, socialisation through schools only reinforces and breeds class discrimination.

4 Aspiring Middle Class in the Cosmopolitan City of Odisha

Rourkela, as a city, saw the emergence of the middle class through the process of educational development and industrialisation. Education provided an important means to enhance their social standing or class position. The obsessive desire in middle-class parents is to see their child as different from others. This idea of 'different' and 'otherness' can be understood as a projection of cultural capital through which these middle-class families seek to assert their liberal credentials and secure their class position. The ability to move in and out of spaces marked as 'other' indeed became part of the process through which this particular faction of the middle class come to know themselves as both privileged and dominant.

Although they would have preferred their child to be sent to a government school, they eventually realise that there is a dearth of good government schools. Since the aspirational middle class wants their children to be happy in an environment that will also provide them with necessary skills and a quality life, they prefer private schools over the government ones. One can see a growing demand, in post-colonial India, for English medium private schools among the middle class which regards the cultural capital as an indispensable component to expand and validate their cultural assets. Another important development, that changed not only the country as a whole but also affected the cosmopolitan cities, was the introduction of post-liberalisation policies. Post-1990 s the country, as a whole, witnessed a structural change in its economy,

that had its ramifications in the education system. A new market for private English medium schools, along with various coaching centres, mushroomed in a short span of time and this fuelled the aspirations of the growing middle class to give their children the best 'cultural capital'. The forces of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation have ushered phenomenal changes. Anthony Giddens (1990), in his book '*The consequences of Modernity*', drew attention to 'time-space distantiation'—the ways in which space and time shrink and compress, distances annihilate and a progressive inter-dependent approach begins—as a phenomenon attracting every one. This neoliberal era led to the emergence of a different kind of thinking which is positively related to material wealth, comfort, luxury, and is driven by market forces and dominated by consumption. It is here that the middle class gives in to these market forces and wants to see their children develop independent attitudes and provides them with cultural (linguistic competence, general and specialised culture) and social capitals. These needs of the middle-class parents are not vital ones; rather, they are '*socially created needs*', as stated by Herbert Marcuse (2012) in his book '*One Dimensional Man*'. Marcuse expressed the view that these socially created needs have nothing to do with basic needs and, hence, they are 'false needs'; so unnecessary in nature. But the middle class, in order to satiate these false needs, represses the genuine needs, sacrifices life, misses the opportunity to enjoy life in its true sense and goes to the extent of depriving others of their basic needs. The middle class, with their aspirational goals, are carried away by these superimposed goals either by the media or market forces. They become mere consumers in the market-driven society and also seek to define others on the basis of their consumption. People start recognising themselves on the lines of the commodity that they possess. In this consumption-dominated society, education has become a consumer good and schools its institutional variant. And to keep the system going in the present modern era, we should keep consuming. Hence, the world 'out there' is not a material to be shaped by the human skills but becomes an item to be purchased. As individuals, we feel free to choose from among a surfeit of options, but, in reality, our choices, determined by our needs, are actually the creation of the system and, thus, we end up being 'trapped' by market forces without our knowledge.

Sancho (2016) has also highlighted, in his classic ethnographic study of Kochi (Kerala) city, as to how the emergence of private international schools is meeting the middle-class aspirations in the city Sancho is of the opinion that the rapidly growing Indian middle class has a different consumption pattern, aspiration and lifestyle. Hence, one may questions: who are these middle classes and who claim to be middle class. This has become a contested field especially post-liberalisation India. Thus, any attempt to define this class in an 'objective' manner would not only be impossible but would also be a foolish endeavour. He explored through his paper that

> the middle class emerges as a constantly renegotiated cultural space that is always at odds with itself and where the terms of inclusion and exclusion are being transformed in globalizing India. While the school boasted about its efforts to keep up with the time and make students internationally competent, their everyday activities were most crucially focused on satisfying the core aspirations of the bulk of its middle-class students—centered very much on India and on gaining access to reputed higher education institutions. However, in

> promoting a demand for internationalized forms of education, and with it particular kinds of ideal practices, aspirations, embodied behaviour, and subjectivities, as a form of unified middle-class aspiration and marker of distinction, the school ultimately summoned legitimacy for projects and desires that favors a dominant minority. After all 'the historically specific models of the educated person encouraged in schools often represent the subjectivities which dominant groups endorse. What we may be seeing here is the emergence of internationalized schooling as a middle-class aspiration and a marker of class status, by which the internationalness of private schools will become a marker of 'superior' educational quality to that which would be experienced in local schools.

This shows how the middle class is looking for the private schools and, eventually, as consumers getting trapped. The private schools also try to promote their schools as per the requirement of the system, by showcasing an all-round, emotionally balanced education, which the middle-class parents are increasingly in search of. For the rising middle-class parents, having enough money at their disposal to spend on the education of their child, these skills are easily pursued by sending their child to the private schools where academic drive is taken as given. For the parents, who regard the government school as a risk that is not providing them enough options, private schools provide the answer. The private schools take advantage of this opportunity by branding their institutional identity with a good packaging that caters to the dreams of millions of parents with an aspiration to give their child the best education. All this leads to the emergence of 'international', 'public' schools mania among the growing middle class and the pseudo internationalism tag gives a feeling of being 'branded' which distinguishes and pushes their status to a higher notch.

In Rourkela too, a wide array of private English medium schools have mushroomed in a very short span of time. The most important reason behind this sudden upsurge is the place's industrial township character and increasing urbanisation. These private English medium schools are treated as consumer goods and, thus, are hierarchically superior for the consumers in terms of prestige and status. These schools function as vehicles of class segmentation which can also be seen in the works of Bourdieu and Paul Willis. While focussing on the 'class' as culture and the hegemonic nature of middle-class culture, they have shown how children from working class backgrounds feel alienated at school. The various ways to reinforce this hegemonic power in the cosmopolitan city of Rourkela can be seen in the fancy names of the various playschools, to begin with, such as '*Little garden school*', '*Bachpan play school*', '*Merryland International play school*', as well as the specifications listed in the admission criteria. In this process, class segmentation is strengthened and becomes a stark contrast to the ideals of education for all and, in reality, it runs two parallel processes of schooling viz. government as well as private schools. Government schools are considered as below par (compared to private school) in terms of hierarchy, and where hardly anybody wants to send their kids. The educated elite of Rourkela, identified in terms of its large service sector professionals, were not sending their kids to the Government school. Thus, the English medium private school acted as a class determinant in Rourkela city. One can easily see the reproduction of this class-cum-language divide which has eventually led to the emergence of a dual educational system, with the government schools using the vernacular—'odia'

as a medium of instruction and the so-called English medium private schools. This shows a clear shift of choice of the middle-class parents wherein factors like caste, sub-caste and lineage are no longer playing a decisive role in choosing the school.

5 Power Game in the Everyday Life of Schooling

As Beteille (1992, p. 17) would argue that '*the family among middle-class and upper middle-class Indians is changing its orientation away from lineage, sub-caste and caste, to school, college and office and that parents are not willing to leave the future of their children to caste and karma'*. Educated middle-class families in Rourkela have a good knowledge of the reputation of various schools and have their own priorities in their choice of school. And this choice of the school by the parents depended on their own socio-economic backgrounds. Sometimes parents also consult their peer groups and the recommendations they get from the latter enables them make the 'right choice' in so far as the school is concerned. Thus, in this manner, the choice of the school also indicates the families' social position while heralding the beginning of social power in the larger society. And once the kids are admitted to the school, the parents as well as the children get an exclusive brand label that the school represents. The school, in turn, also uses the names of the parents as part of an informal branding to influence others and create an image for itself. The end result is a circular process of mutual symbolic capital exchange between the schools, on the one hand, and the students and their families, on the other. Both create and help in sustaining the identity by generating a different 'class' category. This reinforces Bourdieu's argument that class is more than economic capital and it should be understood in terms of *social and cultural capital* as well. The private schools, thus, become 'sacred space' and goods for consumption for the middle-class families.

The school, being a 'sacred space', looks at the manifestations of power in various ways, depending upon the context. And, sometimes, there is a coexistence of both positive and negative power. Here, I am reflecting on two aspects viz.:

1. How power controls, enables, awakens or isolates its member in the creation of the culture of learning?
2. The normal practices by the members of the institution to negotiate with power in their day-to-day functions, and how they engage with the imposed structure, strategise or try to modify them.

The nature and form of everyday practices will help us in critically appreciating the various cultural codes that exist in the school set-up and how these codes are processed by the school through various power dynamics. There are a lot of unstructured, unwritten codes that are also unconsciously getting created everyday and move along this route by forming a part of the culture of learning. An example that can be cited in this context is the daily practice in the classroom (in the absence of teacher), the corridors, the playground, the staff room, the recess time etc. What I understood over the period of my research is that even though for the majority of them power was

enabling and they had internalised it, for many others, it was still like mending their ways in a hard way to deal with it. Keeping the context in the background, I will now focus on the narratives to understand the diverse articulations of power in the school through the lens of the actors/stakeholders, such as the students, the teachers, the principal and, to some extent, the parents also.

Considering the fact that the students spend much of their time in school, their opinion was significant in shaping the foundation of the school culture as also to assess the power dynamics. The classroom dynamics is, generally, egalitarian in nature and students, through their participation, create a 'peer culture' which is informal in nature. Unlike the other school processes, such as educating the students, following the fixed curriculum, prescribed medium of instruction, the routine practices of following the timetable, etc. which are formally laid down, the dynamics of the peer culture has an informal element about it. However, this does not mean that the peer culture is not in the control of the school authority but, nevertheless, it is that space of the students where they have their own criteria and judgement of good and bad. In the absence of the teacher, the classroom turns into an informal space for bonding and interaction. A visible example of this can be seen in the immediate change in the sitting arrangements of the students after the teacher has left the classroom. In the absence of the teacher, the body language becomes informal, the bonding increases with informal talks, taking a quick bite from the tiffin etc. The classroom culture can be interpreted in the presence and absence of the teacher. As Thapan (1991) would say, '*Pupil culture is not some kind of entity in itself but exists only in relation to many components of school life; in fact, it is an ensemble of relationships*'.

During the informal conversations and observations in the classroom set-up, it was evident that the moment the teacher leaves the class, the sub-groups within the classroom emerge. The basis of these sub-groups have various parameters, like being cotravellers in the same bus, residential proximity, sharing of interest/hobbies like dance, music or painting, long-term classmates since nursery and many more. But these parameters were the prominent ones; the hidden parameters of the formation of the sub-groups were based on their ranks and intelligence. If one examined the sub-groups within the class from close quarters, the pattern that emerged was, 'all-rounders' constituted one group, 'average student' another, students, who were more into sports, had their own sub-groups, 'silent studious ones' in another and so on. Not everybody could be a part of every group and it seems an informal membership into these sub-groups also had some criteria to be fulfilled before their membership was accepted into that group. These informal group dynamics were also known to the teachers and it was prevalent in all classes. As the students move to higher classes, these divisions become more evident since they start understanding the cut-throat competition outside the school. From Class VIII onwards, the divisions start intensifying, as slowly the students start getting oriented towards the Board exams they would have to face in the future. According to the teachers, the sub-groups within the classroom culture were functional to the extent that they created an atmosphere of 'healthy competition' among the students. For instance, the students wanted to do well in their weekly tests, craved for good marks, wanted to be in the good books

of the teacher, etc. Those students, who lagged behind also, wanted to be part of the groups of the good students.

The teachers also felt that these kinds of groupisms were healthy for the classroom dynamics, though my observations revealed things to be quite contradictory. I found a boy very shy in the class, hardly talking to even his bench mate and not part of any group. In the school parlance, he was in the 'slow learner' category and was also admitted through the 'economically weaker section (EWS) quota in the Right to Education Act'. In class since he was a 'slow learner' (not good at studies), he had no 'good friends'. My interaction with him began with a 'God Promise' (by swearing in the name of God, not to share his secrets with anyone) and while he was travelling with me in the school bus, he confided, '*All of my classmates are good to me; it's just that I don't fit into their group. So I stay in my own world. They help me when I am absent and show me their class work copies and guide me before the exams. I want to be like them, so I study hard on my own way. During exams I fear a lot as I have a lot of pressure at home. I am not that good at studies as my friends are and so I have to study more. They are good in studies, I am not… so I don't feel bad if no one talks to me. But when teachers in the class tell my friends to help me, I feel bad, because then everybody looks at me. I feel as if I have done something wrong*'.

While the perception of the student showed a positive view, it was evident that he wanted to be a part of the reference group—'good students'. He did not want to be labelled by the teacher. In the classroom dynamics, labelling the student had a negative effect as it led to *'self-fulfilling prophecy'* for the student. It was evident that in the classroom, there was lot of competition among the students in terms of getting a good rank and good marks. For many other students, who were bright in their studies, 'slow learners' were not their competitors as they knew that these students could never move up the hierarchy since they had already been typecast. As one student shared, '*I don't have any problem helping friends who are not very close to me in the class and, especially, who are little slow, because in any case they are not my competitors. I don't see them as a threat to my position in the class*'.

These constructions and deconstructions of relationships at various levels, perceptions of interactions and working of power dynamics among teachers, between teachers and parents, between students and parents, were all done in the name of the child. Here, the child becomes a silent observer and also learns to internalise this process just like learning lessons in classrooms. There is no doubt about the fact that the child's mind is 'schooled' and whatever the teachers say in the class becomes the gospel for him. It is evident in the process of schooling, the power dynamics operating within the classroom makes some students create their own self-image which is, actually, a reflection from others (in this case, to some extent, it is both from the teachers as well as from their own peer groups). This takes us to the idea of C. H. Cooley's (1902) theory of 'Looking Glass Self', where the perception of the society affects the construction of self-image. One can say power can be positive to strengthen the in-group (intra) solidarity, but, at the same time, this solidarity can plant the seed for 'ethnocentric' biases and create a hierarchy in the classroom set-up. Teachers acted as the role models for students, student's mind being *schooled*—idea of discipline was cherished by them, and examinations acted as motivation for many. Power

was seen everywhere in the everyday rituals of schooling, it was omnipresent and, hence, seen as normal. Routines became rituals; it got aligned with the organisational flow of the events in school and everybody was dancing to the music and celebrating it without any explicit resistance. Teachers were rational with their power, the principal was authoritative in his isolation, students were strengthening the culture of learning by following the social facts and parents were emotionally concerned with their particularistic values.

After viewing the entire process of schooling from close proximity, the deeper questions that pervade my thinking as a researcher/teacher/mother are—'Are we really getting educated for grades?', 'Does the existence of the student in the classroom get defined only on the basis of the information he/she has acquired and reproduced in the examination?', 'Is there any way one can think of providing any alternative to the power game in the process of schooling?', Can we diffuse the notion of power in the everyday lived experience of the child in the classroom?' I know it may sound very utopian, poetic and, indeed, many may term me as philosophical, but as a researcher I have to speak my mind and provide an alternative. By virtue of this research work, I realised problematising everything is easy; looking at the everyday functioning of the school from a critical perspective is even easier. After all, a trained sociologist cannot take things for granted. But what I realised as the biggest problem for a researcher is to evolve a new method, to provide an alternative which might not look very ambitious now but, over a period of time, it can become an everyday practice—a '*social fact*'.

Hence, the alternatives that I am trying to suggest will focus majorly from the perspective of the students, since in the ladder of hierarchy, they are the bottom, the most 'powerless' and 'vulnerable'. As a researcher, I know that to do away with 'power' is a 'utopia' but to possess 'power with sensitivity' is a possibility. My extensive engagement and everyday interaction in the process of schooling has enabled me to look at some innovative possibilities through which the notion of power can be sensitive in the culture of learning.

The school should recognise that everyone is a learner. The basic aim of schooling is not to 'sort out' students based on their apparent learning capability, rather it is to bring out and increase their inherent ability to learn. If one picks any student in the class, he/she would say that he/she wants to learn. The reason behind the process of schooling is learning new things. The desire of every student will be to have a successful and rewarding life, and it is the onus of the school to mentor them virtuously in that search. Student's belief in their 'self' begins with the teacher's belief in them. They perceive the teacher as the larger societal reflection. As C. H. Cooley (1902) would say, '*I am not what I am, I am not what you think I am, I am what I think you think I am*'. Thus, it is very important for the teacher to empower each student in the class for strengthening their 'self-perception'. Hierarchy will eventually disappear if each student is placed under one category i.e. 'learner'. The moment the teacher categories the students in the class as 'slow learner', 'bright', 'intelligent', 'lazy' etc, sorting begins and hence sub-groups emerge in the classroom dynamics. 'Intelligent' and 'bright' ones feel more powerful and others are powerless. This leads to labelling of the child and, eventually, the slow learner goes unnoticed

and, finally, gives up in the race. On the contrary, if each teacher in the classroom makes it clear from the beginning that 'everyone is a learner' in the class, including the teacher himself/herself, then the question of 'power' does not arise. Everyone is equally learning in the class, the students are not only learning from the teachers but also from their fellow friends, the school gatekeeper, the gardener, the sweeper, the bus driver and many others. Similarly, the teachers are also learning from their students, fellow teachers and various other members of the school. The reason why the students will start learning from everyone is that they see their teachers are also learners and the teachers are learning from them. Thus knowledge, being a powerful product only possessed by the teacher, is not there and everyone is learning. Hence, in this process of learning where everyone is a learner, no one is superior and no one is inferior. Hierarchy disappears and the idea of learning is cherished.

The assessment should be made part of a learning system and not hierarchising the students. Assessments done through examination are important activities within the process of schooling as it is only through this process that the institution can showcase the progress in a formalised manner. The school notice board proudly displays the rank holders and their photographs. No doubt, it is a matter of pride for the school and that is how these private schools attract their future customers. The present system of assessment is based on the principle of standardisation. Each child will be assessed on the parameter which is already fixed by the system. The uniqueness and speciality is not taken into account in this process. For example, a student in the class may not be good at studies but may be a very nice keyboard player, or singer or any other activity. But since the assessment system is standardised and based on academic subjects; the student is categorised as a 'failure'. Thus, we need to introspect on the mechanism of assessment in terms of its place in learning activity along with the potential and real audiences. Innovative ideas should be flouted within these social practices and with people having different interests and who can negotiate the content, process and meaning of assessments.

Thus, by proposing these changes, and in this journey to empower the students, I feel the role of a teacher is vital. It is the teacher who, at the micro-level, can make this suggestive possibility a 'reality'. The teacher, as a facilitator, helps the student to unfold his or her creativity. Creativity is a kind of limitless expression, which is present in every child. It is the experience the child is exposed to which decides whether it will develop or not. After all, it is ultimately the teacher who will plant the seeds for change. It is not important for the teachers, 'what they know', but it is more important to see 'what they do with it'.

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