chapter 1   Introduction

1.1 Background to the present study

Educational research in India has uncovered the ways in which social inequalities along caste, class and gender lines permeate formal education in all its aspects. Given the extent of social disparity in education, it is not surprising that the dominant tradition within the sociology of Indian education has generally been informed by concerns relating to social and physical accessibility and viable retention for the marginalised sections of Indian society − scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, lower income groups and women. These studies have illuminated the ways in which systems of formal education have paralleled the hierarchies of Indian society in many key respects, and contributed, through a division of the spoils, as it were, among the upwardly mobile social groups, to the strengthening of these hierarchies.

Nowhere is the gender dimension to social inequality more evident than in the terrain of formal education. Inequality of girls and women in terms of access to schooling, retention and successful completion is writ large in the official figures. Macro-level data on formal schooling indicate the pervasive presence of gender inequities in education, at all levels of the system, and for all social classes, although in varying degrees. As in the case of other marginal groups − marginal, that is, to official discourse and social power, such as the scheduled castes and even more so the scheduled tribes, educational research in India has generally tended to focus on issues of access, and to a lesser extent, retention. A strong policy orientation usually marks such research. Constitutional guarantees and educational policy formulations are often used as a benchmark to analyse whether educational realities match up to their intent.

In the context of gender disparity, it is undoubtedly necessary to evaluate how policy intent and programmatic interventions have played out in reality. However, there remains a partiality to the picture which emerges in the absence of a gender perspective −rooted in an understanding of gender asymmetries and relations in Indian society −being applied in

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examining policies. Policy-oriented researches generally identify 'causes' outside the education system – low social value for education (especially for girls), high opportunity costs, etc. However, there is evidence to show that physical inaccessibility, irrelevance of curricula, repeated 'failure' and even harsh treatment in schools contribute to children dropping out or never enrolling in school; in the case of girls, the play of these factors is even more acute (Jalaluddin: 1991:33; Anandalakshmy: 1994:118). [1] Such reasons can be located 'within' the education system as it has developed in India, particularly its approach to school curriculum (Learning without Burden: 1993). Further, a meaningful understanding of gender disparities in education has to foreground the social context within which gender relations are constructed and given meaning by social actors. Such an approach shifts the focus from macro-level data to 'reality in the making' in specific contexts. Analysis becomes more solidly situated within specific locations in which these realities are played out.

1.2   Research questions

The present work attempts to address the question of learning of gender – as an ideology, governing the rules of behaviour in everyday life - in primary school. Examining the constitutive dimensions of such 'social' learning necessitates examining educational processes at the micro-level. In particular, there is a need to look at the structure and content of curriculum which heightens/ gives meaning to concepts about self-identity. Understanding these processes demands sensitivity to the particularities of specific contexts which are best captured through immersion in the everyday culture of actors – here, students and teachers.

The title of the study – *Learning one's gender in the primary school: A study of curriculum* - gives some indication of the lines of inquiry and the contours of the research, as well as the assumptions underlying its conceptual framework:

1. Social values about gender are learned, not biologically determined;

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[1] It is often asserted that in India, poverty is the primary reason for children to drop out of school and enter the labour market. However, studies show that especially for young children, the reasons are more complex (Chaudhury: 1996; Banerjee:1997).

2. The individual child brings to the school knowledge of her/his gender gained from social experience through participation in other social institutions like the family, community and neighbourhood;

3. The curriculum constructs gender, and children make meaning of these constructions through engagement with the 'hidden' part of the curriculum embedded in the social interactional contexts of the classroom/school.

These contours defined the broad research questions of the study: *What are the processes underlying the construction of gender in primary schools? How do children 'read' these processes in relation to their understandings of gender through social experiences outside the school?*

Although children come to school with a fairly well-established sense of gender identity, acquired through the processes of primary socialisation, the school experience tends to legitimise this identity. How this occurs is the subject of inquiry in the present study. Conceptually and methodologically, the study aimed to examine symbolic constructions around gender in the local context of one primary school, while placing these constructions within the wider context of gender relations in Indian society and their imprint on educational discourse. This research concern leads to a problematising of the relationship between school curriculum and gender socialisation in Indian society.

1.2.1 Approach to 'curriculum' in the study: The 'hidden' curriculum

School curriculum is a selection of knowledge from the corpus of knowledge available in a society. Clearly, certain assumptions come into play while making this 'selection' of knowledge: assumptions about 'what' should be selected, 'why', what model of the learner guides the selection, etc. Forms and representation of knowledge in school curricula therefore reflect the discourses of formal education and the pattern of relations in society which make a certain selection 'normal' (Advani: 1996; Anyon: 1981). Thus it has been argued that curriculum is deeply ideological and a 'contested terrain' (Apple: 1979).

The ways in which 'official school knowledge' embodies notions of gender – in terms of invisibility, stereotyping and bias – forms a legitimate and significant area of cultural

inquiry. Such research has been extensively carried out by scholars in the field of school education (see Chapter 2). However, how these notions are 'learned' in school demands further investigation into the contexts within which the child makes meaning of, or responds, to these notions, through the filter of her/his subjective experience growing up female/male in society. While it is important to understand the ideologies underlying the presentation of gender in school textbooks, it is equally pertinent to examine how these ideologies are expressed at the level of everyday school practices.

In attempting to address the research concerns of the study, it is important to define what is meant by 'curriculum'. In this study, 'curriculum' is not restricted to the content of textbooks, or their translation into specific pedagogical tasks. Curriculum is approached as the totality of school experience, and not restricted to the 'overt' or 'official' curriculum as embodied in school textbooks. As a study of curriculum in primary school, the present work places at its centre the idea of curriculum as a body of situated practices, shaped by a constellation of factors, encompassing a range of social experiences for the school child which contributes to her/his knowledge of the social world and, in particular, knowledge of her/his gendered position in this world. These factors include the organisation of knowledge as embodied in 'official' school curricula, since the latter assumes a significant role in structuring educational ideologies, which are in turn expressed within social-interactional contexts in the classroom. Such an emphasis on curriculum places the 'knower' at the centre of enquiry, by examining her/his embeddedness in a landscape of discourse(s) around gender and education, and the discursive practices engendered by everyday school contexts.

The focus of enquiry in this study is, then, on the 'unintended' aspects of the school experience, the *'hidden' curriculum*. The hidden curriculum of gender in school can be approached as the expression of gender ideologies in patterns of interaction in everyday school life. These interactions may be, but are not always, structured by the content of 'official' curriculum. They do, however, play a significant role in shaping children's experiences of gender within the school. The constitutive elements of the hidden curriculum are, among others, organisational arrangements (including the division of physical spaces within the classroom and the school along lines of gender); differential task assignation to

children; routines, rituals and practices in everyday school life; systems of rewards and punishments, teachers' labelling patterns, teacher-student and student-student interactions. All these aspects constitute the child's school experience.

The hidden curriculum cannot be understood in isolation from the nature of social realities within which it is embedded, the ways in which children 'learn' gender through the processes of primary socialisation. The significance of the hidden curriculum to the learning of gender can be understood more fully when seen in the context of interactions outside the school through which children learn their gender positions and the behavioural repertoires they are expected to possess in order to be viewed as competent members of their respective gender category. This study therefore seeks to examine both 'sites' of production of cultural knowledge – the school and home/community – as understood by children, to examine the significance of the hidden curriculum in their lives at school. Such an approach can contribute to a reconceptualisation of gender and curriculum, both in terms of designing curricula and actual school practices, the latter feeding into aspects of teacher training.

How children make meaning of and respond to gendered messages in social interactional contexts within the classroom and school is also an important area of inquiry. Deviating from a pure 'transmission' model of gender socialisation, where adult society transmits expected rules of appropriate gender behaviour to children who in turn passively absorb these rules, an important assumption in the present study is that children are active agents in the construction of gender in the social institution of the school. The site of inquiry is the primary school, where research has shown gender to be an important element of power and control in everyday school life (Apple and King: 1979; Short: 1993).

Central conceptual concerns of the present study are detailed in the following sections. Flowing from these concerns were decisions relating to the design of the study. In the next section I examine the essential concepts/constructs with which the study is concerned.

1.3   Conceptual Framework

This section discusses some of the concepts used in this study. These concepts refer to the underlying questions that define what is significant and therefore what is to be investigated. What I will attempt to do here is critically discuss concepts as they relate to the present study. Several of the themes touched on in this section will be taken up for more detailed examination in other sections of this chapter and in other chapters of this report.

1.3.1   Gender and education

The term gender has become so commonplace in educational discourse and in the public domain that an elaboration of the concept may seem almost redundant. There is reference to gender bias, discrimination, stereotyping, inequities and inequalities in official policy discourse, and a commonsensical understanding exists in the public imagination that gender is used in contexts of demand for sex-equitable recognition, representation and redistribution.

Gender had come to replace the older term 'sex' by the 80s. This is due to several reasons, primarily due to the research that came out of the international women's movement, which critiqued the ideologies that maintained interchangeability of the two terms (Boserup: 1970; Oakley:1972; Du Bois et al.: 1987). In simple terms, gender as a concept refers to the socially and culturally constructed characteristics of women and men which legitimise and sanction modes of 'acceptable' social behaviour. Gender is attributed to social actors by self and others (Kessler and McKenna: 1978), and is a fundamental element of everyday representation of self (Goffman: 1971,1977). It is important to exercise caution while stressing the importance of culture to constructions of gender. There exist pluralities of cultures, and their constructions of gender vary widely; further, these constructions respond to changing historical conditions (Dube: 1988; Niranjana: 1992).

The concept of gender is often seen to be oppositional, in that it sets up dichotomous categories of behaviour for the two sexes, femininity and masculinity. Sex, on the other hand, is regarded as a less ambiguous concept, since it has the quality of biological immutability. Gender and sex often tend to be viewed as inseparable, biologised categories, overlaid with dualisms such as nature-culture, the former associated with women, the latter

with men (Fausto-Sterling:1985; Ortner:1974). Notions of femininity and masculinity – what is appropriate and expected behaviour on the part of girls/ women and boys/men – influence decisions about sending children to school, what they should be taught and for what period they should be kept in school; they also influence access to 'non-traditional' courses at higher levels, subject choices and preferences, and representation of women in administrative positions. Gender, then, can be seen to constitute an integral element of social organisation and stratification: like class, caste, ethnicity, religion and location, it forms an axis of identity, an analytical category needed to understand social reality. Moreover, as feminist researchers have pointed out, gender is equally a political category, since it is critically related to issues of power and ideology. This is evident in language, social practices, representation in different areas of social life and in social organisation.

As a social construction, gender is also *historically constituted*. Femininity and masculinity are fashioned and re-fashioned by discourse in different societies, and the ways in which social practice is embedded in, and responds to these discourses. Historians of education have shown how notions of ideal womanhood at different sociohistorical junctures have influenced decisions about what kinds of education women should receive. The colonial period saw a transportation of normative discourses about education in Europe to the colonies, where public education systems responded to these ideas and adopted them, albeit in considerably altered form, in keeping with the social and political arrangements in specific contexts. The manner in which Victorian models of ideal womanhood redefined the family in India and the position of women in the family, 'engendered' the education system the British sought to introduce, which addressed a male clientele. This was, and remains, the situation within which post-Independence discourses on 'gender equality through education' have developed, not only in India but in several ex-colonial countries.

For many countries in Asia and Africa, colonial education introduced new conceptualisations of women's roles, which were modelled on the emergent roles ascribed to women under capitalism in Europe, where women's participation in 'traditional' occupations such as agriculture and animal husbandry, for example, were invisibilised by normative discourses around their importance as home-makers and producers of children. Indeed, much of the discourse on women's education centred around the cultural values of

the social and political elites within class society. Karen Biraimah has noted how Western notions of gender roles are legitimated through schooling in the Third World. (Biraimah: 1984). In India, we see in nineteenth century writings the importance attached to educating women for gentility and companionability to educated husbands (Karlekar:1992). In the social reform,movements of the nineteenth century, as well as in the nationalist movement, can be seen strands of discourse on education as a liberatory and transformative force (Chanana: 1988; Karlekar: 1986; Kishwar: 1986). The social reform movements of the nineteenth century led by upper-caste and upper-class men, although having a considerable impact on the creation of an impulse for women's education, did not challenge notions of gender roles. Indeed, we see a re-imagining of both femininity and masculinity in this period which profoundly influenced the 'aims' of education for women. The emergence of the 'rational' 'educated' man, under the influence of western liberal nineteenth-century thought, created a cultural schism in conceptualising these aims. What would an education for women look like? Would it alienate women from their traditional roles? As Karlekar puts it, this schism was partially resolved through the ideal of education as one that promoted a spirit of enquiry and independence of thought by constructing special syllabi and subjects for women (Karlekar: 1988: 113). It is in the case of movements which challenged upper-caste and religious orthodoxy and domination in society that we see a critical position taken towards the education of girls and women. The work of the Phules,·and particularly that of Savitribai Phule, in Maharashtra towards women's education are especially noteworthy in this context, as well as the work of Sister Subbalakshmi and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (Forbes: 1996: 32-63).

Mazumdar(1989:3) argues for the need to combine historical analysis with an analysis of how educational systems and processes have influenced discourse on the place of women in Indian society:

> ...[t]he critical issue in analysing the inter-relationships between education and women's status is not only the question of access but that of content, values and structures of educational systems....In the case of Asia, this trinity has had to encounter several pressures. The resulting infrastructure, with its content, value orientation and structural mechanisms to regulate access, performance in the generation, transmission, and utilisation of knowledge – represents a compromise between indigenous social systems with their embedded cultural values and the forces emanating from the cultural encounter with the western world, the economic revolution spear headed by industrialisation and the spread of science and

technology, population dynamics and the rise of anti-imperialist popular movements... [T]he compulsions of economic development very often pushed aside the issues and needs of social development, or the tensions being experienced by the societies from these varied encounters.

Mazumdar raises a critical issue when she relates the historical circumstances of the 'cultural encounter' instantiated by colonialism and the economic and political realities of the post-independence period which saw a further marginalisation of women's roles, needs and aspirations. The period also saw a consolidation of the formal education system, which faced challenges from the forces Mazumdar enumerates above, as well as contradictory forces from the different streams of nationalist thought on education *per se*. Kumar (1991a) discusses these in some detail, although we do not get a very clear picture of the position of women in nationalist discourse from this work. While members of the elites believed in education for their women to better their own standing in colonial society, we also see, in the nationalist phase, abundant romantic imagery of the (pre-colonial) Indian woman, socially respected for her role in upholding the culture of the nation, education for whom was to explicitly move away from the corrupting and polluting influence of western culture and emulate the liberatory roles offered under a reformed Hindu society (see Forbes:41- 44). Parallels can be seen in the Muslim response to colonial education (Minault: 1982). In either case, there is considerable evidence in the writings of women of the time that education – here quite simply writing and reading – opened up a world of thought and ideas hitherto denied them and enabled a critical consciousness about their social worlds. [2]

Colonial education saw the dismantling of traditional systems of learning and consolidation of a public schooling system based on a distinctive textbook-and-examination culture (Kumar: 1986a). Although women's education was not the norm in traditional systems, marginalisation of their 'subaltern' knowledge was accentuated by the introduction of this 'modern' form of education. The 'textbook-and-examination' culture has had implications for critical engagement by learners in the system with aspects of social experience as challenging as those of gender roles and relations in private and public life.

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[2] See for example the writings of women, in Tharu, S. and Lalita, K. (eds). 1993. Women Writing in India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

The foregoing discussion was intended to trace the contours of discourse on gender and education, and how it is intimately tied to questions of cultural history and ideology. While emphasising its intrinsically historically-constructed character, gender must also be seen in continuous movement of definition and redefinition. Just as notions of femininity are altered by a variety of factors affecting social life and experience, so are those of ideal masculinity. There is a growing interest in this area, particularly in the social and cultural contexts surrounding educational discourses and practice (Connell: 1987, 1989,1995; Davies: 1997; Skelton: 1997).

The interrelationships between gender and class, caste, ethnicity, religion and physical location – all of which make up the identity of the social actors in formal education, and most importantly learners - are of critical importance to an understanding of educational discourse. How this discourse is played out in the social/historical/economic/political realities of everyday life in schools, and the ways in which they act – individually and together – as a lens to social experience in formal education settings is crucial. To deconstruct this lens, we need to focus our understanding towards how children 'learn' from this social experience. This entails problematising the concept of childhood and children's socialisation, which is attempted in the following section.

1.3.2 Children and gender socialisation

The idea of childhood as a pure state of being, removed from the influences outlined above, is a misleading one. Social scientists have examined childhood from a variety of disciplinary approaches, attempting to bring forth children's own perspectives and strategies in relation to their social worlds. The seminal work of Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) is a vivid description of changing conceptualisations of childhood in Europe, which moved from the notion of the child as an adult-in-the-making sharing in the world of mature adults, to the separation of adult and child, and structures of family oriented around the child and his education. This work enables an understanding of how categories like 'family', 'child' and 'adult' shift meaning with changes in the material and ideational landscape of societies. Ariès shows that in the changing sociocultural contexts of Europe over four centuries, the textured life of children in communal societies gave way to stricter boundaries between adults and children in industrialised society.

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Much of the work on childhood in different societies and at different periods in history place the crucial function of socialisation at the centre of discussion. Here children are seen to be new entrants into the world of ideal adult behaviour. Davies notes that the 'ambivalence towards children – wanting them to be like adults and wanting them to be like children—is an interesting consistent feature of adults' attitudes towards children'(Davies: 1982:31).

It is important to recognise, however, that socialisation is a continuous and intersubjective process – not merely adult-centred and child-directed. As parents and teachers, we are often as influenced by children as they are by us. The worlds of adults and children are not hermetically sealed off from each other. Anthony Giddens (1979:130) eloquently puts forward this perspective in *Central Problems in Social Theory*:

> The unfolding of childhood is not time elapsing just for the child; it is time elapsing for its parental figures, and for all other members of society; the socialisation involved is not simply that of the child, but of the parents and others with whom the child is in contact, and whose conduct is influenced by the child just as the latter's is by theirs in the continuity of interaction.

Viewing children as recipients, rather than *participants*, in socialisation has implications for curriculum and curricular transaction in schools, and our understanding of children as learners. Although schools are significant sites of secondary socialisation, to assume that they merely play this functional role via the agency of adults is to legitimate a transmission ideology of education-- what Freire (1972) termed 'banking education'--which minimises the liberatory potential of learning, The work of theorists like Piaget, Vygotsky and Mead point to the importance of re-examining socialisation from the child's perspective.

The 'adult ideological viewpoint' (Speier:1976) also forces quite a different view on how children 'learn' gender roles. Encompassed in the 'gender socialisation' and 'gender development' theories is an assumption of the child as a passive recipient of prescription, if not conscription, into a sex-differentiated social world. The 'tabula rasa' image of the child undermines her/his capacities to actively and critically engage with the world of social experience. Several researchers have pointed to the weaknesses of such approaches (Thorne: 1993: 1-10). Anyon makes the important point that there is in fact never a

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complete accommodation to prescribed gender roles; neither is there a complete rejection (Anyon: 1983).

Harré (1986: 819) argues that the western, and particularly American, cultural view , dominates development theories about socialisation, with an exclusive focus on the individual child:

> The child... is invariably seen as a free-standing isolable being who moves through development as a self-contained and complete individual. Other similarly self-contained people - parents and teachers -- may influence the development of children, to be sure, but the proper unit of cultural analysis and the proper unit of developmental study is the child alone. The ubiquity of such radical individualism in our lives makes the consideration of alternate images of childhood extraordinarily difficult.

Most research on childhood in India has been done within psychological frameworks, although there have been attempts to break from the individualistic model, by, for example, adoption of ecological frameworks and socio-anthropological methods. This research has revealed the discourses, patterns and practices in different cultures which enculturate children into gender-divided adult worlds of occupation and social life (Anandalakshmy and Bajaj: 1981; Anandalakshmy: 1994, 1998; Kakar: 1978, 1988; Khullar: 1989; Saraswathi and Dutta: 1988). The model of children as *recipients* of gender socialisation has largely been accepted in these studies. If this is so, despite the above critique of adult-centredness in such a model, it could perhaps be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, the shift to a 'modern' attitude towards children which centres the autonomy of the child, one which would allow for an acceptance of her/his active questioning of accepted gender roles, has been confounded by the harsh and severe conditions of underdevelopment in India. These conditions have helped to consolidate, strengthen and even extend role divisions between adults and children. Further, in the context of formal education, there has been an erasure of the oral tradition, and the marginalisation of unarticulated knowledge and knowledge systems. There appears to be a shift in adult-child relations in India under the influence of globalisation, as well as the 'children's rights' discourse, but for most children in India, the situation is not likely to change in a while. On the contrary, most children are denied a childhood, and expected to take on adult roles at an early age.[3]

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[3] On the relationship between child labour and school education, see Weiner (1991) on the problematics of the children's rights discourse in the era of globalisation, see Pannikar (1998)

A second reason may have to do with the perception that in 'traditional' societies, gender ideologies are so entrenched in collective consciousness that they can only be dislodged through explicitly instrumental means, such as formal education. Indeed this has been the position of educational policy in post-independent India. School curriculum has been at the centre of such policy discourse. The next section discusses discourses around gender and curriculum. Implications for conceptualising curriculum for the purposes of the present study are also discussed in this section.

1.3.3 Gender and school curriculum

There is a considerable body of research which has shown the underlying dynamics of power between adults and children in social institutions like schools. When they enter school, children are participants of a world where they are relatively powerless where the new rules are strange, where there are no previously established relationships, and where 'success' is based on a capacity to cue into what the teachers expect of them. However, as Mehan points out, the introduction of adult structures need not be at the expense of children's culture: in fact, their culture often exists in parallel, sometimes complementing, and at others contradicting, adult culture (Mehan :1979). Children successfully accommodate to the expectations of them as students, the 'pupil's agenda'. A potential source of conflict between these two cultures may come from the teacher's attitudes to pupil culture, which they may construe as an illegitimate 'underlife' in the classroom and which may, if they are not careful, take over the classroom (Davies: 1982:14-15).

With respect to analysis, the framework of functionalism – dominant in studies within the sociology of Indian education - has serious problems for examining gender, since it lays considerable emphasis on conformity to norms and consensual social relations. Another line of interpretation has centred on group life rather than individual acquisition of 'norms'. Studies using symbolic interactionist and phenomenological approaches have introduced nuance and texture to children's interpretations of the world as they shape their own socialisation and development (Davies:1982, 1997; Delamont: 1990; Keddie:1971; Thorne: 1993; Woods:1979; also, in the Indian context, Khullar: 1991; Ray: 1997; Sarangapani: 1997). Studies of educational processes using 'critical ethnography' approaches (Carspecken: 1996; Levinson et al: 1997; Simon and Dippo: 1986) have examined the

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problematic relationship between identity of the learner, dominant social and political discourses and the processes of education. Many of these studies have shown the ways in which gender constitutes a line of difference which can be drawn upon in school life, acting in both complementary and contradictory ways to other lines of difference, such as class, caste, race and ethnicity. Scholars have pointed out that such available lines of difference are not always monolithic in everyday social interaction – at times, one source of difference dominates interaction, while at other times, another difference may be deployed (Bateson: 1972:453; Thorne: 1993; Deaux and Major: 1987). Brewer (1981:350) argues that ' which differences are emphasized under what circumstances appears to be flexible and context-dependent: this flexibility permits individuals to mobilize group identities for different purposes'. 350). As Thorne (1993: 159) emphasises:

> Gender is not only a category of individual identity and the focus of symbolic constructions, but also a dimension of *social relations and social organization...* The organization and meanings of gender vary from one social context to another, from families and neighbourhoods to schools, and, within schools from foursquare to scenes of chasing to classrooms... Gender varies in degrees and mode of relevance. When they form separate girls' and boys' tables in the lunchroom, kids make individual gender categories highly relevant to their social relations. But when boys and girls get together to work on a classroom project or in situations where age or ethnicity is at the fore, g. cr becomes less or differently significant. *In short, at the level of social situations, gender has a fluid quality.* [emphasis added.]

What place does the school curriculum have in the context of such findings? It can be argued that the idea of curriculum as a set of learning objectives needs to be seriously questioned here. The definition of curriculum needs to be widened to include *all* that is taught and learned in schools, the totality of the learning experience. At a later point I will discuss interpretations of curriculum which align themselves to such a definition. For the present, however, I will focus on the responses to gender and school curriculum from the policy and research perspectives.

1.3.4 Gender and/in the curriculum

A working definition of curriculum is 'all that is taught' in schools; the curriculum is a packaging of all that is desired to be 'learned' by children in society. Here we see that there is a body of *knowledge*, which is selected out of the entire fund of knowledge available in a society to be transmitted – consciously – to particular sets of recipients- or students- towards some desirable end. A host of questions arise out of such a formulation of

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curriculum. How are goals set? Who sets the goals? What are the bases for selection of knowledge? What image of the learner defines the selection of knowledge? How is this knowledge to be presented? What assumptions of the learner are being made while choosing modes of presentation of this knowledge? What all these questions point to is the necessarily 'constructed' nature of the curriculum, and its inherently ideological orientation and character.

The present study has been guided by an understanding of 'curriculum' as the totality of school experience; in particular, it examines the 'hidden curriculum' of gender. This is not to undermine the importance of school textbooks - the 'overt curriculum' – in constructing school knowledge. This is an area which has received a great deal of research attention, and contributed in significant ways to understanding how 'educational knowledge' is constructed. Yet, in the Indian context, when we want to understand how gender ideologies are expressed at the level of the classroom, school and individual child, we find there is extremely little research-based knowledge within which to situate our analyses. Consequently, we are dependent on models and frameworks which apply to western societies where such research has been conducted. While these research traditions have generated useful categories for analysis in wider cultural contexts as well, scholars in India have pointed to the necessity for micro-level research in Indian schools to increase our conceptual and theoretical insights into understanding gender and school education within the sociocultural contexts of Indian education (Chanana:1983:113; Nambissan: 1995).

A dominant line of inquiry within international curriculum research is directed towards the uncovering of gender bias and stereotyping in school textbooks and other reading materials. This research has been extremely significant in showing how hegemonic ideas about gender roles permeate the language, thematic content and presentation of these materials. A remarkable feature found in all these studies is the extensive deviation from reality, which is engendered by adherence to such ideas. Girls and women are markedly absent in all areas of economic ('productive') activity, decision-making and adventure and language is male-centred. The image of the world presented to learners is, quite simply, one which is a 'naturalised' world of male dominance, a world which is 'hyper-gendered' and quite

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removed from children's social experiences (Lobban: 1977).[4] The claim that textbooks play a role in the reproduction of gender inequalities in society follows from such work (Sarah and Spender: 1980:31).

The position that school knowledge is 'all that is learnt in school' also brings into focus the different elements which make up the daily life of school experience in addition to curriculum materials, such as routines, rituals, forms and patterns of social interaction, and so on. Research shows that school life is permeated by notions of ideal femininity and masculinity. Some mechanisms, arrangements and processes which engender this are: the social structure and organisation of schools, sexual division of labour in task assignment to children, organisation of physical space, and student-teacher interactions, particularly teachers' labelling patterns of children. All these aspects of everyday life have significant sub-texts of gender, and play a role in children's self-concept and identification (Stanworth:1983; Delamont: 1990; Sarah and Spender: 1980; Deem: 1980; for a review, see Clarricoates: 1981:185-205). Such findings have given rise to policy recommendations in several countries, including the United States, and Australia (Kelly: 1987; Sadker and Sadker: 1982; Yates:1993).

1.3.5 Gender and Indian school curriculum: Policy and practice

The history of policy intervention and public initiatives in women's education in India has been an interesting one, embedded with cross-cutting narratives of gender and national identity, as well as re-conceptualisations from feminist perspectives. The issues of co-education and non-differentiation of curricula figure prominently in discourses of gender equality in the years following independence.[5] Preceded by several government-appointed committees to look into women's educational participation in independent India, which recommended non-differentiation of curricula and co-education, the Education Commission (1964-66) chaired by Prof D S Kothari frontally took on the pernicious influence of gendered values when it spoke of the need for rewriting textbooks in independent India to prepare its youth for participation in a gender-equal society, by inspiring

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[4] Work in this area is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.
[5] For a review of different policy recommendations and initiatives, see Ramachandran (1998); also Khullar (1991).

...[e]ach sex to develop a proper respect towards the other because... it is unscientific to divide tasks and subjects on the basis of sex and to regard some of them as 'masculine' and others as 'feminine. Similarly, *the fact that the so-called psychological differences between the two sexes arises, not out of sex but out of social conditioning, will have to be widely publicized and people will have to be made to realise that stereotypes of 'masculine' and 'feminine' personalities do more harm than good.*
(Education Commission, India: 1966:4-5)

The National Policy for Education (1986) marked a major paradigm shift from the 'equality of educational opportunity' framework, when it extended policy concern beyond the re-writing of textbooks to a more thorough overhaul of the education system towards gender equality in Indian society:

> Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women... [and] will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions.
> (NPE: 1986: para 4.2)

There is a rejection of established notions of *gender difference* in these documents, an idea which was far more evident in early twentieth century reforms in women's education based on pseudo-scientific notions of biological 'capacities' for education (see Chiplunkar: 1930). Scholars have pointed out the instrumentalist dualism of seeing education for women as being more important than for men because of their role in the 'full development of [our] human resources, the improvement of homes and for the moulding of the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy'(in Karlekar:1988:153). The NPE(1986) also stresses that women's education is important not only on grounds of social justice but also social transformation.

Scholars associated with women's studies in India have repeatedly raised the question about whether education can really change the conditions of women's lives (Committee on the Status of Women: 1974). Although the NPE(1986) does indicate the state's commitment in this direction, very little has happened by way of actualising this commitment; in fact, macro-level economic re-adjustment policies have affected the social

sector, both in terms of allocations as well as in objectives of social equity (Rampal: 1996).[6]
The NPE's commitments did nonetheless open up a space within educational discourse to accommodate the needs of women, and brought gender more explicitly to the national educational agenda. Much of the work done by voluntary and semi-government agencies have incorporated non-formal women's education programme in their activities.[7]

The issue of addressing gender in the formal curriculum of schools, where children, and not adults, are learners, however, still remains. An interesting finding of the NPE Review Committee (1990), also known as the Acharya Ramamurthi Report, reflects the myopia in the instrumentalist vision of education serving the social objective of gender equality. The report points out that despite the mission objective, gender is markedly absent in the chapter on 'Content and Process of School Education' in the Programme of Action, except for a mention that 'equality of the sexes' is to be one of the ten core areas (para 6). The report concludes that the task of addressing gender is fraught with complexity, even more so since the hidden curriculum also needs critical attention:

> ...A gender perspective in the content of education means more than the elimination of sexist bias and stereotypes from textbooks... The task of bringing a gender perspective into the curriculum is a complex one and requires research inputs, discussion and debate...
> (NPERC:1990: 44)

The perspective scripted into the NPE's objectives as well as studies on gender bias in textbooks in general have provided the basis for 'counter-measures', such as comprehensive checklists for writers and illustrators of school texts. Even computers now have options for selecting gender-neutral language. With these instruments, as Kumar (1989) points out, it is now possible to 'sanitise' texts from sexist bias. Whether sanitised texts are a means or an end is the crucial question. *Structures* of content are also loaded with gendered messages which linguistic correction may not detect. More sensitive content

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[6] Sudarshan (1998) compares data between 1986 and 1994 to show how the percentage of private school enrolment is increasing in several states. Such changes can be seen in countries as economically 'diverse' as the United States, Britain and Brazil; indeed, the implications of globalisation for national education systems have been the focus of much recent research (Hypolito:1991; Whitty: 1993).

[7] For insights from the work of the Mahila Samakhya programme, which flowed directly from the mission statement of the NPE (1986), see Jandhalya (1998).

analysis from a gender perspective are perhaps necessary, which address both structure and context of curricular materials while paying attention to questions of language and representation (Kalia: 1979;1986; Wolpe: 1974).

1.3.6 Gender and school knowledge

From a research perspective, however, and also at the level of practice, it is challenging to address the larger place of gender in school knowledge. There are certain distinct lines of inquiry which warrant such an exploration, and cast the relationship between gender and curriculum as problematic. Firstly, there is the issue of developing gender-sensitive curricula 'relevant' to children's social experience. The limitations of such an approach are evident: children inhabit social worlds where gender is an inescapable part of reality. Cultural relativism is at its most precarious here. Since gender relations are primarily culturally sanctioned, a cultural-relativist position would extend the processes of primary socialisation to schools, legitimating and consolidating the learning of existing gender roles and divisions.[8] A second issue is that children do not learn about gender only in schools: they *enter* schools with a wide social experience from which they have acquired knowledge about gender roles and gender-appropriate behaviour. Larger discourses on the differential value of schooling for girls and boys show that there are both continuities as well as contradictions between patterns of primary socialisation and those of school socialisation. In the context of gender, then, it seems school curricula would have to play a *counter-socialising* role.

A third problem is to look at the intersections between gender and other categories of social organisation that mark identity, like class, caste, ethnicity, etc. Social class and gender, for example, interweave in several ways. Access to formal schools (and written knowledge in general), expectations from schooling and responses to curricula are determined simultaneously by these aspects of the learner's identity (Bardhan:1993; Kanhere: 1989; Kumar: 1989).

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[8] For a comprehensive discussion on this point, including the ways in which policy discourse in post-independence India has responded to its contours, see Khullar (1991).

These issues point to the significance of interplay between context – structures of social, cultural, economic and political nature – and culture, in the theory and practice of curriculum. Pertinent to the objectives of the present study are the frameworks used to understand and analyse curricular knowledge. Where does gender 'fit' in conceptualisations of the curriculum? What place does the curriculum have in the construction of knowledge about gender values? How is this knowledge 'learned'? *How*, if at all, do schools reproduce gender relations in society?

1.3.7   The 'hidden' curriculum

Since gender is intimately connected with culture and ideology, it is pertinent to examine how curriculum theorists have addressed its cultural and ideological underpinnings in relation to schooling and curriculum. Most of the critical scholarship on curriculum emerged in Britain and the United States following the development of the 'new' sociology of education in the early 70s. The 'new' sociology specifically questioned existing conceptual frameworks which had guided educational research such as those relating to student underachievement, and focussed instead on understanding, through phenomenological approaches, the social constructions which gave rise to such phenomena. The questions raised by the new sociologists were recast-in the context of the functions of schooling in capitalist societies-by the social and cultural reproduction theorists.[9] Bernstein, a social reproduction theorist, framed the question of curriculum in terms of its socially constructed nature:

> How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. From this point of view, differences within and change in the organisation, transmission and evaluation of educational knowledge should be a major area of sociological interest.
> (Bernstein: 1977:85)

The corpus of knowledge embodied in the 'overt curriculum' is a selection, but one that is presented as neutral. The apparent neutrality of the curriculum serves to legitimise a vision of society and its knowledge, a vision which is related to dominant discourses. This results in the absence and masking of conflict (Apple:1979; Kumar:1996). According to Apple

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[9] These various developments within the sociology of education, and their critique by feminist scholars, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

(1979), although a non-critical perspective might present a broader definition of curriculum, it would tend to project a conception that neglects the ideological function and role of the school and the curriculum in the process of social reproduction. In the critical tradition that developed around social and cultural reproduction theories, the process of creation, selection, organisation and distribution of school knowledge has been closely linked with the wider social process of accumulation and legitimacy of capitalist society. The contribution of this perspective and its critics (such as Apple and Giroux, among others) give us good tools to understand that what is defined as school knowledge is constituted from a particular and arbitrary selection of a wide universe of possibilities. In this sense, the curriculum is a selection of particular elements of the culture and could be considered a specific form of *intellectual property* as mentioned by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995:54).

A precise definition of the 'hidden' curriculum' - used as an analytical tool by Bowles and Gintis (1976) to examine how schools reproduce capitalist social relations - is elusive. Conceptually, it refers to those unintended aspects of education in schools which do not appear explicitly in the overt curriculum, but nonetheless form an integral part of the school experience; it is 'taught' and 'learnt' unconsciously. These aspects could be the underlying messages of textbooks, such as those relating to gender ideologies; as well as the practices, routines and rituals which make up everyday school life. 'Hidden' from direct view, this feature of school life introduces/teaches learners to norms, values and attitudes – which may even contradict the overt or 'official' curriculum. It is clear, then, that the 'hidden curriculum' plays a critical role in the ideological discourse of education, through the absence of conflict:

> The hidden curriculum in schools serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalised by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy. This process is accomplished not so much by showing the negative value of conflict, but by nearly the total absence of instances showing the importance of intellectual and normative conflict in other areas.
> (Apple:1979:87)

In the absence of critical engagement with conflict, these assumptions are obligatory for learners. However, the hidden curriculum does not force compliance to norms (Dreeben:

1968), and this applies to norms of ideal gender behaviour as well. The organisation and structure of the school, curriculum materials, divisions of duties and tasks, relations of power and authority, teacher expectations, systems of rewards and punishments and classroom interactions – all these embody implicit and explicit messages about gender. The routines, rituals and practices, which make up the children's school experience are so commonplace, that to look for class and gender 'sub-texts' seems meaningless. However these sub-texts constitute a 'deep structure', which helps us to examine the ideological rules implicit in school curriculum (Apple:1979).

Macdonald (1980) suggests that the implicit orientations around dominant gender roles in the school curriculum reflect the commitment of the state in maintaining the sexual division of labour in society. She argues for a theory of identity formation through such institutionalised modes, which may not necessarily represent cultural frameworks within which individuals acquire a sense of themselves. The latter process is carried out through institutions like family and community as much as by schools. What is important, to an understanding, however, is to know how these processes are received in the educational situation:

> The formation of identity is a highly complex process which cannot be assumed to be successful at either the conscious or unconscious levels of learning. What we need is an analysis not just of the production and transmission of cultural messages but also [their] reception before we can judge their forms.
> (Macdonald:1980:34)

Macdonald draws on Bourdieu's and Bernstein's theories of social reproduction to develop her analysis of gender and school curriculum. Their distinction between the structural division and relations between forms of knowledge is a significant aspect of the formation of social identity, perhaps more significant than the actual selection of knowledge and its hidden messages. What is important is the acquisition of the rules and principles which structure the hierarchies of culture (Macdonald: 1980: 35-6). Bernstein's concept of educational codes is used by Macdonald to explore the existence of a 'gender code'. The gender code refers to the process by which cultural ideals about masculinity and femininity are reflected in a schools' practices and classificatory systems. An understanding of the dominant gender code of a school helps us to understand the 'decontextualisation' of gender in the world of social experience to 'recontextualising' it in the school curriculum.

The idea of recontextualisation, although Macdonald uses it in the specific context of social reproduction of gender roles within capitalist societies, can also be seen in analysis of curricula in India, as well as in other countries. Gender socialisation occurs, then, not so much by passive imprinting, as by the active engagement of children in negotiating the gender code that pervades social interactions within the school.

1.3.8 Learning as social practice

A central problem in the study was to understand how children 'learned' gender in school. This called for a social conception of learning. Learning, thinking and doing are relations among people in activity, in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. Learning involves the whole person, who brings to the learning situation the cumulative and ongoing experiences from her/his social world; thus learning involves primarily the individual learner but also has reference to communities. Lave and Wenger (1991) have developed a theory of social practice, which brings together the various concerns of the present study – the learning of social values, the historically and contextually constructed subject, and the larger cultural and ideological contexts of gender:

> Activities, tasks, functions and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning. These systems of relations arise out of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities...If participation in social practice is the fundamental form of learning, we require a more fully worked-out view of the social world.
> (Lave and Wenger: 1991: 53)

Such a conception of learning enables an understanding of the ways in which social practices are *produced*. It further indicates that examination of these practices must focus on meaning and action within an ordered set of practices: what the particular group being studied (children, their teachers), concretely situated in time and space, constitute as their pattern of everyday life.

In Apple's view, 'no set of social and institutional arrangements can be totally monolithic' (Apple: 1982a: 93). The dialectic relationship between gender ideologies in society and formal education lies in the potential of the latter for individual and social transformation,

while embedded in its very processes are ways in which dominant cultural ideologies, including gender ideologies, are maintained and reinforced. What is the character of these processes? How do children interpret their own subjective gender identities through these processes? Where are the lines of convergence and contradiction between these school-based processes and children's other social experiences outside the physical context of the school? These are some of the questions explored in this study.

1.4   Analytical framework

Understanding the contexts in which gender construction occurs calls for an analytical framework that looks at networks of influence but at the same time allows for possibilities of contradiction. From the conceptual framework flowed certain assumptions which guided the present study:

(1) Children were explicitly seen as competent social actors, who have the ability, and skills to navigate the course of everyday school life.

(2) Gender was not seen as a monolithic, unchanging concept, rather it was approached as an element of identity that constantly shifted according to specific contexts. Further, it was analytically approached as one of several 'lines of difference' that constitute identity and the self-other dyad - such as social class, caste, religion, etc.

(3) Individual and collective meanings of gender were privileged over my own.

(4) The curriculum was approached as a set of 'situated practices' which construct and produce knowledge in everyday life, and the total school experience, not the overt/official curriculum of textbooks, was the focus of enquiry.

In order to 'uncover' the subjective interpretations of interactive contexts through which gender is constructed within everyday school life, an approach was necessary which would enable more textured analysis of the ways in which children arrived at meanings of their gender 'position' and identity in their immediate social worlds, in which schools occupy an important area of interaction. It was necessary, therefore, to adopt an approach which allowed for narratives of experience to speak for themselves as far as possible, while placing them within the context of gender roles in Indian society, and the maintenance of gender ideologies in social institutions such as schools.

Uncovering the processes by which persons arrive at meaning – privileging subjectivity-necessitated empathy with children and teachers, and as near to a participant's understanding of everyday school 'realities' as possible. This was achieved through ethnographic techniques of data collection and analysis. The study was carried out in a municipal primary school of Baroda city, in Gujarat. Two classes of Class IV, comprising 123 children of ages between 8 and 12 were observed for one academic year. The study used ethnographic methods and principles to collect data, primarily on ethnographic observations and interviews.[10]

1.5 Expected Outcomes

The present study has implications both theoretically as well in practical terms. Knowledge about 'how' gender is 'learned' in Indian schools is limited by the lack of critical , qualitative research into school and classroom processes. It is hoped that the present study will cast some light on these processes, and the place of the individual child and the community of learners within them. The findings of the study, it is expected, will also be useful for teacher educators and practising teachers who envision a more gender-equitable education for children.

1.6 Organisation of the thesis

The thesis has seven chapters. Chapter 2 is a critical review of literature in the theoretical and methodological frameworks which have guided the study. It also examines research done in the area of sociology of education, and more specifically, on gender and curriculum. Chapter 3 charts the methodological issues underlying the study, the problems arising from adoption of these methodologies, and the lines followed in the collection and analysis of data. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the observational data gathered in the two classrooms over one academic year. This chapter examines contexts and processes within the school and classroom which constitute the hidden curriculum of gender. The social knowledge that children bring to school and its articulation with the school's hidden curriculum of gender is examined through analysis of interviews with children in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 attempts to

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[10] For a detailed account of the methodological dimensions of the study, see Chapter 3.