

Caste Conflicts and Children's Education[†]

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Caste conflicts continue to structure the public arena in India, as also reflected in the recent controversy over Ambedkar cartoons in NCERT textbooks or in the demand for reservation by Gurjars in Rajasthan which once again brought the issue into the limelight. At least in the Hindi speaking region, the repertoire of caste conflicts appears to be powerful, while the apparent conflict is relatively 'silent'. The crystallisation of caste identities has raised some important questions on the socio-cultural and educational cleavages of Indian society. The impact of conflict on children and its relationship to their education process continues to be one of the most critical areas in research, especially in India.

The present study tries to explore the relationship between experiences of conflict and children's education with

special focus on caste conflict. A hierarchical relationship between the adults and children provides a guideline for the study.

First, caste conflict has been one of the most critical phenomena in socialization and education of children in Indian society. An inquiry into the historical events leads us to an understanding of some kind of cultural, political or economical clash of interests behind these conflicts. These conflicts, at one hand, have been a part of the processes involved in establishing dominance, and on the other hand, they have also appeared on the social scene in the form of resistance against deprivation. In this paper, conflict can be understood in a specific sense, with particular focus on caste. The central issue of this research is the impact of caste conflict on childhood vis-a-vis adult-child hierarchical relation.

[†] This study is based on my field work in Gaya District and is supported by New Education Group-Foundation for Innovation and Educational Research. I am thankful to Ms. Marita Ishwarn and Shri Pradeep Kumar for continuous support during the research. This paper also includes various insights provided by Prof. Krishna Kumar and Ms. Gunjan Sharma, during formal and informal discussions.

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Second, an important concern of this paper is children's education, or more particularly, the nature and role of children's education in situations of conflict. In the National Curriculum Framework-2005, schools are expected to work towards enhancement of peace processes and resolution of conflicting situations. However, such an expectation overlooks the sociologically established fact that schooling itself poses a conflicting social character (we must admit here that education is not synonymous with schooling, despite the fact that schooling plays an important role in children's education and life in general). With education becoming a fundamental right, it is hoped that every child will spend at least eight years in school. However, if one looks at the process of schooling with a sociological lens, it would emerge that the years that children spend at school have an unprecedented impact on their conviction towards violent alternatives in conflicting situations—whether in a positive or negative sense. A close observation suggests that conflict is essentially intrinsic to the mere concept of schooling (Niell, 1968). As this idea in all possibilities would apply to all kinds of conflicts, and as such caste conflict as well a systematic and critical research based understanding is required.

Conflict and its implications can also be observed in the nature of content (syllabus, curriculum, time frame etc.),

accessibility and achievement within the school system. For example, the absenteeism problem related to the Musahar children (as claimed by the teachers) has its reasons in the conflict between the character of schooling and lifestyle of a Musahar child. This conflict* becomes more severe in case of a Musahar girl child, the reason being the experiences of the Musahar girl child owing to their caste which incidentally is placed among the lowest in the caste hierarchy; that gets intermingled with their 'gendered' life worlds— with girls being prepared for and expected to shoulder the responsibility of domestic chores and of bringing up younger siblings.

Locating Children Experience in Discourse on Conflict

Children's experiences of conflict and the conflict inherent in the concept of 'institutions' like family and schooling are presumed to be two different things. This is obvious from an initial observation of curriculum and pedagogical practices where the conflicts related to children's home and school are seen as two different things. This is also acknowledged by the NCF-2005 to some extent. However, children's experience of conflict and the corresponding conflicting situation are always overlapping and this dichotomy formed a potential research area.

The 'understanding' of the impact of conflict and its relation to children's

* The term conflict hereafter refers to caste conflict, unless otherwise specified

education has been largely dominated and shaped by the adults in a hegemonically organized society. This is clearly visible in both covert and overt forms of conflict. The earlier studies highlight some categorical limitations in understanding the impact of conflict on children. For instance, the definitional periphery of 'conflict' has mainly been established according to the standards of adults. The documents and study of exclusion and dominance, however, have some obscure description of conflict in relation to childhood. For instance, considerable portions of autobiographies by Indian Dalit writers (Valmiki, 1997; Limbale, 2003) have narratives on deprivation of schooling and the humiliation faced by them at school. However, studies of the impact of conflict on children or those based on 'character of schooling'— with reference to conflicts, are difficult to come by. The available studies only throw light on social, economical and political context of this conflict but children, childhood and educational scenario remains hazy even in these studies.

Any form of conflict experienced by children can also be seen as a 'pedagogical event'. Michel (2001, p. 93) talks of a specific strategy for education while exploring the educational possibilities of children in conflict situations. It emerged that the theme needs to be explored further specifically in terms of what other meaning(s) is attributed to conflict by children, apart from deprivation of means of living. Any

conflicting situation ought to be examined in context of the communicative value of any social event or process. In other words, communication; mobility and acceptance of violent processes and activities are much faster than the process in which the 'peace-processes' gain visibility.

Prima facie the reasons for the above can be traced, first of all, to the formation of 'the unconscious' from the experiences of early childhood (Freud, 1986). The socialization during middle childhood (6-12 years) and the understanding of world during adolescence (late childhood) can be regarded as second and third key reasons. Children often observe, or are forced to observe, the methods of resolving conflict resorted to by adults in social cohesion. These methods are to some extent based on peaceful negotiations but, in most instances, they include a gross resorting to violent alternatives. These violent alternatives are responsible for shaping the archaeology of experience, and yet, often remain unnoticed. It is rightly explained by Davis (2004, p 19):

A problem in educational theory is that there has been a neglect of theorizing to explain the differential contribution of schooling to national or global tension. One strong emphasis within the sociology of education has been on its contribution to inequality, looking at reproduction of social class or gender relations. The reproduction of conflict has received far less attention,

except in institutional terms with studies of deviance and labelling. Studies within the psychology of education can give us insights into individual conflicts within the school and the aetiology of aggression. Yet we lack a suitable theoretical framework which can explain the macro issues of how education can act to reproduce conflict on a global scale, or conversely how some educational arenas are active in the struggle for peace and how some schools in conflict zones are resilient while others crumble.

The Research Problem/Questions

The present study has its origin in the inter-relationship of conflict and children's socialization and schooling. The basic purpose was to understand how children experience conflict, particularly caste conflict, and its relation to their educational processes. In this context, it would be worthwhile to understand the following three main contextual factors which influence the nature of caste conflict in case of children:

- i. The relationship between adults and children is a significant context for the research as childhood is not merely a social and cultural position manifested by historical process (Aries, 1973; Kakar, 1981) rather it is a political framework imposed by the adults (Kumar, 1978). It further explores whether this politics of adulthood is creating any conflict among children and

this was augmenting the caste conflict.

- ii. Childhood is a very important phase for cognitive and social development. Institutions like family, community, school; and their pattern of communication, collective and personal memory; all play a crucial role during this developmental phase. Thus, there is a need for an equal focus on both public and private spaces in order to understand childhood and the situations that lead to conflict.
- iii. As has been argued by some prominent educational thinkers children are deeply aware of social conflicts and this awareness makes them anxious about the future, but they seldom find opportunities to express their anxiety (Kumar, 1996). The key requirement was to understand the overall matrix of conflicts constructed by children and to specifically know that how the thread of caste conflict was interwoven in this matrix. Whether or not children correlate or differentiate various kinds of conflicts, viz. ethnic conflicts, caste/class struggles, so-called developmental projects, gender positions, violence demonstrated in various forms of media or its more pernicious obscure forms of conflict like hunger, poverty, fear and to examine question of children's identity formation. The process of 'reconstruction' of experiences was dealt with in

relation to their implications for a child, or a group of children, who have experienced conflict in one or more than one of its forms at the same time.

Keeping in view the above background some critical questions that need to be addressed are:

- i. How does the experience of conflict mould the child?
- ii. What are the situations where children are compelled to do such reconstruction?
- iii. What would be the role of schooling in this context?

Research Methodology

As a preliminary step, a review of literature related to children, conflict, violence and education was done to understand the interrelationship between them. An initial sketch of childhood was developed on the basis of a detailed secondary review of literature. The categorical limitations of earlier studies highlighted in the rationale led to the search for a methodology which can register/articulate the various tendencies especially children's psyche and social change that are taking place on account of conflict. The area selected for study was Gaya in Bihar. The communities selected for the study included the Musahar (SC).

Musahars in Gaya district (Bhuinya, Kamia*, Saday) are at the lowest social strata in their respective categories. Bhuinya is a caste group

* It is a system of bonded labour particularly in paddy crops, mostly associated with Musahars of Gaya

which is settled between the Chota Nagpur plateau and mid Ganges valley with a strong connection to cultivation. The local economy is largely supported by paddy cultivation and the Bhuinyas, are engaged largely as casual wage labourers. Since paddy is a labour intensive crop, the Kamia system was historically developed to assure the supply of labour and livelihood to the caste groups residing in the area. Kamia system is actually the practice of attaching labour with a regular master, and has a deep rooted history of atrocity and pain. The increasing influence of the Kabir panth is also one of the concrete expressions of Musahar's search for identity. All these are an effort towards acclaiming their dignity, empowerment and to some extent, development.

The Musahar community has its own conviction about culture, identity and history which is very different from the perception of non Musahar communities in the region. A discussion with the non Musahar community members gives a clear picture of the general identity of the Musahars, i.e., as pigs, and low income wage labourers. These two elements have a very significant role in the culture, religion and festivals of the community. Not only these elements construct the identity of their society and life but it also plays a crucial role in their rituals. Pigs have special importance in their day-to-day life. It is important to note that this community does not have a caste-based

profession of their own nor do they have any capital asset apart from labour. Land has always belonged to the landlords and as such Pigs are an asset formation.

Sampling: For this research, two villages which have witnessed various forms of prolonged conflict were selected for this study. In Gaya, though caste conflict has not only reached up to the level of caste based violence, it has definitely influenced the village fabric, the lifestyle and the distribution of government facilities at a micro level. The caste boundaries involve higher and dominant castes like Bhumihaar, Brahman and Rajput on one hand and the Musahars on the other hand.

The villages were studied by using ethnographic tools with appropriate use of psychohistory for six months, in different phases, with a focus on children and schooling. The researcher partly adopted the tools used by M.N. Srinivasan (1971) in his work 'Remembering Village' and Shyamacharan Dubey (1996) in his work 'Indian Village'.

Before moving ahead, we need to provide some more clarification about conducting field work in Mastipur and Jetian-Tarwana. As experienced by the researcher during the process of study the conflict faced by Musahars in Gaya is multifaceted. For instance, the conflict between Musahars and

Paswans is very different from the conflict between Musahars and Rajputs. This observation has been substantiated by secondary sources like *An Anthology of Musahar Culture and Lifestyle**. Since it is not possible to develop an understanding of all kinds of conflicts, the researcher focused on two major kinds of conflicting situation, i.e., (1) Mastipur** with a considerable population of Musahars and Paswan and (2) Jetian-Tarwana – a Rajput dominated village with 200 families from the Musahar community.

Cultural Conflict and Schooling– Two Case Studies from Gaya, Bihar

In order to understand the linkages between cultural context, developmental processes and the caste conflict, two case studies have been outlined:

Mastipur: Three dimensional conflict– Musahar, Paswan and Mahantji

Mastipur and adjacent Muhalla Piperpati are part of Bodhgaya city. People in the 'village' are involved in agriculture and also work in various temples in Bodhgaya. A very clear influence of Bodhgaya*** and its religious tourism can be seen on the population, culture and work pattern of the village. Majority of the population in the village (around 180 households)

* Joshi, Hemand and others. 2003. *Asserting Voices*, Deshkal Publications, New Delhi

** Though this area is not a village in the government documents now yet it continues to be a village from cultural, social and economic perspectives.

*** Bodhgaya is the place where Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism is known to have attained enlightenment.

belong to Manghi (Musahar) community. Besides these, around 20-25 households are of Paswan community, while 2-5 households belong each to Thakur, Kumhar and Yadav communities. Pasi, Dhobi, Nai and Lala community have one house each. An attempt (muhim) to relocate the village started in 1980s to address the expanding needs of the Bodhgaya city. One woman recalls that the village had around 125 households around 32 years back, i.e. in 1980. It is to be noted that the Naxal movement in Bihar was at its peak at that time. The land around the village belonged to Mahantji (the head of the main temple at Bodhgaya) which was being vacated at that time. This process led to a clash with Mahantji who had government on his side. Two people died and three got badly injured. The people who lost their lives in this violence are considered as martyrs among Musahars and are still remembered on 8 August every year.

The clash with Mahant of Bodhgaya has a significant role in the village history as the village was totally scattered after the clash. Some people settled nearby while others were allotted land by the government. The Manghi community believes that the situation of the Paswans and other castes are comparatively better. On the other hand, other communities are of the opinion that even if the government provides facilities, not much progress would happen for the Manghi community because these people spend most of their lives drinking.

Our initial observations, however, tell a different story. As informed by a villager, seven Paswans are in government job (even though it is not exactly clear whether it is a government job or simply any other 'good' job). Most of the elderly person and in many cases children from Paswan families go regularly to Gaya for agricultural work while Manghi family members either work as rickshaw pullers in Bodhgaya or go to other villages for daily wages. To quote an instance: "In October, 'a Manghi family was preparing vegetable of potatoes, with turmeric and chillies, at about seven in the morning. The entire family had this vegetable with rice. Eating utensils were made of steel and cooking utensils aluminium. They eat twice a day. In some instances they eat the leftover food from the morning in the evenings. Children also eat the same food and go to school. Though there was no sign of starvation in the village yet it was clearly seen that food definitely was a challenge in the Manghi families." People from Manghi family go to the nearby villages for daily wages during the rice cultivation. The situation of Paswan families definitely was better than Manghi families mainly in terms of dealing with hunger and employment. This is substantiated by local government functionaries like AWW, school teachers and villagers (both from Manghi and Paswan).

The village has a single room government school with a severely damaged ceiling. Children in the village have no excitement to go to school. A

school run by an NGO is also located in the same village but not all children get admission there. Children from some well off families go to a private school 'Elean Divine' in New Taradih. The village also has two Aanganwadi centres – one each in Mastipur and Piperpati. But major government schemes never reach beyond Piperpati, a neighbouring settlement.

Childhood in the Village

If we analyse from children's point of view, their main concern is confrontation with the visitors coming to Bodhgaya. Children in the village not only get influenced by the happenings in the village but processes in the village also affect them on regular basis. For example, a child from the Manghi family does go to school but neither he nor his parents understand what he will really do in school. Going to school and clashing because of his 'caste position' after coming back home creates such a conflict situation for this child that he is constantly searching for ways to avoid such situations.

Umesh, 14 years, never understood why he used to go to school. The daily routine of coming home from school and observing family members involved in wine making continued for three years. Later he got to know that tourists (white tourists) give money to children. The next few years he spent following white tourists after the school hours and at times even during school hours. After a point he

went to Mysore with a man for some work. Umesh very categorically tells that children from Manghi families only go out with these men for work while all other children remain here for study.

Village people see Bodhgaya as a place with lots of work opportunities. Children also develop a similar insight while begging or going to school. This can be explained through the researcher's observation of wine making process, where children were observed standing close to the wine bucket with their mouth stinking of country liquor.

Association with School

After developing an understanding with the help of parents from Mastipur, it was important to know their interest in the present schooling process and to what extent they actually understand school. An outline of community understanding regarding school and schooling has been prepared with the help of two classifications based on the Manghi and other families. The outline is in terms of the following points:

- The extent to which they are associated with the schooling of children.
- How they perceive and give meaning to the school and schooling as such.

People in Manghi families were asked whether they have any discussion with children about going to school or with others in the community about the education of their children. Majority of

the people approached first of all took a lot of time and in the end chose to refrain from giving any response. The few who responded spoke about consulting people from outside the village, especially field investigators from Pyagya Vihar (a school run by a Trust). However they do not have any discussion at home or with the children about their education. In fact, there were also some parents from Manghi families who had no idea about the classes their children studied in. They were neither aware of management committees or teachers nor could they recall even one thing said by any of the teachers in the school. They only knew that Kaushlendra babu had asked the children to come to school.

On the contrary, parents and children do talk about the education and schooling in the other castes, especially in the Paswan families. There were only two families in the non Manghi families who were not aware about the classes their children were in. Manghi families were not able to differentiate subjects taught in school whereas non Manghi families had the understanding of individual subjects like Mathematics, English, Hindi, Geography and Science, etc. Most of the children from non Manghi families go to a private school in the nearby village and their fathers often go the school to deposit the school fees. Even parents of some Paswan children, who attend the village government school, pay regular visits.

The common understanding shared equally by majority of the families was the fear of 'passing' or 'failing' in the examination. Irrespective of the background of the family, all wished their children go to school regularly and pass the examinations. An in depth analysis and understanding of the 'hesitation' and 'unfamiliarity' of Manghi families regarding school system brings their deep suspicion on the surface. In reality, what we consider as unfamiliarity and backwardness is actually an intense resistance and conflict between the present nature of schooling and the situation of this caste group. We get the details of the above when we talk about the future of children in the families. This discussion also has links with the question of 'who according to them is educated or what are their expectations from education?'

Tarwana-Jetian: Two Dimensional Conflicts between Musahars and Rajputs

Despite several similarities in the caste conflict in Tarwana-Jetian and Mastipur, there are many differences in the character of both. The difference lies not only in the history of caste conflict but also the caste dynamics. On the way from Gaya to Atari, many small habitations can be seen between Gahlor and Jetian alongside the hill. Atari block and Wajirganj are separated by a hill. The settlements alongside the foothill mentioned above are the Musahar settlements and each locality has a Musahar colony ('*tola*' in local

language) adjacent to it. Establishment of Musahar tola away from the main village is itself an indication of exclusion.

One of these settlements is Tarwana which is part of Jetian village. This settlement is located on the foot of the hill and therefore has its own structural challenges. Stones from the hill top fall to block the way and all the rain water stagnates during monsoons. This not only disconnects the settlement, but also leads to breeding of many small insects and thereby, diseases. Water from some of the wells constructed by the government in Tarwana also becomes unusable due to the rain water mixed in the well.

The community people in Jetian (mainly Rajputs) have their own different perceptions. Many families from the village have shifted to Patna or Gaya city. These people identify themselves as farmers and are mainly dependent on agriculture. The village has three schools– Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Buniyadi High School and Primary school. Children from Tarwana had to cross a road to attend the school in Jetian at about a distance of one km. It is a major challenge for children to reach the school in the Rajput basti.

A preliminary observation of the above areas makes evident the unique geo-cultural identity of caste conflicts. These conflicts are nurtured by the past experiences as well as present interest clashes. But the moment we place children in the centre of our thinking,

limitations of these discourses become visible. Preliminary observations show that caste conflict has certain specific meaning for children.

Conflict in aspirations: Idea of Pedagogy, Curriculum and Knowledge: The village has a long history of relations between Rajputs and Musahars and both have articulated this historical past as per their own perspective. Separate discussions were held with both the groups.

Narrative of Musahar Community

Due to initial resistance from people of Musahar community in Tarwana, it took a few weeks before they opened up to talk about education of their children and the schooling process. The description below is based on the three days discussions with people in Tarwana village. At times when the answers were not very specific and direct, then observation, expressions and support from other people in the community were used to understand the facts.

The reason for the lukewarm response to the discussion on 'education of children' can be traced to the details shared by the villagers about their past. These past details encompass a wide range of issues such as demanding land from the District Collector of Gaya to make a house, digging a well, complaint to the local MLA or DM for not receiving the full payment or proper government facilities etc. During the sharing process, they

also highlighted migration issue as majority of them have to go out of the city in search of work and issues related to frauds in the preparation of job cards under MNREGA. It is not a mere coincidence that the question of children and their education did not come to surface in the entire description of their past experiences and struggles. On being directly questioned about children and education, many a times they give clear answers and there are also instances where they lack complete clarity. For instance, one mother wanted to educate her son despite her poverty so that he should get a job. But when she was asked to name the people in the community who have got employment after getting educated, there was doubt written all over her face. Many such doubts and suspicions surfaced at various levels.

Two phenomena emerged very categorically:

1. It is one of the toughest works to get someone educated. In poverty stricken and discriminated lower caste societies, poverty and migration are two prominent hindrances in the way of providing proper education. Most of the elders in the village work as daily wagers and many a time they have to go out of the city to brick kilns in order to fulfil their needs. The slogans like, '*Bhatta majduri ya gulami*' (literally meaning, work in brick kilns versus bonded labour) appeared time and again in the conversations. In the circum-

stances, hunger and the problem of insufficient food often take the shape of a larger challenge forcing children to drop out of school.

2. Secondly, the nature of the experience of people in the community regarding education per se is very ambiguous. People did share that they want to educate their children as they feel it is for their own good but they fail to substantiate it with concrete examples of education having brought an impact or change in the locality. The sole example which was shared repeatedly was of a youth who was selected as a Shiksha Mitra.

The caste group many times had this discussion about how their locality should also have a school like Jetian. They were of the opinion that related issues such as children's fear to attend school could be easily resolved if teacher was from their own community and this would further enhance the performance of children in the school. During one such discussion, community people opined, "We do not have educated people among us (Musahars) therefore we do not have teachers from our community". However, in a prior discussion, a separate group in the same community had said that their children are not educated as theoretical education is of less utility for them and household poverty too poses a hindrance in schooling which somehow seems to point at a vicious circle.

The entire episode has led to an obvious question of whether going to school is a painful experience for children. It was enquired with parents whether children face any kind of misbehaviour, abuse or discrimination in school. Some parents confirmed the dominance of upper caste children, while their own children had to remain submissive because the school is located in their basti (settlement). The fear in children to 'ask anything' from the upper caste teachers formed a constant threat in discussions. This was specifically shared by the Class X passed youth in the group discussion.

In the process of study, an effort was made to have discussions with parents of school drop outs. They either had no answer or were not willing to share the reasons for their children dropping out. The next challenge was to decode the reasons of lack of interest. The following responses were received:

- Children did not learn to write a single sentence after four years in school.
- Used to bunk school.
- Went to work in brick kilns.
- School is very far and located in another settlement.
- Could not understand what was being taught.

Narrative of Rajput Community

Contrary to the above arguments and understanding of Musahar community,

people in Rajput community were clear as to why and how they wish to educate their children. Generally, they aspire for government jobs especially in the case of boys. They do not perceive access to job as a challenge. Rather quality of education in school is a major challenge for them. Many parents would prefer to send their children to Gaya or Patna if they find there is lack of quality education in their locality schools.

The difference regarding the understanding, aspirations and interest in education by both the communities also impact their epistemology and pedagogy. The expectation from education decides the nature of education they prefer for their children. Musahar on one hand had no obvious expectation from education due to the reasons found in their past where there was hardly any example of abrupt change in life as a result of a better education. Rajputs, on the other hand, had a clear expectation of a job (preferably a government job) after education because they have examples around them of people who have a better life due to quality education. These examples strengthen their hope that today's education (without drastic change) will have a clear and positive influence in the lives of their children, if imparted in a proper manner.

Discussion and Observation: Taking insight from above mentioned two cases some basic trends of conflict are apparent:

1. What is worth knowledge and adequate pedagogy

One of the questions for this study was to know the knowledge and pedagogy of different caste groups. Therefore, small group discussions were held in both the localities in various stages with the objective of getting their understanding on the following questions:

- What a child should know after he/she finishes the school education?
- Where, other than school, do children learn?

An attempt was also made to know their opinions on classroom processes which would lead to positive changes in the life of their children. The answer to these questions provided the initial outline of the conflict developed due to caste and cultural contexts.

The Mushar community in Tarwana as well as of Mastipur underlined the following on the basis of a consistent enquiry about what a child should know if he/she goes to school:

- Record/ Negotiation of wages
- Able to do the paper work
- Able to understand the language of 'outside world'

People in this group agreed that children do learn many things outside the school also especially while doing some 'work'. 'Work' in most of the cases was referred as 'manual work'. An example of the process of taking the bundle of rice crop to the fields, shared by an elderly person, would clarify this further; "if you try to pick it up suddenly

or without anyone's help, you may get injured". Also you have to maintain and walk in a particular rhythm. A child will not be able to learn all these without actually doing it. He also provided other examples of brick making and agriculture.

The abilities enshrined in doing the paper work have the following elaboration:

- Able to understand papers related to MNREGA.
- Able to understand other government schemes.
- Able to get papers made for their own land.

Another significant elaboration was related to understanding the language of 'outside world'.

The local language of the area is 'Magahi'. Most of the times these people are unable to negotiate either with the contractor who arranges for work outside the village or with their actual employers. Due to this lack of language and negotiation skills, cheating and fraud is not uncommon. However, why the school does not teach negotiation for work, could not be answered by Musahar parents.

On the contrary, people from Rajput locality demanded some 'significant' improvements in the school system:

- Teacher should teach properly.
- Teacher should attend the school regularly.
- At least English and Mathematics should be taught properly as the

understanding of these subjects prepares the children for government jobs.

A clear conflict is reflected when we compare the responses of Mushar community from Tarwana and Rajput community of Jetian. Here we see two mutually contradicting interest groups on curriculum development and teaching methodologies. One group wants an education which can enable it to do justice with its wages while the second group aspires for an education which will ensure a government job.

The discussion related to pedagogy was also not different. People in Rajput community feel that children learn while visiting the houses of relatives or by observing elders in the house apart from school. However, in case of girls they admitted their learning through manual work at home. On the other hand, Musahar community very clearly highlighted manual work as a learning process.

The statement given by the government teachers supports a status quo. For them, curriculum is all right and does not discriminate against children from any community. On listening to the shared views of Musahar community, it was extremely difficult for teachers to understand how the negotiation of wages could be part of the curriculum. Their response was very similar to the responses of Rajputs that children learn at home or while going to the relatives. etc.

2. Location of the schools—usually away from Musahar Basti-

There are three schools in Jetiyan, Tarwana— a Primary School, a Basic School and a Navodaya School. The first two schools are attended/accessed by children from the village and around, whereas the other school also caters to children from outside. The basic school had about 45 acres of land, of which around 30 acres of land got allotted to the Navodaya Vidyalaya when it was made. It is necessary to clarify here that the school which is called 'Basic School' is a basic school only in terminology; it has nothing much to do with the Gandhian Basic Education anymore. Today, even the teachers are unaware about the concept of Basic Education.

3. Inside the Class: Poor attendance—a long list of problems and nature of resistance

As for the reasons of poor attendance of children from lower castes, the teachers put forth a long list of problems. They said that the children's families/households have exhausted all their stocks of wheat, and as such have nothing to eat for breakfast. The students who came to the school ate only rice in the morning. Therefore, many children are forced to accompany their parents to work in brick kilns.

There appeared to be two major reasons for children's absence. Tarwana's children were not present because they went to brick kilns or migrated with parents (on work) or were

taking care of younger siblings at home. The absence of children was directly linked with the means of earning a living in the village. Parents go outside to other states to make bricks; the children accompany them and come back to the village when this work gets over. Apart from this, many children were those who came to school only after feeding the cattle at home or had to leave the school in between for this purpose. At the time of the field visit, the season for harvesting certain specific varieties of 'Dhaan' (rice) had started and many children were engaged in this work. For instance on enquiring "why Geeta hasn't come", a student replied "She has gone to harvest Dhaan." However, this was not the case as after a few minutes the same girl (11 years of age) was observed in Tarvana looking after her younger sibling. On confronting the Masterji it was informed that the child who informed about 'Geeta' did not have the correct information. In reality teachers have very little knowledge about children coming from the lower caste strata.

4. The seating arrangement/ pattern

Initially it did seem that children were sitting randomly, but careful investigation unfolded a pattern of seating arrangement. One clear trend was that the basis of seating was not the class or grade but the village from which they came – children from Jetiyan sat together while those from Tarvana sat together. (It also needs to

be clarified here that Jetiyan is a village of the 'upper caste' whereas Tarvana is a Dalit Basti). There was also clear distinction in the appearance of children from Jetiyan and Tarvana in relation to their physical structures, glow of the face, clothes, their school bags, etc. Nobody was in a position to provide a clear answer on the reason behind these demarcations.

5. Children's belongings

Many children from Jetiyan wore torn and dirty clothes to school and almost each one of them carried a small bag ('jhola') in which they would carry their textbooks and notebooks. While observing a child's bag it was found to contain a Class II Bihar Textbooks Corporation's Hindi books. Apart from this, there was a 'Khaini' (tobacco) box which was now used for keeping small pieces of pencils made of lime stone. The bag also had a graphite slate which was broken at one edge. There was also a small book which was very well kept covered with newspaper and plastic stapled on it. On removing the pins the name of the book and the publisher was visible– Saroj Publications, Shahjahan Ganj, Patna and was titled 'Good' English (although this book was in English it had many Hindi words).

Tarvana's children used to sit at one place. Describing their clothes as torn will be an incomplete expression. That is why we will go in a little more depth. On keen observation of every child's shirt and pants (the children from this basti consisted only of boys, there was

not a single girl) it was observed that besides being torn, there were no buttons in their shirts and the button holes were also torn. Most of these children did not have school bags; they only brought a slate and a pencil. While trying to speak to an eight-year-old child, he could not understand me and started crying. We cannot traditionally understand this expression of crying. There were a whole bunch of emotions involved, which not only states his poverty status but also expresses his feeling of fear regarding the outside world embedded in his inner world.

6. Children who had passed out from the primary school of the village

One major reason for disinterest towards the elementary education was the plight of children who have already passed out from the school. There was a young boy from Tarvana, who passed the fifth grade but couldn't study further and as such had started working as a labourer in the village. Masterji informed that there were at least 40 to 50 such youngsters in Tarvana basti who somehow managed to study only till the third, fourth or fifth. One collective reason for this abrupt discontinuation of education was definitely the pressure to earn. Ironically, there were only 15 to 20 youngsters/adults in the whole village who could actually read and write.

Conclusions

On the whole, the study traces the relationship between caste conflict and

institutional education across three salient features:

1. A substantive corpus of diverse and sometimes conflicting experiences.
2. A range of politics of representation (Questions related to whose experiences and what is the nature of experience), and
3. An official structure for acceptance of experiences and validation processes.

The extension of these three can be seen in the questions on identity and the dilemma of adjustment causing various levels of conflict and finally expressing itself in the form of resistance. Some of the major conflicting trends observed are as summarized below:

- **'Being educated'** holds different meanings for different castes, based not only on their position in caste hierarchy but also on different geographical settings (caste position being the same).
- **Aspirations** from education are different for all castes (both within the hierarchy and geographically).
- **Question on the content of curriculum** in school education got different responses from different castes. Most of the respondents from upper castes stressed on mainstream subjects which are usually associated to high and elite social status like Mathematics and English. Whereas, most respondents from lower castes thought that

the curriculum should provide education which:

- is related to their daily lives,
 - empowers them against exploitation,
 - makes them capable of earning and demanding a respectable wage,
 - helps to know ways in which they can harvest more from smaller pieces of land/field,
 - enables them to fill MNREGA forms independently,
 - enables them to avail services provided by the government, especially health services.
- **'Pedagogy'**- idea that community is the most significant factor in learning, and culture being the most significant context within. Most of the respondents from upper caste believed that children learn good things mainly at school, with the family and in some cases through family relationships. On the contrary, majority of the respondents from lower castes were of the view that good things can be learnt in community, at work and even while being involved in household chores. They visualized their work and culture as pedagogy. However, in both the cases responses for girls were different with the respondents largely believing that girls learn good things only at home. Thus,

gender discrimination existed across caste lines.

- **Meta-structure of Schooling**- that gives constant messages to the people from lower castes that there is nothing that schooling has to offer them.
- **Work and Caste**- Another way in which the meta-narrative of caste operates is through the work in which the children are involved, which in turn shapes their aspirations. The nature of work in which the child sees his parents and relatives engaged influences the psyche of children not only directly but also through other people's perception of that work.
- **Spared of Conflict**, is not only limited to public spaces such as schools, but it is also very much in existence in the private spaces such as family and community. Seemingly it all happens in a simple society where many forms/processes of conflict are prevalent like caste conflict or in other social conflicts arising from 'developmental process' and 'peace processes' mostly by the state.

As the field notes suggest, the dominant culture tends to reproduce itself but resistance also has the capacity to do the same. The increasing cases of drop outs, learning disorders, cases of pathology; aggressive behaviors etc. are not only the instances to be looked as maladaptive behaviours and

psychological problems; but it also needs to be understood in the light of the resistances emerging from caste conflicts. The greatest threat of the simplified and fact-distorting narratives on caste conflict is that these communities not only have ideas

nourished by "silence" but also by words. Official "accuracy" about caste conflict does not necessarily provide exhaustive pictures of the situation, which is also reflected in the constant struggle of children from these communities.

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