

Teaching to Hate

RSS' Pedagogical Programme

The RSS/BJP has attempted to effect a radical departure in the existing educational ethos through the use of both state power and the instruments of 'civil society'. This article looks at schooling as part of the RSS agenda to create certain notions of citizenship and identity, first examining the textbook debate and then through ethnographic fieldwork in RSS schools in Chhattisgarh.

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If schools are one of the modes by which nations imagine and reproduce themselves, debates over schooling systems – availability, cost, curriculum, language, pedagogical techniques – are, at heart, debates over the style and content of this imagining. Increasingly in India, RSS notions of citizenship, nationhood and patriotism have come to be critical to this debate. This paper is an attempt to explore some of the RSS/BJP's educational interventions and their implications for the future production of 'citizens', first, at the national level through the textbook debate and then, through ethnographic fieldwork in RSS schools in Chhattisgarh.

The RSS has long recognised the centrality of education to any project of gaining power and reorienting the political arena. Its educational front, Vidya Bharati, runs one of the largest private networks of schools across the country, catering mainly to lower middle class students.¹ Other RSS fronts providing education include the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), which specialises in hostels for adivasi children among other activities; Sewa Bharati (for dalits), and the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation which runs single teacher pre-school centres where children are taught basic reading, writing, Sanskrit and 'sanskars' or good behaviour.

In terms of debating the nation's past or portraying contemporary society through state produced textbooks, the RSS/BJP agenda may seem not very different from that of conservative governments elsewhere: for them, social science, especially history, is intimately connected with inculcating national identity and patriotism [Nash, Crabtree and Dunn 2000; Hein and Selden 1998; Nelson 2002; Kumar 2001]. The 'nation' is identified with dominant groups in society and only narratives that value the role of these groups positively are seen as patriotic. Patriotism, in this version, also means extolling the virtues of one's own country over that of others and glossing over its negative phases [Nash, Crabtree and Dunn 2000:15]: In the US, this involves describing America as a consistent defender of freedom and democracy all over the world and minimising discussions of slavery or the extermination of native Americans [Hellinger and Brooks 1991], in Japan it means glossing over wartime atrocities [Nelson 2002], and in India it takes the form of glorifying Hinduism and minimising caste oppression. Ideological conflicts over the shape and content of history or civics textbooks inevitably involve debates over the emphasis given to certain people – dominant groups versus women and minorities – or certain periods in history over others.

In terms of the pedagogy transmitted by the RSS' own schools, however, the more relevant model for comparison appears to be

fascist schooling, although there are significant differences in that the RSS' control over the state is still far from complete, and is further complicated by the country's federal structure and the creation/reinforcement of distinct religious and ethnic populations through separate schooling systems. Under fascism, in addition to curricular content, much attention is focused on extra-curricular activities and the everyday rituals that punctuate the school day such as assembly, attendance, uniforms, etc [for some early work see Kandel 1935; Mann 1938; Minio-Paluello 1946]. As against the mere silencing of the diverse cultures and contributions of women, minorities, or workers found in conservative visions of education, the fascist school curriculum involves an active manipulation of historical evidence in order to foster hatred for and violence against minorities. While conservative school curricula often denigrate people of other countries, fascist schooling is also marked by the construction of enemies within. Finally, while fascist schools do not have a monopoly on militarist education,² preparing children for national 'defence' is intrinsic to the fascist project [Giles 1992; Wolff 1992].

Textbooks War

While the quality of textbooks has been pedagogically patchy in the past [Kumar 2001: 52-54] and the extent to which government schools have been really secular can be debated,³ Murli Manohar Joshi's regime as HRD minister, marks a qualitative turning point in Indian education. One of the first illustrations of this was the NCERT's 2000-2001 National Curriculum Framework for School Education, which bears quoting in detail:

Traditionally, India has been perceived as a source of fulfilment – material, sensuous and spiritual, consisting primarily of an agrarian society, the social design of which emphasised self-sufficiency, contentment and operational autonomy for each village...*The social matrix was congruent with the economic design based on the principle of distributive authority given to each village unit....A sizeable segment of the contemporary Indian society seems to have distanced itself from the religio-philosophic ethos, the awareness of the social design and the understanding of the heritage of the past...the structure of the authority of the Indian agrarian society has been disturbed. An individual in the formal work system could exercise authority over those who were otherwise his superiors in age and in the societal structure. In the agrarian society, successive generations followed the occupation as well as the goal sets of the family or caste at large. However, technological developments later introduced new professions and consequently new goal sets emerged. In contrast to*

the joint and extended family system, the society now is witnessing the phenomenon of nuclear families, single parents, unmarried relationships and so on. [NCERT 2000:3-4] (sic) (emphasis added).

Despite the formulaic appeal in the very next paragraph to the “national goals of secularism, democracy, equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, national integration and patriotism”, it is impossible not to note the sense of loss and dismay that greets the changes in this idealised agrarian society – the loss of caste authority, for example, when a low caste person is in a position of bureaucratic power, or when women are no longer bound by the patriarchal joint family.

A PIL pleading that the NCERT had not followed the correct procedures for consultation with the states before preparing the curriculum and that it sought to introduce religious teaching was, however, rejected by the Supreme Court.⁴ Article 28 of the Constitution stating that no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds was interpreted by the judge to allow for teaching about religions. In addition, Justice Shah expounded on the necessity of religion “for controlling wild animal instinct in human beings and for having civilised cultural society” (sic) (p 31).

The NCERT then released its history and social science textbooks. Although textbooks in other subjects have also been criticised [see for instance, Menon 2003] they have not earned the same kind of attention as history texts – in part because of the centrality of history to the RSS’s own project of rule. In a logic where the past is seen as determining current identity, rights to citizenship, and raising questions of historic reparation and justice, the teaching of history is inevitably deeply political [see also Nash, Crabtree and Dunn 2000; Kumar 2001]. What Hitler laid down for the teaching of history in *Mein Kampf* might well apply to the RSS agenda today: “History is not studied in order to know what has been, but one studies history in order to find in it a guide for the future and for the continued preservation of the nation itself” [Quoted in Kandel 1935:65]. In part, the greater focus on history is also due to the strength and sophistication of contemporary historical scholarship in India, and its success in challenging colonial and communal narratives [for one perspective on why history is the major terrain of dissension, see Lal 2003].

The NCERT social science/history textbooks are not only shockingly low on both grammar and fact, but also reflect many of the RSS’s pet themes – e g, the urge to prove that Indian civilisation is synonymous with Hinduism, which in turn is synonymous with the ‘Vedic civilisation’.⁵ This Vedic civilisation is portrayed as the fount of all things great in the world, while all the evils that beset India are traced to foreigners – Muslim invaders and Christian missionaries. In the textbook on medieval India, the exactions of the Sultanate Rulers or the Mughals are exaggerated and portrayed in anti-Hindu terms, and their contributions to society, culture and polity are ignored. The idea that the Babri masjid was built on an earlier temple is given textual sanctity: “the sites (for Babur’s mosques) were carefully selected...Ayodhya was revered as the birthplace of Rama” [Jain 2002:134]. It is not difficult to see the parallels with the version of history coined by the RSS’s late chief and ideologue M S Golwalkar, in *We or Our Nationhood Defined*: “Ever since that evil day when Moslems first landed in Hindusthan, right up to the present moment the Hindu nation has been gallantly fighting on to shake off the despoilers” [1939: 12].

In his remarkable book, *Prejudice and Pride*, Krishna Kumar compares Indian and Pakistani textbooks on their narrative of

the freedom struggle, and finds both lacking in important ways. In projecting the freedom struggle as a secular progression, rudely interrupted by partition, and by focusing mainly on political events and personalities, the earlier NCERT textbook on modern India, Kumar argues, did not enable children to understand the processes and sociological factors that led to communalisation and partition. Nor do they get a sense of why a secular Constitution meant so much for India’s leaders [Kumar 2001]. In the new NCERT textbook for class IX, however, there is even less attempt to understand ideals and processes – instead, the blame is clearly assigned. *Contemporary India* spends considerable time on the role of the Muslim league in causing partition, and the perfidy of the communists for supporting the Allies in the second world war, while omitting any mention of the RSS or the Hindu Mahasabha’s contribution to communalism and partition. There is no word on Gandhi’s assassination by RSS sympathiser, Nathuram Godse. With such remarkable passages as “The task of the framers of the Constitution was very difficult. Their foremost job was to ensure the integrity of the country taking into account the presence of Pakistan within India herself”, children are easily led to see Muslims as fifth columnists and not fully Indian. Much of this is again presaged in Golwalkar:

In this country, Hindusthan, the Hindu race with its Hindu Religion, Hindu Culture and Hindu Language (the natural family of Sanskrit and her offsprings) complete the Nation concept; that, in fine, in Hindusthan exists and must needs exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu nation. All those not belonging to the national, i e, Hindu Race, Religion, Culture and Language, naturally fall out of the pale of real ‘National’ life...All others are either traitors and enemies to the National cause...[Golwalkar 1939: 43-44].

Contemporary India covers the scope of world history from the 15th to the 21st century in 10 pages, presumably on the assumption that 14-year-olds cannot cope with more. The problem is not, however, just dumbing down, but passages like this: “The German nationalism which had developed a superiority complex about the purity and antiquity of its so-called Aryan blood was smarting under the humiliating terms imposed on it under the Treaty of Versailles. The German frustration gave birth to the personality of Adolf Hitler who created the Nazi party. The ideology of the Nazi party was a sort of fusion of German nationalism and socialism. The rising tide of German nationalism was seething with an ardent desire of revenge. The Germans readily accepted Hitler as their leader and surrendered to his dictatorship” (p 10). There is no mention of the holocaust, and perhaps this is not surprising in the light of what Golwalkar had to say on the subject:

To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh-impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by [Golwalkar 1939:35].

State Failure in Schooling

The ‘success’ of the RSS agenda on education must be seen in the wider context of state schooling. Despite climbing government statistics on the number of schools opened, teachers hired or children enrolled, the micro level reality remains grim in central India. PROBE (1999) found widespread teacher absenteeism,

leaking roofs, non-existent toilets, no drinking water, no blackboards and no educational materials such as textbooks, maps, etc. Adivasi and dalit children face additional problems such as the language gap between students and teachers, blatant discrimination or at the very least unequal treatment by teachers compared to upper caste students, and general condescension which makes the educational experience particularly alienating for these children [Nanda 1994, Nambissan 2000, PROBE 1999: 50-51].

Teachers, especially in adivasi areas, often blame parents for not sending their children to school, either because they are too 'backward' to realise the importance of schooling or because they need to send their children to work. PROBE, however, indicates that parental motivation to send their children to school is high across the country. The problem is really the cost of schooling (uniforms, etc), as well as the poor quality of education and the sense of inferiority generated in adivasi/dalit children that makes it not worth the expense [PROBE 1999, Haimendorf 1982: 133-134].⁶

In other words, even among those populations historically distanced by the schooling system, there is a strong desire for education as a means to challenge existing social inequities and to lay claim to the attributes of citizenship that the state promises. One consequence of this widespread demand and the lack of matching state initiative has been the considerable increase in private schooling, both of the religious non-profit and the supposedly secular profit-making variety. In many places, particularly urban or semi-urban areas, this has exacerbated social differentiation, with the poor being confined to vernacular government schools and anyone with the slightest ability to pay sending their children to private schools, preferably 'English medium' ones. Increasing class and communal divisions, promoted through differential schooling, thus diminish the promise of a more meaningful common citizenship held out by higher literacy levels [Vasavi 2000].

Jashpur District, Chhattisgarh

Textbooks are only a small part of pedagogical practice, and their reception often depends on the specific setting in which they are taught. As Luykx (1999:xxxiii) tells us: "educational processes...are fundamentally, cultural processes". This section, accordingly, aims at fleshing out this notion of pedagogy as cultural interpellation, based on fieldwork conducted in Chhattisgarh, primarily but not only in Kunkuri, a block headquarter in Jashpur district. Like other small urban concentrations in a predominantly adivasi belt, Kunkuri has a significant number of government staff and traders, (mostly Marwari and Jain but also some Muslims). The surrounding villages are populated largely by Uraon cultivators, many of whom are now Christians. Kunkuri is known as something of an educational centre in the district, primarily because it is home to one of the oldest Jesuit boarding schools in Chhattisgarh, the Loyola boys high school, and now has a proliferation of schools. In the late 1940s, the VKA was founded here to counter Christian proselytisation, setting in motion a process of competitive schooling. In recent years the Jesuits have also started a co-educational English medium day school in the Loyola premises. A Catholic girls high school, Nirmala, run by the Order of St Anne's, has a small boarding house attached to it. Kunkuri has two government high schools with hostels (one for girls and one for boys), as well as a government middle school. It also has a Saraswati Shishu

Mandir (run by Vidya Bharati), which is at present only from primary to middle school but has plans to expand to high school. The Shishu Mandir has no hostel, but some of the students stay in the VKA hostel. Some VKA hostellers go to Loyola as well.

The schools are distinctive not just in terms of their extra curricular content, but the social composition of both students and teachers (Tables 1-3). Both the Catholics and the RSS practise some degree of boundary policing of their own communities. The Catholic schools cater mostly to Christian adivasis – the children of both peasants and salaried government employees. Large scale recruitment to the army and to the Assam tea gardens, from the second world war onwards, encouraged by the Church, brought greater prosperity and also increased income differentiation among the local adivasis. Many of the Uraons in this area have been able to take advantage of reservations for STs and Loyola graduates are estimated to occupy about 20-40 per cent of government posts in Raipur. In addition to the priests, almost all the teachers are Catholic. Many business families traditionally sent their boys to Loyola, because it was the best education on offer in the area. However, now that the government school and Saraswati Shishu Mandir also have good results, many business parents have switched to these.

The clientele of the RSS school is predominantly lower middle class Hindu families – government employees, small business owners and traders, who can afford the fees of Rs 80-250 per month (depending on the class and the locality). In caste terms, the RSS base among OBCs – who feel threatened by Uraon educational progress and resent reservations – is reflected in the preponderance of OBCs over adivasis among both students and teachers. Unlike other Shishu Mandirs where the children are almost totally Hindu [Sarkar 1996: 245], the Kunkuri school has approximately 16.4 per cent Christians and Muslim students. Most of these Christian adivasi children belong to families with one parent in a government job, since only they can afford the fees. The Kunkuri Vidya Bharati principal claimed that their parents sent them because they were taught discipline and culture in addition to their regular school courses, but this clearly needs further investigation.⁷

Out of 26 teachers in the Shishu Mandir, only seven are women, of which one is a Christian Uraon, while the bulk are from the OBCs. Although the minimum qualification for a primary school teacher in the Vidya Bharati network is high school certification,

Table 1: Social Composition of Students of Loyola, Saraswati Shishu Mandir (SSM) and Government Schools (2001-2002)

	Scheduled Tribes	Scheduled Castes	Other Backward Class	General	Total
Loyola (6-12)	1042	37	162	42	1283
Loyola Hostel (6-12)	422	-	47	4	473
Loyola English Medium (1-5)	NA	NA	NA	NA	270
Loyola English Medium (6-9)	NA	NA	NA	NA	124
SSM Primary (1-5)	100	50	140	105	395
SSM (Middle and High 6-10)	50	30	316	10	406
Govt Boys High school hostel	143	10	25	-	178
Govt Boys Total	287	46	216	23	572
GB Middle (6-8)	49	13	25	2	89
GB High (9-10)	134	15	114	12	275
GB Higher (11-12)	104	18	77	9	208
Govt Girls High (9-10)	134	19	86	20	259
Govt Girls Higher (11-12)	42	7	31	19	99

Note: Loyola starts from the sixth, SSM goes up only to the 10th, the government girls and boys schools have classes from 6-12. The figures for government girls middle school were not available, and nor was the detailed breakup for Loyola English medium school.

a little more than half (14 out of 26) are postgraduates. Recruitment is through written exams, followed by an interview, a 7-day training period, and then another exam. By completing a year-long training course run by Vidya Bharati at the Saraswati Shiksha Mahavidyalaya in Jabalpur, teachers can get extra increments. Becoming a teacher in one of the Vidya Bharati schools, (unlike many students who come to these schools simply to get a good education), generally requires prior and special commitment to the Sangh agenda, which is further reinforced by the ideological training they periodically receive. However, teaching in these schools is also seen as a job – and given that teachers are paid less than the government scales, many of them would be happy to switch to government jobs.⁸

The government schools are divided roughly evenly between adivasis and OBCs in terms of students. However, approximately only one third of the teachers are adivasis (12 out of 31). Since government schools do not charge fees, unlike the Catholic schools or the RSS school, they tend to attract the poorest adivasi students or those students from business families, particularly girls, for whom schooling is seen as just a way of marking time before they get married or take over the family business. The level of discipline is generally much lower in government schools, with a corresponding decline in pass percentages. Extra curricular activities are also noticeably limited compared to the religious schools. The government boys school has recently acquired a strict principal, who has ensured better results, leading to a corresponding increase in enrolment.

While pass percentages are an inadequate reflection of school performance, because the results are not weighted by factors such

as the numbers enrolled, dropout rates, and the caste, class and gender composition of students, the following table provides a rough comparison. Both the government schools and Loyola had on average between a 100 and 200 students, while the SSM had on average less than 50 students per year.

In sum, while religion evidently plays a role, the ultimate criterion for parents in selecting schools appears to be exam results and cost of schooling. In the public perception, RSS schools fare well on results and are affordable for the lower middle class and thus manage to attract a range of children whose parents are not necessarily committed to the Sangh agenda. Children who graduate from these schools, however, seem to end up with a strong sympathy for the Sangh.⁹ The following section, based on ethnographic observations in the Kunkuri Shishu Mandir attempts to explain why this is so.

Saraswati Shishu Mandir

The first Saraswati Shishu Mandir was set up in 1952 in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, although a Gita school had been established by Golwalkar in 1946 at Kurukshetra, Haryana. As the number of schools grew in different states, an all-India coordinating body, called Vidya Bharati, was set up with its headquarters in Delhi. The Vidya Bharati educational mission is founded on the objective of training children to see themselves as protectors of a Hindu nation:

The child is the centre of all our aspirations. He is the protector of our country, Dharma (religion) and culture..... To relate the child with his land and his ancestors is the direct, clear and

East Northeast Social Science Workshop

The Eastern and North Eastern Regional Centres of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) jointly propose to hold a workshop on *Development, Deprivation and Democracy in Eastern and North Eastern India: An Alternative Perspective* in Shillong on July 8-10, 2004.

The workshop will explore such themes as the specific trajectories of historical development in the above regions, the sections who have benefited or been deprived in the process, whether democracy has been deepened or weakened, what kind of inequalities have been generated, has there been overexploitation of natural resources, what distinctive role have the women played, what are the ethnic and cultural implications of development and has any alternative paradigm of development been developed or practised? The themes suggested are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive.

The workshop will bring together doctoral and post-doctoral scholars (below the age of 35) from all the disciplines of the social sciences working on related topics with a specific focus on Eastern and North Eastern India. Scholars affiliated to institutions in Eastern and North Eastern India are especially encouraged to apply. Selected participants will present their research work for discussion by senior scholars in the field drawn from leading institutions in India, including members of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and NEHU faculty.

ICSSR-NERC will provide accommodation and hospitality during the workshop and bear the expenses of road or 3-Tier AC rail travel for participants from outside Shillong. Those interested may apply with their CV and paper proposal (within 300 words) by *May 17, 2004* to Mr. Prabir Basu, Joint Director, ICSSR Eastern Regional Centre, R-1, Baishnabghata Patuli Township, Calcutta - 700 094, or by e-mail at cssscal@vsnl.net

unambiguous mandate for education. We have achieved the all round development of the child through education and sanskar, i.e., inculcation of time honoured values and traditions.¹⁰ (sic) (emphasis added)

The Vidya Bharati schools are funded through fees and private donations from rich trading families or other wealthy sympathisers, including NRIs.¹¹ The RSS claims to take no government aid in order to maintain the spirit of voluntarism and avoid government restrictions. However, periods of RSS expansion certainly seem to show an uncanny correlation with having a BJP government in power.¹²

In what follows, I shall describe different aspects of the school's culture – focusing particularly on the extra curricular markers and makers of identity. To an extent, RSS practices may be seen as a perfectly legitimate reaction to the widespread internalisation of Christian missionary educational practices under the guise of 'modern' and 'secular' education. For instance, while many government schools have started making girls wear salwar kameezs, boys invariably wear shorts or pants, and in the more elite schools, girls generally wear skirts. Teachers are addressed as 'Sir' or 'Ma'am' or 'Miss.' In the Vidya Bharati schools, however, care is taken to use purely 'Hindu' cultural markers. Although the students' uniforms are similar to those of children at other schools (blue kurtas for girls with white sashes and khaki shorts/pants for boys), here teachers also wear uniforms. Even more unusually, while women have always borne the burden of upholding tradition through sartorial conservatism (in this case white sarees with red borders), here male teachers too flaunt their indigeneity by wearing white dhotis and kurtas unlike the western pant/shirt that has become ubiquitous among urban men in India. The use of Sanskrit terms to address teachers ('Acharya'), the practice of touching their feet as a mark of respect, and the naming of classrooms after Hindu sages ('Vashishth kaksh', 'Vishwamitra kaksh'), also marks the school out as a space where Hindu Dharma and Hindu sanskars are asserted with pride, where tradition is saved and transmitted as against the 'deculturation' or 'Christianity and western mores' (sic) that convent schools lead to (Vidya Bharati website).

In addition to the two national days (January 26 and August 15), the Vidya Bharati schools celebrate their own roster of special days, such as the birthdays of Shivaji and Jijabai, Vivekanand, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, and Savarkar. Significantly, Gandhi Jayanti is not celebrated, although in recent years, he too is being appropriated. Shikshak diwas or Teacher's day (celebrated by the rest of India on September 5 on the birth anniversary of the former president and educationist Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan) is celebrated on the supposed birth anniversary of the Sage Vyasa, while Krishna Janmashtami stands in for children's day, normally celebrated in India on Nehru's birthday, November 14. Myth and history, the birth and death anniversaries of actual historical figures and those of mythical characters are thus seamlessly conflated and inscribed in the child's consciousness through the regime of annual holidays, celebrations, morning prayers, as well as through the content of history and 'cultural knowledge' textbooks.

A similar process of conflation (of real and mythical events/people), elision (of non-Hindu persons and things) and abuse (of facts) is evident in a variety of spheres. The 'Ekatmata Stotr', which students recite to start the school day names the places associated with Hindu sacred geography, Hindu mythological figures, the sacred books of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs, Hindu saints and poets, Hindu kings and queens and finally RSS leaders like Hegdewar and Golwalkar. Another example is the

Sanskriti Gyan Pariksha, a 'cultural knowledge' exam which is, on the face of it, a disinterested test of knowledge about the country's geography, history and culture, in question-answer format. All students in RSS schools take this, for which they get a certificate. Among other RSS fantasies [see Sahmat 2001: 14-18], is one section on Ramjanmabhoomi (pp 13-14):

Q: Which Mughal invader destroyed the Ram temple in 1582?

A: Babur

Q: From 1582 till 1992, how many Rambhaktas sacrificed their lives to liberate the temple?

A: 3,50,000.

Deeply contested issues are thus turned here into 'facts'. Needless to say, neither in the Ekatmata Stotr or the Gyan Pariksha Primer, are there references to anything Christian or Muslim and the version of Indian culture that is produced is thus an exclusively Hindu – upper caste (mostly northern) – culture. This both reflects and reinforces a phenomenon in wider cultural practice and media representations, where a Muslim or Christian presence is far rarer than it used to be.

More than just a site for the transmission of Hindu cultural traditions, however, the school is portrayed as a temple. Starting with the name itself, Saraswati Shishu Mandir, the practice of leaving shoes outside the classroom, the chanting of Sangh shlokas in Sanskrit to mark each transitional point such as the break for recess or the end of the school day, the rich visual display of calendar art posters of Hindu gods and goddesses¹³ – all reinforce the notion of learning as an act of faith or religious devotion which precludes any kind of critical questioning. As against being a space where children can transcend their religious identities and begin to learn about other cultures or develop faculties for critical enquiry, the school becomes an extension of the kind of religious discourse that is imparted in temples. This should not be confused with the rote learning for which Indian schools in general are notorious, but give

Table 2: Loyola Hostel (2001-2002)

Tribals	Non-Tribals	Christian	Non-Christian
422	51	409	64

Table 3: Saraswati Shishu Mandir (2001-2002)

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus	Total
Primary school (1-5)	44 (all tribal)	37	314	395
Middle and High	20	30	356	406
Total	64	67	670	801

Table 4: 10th Grade Results: Percentage of Those Who Passed the Exams

Year	SSM	Loyola	Government Girls	Government Boys
1991-92	NA	48	22	62
1992-93	NA	63	45	32.4
1993-94	NA	47	15.05	19.6
1994-95	NA	35	6.8	24.3
1995-96	NA	58	24.4	20.4
1996-97	59	66	23.4	51
1997-98	52	49	20.2	25.5
1998-99	51	NA	26.4	59.4
1999-2000	93.84	NA	28.4	52.3
2000-2001	NA	67	18.1	47

Note: I have selected the 10th Board Exam results because this is the only class for which I have figures for all the schools. The Saraswati Shishu Mandir only started its Xth class from 1996-97. The percentages have been calculated on the basis of those who sat for the exams.

the sense that the functioning of the school is primarily to keep a religious identity alive. Textbooks maintain the emphasis on devotional zeal – with the history textbook for class V, for example, referring constantly to ‘Mother India’ from whose womb many brave sons were born, who worshipped her and died for her, with the *Gita* in their hands and *Vande Matram* on their lips (pp 27-28).

Most of the Vidya Bharati schools are affiliated to the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) or their local State Boards. In general, these schools follow the syllabi (and the textbooks) published by the NCERT. Earlier, there were obvious contradictions between official texts which said that the Aryans came from central Asia and the RSS assertion that they are indigenous to India, or those which give Gandhi pride of place in the freedom struggle and the RSS denigration of Gandhi as a ‘dushtatma’ for ‘appeasing’ Muslims. Individual teachers may have perfected sophisticated pedagogical techniques for getting around this [Mody 2002], but perhaps what enabled the two belief systems to coexist is the emphasis on teaching in order to get marks and pass exams. The revised NCERT textbooks do much to alleviate this problem, in that they broadly reflect RSS ideology, yet they are still inadequate in that they cannot openly talk about the Sangh.

Vidya Bharati therefore brings out its own textbooks, which ‘supplement’ and ‘correct’ the history that is taught in the official books, working as much by selective emphasis on certain figures as against others, as by crude propaganda against Muslims and Christians. ‘Itihas ga raha hain’ (history is singing) for class V blames ‘internal disunity’ for the invasions by the Turks, Mongols and Mughals, but notes that even in the medieval period the ‘freedom struggle’ was kept alive [Singh 1997: 9]. Any evidence of Hindu-Muslim collaboration is seen as betrayal by Hindus [Singh 1997: 78]. The connection between such views and the RSS violence against Hindus who helped Muslims during the 2002 Gujarat genocide is obvious [Sundar 2002: 117]. Christian pastors are described as one of the main instruments of colonialism [Singh 1997: 27], thus strengthening the association in children’s minds between Indian Christians and anti-national activities. One of the central planks of the RSS is the equation of ‘holyland’ with ‘motherland’ – and the claim that because Muslims and Christians have their Meccas elsewhere, they are not fully loyal to the country. The text exhorts children to remember who they are so as not to become slaves again and asks rhetorically, “Whose is this country? Whose motherland, fatherland and holyland is it? Whose customs and festivals are celebrated according to the agricultural rhythms and climate of this land? Which people is it who call Sivaji, Ranapratap, Chandragupta, Bhagwan Ram, Krishna, Dayanand their great leaders.” It then goes on to a fervent description of the greatness of the RSS founders, Hegdewar and Golwalkar, and the need for an organisation like the RSS to build Hindu unity [Singh 1997: 77-81].

In addition to the prescribed curriculum, Vidya Bharati schools teach five extra subjects all of which are thought to contribute to the development of sanskar or character formation: ‘moral education’ which includes stories about great men, songs, instruction on honesty, personal hygiene, etc; physical education which includes learning to wield a stick, dumbbells, and martial arts; yoga; music; and Sanskrit (from kindergarten onwards and not just from the third as in government schools). ‘Vedic Mathematics’ is introduced in the third standard.

While the schools attempt to inculcate Hindu sanskars, they also borrow liberally from elite school organisational forms like student groups for self-governance (Bal Bharati for classes 6-8; Kishore Bharati for classes 9-11 and Kanya Bharati for girls). These groups are assigned responsibility for the library, singing practice, celebration of national days, etc. During the Kanya Bharati sessions, girls learn sowing and cooking so that, as one teacher in Raipur explained, they can be good housewives and mothers “like Jijabai (who exhorted her son Shivaji to war) and Lakshmibai (who strapped her child on her back and fought the British in 1857).”

In order to achieve more complete indoctrination, a constant attempt is made to wrest control over the family’s socialisation functions. Unlike the usual practice of calling parents to school for parent-teacher interactions, teachers from the Shishu Mandirs go to students’ houses and tell their parents about the children’s performance, activities planned by the school, and other matters. They also have an annual gathering of parents. Children serve as messengers by taking home pamphlets about RSS or Vishva Hindu Parishad activities for their parents. Teachers keep an eye out for promising students or volunteers who can go on to RSS summer camps (officer training camps) and receive further ideological training. According to the principal of one of the Shishu mandirs, about 2 per cent of the students from middle and high schools go to these camps every year [for the importance of camps to fascist education, see Schiedeck and Stahlman, 1997].

If Vidya Bharati schools stopped at transmitting a religious identity per se, they might be little different from Catholic schools, whose daily routine is also marked by morning and evening mass, which is compulsory for Catholics but not for non-Catholics. What marks the transition to fascist schooling, however, is the overriding emphasis on the physical ‘defence’ of religion couched in broad nationalist terms. At the end of the school day, the teacher asks ‘Hamari Mata kaun hai’ (who is our mother?), to which the students reply, hands raised, fists clenched: ‘Bharat Mata, Bharat Mata’. The teacher then asks twice ‘Iski raksha kaun karega’ (who will protect her?), to which they shout back twice ‘Hum Kareng’ (we will).

At Republic Day celebrations in a Saraswati Shishu Mandir school in Raipur in 2002, the same slogan was repeated after the national flag was hoisted. The rest of the programme was a long succession of speeches on terrorism, self-defence and the need to fight Pakistan, thus inscribing blood and guts as the very essence of patriotism. For instance, the female student (leader of Kanya Bharati) who was conducting the programme said that the 24 spokes in the Ashok chakra in the centre of the Indian flag “reminds us that we should be 24 hours alert in the defence of the country”. After a display of physical exercises, *lezium*, gymnastics and yoga, honouring the country’s martyrs and Hindu dharm’s ‘four gods and four castes’, primary school children sang a song about the need to fight the ‘neighbouring country’ and demolish it as brave children of Savarkar, a theme which was reiterated by the chief guest’s address at the end of the programme. In between was a speech in English on ‘terrorism’, another one by a fifth grade girl in Hindi on September 11 and December 13, which pitted the “conservative, fundamentalist, terrorist Muslim community” on one side versus the ‘powerful American community’ on the other. India lay in between, with its belief in ‘vasudeva kutumbkam’ (the whole world is one family). A high school boy gave a speech in Chhattisgarhi on ‘defence’ and the

'danger for Hindus' faced with enemies both outside and inside the country (i.e., Muslims). One very small girl talked about how the Constitution laid down rights and duties for all, but some people only thought of their own rights and did 'injustice' to the rights of others. On the face of it this was an unexceptional exercise in reminding people of their civic duties, but in the light of the RSS discourse on government 'appeasement' of minorities at the expense of the 'majority', acquires a clear anti-Muslim or Christian bias. Indeed, the fact that Pakistan and Indian Muslims are never explicitly named but referred to only as 'the neighbouring country' or terrorists paradoxically serves to strengthen the message – since the RSS can then take recourse to the claim of pure 'nationalism'. Students claim they are taught only about 'Indian' culture and deny that they are taught to hate other communities.¹⁴ They don't realise that the version of Indian culture they are taught is such a strongly Hindu and anti-minority one.

Interspersed between the speeches were catchy songs describing the victory of Hindu kings like Rana Pratap against the Mughals or comparing Hinduism to a sea into which all religions flow. The entire programme was prefaced and suffixed with an aarti to a picture of 'Mother India' represented in Hindu terms by the goddess Durga against a map of India.

While Republic Day is inevitably an occasion for a display of patriotism, a moment when schooling reveals its connections to state projects, and the constitutional ideal of secularism and sovereignty is reiterated (however imperfect the practice), in the hands of Vidya Bharati, such occasions become weapons to destroy this fragile constitutional existence. If children are schooled, it is only to become better soldiers for a Hindu nation. Even the leaders of the groups into which students are divided for extracurricular activities are called 'senapatis' (generals). For the RSS, as for the Nazis, "education is never for its own sake; its content is never confined to training, culture, knowledge, the furtherance of human advancement through instruction. Instead it has sole reference, often enough with implication of violence, to the fixed idea of national pre-eminence and warlike preparedness" [Mann 1938:6; see also Kandel 1935: 12-13].

Conclusion

This article looks at schooling as part of the RSS agenda to create certain notions of citizenship and identity. The RSS/BJP has attempted to effect a radical departure in the existing educational ethos, through the use of both state power (packing state educational institutions with its own ideologues), and the instruments of 'civil society' (creating its own network of schools in order to feed into a well developed cadre structure). Inevitably, the 'success' of ideological reproduction through schooling depends on a variety of factors such as the degree of conformity of the child's lived experience with the dominant ideology, or the extent to which this ideology is reinforced through wider cultural practices and political developments in society. So far, children going to RSS schools have tended to come from upper caste Hindu backgrounds and schooling has merely reinforced existing sympathies [Sarkar 1996: 246], but as the RSS expands among dalits and adivasis, their relationship with the Sangh's message is bound to be somewhat different. The RSS educational and political agenda includes both absorbing subaltern groups into a Hindu fold to fight against 'minorities' and using violence against these same groups in order to perpetuate the existing social order.¹⁵

In keeping with Gramsci's idea that the content of education must be seen to be disinterested to become hegemonic [Forgacs 1988: 313-18], RSS schools are popular with a wider circle of parents beyond the strictly converted, primarily because they perform the requisite educational function of producing 'good exam results', which appeals to middle class parents and children in a certificate-and-degree-oriented economy, and in a context where state schools suffer from gross neglect and under-funding. While such non-RSS parents may not desire an overtly Hindu education, here the discipline and sanskars become a bonus because they are tagged on to success in exams. Girls, especially, welcome the training in 'values' they get – the idea that girls must study and perhaps even have careers but never abandon their primary duty to their family.¹⁶

The degree of militarisation that accompanies this training varies across genders. The confidence instilled in both boys and girls can quickly turn into aggression and chauvinist attitudes towards non-Hindu 'others'. As conversations with SSM alumni showed, with boys, this is also directed against girls and women, with the non-conventional or non-Hindu woman becoming an object of both prurient interest and disgust.

The Sangh's appeal lies in its ability to conceal its own warped and petty version of Hinduism within Hindu culture at large. Non-RSS parents need to realise, however, that the RSS pedagogical project is distinct from all other schools in the harnessing of pedagogy to a clear political end. Although in the past Jesuit schools had proselytising zeal, now schools like Loyola act primarily as channels for general, middle class mobility. In RSS schooling, curricular and extra-curricular messages such as uniforms, functions or cultural knowledge exams all serve to remove non-Hindus from the discursive space of the nation. When they appear it is only as insoluble 'problems' for the Hindu body politic. Coupled with the emphasis on militarism – physical training in knife and stick wielding, the repeated exhortation to 'defend' the 'nation' – the stage is set for internal civil war. The tragedy is that, imbricated in the banality of exams and results and the middle class desire for service jobs, this is legitimised as just an alternative form of education. **EPW**

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Notes

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- 1 As of March 2002, Vidya Bharati had 17,396 schools (both rural and urban), 2.2 million students, over 93,000 teachers, 15 teacher training colleges, 12 degree colleges and 7 vocational and training institutions www.vidyabharati.org
- 2 Militarised education is found in other contexts, e.g., pre second world war British public schools; see also Beni 2003 on military schools in Maharashtra.
- 3 For instance, the government boys school in Kunkuri celebrates Saraswati Puja. Much depends on the predilections of individual principals and teachers.
- 4 Judgment by Justice M B Shah, D M Dharmadhikari, and H K Sema in Writ Petition (Civil) No 98 of 2002, Aruna Roy and others vs Union of India and others.
- 5 Habib et al 2003; see also the riposte by Lal et al (2003), which brings the debate to a new low.
- 6 For similar conclusions about the role of schooling in generating feelings of inferiority and thus reproducing structures of class, gender and

- ethnicity elsewhere, see McCarthy and Crichlow 1993; Brown et al 1997.
- 7 A more likely reason is that Loyola starts only from middle school and the Loyola English medium is slightly more expensive.
 - 8 They get between Rs 1,250 – Rs 1,800 per month as basic pay, depending on whether they are primary or higher secondary school teachers. The managing committee for each locality decides on how much it is able to pay.
 - 9 Interviews with graduates of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, studying in the government girl's high school and in Loyola school.
 - 10 www.vidyabharati.org
 - 11 South Asia Citizens Web and Sabrang Communications (2002).
 - 12 The principal of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir in Rohinipuram, Raipur said that although Vidya Bharati work began in Chhattisgarh in 1968, they received a new impetus in the 1990s (coinciding with the BJP-led Sundaril Patwa government). Reports of government patronage – gifts of prime land in the capital to RSS organisations at very low rates – made newspaper headlines in late 2002.
 - 13 Unlike government schools whose walls are bare, save perhaps one poster of Saraswati or Ganesh over the blackboard, or Catholic schools which have a cross in each classroom, the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs have a proliferation of calendars and posters with pictures of gods/goddesses. Ram in his martial pose is particularly popular.
 - 14 Interview with ex-students of SSM, now at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Kunkuri
 - 15 In the Gujarat genocide of 2002, dalits and tribals were mobilised by the VHP to loot, burn and kill Muslims. In October the same year, however, in Jhajjar, Haryana, a VHP mob lynched five dalits for allegedly skinning a live cow, followed by one of their leaders declaring that the life of one cow was more important than that of five dalits.
 - 16 Interview with ex-students of SSM, now at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Kunkuri.

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