

9 The Morning Assembly

Constructing Subjecthood, Authority, and Knowledge through Classroom Discourse in an Indian School

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9.1 Introduction

This chapter leverages insights from language socialization and critical discourse analysis to unpack the discursive shaping of subjectivity and epistemic ideology in an Indian school. We focus on a lynchpin daily event in the instructional experience of young Indian children: the Morning Assembly. Therein, different dimensions of authority and subjecthood are performed and invoked, via the differentiation of forms of knowledge and the articulation of distinctive mechanisms of learning. Although the formation of subjecthood and knowledge might be conceptualized as independent processes, in the context of schooling they are deeply entangled and, in fact, mutually constitutive.

The ritual of the Morning Assembly, the distinctive start to an Indian school day, has long been ingrained within the educational system. It normally encompasses dissemination of news, patriotic and devotional songs in multiple languages, as well as edifying lectures (see Section 9.5) whereby students are exposed to and engaged in a variety of texts and genres such as prayers, songs, pledges, *mantras*, and lectures. It is also a daily ritual meant for developing character, and is considered instrumental in conditioning children into ethical living (Duesund, 2013; Kumar, 1990). In this capacity, it serves as a medium for the inculcation of moral values regarding, among other aspects, patriotism, citizenship, and spiritual growth (Benei, 2008; Duesund, 2013; Kumar, 1990; Sarangapani, 2003; Subramaniam, 2000; Thapan, 2014). Our analysis reveals that the language practices of the Morning Assembly reflect and enact two “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1980): two paradigms of knowledge/power relations that both justify and undermine the schooling experience of Indian children.

This study builds on the limited research on this ritual by scholars, principally Sarangapani (2003), who argues that the Morning Assembly socializes students into particular learner stances that draw on traditional Hindu religious and cultural scripts. Crucially, ideologies about teachers’ authority are pivotal within this socialization process, achieved chiefly through keying into “ancient truths” (Sarangapani, 2003, p. 407). The traditional *guru–shishya*

(master–disciple) relationship figures most prominently within this discourse. This dyadic relationship, while an integral aspect of Indian custom, also encodes certain elements of subversion. Not only does it compete “in Indian folklore with the mother–child relationship for idealization and reverence” (Sarangapani, 2003, p. 406), but it also disrupts strictly regulated hierarchical relationships based on caste and gender. The casting of the contemporary teacher and student in the traditional mold of *guru* and *shishya* endows teachers with authority because of the absolute primacy of that model of educational relationship since ancient times (Sarangapani, 2003).¹ This chapter expands on Sarangapani’s analysis in two fundamental ways: (1) We detail how different components of the ritual of the Morning Assembly enact different forms of authority and subjectivity; (2) We discern the relationship between authority and knowledge. More specifically we delineate how authority is predicated upon knowledge, which in turn legitimizes deployment of disciplinary technologies (e.g., surveillance, classification, regulation) (Foucault, 1977) aimed at promoting different dispositions toward learning among students.

After establishing the theoretical backdrop, the chapter describes the context, participants, and procedures that relate to the collection and analysis of data. We then present three representative excerpts that illuminate how authority, knowledge, and subjecthood are co-articulated within and through the ritual of the Morning Assembly. A complex picture emerges, in which the traditional *guru–shishya* relationship is invoked and at the same time displaced by the teacher–student model promoted within the modernist educational agenda of the postcolonial Indian state. This tension also manifests in the epistemological sphere, with the juxtaposition of traditional and modern forms of knowledge and pedagogical practices. In the conclusion, we consider how the Morning Assembly – a site of layered authority and subjecthood – may contribute to the reproduction of socioeconomic inequalities within Indian education.

9.2 Theoretical Framework

The investigation employs the theoretical lens of language socialization, which is centrally concerned with the socialization of cultural novices into and through language (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). A key tenet of the language socialization paradigm is that everyday communicative practices are a locus of production, reproduction, and transformation of culture. Routines in particular, punctuating the everyday experience of community members, function as central sites of cultural learning (Baquedano-López, 2008; Rogoff et al., 2007). Often quite simple and formulaic, and rooted in “bodily hexis” (Bourdieu, 1984), routines are indexical of broad and complex sociocultural

orientations (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). The routine of the Morning Assembly, for instance, organizes Indian children's normative positions vis-à-vis learning, knowledge, and authority.

As a result of the "criticalist" (Watson-Gegeo and Bronson, 2013) orientation of our scholarship, we also utilize a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989) lens to unpack the ritual of the Morning Assembly. This allows us to sharpen our focus on power, hierarchy, and inequality, drawing largely on Althusser's and Foucault's theorizations on ideology, discourse, discipline, subjecthood, and education (e.g., Fairclough, 1989; Hall, 2001; Luke, 1995). Althusser (1971) posits that systems of power, notably the State, deploy ideology to ensure their reproduction by incorporating individuals into power structures. The State utilizes "ideological state apparatuses," such as educational institutions, to shape subjectivities that will be fitting to the dominant power matrix (Althusser, 1971). In a similar fashion, Foucault conceives of schooling as a core element in the production of subjecthood, principally via disciplinary techniques. According to Foucault (1977), discipline does not intervene on a pre-existing subject but rather brings this subject into being in the very moment it imposes onto him/her/them conditions for recognition.

In a Foucauldian perspective, it would be misleading to consider disciplinary interventions as a purely oppressive mechanism of subjugation. Modern pedagogies foster primarily "technologies of the self," "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves and attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Subjects are educated to become the master of their own ethical self-constitution.

The pedagogues – fashioned as technicians or sages – draw students to disciplinary practices that, while steeped in societal and cultural values, are ultimately to become individual regulations and aspirations.²

9.3 Data, Methodology, and Focal Event

Language socialization researchers document how sociocultural and linguistic patterns are saturated with cultural content, sedimented over time (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Language socialization research adopts an ethnographic perspective characterized by longitudinal study design, field-based data collection, and conversation/discourse analysis of a substantial corpus of audio and video recorded naturalistic interaction (Garrett and Baquedano-López, 2002). Conforming to these methodological principles, this study brings together a range of data to provide a complex and holistic picture of the ritual of Morning Assembly. Part of a broader investigation of young boys at an *anathashram* (orphanage) in suburban New Delhi spanning nine years, this

study draws on data from eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the first author at a village school the boys attended, between December 2010 and August 2011. The boys were between the ages of five and 14 during the data collection period. The data collection process entailed participant observation in the *anathashram*, supplemented with audiovisual recordings of semi-structured informal interviews with the boys, and nearly 100 hours of classroom observations (approximately four to six hours per week when school was in session). The focal subjects were eight children from the *anathashram* and five teachers at the school, though each classroom had approximately 30 students. Written artifacts that offered additional insight included the children's school diaries, textbooks across subjects from nursery through Class VIII (eighth grade), homework, schoolwork, Unit Tests, Mid-terms, final exams, and *anathashram* records.

9.3.1 *The Research Site*

SCB School³ is located in Madhupur Village (within the city of Noida), home to approximately 3,500 inhabitants, a mostly floating population of migrant workers. Noida is one of the cities comprising the National Capital Region, a conurbation of New Delhi and several urban agglomerations. An ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socially heterogeneous city, it has about 650,000 inhabitants. The languages of state administration, business and commerce, and schooling are English and/or Hindi, although many inhabitants speak other languages at home (e.g., Punjabi and Urdu). SCB School, a co-educational semi-private institution, had approximately 250 students and was in session Monday through Saturday, from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. The teachers (including the school principal), in their thirties and forties, had grown up in nearby towns and villages and held postgraduate degrees in various disciplines from regional universities.⁴ The school principal also taught English, Hindi, and social science to several of the classes. The school itself was made up of a series of rooms connected with half-walls, with each classroom and teacher serving concurrently two or three grade levels. Each classroom was packed with small desks, two to three children to a desk, and each classroom was separated by a narrow aisle. As a result of the spatial constraints, each classroom was run as a multi-grade context. During the Morning Assembly, the children, in their uniformed attire, would stand or sit at their desks, and the teachers would walk back and forth across aisles in each classroom and also across the open corridor connecting all the rooms. Thus, as a result of the open plan of the school (see Figures 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3), all the children participated together in the ritual of Morning Assembly.



Figure 9.1 Standing in the aisle of a classroom, *Bade Sir* reads and chants from the *Hanuman Chalisa*, while the children repeat after him. Sixth graders are on the right of the aisle, and seventh graders are on the left.



Figure 9.2 Students recite the School Pledge, with their hands outstretched. Fourth grade students are on the right of the aisle, and sixth graders are on the left.



Figure 9.3 Students are chanting the *Gayatri Mantra*, standing with their hands folded in the *namaste* pose and their heads slightly bowed.

9.4 Analytic Procedures

At the start of this investigation, we were broadly interested in examining the dialectical relationship between traditional and contemporary Indian educational practices, particularly with reference to processes of authority and subjectivation. As we mined the data, the Morning Assembly ritual – with its juxtaposition of languages and textual practices (see Section 9.4.1 for a detailed description) – emerged as an especially rich site from which to examine these intersections.

In the course of this research project, the first author has reflected deeply on her own religious and educational experiences and been sensitive to the ways in which they have framed, informed, and shaped the collection and analysis of data. She grew up 13 miles away from the village school, in a similar linguistic landscape to that inhabited by the children. Her educational history also entailed Morning Assemblies similar to the ones under analysis. Her personal and academic background as an Indian, a New Delhi native (where she spent the first 22 years of her life), as a married Hindu Bengali woman in her thirties (at the time), playing the multiple roles of *didi* (Bengali, ‘elder sister’) and researcher, a product of the Indian K-12 system, an academic within US higher education, and someone specifically interested in the processes of schooling and language socialization, have potentially influenced the nature of the data collected and analysis conducted and also provided an additional source of reflection on the data.

9.4.1 Focal Event

At SCB School, every day commenced with the Morning Assembly. It is comprised of devotional, inspirational, and patriotic songs and prayers (in Hindi, English, Awadhi, and Sanskrit), followed by choral recitation of the School Pledge, and ending with the singing of the Indian national anthem. Meditation is also integrated into the assembly most days. The Morning Assembly would follow a similar format on every school day except on the auspicious days of Tuesdays and Saturdays, when students would recite the *Hanuman Chalisa*, an extended devotional hymn spanning 40 verses dedicated to Hanuman, a Hindu deity. The duration of the morning assembly varied from half an hour to over two hours, depending on what else was going on that day (such as exams or festival celebrations).

On a typical day, the Morning Assembly began with the children being given a teacher’s drill commands “Attention!” and “Stand at ease!” several times, in English. The children would stiffen and relax their bodies according to the orders, and the cement floor would reverberate with the sound of their

feet hitting the ground in time with the commands. The teachers would watch the children carefully to make sure that they all remained silent while moving in unison. During this process, the children would be given specific instructions (involving code-switching between Hindi and English) that ranged from regimenting the distance between their heels (down to the exact centimeter) during the “Attention” pose; the straightness of their backs; and how precisely their hands should be clasped behind their backs when “At ease.” Normally Swaraj Sir, who had trained as a cadet in his youth, would be in charge of giving these commands to the children. In a way that recalls Mauss’ descriptions of “techniques of the body” (Mauss, 1973 [1935]), these commands target explicitly and exclusively the child’s body, imparting instructions on proper posture and gait (see also Burdelski, Chapter 10 in this volume). After faithfully following the commands several times, the children would be told to start with prayers.

While chanting the *Gayatri Mantra*, an important Vedic hymn, the children would be instructed to stand erect, hands clasped in a *namaste* pose, with their heads bowed down in devotion (see Figure 9.3). For the School Pledge, the students would keep their right hand outstretched, their backs straight and gaze looking firmly ahead (see Figure 9.2). For the national anthem, their right hands would be against their right temples forming a salute, their bodies steady. For the extended chanting of the *Hanuman Chalisa* (see Figure 9.1), the students would sit in their seats, their backs straight, with most students clapping along in rhythm to the chants. Finally, they would meditate (with “eyes and mouths closed,” as they were ordered to do) for a few minutes, after which they would listen (relatively) quietly as a teacher (most often the principal, *Bade Sir*) lectured. After the lecture finished, the students would be instructed to remain seated silently with “straight backs, straight waists,” their eyes closed shut. A couple of minutes later they would be told to open their eyes, and, with the Morning Assembly drawing to a close, teaching would commence.

9.5 Authority, Subjecthood, Knowledge, and Education in the Morning Assembly

In this section, we analyze three representative excerpts that illuminate situated notions of authority, subjecthood, knowledge, and education, as they emerge during the ritual of the Morning Assembly at SCB School. We begin by closely examining the pledge and show how its textual and performative dimensions call specific dimensions of subjecthood into being, situating each individual child into a social matrix of both communion and hierarchical order. The second and third excerpts, segments of lectures delivered by the principal on separate days, illustrate how submission to teachers’ authority is articulated

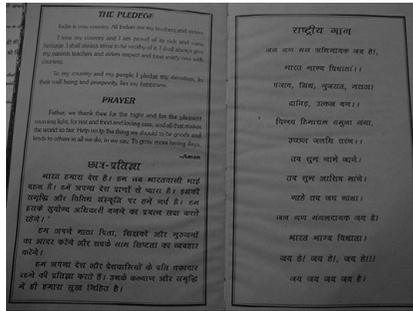


Figure 9.4 School Pledge in the children’s school diary. The pledge is written in English at the top of the page on the left, and its Hindi version at the bottom (the two versions are separated by a prayer). On the right of the page is the Indian national anthem, which is a Bengali song that is written here in Devanagari (Hindi) script.

and socialized through ideological processing of epistemic differentiation and valorization of tradition.

9.5.1 The National Pledge as Interpellation

Once the devotional singing draws to a close, the children prepare to recite the School Pledge. They stand with their right hand outstretched in front of them, their bodies erect. One or two children are selected to lead the school in reciting the pledge. They enunciate a segment of the pledge, roughly a prosodic unit (not all mapping onto a full sentence), with loud voice and staccato rhythm, and then the rest of the children repeat the segment in unison. As such, the pledge recitation can be likened to formulaic language practices that language socialization scholars have documented as central to “socializing novices to social dimensions such as politeness, hierarchy, and social identities including social roles and statuses, and relationships” (Burdelski and Cook, 2012, p. 173).

The pledge appears in both an English and a Hindi version in the children’s school diary, but the one recited during Morning Assembly is the English version (Excerpt 9.1). The original English text of the pledge follows (Figure 9.4):

Excerpt 9.1 School Pledge

India is my (*sic*) country. All Indian (*sic*) are my brothers and sisters. I love my country and I am proud of its rich and varie (*sic*) heritage. I shall always strive to be worthy of it. I shall always give my parents teachers and elders respect and treat every one with

courtesy. To my country and my people I pledge my devotion, In (*sic*) their well being and prosperity (*sic*), lies my happiness.

The pledge is recited quickly, with most of the breaths drawn sharply at the end of prosodic units. The errors in written text are, on the instances observed by the researcher, preserved in the oral recitation. Additionally, depending on how well the selected child or children remember the text, minor variations are introduced during the recitation (e.g., fragments would be repeated or left out). We would like to suggest that the pledge functions as an interpellation act, in an Althusserian sense (i.e., as a process of calling individuals into ideologically saturated subject positions) (Althusser, 1971). Althusser offers the simple but effective example of a police officer shouting out “hey, you there!” in public. When an individual, upon hearing the exclamation, turns toward the officer “by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*” (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). In the act of responding, if only nonverbally to the officer’s hailing, the individual accepts that it is he who is addressed. This way subjects take on their subjecthood, one that was made possible for him by the officer’s exclamation, and, as such, one that is inherently situated in a power relationship.

In having the children enunciate the pledge (with proper accompanying body posture) the authority figures in the school recognize them as individual subjects. By inhabiting vocally the “I” of the pledge, the child accepts the conditions for this recognition of subjectivity, the stipulations that shape her/him/them as subject. We argue that the pledge is a textual technology that interpellates children into subjecthood predicated on reverence for adults and relatedness with all fellow Indians.

The pledge operates as interpellation at two levels: the performative and the referential. As a performative act, the pledge enacts affiliation and closeness. Repeating verbatim after a leading prompt instantiates agreement, alignment, and alliance. Repeating in unison is an enactment of togetherness. Thus, as the children perform the pledge every morning they subscribe to conditions of being that root them deeply in an experience of belonging and mutual interdependence. At the referential level, the pledge establishes students’ sense of ownership in their homeland (“may [*sic*] country”). Mirroring in part the performative, the pledge also situates Indians within a familial network (“brothers and sisters”). It then iterates students’ pride in Indian tradition, which students must “always” endeavor to prove “worthy of.” These lines show how children are not just socialized into a sense of patriotism, but also taught that patriotism is entwined with personal responsibility. Attendant to these notions is the emphasis on showing respect to “parents teachers and elders.” Significantly, this grouping treats parents, teachers, and elders as if they comprise one category. We suggest that the absence of commas within

this sentence, instead of merely reflecting missing punctuation, symbolically naturalizes the three groups as peers within a single unit. By explicitly classifying the three together, teachers are able to tap into a tradition of respect, deference, and obedience accorded to parents and elders that has been the cornerstone of Indian society for thousands of years (e.g., Gokhale 2003; Srinivasan and Karlan, 1997). These themes also emerge, as we see next, in the lectures given by the principal.

9.5.2 *Forms of Knowledge and Hierarchical Order*

Excerpt 9.2 offers a clear illustration of the SCB educators' epistemic ideology. Categorization and hierarchical ordering of forms of knowledge were repeatedly discussed in the principal's lectures, thereby constituting a salient socialization domain for the children in the school. The excerpt reveals tension between what the principal professes to be the most valuable knowledge and what the children are taught in the school.

Excerpt 9.2 Bade Sir's Lecture

(March 7, 2011) The prayers completed, the principal, *Bade Sir*, begins his lecture by invoking the upcoming examinations, a cause of great stress and anxiety among the children that day.

- 01 हम यह जो शिक्षा ग्रहण करने के लिए यहाँ पर आये हैं,
'This education that we have come to acquire here,'
- 02 इन किताबी शिक्षा का एक आपके सामने अभी जो आने वाला है दस दिन में पांच
दिन, में जो परीक्षा होने वाली है,
'This examination that will happen of the bookish education that is in front
of you in coming ten days, five days,'
- 03 यह इस किताबी ज्ञान का इम्तेहान है. बाकी हमारे जीवन में हर रोज़ इम्तेहान,
'This is an exam of this bookish knowledge. The rest [of it] in our life
everyday [there are] exams,'
- 04 और उस ही इम्तेहान में हम लोगों को वही देते हैं जो हमारे पास होता है.
'And in that exam we can give only that which we [already] have.'
- 05 हम अपने व्यवहार द्वारा जीवन में दुसरे लोगों को वही देते हैं जो हमारे पास हुआ
करता है,
'In our life we through our behavior towards other people [we] can give only
that which we already have,'
- 06 [...]
- 07 हमारे अंदर विद्वता है तो दूसरे को भी विद्वता देंगे. हमारे अंदर मूर्खता है तो दूसरों
को भी मूर्ख बनाएंगे मूर्खता देंगे उनको भी.

'If we have erudition within us then we can also give erudition to others.
If we have stupidity in us then we will make fools of others, we will
also give stupidity to others.'

08 तो शिक्षा का क्षेत्र मात्र इतना नहीं है कि हमारे सिलेबस में जो books लगी हों
उनकी () को पढ़ें, उनके पीछे जो question answer दिए हैं उनके answer
रट लें,

'Then the field of education is not only limited to that we () the books in
our syllabus we study, the question answers at the end we memorize by rote,'

09 कॉपी में लिखाएं और समाप्त हो जाये बात.

'Get written in the notebook and the matter is finished.'

10 शिक्षा का उद्देश्य है हम जीवन में "how to behave," दूसरों के साथ कैसा
व्यवहार करना है,

'The meaning of education is how to behave in life, how to behave with
others.'

11 शिक्षा की जो parameter है इतना छोटा नहीं है,

'The parameter of education is not this small.'

12 शिक्षा के parameter में वो तैयारी की जाती है कि हम जीवन में, अपने जीवन
को उत्कर्ष की ओर ले जाने के लिए हम क्या क्या करें,

'In the parameter of education the preparation is done that in our lives, what
all we must do for going towards progress in life.'

13 तो हम दूसरों के साथ दूसरों को क्या देंगे, यह depend करता है की हम अपने-
मेरी-जेब में क्या है,

'Then what we do with others, what we give depends on what we-our
own-have in our pockets.'

14 मेरी जेब में जो है वही मैं दूसरों को दे सकता हूँ.

'What is in my pocket that is only what I can give to others.'

15 [...]

16 यह पीढ़ी व पीढ़ी चलने वाली व्यवस्था है,

'This is an arrangement happening generation after generation.'

17 हमने अपने शिक्षकों से, पेरेंट्स से, अपने बड़े बुजुर्गों से जो चीज़ें सीखीं है,

'We from our teachers, our parents, our elders those things that we have
learned.'

18 वही हमारे पास हुआ करती है.

'That only is with us.'

In this excerpt from *Bade Sir's* lecture, students are invited to see an expanded 'parameter of education' (line 11). This perspective extends the scope of education beyond 'bookish education' (line 02) and encompasses learning 'how to behave' (line 10). *Bade Sir's* description of book learning captures prototypical literacy practices at the school: the children study books assigned in the syllabus, learn by rote (Moore, 2006) answers to questions provided at the end of lessons, and copy answers into their notebooks. In fact, this lecture was immediately followed by these same activities during that particular school day. In redefining education as going beyond these activities, *Bade Sir* not only leans on traditional ideals of respect for India's heritage and elders – as articulated in the pledge – but also invokes a commercial metaphor, by mentioning what is in one's pocket. Thus, virtuous knowledge (that is, knowledge of virtues) is commodified and likened to money. It is given a transactional value. It is what one 'has' to offer to others and previously had to take from key adult figures. Indeed, the adults may also be seen to be investing in the children. Moreover, *Bade Sir* adds historical scope to his comments by claiming, 'This is an arrangement happening generation after generation' (line 16). This serves to establish that his statements are not merely his perspective: They convey an understanding of education with long roots in Indian history. Furthermore, as in the pledge, we find 'teachers, . . . parents, . . . elders' (line 17) classified together. Through this deliberate discursive move, teachers are removed from the more technical sphere of academic pedagogy – which is strictly related to books, schoolwork, and testing – and are again elevated into the sacred and venerated space in Indian tradition that parents and elders have occupied for millennia. This also attempts to recast the present-day teacher into the same venerated space as the ancient *gurus*. Moreover, the adverbial qualifier *only* in the statement 'That only is with us' (line 18) drives home the point that 'bookish knowledge' (line 03) is not as lasting or as virtuous knowledge, which plays a more powerful role in defining how students should live their lives.

The ideological work that *Bade Sir's* words do is complex and significant: the principal categorizes forms of knowledge, differentiating bookish knowledge from erudition. This distinction is made through the articulation of a hierarchical order between forms of knowledge, with knowledge acquired (in school) for the school test not deemed as important as that acquired for virtuous conduct in life. A key aspect of the epistemic ideology transmitted in the lecture is the differentiation between sources of knowledge: schoolbooks are not authoritative sources of knowledge; elders and parents are, by tradition. The teacher is thus aligned to elders and parents, the more valued sources of knowledge, to gain ultimate authority over pupils. Furthermore, different forms of knowledge are associated with different pedagogies and mechanisms

of learning: written questions that rephrase textbook information and rote repetition are dominant teaching/learning methods within the academic domain. As for erudition, it is acquired in everyday interaction, by observance and observation, best modeled by older adults. Through epistemic ideology children are thus also socialized to differentiate between forms of knowledge and to relate differently to different knowledge sources. The sources affirmed as authoritative are those that are linked to Indian tradition, toward whom, consequently, the children are expected to submit themselves.

9.5.3 Student–Teacher Relationship Steeped in Tradition

Through the analysis of Excerpt 9.3, we unpack further the authority construct in the Morning Assembly rituals and how students are positioned vis-à-vis the educational figures in the school.

Excerpt 9.3 Student–Teacher Relationship

(March 13, 2011). This lecture followed the group recitation of *Hanuman Chalisa*, which was recited in tune, punctuated by the rhythm of timed applause. The children were then told to sit still and meditate, their backs erect (with repeated orders, in English, of ‘Straight [sic] your back!’), eyes closed, and no talking allowed. After the meditation was over, they opened their eyes, but continued sitting with straight backs, listening (mostly) quietly as *Bade Sir* lectured.

- 01 ध्यान की पद्धति इस लिए है, कि हमारी जो बिखरी हुई चेतना है, (.)
 ‘Path of meditation is so, that our scattered thinking.’
- 02 उस में एकाग्रता आये.
 ‘In that concentration arrives.’
- 03 वह सारी की सारी जो बिखरी हुई चेतना हैं,
 ‘All that scattered thinking.’
- 04 इधर उधर की बातों में जो लगी हुई है,
 ‘That is focused on matters here and there.’
- 05 उसको हम एक जगह एकत्र कर सकें.
 ‘We can accumulate in one place.’
- 06 और एकत्र करने के बाद, उसको किसी उद्देश्य में लगाया जा सके.
 ‘And after accumulating, put it in the service of some purpose.’
- 07 जो हमारा उद्देश्य हैं. (.) उद्देश्य कुछ भी हो सकता हैं
 ‘That which is our purpose (.) our purpose can be anything at all.’
- 08 अभी आपका उद्देश्य सिर्फ पढ़ना हैं, education प्राप्त करना हैं, शिक्षा प्राप्त करना है.
 ‘Right now your purpose is only studying, obtaining education, obtaining education.’

- 09 तो उस में शिक्षा प्राप्ति के उद्देश्य को आप भली भाँति साकार रूप दे सकें इस लिए आवश्यक हो
 'Then in that for you to be able to give proper shape to the aim of obtaining an education it is necessary that,'
- 10 कि आप के अंदर एकाग्रता हो. और एकाग्रता के लिए अनिवार्य है की आप (.)
 'That in you there will be concentration. And for concentration it is mandatory that you,'
- 11 ध्यान करे, ध्यान. (?) आँखें बंद कर के ध्यान कराया जाता है.
 'Do meditation, meditation. With closed eyes meditation is gotten done.'
- 12 यह सब इस लिए कराये जाते हैं की आप के मन की जो चिंता (चिंतुता) है
 'These all, for this reason are gotten done. That the anxiety that is in your mind,'
- 13 वह दूर हो. मन जो बार-बार भागता है, आपको लेकर इधर-उधर, भागता है,
 'That is removed. The mind that again and again runs, taking you, runs here and there,'
- 14 उसको रोकने के लिए ध्यान कराया जाता है.
 'To stop it meditation is gotten done.'
- 15 में (.) हमारी जो prayer, morning prayer होती है, उस morning prayer में
 'Me (.) our prayer, morning prayer that happens, in that morning prayer,'
- 16 हनुमान चालीसा, या अन्य प्रार्थनाएं जो भी हैं, गायत्री मंत्र (.)
 'Hanuman chalisa, or other prayers that are there, Gayatri Mantra,'
- 17 गायत्री मंत्र छोटी-मोटी वस्तु नहीं है.
 'Gayatri Mantra is not a small thing.'
- 18 गायत्री मंत्र जितने भी हमारे चारो वेदों में मंत्र है उनका, उन सब का मुख्य एक मंत्र है,
 'Gayatri Mantra all the four Vedas in, in those it is the premier mantra,'
- 19 इस लिए उसका उच्चारण कराया जाता है. चारो वेदों में,
 'That is why its recitation is gotten done. In four Vedas,'
- 20 जो जितने भी मंत्र हैं उनका एक सबसे मुख्य मंत्र है,
 'Whatever mantras are there it is the premier mantra,'
- 21 इस लिए केवल इसी का सुबह पांच बार जाप कराया जाता है,
 'That is why only this one chanting is gotten done in the morning five times.'
- 22 जिससे कि हमें चारो वेदों के मंत्रों के जाप का फल प्राप्त हो सके.
 'So that we can get the fruits of the chanting of [all] four Vedas.'
- 23 हम जो हनुमान चालीसा पढ़ते हैं हनुमान चालीसा-हमारी भारतीय संस्कृति में ऐसी परंपरा है,
 'That we read Hanuman Chalisa. Hanuman Chalisa-our Indian culture has such a tradition,'

- 24 शिक्षा प्राप्त करना, हम यह नहीं समझते कि हम कोई वस्तु खरीदने जा रहे हैं बाज़ार से,
'Obtaining an education, we do not think that we are buying a thing in the bazaar.'
- 25 टीचर को फीस दो, education मिल जाएगी. ऐसी हमारी मान्यता नहीं है,
'Give the teacher fees [and] get an education. That is not our belief.'
- 26 हमारी मान्यता है गुरु शिष्य के बीच का एक ऐसा पवित्र सम्बन्ध है,
'Our belief is that (.) There is such a pure relationship between guru and student.'
- 27 जहाँ पर समर्पण के बाद इस वस्तु को हासिल किया जा सकता है.
'Where after surrender this thing can be achieved.'
- 28 गुरु गोविन्द दोनों खड़े काके लागु पाँय?
'If Guru and Govind [Krishna/God] are standing [there] whose feet do I touch⁵?'
- 29 बलिहारी गुरु आपनो गोविन्द दियो मिलाये.
'Guru's feet first, since he introduced you to God.'
- 30 इसमें गुरु का स्थान है वो ईश्वर से भी बड़ा होता है.
'In this the place of the guru is even bigger than God.'
- 31 कवीराज ने गुरु का जो स्थान है ईश्वर से भी बड़ा बताया है.
'The poet king [Kabir Das] has said the role of the guru is bigger than God.'

The principal's lecture opens with a lengthy explanation of why it is important that students meditate. It is noteworthy that the students just completed a meditation session. The explanation is thus provided after the students are directed to engage in the activity and not before. In a similar manner, this lecture includes an explanation of why students chant the *Gayatri Mantra* and the *Hanuman Chalisa*, after the ritual chanting has been completed. We argue here that the sequential order, of activity (first) and (then) justification for the activity, where students are imparted instructions and expected to be obedient, socializes them to follow unconditionally the authority figure of the teacher.

The explanation proper provides additional detail about the subject position students are to assume in the educational context, specifically in relation to authority figures. As in Excerpt 9.2, reference is made again to market transaction. Here, however, it serves to set the teacher–student relationship in contrast to a commercial relationship and to place it instead in the “pure” mold of the traditional *guru–shishya* dyad (lines 26–27). As such the teacher–student relationship is imbued with powerful cultural, spiritual, and religious overtones.

Conditions for obtaining an education and a learning trajectory are also alluded to by *Bade Sir's* words: necessary to undertaking and then achieving

education is an act of surrendering to a *guru* and submitting to his guidance (line 27). The reverence that the student is to give to the teacher cannot be overestimated. Quoting a well-known *doha* (couplet) by the famous fifteenth-century mystic and poet Kabir Das, *Bade Sir* posits that the *guru* is greater than God because it is through the *guru* that God becomes known. In fact, this notion is invoked three times (lines 29–31) in the span of the four lines: first within the *doha*; then in the explanation following the couplet; and finally during *Bade Sir*'s assertion that Kabir himself had articulated this. The repetitions reinforce the hierarchy, thus discursively reifying the primacy of the instructor.

9.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has extended Sarangapani's scholarship (2003) on the pivotal Indian schooling ritual of the Morning Assembly by demonstrating how it contributes to the subjectivation of Indian pupils through participation in a set of regimented disciplinary activities. Employing both language socialization theory and critical discourse analysis, we illustrated how school discourse within this ritual component recruits the child into a subject position steeped in tradition and subservient to authority.⁶

The School Pledge, recited at the beginning of the ritual, warms up, so to speak, the children's disposition to obedience, at both the referential and performative levels, which unarguably is essential for the smooth running of the instructional operations to follow. The chanting of the *mantras* and the silent meditation, as "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1980), foster each child's submission to tradition. The moral lectures often invoke tradition explicitly, through reference to sacred texts, religious figures, and spiritual guides, notably the *guru*. To him – ultimate authority exceeding that of God, as articulated by Kabir – is due absolute submission.

The Morning Assembly is also a site where the subject position of teachers is articulated. Our analysis has revealed that for teachers as well, tradition is a chief reference. Their authority is claimed and legitimized through discursive acts of alignment with elders and parents, who are long-established authoritative figures in Indian society.

In doing that, however, a tension emerges between domains of knowledge and pedagogical strategies linked to the traditional *guru–shishya* relationship and those associated with the contemporary schooling institution. We suggest that this tension can be characterized as the coexistence of two distinct regimes of truth, that is two sets of institutionally produced and approved truths that govern sanctioned and desirable ways to think, act, and feel (Foucault, 1980). On the one hand, we have wisdom and moral growth, which are apprehended through observation of and participation in virtuous practices of parents, elders, and *gurus*, whereas on the other hand, we have

academic education, chiefly literacy skills, acquired through textbook exercises and rote learning. Both seem to undergo some form of commodification, but the mechanisms of transmission within the two regimes of truth remain significantly different.

In closing, we wish to bring attention to an important implication: juxtaposing the schooling regime of truth to the traditional regime of truth inevitably undermines the former and the emancipatory potential of education. Children are being socialized into stances that not only put a premium on obedience but also redirect their aspirations away from academics and toward good behavior. For underprivileged children, for whom literacy skills and academic success may be the only way out of poverty (Dreze and Sen, 2002; Mohanty, 2008), this form of socialization can be especially consequential, ultimately leading to the reproduction of existing socioeconomic inequalities within Indian education.

NOTES

- 1 Sheshagiri (2010) traces the ascendancy of the *guru* in Indian civilization to the Upanishadic times, between 800 and 500 BC. There, the *guru* served as intellectual mentor, requiring from the pupils the “exercise of reason rather than exercises in submission and blind conformity” (p. 468). It was only in the *Bhakti* period, around the seventh century, when this understanding of the *guru*’s role underwent a sea change. During that time, “devotional surrender” to the *guru* became critical to the acquisition of knowledge (ibid.). This conception held sway until colonial mechanisms reshaped the learning context, rendering the *guru* as the instructor, or “meek dictator” (Kumar, 1991) in the classroom. The tensions we articulate below map onto these different historical trajectories of the term.
- 2 Indeed, Foucault (1987) points out that “if I am interested in fact in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of self, these practices are not nevertheless something that the subject invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his (*sic*) culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” (p. 11).
- 3 Names of people, the village school, and the village have been changed to protect participants’ identities.
- 4 Teachers were typically referred to by their first names followed by the title “Sir.” However, one exception was the principal, who also taught in the school and was referred to as “*Bade* [big] Sir.”
- 5 The touching of elder’s feet is a core aspect of broader Hindu culture, and symbolic of the respect and authority accorded to one’s elders.
- 6 While we have focused exclusively on disciplinary technologies and authority, we do not assume those to be solely oppressive and children’s agency insignificant. While we did not witness overt resistance during the Morning Assembly, we observed children exercising subtle subversive tactics like mumbling words or merely mouthing words instead of reciting them, and slouching when required to sit erect. Children’s tactical maneuvering within regimented spaces would indeed deserve more careful investigation.

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