Understanding Religious Diversity I, the Other and Us

Anita Rampal* and Deepti Srivastava**

Abstract

Children's understanding of religious diversity remains an important area of concern from the standpoint of research in education. This is because schools as sites of secondary socialisation deal with children who have an already formed 'self' and internalisations of the 'other' which are tested afresh in the classrooms with mutual identifications and communication between children belonging to diverse socio–religious groups. Here the curriculum and its transaction influence children's judgments, attitudes and affiliations towards the others. Additionally, an important objective of the school is to equip children with knowledge and skills that enable them to operate effectively in a culturally diverse classroom, community, nation and the world. To understand effectively, how children view themselves and the others; to see how the revised NCERT textbooks that offer scope for accommodating multiple perspectives, allow for critical discussions on issues of religious conflict and also what are the teachers perspectives regarding the teaching–learning of religious diversity is what this paper seeks to explore.

Introduction

Terrorist attacks and bomb blasts happen. They are aired on television; adults as well as the young watch them, hear them from their friends and sometimes are even a part of these mishaps. How do adolescents understand these events and in the wake of such public display of dissention and hatred for the terrorist 'other', how do they look at diverse religious

* *Professor* of Education, Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi, Delhi–110007
** *University Teaching Assistant,* Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi, Delhi–110007

groups? What are their experiences at home, school or outside? Within the school how are these proposed, accepted, rejected, modified and reconstructed in classrooms where adolescents come together to share the same space and learn? These are some of the issues this paper tries to address and grapple with.

While I sought to seek answers to these questions, Mumbai was attacked on 26/11. The *modus operandi* employed in the attack shook our sensibilities as earlier terrorists used to infiltrate crowded plebian spaces but now they had infiltrated the secure and more privileged space. They had attacked the middle class protective psyche which took refuge in the refrain– 'don't go to crowded places'. Even though many of us were distant from the tragedy, we felt threatened and insecure. Is there any place which is not free of threat and assault today? Isn't it natural for children to feel scared? Do they not want to understand why it happened? Do we answer their queries maturely? Or do we rather keep them away from such talk as they are children anyway, and they would only understand as they grow older (Kumar 2007).

In fact children need adult help to make sense of social/political conflict as they do not have all the details and concepts that enable them to realise why such conflicts arise and how they are being played out (Kumar 1996). If we discuss the issues they raise or question that bother them, we help them put pieces together and prepare them for an adult life in a meaningful manner. In growing to be an adult, the child makes sense of 'self' and the 'other' from what takes place within the family and later among friends and peers, at school under circumstances in which feelings of love, hate, fear, anxiety, pride, guilt and affection are experienced. Within the family, the individual member of the society simultaneously externalises her own being into the social world and internalises it as an objective reality. This does not mean she understands the 'other'. She may misunderstand the 'other' as each family, kinship group and community views the 'other' from 'their own eyes' (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Thus, when a parent, who watches news of riots on television, casually says "*Yeh toh Muslim hi hoga*" it has a strong influence on children. This child might then, conjure a distorted image of a Muslim and start thinking 'Why are all terrorists Muslims?' Does the parent/child think the same way when *Babri Masjid* is demolished or *Malegaon* is attacked?

Children are more sensitive to noticing minute details about such issues as compared to adults whose 'socialised eye' becomes accustomed to and therefore insensitive to such aspects (Kumar 1999). On the other hand, children's 'sensitive eye' is curious to uncover ambiguities by understanding things from multiple perspectives; perspectives that

change so fast that an adult can feel lost and confused about the direction of discussion. The adults however, avoid such discussion of social and political conflict and deliberately snub or silence the children as they feel the children are innocent and naïve to be exposed to such complexities. They want to protect their children from harsh realities and think they will understand when they grow up (Kumar 2007) not realising that the children are growing up imbibing notions of 'self' and the 'other' from their active engagement or silence. In a study by Amar Kumar Singh on 'Development of Religious Identity and Prejudice in Indian Children' done with Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian children, it is shown that children with both prejudiced parents have highest prejudice scores in both Hindu and Muslim samples thus showing that the socialisation of prejudice takes place in family through parental models (Sinha 1881). Though the influence of family is strong, there is little intervention possible at the level of family therefore one looks at other alternative sites. One such alternative socialising agency is the 'school' which is considered as a close rival of the family as a significant agent of social/political socialisation (Apple 1990).

Schools as sites of secondary socialisation deal with an already formed 'self' and an already internalised world to modify these internalisations with mutual identification and communication between human beings (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Schools are concerned with how children understand past and present as their attitudes and beliefs are of essence for society's survival and as a normative discipline, education is closely linked with what concerns 'favourable socialisation' be it home, school or beyond in a multi–religious, multi–class, multi–caste, multilingual society as India. For a society so diverse with people holding conflicting viewpoints, yet also a society which is a collective aspiration should so it becomes "…young people be encouraged to think about such questions by hearing them discussed from every point of view?" (Russel 1961, p. 225) But do the schools allow such discussions? Do views of all religious groups get a representation in schools?

Schools often represent the 'dominant class culture', the 'middle class' value system which is not overtly stated but covertly goes on through what Jackson (Apple 1990) calls the 'hidden curriculum' i.e., norms and values that are not usually talked about in teachers statements of ends or goals. This 'hidden curriculum' contributes more to understanding 'self' and the 'other' than the other forms of teaching value orientations. The concept of hidden curriculum is crucial to understand how the treatment of social/political conflict in school curriculum can lead to acceptance by students of a

perspective that serves to maintain existing prejudices. Apple shows just how it operates through the social studies text material which presents a somewhat biased view of the true nature of the amount and possible use of internecine strife in which groups within and outside the countries have engaged (Apple 1990). In India, one such instance is the revision of History textbooks after NCF–2000. These revisions, intended to inculcate political and cultural values propagating ideological legitimacy of the Hindu nation, led to protests as "these NCERT textbooks reflected many of RSS's (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) pet themes—e.g., the urge to prove that 'Indian Civilisation' is synonymous with 'Hinduism' which in turn is synonymous with 'Vedic Civilisation'. This Vedic Civilisation was portrayed as the fount of all things great in the world while all the evils that beset India were traced to the foreigners—Muslim invaders and Christian Missionaries" (Sundar N. 2004, p.1601-1605).

Similar problems existed in History textbooks, used by thousands of schools across the country where facts are mixed with myth and legend in a way that makes it difficult for students to distinguish between them. This leads to a fragmented understanding for the children as is evident from the study conducted by *'The Sunday Times'* where it spoke to students at a Saraswati Shishu Mandir in West Delhi, run by the RSS, and found that they perceived Indian history to be nothing but a conflict between Hindus and Muslims. A casual conversation with students at a Saraswati Bal Mandir in South Delhi unveiled an image of India as the oldest civilisation in the world and the source of all knowledge and culture. Meanwhile the young children studying at a madrasa in Delhi's Okhla area don't recognize names such as Ashoka, Buddha and Chandragupta. These historical figures are alien to them. It's almost the same story in many of the more than 1,000 madrasas operating in the national capital (Saxena S. 2008).

While misrepresentation of facts is a serious concern, equally grave is the glossing over or omission of facts and information by teachers due to their personal biases and beliefs. Pedagogically, socio–political conflict is relevant for discussion in any classroom but 'Social and Political Life' classrooms offer more scope as its subject matter comprises diverse concerns of society like religion, caste, class, region and language. Subsumed in these problems are the social issues such as tensions, violence, aggression, global terrorism, student unrest, health, education, unemployment, poverty, slums, population and corruption. These complex issues in the textbook require an active student–teacher engagement as an involved engagement of teacher and students with the textbook opening up avenues for further inquiry. It

is required as students as well as teachers might not comprehend all the details of why conflict arose in the first place and then how it is being shaped. But when a Social and Political Life teacher in a government school expresses disapproval of the textbooks (NCERT 2005) that discuss socio–political conflict from multiple perspectives by saying,

"जिन्होंने NCERT की किताब लिखी है उनसे हमने कहा कि आप विभिन्नता की बात करके विभिन्नता को बढ़ावा दे रहे हैं। बच्चों को ये सब बताने की ज़रूरत नहीं है..."

One feels how and when would children know about varying perspectives then? From telling them about their stance, there are other teachers who deliberately avoid providing answers sometimes because of their own deeply entrenched prejudices and desire to be 'idealistic' and to present harmony where none exists.

"मैं तो झूठ पढ़ाता हूँ, आदर्शवाद पढ़ाता हूँ, पर मन मैं जानता हूँ की हम अलग हैं"

Why does this teacher say something he doesn't believe in? If he feels we are not united does he feel a deceptive idealisation is going to serve any purpose? He just doesn't discuss reality as he thinks, it might politicize education. At one level, we can say, all educational activity has ideological and political bias. At another level, do we ever think what education is for? Is it for 'professional development' or for life? Does it not have to relate to life and events affecting us?

Can a response, like the one above, that shows harmony where none exists, convince children? This kind of knowledge for the young who can experience conflict around them is misleading and unconvincing. For an adolescent it means a lack of faith in the ideological system which may result in widespread confusion and disrespect for those who govern the systems of social rule (Erikson E. in Hjelle and Zeigller 1992). It not only leads to a disbelief in the ideological system (school/family/government) but also affects the formation of identity (Apple and Buras cited in Apple 2008).

Need, Rationale and Objectives

All students, regardless of their gender, caste, class, region, religion or language should have an equal opportunity to learn in schools. It has been noted however, that some students have better chance to learn in schools, as they are presently structured than do others because of their cultural characteristics. As a consequence, the institutional nature of schools, deny some groups of students equal educational opportunity. The education, schools impart, is of a specific kind; it favors those who possess 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and designates those who do not possess this cultural capital as deviant by producing categories of pass/fail, dull/bright, successful/ unsuccessful. The inequalities can be seen pronounced in categories of

gender, caste, class and region. For instance, it is noted that:

- Illiteracy among rural women is below the national average (46.13%) (Planning Commission 2005, p.5).
- As per Sachar Committee Report (GOI, 2004) nearly 25% of Muslim children have never attended school. The incidence of dropouts is also high for Muslims, only marginally lower than SC/STs (CIE, 2007, p.28).
- Female literacy rates among Muslims is particularly low in Haryana (21.5%), Nagaland (33.3%), Bihar (31.5%) and Jammu and Kashmir (34.9%) (Planning Commission 2005, p.12).
- Dropout rates at primary level for SCs (34.2%) and STs (42.3%) are substantially higher than the national average (29%) (Planning Commission 2005, p.5).
- Basic education in government schools is usually free in India, but the quality is, often, low and government schools have become schools for poor and deprived castes. As long as they can afford it, parents from so called 'higher castes' send their children to better private schools, thus, causing a ghettoisation of schooling (Kropac 2003, p.14)

Dominant groups, in every society, have a say in what comprises relevant education. The legitimacy of such a curriculum is not forced overtly; it works from within. It does so by integrating popular democratic and economic claims that favour interests of community at large (Apple 1982, 1990). Even inside the classrooms, children who have the 'cultural capital' are least aware of existence of this 'culture of power'. It is those that lack this cultural capital are often aware of this existence (Delpit 1995). *Kancha Ilaiah* sees this 'culture of power' at work in schools when he says, "as we were growing up, stepping into higher classes, the textbooks taught us stories which we had never heard in our families. The stories of Rama and Krishna, poems from Puranas, the names of two epics called Ramayana and Mahabharata occurred repeatedly. Right from early school up to college our Telugu textbooks were packed with these Hindu stories. For *Brahmin–Baniya* students these were their childhood stories, very familiar not only in the story form but in the form of Gods they worshipped.…I distinctly remember how alien all these names appeared to me" (*Ilaiah* 1996, p. 13).

Alienation or representation of social groups in a curriculum is a significant index of value attached to these groups in a cultural configuration that education helps to form and transmit. The children whose cultural groups are either ill–represented or not represented, are forced to identify with language, symbols and norms of dominant groups to save themselves from being labelled 'different' or 'deviant' (Kumar, 1988). Such subjection to

a particular authority and rule are normalised through the daily routine of school organisation and classroom learning. The daily ritual of a school is subjugating and stifling for a 14 year old Saddam who says,

"ये देख लें कि स्कूल में प्रार्थना करते समय कुछ धर्म की बातें आगे बढ़ायी जाती हैं, पर मैं नहीं पढ़ता।"

Even in casual conversation, when her classmate remarks at Liya, "तुम अगर *Christian* नहीं होती तो हिन्दू होती! referring to Christian conversions, Liya feels awkward but she does not reveal her discomfiture. She tries to show it doesn't matter to her and thinks, "इससे मुझे कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता। मैं जो हूँ वो हूँ।" She thinks but she never speaks. Her voice is silenced. It does make a difference though as it affects her sense of 'self', personal to her though her social self shows otherwise.

In order to understand these experiences of diversity, the present study limited itself to explore how children view themselves and the others, the role of education in shaping and transforming these experiences and the influence of school curriculum on children' judgments, affiliations and attitudes.

It was assumed that the realisation of belonging to a particular group and distinctiveness from the other begins at an early age and develops fully by 8–9 years of age. Also children of 13–14 years form opinions and are able to articulate conflicts in the adult world and a young person has the capacity to perceive ideologies of the society. Ideology, according to Erickson, is a set of values and assumptions reflecting religious, scientific and political thought of a culture (Erickson E. 1958 in Hjelle and Zeigller 1992, p.200). While the children see and hear conflicts in and around their society they have many pertinent questions for which they seek clarity. The classroom is one such shared space where children from diverse religious backgrounds interact with each other within and outside classrooms. These opportunities of interaction allow them to question issues of religious strife and conflict in society. Are these issues discussed in classroom in the first place? Surrounded by these conflicts, how do children view their own 'self'? How do they view their own community? How do they view the 'other'? Do religious differences really matter to children? How do they view India as a multi–religious nation? What does patriotism mean to them? How do communal riots, past and present, shape their opinions of other religious groups? How do children, then place the 'other' as a part of India? How do children belonging to mixed religious group view these issues? What role does school play to sensitize children on religious diversity?

It is noteworthy that many studies have identified the school as an important agent of children's enculturation in fostering their understanding of the nation. Education is systematically related to

children's level of political knowledge and expertise. The specific role that the school can play in fostering children's understanding of the state has been investigated in a sequence of studies conducted by Berti (Berti, 1994 in Barrett 2007, p.93). In these studies Berti examined whether the particular History textbooks that children use at school and the contents of the curriculum to which children at school are exposed can impact on children's knowledge and understanding of the state. She found that different textbooks produced significantly different pattern of responses showing influence of textbooks on formation of attitude, belief and opinion of students.

Textbook as being an important source of discussion in the class, the present study looks at 'Social and Political Life' textbooks as they offer ample scope for discussion of diverse issues related to discrimination and equity. The Social and Political Life (Classes VI–VIII, NCERT 2008), through use of narratives, case studies and reflective questions allow understanding issues from multiple perspectives. For this reason, Social and Political Life textbooks were taken as a starting point for discussion with children and teachers. How does classroom discussion take shape around this textbook, was another aspect this study wanted to explore. To study this, the research tried to understand teachers' perspectives on the textbook. How do the teachers view the textbook they are teaching? How far do they think complex issues should be discussed? What happens when such questions come up in the class? Does additional support from school in form of external intervention of an organisation, if any, help in shaping opinions of 'self', 'other' and 'nation'? These are the minute details the study wished to understand. Broadly, they were studied as:

1. Exploring and understanding how children relate to religion in their sense of self
2. Probing children's understanding and experience of religious diversity
3. Probing children's understanding of 'patriotism'
4. Understanding teachers' perspectives of Social and Political Life textbooks.

Design of the Study

It requires an in–depth study to identify how notions of religious diversity are experienced, shaped, altered and negotiated within classrooms, schools and outside. This can be done best by drawing on a qualitative research approach. This approach requires 'purposeful sampling'. Such a sampling can provide 'rich information' and insight of the phenomena under study. For the data to be illuminative and to be insightful, we planned it such that:

1. Research work was carried out in three schools— one Government School, one Minority School and one Public School. The reason for

such a selection was based on the assumption that:

a. **Government School** may or may not represent a religious ideology and would comprise of students from different backgrounds of religion, region, caste and class.
b. **Minority School** would represent a religious ideology. The school would have better representation of the students of the religious group that the school represents.
c. **Public School** may/may not represent a religious ideology. It would comprise of students from different backgrounds of religion, region, caste and class. The Public School to be studied would be engaged with an organisation working to sensitize teachers and students on issues of diversity.

The study also explored whether school ethos affected engaging with and interpreting issues of religious diversity among children.

1. Within the three schools, 7 students of Class IX were selected for focus group discussion which means the study was undertaken with 21 students. Selected portions of the text were taken up for discussion with the children (Class VII–IX, NCERT).
2. To get a better perspective on children's understanding, we explored Teachers' views and beliefs on the textbooks they are teaching, their own pedagogy and their personal beliefs on diversity and discrimination. This was done through focus–group discussion and semi–structured interviews with teachers of Social Science (Classes VI–XII) in the three schools.
3. As a part of the study, we also probed views of children who underwent sessions with the organisation, engaged with the public school to sensitize them, on diversity and discrimination.
4. Going deeper, we also explored the experiences and interpretation of children of mixed religious identity on religious diversity. How do these children view diversity and how do they negotiate their own sense of belonging to two religious groups?

Methodology

For the purpose of the study, we sought seven students of class IX (as they belong to 13–15 year group) from each school. We engaged with the entire class and asked all of them to write on the topic 'Who Am I?' and then selected seven from among them, on the basis of their writings. The group of seven students was selected keeping in view that they:

- Hailed from different religious backgrounds,
- Were assertive in their opinions and/or
- Held strong views on religion or conflict.

To analyze writings of students of Class IX, who wrote on 'Who Am I?' a chart was prepared and similar themes were given same colour for example, gender was coloured blue,

religion orange and so on. Then the chart was read for dominant themes that emerged.

At first, after having chosen a group of seven students from each school, a number of focus–group discussions were carried out on different days. On the first day, the discussions were centered round the children's scripts. Striking opinions like 'Why can't I give my life for my country?', 'There is no discrimination in India'; 'I am with the Congress' were taken up for further discussion. Other students of the group joined the discussion.

Subsequent method of discussions varied for the three groups of students depending on their responses in the previous discussion. For instance, in the Government School, we realised that Saddam was not participating in the discussion though his initial writing was expressive and the others in the group were also hesitant to speak about religious conflict. So, we asked this group to write on— these questions. What does religion mean to you? and which religion do you want to know of and Why? After this exercise, the group became more open to discussion.

In Christian Minority School, beginning from their scripts, we discussed about textbooks and certain issues like — What is discrimination? How do we knowingly/unknowingly practice it everyday? Later, Saumya, Arushi and Payal sent their reflective writings by mail.

These reflective writings were on:

- Religion, Love and Discord,
- God, Religions and I and
- Religious Diversity of India.

In the Public School, after initial discussion about their scripts, students discussed about the social/political issues in the textbooks. During the course of discussion, when they mentioned meeting a group of college students from Lahore through Pravah's initiative, students were asked to share their experience. Later, Surabhi, who has been a part of Pravah's workshop in the previous academic session (2007–08), was asked to share if she felt Pravah's intervention has influenced her in some way. If she thinks it has/not, why does she think so?

With children belonging to Hindu–Muslim family backgrounds

Brothers, Mohammed Zanskar Danish and Mohammed Mushkoh Ramish: Their father is a Muslim and mother is a Hindu. Danish and Ramish discussed about their own experiences being Hindu–Muslim. They were read out portions from the textbook which they related to their own life experience. Later, Danish wrote on 'Why do I think it is useless to fight over religion?'– His oft repeated phrase while discussing religious dissensions. Ramish, a proud 10 year old Indian, wrote on – 'I am proud to be an Indian'.

The data was in the form of focus group discussions and interviews with teachers and children. This data was analyzed and themes were interpreted and explained.

Understanding Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions on textbooks, children's understanding, their own prejudices and their pedagogy present a variety and complexity of the teaching–learning process in the classrooms. Teaching does not merely involve dissemination of information; it requires active engagement of the students and teachers in the class. Even when the teacher is cautious of revealing her own beliefs about social realities, it gets uncovered when issues are discussed as classroom interaction cannot be pre–planned. Teachers' active engagement and silence affect children's understandings of diversity and discrimination. Through the data gathered I have identified certain perceptions of teachers which I feel are, or have been particularly important. The teachers spoken to, feel that the present Social Science (NCERT) textbooks that present content 'as it is' in the social world are difficult to deal with, in the class. One teacher is skeptical about the way the content has been presented in the textbooks of Social Science. He says, "बच्चे को ये सब बताने की ज़रूरत नहीं है जैसे 'अन्सारी को घर नहीं मिला' या ओम प्रकाश वाल्मीकि का... (referring to case–studies in Social and Political Life textbook, Class VII, NCERT, p.14) ऐसा सुन कर बच्चों को अच्छा नहीं लगता पर वो (people in NCERT) कहते हैं, "ये तो *reality* है, ये तो बतानी पड़ेगी।" While the content of the textbook is given 'as it is', the teacher finds it difficult to address 'why is it so?' Is it so because his pedagogy is teacher–centric? "*Time* कहाँ है? *Syllabus discuss* करना होता है, और हम लोग ऐसी बातें करेंगे तो विभिन्नता होगी", he says. Why does the teacher limit himself to syllabus? Is education only to prepare students for exams? Does it not have to do with being aware of social and political issues that children as well as teachers see and live with? Even while teaching, teacher is providing examples to the students rather than students relating the given content to everyday life as "बच्चे उसे समझ नहीं पायेंगे।" Teacher plays an important role in quoting examples from our day to day life. The content of the textbooks rather than being teacher–centric, requires active engagement on both the sides as children are not blank slates. They bring preconceptions and misconceptions in the classroom that have to be addressed to. Having pre–conceptions is alright but misconceptions and prejudices have to be carefully addressed to by looking at the issue from multiple perspectives. But teachers are unwilling to do so as they think that school is a protective space. They feel that school is a normative and value building enterprise where talking of issues of discrimination might

cause them to grow, where none existed before not realising their own students face discrimination inside their classes and even outside the school. When a 14 year old Shweta says, "वो लोग (people in Delhi) हम पर हंसते हैंख्रख्रख्र रंग के कारण," and her classmate responds by saying, "people in Delhi do not have feelings" it means they are hurt being discriminated and it matters to them. So why then, are we not willing to accept that we discuss the issues with children? Why do we make discrimination appear remote to students by saying "पहले ऐसा होता था, अब नहीं। अब कुछ गाँव में होता होगा, कुछ *discrimination* पर शहरों में ऐसा नहीं है।" Even when laughter is evoked in the classroom as children are unaware of the rituals of other religious group the teacher who lacks pedagogical experience, feels uncomfortable in handling this situation. As a result, she does not delve into discussing with the students, their misconceptions about the other religious group. Teachers are cautious while discussing discrimination in class. This cautiousness is revealed when the teachers say, "इसके पीछे *family background* भी बहुत बड़ा *factor* है। जैसे कुछ बच्चों के *parents* भी वैसे ही सोचते हैं, जैसे यहाँ वो *person* जिसने *house* नहीं दिया। कुछ बच्चे तो सोचते हैं कि ऐसा ही होना चाहिए पर उनकी संख्या कम है। आज की *generation* में, मैंने ये देखा है, *interacting with people and children.* लेकिन बहुत संख्या वाले लोग ऐसे हैं जो सोचते हैं कि *yes individuals should be given respect."* How can teachers, take such a stance when they are aware of social/political dissensions in society? Do they not strengthen rather than question the status quo on issues of caste, community and religious diversity by taking a stance like this? These teachers do engage actively with students in the class and try to uncover their biases. They understand, "ये *discrimination* हम खुद कर रहे हैं। अब वो बात नहीं है कि *male dominated society* है पर जो *orthodox feeling* है उसमें बदलाव नहीं है।" But they strongly feel home has a greater role in nurturing discrimination. But is it only parents and home that are doing so? What about the teacher, who while feeling 'patriotic' thinks 'देश के काम आना चाहिए। धर्म के काम आना चाहिए। धर्म के लिए कुछ नहीं कर रहा' and does not problematize the students' invocation of "*Pakistan* पर हमला करना चाहिए" whenever there is a terrorist attack. What sense of patriotism does he evoke and why does he not question himself and the children who need an 'enemy' to feel patriotic? While teachers believe that children emulate them, why do they not show them that "all people are important and merit active respect?" (Goulet in Freire 2005) Why do they think "उन्हें *(religious minority and SC/STs)* साथ भी रखना है और बुरा भी नहीं लगने देना है" rather than engaging in a dialogue with students so they can intervene in reality to change it? Rather, teachers offer a perspective of 'हम सब एक हैं' though they personally do not believe

in this ideal. Rather they reveal deeply entrenched prejudices when they say, "मैं धर्म को ज़्यादा नहीं मानता पर जानता हूँ ये लोग यहाँ आ कर गन्दगी करेंगे और दस लोगों को यहाँ *try* करेंगे। फिर हमें जाना पड़ेगा वहां से।" If this is what they think about the other religious group, how do they address social/political conflicts in the classroom? They teach what is given in the book but do not get into why is it given so. They complete the syllabus and achieve the end but the process seems to be lost on the way. Also, how do those teachers, who are not convinced with the content of the textbook, teach? Do they go beyond 'superficial' teaching? How can such a social science teaching provide "social, cultural and analytical skills required to adjust to an increasingly interdependent world?" (NCERT 2006a, p.1) Can it ever be able to deal with political and social realities if students are passive recipients of knowledge in the class? These are some of the issues that need to be addressed.

Children's Interpretations of Diversity

After listening to children, one realises that they are aware of socio–political realities. They understand diversity and discrimination lived and practiced in their homes, school, society and nation. They explicate their experiences of discrimination, diversity and unity with such a fluidity that possibilities of change emerge naturally from them–unrestricted, un–imposed. "In our textbook, it is written 'in India we are all equal' but we don't treat them equally," says Ramish who is born of Hindu–Muslim parents when his elder brother relates their experience of calling their Muslim father, "Mr. Datta" to seek shelter for a night, in a *dharamshala* near the temple while they were passing through Uttaranchal.

Why does a person need to mask his identity to seek shelter for a night? What if someone cannot in a day to day situation? What if a 14-year-old Saddam Hussain from a Government School, who carries a terrible burden of sharing the name with a well–known political leader of Iraq? He faces unwarranted remarks from his peers and friends as Ritesh, his close friend recollects, "जब ये पहले आया था तो सब कहते थे कि आतंकवादी है, इससे दूर रहो।" When he was new to the school, Saddam was verbally bullied and excluded by other children. Not only because of his name but also because of his religion, Saddam says that he has to defend his identity of being an Indian whenever there is a cricket match or news about strained relation with Pakistan. Saddam is questioned about his loyalty to India, "तू किसकी *side* है", they ask him. "अब हिन्दुस्तान में हैं तो हिन्दुस्तान को *support* करेंगे, हमारे धर्म में कहा है कि जिस देश में हो उसके प्रति वफादार रहो नहीं तो गद्दार कहलाएगा।" he defends himself. But why does a child, belonging to a minority group, have to prove his Indianness each

time he is questioned? "It has been argued that identity problems of a Muslim child derive directly from valuation of his group in the wider society, and the status accorded to it in the social structure" (Razzack 2007, p.33).

Valuations accorded to a minority, is more often than not, rigid. This was observed in the focus group discussion of students of the Public School when a discussion about composition of their neighbourhood which comprised majority of Muslims led to describing why people do not will to stay in this neighbourhood. The students said:

Jaskirat: पर *ma'am* कोई *will* नहीं करता वहां जाने को।

Rahul: वहां पे वो नहीं जाने देते *Hindus* को।

Researcher: कैसे?

Rahul: *Ma'am* ये होता है। हमने देखा है। सारे मुसलमान ना एक हिन्दू को मार रहे थे।

Jaskirat: कभी कुछ काफी *aggressive* होते हैं।

These children, during the course of discussion are generalising that Muslims are aggressive. They depict the Muslim as assailant but cannot see him as a victim because they can only see a part; they can't see the whole. Socialisation produces mutually exclusive constructions of the 'other' so mixtures are unthinkable. Attributes and traits are thought of as fixed objects rather than a discourse. For instance, Rubina Saigol sees a similar exclusiveness accorded to Hindus in Pakistan when she says, "(In Pakistan) Hindus are always weak or tricksters and all Hindus possess these fixed traits or characteristics." These categorisations or stereotypes govern the separation of the groups into an in–group and out–group (Saigol 1995, p.102). Prejudice is the regrettable precipitate of this process of category formation as these are applied to person categories. People slip easily into ethnic prejudice because the vagaries of 'natural and common' processes of categorisation in themselves produce bias (Barret and Barrow 2005, p.200). "जैसे हम लोग *left* से *start* करते हैं वो लोग *right* से *start* करते हैं। हम लोग आगे से *start* करते हैं वो लोग पीछे से (talking about writing) और उसके बाद जैसे तवा होता है। हम सीधे तवे पे खाना बनाते हैं वो उल्टे तवे पे बनाते हैं।" This demarcating and attracting one's kind and alienating the others creates out–groups (Saigol 1995, 103). If a group identity accurately reflects an individual's sense of self, the identity is construed as authentic, whereas if it does not reflect, or is inconsistent with, the self concept, the identity is construed as inauthentic. "वो *Christian foreign country* में होते हैं। *India* में आ कर *Christian* हो मतलब वो लोग ने जबरदस्ती किया है कि तुम लोग *Christian* बनोगे *India* में।" Liya in the focus group comments while narrating how her classmate reminded her that she would have been a Hindu, had she not been a Christian.

'Minorities worldwide are frequently blamed for bothering

themselves, as if racial consciousness was the cause of social division, rather than the product of pre-existing patterns of discrimination. They have themselves to blame, if they didn't mark themselves as different, there wouldn't be a problem in the first place. But who marks them in the first place? Who 'others' them?' (Bharucha in Conference on Indian Muslims 2007, p.69). The majority in a group 'others' the minority as was reflected in Danish's (born of Hindu–Muslim parents) interview where he says, "ऐसे ही मेरा *friend* है। *He's not very smart;* once he asked me during a match do you support India or do you support Pakistan? Danish said "If I was a Bengali would you ask me do you support Bangladesh and all? His friend said, "No, I was just wondering. Pakistan has all Muslims and you are also a Muslim." Then Danish said, "Why would I choose to stay in India? I would rather go to Pakistan."

The discussion with students from the Christian Minority School revealed that individuals belong to multiple aggregations, each of which has different relevance depending on the social condition. At any given moment, what an individual does may be contingent on the person being a member of certain gender, class, caste or religion depending on which category is socially dominant. Saumya brings out the complexity of religion and gender domination in a particular context when she says, "*We are brought according to this way; you have to believe in this God, you have to follow this religion. If you are not that way then there's a problem. I have seen my sister struggling so hard. She is a Christian and the guy she loved is a Hindu. She converted into Hindu. I don't know why they had it that if you have to be a bahu of the house. And come on yaar! You obviously tend to do it for one you love. She lost her mother when she was young and her stepmother had a biased behaviour towards her. We had many problems but she is fine now. She has accepted it. She has been going around with that guy for the past 8 years. If they have done an inter–caste marriage in the social group they are wrong as if they have committed a sin. My sister has married a Hindu because she loves him but in the reception party we heard people saying… You had to see my sister cry when she had to convert to Hinduism. And then they blame the parents.* इनकी वजह से ऐसा हुआ है। इनके *parents* ने इनको ठीक से नहीं रखा है। इसकी परवरिश ठीक से नहीं हुई है।

While on the one hand, children show their understanding of religious discrimination there is an outpouring of 'patriotism' with different connotations on the other. Many of the children's writings on 'Who Am I?' brought forth these multiple meanings of patriotism that needs to be looked into. While Digvijay from Christian Minority School says, "I am a Hindustani. I am patriotic as I would be no better in America than in India"

he reflects a sense of belongingness to his nation. Amanpreet from the Public School says, "I believe India is our motherland we should give our life to it. जब हमारी *country* आज़ाद नहीं हुई थी, *Freedom fighters* ने जान दे दी थी। वैसे ही कभी ज़रूरत पड़े तो जान दे सकूं। *I think we should serve our motherland."* Amanpreet reflects a sense of idealism and believes in learning from the revolutionary heroes of the freedom movement. Ankita from Government School believes that she has to take care of her country and protect it from terrorism, 'This country gives me a lot. Why can't I give my life to it?' she says. Ankita's family background (father is in the Indian Army) and her sense of idealism influence her notions of patriotism. It is good to feel for the collective but why can it not be in terms of proactive action for common good rather than the jingoistic sense of patriotism which urges one to 'die for the country'.

Mudaliar Commission (1953) articulates the notion of patriotism as "True patriotism involves three things—a sincere appreciation of the social and cultural achievements of one's country, a readiness to recognize its weaknesses frankly and to work for their eradication and an earnest resolve to serve it to the best of one's ability, harmonizing and subordinating individual interests to broader national interests." When Ritesh from the Government School says, "I want to modify the present in an attractive manner" he reflects patriotism through proactive action. It has however been observed in an interview with a teacher of the same school that he allows warlike patriotism while a lesson on global terrorism is discussed in the classroom, "*9th* में *global terrorism* पर *chapter* है। तब ये *discussion* होता है। हाँ पाकिस्तान की कोई बात हो तो बहुत *interested* होते हैं। सभी कहते हैं कि पाकिस्तान पर हमला करना चाहिए" he says and he did not intervene when students said so. Would it not be better to intervene and discuss peaceful ways of learning patriotism?

A jingoistic spectacle of patriotism at Wagah Border everyday is appreciated by the students of the Christian Minority and Public School who are filled with fervor and 'patriotism' generated by the cheering crowds, sloganeering 'भारत माता की जय' and patriotic songs. This ritual of constructs patriotism as surpassing the enemy thereby engendering hate among the numerous crowds present on both the sides. But watching such synchronised movements and intimidating gestures, Mayur from the Public School feels, "इतना *coordination* होता है कि लगता है कि वो *friends* होंगे।" Mayur has straightforward notions of enemy and constructs enemy as hating each other but when he sees them performing in synchronisation he feels they must be practicing together and hence, are friends. Saumya from the Christian Minority School, on the other hand feels 'patriotic' at the Wagah when she says, *O man! One superb!* पता है वहां जा कर पता नहीं क्या हो

जाता है। आत्मा भर आती है। *You become so patriotic.* तुम उनके साथ चिल्ला रहे होते हो। *Marching and all fantastic.* उसके बाद...

Rest of the Group: कहाँ? क्या?

Saumya: *India* की जय! *Marching* में *they lift their leg till here.*

I got the chance to see this where they show how India and Pakistan were divided. अपना द्वार इतना बढ़िया होता है ना। *Gate* है ना।

Researcher: Is it nice to see India and Pakistan divided?

Saumya: No. But this is a reality. Divided it is. *But I think* हमारा *uniform* है ना, *it is nice. Better than they have. Theirs is this black as if they are goondas.*

Saurabh: You know they must be thinking the same for us.

Saurabh is discerning not to categorize people and nations when discussing on Pakistan or religious diversity but when he explicates who a terrorist is by saying, 'All Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims,' he is probably taking these messages from the media. Sensitive educational programmes can probe these categorisations of the further to sensitize children as such categorisations are problematic.

The reality that is officially constructed through state curricula and media is often problematic. It is skewed to favor the dominant groups beginning from the morning assembly of the schools where each child is socialised into conforming to rituals even if they do not belong to them. Those that do not identify with these rituals feel helpless. As an alternative, Saddam very genuinely and sensitively suggests, "ऐसा क्यों ना किया जाए कि सबके लिए कोई गीत हो?"

In fact, Saddam also appeals for another reality in his native village where his Brahmin neighbour enjoins in celebration of Eid with him in Bihar.

Saddam: सिर्फ ये है कि हिन्दू मुस्लिम, हिन्दू मुस्लिम, हमारे यहाँ इतना अच्छा है कि बकरीद भी करते हैं तो हिन्दू ब्राह्मण सबसे ऊँची जाती का, वो हमारे यहाँ आकर खाता है।

Researcher: कहाँ पर?

Saddam: बिहार में, किशनगंज *district.* जो सबसे पिछड़ा ज़िला है। वहां।

As Saddam points, we should share with and talk more lived realities. Newspapers bring these realities up but schools need to discuss these with the children. Especially in a divided urban set-up, children can be made conscious through media, school discourse and oral narratives such as his.

The School Ethos and Religious Diversity

There was a qualitative difference in schools observed in the study. In the Government School, where the composition of students in the class was heterogeneous, students identified themselves with their region, religion, language and caste more than the other two schools. These children voiced their opinion openly whereas students from the Public

School were being cautious in their speech. The Public School is located in Anand Vihar which is in proximity to Seelampur, a Muslim dominated area. The Muslim population in this area is mostly poor/lower middle class. The students of this group lived in a mixed locality comprising Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and the Jains. Though in their school, there was an initiative by an NGO to sensitize them about stereotypes, yet strong feelings of prejudice existed among some students because they lived in close contact with the poor Muslim community. Among the group, Surabhi was cautious not to label or categorize people and communities. She was a part of the NGO's youth initiative for active citizenship. The NGO, Pravah conducted a meeting of various school students with students from Lahore which had an influence on Surabhi's perspective as she said,

Surabhi: When we were going in the van we were discussing that we don't have to open. Slowly slowly we have to open.

Researcher: *Ok.*

Surabhi: *Main topic* था *terrorist.* उन्होंने कहा कि जैसे आप सोचते हो कि पूरा पाकिस्तान ही *terrorist country* है पर *that's not true* ना। जैसे एक *class* में शैतान बच्चा है हम सारी *class* का तो नाम नहीं ले सकते ना। *Similarly* हमारे *country* में *terrorism corner* है... *main* जो बात है कि आपके मन में जो *feeling* है कि सारे पाकिस्तानी *terrorist* हैं वो *feeling* खत्म करना चाहते हैं।

Researcher: तुमको ऐसा लगा कि *conscious* हो के बता रहे थे?

Surabhi: हम लोग *conscious* हो रहे थे *share* करते हुए पर वो लोग *openly* बोल रहे थे। उन्होंने कहा 1st *step colleges* और *schools* से शुरू कर रहे हैं। हम लोगों ने बात की आपसे तो आप लोगों के मन में *image* सुधरी ना पाकिस्तान की। अब आप लोग भी ऐसे बात करेंगे तो उसको भी लगेगा। फिर सब लोगों के मन में *image* सुधरेगी पाकिस्तान की।

It was also observed that the school that engages with non–governmental initiatives to provide orientation to teachers and makes effort to sensitize children on issues of plurality is helpful as it generates awareness among teachers to realize issues are important and to look for opportunity to engage with these issues. Though resolution is not immediately possible one can look for such action within the classrooms.

Students from the Christian Minority School belonged to rich/ upper middle class families. These students did not identify themselves with their religion, language or regional identity. These children, in their writings, identified most with their gender and then with 'being an Indian'. A class consciousness was observed in this group with reference to terms like, 'I want to be rich', 'I hate Bajaj scooters' and 'I am extravagant'. In the focus group discussions, it was observed that students talked about discrimination by the teacher, in the class on the basis of student's performance rather than in terms of religion, region, caste or language.

One student, Saumya was aware of discrimination as she had seen it in her own family. She narrated how her sister had to go through a lot of anguish as she had to convert from Christianity to Hinduism to marry.

It was also observed that children belonging to mixed religious family are more tolerant to diversity and consider that discrimination and fight over religion is futile. Danish writes, "*I think that fighting over anything is pretty useless the reasons are good. Fighting affects both sides greatly but if the reason is so stupid as religion it is not good. I am not saying that religion is stupid but in my school if there is a fight over a small reason the reason is soon forgotten but the fight continues. Who knows the reason for the Hindu Muslim riots? It's just he is not Hindu or he is not Muslim so kill him. I think these fights are useless as no one will win but the fights and hatred will continue so we should stop these fights.*"

While children are aware of discrimination and also sometimes offer suggestions to resolve issues, we need to understand how education system can socialize them to respect plurality. In a study done extensively on twenty–five developed countries by Andy Greene, Greene demonstrates how education system of a country can promote social cohesion. The study shows how education socialises students through formation of values and identity. The two main observations of the study are—

1. There is evidence for a number of countries, particularly from studies of education and racism, that levels of education can affect attitudes and behaviour to do with tolerance.
2. Countries where students reported receiving effective education on pluralism, internationalism, patriotism and elections reported having high levels of tolerance (Green, Preston and Janmaat 2006).

Conclusion

When children were asked, 'Can discrimination end?' a 14 year old Nitesh said, "होगा तो कोई *timing* थोड़ी ना दे रखा है।" He is sure that India can unite due to industrial development, क्योंकि जब कोई किसी *industry* में आ जाता है वहां हर एक प्रकार के लोग होते हैं और हर एक तरह के *religion* से मिलते हैं और उनके बारे में समझते हैं।"

The rise of industries, phenomena of migration and invention of telecommunications has created potential for individuals to communicate and interact with people of other diverse communities within and across national boundaries like never before. At the same time however, nations remain riven with discord, prejudice and hostility between communities within and across their boundaries. In wake of such discord, how to promote and maintain social cohesion in the face of rapid globalisation has become one of the key policy challenges of the new millennium (UNESCO 1996 in Greene, Preston, and Janmaat 2006, p.1).

We need, then, an education which will lead teachers and pupils to take a new stance towards issues of diversity and discrimination for acceptance of plurality. Such a stance requires 'problematising knowledge instead of repeating irrelevant principles'. An education of 'why is it so?' rather than 'it should be'. "Vitality, instead of insistence on the transmission of what Alfred North Whitehead has called 'inert ideas—that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combination" (Freire 2005, p.33).

In the 'shared spaces' of classroom, teacher and pupil interaction is vital to acceptance of plurality. The fact that the pedagogical interaction takes place inside the classroom where teachers and students are engaged with texts makes it possible to generate multiple perspectives and shared understanding (Saigol 1995). But when the teachers themselves take the onus of providing one, fixed perspective knowledge becomes remote and pupil remains passive. While Social Science education as such, is based on democratic ideas children can be taught democratic ideals through practice of democracy.

While NCF – 2005 has for the first time, linked professional and pedagogical concerns of child and teacher, it has been unable to address the 'voice and agency' of teacher, which is a challenge in the delivery of quality education (Batra 2005, p. 4349). Teachers' orientation to the curriculum proposed by the NCF still remains a major challenge.

After all, "Unity is not Uniformity. No one is asked to give up his faith in the religion of his fathers, his love for the language which the poets who have inspired his life and the life of thousands like him– chose as a medium for their sense of truth and beauty, or his pride in the lives and achievements of the great men and women who lived and worked in the part of India he himself lives in… such loyalties do not detract from the loyalty to the nation… There is no either–or relationship between sectional loyalties and national loyalty; the two subsist together" (Government of India 1962, p.2–3). It is therefore, required by schools to accept plurality for building tolerance and appreciating diversity with the teachers having a major role to play in this respect.

References

Apple Michael W. 1990. *Ideology and Curriculum.* Routledge, New York.

_____. 2008. Can Schooling Contribute to a More Just Society? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice.* vol. 3(3) 239–261.

Batra P. 2005. 'Voice and Agency of Teachers: Missing Link in National Curriculum Framework 2005.' *Economic and Political Weekly.* October 1.

Barrett Martyn. 2007. *Children's Knowledge, Beliefs and Feelings About Nations and National Groups.* Psychology Press, Hove.

Barret, M and Barrow–Buchanan E, (Eds.) 2005. *Children's Understanding of Society.* Psychology Press, New York.

Berger Peter L. and Luckmann T. 1967. *Social Construction of Reality*. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London.

Bourdieu P. and Passeron J.C. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.

Central Institute of Education. 2007. *Report on the conference of Indian Muslims*. Delhi University, Delhi.

Committee on Emotional Integration 1961–62. 1962. NCERT, New Delhi

Conference on Indian Muslims: Ground Realities and Challenges for Inclusive Education. 2007. University of Delhi, Delhi.

Delpit L. 1995. *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. The New Press, New York.

Democratic Politics – I Textbook for Class IX. (2006b). NCERT, New Delhi.

Freire Paulo. 2005. *Education for Critical Consciousness.* Continuum, London.

GOI. 1962. *Report of the Committee on Emotional Interaction.* MHRD, New Delhi.

Government of India. 2004. Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India. Sachar Committee Report. New Delhi.

Greene A., Preston J. and Janmaat J.G. 2006. *Education, Equality and Social Cohesion: A Comparative Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Hjelle Larry A. and Zeigler Daniel J. 1992. *Personality Theories: Basic Assumptions, Research and Applications*. McGraw Hill, Inc., New York.

Ilaiah K. 1996. *Why I Am Not A Hindu?* Samya, Calcutta.

Kropac M. 2003. '*Dalit Empowerment and Vocational Education: An Impact Study*.' Working Paper Series of Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. November 03, Volume II.

Kumar K. 1988. *Social Character of Learning*. Sage Publications, New Delhi.

_____. 1996. *Learning from Conflict: Tracts for the Times/ 10.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.

Kumar K. 2007. *Battle for Peace.* Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

National Curriculum Framework 2005. NCERT. New Delhi.

Position Paper National Focus Group on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. 2006c. NCERT, New Delhi.

Razzack A. November. 1991. *Growing Up Muslim*. In report on the conference of Muslims, CIE, Delhi University, Delhi.

Report of the University Education Commission 1948–49. 1962. Ministry of Education, New Delhi.

Report of the Planning Commission. 2005. Government of India. New Delhi.

Russell, B. 1961. *Education and the Social Order*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London.

Saigol, R. 1995. *Knowledge and Identity: Articulation of Gender in the Educational Discourse of Pakistan.* ASR Publications. Lahore.

Saxena, S. 2008. *'Hate as a History Lesson.'* TNN.

NCERT. 2007. *Social and Political Life Textbook for Class VI.*. NCERT, New Delhi.

_____. 2007. *Social and Political Life Textbook for Class VII.* NCERT, New Delhi.

_____. 2008. *Social and Political Life Textbook for Class VIII.* NCERT, New Delhi.

Sundar, N. 2004. 'Teaching to Hate: RSS Pedagogical Programme,' *Economic and Political Weekly*. April 17.

Sinha, D. Ed. 1881. *Socialisation of the Indian Child.* Concept Publishing Company. New Delhi.